

STOP GENOCIDE – WE DO REJECT!

Last week, there was an information banner about abortion installed in front of the Masaryk University of Social Science. Its main message was that abortion is a genocide. This is an example of how the material artefact can trigger emotions and even cause a social action. In my paper, I will analyse their argumentation and reflect what kind of reaction it caused among student of FSS. In the end, I will add...

LOCATION

Firstly, I would like to discuss the **location** of this campaign. These posters have appeared mainly in areas where young people gather e.g. in front of a university, in front of a medical secondary school etc. The reason of this might be to challenge young people's opinion about abortions. We will see that installing such a campaign in front of our faculty opened a hot discussion. There was a deep disgust because of misleading arguments. We might wonder why it was installed just in front of this building. It might be because students have certain knowledge about societal and political issues or because of the specific age group and its relation to abortions in general.

WE DO REJECT! That was the straight message which appeared very soon on Facebook page called Sociologické nástupiště¹. One of the student's arguments was the **lack of dignity** of this campaign: "This kind of display does not belong to academic campus or to its close surrounding. We think that students are *knowledgeable enough* about this topic and do not need such a propagandistic impulse to discuss this issue." So to say, **anger** was one of the main reactions among students of FSS as their opinion was that academic place should be free of any political or any other propaganda.

Shock – guilt – disgust – all these emotions were flying in the area where these pictures comparing abortion to a genocide were exposed. Shock was caused by the fact that students could see real explicit pictures of unborn children's bodies. **Abstract concept** of abortion got real shapes. However, this campaign did not provoke the debate whether abortions are good or bad, which was probably its aim. But instead it triggered disgust of campaign's **political argumentation**.

In students' opinion, the campaign did not respect certain boundaries. We can reflect certain disruption between academic and public sphere. It is just this kind of blurring, disappearing and crossing borders which Ulrich Beck considers to be typical for postmodern society. (Beck 2004) The outcome is **conflict and tension** in areas where we would not expect it before.

¹ Available from: <https://www.facebook.com/soc.nastupiste/posts/814842771888267>

CONTENT AND INTENTION

"I do not understand what *abortion has to do with socialism...*"

One of the reasons why students felt **offended** was that this campaign was not presented as any "normal" petition. "It has a concrete content and intention – to evoke the notion that people who agree with abortion or undergo it are murderers." Therefore, students discussed the strategy of **discursive framing** of abortion as a murder.

In this case, we can reflect that it is a discourse which becomes an **object of student's analysis**. Abu-Lughod claims that emotional discourse is an outcome of cultural context paved by social projects. To analyse discourse we need to realize that it is an interaction between **social and political life**. Language is a crucial article of dialog between these two worlds. It is pragmatic, not referential. (Abu-Lughod 1990)

The campaign was comparing killing and dying children in different political and cultural contexts. For example, it compares killed children in Cambodia to aborted Czech children. In both cases, the campaign uses the verb "**to brutalize**". In this sense, we can reflect the power of language, which evokes in us the **notion of violence**. Students felt that using the **word genocide** in this context is rather too much.

Abortion is described as a **plaque of modern possibility of choice**. Language serves to present abortion as genocidal illness of population. It is mainly the **illness of our thought** which is wrong, because *we do finance this murdering from our taxation.*(<http://stopgenocide.cz>) There are many metaphors which try to highlight the aspect that this kind of behaviour undermines "normal system".

The normal is **socially construed** by this campaign as the right to live. According to Susan Sontag "Disease has long served as metaphors, which should give greater clarity to the allegation that the society is corrupt or unjust." (Sontag 1997: 71) Such a metaphoric description can be reflect in campaign presenting gulag, famine and abortion as **different kind of socialistic genocide**. Abortion is perceived as an illness which creates imbalance in political way of meaning. Picture of death children on the coin with the **LIBERAL SOCIALISM** puts the emphasis on the state. According to Machiavelli, it is the state which should protect their citizens from disease - social crisis. State should avoid any kind of social unrest trough rational action. (Machiavelli in Sontag 1997: 74)

Language influences our reality. We believe in a specific language, define the world through language as well as ourselves. The importance of language is mirrored in the word of experts who present their views of diverse topics to the general public and might affect human behaviour.

In the opinion of the page Sociologické nástupiště, this way of seeing abortion is very simplified: *“They present sensitive debate through prejudice or denial of the values of social justice, which is very simplifying.”* It tries to evoke the feeling of guilt in a passer-by. On the other hand, shall we raise a question - *„isn't any kind of campaign based on emotions and simplification?”*

Emotionality is produced through the **objects of photos** which have a great power: *“...these photos create a discussion. We were not the first school where this campaign evoked an **offense**. I think that there is a certain consensus that this campaign is far too much.”*

Campaign can be perceived as a **social interaction**, where vital process of embodiment takes place. Emotions are learned, felt and interpreted and so get their relevance. (Svašek 2007: 230)

Based on this cocktail of emotions, I called into the question whether emotions are universal or culturally specific. Because on the one hand, we could reflect that students have similar emotions about the campaign, on the other hand, the **inner impulse** - to feel disgust or anger – differed.

It might be because *„the admissibility abortion is typical questions of general interest, where people have very conflicting views”*. Their attitudes are shaped by moral and religious beliefs, based on their values and experiences – all of these lead to controversies which are basically unsolvable.

Based on that, we could agree with Evans who claims that **culture** influences our ways of expression of emotion. (Evans 2001) Students might be considered as individuals with a certain **cultural capital**. They have certain knowledge through which they perceive the campaign as complex information. Any passer-by might have similar **basic emotions** – disgust, guilt, fear etc. However, it is followed by the question how they display it. In this case, we do not have to think about different cultures in terms of different nations. It can be just people with different societal status and education who represent different cultures. Their **cultural and economic capital** will differ as well as their opinions about abortion. (Bourdieu 1998)

Therefore, the answer to the question **„what bothers you on this campaign“** would probably differ. According to discussion group on Facebook, it is an important question which everybody should answer to him/herself: *„I personally protest on most matters associated with Christianity. There is little evidence of loving your neighbour, forgiveness and mercy, but rather there is tendency to blame someone. Being a Christian myself, it bothers me.”* In Abu-Lughod's interpretation, we could say that emotions are tokens in construction of our subjectivity. (Abu-lughod 1990)

In this case, emotions of students cannot be categorized just as a biological response of their body or an intrapersonal mental state. To answer through the lenses of **Cartesian dualism** body-mind is too simplifying. Discussions on Facebook mirror Svašek's opinions that emotions are moral acts, shaped by an inner dialogue. The Campaign started up an emotional process which was based on moral judgement influenced by sociocultural dynamics. (Svašek 2007: 230)

Photos of emotions aim to create a bridge between past and present. They embody material engagement through the active images. One part of the campaign is **material characteristics**. Photos of real unborn children evoke very authentic feelings and confront us with the question of life and death.

We can track a very similar line of controversies as in the case of displaying anatomical specimens. In that case, real corpses of body parts became part of an exhibition. It created debates about death bodies. How should we discursively frame it? As „souls” or „people” with certain rights? (Svašek 2007: 336)

Similar debates were run among students in this campaign; however, emotional agency did not question the rightness of abortion, but rather focused on the context of it. In students' eyes, the campaign lacked a **legitimate status to justify** their opinion linking abortion to a genocide.

We could compare this campaign to an exhibition where dead parts of bodies became a part of an anthropological research. Dead heads were installed as a part of an ethnographic study. It provoked a hot discussion about morals since these objects were symbols of horror in the studied ethnicity. Heads were cut as a threat to an enemy in a primitive nation, however, after a certain ritual, it became just an empty object for this culture. Furthermore, in Western context, this exhibition evoked **waves of cruelty**, hatred, questions about such a „primitive act” and accusations of a primitive race. (Svašek 2007: 341)

Also the Stop-genocide campaign has a **different context** – the political massacre in former Yugoslavia is compared to contemporary politics of the EU. Genocide in Rwanda is put on the same level of guilt as the abortion in the Czech Republic. Comparing different political context produces not just a guilt of thinking that abortion might be right in certain circumstances, but it makes people feel guilty even for situations she/he could not affect.

Therefore, we could call the campaign an **emotionally evocative symbol** of political-religious opinions. **Death becomes a political statement** just as in the case of Jan Palach. We know from history as well as from Svašek's reading that by burning himself, Palach became a part of a political narrative, a symbol of struggling with forms of oppression. After 89, his memorial became a physical symbol of collective suffering. Until nowadays,

just passing by Jan Palach's memorial, it evokes waves of **freedom, democracy or feeling of pride**. (Svašek 2007: 332)

However, we can see that **political intentions** are not always something that can legitimize the death argument of a social order. In the Stop-genocide campaign, political implications of death have an opposite effect. We might speculate what the response would be if that message was presented in a different context. It is a scientific legitimizing power and argumentation which is missing. How the campaign might be perceived by students if it is presented by doctor, for example. What might be students' arguments if it was pro-life doctors who put real facts, pictures about abortion? How might the atmosphere about the whole campaign change?

DNA MYSTIQUE – sekularizace, AR

In the whole campaign, we can reflect certain links between genetic material (embryo) and a Christian soul. Advocates of this pro-life campaign perceive the DNA of an unborn child as a **sacred soul**. It was science which started to describe the human genome as The Bible. Molecular structure started to be used as an explanation for the **natural and moral order**. (Nelkin, Lindee 2004: 39)

This started off the secularization of religion and the consolidation of the power of science. Scientific DNA reached similar meaning as the biblical soul. DNA has several characteristics similar to the immortal Christian soul which is not a coincidence. **DNA became an icon**, a secularized equivalent of spiritual soul. (Nelkin, Lindee 2004: 50)

In many states, **DNA is a taboo**. It is a topic where people should not have the right to decide which kind of cell should survive. Individuals should definitely not play the role of God. However, this is exactly the process which happens when **DNA is sacralised** in the name of science.

We can see this taboo in this pro-life campaign. According to demagogic statements, we could claim that the campaign does not agree with implementing religious discourse of DNA into the secular.

This campaign uses an embryo as a cultural icon which is abused, **misused**. The scientific knowledge and possibilities of science is perceived as an abuse of a sacred territory.

TO SUM UP

On the other hand, we can also highlight the **positive impact of campaign**. Students saw the campaign as a challenge of public sociology: *„responding to the growing gap between the sociological ethos and the world we study, we could organize conference about public and symbolic sphere focused on pro-life social movement in the Czech Republic.”*

To conclude, we might ask whether the campaign reached its aim – it shocked, it triggered disgust and guilt. Moreover, it opened a live discussion among students which will probably lead to a certain socio-political action in the form of a conference.

RESOURCES

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