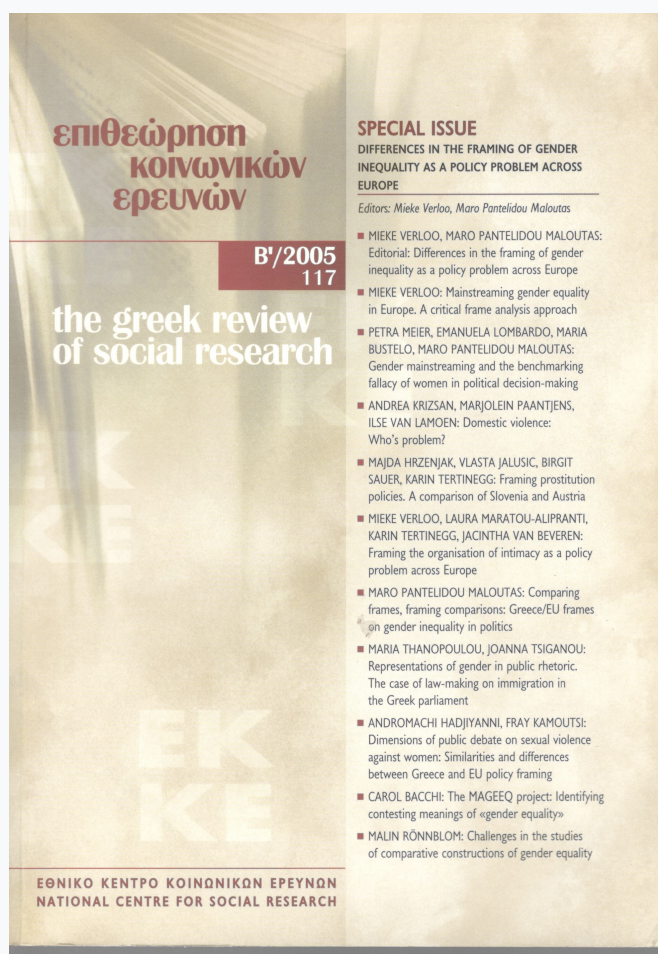


The Greek Review of Social Research

Vol 117 (2005)

117 B' Special Issue: Differences in the framing of gender inequality as a policy problem across Europe. Editors: Mieke Verloo and Maro Pantelidou Maloutas



Challenges in the studies of comparative constructions of gender equality

Malin Rönnblom

doi: [10.12681/grsr.9565](https://doi.org/10.12681/grsr.9565)

Copyright © 2016, Malin Rönnblom



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

To cite this article:

Rönnblom, M. (2016). Challenges in the studies of comparative constructions of gender equality. *The Greek Review of Social Research*, 117, 235–249. <https://doi.org/10.12681/grsr.9565>

Malin Rönnblom*

CHALLENGES IN THE STUDIES OF COMPARATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER EQUALITY

ABSTRACT

Why are comparisons interesting, or what are comparisons all about? In this article, the comparative ambition in the social constructivist tradition is scrutinized, and the other articles of the issue are used as examples of what is seen as principle problems of comparative studies. The first part of the article deals with the need of reflexivity in order for the researcher to avoid implicit notions of «good gender equality» or «real feminism». In the second part, the problems of comparative studies are more specifically addressed, by both discussing the traditional legacy of comparative politics and bringing forward possible alternatives for non-positivistic comparative analyses. The article ends by asking for a reflexive intersectional comparative approach.

In the beginning of April, I was invited to give a lecture by the regional association of the Conservative party. They had gathered for two days with the intention of both taking decisions on their political agenda, but also with the ambition to increase their member's knowledge on questions concerning gender and regional development, and that was the part where I came in. My topic for the day was how gender equality is constructed in regional policies, framed in a more popular title, «Gender equality in regional policies – a necessary evil?». After my lecture there was some time for questions and discussion and several of the people in the audience of around seventy (mostly men) were very keen on asking questions and giving statements. One of the questions was put by a man who is a former member of parliament:

* PhD in Political Science, Research Fellow at the Centre for Women's Studies, Umea University.

«There are so many discussions going on concerning how we should create a gender equal society. Should we for example increase the number of child care centres, or should we give economic support to parents and let them decide on how they want to care for their children? Those discussions are all politics, and now, when we have a researcher here, I would like to ask you, what is the best way of improving gender equality in Sweden today? This is your research field, you must have an answer».

WHO'S GENDER EQUALITY?

I believe that the situation described above is a well known situation for many researchers in the field of feminist or gender studies, and that many of those/us also find these kind of demands problematic. The demands to give the «right answers», to be the person carrying «the solution» could also be seen as especially problematic for those of us working in a social constructivist tradition. To give the «right» answers is absolutely not «our thing». A social constructivist approach tends instead to turn the interest of the researcher away from giving answers and towards asking questions, for example wondering in what way, with which words, and in which context, a person (of which gender, race, age, class?) puts a question or makes a statement. We are immediately deconstructing the statements given and this of course creates great difficulties in giving the «right» answer – especially if your way of seeing the world does not include that there is any such thing as a right answer.

At the same time, I think that we as researcher often (and unconsciously) more or less adjust to these kinds of questions, and that we relate to our own implicit definitions of «what gender equality really is». At least I know that I do. When I got the question quoted above I thought, how could he look upon the choice of the family as something that could be connected to gender equality? In my view, there are no such things as free choices. Of course, I thought that such policy would reproduce traditional views of «women's roles» in society. My answer was more polite.

By this example I want to draw attention to what I see as a problem when analysing constructions of gender equality in different contexts, and that is the tendency of bringing in «hidden» definitions of «real gender equality» as some form an implicit reference point in relation to which the analyses are performed. In the articles presented in this issue, there are as I see it more or less outspoken definitions (or ways of measuring) of what

«real» gender equality «is», and more broadly how society both «is» ordered today and how the «good society» should look like.

My ambition with this article is to take the opportunity to discuss a few fundamental problems when analysing constructions of gender equality in different policy fields and national contexts. In doing this I will use examples from the other articles in this issue. I would like to underline that I have taken this opportunity to discuss a problem in this field of studies that I have been thinking of for a long time. In other words, this is not in any way specific of the articles of this journal but a more general discussion that I believe is needed in order to develop this growing research field of critical studies on gender equality policies.

My first example comes from the article on the policies of intimacy (Verloo et al., this issue). In this article it is possible to discern different views, or different ways of measuring, what «real» gender equality is seen to be. In the section where the policies of Austria are discussed, the authors introduce the first definition of gender equality; «A gender equality perspective in the sense of a more equal sharing of family responsibilities between men and women has been weakened between 1995 and 2003 ...». Here, the authors' ideas of gender equality slips through, and in my view, this is one of several possible definitions. For example, maybe Austrian policy makers believe that giving women the possibilities of «just» taking care of home and children is to produce the «right» gender equality. Such a discourse relies on a notion of biological difference between women and men, and that women are more suitable for care work than men are. «We» as researchers could of course disagree with this construction of gender equality, but could we say that it is of «less value» than another standard, than our own construction?

With this example I am trying to show that by using the concept of gender equality as both an empirical concept of scrutiny, and as a way of stating the researcher's own views on gender equality, the analysis becomes somewhat unclear. By this I do *not* mean that sharing family responsibilities in any way should be unimportant, but I believe that the author's normative point of departure could be reflected on in relation to another, analytical, concept than gender equality. For example, by using women's agency as an analytical tool, it could be possible to come to the conclusion that this kind of gender equality discourse is limiting women's agency and reinforcing traditional stereotypes of women, giving women subject positions as the Other, as the Caring.

In the article on prostitution (Hrzenjak et al, this issue), I believe that there are several understandings of how society «is» that could be found implicit in the text, and also that function as reference points when the authors draw their conclusions. The following sentence illustrates the difficulty I am trying to point out; «Somewhere between these extremes, however, lies a substantial truth about the prostitution, which admittedly, though not a consequence of organized crime and extreme coercion, is nevertheless not voluntary». This sentence is an example of a, in my view, problematic research position, where the researchers stand «outside the frames», taking an «objective position» telling the reader «the truth», and then having this as a reference point in their further analyses. By using this example, I also want to highlight an additional aspect to this discussion, being the difficulties to stick with the social constructivist approach; a problem which I believe is most prominent in the article on prostitution. Several times, the authors make references to how things really are, for example in the last section of the article where it is stated that « ... in reality prostitution is a many-sided phenomenon». Here, it also becomes clear that the authors have a «truth» in mind when analysing different frames of prostitution. Those frames are «measured against» the reality of the authors, you could say against their reality. I totally agree on the authors conclusions of the heteronormativity that is inbuilt in dominating discourses of prostitution, but I believe that their conclusions here would have been more convincing if they would have proposed another purpose for their article than comparing framings of prostitution in Slovenia and Austria, something I will come back to in the next section of the article.

The definition and analytical use of «gender mainstreaming» in the article on political representation and decision making (Meier et al, this issue), is in my view a good example on how it is possible to be more careful with the words and concepts used. The authors refer explicitly to the definition of gender mainstreaming made by the European Commission as their reference point, and then clarify their own definition as «... a definition of the policy problem or solution *in terms capable of transforming gender biased structures, systems or practices* (italics in original)». As I read this text, a specific definition of gender mainstreaming is the basis for analysing if gender mainstreaming is at use or would be possible to use at all in the countries discussed in the article. At the same time as I really appreciate this approach, I cannot stop thinking of how I as a reader should understand this definition of gender mainstreaming. Is it for example a vision or a reachable goal? Is it really possible in relation to how politics are institutionalised in

the Western world, to integrate this form of approach or perspective in politics, or should such a change turn the political systems upside down? Despite those questions, my interpretation is that one of the reasons for the analytical clarity that is significant for this article lies with the authors' ability to separate the empirical and the analytical levels, and the explicit definition of gender mainstreaming has certainly been a help in this.

What is then the problem with having an implicit norm of gender equality in your writing? I would like to underline that I am not arguing for a de-politicisation of research, i.e. for me it is self evident that researchers, like everyone else, carry values and experiences that inform their work, and that this should be regarded more as an asset than as a problem. What I although do think is needed is a more outspoken discussion on reflexivity in order to avoid the reproduction of implicit «right answers». In my view, the need of reflexivity in critical policy analysis could not be underlined enough.

My notion of reflexivity is related to the work of Sandra Harding and her discussions on «strong reflexivity» (Harding, 1993, 1991). Harding highlights the need of scrutinising both the context of discovery and the context of justification, which also brings the position of the researcher to the centre of scrutiny; «Strong objectivity requires that the subject of knowledge be placed on the same critical, causal plane as the objects of knowledge. Thus, strong objectivity requires what we can think of as “strong reflexivity”» (Harding, 1993, p. 69). Carol Bacchi also draws attention to this when discussing her approach on policy analysis, the «What's the problem? Approach» (1999) and states that «I think it is crucial that all analysts reflect upon their own location, institutional and cultural, reflect upon their position in discourse, and discuss this in their comments on constrictions of policy problems» (Bacchi, 1999, p. 62).

This position is also closely linked to the need of seeing knowledge production as a situated activity and increases the demand on the researcher to be open with hers or his understanding of the research problem at hand, and that those understandings actually informs how the research is conducted. According to Donna Haraway, this epistemological position also challenges traditional/positivistic notions of «good research» (Haraway, 1988). Feminist research, or gender research, has been and is still, criticised for being normative, political, not really knowledge production. In putting feminist research as opposite to «real research», this critique often creates a dichotomist view on knowledge where knowledge is either objective or relative, instead of nurturing the ambition of going «beyond» this way of thinking of knowledge production. Or in Donna Haraway's words; «Relativism is the perfect mirror

twin of totalization in the ideologies of objectivity; both deny the stakes in location, embodiment, and partial perspective; both make it impossible to see well» (Haraway, 1988, p. 584).

I also believe that this criticism directed towards feminist research does something with how we think about our work, and that it creates «thinking barriers» when we are interested in developing and examining how research could be transformed. With this I neither mean that feminist research in any fundamental or «natural» (sic) way should be different, nor that feminist research does not have any demands on quality of research. My point is that the constant criticism that feminist research meets puts a too strong focus on adjusting to «normal» science criteria.

If reflexivity could be seen as the more general answer to the problem of (re)producing implicit notions of the «right» gender equality, I see the distinction between analytical and descriptive concept as the more pragmatic «solution». In line with the argument of Carol Bacchi, I believe it to be of importance to separate analytical and empirical concepts (Bacchi, 1996). With a reflexive approach, it is also possible to create a necessary distance between analytical and empirical concepts. My main argument here is that it is problematic to look upon gender equality policies as self evident tool in order to create a fair society where discrimination related to sex, ethnicity, sexual preference and class is a memory of old times. Instead, the field of gender equality is needed to be analysed as a policy field where gender, but also sexuality, nation and class are constructed, and that those constructions are made in relation to each other – or, in other words, are intersectional. In the articles in this issue, the concept of gender equality is both used as a normative, and not explicitly stated, point of departure for the authors themselves and as a policy field that is to be scrutinised in the text. I think that we have to be aware of the fact that we ourselves use implicit definitions of gender equality as a way of «measuring other definitions», and that we therefore need to separate our analytical tools when analysing the empirical policy field of gender equality. From my own research it is very clear that gender equality is a concept that is filled with different meanings in different contexts, and also important, by different actors who have different agency.

Overall, I believe that carefulness concerning the use of words is central in a research tradition where the analyses made are strongly connected to the use of language. The use of language in the article on domestic violence could be used as an example of the difficulties of language in this strand of

research. By choosing to name the policy field of scrutiny domestic violence, the authors frame their own work in a specific way, or place themselves in one feminist tradition, especially since one of the countries studied uses the language of domestic violence, while the other use the vocabulary of violence against women. What is then my suggestion in relation to this problem? Of course I do not think that it is possible, or desirable, to find some kind of objective language, but I think that there is a need for another vocabulary than the one used in the policy field that is scrutinized. One way of doing this is to explicitly place oneself in a feminist theoretical tradition and use the language that has been established there.

The need of reflexivity is also a theme for the next section of this article, where I highlight the problems of comparative studies in a social constructivist epistemology.

COMPARATIVE POLITICS – WHAT’S THE POINT?

When going through some text books on comparative politics a few years ago, I realised that comparative methodology could be seen as a prominent feature in political studies. Or, as expressed in the book «Comparative Politics Today. A World View».

«Comparison is the methodological core of the scientific study of politics as well. Comparative analysis helps us develop explanations and test theories of the ways in which political process work and in which political change occurs. Here the logic and the intention of the comparative methods used by political scientists are similar to those used in more exact sciences» (Almond et al., 2000, p. 33).

This statement made me think of how I conduct my own research, what it for example meant that I analysed three women’s groups in my dissertation, although without the explicit ambition of comparing them. What was my intention with choosing three? How did I formulate this comparative approach, did I at all formulate it? This statement also made me think of the common use of dichotomies in research, and the discussion within in feminism of how we reproduce categories, for example the categories of women and men, but stating them and giving them opposite positions.

This quotation also illustrates other central aspects of the tradition of comparative politics; the emphasis on setting up and testing theories and to have the ambition of finding the explanations. As presented in another text book; «... the comparative approach can be regarded as the “master strategy” in drawing inferences about causation in any area» (Hague and

Harrop, 2001, p. 62). The descriptions of what it means to compare countries often include words like describe, explain and predict (Almond et al., 2000), or explain and evaluate (Kopstein and Lichbach, 2000). In the words of Kopstein and Lichbach: «We also compare to find out what is best» (Kopstein and Lichbach, 2000, p. 27). Of course, different problems in doing comparative studies are singled out and discussed in this context, one being the problem of in relation to what standards evaluations should be performed, for example in relation to «the good society». Hague and Harrop also discuss the problems involved in hypotheses testing and the possibilities of foreseeing political development and end with the conclusion that there most of the time is not possible to give explanations of political development, and that the researcher most of the times has to be content with «just» to provide descriptions and ways of understanding politics.

My overall impression of this literature is that despite the problems, the ambition in this research tradition is clear, and that is to refine the comparative methodology as far as possible, with the epistemological vision of the laboratory as reference point. What struck me is also the combination of knowing that comparative politics never could reach the laboratorial standard of science, and at the same time being so convinced of this way of doing research.

With this (dominating) discourse of comparative studies in mind, I have analysed earlier some feminist contributions of comparative country studies, coming to the conclusion that the traditional discourse seems to play a dominating role in the understandings of how comparisons ought to be performed (Rönnblom, 2002). One overall impression was also the lack of discussion on how to make comparative studies, an impression that I interpreted as resulting from the self evident position of comparison in the studies of politics, as was illustrated by the quotation from Almond et al. With this in mind, I have also studied how the articles in this issue relate to and discuss the notion of comparison. This is how the comparative ambition is described in the article on political decision-making;

«We investigate how the issue of wo/men's position in political decision-making has been dealt with in three countries, the Netherlands, Spain and Greece. This selection is based on the fact that the position of women in political decision-making is not the same in all three countries and has been dealt with in different ways, while as EU members all are confronted with the same policy framework. Moreover, the comparison between two Mediterranean

countries with important socio-political similarities but also differences, and a North European country with a longer tradition in gender policy, seemed fertile to us in view of our research target» (Meier et al., 2004, p. 1).

Here, the authors argue primarily in relation to the differences between their cases, but also in relation to similarities, especially between two of the three countries. That the countries studied all are members of the European Union and thus have to related to this supra-national policy framework is seen as binding the countries together. My interpretation is that some, but not too much «difference» is regarded as fruitful for the analysis.

In the article on the policies of intimacy (Verloo et al., this issue), the comparative ambition is more or less just stated, that the article will analyze the Netherlands, Greece and Austria along three dimensions and that «the final discussion will highlight similarities and differences across countries and between the three countries and the European Union». In the introduction it is also stated that «we are interested in finding out if there are differences in framing this problem». Clearly, differences are in focus in this comparative approach. In the article on prostitution (Hrzenjak et al., this issue), the comparative approach is described as an attempt at «explaining similarities and differences» in two countries that «have many elements of historical, cultural and religious traditions in common although their political systems and political cultures developed in rather different ways after the Second World War». The authors also write that mapping out differences in similarities in framing prostitution in Slovenia and Austria since the mid 1990's, is a main goal. In this article, the similarities between the two countries are used as the starting point. Finally, in the article on domestic violence (Kriszan et al., this issue), the comparative approach is discussed in terms of the authors choosing two countries that have different policy traditions concerning domestic violence. Also here, similarities are brought up as one main argument of comparison.

These ways of describing comparative ambitions in these articles are as I see it very common, and also goes well together with the statement that comparisons lies in the heart of political analyses. My mission here is not to say that there is something «wrong» with describing comparative studies in this way. What I think is important to discuss is what kind of answers questions in terms of differences and similarities give, and how this could be related to a tradition of a social constructivist knowledge production.

In the language of traditional comparative studies, this way of choosing cases is in line with the tradition of discussing comparison in terms of «most

similar» or «most different» approaches (Read and Marsh, 2002). This way of discussing how to choose cases for comparison could be seen as lying in the heart of comparative politics or comparative studies. On the one hand, I have nothing against this way of reasoning. It obviously makes sense to compare different cases with the ambition of finding out both similarities and differences. On the other, I believe that there is one important question to be asked in relation to comparative studies, and that is the question why. Why are we interested in differences and similarities? Why are we comparing? What are our ambitions when doing comparative studies? One answer could be that we, as researchers, want to know «more» of something, another that we want to single out a «winner» of something, a third that we want to «prove» that something is general, that there are some things that are there, despite context. But how could qualitative analyses secure the comparison of «same with same»? A demand that is central in the traditional epistemology of comparative politics.

There are obviously more answers to this question, and my intention here is not to come with any «right» answer. Instead, what I would like to point to is that different questions –and answers– are connected to different epistemologies, and that traditional comparative studies could to a large extent be placed in a positivistic tradition. To compare is to rank. It is often to find out who is best, in relation to an outspoken or more implicit goal. This means, as I see it, that comparative studies when working in a non positivistic, or social constructivist, tradition are difficult. I also believe that there is a need to formulate arguments on why comparisons are interesting, and to find arguments that do not contradict the epistemological tradition that inform the research.

For example, I believe that the importance of context in comparative analysis could not be underlined enough, and with this I mean to really analyse the context as giving different frames different meanings. The same framings of gender equality could be defined as «success» in one country and «backlash» in another. This is also an example of the importance to be clear on why the answers on similarities and differences are important, and in what way they could add to the more overall research problem. My apprehension is that too much focus on similarities and differences could blur the analytical focus and reduce the significance of the overall research problem. Instead, similarities and differences tend to get a life of their own, which goes hand in hand with the positivistic tradition of comparative studies.

One example to illustrate this argument could be found in the article on prostitution (Hrzenjak et al., this issue). When discussing, and comparing,

prostitution in Slovenia and in Austria, Slovenia is described as having a (dominating) neo-liberal framing of prostitution. In the Austrian case, no such frame is identified. In the article, this difference is more or less just stated, but how could this difference be understood? One answer is that Austria has been a country dominated by a (neo) liberal discourse for a long time, as have all the European countries, more or less, while there has been a shift in Slovakia and an ambition of getting «closer to the West». Here, there is an example of how more reflexive questions could be used in order to *understand* comparisons.

At the same time, I also believe that the comparative approach in the article on political representation and decision making actually is treated in a slightly different way than in the other articles, although this is not made explicit. In my reading, the authors are actually performing some kind of test of gender mainstreaming and in doing this always keeping the analytical problem in focus, and not only declaring differences and similarities. On the other hand, you could ask if it is coherent with a social constructivist epistemology to test hypothesis, which is also an ambition stated in this article. My interpretation is that the tradition of comparative politics, or rather the dominating discourse, influences the (our) language in which comparative analyses are described to a larger extent than we are aware of.

Here, I also would like to point out one of the articles in this issue, an article not yet mentioned here, as an example of how it is possible to be more analytical and consistently use «differences and similarities» in a comparative analysis. In the article on how gender inequality is framed in Greece and the European Union (Pantelidou Maloutas, this issue), some more theoretical questions are put in the forefront of the analysis, and these are also used in relation to the language of similarities and differences. Here, I am thinking especially on the construction of gender and the importance of how gender is produced for the understanding of gender (in)equality. In this article, the importance of how we as researchers define –or not define– gender in our own work also is discussed. In my view, this more theoretical focus moves the analysis in an interesting way «beyond» measuring differences and similarities. This focus also brings me back to my earlier discussion on reflexivity. In the same way as Sandra Harding's «strong reflexivity» is an approach to use in order to keep the analytical level in your analyses, it could also be seen as part of a methodology of comparison. This mode of thinking is also inspired by the Finnish sociologist Solveig Bergman who in her study of the women's movement in Finland and (West) Germany presents a comparative approach in terms of contrast.

«I treat my case studies as contextual and contrastive frames of reference for each other. In this way I attempt to look upon the feminist movement in one country through the movement in the other country» (Bergman, 2001, p. 8).

My interpretation of Bergman's approach is that her cases «talk with each other». This approach opens up for a more dynamic comparative analyses where the comparison includes possibilities of asking new questions, instead of the traditional focus of repeating the «same» questions to the «same» material. I do not agree with Bergman when she writes that this approach means that the countries «... contextually defined differences tend to be highlighted» (Bergman, 2001, p. 8). For me, contrasting as a methodology means an interaction between different empirical materials, an interaction where the research problems and questions are in focus – not primarily similarities and differences. Here, there is also interesting to highlight another aspect of the research and that is the analytical distance. By «reading» one material through the other, new dimensions in the material could appear. This is particularly interesting in relation to your «own» country or the case that you as a researcher «know the best».

One example of comparative country studies that is interesting in this context is the book *Women's Organizing and Public Policy in Canada and Sweden*, with Linda Briskin and Mona Eliasson as editors (1999). Briskin and Eliasson were not only editors but also the researchers taking the initiative for research cooperation between Canada and Sweden, a project that resulted in the book. The fundamental idea of the project was to «pair» researchers from the both countries, researchers that had competence in the same research area, for example the situation of lesbian women. By working together, analysing empirical material together from both countries, the ambition was to avoid falling in to the «traps» that Briskin herself experienced when she as a Canadian was studying the Swedish women's movement, for example that she «... missed the critical significance of women's organizing in Swedish political parties because she read "parties" (...) through Canadian feminist eyes» (Briskin and Eliasson, 1999, p. viii).

By bringing together two researchers from two different countries, the ambition was to put the dialogue in focus. In dialogue, the two researchers could problematise their own point of departures, discuss analytical tools and foremost challenge «... almost inevitable privileging of one perspective – that of an outsider» (Briskin and Eliasson, 1999, p. ix). One other aspect that Briskin and Eliasson highlighted in their discussion on comparison was

the cooperation and dialogue between the researchers, and that this process made the researchers see new dimensions of their own countries.

In an article on feminist comparative policy, this field of research is described as a large and growing field (Mazur, 2004). Considering the methodological theory building, the development during the last years is described as going from small *n* analysis, case studies and the comparative method towards using the statistical tools of large *n* analysis, while other studies take a bridging approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative analysis (Mazur, 2004). This description of feminist comparative studies resonates with my understanding of how the comparative approach is both described and to a large extent applied. From my perspective, I see problems with the lacking ambition of highlighting the epistemological level when thinking of comparison outside the traditional, positivistic way of doing comparative studies. Instead of modifying already existing thoughts on comparative politics, I believe a more fundamental re-thinking is needed in order to create some form of equivalence with a social constructive epistemology. To conclude, I would like to see more discussions of reflexivity in relation to critical studies on the constructions of gender equality, and also more generally in relation to comparative studies that are informed of a social constructive way of thinking about knowledge production. I also believe that the MAGEEQ project is an excellent site of creating methodology in relation to comparative studies, and I hope that the research team will see this as an interesting and important challenge.

TOWARDS A REFLEXIVE INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER EQUALITY

In the Nordic countries there is a big competition going on, and that is the competition on being the most gender equal country in the world. The competing teams are primarily Finland, Norway and Sweden, closely followed by Denmark and Iceland. In Swedish gender equality policies this competition also is connected to how this winning policy field could be exported.

«We in Sweden have come a long way in an international perspective, yes furthest in the world. We like to share our experiences; we gladly export our Swedish model of gender equality. But our first place must not let us believe that we have finished, there is a lot of work yet to be done in several areas» (Skr. 1999/2000: 24, p. 6, my translation).

This construction of gender equality goes hand in hand with the neo-liberal notion of politics as commodities, not as conflicts of interests and/or groups. While this is both interesting and central to the understanding of how gender equality is constructed today, my main intention with this example is also to point to the need of including for example the notion of nationality in the analyses of how gender equality is constructed in different contexts.

In analysing the constructions of gender equality, I believe that the inclusion of other analytical dimensions than gender is necessary for creating an understanding of how these constructions become a part of (re)producing dominating power orders in society. For example, the dimension of nationality, to construct gender equality as a Swedish project, is one of the main principles used to «get rid of» the gendered power dimension. This is done by placing the problem of gender equality on the «others», on «the immigrants with unequal gender relations». The dimension of hetero-normativity is also functioning as an important aspect in de-politicising gender equality. By creating gender equality as a common goal for women and men, placing the care of the children in the centre of attention, the possibilities of discussing gender equality in terms of conflict between women and men are closed. In other words, this construction (re)produces gender equality as a reciprocal hetero-normative project.

These are only two of several examples of how constructions of gender equality shuts close the possibilities of discussing gendered power relations, and how discourses of gender equality in themselves (re)produces gender power. As a methodology, I see an increased focus on reflexivity as a method of integrating an intersectional approach in the analysis of constructions of gender equality. An increased focus on both the ethnocentric and the hetero-normative dimensions of how both gender and gender equality are constructed in different context could increase our knowledge of power relations in society. Parts of an intersectional analysis is to be found in several of the articles in this issue; a more inclusive analysis within an intersectional approach would highlight the highly contextual and complex ways in which gender equality is constructed. To draw attention to the dimension of nationality, how the nations are (re)produced in constructions of gender equality could also be seen as another way of thinking about comparisons, i.e. to scrutinize the construction of the cases themselves.

After reading the, both informative and interesting, articles in this volume I am stuck with a feeling of longing. I am longing for a more explicit power analysis. I want to know more about how these researchers think of gendered power relations, and how different frames, or maybe discourses, reproduce

male domination and the subordination of women – and how those power relations intersect with other power relations, related to sexuality and ethnicity/race. Maybe it is not fair to place this demand on other researchers, but my impression is that their knowledge of gendered power relations easily could be used in producing several publications of the (re)production of power relations in different constructions of gender equality.

REFERENCES

- Almond, Gabriel, Powell Jr., Bingham, Ström, Kåre och Dalton, Russel, 2000, *Comparative politics today, A world view*, New York, Longman.
- Bacchi, Carol Lee, 1996, *The politics of affirmative action*, London, Sage.
- Bacchi, Carol, 1999, *Women, policy and politics: The construction of policy problems*, London, Sage.
- Bergman, Solveig, 2001, *Contextualising and contrasting feminisms*, Paper presented at NorFa Network WMI, Helsinki, August.
- Briskin, Linda, Eliasson, Mona, 1999, *Women's organizing and public policy in Canada and Sweden*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Hague, Rod, Harrop, Martin, 2001, *Comparative government and politics. An introduction*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, MacMillan.
- Haraway, Donna, 1988, «Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective», *Feminist Studies*, 14, 3, pp. 573-600.
- Harding, Sandra, 1991, *Whose science? Whose knowledge?: Thinking from women's lives*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press.
- Harding, Sandra, 1993, «Rethinking standpoint epistemology: "What is strong objectivity"?» in: Lacoff, Linda and Potter, Elizabeth (eds), *Feminist epistemologies*, London, Routledge.
- Kopstein, Jeffery, Lichbach, Mark, 2000, *Comparative politics. Interests, identities, and institutions in a changing global order*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Marsh, David, Stoker, Gerry (eds), 1995, *Theory and methods in political science*, London, Macmillan.
- Mazur, Amy, 2004, «Feminist comparative policy: Leading european political science into the future», *European Political Science*, 3: 2, pp. 67-84.
- Read, Melvyn, Marsh, David, 2002, «Combining qualitative and quantitative methods. In Marsh, David and Stoker, Gerry (eds), *Theory and methods in political science*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- Regeringens skrivelse 1999/2000: 24, *Jämställdhetspolitiken inför 2000-talet (Gender equality policies towards the 21st century)*, Stockholm, Riksdagens tryckeri.
- Rönblom, Malin, 2002, *Ett eget rum? Kvinnors organisering möter etablerad politik (A Room of One's Own. Women's Organising Meets Established Politics)* Statsvetenskapliga institutionens skriftserie, 2002: 3, Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, Umeå universitet.