

(re)Articulating Feminism

A Discourse Analysis of Sweden's Feminist Initiative Election Campaign

Kirill Filimonov & Jakob Svensson

Abstract

In this article we study campaign material of the Swedish party Feminist Initiative (FI) during the 2014 parliamentary election campaign in Sweden. Approaching the topic from discourse-theoretical and intersectional perspectives, we ask how the inclusion of various social groups into the hegemonic project of feminist politics becomes possible, what was constructed as an antagonist to feminist politics, and in what ways it impeded FI to realise such politics. Our findings show that intersectionality allowed FI to include every group/individual into its feminist political project as long as they experienced oppression. Even though racists and nationalists in general (the Sweden Democrats in particular) were singled out as antagonists, it was mainly norms and structures that were addressed in the online material as standing in the way for FI to fulfil both their identity and hegemonic project.

Keywords: articulation; discourse theory; election campaign; feminist politics; intersectionality; the feminist initiative

Introduction

Feminist politics have been a long-lasting source of inspiration in the field of gender research, yet questions regarding feminist politics do not often enter the public and political domains. This is, however, exactly what happened during the 2014 parliamentary election campaign in Sweden. The then-leader of the opposition (and the current Prime Minister) Stefan Löfven has repeatedly proclaimed himself to be a feminist (Holmqvist, 2013; Martikainen, 2012). The Liberal Party selected 'Feminism without socialism' as one of its campaign slogans, while the spokesperson for the Greens Gustav Fridolin called for a 'feminist government' (Bie, 2014). Furthermore, the foreign minister of the newly elected government Margot Wallström promised that under her leadership Sweden would be the only country in the world to conduct a 'feminist foreign policy' (Rothschild, 2014).

On the forefront of this feminist discourse during the elections was the political party Feminist Initiative (Sw. *Feministiskt initiativ*, or *FI*), which in 2013-2014 became Sweden's fastest-growing party (Orange, 2014). In 2014, 20,740 new members were enrolled in FI, comprising half of the total number of new members enrolled in Swedish political parties that year (SvD, 2015). FI won its first mandate in the European Parliament election in May 2014, becoming the second most active Swedish party online (Brandel, 2014; on some platforms even the most active, see Filimonov, Russmann, & Svensson,

2016) and was close to making it into the Swedish Parliament, but eventually failed. This article examines the FI phenomenon in Swedish politics, focusing on one specific aspect: the construction of the notion of *feminist politics* in their online campaign. By feminist politics we mean a hegemonic project (see theoretical framework) involving a variety of social movements, structured around the floating signifier ‘feminism’ as articulated by FI.

FI claimed to challenge the existing political order, positioning itself as an ‘ideologically independent feminist party’ (Feministiskt initiativ, 2014) that derives from intersectionality. FI focused on both feminism and antiracism, actively engaging the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Queer) community and appealing to immigrants, racial minorities, and people with disabilities (Feministiskt initiativ, 2014). This resulted in a broader definition of feminism compared to first- and second feminist waves that focused almost exclusively on women (for an overview see Bryson, 2003). FI is thus an example of an intersectional, third-wave feminist organisation.

For these reasons, we discuss the *rearticulation* of feminism in FI’s online election materials during the 2014 election campaign. Our aim is to study how FI rearticulated feminism by including various social groups into the hegemonic project of feminist politics and who or what was asserted as its antagonist. The focus on articulation and the logics of contingency leads us to the theoretical and methodological framework of the article: discourse-theoretical approach.

Theoretical Framework

Laclau and Mouffe’s (2014) discourse-theoretical approach (DTA), situated within poststructuralist and post-Marxist frameworks, has been used in this study. DTA offers a range of useful analytical tools – most notably hegemony and antagonism – that enable approaching the construction of an ‘us’, a political identity, in this case the political identity of FI. Following Laclau and Mouffe, we define discourse as a ‘structured totality resulting from articulatory practice’ (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p. 91), in other words, an ensemble of articulated signifiers whose meaning is constantly (re)negotiated. Any social practice is articulatory in the sense that it requires construction of meaning by fixing it relatively around particular signifiers called nodal points (p. 99). We refer to these articulatory practices as *hegemony*.

To articulate a signifier therefore implies ascribing it with a certain meaning. Following the Gramscian tradition, in DTA hegemonic projects have the ultimate goal to ‘construct and stabilize systems of meaning’ (Howarth, 2000, p. 110). For Laclau and Mouffe (2014, p. 122), the two conditions for a hegemonic articulation are the presence of antagonistic forces and the instability of frontiers that separate them, i.e. a wide range of unarticulated elements floating within the discursive field. Laclau and Mouffe maintain that there are no necessary links between different signifiers of a discourse, as meanings always depends on a specific hegemonic articulation. This is an important analytical premise as it enables approaching feminism as a floating signifier, i.e. its various meanings being a result of various articulations rather than certain pre-given conceptions.

Hegemonic projects are articulated in a discursive field criss-crossed with antagonisms. No hegemony can ever be complete because there is always resistance to power emanating from an antagonistic force. At the same time, this force enables accentuating the difference of the project and in this way shapes it in a particular form (see Laclau

& Mouffe, 2014, ch. 3). The antagonist thus becomes a necessary prerequisite for the emergence of the subject, or, in the language of DTA, its *constitutive outside*. For Laclau and Mouffe (2014, p. 137), social antagonisms are part and parcel of the social, and, therefore, unavoidable and even desirable in a radical and plural democracy. The latter can therefore be described as ‘a form of politics that recognizes diversity and invites participation from a variety of social spaces’ leading to ‘the continual proliferation of new voices, new communities, and new identities’ (Sandilands, 1993, p. 3).

We suggest that intersectionality is an example of this equivalent democratic logic encouraged by radical-democratic theory (see Mouffe, 1993), i.e. collaboration of a variety of social struggles. The basic premise of intersectionality is that studying social stratification is reductionist and misleading if ‘structural axes of differentiation’ (Peterson, 1999, p. 53), – race, class, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, age, and religion – are analysed independently from each other. From the intersectional perspective, such an approach downplays specific problems of, for instance, women of colour in western societies, who experience discrimination and abuse not only as women, but also as members of racial or religious minorities and, often, working-class individuals (e.g. Crenshaw, 1991). The approach has perhaps been best summarised by Matsuda (1990, p. 1189):

When I see something that looks racist, I ask, ‘where is the patriarchy in this?’
When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, ‘Where is the heterosexism in this?’
When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, ‘Where are the class interests in this?’

The critique of intersectionality has pointed at its potentially devastating effects for the unity of women and the idea of a common ‘sisterhood’ (see Brah & Phoenix, 2004). Indeed, intersectionality challenges the holistic approach to women, instead acknowledging differences existing within them as a sizeable social group. It reflects an understanding that people who belong to the same collective can be positioned differently in relation to a whole range of social positions. If the world is seen differently from each position, any knowledge based on just one position is incomplete (Yuval-Davis, 1999), which intersectionality seeks to remedy.

The denouncement of essentialism and an amalgam of a variety of social struggles make it legitimate to bring together the theories of radical democracy and intersectionality under a common denominator. From a poststructuralist perspective, which informs radical-democratic theory, a stable notion of woman encouraged by first- and second-wave feminism is deeply problematic. We know from Derrida (1978) and Lacan (1994) that there is no ‘last word’, but instead a constant play of signifiers, which makes the meaning slip out of reach. The word ‘woman’, for instance, is simply unable to signify anything but ‘particular women in particular situations’ (Soper 1990, cited in Mouffe, 1995, p. 328). Soper rightly concluded (albeit in a critical manner) that the failure of signification of women results in the inability to construct a political community around women as such. For Mouffe (1995), however, this opens up the opportunity to redefine feminist politics in accordance with her radical-democratic rationale:

I argue that, for those feminists who are committed to a radical democratic politics, the deconstruction of essential identities should be seen as the necessary condition for an adequate understanding of the variety of social relations where the principles of liberty and equality should apply. (p. 371)

In other words, rather than pursuing goals of women *as* women – a definable group with a shared identity – feminists should articulate their aims within a wider context of demands, struggling against various ways in which ‘the category of women is constructed in subordination’ (Mouffe, 1992, p. 382). Women should be understood as over-determined social agents in contrast to the reductionist approach that ascribes women a single subject position based on their gender identity. As Emejulu (2011) pointed out, this would lead to ‘building of solidarity between and amongst subjects who recognize themselves as radical democratic citizens’ (p. 385).

From the radical-democratic and intersectional perspectives we suggest that FI’s (re)articulation of feminism was based on the inclusion of several social groups into something that has traditionally been considered relating to (and produced by) women, understood as an essentialised biological (and social) category. We will study the discursive mechanisms behind the equivalent logic that expanded the hegemonic project of feminist politics. For that purpose, we have both singled out the nodal points that maintained the hegemonic project and analysed the discursive construction of a constitutive outside. As Mouffe (2005) reminds us, ‘in the field of collective identities, we are always dealing with the creation of a “we” which can exist only by the demarcation of a “they”’ (p. 15). It is thus indispensable to illuminate both the ‘we’ and the ‘they’ of a discourse under analysis.

The aim of this article is thus to study how FI articulated the hegemonic project of ‘feminist politics’ in terms of intersectionality in their online election materials (website and Facebook page) during the 2014 election campaign. Two research questions were posed: RQ1) How does FI try to include various social groups into the hegemonic project of feminist politics? RQ2) What or who is constructed as an antagonist to feminist politics, and in what ways does it impede and make such politics possible?

Data and Method

Because of a close intertwinement of theory and method in discourse analysis (Winther-Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010), analytical categories attended to in the theoretical section, in a sense, define the methodological framework *per se*. Due to a lack of any common algorithm in DTA, it is always up to the researcher to define the structure of analysis using DTA’s analytical concepts. Below we present our suggested analytical framework, preceded by the description of the empirical material and its selection.

Empirical Material and Data Collection

Given FI’s campaign strategy to use the internet and social media, as well as their relative success in doing so (compared to other parties, see introduction), we have focused on the online content. Online material is also easily accessible and often used by political parties (Svensson & Larsson, in press), which was also the case with FI who actively addressed voters with their campaign materials through social media channels. The empirical material of this study is a middle-sized, specialised corpus of texts (50,455 words), with compiled textual materials from:

- 1) FI's official website (www.feministisktinitiativ.se), making up about 90 per cent of the data (44,150 words): The website was chosen as a main source of data as it provides easy access to a wide range of campaign materials. Moreover, websites generally provide an opportunity to express political stances and articulate identities more explicitly compared to traditional forms of agitation such as leaflets. All of the texts related to FI's pre-election political programme, available online as of April 2015, were selected and manually compiled into a single file. When quoting fragments from the website materials in the analysis, we shall refer to the full name of the document in brackets.
- 2) Posts from the party's Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/feministisktinitiativ>) (6,305 words): The collected Facebook posts comprise a one-month period prior to Election Day (14th August-14th September 2014). This is normally a period of intense campaigning when parties and candidates seek to communicate their election platform to voters; therefore, it was deemed the most appropriate period to study the discourse of the campaign. The same gathering procedure was carried out with the Facebook posts as with the website content: they were manually collected from FI's Facebook page in April 2015 and copied into a single file. When the posts contained a link to an article written by one of the party's top candidates for mass media, this article was also included in the corpus. Looking into the content of FI's official page on Facebook was particularly promising since, as we mentioned in the introduction, FI had outperformed most Swedish parties in the intensity of use of social networking sites in pre-election campaigning.

As the language of the empirical material was almost exclusively in Swedish (except for the text 'Election platform' translated into English and other languages by FI), fragments quoted in this article were translated into English by the first author. The way the material was used and analysed is explained in the section below.

Analytical Procedure

As mentioned before, there is no single way of employing DTA. The analytical procedure is seldom a linear straightforward process often described in sections like this. Nonetheless, below we attempt to summarise our analytical procedure as transparently as possible. It can be described as an iterative in-depth text reading of the collected empirical material in order to identify central signs around which meanings were organised (RQ1) as well as what identities and groups are discursively constructed (RQ2) (see Winther-Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010, p. 165-166). The analysis of the collected online material revolved around two DTA processes: institution of nodal points and construction of an antagonist.

The institution of nodal points. This part of the analysis corresponds to RQ1. We sought to identify central signifiers that FI had instituted in the discourse with an eye to fix the unstable meaning of feminism. We were interested in discursive mechanisms that enabled the expansion of meaning of feminism and construction of a political identity based on intersectionality. The discourse-theoretical perspective informed our assumption that the nodal points should sustain the expanded signifying chain of feminist

politics, which now concerned numerous social movements as opposed to women as a definable and unproblematic entity. The intersectional/radical-democratic approach, in turn, made us take into account the differences within the elements of the signifying chain. Therefore, we were, on the one hand, searching for signifiers in the online material that could be considered central for structuring feminist politics as a single whole, while on the other hand looking for signifiers that enabled the expression of difference and particularity within the collective movement.

The construction of an antagonist. This step in the analysis helped answer RQ2. The aim here was to shed light on who or what was understood to be the constitutive outside that impeded full realisation of the hegemonic project. Analysis of an antagonist is crucial for understanding any hegemonic project, given DTA's point of departure that any identity comes into existence only when juxtaposed against an external force. A solid grasp of the constitutive outside, therefore, leads to a deeper understanding of the opportunities and limits of a hegemonic project. Two criteria were used to identify the antagonist (following Howarth, 2000): 1) It should prevent the social agent (feminists) from attaining its identity, and 2) the social agent (feminists) constructs it as a foe deemed responsible for this failure.

Accordingly, the basic question posed to the collected material was: what is constructed as 'us' and 'them'? A concordance analysis, i.e. analysis of semantic context (see elaboration below) was conducted to see what function was ascribed to the antagonist in the texts (what it was said to *be* and to *do*) as well as how this function hindered FI's hegemonic project based on the nodal points elicited at the first stage of the analysis.

Previous studies (e.g. Baker & McEnery, 2005; MacDonald, Homolar, Rethel, Schnurr, & Vessey, 2015) have shown evidence of how basic elements of quantitative analysis (namely, from corpus linguistics, see Baker, 2006) can support claims stemming from discourse analysis. This is particularly helpful in the analysis of larger corpora of texts, such as the one used in this study, albeit to be handled with care. In this study, two quantitative techniques – keyword analysis and concordance analysis – were used to navigate through the texts. Freeware AntConc, an analogue of Wordsmith (see <http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/>), was used for quantitative operations with data. Below we attend to both analyses.

Keyword analysis. This analysis was used to make sense of the massive corpus rather than automatically generate ready answers to our questions. By keywords we mean the unusually frequent words in a given corpus compared to a reference corpus. To obtain a keyword list, AntConc conducts a log-likelihood test on each word from a given corpus and assigns it a keyness value; the higher the value, the stronger the keyness of that word (for the use of log-likelihood tests for corpus comparison, see Rayson & Garside, 2000). As a reference corpus, to which the data were compared in order to identify unusually frequent words, two corpora of modern Swedish language, recommended by Gothenburg University (Språkbanken), were used: *August Strinbergs brev* (1,507,268 tokens) and *ASPAC svenska* (773,648 tokens). Thus, keyword analysis results present a list of unusually prominent words in FI's online election materials compared to their use in modern Swedish language (see Table 1).

Table 1. Keywords (most salient lexical words) in the Corpus

Rank	Word	Frequency	Keyness
1	Kvinnor [women]	164	1026.752
2	Initiativ	169	1016.704
3	Sverige [Sweden]	158	974.825
4	Våld [violence]	132	807.424
5	Människor [humans]	120	742.367
6	Rättigheter [rights]	88	548.767
7	Personer [people]	87	535.867
8	Diskriminering [discrimination]	66	431.181
9	Barn [children]	88	406.110
10	Resurser [resources]	61	380.935
11	Perspektiv	58	344.376
12	Män [men]	58	339.558
13	Hbtq [LGBTQ]	49	333.185
14	Samhället [the society]	55	330.376
15	Sexualitet [sexuality]	54	329.511

It should be noted that only lexical words, i.e. nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, were taken into account. Function words such as prepositions and pronouns were disregarded. The first column (Rank) numbers the keywords in the order they appear in the analysis results based on keyword strength. The second column (Word) presents each keyword. The third column (Frequency) indicates the number of times a certain word appeared in the corpus. The last column shows a keyness value.

Concordance analysis. This analysis was used to take a closer look at the context of broader discursive patterns that were identified by keyword analysis and during text reading. Concordance is ‘a list of all the occurrences of a particular search term within a corpus, presented within the context that they occur in’ (Baker, 2006, p. 71). It is arguably one of the handiest techniques of looking at the context of the use of words, which enables sorting a list of words with same lemmas one by one. All in all, concordance analysis was deployed for an easier navigation through the texts and simpler access to a relatively large amount of data.

Findings

RQ1. Nodal Points of Feminist Politics

In the case of FI, we deal with what Mouffe (1993) labelled a ‘particularized universalism’ (p. 13), meaning the importance of an open expression of differences in politics for the sake of expanding the application of the universalised notions of equality and liberty. Two nodal points in the discourse on feminist politics were extrapolated from the data: *human rights* and *experience of oppression*.

The data revealed that FI emphasises human rights as opposed to just women’s rights. Concordance analysis revealed that in 47 per cent of occurrences, the word *rättigheter* [rights] was linked to the word *mänskliga* [human], forming the collocation ‘human rights’. This seems to confirm the aforementioned suggestion that, in spite of feminism’s

traditional preoccupation with women's issues, FI generally tends to go beyond the traditional articulation of feminist politics as a platform for the struggle for the rights of women *as women*. In order to test this hypothesis, a concordance analysis was conducted to identify the context in which the signifier 'human rights' occurs. Out of 48 occurrences, only nine were directly associated with women, women's rights, and gender equality. By contrast, in 37 cases 'human rights' was used in a broader, universalistic sense, embracing all people (see example below, our emphases):

'Feminist Initiative works for *everyone's human rights*' (<http://feministisktinitiativ.se/politik/vald-mot-kvinnor/>, retrieved 21/11/2015).

'The European Convention on Human Rights, which has been Swedish law since 1995, states that *everyone has the right* to respect of their [private] correspondence' (<http://feministisktinitiativ.se/politik/rattspolitik/>, retrieved 21/11/2015).

As for the word *människor* [humans, people], it was used 185 times in comparison to 313 occurrences of the word *woman* in various lexical forms. Given that we are considering the discourse of a party with feminism in its name, we deem this quite a large ratio of the all-encompassing notion of *humans* compared to a more particular notion of *women*.

The second nodal point in FI's discourse on feminist politics is 'experience of oppression'. The signifier 'experience' appears in various contexts, which, according to the concordance analysis, were predominantly negative. First and foremost, the experience concerns discrimination and oppression (our emphases):

All of us have different *experiences* and body memories of *discrimination and oppression* (<http://feministisktinitiativ.se/om/margaret-om-intersektionalitet/>, retrieved 21/11/2015).

Research shows that mental illness is higher among foreign-born individuals than among natives. It suggests that past traumas, but also racism, everyday discrimination, *experiences of injustice and degrading treatment* have effects on physical and mental health (<http://feministisktinitiativ.se/politik/halsa-och-sjukvard/>, retrieved 21/11/2015).

Moreover, FI specifically touches upon the experience of exclusion from the mainstream public sphere (our emphases):

Many racialised women in Sweden and in other places, where whiteness gives power and privilege, have an experience of *being silenced, excluded* or told to "calm down" when they raise issues of racism (<http://feministisktinitiativ.se/om/argumentationsguide/>, retrieved 21/11/2015).

RQ2. The Constitutive Outside of Feminist Politics

An inevitable condition for a successful articulation of a political identity is an identification of the Other which constitutes and delimits identity (Mouffe, 2005). Drawing on Howarth's (2000, p. 105) reading of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, we use these two criteria to approach the articulation of a constitutive outside: 1) The social agent is unable to attain its identity due to the presence of an antagonist; 2) The social agent constructs an 'enemy' deemed responsible for this inability.

Our findings demonstrated that the way in which FI was demarcating its constitutive outside was rather inexplicit. Formally, FI openly proclaimed its foe to be extreme right-wing ideologies, particularly nationalist parties Sweden Democrats (FI claimed to be ‘the most obvious opposition to the Sweden Democrats’, see <https://www.facebook.com/feministisktinitiativ/>, retrieved 21/11/2015) and the Party of the Swedes. FI sees itself as a carrier of a new feminist ideology that ‘challenges the old ideologies in the Riksdag’ (<https://www.facebook.com/feministisktinitiativ/>, retrieved 21/11/2015) with nationalists considered as the main threat to this ideology. FI constructs this opposition quite explicitly in most texts, from its slogan ‘Out with racists, in with feminists’ to numerous statements:

Fascism and nationalism are always accompanied by limitations of the rights of women and LGBTQ persons’ (<https://www.facebook.com/feministisktinitiativ/>, retrieved 21/11/2015).

Misogyny, homophobia, racism, fascism, and nationalism go hand in hand. FI challenges all of this (<https://www.facebook.com/feministisktinitiativ/>, retrieved 21/11/2015).

Thus, on the one hand, Nazism, fascism, and nationalism (which in turn form a sort of chain of equivalence in FI’s discourse) were explicitly proclaimed to be FI’s ideological foes. It was paradoxical, on the other hand, that the respective signifiers were poorly presented in the corpus; each of them appeared only four times in various lexical forms (e.g. fascism, fascists, fascistic, etc.). If so little attention was paid to someone so important for self-identification, it is legitimate to question whether these ideologies are the actual Other. In fact, FI itself points at the blurred line between friends and foes with a somewhat unusual frankness for a political party:

Everyone is characterised by racism because we are a part of a racist society. The majority don’t want to be labelled as racists, but one’s actions and way of thinking can be racist, whether one wants it or not (<http://feministisktinitiativ.se/om/argumentationsguide/>, retrieved 21/11/2015).

Judging from the above, everyone in society appears to a certain extent to be guilty for being racist without even noticing. This can be said to be in line with FI’s general anti-essentialist approach to identities: racism is not ascribed to only one social group (which would make it, in discourse-analytical terms, a sutured and self-defined totality), but considered to be dispersed in society. Indeed, if society as a whole is ‘racist’ – and racism threatens the project of feminist politics – then the constitutive outside cannot be represented simply by one social group.

After a closer reading of FI’s campaign materials, we suggest that these are in fact *structures* and *norms* that are subjectified and constructed in antagonistic relation to FI’s project of feminist politics. Both signifiers are quite salient in the texts: the corpus contains 54 occurrences of the words *structure/the structure/structures/structural* (*struktur / strukturer / strukturer / strukturell / strukturella*) and 84 occurrences of various semantic forms of the word ‘norm’ meaning social norms (*norm / normer / normal / normkritik / normkritisk / normkritiska / normkritiskt*). A close look at collocations containing the root *struktur-* gives a clear idea of the context where it was predominantly used. FI uses, albeit never clearly defines, ‘structure(s)’ as a set of complex relationships that organise

and reproduce a social system. The intersections between different structures have often been underlined (our emphases):

We are going to show that feminism is not some special marginal interest, but a political force that is going to break down *patriarchal, sexist, and racist structures* (<http://feministisktinitiativ.se/politik/feministisk-antirasism/>, retrieved 21/11/2015).

FI is working to challenge the *established and discriminatory structures* that maintain ethnic privileges in society... and to make visible how *gender and racist structures* strengthen and maintain each other (<http://feministisktinitiativ.se/politik/feministisk-antirasism/>, retrieved 21/11/2015).

Concordance analysis of the word 'strukturer' [structures] from the website revealed that it was predominantly used as a subject with agency. Abstract, depersonalised structures come to life and effectively become social agents *per se*. Namely, they are said to:

- *strengthen* other structures,
- *interact* with other structures,
- *create* conditions for discrimination in the workplace,
- *subordinate* certain groups systematically,
- *assign* men and women different positions,
- *maintain* ethnic privileges in society,
- *distribute* resources and influence inequitably,
- *create* power imbalance in society,
- *separate* individuals,
- *provide* men with benefits just because they are men, and
- be *manifest* in the concentration of power.

We see how structures are said to 'maintain', 'strengthen', and 'interact with' each other, as well as to 'subordinate' and 'separate' individuals from one another. This means that, if feminist politics is based on the nodal point 'human rights', the subjectified structures hinder it and prevent realisation of the hegemonic project. In other words, FI's ultimate claim is that their antagonists are not nationalist or fascist political movements; the party sees structures behind them: 'Perhaps the most important knowledge is that... one can never stay outside social structures' (<http://feministisktinitiativ.se/politik/sexualpolitik/>, retrieved 21/11/2015).

By now, we have made clear what the structures are said to *do*; in Table 2 the adjectives used together with the word 'structures' are presented in order to understand what they are said to *be*.

Table 2. *Adjectives Used with the Word ‘Structures’ in the Corpus*

Adjective	Occurrences (N)
Power	9
Racist	8
Sex (kön)	3
Patriarchal	3
Social	2
Discriminatory	2
Sexist	1
Heteronormative	1
Deep	1
Various	1
New	1
Global	1
Comprehensive	1
Socioeconomic	1
Colonial	1

Judging from this data, ‘structures’ are constructed in a way that is completely opposite to the feminist subject: in terms of gender (structures are ‘patriarchal’ and ‘sexist’), race/ethnicity/ nationality (‘racist’ and ‘colonial’), sexuality (‘heteronormative’), and class (‘socioeconomical’). Being what they are described to be, structures are a blocker of feminist politics situated at the intersection of the abovementioned categories. Structures are a serious enemy, described as ‘deep’ and ‘comprehensive’, and they function on a global scale. Most notably, structures directly relate to power and shape power relations, albeit ‘power’ as such remains a vague and unattended signifier in FI’s campaign materials. Yet, structures are not the only foe.

A closely related concept to structures in FI’s articulation is *norms*. Together with structures, they are constructed as the constitutive outside of feminist politics. Table 3 shows that the adjectives denoting *norms* are neutral or pejorative. Most of them, however, relate to feminism (as discussed above) in one way or another.

Table 3. *Adjectives Used with the Noun ‘Norm(s)’ [norm/normer] in the Corpus*

Adjective	Occurrences (N)
Gender	5
Cultural	4
Social	3
Heterosexual	3
Sexual	2
Oppressive	2
Patriarchal	1
Destructive	1
Function (funktionsnormer)	1
Gender-binary	1
White	1
Western	1
Stronger	1
New	1

Norms are said to promote a white, western, gender-binary and heterosexual standard, also stigmatising disabilities; overall norms maintain an oppressive, patriarchal and destructive order:

Today oppressive gender norms are maintained at the state level and those who violate gender norms are often subjected to violence and stigma as well as suffer more from poverty (<http://feministisktinitiativ.se/politik/sexualpolitik/>, retrieved 21/11/2015).

If you, like us, wish [to live in] society where every person is free to live their life beyond the norms of masculinity and femininity, whiteness, abilities and sexual orientation, we have the policies to reach those goals (Schyman, 2014).

FI makes clear that all of the groups united in the project of feminist politics suffer from norms, which set exclusionary standards. They contradict feminist politics and, therefore, are understood as its enemy. Norms can be social or cultural, but, importantly, they are *constructed*. This example illustrates FI's social-constructivist approach to the issue of masculinity and violence: 'What we associate with masculinity is governed by cultural norms, not biological conditions' (<http://feministisktinitiativ.se/politik/vald-mot-kvinnor/>, retrieved 21/11/2015).

Considering how norms are constructed in the texts as a subject and object can help understand its discursively ascribed function. As with structures, FI subjectifies norms, which become a social agent *per se*. On the website norms are said to (our emphases):

- 'underlie abusive treatment',
- 'contribute to limiting women's and girls' space in public',
- 'permeate media, its content and appeal',
- 'affect young people's notion of their body and sexuality', and
- 'be able to be significant for how violence is made possible, understood and addressed by society'.

Interestingly, structures and norms are discursified differently, with the scope of the latter appearing much more modest than that of the former. Whereas structures are ascribed strategic functions such as creating a power imbalance in society and the very conditions for discrimination, norms are thought to function more tactically, with a supportive role in shaping power relations (e.g. *can* be significant, *contribute* to limiting rights).

Table 4 presents the list of verbs used in relation to 'norms' and 'structures' when they stand as objects in texts. Once again, there is a certain similarity between 'norms' and 'structures' as objects in a sentence: both are conceptualised as social constructs that are created, can be made visible and altered. However, there is much more agency left to an individual in challenging norms rather than structures. Unlike structures, it is suggested that norms should be questioned, opposed, counteracted, criticised, violated – and even to get free from.

Table 4. Verbs Used with ‘Norms’ and ‘Structures’

Norms		Structures	
Alter	Present	Break down	Stay outside (of)
Violate	Challenge	Alter	See
Make visible	Legitimate	Create	
Question	Entrench	Make visible	
Talk about	Oppose	Understand	
Fit (in)	Ponder	Illuminate	
Be freed (from)	Criticise	Challenge	
Counteract	Break	Become aware (of)	

FI actively involves itself in the hegemonic struggle and comes up with a remedy against the antagonist: a so-called *norm-critical pedagogy* (normkritisk pedagogi) in educational establishments. A closer look at this tool’s expected results gives an understanding of FI’s idea about the ultimate fixation of the discourse on feminist politics. Norm-critical pedagogy, *inter alia*, is supposed to do the following:

Make visible various norms and power structures that underlie abusive treatment (<http://feministisktinitiativ.se/politik/utbildning/>, retrieved 21/11/2015).

Provide a tool to break down structures that shape power imbalance (<http://feministisktinitiativ.se/politik/utbildning/>, retrieved 21/11/2015)

We may see that the FI’s articulation of feminist politics is asserted in line with Foucault’s (1978) *speaker’s benefit*. By mere articulation (making structures and norms visible, deepening understanding of them, and ‘seeing’ mechanisms behind discrimination), the antagonist is expected to be defeated, and those capable of articulating knowledge of the oppressive essence of norms appear to be liberated. However, the fact that both structures and norms remain purely imaginary constructs brings fundamental difficulties for FI’s political identification. This is a point we turn to in the discussion.

Discussion

The analysis leads to two important conclusions. One concerns the radical expansion of meaning of feminism by FI. By articulating oppression as one of the nodal points that sustains the signifying chain of feminist politics, FI essentially leaves the door open for all discriminated groups in society: any of them could become a subject of feminist politics. Once again we are faced with the problem of shifting the focus away from women as a single group, as a ‘sisterhood’ – although this time on a level of policies rather than theories. To be sure, there is nothing wrong about taking a complex approach to social inequalities. What seems problematic is the effect of FI’s rearticulation of feminism as an analytical category. If feminism acquires the meaning that essentially makes it a synonym with anti-discrimination, we may well talk about emptying the concept. If gender is only one of the ‘axes of differentiation’, does it mean policies for women’s empowerment should be abandoned? Would it make the struggle for equal representation of women and men less significant because of its uncritical take on gender binary

and negligence of, for instance, race as an equally substantial part of gender equality? It could, yet it does not. The reason is that FI, despite its proclaimed intersectional stance, often resorts to both liberal and radical feminist discourses that can mask possible contradictions between the deconstructive approach to womanhood and the struggle for women's rights. For instance, even though FI (in a poststructuralist fashion) acknowledges that '[not] all men have more power than women in all situations. Everyone can be inferior in once sense while being superior in the other', they go on to say:

But it is important to see that there is a structure that provides benefits to men just because they are men, and that this structure cuts across all social classes (<http://feministisktinitiativ.se/politik/vald-mot-kvinnor/>, retrieved 21/11/2015).

Notably, the latter statement represents an essentialist approach that is merely based on stable (and binary) gender definitions. FI's rhetoric, consciously or not, remains inconsistent, which brings us to the uneasy question of the possibility of concordance between an intersectional political agenda and election campaigning. Whether or not it is possible to match a political campaign context with intersectionality at all, it is apparent that FI failed to do so without falling into the trap of essentialism.

The second implication has to do with FI's construction of antagonism. That structures and norms are the constitutive outside of feminist politics brings us to Lacan's and Žižek's idea of a failed signification, with the signified slipping out of the signifier's reach (see overview in Stavrakakis, 1999). We observe the same issue in FI's articulation of its antagonist which is represented by a mere signifier: unable to fix the meaning around any particular 'real' object, 'structures' and 'norms' do not transcend the symbolic register – the language – and remain essentially a void masked by a signifier. Following Lacan (1994), we may thus talk of *fantasy* guiding the articulation of feminist politics, which becomes dependent on purely imaginary concepts articulated as its antagonist. We argue that such articulation is highly problematic for the affirmation of FI's hegemonic project. From a radical-democratic perspective, a successful articulation of a political identity requires delineating the foe (the 'big Other'); what FI does instead is blur the line that separates 'us' from 'them', as we have seen in the example of racist structures that permeate society. However, with the signification of the foe failing, the identification process remains incomplete and the identity obscure. Operating in antagonistic terms of radical politics, FI nonetheless skips the crucial last step: defining its big 'Other' in a way intelligible enough to gain support among voters and enter the Parliament.

Conclusion

To conclude, in this study we asked two questions when examining FI's online campaign material: 1) how does FI try to include various social groups into the hegemonic project of feminist politics, and 2) what or who is constructed as an antagonist to feminist politics and how does it impede and make such politics possible? In regard to the first research question, we found that intersectionality essentially allowed FI to include every group/individual into the hegemonic project of feminist politics – as long as they had experienced oppression (it is up to each group/individual to define their experience as that of oppression). This also leads us to the second research question. Even though

racists and nationalists in general, and the Sweden Democrats in particular, were singled out as the antagonist, it was mainly norms and structures that were addressed in the online material as standing in the way of FI affirming its hegemonic project of feminist politics.

The study of FI's articulatory practice goes to the core of the critique of intersectionality as potentially devastating for the unity of women (see Brah & Phoenix, 2004). What happens to the idea of a common 'sisterhood' when FI attempts to embrace everyone feeling oppressed by structures and norms? A hegemonic project challenging the holistic approach to womanhood – by revealing its contingency as opposed to the traditionally stable and unproblematic notion of women – proved difficult to communicate in a comprehensible manner during an election campaign. We do not aim to argue here against Mouffe's (1992) claim that feminism should be articulated within a wider context of demands, nor do we put forward the idea that women should be reduced to an essentialised (gender or sexual) category. Our point is that such a radical expansion of struggles constituting the project of feminist politics risks making it difficult to communicate, explain and make the hegemonic project relevant, at least in the context of an election campaign. Hence, FI's initial appeal to a constituency looking for alternatives to grand narratives of 'old ideologies' (to use FI's own expression) remained largely unnoticed as the election campaign proceeded to the traditional logic of the Left vs. Right, with issues such as unemployment overshadowing matters of identity. FI managed to involve numerous social struggles into its hegemonic project, but did not succeed in structuring the discourse in a way that would cover the void behind its own political identity.

References

- Baker, Paul & McEnery, Tony (2005). A corpus-based approach to discourses of refugees and asylum seekers in UN and newspaper texts. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 4(2), 197-226.
- Baker, Paul (2006). *Using corpora in discourse analysis*. London: A&C Black.
- Bie, Narok (2014). Fridolin: "Sverige ska få en feministisk regering". *SVT*. Retrieved from <http://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/fridolin-hatarna-ar-politikens-huliganer>, 21 November 2015.
- Brah, Avtar & Phoenix, Ann (2004). Ain't I a woman? Revisiting intersectionality. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 5(3), 75-86.
- Brandel, Tobias (2014). FI näst största på nätet'. *SvD*. Retrieved from <http://www.svd.se/svd-lisslys-nya-valtjanst- visar-att-feministiskt-initiativ-ar-nast-storst-pa-natet>, 21 November 2015.
- Bryson, Valerie (2003). *Feminist political theory: An introduction*. Gordonsville, VA: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé W. (1991). Mapping the margins. Intersectionality, identity politics and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299.
- Derrida, Jacques (1978). *Writing and difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Emejulu, Akwugo (2011). 'Re-theorizing feminist community development: Towards a radical democratic citizenship. *Community Development Journal*, 46(3), 378-390.
- Feministiskt initiativ (2014). Election platform. Retrieved from <http://feministisktinitiativ.se/sprak/english/election-platform/>, 21 November 2015.
- Filimonov, Kirill; Russmann, Uta & Svensson, Jakob (2016). Picturing the party – Instagram and party campaigning in the 2014 Swedish elections. *SM+S Social Media + Society*, 2(3). Available at <http://sms.sagepub.com/content/2/3/2056305116662179>

Acknowledgements

This article springs out of Kirill Filimonov's master thesis work under the supervision of Dr. Jakob Svensson at Uppsala University. Filimonov is the first and main contributor of this article. Filimonov's MA studies (and hence also this research) was possible thanks to a grant from the Swedish Institute.

- Foucault, Michael (1978). *The history of sexuality. Vol. 1: An introduction*. New York: Vintage.
- Howarth, David (2000). *Discourse*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.
- Holmqvist, Annette & Stenqvist, Victor (2013). Fick största applåder – för feminismen. *Aftonbladet*. Retrieved from <http://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/article16702224.ab>, 21 November 2015.
- Lacan, Jacques (1994). The mirror-phase as formative of the function of the I. In Žižek, Slavoj (Ed.), *Mapping ideology* (pp. 93-99). London: Verso.
- Laclau, Ernesto & Mouffe, Chantal (2014). *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics* (3rd ed.). London: Verso.
- Matsuda, Mari J. (1990). Beside my sister, facing the enemy: Legal theory out of coalition. *Stanford Law Review*, 43, 1183-1192.
- Martikainen, Rebecka (2012). Jag är en övertygad feminist, punkt slut. *Expressen*. Retrieved from <http://www.expressen.se/nyheter/jag-ar-en-overtygad-feminist-punkt-slut/>, 21 November 2015.
- MacDonald, Malcolm; Homolar, Alexandra; Rethel, Lena; Schnurr, Stephanie & Vessey, Rachele (2015). Manufacturing dissent: the discursive formation of nuclear proliferation (2006-2012). *Discourse and Communication*, 9(2), 173-197.
- Mouffe, Chantal (1992). Feminism, citizenship, and radical democratic politics. In Butler, Judith & Scott, Joan W. (Eds.) *Feminists theorize the political* (pp. 369-384). London: Routledge.
- Mouffe, Chantal (1993). *The return of the political*. London: Verso.
- Mouffe, Chantal (1995). Feminism, citizenship, and radical democratic politics. In Nicholson, Linda & Seidman, Steven (Eds.). *Social postmodernism: Beyond identity politics* (pp. 315-332). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mouffe, Chantal (2005). *On the political*. London: Routledge.
- Orange, Richard (2014). Sweden's Strictly star adds charisma to feminist push for parliament. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/23/strictly-star-sweden-feminist-push-gudrun-schyman>, 21 November 2015.
- Peterson, V. Spike (1999). Political identities/nationalism as heterosexism. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 1(1), 34-65.
- Rayson, Paul & Garside, Roger (2000). Comparing corpora using frequency profiling. *Proceedings of the workshop on Comparing Corpora, held in conjunction with the 38th annual meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics (ACL 2000)*. 1-8 October 2000, Hong Kong. Retrieved from <http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?doid=1117729.1117730>, 21 November 2015.
- Rothschild, Nathalie (2014). Swedish Women vs. Vladimir Putin. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/12/05/can-vladimir-putin-be-intimidated-by-feminism-sweden/>, 21 November 2015.
- Sandilands, Kate (1993). Radical democracy: A contested/ing terrain. *Synthesis/Regeneration*, 5, 5-13.
- Schyman, Gudrun (2014). Välj i Fi och skapa historia. (Vote for Fi and make history) *SVT*. Retrieved from <http://www.svt.se/opinion/article2308894.svt>, 21 November 2015.
- Stavarakakis, Yannis (1999). *Lacan and the political*. London: Routledge.
- SvD (2015). 'Partierna växer – Fi allra mest'. (The Parties grows –Fi the most) Retrieved from http://www.svd.se/nyheter/inrikes/partierna-vaxer-fi-allra-mest_4437927.svd, 21 November 2015.
- Svensson, Jakob & Larsson, Anders O. (2016). Interacting with whom? Swedish parliamentarians on Twitter during the 2014 elections. *International Journal of E-Politics*, (7)1. 1-15.
- Winther-Jørgensen, Marianne W., & Phillips, Louise J. (2010). *Discourse analysis as theory and method* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira (1999). What is 'transversal politics'? *Soundings*, 12, 88-93.

KIRILL FILIMONOV, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Informatics and Media, Uppsala University, kirill.filimonov@im.uu.se

JAKOB SVENSSON, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Informatics and Media, Uppsala University, jakob.svensson@im.uu.se