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The Devil is in the details: A feminist inquiry into diversity initiatives within the Swedish Private Sector

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Abstract

Diversity and gender equality are key buzzwords within the private sector in Sweden. The aim of my thesis was to interrogate how diversity is understood within the private sector in Sweden and identify key motivations for its popularity. I also sought to understand how those who embody diversity experience and understand discourses around diversity and gender equality.

The research was conducted in Stockholm, where I worked as a diversity worker from February to June 2016 with a diversity consulting company. The research adopted mixed methodologies, which included partial participant observation at one public event in May 2016, work as a diversity consultant as method, document analysis and semi structured interviews with four diversity managers and three racialized women who provided their insights that have shaped the research.

My findings reveal that diversity is conceptualized in a number of ways; it can be seen as a fluffy term that encompasses all and everything; it can signify an appreciation of difference and it can also be seen as a strategy to challenge inequality, there is no uniform agreement which allows it to remain fluid and loose. I argue that the fluid nature of diversity makes it unable to challenge what Joan Acker calls 'inequality regimes' within organizations which create gendered, classed and racial hierarchies in the workplace. Its failure to address power hierarchies and undertake intersectionality as a method of inquiry renders it weak. The research makes visible the experiences of those who embody 'diversity' by highlighting the experiences of racialized women in the labour market and their multiple identities. The research reveals the ways that social inequalities position them within the labour market and the strategies they adopt to overcome these inequalities.

Keyword:

Diversity, Gender Equality, Capitalism, Neoliberalism, Postcolonial
Private Sector, Racialization, Sweden

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Introduction

In the cases of Britain and Sweden...‘diversity’ continues to be highly praised as a resource for economic growth and prosperity, and explicitly xenophobic populist parties are shunned by mainstream politics. However, ‘cultural difference’ tends, at the same time, to be branded as ‘an excess of alterity’ that needs to be controlled through assimilationist policies, citizenship tests, police action and biopolitical counter-insurgency strategies to control the populations under review, albeit under the rubric of democracy and human rights. (Schierup & Ålund 2011: 57)

Background

I arrived in Gothenburg, Sweden in August 2014, I had just missed a ‘great summer’, everyone was talking about how great the weather had been this summer and cautioned us, new students, about the coming dark and cold winter. I had missed most of the introduction seminars for newly arrived students and I had a chance to catch up with one of the last few sessions which happened to be on student life and work opportunities in Sweden. The speakers at this session provided tips on how students could engage in paid work whether during or after their studies and informed us of the cultural rules and etiquette of the Swedish workplace. One of the few things I clearly remember was that *fika*, the Swedish coffee break, was an important activity within Swedish workplaces and that in Sweden people often got job opportunities through networks, therefore it was important to build professional networks in order to gain trust with employers.

Fast-forward to about six months later, I had now settled into my new life in Gothenburg, and indeed the dreaded dark winter had finally arrived and taken its toll on me. In my day-to-day engagements with new people, students and residents in Gothenburg, I also heard the horror stories of people who had moved to Sweden and could not find work despite their qualifications and language skills. At first, I thought that this was not unusual, everyone who moves to a new country faces a number of challenges settling in and getting used to the new system and ways of doing things and learning the language. In the course of my studies and general interest, I came across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2014 report, which observed that the unemployment rates for foreign-born Swedes

stood at 16.4% in comparison to 6.2% for native-born Swedes¹. The OECD gave a number of factors to justify these discrepancies, including lower educational levels of ‘immigrants’. Living in Gothenburg exposed and opened my eyes to the level of segregation and exclusion especially of racialized groups who are commonly referred to as ‘people with foreign background’ or ‘immigrants’ or ‘*rasifierade*’/racialized groups, denoting those born out of Sweden and Europe in general and their descendants². The media was rife with stories of tragedy; violence and crime in areas inhabited by racialized groups and constantly depicted these groups as troubled. I wondered how the discourses on racialized ‘others’ could be reconciled with the image of Sweden as an egalitarian country where gender equality was broadly accepted and its historical engagements in anti-racisms struggles globally. Something did not add up, this was not the Sweden the world knew. How did Sweden reconcile the call for egalitarianism with the blatant exclusion of racialized groups from social and working life? I wondered how racialized groups were placed and how did these ‘placements’ reinforce ideas of ‘otherness’.

Like all students, getting an internship placement was not easy and especially for the non-Swedish speaking students, most of who chose to undertake their internships abroad. This signalled to me that there was indeed something about the labour market that made it difficult for non-swedes to access. I sent multiple applications with no response and finally got a response from a diversity management consulting company in Sweden. During my internship interview, the first thing that was mentioned was that the company recognized the difficulty of new arrivals to access the labour market and the challenges that the labour market presented especially for non-European/white individuals in Sweden. I immediately knew this was the place that I could learn and try to understand my earlier concerns. During my internship, I conducted research aimed at shaping and designing diversity trainings for private companies. I become interested in how the concepts of gender equality and diversity management were understood within the Swedish private sector. In this time, I learnt that gender equality was viewed as part and parcel of Swedish progressive culture, as something companies wanted to be associated with and as something that made Swedish companies different from other

¹ The term Native born often refers to ethnic or white Swedes whereas foreign born Swedes while encompassing a broad group of persons born outside Sweden including EU citizens and European descendants globally, is often used to denote non-white persons/Sweden

² I adopt a broad definition of Europe to include descendants of Europeans found in other parts of the world including the Americas, Australia, New Zealand

companies around the world. Yet, while this concept was widely accepted, the obvious labour market discrimination against racialized groups in Sweden led me to take an interest in how private companies embraced gender equality but ignored or were unaware of how to view gender as intersectional with other forms of oppression and discrimination in Sweden. My choice to look at how the private sector in Sweden embraces these concepts is guided by my initial interactions with private companies where I saw a demand for diversity strategies and trainings on the concept of diversity. I recognize that unlike public institutions, which are heavily influenced by state policies and politics on equality, private sector tends to have some liberty in shaping the extent of equality discourses relying on the market logic while observing the minimal legislative requirements. Therefore I was interested in understanding how they viewed diversity and what motivates these companies to adopt diversity and gender equality strategies beyond state interventions. I identified the category of racialized women in my study because I think their experiences present ways in which intersections of gender and race/ethnicity can play out in the labour market, especially how gender equality initiatives that aim to create better work opportunities for women engage with the realities of racialized women in Sweden. Thus my research aims to understand how the concept of diversity is understood in relation to gender equality within private companies. Lastly, I was curious to know how racialized women in Sweden receive these discourses and how they navigate the labour market. My research aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do companies understand and implement diversity initiatives and what intersections and categories of diversity are seen as important?
2. What motivates private companies to take on diversity and gender equality strategies?
3. How do racialized women experience the labour market and how do they understand their experiences within the labour market in terms of gender and diversity?

Previous Research

Sweden has over the years gained a good reputation for its success in promoting gender equality including gender equality research in all spheres of life including working life. Scholarship such as this forced a reconsideration of the concepts of “work” and “economy,” and challenged labour analyses at its core by leading the way in terms of developing new methods, new analytical tools, and theoretical perspectives in order to understand the many features and facets of labour and its meaning in people’s lives. (Mulinari & Selberg 2016:81)

In Sweden researchers have analysed gendering processes in formal organizations (Patricia

Yancy Martin 2003); highlighted gender discrimination within Swedish organisations (Barbara Czarniawska 2006); traced the historical development from gender equality to diversity as management tools in organisations (Wahl & Höök 2007). Similarly, gender research has in the recent years adopted intersectional analysis where researchers (de los Reyes 2000, Mulinari 2005, Molina 2005& 2006), have challenged the hegemony in Swedish gender studies and its focus on the category of gender by calling attention to social relations that up until then had been mostly excluded from the gaze of research, and the complex relationship between “the woman-friendly” welfare state, its gender regime, and its migration and ethnic regime. (Mulinari & Selberg 2016: 83).

My research therefore adds to this latter tradition of feminist inquiry that seeks to explore the intersections of gender and racial/ethnic regimes within a changing welfare state. My research primary draws from the research of Paulina de los Reyes which includes her article, ‘*Diversity at Work: Paradoxes, possibilities and Problems in the Swedish Discourse on Diversity (2000)*’ and her comprehensive book ‘*Diversity and Differentiation: Discourse, difference and construction of norms in Swedish research and public debates (2001)*’. As the titles indicates, she addresses herself to research and public debates and discourse yet her research is important as it provides a clear historical account of diversity as a concept in Sweden and how the discourse has circulated within Swedish society. de los Reyes highlights that in Sweden, the concept diversity (*mångfald*) is first and foremost related to ethnicity and heterogeneity in terms of citizenship or national origin while other social categories are often not understood in terms of diversity (see, de los Reyes 2000: 255). However this ‘discourse on ethnicity has...been constituted around immigrants as being holders of deviant experiences, values and behavioural patterns (de los Reyes 2001: 71) including presenting the ‘cultural’ background of the migrants as automatically associated with low qualifications (de los Reyes 2000: 258) and *Swedishness*’ as a ‘quality sign and important factor of employer’s evaluation of professional competence’. (de los Reyes 2000:260). She further draws attention to the use of the term ‘immigrant’ noting that in research and discourses in Sweden, the term is used to capture all non-white/European migrants regardless of the different intersections and migrant routes to Sweden adding that the same categorisation is extended to second and third generations who are still considered foreign ‘making ethnicity a ground for differentiation and exclusion’. (de los Reyes 2000: 258). In regards to migrant women, she observes how ‘culture’ is used to

justify why racialized women do not participate in the labour market, defining them as ‘being oppressed by their husbands and male relatives’ (de los Reyes 2001: 91). This perception of immigrant women is in stark contrast with the idea of womanhood in Sweden, which is ‘based on an active labour market participation’ (de los Reyes 2000: 259). Yet despite the intensive debates on gender equality and the situation of women within the labour market in Sweden, research and public discourses do not address the experiences of racialized women in regards to aspects that ‘characterise women’s work in Sweden, such as their absorption into low-pay jobs, occupational segregation, lack of mobility and obstacles to advancement’ (de los Reyes 2001: 94). Today, these perceptions still hold and continue to be circulated in popular discourses and debates where racialized women are still ‘assumed to be subjects of sexual discrimination only within their own group, since it is assumed elsewhere there is equality in Swedish society’ (de los Reyes 2001: 93). In this way, the experiences of racialized women are rendered invisible.

While her research was conducted in the late 1990’s and 2000, it is still relevant in understanding how discourses on diversity especially gender and racial/ethnic diversity have developed in Sweden and whether these views still hold today. My point of departure from de los Reyes is obviously that Sweden has changed in the last sixteen years and while the concept of diversity was largely associated with integration within the public sector in Sweden, the private sector has been primarily motivated by capitalist and neoliberal demands on the market economy. My research adds the voices of racialized women and highlights how individuals experience diversity within the workforce and how they make sense of it all. While de los Reyes does not analyse the private sector’s adoption of diversity concepts, her analysis, is relevant today as renewed efforts at diversity have been prompted by the so called ‘refugee crises³’ which has seen many Syrians escaping the war, seeking asylum in Sweden. I have limited my analysis to de los Reyes because I feel that her contributions provide an in-depth look at diversity discourse in Sweden and provided a rich analysis from which to anchor my research. This does not imply that the research on the topic is limited to de los Reyes

³ The arrival of Syrian refugees in Sweden and in Europe generally in 2015 has been dubbed a ‘refugee crises’ despite the fact that the European Union failed to reach a comprehensive agreement among member states which would have seen the EU countries distribute the share of refugees fleeing the war in Syria and provide more humane way of seeking asylum. Instead the failure to research an agreement saw thousands of refugees cross Europe in the most challenging and difficult circumstances few of whom managed to reach Sweden which had made a declaration welcoming refugees from Syria, a policy that has been later removed in favour of strict immigration and asylum regulations

contributions but I have found them to provided me with an rich analysis on diversity as understood in Sweden.

Theoretical framework

Gender is embedded in hierarchical structures, jobs, division of labour, processes such as hiring and wage setting, in images of workers and managers, in interactions in the workplace, in the work/family interconnections and in individual constructions of identity. (Joan Acker 2011: 67)

Joan Acker's work on gender, race and class within organizations has been instrumental in shaping feminist inquiry into gender in organizations. In particular the concept of '*inequality regimes*' provides useful insight into how inequalities such as gender, race and class manifest within a work environment, noting that 'organizations are embedded in the social processes of societies in which they exist; the belief in systems and stores of knowledge of these societies shape how organizations function. (Acker 2011: 70) This point forms a core foundation for understanding the Swedish society and how this in turn is reflected within organisations. The norms and practices adopted within companies often reflect the broader societies norms and individuals who do not fit into societal norms often find themselves excluded from organizations as well. Thus, my research looking at diversity concepts within the private sectors aims to establish how and if inequalities especially gender and racial/ethnic inequalities continue to persist within the Swedish society and how these are linked with other process globally.

A postcolonial reading of diversity in the workplace is important to understand how bodies are read and configured, following de los Reyes observation that immigrants in Sweden are marked as possessing deviant behaviour. Prasad (1997) argues that to understand diversity in the workplace, it is important to analyse how the 'non-Western' others gets constructed through the colonizing consciousness of the 'West'. Mulinari, Suvi, and Tuori (2016) have used the concept 'colonial complicity' to provide an account of Sweden's investment in colonialism, which signifies the process which (post) colonial imaginaries, practice and products are made to be part of what is understood as 'national' and 'traditional' culture of the Nordic countries. (p.17). Against this backdrop, it can be argued this complicity with colonialism and the uptake of white supremacy ideology advocated by the colonial enterprise it is likely in different degrees to position the non-western/white other as 'representing inferiority, irrationality, backwardness, immaturity, corruption, 'a menace to society'', a grave threat to meritocracy, an evil conspiracy designed to the Christian West, and so forth" (Prasad 1997:304). Hubinette and Lundström (2014) concept of '*hegemonic whiteness*' in the Swedish context talks to how the nation is constructed along these postcolonial images of the western self and the non-western 'others'.

They argue ‘that whiteness is a pivotal analytical category for understanding a white nation in crisis and its intersection with class structures and gender relations.’ (Hubinette and Lundström 2014: 426). Their analysis provides a starting point in placing diversity within the broader societal perceptions of identity and nation. It is important to remember that whiteness is not reducible to white skin, or even to ‘something’ we can have or be, even if we pass through whiteness (Ahmed 2007: 159). These readings of (post)colonialism and hegemonic whiteness lead me to new ways of understanding how gender and racial/ethnic diversity is understood, embodied and practiced within the corporate sector and interrogates whether ‘diversity reproduces rather than challenges social privilege’. (Sarah Ahmed 2007: 240)

My research borrows heavily from the comprehensive work of Sara Ahmed (2007; 2009; and 2012) on diversity, equality and race/ethnicity. Ahmed (2009 & 2012) discusses the ways in which diversity work travels through institutions and how it shapes institutions and positions individuals within these institutions. Ahmed’s point that ‘if diversity is a way of viewing or even picturing an institution, then it might allow only some things to come into view’ (Ahmed 2012:13) is relevant for understanding what Swedish private sectors endorsement and investment in diversity means beyond branding and corporate management strategies. I also use her research and analysis to understand how institutional racism is maintained and challenged, as well as how much hegemonic whiteness operates as a force within private companies in Sweden. Ahmed argues that ‘the very idea that diversity is about those who ‘look different’ shows us how it can keep whiteness in place. (Ahmed 2012: 33) Additionally, Ahmed (2007) uses ‘comfort’ as a way of seeing how whiteness is reinforced and reproduces racial/ethnic discrimination when she says that ‘to be orientated, or to be at home in the world, is also to feel a certain comfort: we might only notice comfort as an affect when we lose it, when we become uncomfortable’. (Ahmed 2007: 158) Therefore, I adopt the term ‘dis/comfort’ to evaluate reactions and resistance towards diversity within institutions especially when talk about diversity produces discomfort. The concept of comfort is also useful in discussing the experiences of non-white bodies in white institutions/spaces and the anxiety these bodies may feel and how these feelings of anxiety can make these bodies unwelcome and unable to ‘fit in’.

Today, it is common practice for private companies to support social and environmental projects and diversity is among the key social projects that have been enthusiastically taken up by companies in Sweden. Yet beyond the need to be seen to comply with laws and regulations,

companies have taken up diversity as a social good project, as ‘the right thing to do’. In making sense of the contradictions within capitalistic ambitions and social good, I take up Elisabeth Bernstein’s (2016) theory of ‘*redemptive capitalism*’ to understand how capitalism is rebranding itself through the new corporate interest in human rights and equality discourses globally and the use of market driven solution to address social inequality. Bernstein defines redemptive capitalism as a capitalism that is understood by its proponents to be not only transforming of self but of world, and indeed, of markets themselves in a moment when “the era of social entitlements is over.” (Bernstein 2016: 55). This is a capitalism that unlike before incorporates social good with profit making, co-opting the language of equality and human rights. While capitalism reconstitutes itself to survive, neoliberalism reconstructs individuals to meet market demands. I adopt Aihwa Ong’s (2006) definition of neoliberalism as a ‘mobile technology’, as opposed to a fixed and static ‘economic tsunami’ that takes over all spheres of life. She provides an elaborate description of neoliberalism as follows:

Neoliberalism with a small ‘n’ is a technology of governing ‘free subjects’ that co-exists with other political rationalities. The problem of neoliberalism – i.e. how to administer people for self-mastery – is to respond strategically to population and space for optimal gains in profit. In Great Britain and other advanced liberal nations, neoliberalism has been defined as a mode of ‘governing through freedom’ that requires people to be free and self managing in different spheres of everyday life – health, education, bureaucracy, the professions, etc. There is also a stress on responsibility at the community level, and new requirements of self-responsibility by individual subjects. Neoliberalism as a governing by calculation suggests new relations between the governing, the self-governed and the space of administration. (P.4)

Using this understanding of neoliberalism helps to shed light into some of the motivations for private companies to undertake diversity initiatives, which seek to include individuals such as women, racialized groups etc. within the organisation. Ong notes that ‘[w]hile many consider neoliberalism broadly as global markets overwhelming countries, neoliberalism as a technique is fundamentally about the re management of populations’ (Ong 2006: 5) Within the neoliberal market logic, individuals are constructed as workers and consumers, hardworking, self sufficient, responsible for their own well being and free to make choices, and failure is attributed to the self as opposed to structural inequalities. In this discourse, diverse ‘others’, become responsible for their own inclusion into the labour market, and where they do not access the labour market, individualized narratives are adopted to justify their exclusion, for example, ‘*I don’t speak perfect Swedish*’ or ‘*I’m not good at networking*’. Newman (2013) argues that neoliberalism is at the same time disrupted and shaped by the new arrivals. She documents the ways in which feminist discourses and neoliberal ideologies have been

entangled together sometimes being aligned towards the same goals, as in the case of increase of women in the labour market, and other times in opposition. She documents how ‘women’s activism helped neoliberalism to adapt and flex, but also how it made new demands on capitalism (including those of equality, rights, welfare benefits and provision for ‘care’ as new classes of women were drawn into the labour force). (Newman 2013:210) Thinking with Newman I analyse how inclusion of ‘others’ reshapes organisational thinking and creates opportunities for change.

I use Kairi Talves’ (2016) concept of self-positioning, which she uses in analysing the strategies adopted by Estonian female scientists in the areas of natural sciences and technology to navigate their careers in a predominantly male field. Talves (2016) defines self - positioning ‘as a strategic act, in which its participants try to establish for themselves – either consciously or unconsciously – favourable positions’ (p. 160). Talves see women’s self positioning as a strategic act, where ‘favourable position taking is reflected in normalisation and coping strategies that discursively fit into the gender system’ (Talves 2016: 160) I use this understanding of positioning to evaluate the way racialized women take up positions in their narrative. I also use Judith Butler’s (1999 & 2004) gender performativity theory to understand how identities are constructed, how they perform their identities in compliance with structural power and ways in which they disrupt these constructions. She argues that ‘gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of act. (Butler 1999: 179)

Methodology

My research adopts an interdisciplinary approach recognizing that the topic of diversity and gender equality within organization brings to fore a number of disciplines from gender theory, organizational management studies, critical race studies, postcolonial studies and political economy studies. All these help shape the ways in which I engage with the topic and the methodology I apply in making this inquiry. This is an empirical research, analysing how concepts are used, embodied and performed. The research adopts multiple methodologies in answering my research questions. I use ‘intersectionality as a critical method’ (Kathy Davis 2014) as it enables me to ‘complicate gender as theoretical mainstay of feminist research’ (Davis 2014:23) by acknowledging other cross cutting categories that affect individual experiences and positioning. In using intersectionality as a critical method, I begin by situating myself within my research and identifying my own location. I proceed to provide an analysis on my choice of methods, how I went about it, all the while reflecting on these experiences as part of knowledge production.

Politics of location and situating myself within my research

It is important to bear in mind that every researcher occupies various different positions within social space and therefore it is important to discuss their possible effects and reflect on what kinds of traces the subjectivity of the researcher leaves on the research process (Barzoo Eliassi 2012: 84)

I arrived in Sweden in August 2014 at a time when the political climate was slowly moving towards right wing anti-immigrant sentiments. Later that year, the Swedish Democrats, Sweden’s far right party which as been termed as nationalist and racist, won a 13% vote becoming the third largest party in Sweden. In 2015, Sweden received a large number of Syrians fleeing the conflict in what today is deemed the ‘refugee crises’ that saw thousands of refugees make the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean sea and the long and treacherous walk across Europe just to access the right to asylum with the largest numbers going to Germany and Sweden. These developments were followed by a series of debates on refugees and immigration, followed by anti-immigrant backlash and racist rants and rhetoric across Europe as well as in Sweden, the situation has been further fuelled by terrorist attacks in Paris and the sexual assaults against women in Cologne German during the new year

celebrations in 2015 by supposed ‘Muslim men’. These events have deepened racist anti-Islamic and anti-immigration sentiments within public discourses. It is from this location that I conduct my research and write this thesis. Ahmed (2007) argues that ‘bodies are shaped by histories of colonialism which makes the world white...a world ready for certain kinds of bodies (p.154). The sentiments seen during the last few years are nothing new in Europe or Sweden, instead they are linked with colonial understanding of the ‘others’ and histories. It is from this juncture of complex relationship between ‘Swedish whiteness’, nationalism and neoliberal market logic that I seek to understand the concepts of gender equality and diversity in Sweden. As a foreign student in Sweden, a racialized woman from Kenya, and a professional invested in advancing my career in human rights and gender equality, these developments have motivated my inquiry as they bring out in me a series of emotions and affect. In writing about my methods, I will reflect on these in more detail.

Field work: Work as method

As part of my research, I worked part time as consultant for a diversity management company in Stockholm from 15 February to 30 June 2016. I employed work as a method noting that ‘researchers consciously employ work as a method and a means for understanding how ‘culture is lived, and in the living of it, constituted.’ (Turner 2000: 52) In this case, I wanted to experience working as a diversity worker to embody this work and to access the field of inquiry, that is, the diversity-consulting sector in Stockholm and get a deeper understanding on how the private sector understood and implemented diversity and gender equality strategies. Researchers have often ‘turned to work and embodying a certain form of labour in order to more fully explore the construction of identities, ideologies, and power structures. (Gavin Hamilton Whitelaw 2013:30) I worked in a small diversity consulting company that worked with different actors within public and the private sector. I made participant observations through engaging, listening and participating in the work. My day-to-day work involved working with the team to develop trainings on diversity management and sustainability for companies, conducting research that informed presentations made to potential clients and held meeting with clients to describe the work of the company and ways in which the company could offer its services. It also involved engagement in developing strategies for the company. My work enabled me to experience this work first hand, engage with the diversity consultants

and understand their work, listen to conversations about their experiences, observe how they engaged with clients and made presentations during workshops. This ‘insider’ information was useful in shaping the direction and themes of the thesis. Fieldwork is to a large extent a personal experience that requires us to be aware of our own position and connections to the world we describe. (Jakob Krause-Jensen 2013:49). It is a strange feeling to know that it is people like me, racialized people, that are the target of diversity measures by companies, therefore my position as a diversity worker and researcher presented some challenges as sometimes I was irritated by clients focus on literal identity representations, sometime I felt heavy reading research on the extent of discrimination in the Swedish labour market and the experiences of racialized individuals including my colleagues, I was annoyed at initiatives that targeted newly arrived highly educated and qualified refugees or migrants that proposed no pay internships, as if to say, all their education and experiences were worth nothing, and sometimes I was just tired of hearing and reading about these things and the public discourses on ‘problems’ with and of racialized groups in Sweden. I was also impressed by diversity managers, who were working hard to ensure that companies changed their policies, and inspired by the way they overcame the challenges and instead strove to find opportunities for change. Fieldwork is not only an intellectual endeavour but also an emotional one (Krause-Jensen 2013:49), yet the experience exposed me to alternative discourses and individuals who were trying to make an impact in the society, from activists, researchers, diversity practitioners and my colleagues who faced the challenges with such grace that I sometime could not understand. I came to understand the ways that people everyday challenge and resist the normative structures, be it at work or within their own lives and the ways that they subvert structures that aim to oppress them and use them to their own advantage.

At the onset of my research, I planned to conduct participant observation during two diversity events however this proved to be a challenge. I realized that capturing my observations and engaging my mind to the tasks of the organisation was not always so easy. For example, during one of the training I participated in, I was actively engaged in the preparation and presentation of the material and therefore I was unable to just sit and observe, additionally, I quickly learnt that it was not in the interest of either the company or clients to be ‘watched’, this was a sensitive point especially when discussing diversity and I felt that it was better not to undertake that particular strategy. One general problem that confronts the ethnographer wanting to do participant observation in organisations is that these settings often involve activities requiring

expert knowledge and highly specialised skills. (Krause-Jensen 2013:49) Since I was also expected to work as a diversity consultant, I was not always able to observe as much as I wanted, as I was engaged in other intellectually demanding task, this meant that I took notes at the end of the day and sometimes, I was just exhausted from the work itself to make a clear analysis. I had initially planned to observe two trainings on diversity and gender equality as part of my research instead I chose to attend one public event on gender and equality on 2 May 2016 in Stockholm. The event was hosted by the Embassy of India in collaboration with Swedish and Indian companies, and was aimed at providing a platform for Swedish and Indian companies to share their experiences working on diversity. The event had three speakers from each of the countries who contributed their ideas on diversity and how they had implemented them. The great thing was that the event was in English and I was able to follow and record the proceedings, which have informed part of my research. The rest of the time I made field notes on my experiences at work and my discussions with colleagues, which I have relied on in this research.

Semi-structured interviews

Feminist ethnography—with its focus on the particularity and importance of individual experience, situated within uneven systems of power—can be central in uncovering how neoliberalist policies lurk in people’s lives; by locating knowledge often obfuscated by methodologies that survey efficacy, we can create a critical dialogue and reframe these central concerns about historical and emerging inequalities (Davis & Craven 2011: 195)

In addition to work as method and participant observation, I conducted semi-structured interviews each lasting sixty minutes with four diversity managers and three racialized women in Stockholm between March and April 2016. The choice of this method was to gain more understanding beyond what I read and observed about diversity and gender equality concepts and discourses. The experiences of the informants was important because it opened up my research beyond just what is written on paper but to how these concepts are thought about and experienced by individuals, providing a voice beyond that of the organisation. Although it was not the intention of this research, the diversity managers interviewed were all female and white; which speaks to the labour of those who embody diversity in Swedish corporations which is often women. I identified racialized women based on their gender and racialization status to demonstrate the ways gender equality and racial/ethnic diversity are interlinked.

Access to informants

In the case of diversity managers, it was straightforward, I began my search by accessing the Diversity Charter Sweden website, this is a non-profit association that promotes diversity within the private sector in Sweden. The website provided a membership list which I analysed. I identified those companies that had a statement on promoting diversity and inclusion within their institutions, thereafter I searched the individual company websites for contact information and sent an introduction and a brief note on my research aims and objectives and a requested for an interview. I sent interview requests to eight companies in Stockholm and I received responses from two of these companies and finally secured an interview with just one. Realizing the challenge of securing an interview, I decided to use LinkedIn, the professional networking site, to identify diversity managers in Stockholm. I identified two managers with years of experience in diversity and management and I requested an interview and both accepted my request. The last company I accessed was situated in Gothenburg and I got access through my housemate who provided the contact information for the diversity manager. I got in touch with the manager who at short notice graciously accepted my request for an interview.

The search to identify racialized women willing to participate in my research turned out to be a complicated matter. As I have no social networks in Stockholm, it was difficult to get access to racialized groups or networks. I started my search by contacting people I knew who worked as activists or who were vocal in their communities in Stockholm for contact information and suggestions, they did not always respond. I used Facebook as a tool to connect with different forums for racialized groups and requested their assistance to identify people willing to participate. This took longer time than I had anticipated; I solicited help from friends and colleagues who introduced me some of the women whom I interviewed. I therefore used colleagues and friends networks and Facebook to identify the three racialized women interviewed in this research.

Conducting interviews

The interviews were conducted across Stockholm, with the exception of one in Gothenburg. Three of the interviews with diversity managers were conducted face-to-face in the premises of

the company and one interview was conducted in a restaurant at a library. The interviews with the racialized women varied, one was conducted in the library café, one over the phone and the other over Skype using video conferencing. All the interviews were recorded and the informants provided their consent prior to the recording. I would have preferred to conduct all the interviews face-to face however this was the informants' preferred method of engagement due to time constraint and locations. I prepared a question guide that I used during these interviews and the conversations were informal to encourage the participants to express themselves freely.

Interview analysis

Analysing the recordings and notes proved to be a daunting task. I had in total seven interviews, each about 60 minutes long to transcribe; naturally this took a long time. I transcribed each interview and filed it away, this way I could come back to it when writing my thesis. In the course of writing, I have not only gone back to the notes but also listened and re-listened to the interviews to get a more nuanced and in depth understanding of the content.

Document Analysis: Textual analysis

In my research I also analysed company materials and documents on gender, diversity and inclusion, which included a review of company websites, reports and publications, which demonstrate how companies in Sweden talk about their work on gender and diversity management.

Ethics

When I began my work at the diversity consulting company, I informed all my colleagues that I was undertaking my Master's thesis research as part of my job and thereafter circulated an email with an outline of my research and informed them that during my work I would be observing and recording and if they were uncomfortable or did not wish to be part of my participant observation they could inform me via private email. During my request for interviews, I shared with each of the participants a brief outline of the research, which included my research questions and aim as well as ethical considerations. I added the following caption to the brief:

The research will follow the International Sociological Association's (ISA) Code of Ethics to ensure all ethical concerns are adhered to. Interview participants shall provide their consent prior to their engagement either verbally during the interview (via recording) or in writing. Interview

participants have a right to drop out of the interview at any time they choose. All engagements with participants will be kept confidential and the research will respect the anonymity of the participants unless participants have asked or agreed to be cited in the research.

During the interview, I requested participants' consent to record and I informed them that they were free to ask me to stop recording and quit the interview at anytime. I also asked if they had any objection to being named in the research or having their names mentioned. Each of the participants provided their consent freely. Whereas, all the participants agreed for me to use their real names, I have chosen to use pseudo names to protect their identity. I also decided not to names of the companies interviewed, including the company where I undertook my research in order to protect their privacy and confidentiality.

Structure of the thesis

The research analysis is divided into a number of themes based on the key areas that emerged from the research and interviews. The first theme illustrates the tensions and contradictions within the discourse of diversity more broadly and gender equality in Sweden. I chose to leave these tensions open for further interpretation and not fix a definite definition on the terms as it has the potential to demonstrate how these terms circulate, mesh and are contested within the Swedish private sector and allude to the point that perhaps this migratory nature of the concepts enables them to be fluidly applied when needed. The second theme analyses the material from the point of capital and neoliberal interests which govern private corporations motivations in Sweden and globally. Looking at diversity within this framework enables us to see how the concept has moved around, what it does within these spaces. The third theme addresses the how individuals are positioned by and perform diversity, I analyse my experience and that of racialized women and voices moving the research away from the theoretical and organisational talk into how individual internalize and embody these concepts with the private sector. This shift seeks to turn the gaze away from corporations and academics to individual lived experiences to demonstrate the variety of positions and the contestations on the terms diversity.

Limitations

I recognize that my research is limited in size and scope and therefore it does not claim to present a complete picture of the state of diversity and gender equality in Sweden. Instead, I offer my glimpse into the discourse and experiences of diversity managers and racialized women. The research is limited to Stockholm with one interview in Gothenburg, I am aware that it may vary across different towns across Sweden. I recognize that the realities of women

and racialized groups vary from sector to sector however a common phenomenon is that women and racialized groups are often not represented at the top echelons of companies.

Theme I: Tensions in diversity and gender equality discourses

Introduction

Part of the motivation to undertake this research was my curiosity as to who benefits from gender equality discourses in Sweden. As I have discussed in my introduction, I was failing to grasp why racialized women were often invisible in the discussions on gender equality especially in private companies. Was the category women used as a generic term to cover all women? Or was it not intended to cover all women but just some women? The purpose of this chapter is therefore to understand how diversity and gender equality measures are understood within the private sector. The chapter uses the interviews carried out with the four diversity managers, Emma, Veronika, Eva and Katarina and materials and documentation developed by some of the companies to provide insight into the ways in which they perceive diversity and gender equality and how this in turn has the potential to shape the way the discourses are circulated within the private sector. I also reflect on my experience as a diversity worker and the discussions we had with my colleagues on diversity work, including our frustrations with how diversity is sometimes understood. From the discussions and textual analysis, it was clear that there is not clear definition of diversity instead there are many similarities and differences in how organisations and individuals understand diversity and gender equality. This chapter traces the common understanding of diversity and exposes tensions; contradictions and ambiguity in the ways that diversity and gender equality concepts have been understood and how this understanding affects the ways companies 'do diversity'.

Conceptualizing 'diversity' within Swedish private sector

At the start of my interview conversations with the diversity managers, I often asked them what they and the companies they represented understood by diversity and gender equality in Sweden. Unsurprisingly, there was not always a clear definition of diversity as a concept whether by the managers themselves or the companies. This is not unusual, there is no agreed upon definition of diversity, perhaps 'one reason is that so many stakeholder groups – managers, consultants, activists, unions and academics -all claim ownership over the term and offer their own interpretations of it'. (Konrad, Pushkala, & Pringle 2006:1)

Diversity as a mobile term

Emma, a diversity manager at a Wine Company, explained to me what diversity in her company was about:

How do we define diversity? I think we haven't really said diversity is this and that, in that way, its more that we like to embrace diversity but we also want to see the actual diversities that we have in our company, we are also on a learning process, we have to find out what kind of diversity matters, that we have and don't have, what we are missing, what we could benefit from having more and so on and in that way we also define what is diversity to us.

Emma's point above tells us that diversity is not really outlined or defined, instead, it is seen as a mobile term, diversity is about seeing what is 'missing' and appreciating what is available, if it benefits and is useful for the company. In our conversations with Emma, she also shared that as a company, they wanted to do the 'right thing' and not discriminate against anyone including those within the organization. She acknowledged that in Sweden, the Anti-Discrimination Act (2008) prohibited employers from discriminating on the basis of sex, transgender identity, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation and age. Emma also explained that diversity was also about getting new skills or competencies in the organization, this was dependent on multiple factors; for example, it could be that the company wanted to explore new markets and needed staff that knew the market and had local knowledge and language to enable the company access or launch itself into that market. Diversity could also signify appreciating the uniqueness and talents of the current staff within the organization and ensuring that the staff felt valued. In this way, diversity becomes a mobile and fluid term that is operationalized when it is needed. As Sarah Ahmed (2012) observed in her own research with diversity workers, the word diversity 'can be a conjuring trick, it can mean a variety of 'anything and everything' (Ahmed 2012: 79). Therefore, if the word can be anything or everything, it is important to see who gets to define what it means for a certain institution. Perhaps this could explain why the term diversity is so popular within corporation as it does not provide fixed conditionality and it is viewed as a positive word.

Diversity as differences

For some, diversity is about differences; it is about getting those who embody these differences. Veronika, a diversity manager with an automobile company, shared that the company understood diversity as going beyond the usual categories of gender and ethnicity/nationality. She noted that:

We are actually talking about diversity and inclusion and in our new plan we want to focus on **individual differences**. We don't want to highlight gender, although we do that I will explain, but the most important thing is not that you have a different gender or different nationality. We want to have people with different experiences and competences and personalities. (Emphasis mine)

The automobile company values individual differences as opposed to group differences, people should be valued as individuals and not as representing their social location or group category. This could be one way the company tries to move away from the often essentialist diversity discourses. However it does raise the question about what competencies and personalities are different and different from what? Veronika explained that the company was looking to have different competencies, skills and experiences including experiences outside of Sweden; the norm in this case was Swedish norms and experiences. She noted that they wanted to recruit from a wider context than had been previously the case. The concept of the Swedish experience here is taken as homogenous and natural as opposed to a complex and contested experience based on individual social locations of gender, class, sexuality, and race/ethnicity among others. However, the company did identify one salient feature of inequality. Veronika noted that women were marginally represented in top positions within the company and that the company has made specific gender targets. She noted:

For example, when it comes to females, since we are targeting the higher project management levels and managerial position, we have a target to have 35% women in leading position by 2020 and of course that its a rather stretched targeted. We are 26.5 % or something at the moment, and of course it's to find competent women.

It was not clear why gender as a category as opposed to other categories has been identified as a key target for changing representation at top management. This could be that gender is more visible through popular Swedish discourses on gender equality.

Diversity as an equality discourse

In the following case study, I will change course of my analysis. The House Company hired Katarina, a diversity expert, to help it develop a broader diversity strategy beyond what was highlighted in its documents. Unlike Emma and Veronika, Katarina was hired to provide the knowledge needed to conceptualize the company's diversity strategy. In this regard, I take up Katarina's input as a way of demonstrating the thinking within the company during this time of developing a diversity strategy. Prior to meeting with Katarina, I had looked at the company's website where its diversity vision stated that the company:

Works to increase diversity in the construction industry. We do this for companies in the sector to develop and be competitive. A modern and attractive construction industry needs to be more equitable and inclusive. It is also important to broaden the recruitment base. Therefore, we work for the construction industry **for men and women, Swedish and persons with foreign background**⁴ (emphasis mine).

The main concern for the company was the limited number of females within the sector. Katarina noted that women constituted only 8.5 % of the employees within the sector and persons with foreign background constituted 11% of the sector. These figures were considered to be very negligible and not reflective of the Swedish society. The Housing Company understood diversity in terms of rectifying labour market inequalities within its sector. As an advisor to the company, Katarina provided advise and tried to broaden the scope of diversity to include other categories excluded from the labour market, however issues such as sexuality were still considered quite controversial in the industry and had not been fully accepted by all. She stated that it was a work in progress; the fact that she was hired to advise the company was a sign that diversity was seen as valuable for the industry. Katarina noted that only recently had diversity and equality goals been taken up by the management team and prioritised, otherwise, it was usually left to human resource managers with no firm support from the decision makers within the companies. She noted that whereas fifteen years ago, the terms discrimination and equality were not used within the sector, there was a renewed interest in these concepts and these terms were slowly starting to reappear in the discourses around diversity. She felt that diversity should be seen as a strategy to counter discrimination. Katarina noted that from her experience, most companies had a number of challenges, the primary one being the lack of clarity on what diversity meant and why companies were engaged in diversity measures. She added that because this was unclear, the companies did not have any vision or strategy for equality measures and no systematic way of working with diversity.

My Analysis

The disparities, vagueness and complexities entrenched within these diversity discourses in Sweden may become a useful way to navigate away from potentially dangerous conversations but also a way to keep privilege and power. The challenge with discussions about different skills and competencies is that 'it treats all differences as meriting equal attention, and fails to recognize that some differences (e.g. race or sexual orientation) are likely to present more

⁴ My translation from Swedish to English

severe disadvantage in the workplace than others (such as hair colour or communication styles). (Prasad, Pringle & Konrad 2006: 20) The discussion, while aspirational, fails to take into consideration the existing inequalities in society that manifest themselves in the organisation and therefore has the potential to nullify claims by excluded and marginalized groups who suffer labour market discrimination. On the other hand, discourses that reify these groups (women or minority groups) can also be dangerous, as they tend to construct these categories as static and fixed and engage in identity politics where individuals are constructed in terms of group membership. Ghorashi & Sabelis (2012) discuss this eloquently:

Essentialism has a reifying quality to it. Identity components (such as gender, ethnicity, and class) are necessarily seen as static, fixed, timeless, and barely changeable. This position has influenced the debates on diversity from which we draw when looking at the current development of diversity. Essentialism does not allow for contextual and situational ways, in which individual members of groups shape and re-shape their (ethnic, cultural, gender) identity through interactions with other individuals over time. It also renders invisible the need for rethinking concepts of difference vis-à-vis current practices of cooperation, experimentation, and change inside and outside organizations (Ghorashi & Sabelis 2012: 79)

The danger Billing & Sundin (2006) identify with the rationale of difference and special contributions is that employees are placed in silos that highlight their differences and that may limit them to certain positions or to certain tasks.

Whereas some managers like Katarina were more vocal about challenging structural inequality more broadly, most managers talked about creating a more inclusive culture which would be adaptable to everyone's needs. This cultural change focused on changing individual behaviours in the work place, which is why diversity trainings are quite popular, yet they failed to address the structural inequalities that were present in the workplace. During the diversity trainings, institutional inequalities were not challenged rather employees are provided with information that enabled them to spot their own bias and prejudice so that they do not reproduce them at work. In this way, the discourse positions the employees as the problem that needs fixing as opposed to the inequality regimes that are operational in the specific institution. de los Reyes (2000) argues that 'the ways in which these structures are reproduced and preserved within organizations is not problematized...to the extent that diversity is conceptualized in terms of 'natural' variations rather than socially constructed differences; the diversity approach implies that phenomena such as discrimination and segregation can be addressed by information'. (de los Reyes 2000: 262) However, despite the challenge with

diversity, I think it provides a platform to name some of the inequalities. Most managers I interviewed were clear that those who held the most power in organisations were white Swedish males. The question was what to do to change these inequalities beyond the diversity trainings and diversity talk. I think one way is to get ‘the others’ inside and in top positions like in the example provided by Veronika. In finding a way out of this quagmire, perhaps a more reflective conceptualization of diversity taking into the specific realities and histories of Sweden would be a good way to reconceptualise diversity concepts while rejecting the temptation to create static identities. This means constant attention to implicit (taken-for-granted) power relations and a balancing act between approaching differences in a non-hierarchical manner without essentializing otherness. (Ghorashi & Sabelis 2012: 81)

Diversity and Gender Equality: What comes first or is this a silly question?

(Question asked by Monica, moderator at a Gender & Diversity event, Stockholm, 2 May 2016)

Most diversity managers often highlighted that many of the private companies were predominantly white and male, within larger companies; this dynamic was acutely noticeable at the management levels. Thus the discourse on diversity in Sweden has focused on those who are different, ‘not white males’ that is, those not included or within the institution or those who were not adequately represented within the institution. While other categories such as sexual orientation and expression, age, and disability are recognized, gender and ethnicity are the predominant categories when talking about diversity. Yet Monica’s question above provides some insight in the ways these two categories are understood. She asked this question during a Diversity and Gender Equality Event on 2 May 2016 that I attended as part of my research. She was addressing this question to the panel, which was a mix of Swedish and Indian business experts. The aim of the forum was to create a platform for the exchange of diversity strategies between Sweden and India. From Monica’s question and her anxiety not to ask a ‘silly question’, we see that there is some confusion on how these two terms should be understood and used. The Facebook event page defined the objective of the event as follows:

Indian companies have been very successful in managing religious, ethnic and regional diversity and apply an inclusive approach. Sweden has been a leader in gender parity, LGBT rights and opportunities for disabled people. Can we find ways to promote diverse leadership, diverse

companies and diverse organizations by exchanging experiences between Sweden and India? What are the winning strategies? What are the best practices?⁵

The title of the event 'Diversity and Gender' tells us that perhaps the organizers see these as two separate concepts while the note on the Facebook event page seems to imply that diversity is an all encompassing term for various categories such as gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability and so on. The responses to Monica's questions varied, for example, the two panellists from India agreed that diversity depends on regional or local context, and the specific challenges faced by certain social groups such as women or religious minorities, this varied across India. The Swedish panellist noted that for her and the automotive sales company she represented, gender diversity came first as this was easier to start with and other categories were more challenging. Some of the managers interviewed shared a similar understanding to the Swedish panellist while others agreed about contexts and needs within the specific sector. For example, Katarina noted that females in general (whether Swedish or foreign born) were underrepresented within that labour market. While other managers agreed that gender equality was easier to work on while other categories were such as ethnic diversity or sexuality were more challenging in the Swedish context. Emma, like the Swedish panellist, admitted that it was easier to start with the gender question because you can easily count the number of men and women in the company and in her case the ethnicity question was not yet relevant as there was no one with a different ethnicity working there:

Well, we started with the gender issue here as part of sustainability and of course diversity at large, but since today we aren't that diverse in our company, we wanted to start with gender and where we were and then work our way through the diversity part, so there it has to do with making sure that we are doing things the right way so that no one is getting hurt or not, how do you say, hurt in an illegal way (discriminated?) exactly.

Equal opportunity for women and men has been institutionalised as a social value considered as a fundamental part of Swedish self-image as compared to the rest of the world. (Paulina de los Reyes 2001: 87) Gender equality in Sweden is therefore something people and private companies want to be associated with, it is seen as progressive and sewn into the national fabric. Other social categories such as ethnicity and religion in varying degrees do not enjoy the same status due to various historical developments. During the interviews, I noted that the discussions around gender were more palatable and more fluid for all the managers and

⁵ See Facebook event page at : <https://www.facebook.com/events/1079118445442087/>

companies. Gender equality was cited as a key priority in terms of diversity and/or equality work within companies.

Yet, within the Swedish context, ethnic diversity is often not as fluidly discussed or as palatable as gender equality. In Sweden, the concept of diversity (mångfald) is first and foremost related to ethnicity and heterogeneity in terms of citizenship or national origin (de los Reyes 2000: 255). As Monica's questions suggests, diversity and gender equality are often seen as two different categories, with diversity implying ethnic/national diversity and gender relating to increase in females in the workplace. As some of the managers suggest, it is easier to start with gender equality then move on to other categories. In the case of ethnic diversity, this poses certain challenges especially in regards to Sweden's self image as being a non racist and colour-blind society. This can be traced to the historical developments in Sweden in regards to the word 'ethnicity' in place for race. In 2001, the parliament decided to abolish the word 'race' on a governmental and public level, as well as in legislation, in academia and media...one consequence of this ban on the word 'race' was that [it] became automatically translated into Swedish as 'ethnicity'. (Hübinette and Mählck 2015:66) This historical development is important in understanding what significance the word 'ethnicity' holds in Sweden as opposed to other parts of the world and what it tries to avoid or erase. In the Swedish conscious, the word 'race' is entangled with Sweden's dark history, which included 'Sweden's former Institute for Race and Biology, Nazi Germany and European colonialism' (Hübinette and Mählck 2015: 68). The discussions about ethnicity or ethnic diversity bring to fore this unpleasant historical baggage but also interrupt Sweden's self image as anti-racist and egalitarian, an idea created by the erasure of racial discourse within the country.

Eva, a diversity expert, notes that these two terms, gender and ethnicity are often gendered:

When we talk about gender equality [in Sweden], we want to increase the number of women...when we talk about people from different nationalities or ethnic backgrounds or whatever, then we are automatically talking about men. When I say these words, which I have done many times, I need to explain. When I say different ethnic backgrounds or national backgrounds, I need to say men and women because otherwise people they don't even recognize that, I'm serious that is really the case.

Katarina adds that while the concept of diversity is gendered, the concept of gender equality is classed and racialized:

I would say like just the overall feeling is that it is [the debate] mostly without intersectionality at all... It's like when we talk about equality between the genders and equality questions, its better

off for the female, white middle aged women, still I think. It's quite typical for Sweden.

This conceptualization of diversity and gender equality has the consequence of erasing or making invisible racialized females because it fails to acknowledge their particular situation of being gendered and racialized within a society that hails gender equality and professes colour blindness. The state-sanctioned and institutionalised gender equality discourse carries with it a sense of national identity which is intimately intertwined with whiteness, and which particularly excludes migrants of colour in relation to the very notion of gender equality: they are imagined and marked as inherently patriarchal (de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005; Keskinen, Tuori, Irni, & Mulinari, 2009 cited in Hübinette & Lundström 2014: 441). Thus, racialized women when discussed are often seen as victims of their patriarchal culture and/or religious beliefs. Katarina and Eva are aware that the lack of an intersectional understanding of how these categories are interlinked has resulted in gender equality debates benefitting predominantly white, middle class and middle aged women within the private sector who have been able to gain some favourable mobility within corporations compared with their racialized counterparts. They also highlight that this lack of an intersectional discourse has resulted in keeping organisations ethnically Swede as 'others', in particular, racialized women are mostly made invisible when companies do the head counts on gender equality and diversity. The other categories such as age, disability, sexual orientation and expression suffer a similar fate of being gendered or racialized.

What then do diversity discourses in Swedish private sector enable us to see and what do they hide? This is not an easy question, however one thing that seems to lurk in the shadows in most discussions amongst managers and companies is 'power, whiteness and privilege' within the private sector. The very idea that diversity is about those who 'look different' shows us how it can keep whiteness in place...Alternatively, as a sign of the proximity of those who 'look different' diversity can expose the whiteness of those who are already in place (Ahmed 2006: 33). In the case of Sweden, the concept of 'whiteness' is attached to 'Swedishness therefore 'being white constitutes the central core and the master signifier of Swedishness, and thus of being Swedish.' (Hübinette & Lundström 2014 : 426) The discourse on diversity therefore is about including those 'others' female and individuals with foreign background (non-white) into the labour market. An understanding of whiteness/Swedishness helps expose the power dynamics and status quo within institutions. Yet, the inclusion of these 'others' has the potential to interrupt whiteness and its hold on power. A lot of different 'others' at the

workplace could mean that formerly accepted norms might be questioned (Billing & Sundin 2006: 12) In this case, normalized Swedish norms that exclude 'the other' come to be challenged.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have highlighted the various ways that companies understand and use the term diversity. I have shown that it can be vague and mobile, it can be about differences and it can also be about addressing inequality. What is important here is that there is no fixed definition and companies take up the term in ways that they think is relevant for them. I have shown how these definitions can be problematic and provided a way out of these challenges. I have also discussed the way that diversity and gender equality are sometimes viewed as two parallel discourses due to the historical developments of the ethnicity/race and gender as concepts in Sweden. I also show how most discourses fail to adopt an intersectional analysis when talking about gender or ethnicity/race and how in particular, racialized women can be made invisible in both discourses. I have shown how these concepts are attached to the national imagery and hegemonic Swedishness, which contributes to the exclusion of the foreign 'others'.

Theme II: Capitalist and Neoliberal Entanglements

The language of valuing diversity is of course mainstream, and hesitates between discourses of economic value (the business case for diversity) and moral value (the social justice case). (Sara Ahmed 2009: 43/44)

Introduction

My experiences as a diversity worker raised my curiosity on the implications of corporate investments in diversity strategies in Sweden and in particular, what kinds of subjects were being produced by these investments, and lastly what effects diversity strategies have on equality and non-discrimination struggles. To answer these questions, it is important to understand the Swedish private sector within the broader concepts of capitalism, globalization and neoliberalism and thereafter locate local factors that shape and influence corporate strategies adopted within the Swedish private sector. Diversity has become part of a global management strategy influenced by historically developments in the US and UK and which have thereafter spread out throughout the world. Therefore to understand diversity management in Sweden, its important to understand the circulation of this concept as a management strategy and what is has come to signify for companies in Sweden.

During my time at the consulting company, I observed how we talked about diversity with the clients. We organized workshops and sessions on diversity with the aim of assisting companies to get a better understanding of the concept and how they could strategically work with diversity and inclusion, the latter relating to how they could manage diversity within their companies. The sessions with the clients often start with the ‘what is diversity and why is it important to you?’ question. I observed that the clients were interested in understanding the business benefits, and many diversity and/or human resource managers were interested in getting the arguments that would convince top management to prioritise diversity within the companies core objectives. One manager we spoke to during a meeting expressed her frustration at not getting the senior management to commit fully to diversity strategies and she saw the economic arguments as key in getting buy-in from top management. Therefore, managers needed business case arguments to get the top management to pay attention, even though some of them were very aware of structural problems in how recruitment and promotions were done and organisational cultures that enforced discriminative practices and fostered exclusion. Structural discrimination and power were not concepts that get management

to pay attention, instead, these discussions made management and employees feel the need to be on the defensive and sometimes justify the exclusion. A common defence heard by interviewees was that ‘there were no people [add particular category: sex, ethnicity, disability, sexual identity and orientation etc.] to fill the position or they didn’t apply for the jobs’. However, despite the obvious inequalities and exclusions within the labour market, we were careful not to ‘upset’ or ‘repel’ potential clients with talks about structural discrimination such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination, instead we chose to use words that would woo them to see diversity as a ‘positive’ strategy aimed at taking advantage of differences and experiences for profit despite the fact that the need to include these ‘differences’ and ‘experiences’ were often created due to the existing structural discrimination. In this chapter I discuss the motivations, tensions, contradictions and opportunities presented by diversity and how these are entangled with equality, capitalism and neoliberal ambitions.

Motivations

The prevalent arguments among diversity managers and companies is that diversity makes business sense and yields economic value; it increases profitability by enabling companies to reach untapped markets whether in Sweden or abroad and attracts the best talent to help it achieve its profit making goals all the while being inclusive. Organisations that promote diversity in Sweden, such as Diversity Charter, an association made up of mostly large companies in Sweden sees diversity as a tool to integrate young people from different ethnic backgrounds into the labour market, aiding in the governments efforts at integration⁶. While this forms the motivation for establishing the association, it articulates in its vision as:

Diversity and inclusion is a natural and integral issue in every company and organization's strategy for strengthening competitiveness and business benefits. *(Translated from Swedish)*

Here diversity is seen as a ‘natural’ and ‘integral’ for enhancing business benefits, diversity is profitable. On the other hand, other companies site different reasons for taking up diversity, yet the end goal is that whatever the ‘social’ good, it should yield profit, it should be a worthy investment. Yet companies don’t want to be seen as only interested in making money, they also want to be seen as being interested in the society and doing ‘the right thing’. For example, the Housing Company states that diversity and inclusion will help its members to:

⁶ See, <http://www.diversitycharter.se/om-oss/historia>

...develop and become competitive. A modern and attractive industry needs to be more equitable and inclusive. It is also important to broaden the recruitment base. Therefore, we work for the inclusion of men and women, Swedish and persons with foreign background' (translated from Swedish).

The Housing Company wants to be more equitable and inclusive, perhaps recognizing that in the past certain groups have been excluded such as women and persons with foreign background. The Company wants to see a more equitable industry not just profitable although equity and attractive are linked in ways to profitability. In diversity discourses, companies can reconstruct themselves as caring and concerned about the society and the welfare of its workers.

In understanding the thinking behind some of the company's diversity goals, I asked the managers' interviewed why their companies had taken up diversity and what were the motivation factors that led to their investment in diversity. Veronika provides a detailed response that I think captures a lot of what was mentioned by the other managers regarding their companies:

We think its important from a innovation perspective, if everyone would come from Chalmers in Gothenburg and have been living in Sweden all their life, they have a narrower perspective. If we get different perspectives into the company, it's about getting better innovations, better results and better products to our customers and to of course understand different customers. We have added as one of our corporate objectives to be the 'employer of choice', and we think as well if we are including and have an inclusive culture, we hopefully attract top talent from different groups of people because they feel its a company that is open for differences and want to have difference and we welcome different people. So it is as well as bit of an employer branding, to attract the talent and if we can attract talent from different countries outside Sweden it is even better than just looking into our pool here. As well, we are perceived as a good employer if we try and include them, the people in the society, so the social responsibility aspect of course. The key focus is to have better innovation, better products and understand the customer needs.

All the managers noted that it was important that companies see how diversity and inclusion strategies affect their bottom line otherwise there was no investment in diversity initiatives. Once this was understood and clear, the companies went into full gear to not only embrace diversity but to be the leaders in diversity and inclusion. Billing and Sundin (2006) call this rationale for diversity the 'special contribution perspective', which means that people are appreciated for their differences. This perspective 'suggests that organizations should value and use the resources of its diverse staff to develop itself'. (Billing & Sundin 2006:14).

However, it is not only that companies should have policy documents or mention their commitment to diversity but that they must be seen to be leaders in promoting diversity and

inclusion and use diversity of their staff as branding opportunities. One example of such branding strategy can be seen in the TV commercial advertisement launched recently by CAR company. The video starts by showing the grey and gloomy winter weather in Sweden and shows individuals of different genders, ethnic/national and religious backgrounds getting up early in the morning and getting ready for work, some eating breakfast with their families and doing 'the normal things' that people do in Sweden, this includes taking their children to school, etc. The perception one gets is that all these individuals despite their different background have similarities such as love for family and navigating through the same city via different modes of transportation, they are different but the same. They are shown getting to their respective work places, looking cheery and happy to see and work with each other, eating and laughing together. Most work in the factory floor, however those shown in top management are predominantly male, while females are shown challenging masculinized stereotypes doing manual jobs often associated with men, such as welding. Everyone is happy to work to produce great cars and all leave to go back to their respective homes in this grey city. The advertisement continues with a brief extract:

'GREAT MINDS DON'T THINK ALIKE

Who builds the best cars? The Germans? The Americans? The Italians? The Koreans? Or is it the Swedes?

Truth is, it's none of those. It's all of them. Together.

Ever since the 50's we've brought people here from all over the world to develop and build our cars. Not because we're a caring and human company, but because we know it makes us better.

Diversity sparks creativity. It pushes innovation. It helps us to build safer and smarter cars, designed around peoples' everyday life.

So if you ever wondered who makes the best cars, you know now. It's people.'

People are seen to possess qualities and it is important that these people come from different countries come together to build great cars. This model of diversity reifies difference as something that already exists 'in' the bodies of others (we are diverse because you are here). (Sara Ahmed 2009: 43). For the CAR Company and others, diversity is embodied in 'others', that is 'people from all over the world' who are different from people here. These different nationalities bring something to the company; in this case they bring innovation and creativity. Sometimes, they bring their different 'experience' or 'background', which is assumed to be

different from that of those within the institution. Yet, the discourses on diversity tend to take an essentialist perspective when talking about the various categories. The presumption is that with different cultures, genders and ages follow different perspectives and ideas. (Martisson and Reimer cited in Lin 2008: 61). This focus on different ‘others’ can be traced to the fact that ‘the language of diversity management emerged as a response to capitalize on the competitive advantage of difference in organizations’. (Metcalf and Woodhams 2012: 126).

Diversity and its entanglements with Capitalism and Neoliberal

Diversity becomes everything and nothing, a signifier without a signified. In other words, diversity becomes a highly malleable object that can be deployed for various strategic purposes and with differing and shifting meanings. In this process, underpinned by the shift from liberal to neoliberal governmentality, the links between diversity and the conditions of its historical emergence, that is social (in)justice, weaken or break altogether. (Ahonen, Pasi, Janne Tienari, Susan Meriläinen, et al. 2014: 272)

Earlier, I highlighted the ways that diversity becomes mobile and valued based on its potential to benefit the organization. I want to broaden this argument by looking at what motivates companies to place value on diversity. This is not always easy to track and is most times blurred by the fluffiness of the term diversity and unproblematic celebration. Martisson and Reimers (2008) point out clearly that discourses of diversity that present the economic and social justice arguments often fail to see how they both ‘strengthen the capitalistic discourses as a hegemonic force’ and also ‘conceal that the capitalistic relation to production is a root of numerous relations of subordination’. (Martisson and Reimer cited in Lin 2008: 61). After all, we are talking about including people into the machinery of production in whichever ways it may be set up. At the end, the need for diversity is created by global capitalist interest and at the same time diversity fuels these same capitalistic goals. Diversity is ‘no longer linked to histories of discrimination, colonialism, diaspora and economic exploitation, but rather to individualizable, productive sources upon which competitive advantage can be secured’. (Ahonen, Pasi, Janne Tienari, Susan Meriläinen, et al. 2014: 272) Businesses through positive diversity discourses are reconstructed as good for society. Elizabeth Bernstein (2016) calls this reconfiguration, ‘redemptive capitalism’, that is, ‘a capitalism that is understood by its proponents to be not only transforming of self but of world, and indeed, of markets themselves in a moment when “the era of social entitlements is over”.’ (Bernstein 2016: 55) Bernstein

illustrates her example through analysing how the global private sector has carved out a niche in philanthropist work, in this case, becoming a key champion against sex trafficking. Bernstein's analysis on the ways that capitalism has reconstituted itself is interesting in understanding the motivations behind diversity branding. Bernstein argues that redemptive capitalism aims to 'do good' while making profit. In this sense, companies and corporations invest in social good initiatives in the community and environment by providing a market solution for social problems. She highlights social enterprises such as eco-tourism or organic and fair trade movements as examples of the way capitalism has changed to fit in with the needs and demands of society and the environment. Redemptive capitalism rearticulates the 'morality of market exchange not in the supplementary spheres of family, church, and charity but within capitalist enterprise itself as the key site of feeling and belonging (Bernstein 2016: 54) On the other hand, neoliberalism as a 'technology of governing 'free subjects' (Ong 2006:4) constructs individuals to fit into the market logic of efficient worker and consumers. Clarke (2008) argues that in neoliberal discourses, [t] he market logic seeks to establish universalizing principles of ordering human affairs (through market relations, or, if necessary, through market-mimicking processes: see many of the reforms of public services under the New Public Management, for example) (p. 141) while at the same time personhood is linked to market logic evaluations which construct individuals as valuable subjects defined as 'hardworking', as "hard working" producers, "responsible" consumers, "effective" parents, and so on. (Clarke 2008: 141) Therefore it is within this discourse that diversity is seen as valuable only when it is correlated with some value, which attaches to different bodies in different ways. Janet Newman (2013) has shown how women become constructed as workers, through neoliberal co-option of gender equality discourses when women become valued for their cheap labour that would give the companies competitive edge. It is this neoliberal logic, which values personhood in the pursuit of profit that diverse others get to be included and reconfigured as workers, citizens, and consumer. Therefore the application of diversity and its management becomes about overriding earlier exclusions and dismissing histories of inequality and discrimination and instead value individuals as human capital engaged in the expansion of the business enterprise. The market logic in search of competitive edge or innovation makes diversity valuable and therefore desirable.

Yet, while neoliberal interests have been a key force in the renewed interest in diversity away

from social justice and equality aspirations, it has nevertheless provided entry points for previously excluded groups to enter the labour market. The presence of these new groups presents challenges and opportunities. Therefore not only are citizens shaped as neoliberal subject, they also shape neoliberal institutions. Larner argues that different formulations of neoliberalism emerge out of a multiplicity of political forces always in competition with one another, producing unintended outcomes and unexpected alignments. (Wendy Larner 2000: 16) It can therefore be argued that diversity strategies while predominantly focused on promoting profit have also increased or provided space for previously marginalized groups, for example, the increase of women in the workplace and in top management, which has had the effect of disrupting patriarchal and racial ideologies within corporation. Larner (2000) points to the fact that as neoliberalism shapes individuals, new subjectivities are created that contest or challenge earlier held views, for example, she points to how ‘the new consumer –citizen’ is de-gendered’ and ‘how concepts of male breadwinners have also been eroded, manifest in a more gender neutral model of citizen worker’. (p. 19) Newman (2013) documentation of feminist entanglements with neoliberalism in the UK presents interesting findings. She observes the ways that the inclusion of women into the workforce, in particular feminist women made demands on capitalism to become more inclusive towards women, including the acceptance of rights for working mothers and now fathers and expanded provision of welfare benefits within the workplace. Thus, Newman argues that that neoliberalism itself had to adapt and flex to take account of particular strands of feminism: its claims and demands, and the cultural and politics shifts it had generated. (Newman 2013: 212) Diversity according to Newman can thus be read as a form of neoliberal ‘flexing’ to take account of unresolved contradictions, but the reframing of diversity and equality around notions of individualism and choice can be viewed as attempts to smooth increasingly problematic antagonisms. (p. 213)

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have highlighted the motivations for diversity work in Sweden. Among the companies interviewed, it was noted that diversity was good for business; it contributed to innovation and competitiveness. I have situated the concept of company image and branding within the discourse of ‘redemptive capitalism’ where companies want to be seen to be doing social good in the pursuit for profit, abandoning old images of exploitation and inequality. However an understanding of neoliberalism helps to uncover what lies behind these

motivations. I have shown the way that value is calculated using market logic and therefore how individuals come to be valued for what they bring to the company, whether it is innovation or a good image, it is all geared towards economic gain. However, I also think that individuals resist these neoliberal tendencies by challenging inequalities once inside the institution, which can have some positive effect. Using the example of Newman (2013), I have shown the way women's inclusion in the decision making positions in the UK disrupted old patriarchal ideals in some ways, although not always fully successful it brought on board some of the feminist claims such as child care and maternity benefits. I conclude that while neoliberal shapes individuals, individual also have the possibility to shape neoliberalism in their every day experiences. Thus while diversity may be motivated by profit, it has the potential to still make social change.

Theme III: Performance and positioning: Navigating diversity in the workplace

Introduction

In this chapter, I want to continue the conversation started in the previous chapter on diversity in the neoliberal age and move this discussion away from the organisations and towards how individuals position themselves and cultivate a sense of self in the workplace to overcome inequality or discrimination. I demonstrate the discordance and tensions present in individual narratives of the self, the ways that individuals embody diversity while at the same time challenging the racialized and gendered identities constructed within Swedish society.

The stories that people tell about their lives present their meaning making; how they connect and integrate chaos of internal and momentary experience and how they select what to tell and how they link bits of their experiences, are all aspects of how they structure the flow of experience and understand their lives (Ruthellen Josselson 2011: 224) During my research, I asked each of the interview participants to define themselves and share their background with me. The narratives collected during this research present just one way of understanding how individuals navigate and manoeuvre ‘diversity’, either because they are responsible for the promotion of diversity, as diversity managers, or are marked as being ‘diverse’ in their workplace, or both. In this chapter, I look at the ways that the research participants, position themselves within the discourses of gender equality and diversity. I begin the chapter with my own individual experience as a diversity worker, researcher and foreign and racialized woman in a Swedish context and I reflect on my own positioning and performances in conducting this research. I thereafter explore the narratives of the three racialized women interviewed in my research, Lisa, Mariam and Jane.

Position and performance in research

My writing embodies me and I embody my writing. (Barzoo Eliassi 2012: 84)

I must admit, doing this research project irks me as it interests me primarily because diversity is a heavy word which brings to the fore a violent and dark history of patriarchy and colonial encounter of the ‘West’ with the racialized /orientalised ‘other’. It is the inclusion of the

‘undesired’ others into the workplace by those that have greatly benefitted from this history in the pursuit of profit making. Therefore as Sara Ahmed notes, diversity is both a problem and a paradox for those who embody diversity. (Ahmed 2009:42) In this research, I have occupied a number of positions, consciously and unconsciously, and here I reflect upon them. Yet these positions are not a claim to a fixed identity, rather they are some of the positions that shape my experiences doing the research and that influence my ways of seeing and knowing while at the same time they are markers that may be used to make sense of who I am. As Donna Haraway points out, ‘[s]ubjectivity is multidimensional; so, therefore, is vision’. (Donna Haraway 1988: 586) Instead I use these experiences and locations to position myself as an ‘outsider within’ (Collin 1984), outsider in the sense that I am a racialized foreign student/ researcher undertaking my research within the Swedish private sector which is predominantly male and white. Yet, as a diversity worker I have access to and belong to the Swedish private sector during the course of the research.

Student/Researcher

Conducting research on gender equality and diversity in Sweden as a non-Swedish speaker carries with it particular challenges and opportunities for new discoveries. Whereas individuals and private companies commonly use English, meanings and translations are sometimes lost. Being relatively new to Sweden and new to corporate culture in Stockholm made the research journey quite interesting and confusing. The lack of ‘native knowledge’ meant that I had to become a diligent observer, watching out for other ways of knowing such as body language and performances. To start, I noted the ways in which I was met when I stated my research interest when discussing with the various research participants, clients as well as socially among acquaintances or friends. Most times, there was a genuine interest and sometimes excitement about the topic and my take on the concepts in Sweden; sometimes I faced disinterest or defensiveness, where I would be reminded that after all Sweden was not so bad for women or racialized others with common references to the United States or my own country Kenya or the generic ‘Africa’ in reference to gender equality. Sometimes I encountered silence and discomfort especially among some ethnic/white Swedes. All in all, these experiences have fed my research and inspired and frustrated me at different junctures. My experience in Sweden is that diversity is not always received or understood as a ‘happy’ word when talking with individuals, which differs in the ways that institutions do. Sarah Ahmed notes that for

institutions ‘the appeal of diversity is about looking and feeling good’ (Sarah Ahmed 2006: 44), yet for individuals, especially those who embody diversity it may not always feel so happy and good.

As a diversity worker

Conversations with clients were informative not only to understand what companies wanted but also to see how diversity talk affected those involved in the conversation including myself. Sometimes it was not what was said but what was done or not done or subtly done that was telling on how diversity was truly perceived beyond the words and the documents. As a racialized diversity worker, diversity talk was many times an uncomfortable adventure; it was couched in ambiguities, possibilities and scepticisms. I was never sure why diversity was desired; sometimes I would see the possibilities of challenging norms and stereotypes in companies and moving beyond static identities; and other times the discussions left me sceptical, thinking, ‘was this really ever going to work?’.

I borrow Sara Ahmed’s concept of white institutions to describe the Swedish private sector. She notes that white institutions are those institutional spaces [that] are shaped by the proximity of some bodies and not others: white bodies gather, and cohere to form the edges of such spaces (Ahmed 2007: 157). In Sweden, a significant number of managers are middle class, white, heteronormative and able-bodied males yet within human resource and diversity, middle class white Swedish women take up majority of the positions. As white institutions, it is evident that some bodies more than others are recruited, those that can inherit the ‘character’ of the organization, by returning its image with a reflection that reflects back that image, what we could call a ‘god likeness’. (Ahmed 2007: 158). Therefore talk about diversifying the company sits uncomfortably with those who are supposed to take it up as a company priority, it can be read as a way of undressing the company by highlighting the company’s whiteness or masculinity, which is in stark contrast with the Swedish gender equality, colour blindness and anti-racist identity. My colleague and fellow diversity worker, Jenny’s experience provides an insight into the ways diversity talk may be resisted or disrupted by those embodying the whiteness and masculinity of the institution:

After I finished my presentation in Swedish, this guy came up to Maria and me, he turned his shoulder towards me and said in Swedish ‘As an older white man, should I leave my job then?’

He then proceeded to hand me a note and suggested tips on a person that I should talk to saying, ‘Talk to him, he will give you a history of how far Sweden has come’.

In thinking about these types of reactions from workshop participants she states:

I think people feel more comfortable talking or listening to another white Swede about diversity than me. I think it makes people more comfortable. I get resistance when, for example, I talk about not asking people ‘where are you from?’ people get defensive. I think white people prefer to talk about diversity and equality with other white people. They are taken more seriously.

Jenny’s experience is unfortunately not unique for diversity workers; Sarah Ahmed (2009) highlights the challenges of doing diversity work while embodying diversity. Similarly, experts in working with gender equality have noticed resistance regarding the idea of discrimination, which appears in the form of denial and individualisation of the problem’ (Talves 2016).

Individual racialized women’s experiences

Arrival of women and racialized minorities in spaces from which they have been historically and conceptually excluded is an illuminating and intriguing paradox. It is illuminating because it sheds light on spaces that have been formed through what has been constructed out. And it is intriguing because it is a moment of change ” (Nirmal Puwar 2004:1)

Belonging

Lisa, is a management professional in her 40s, who strongly self-identifies as a Swede and with Swedish culture. Lisa was adopted by a financial stable Swedish family from Korea and grew up in a white wealthy neighbourhood in Sweden. She has worked in various capacities and during the interview she worked for a management consulting company in Stockholm. She pointed out that being adopted was quite a different thing from being an immigrant in Sweden, in her case her experiences growing up as a Swede in a white wealthy Swedish family and neighbourhood meant that she considered herself a native and not a foreigner. The experiences of adoptees to Sweden has been documented by Tobias Hübinette & Tigervall (2009) whose has demonstrated the complexity of adoptees in Sweden⁷. Reflecting on her own racial/ethnic appearance, Lisa felt that her ethnicity was never a factor in employment, she noted her gender, aesthetic appearance and age in many ways affected the way she was treated both in the

⁷ They note that that ‘in spite of a compact belongingness to Swedishness and Swedish culture, having a Swedish citizenship, a Swedish language, a Swedish and Christian name, and above all, being fully integrated within a white Swedish family network, adoptees are obviously constantly racialized in everyday life, as their non-white bodies are localized to a certain geographical origin, connected to a certain ethnicity, nationality, language, religion and race, and sometimes also linked to certain cultural and mental characteristics.’ (Hubinette & Tigervall 2009: 504)

workplace and in general. She reflects:

It depends a lot on how you perceive yourself, I think, because when I was younger, I have always been very small, very pretty, I have been a pretty girl, you know, and when you are younger and also because you are a girl, you want people to like you and you understand that people like you because of being pretty and I felt it was really hard to be taken seriously but I also played along because I wanted people to like me. Now as I have gotten older, I have a different integrity, first of all I don't really care if people like me... I am always treated with respect so I think it depends a lot on yourself and how you present yourself.

West and Zimmerman (1978) notes that society encourages men and women to 'do gender' nearly continuously through displaying dress, action, demeanour, posture, hairstyles, and so on consistent with their gender standpoint (Martin 2001: 588). Lisa's appearance conforms not only to her assigned gender but fits within the Western heterosexual ideal of female attractiveness, that is, small, petite, and slim. Judith Butler (1999) has argued that intelligible subject are 'partially structured along matrices of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality' (Butler 1999: 185) meaning that the significance of Lisa's age and physical attributes should be read along the contradictory heterosexual matrix where on the one hand, feminine qualities such as 'small/petite' or 'pretty' are valued but also these same feminine qualities are used to undermine her in the masculine workplace. Joan Acker (1990) has documented the ways in which organizations are gendered in line with societal gender divisions noting that within these masculine organisation women's bodies are 'ruled out of order, or sexualized and objectified...while men's bodies are not'. (Acker 1990: 152) To say that an organization or any other analytical unit is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meanings and identity are patterned through and in terms of distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. (Acker 1990: 146) I argue that Lisa, takes up the position of the young pretty girl and performs it to her advantage, she wants to be liked so she does what people want her to do. In this way, it can be argued that whereas she conforms to the gender requirements assigned to her within the organisation, she uses this gender expectation to navigate an unequal workplace to progress despite knowing that this position means that she is not taken seriously. In this way, her doing gender can be read as resistance against an unequal gender hierarchy that limits her progression within the organisation yet this doing of gender maintains the status quo of the power hierarchy creating a contradiction. Lisa further pointed out that in her opinion, the way one is treated in the work place depends on how one perceives oneself, this may be seen as a discursive self positioning strategy that is aimed at 'neutralising gender (or ethnicity) by referring to personal

characteristics, which hide the issues of gender discrimination, women's non-advancement and the double burden of work and family tasks' (Talves 2016: 165) and therefore to avoid a victim position in the narrative.

Lisa is however weary of diversity concepts and strategies:

If companies are saying they value diversity, I would assume actually if they say it out loud that they are just saying it, I would be a bit uncomfortable actually, I would assume they are saying it because of me, when I think of the places I have worked, one place was very diverse but there was no organisational talk about diversity. I believe that people were solely employed because of their skills and nothing else... I would feel uncomfortable, because I think it has to do with the fact that they didn't see me as Swedish and as I identify myself as Swedish, it would upset me in some way, that they would assume that this would be flattering or whatever

Belonging is about emotional attachment (Nira Yuval Davis 2006: 197), Lisa feels that she belongs in the Swedish society therefore diversity strategies that attempts to deny her of this belonging is upsetting. Her statement can be read as challenging the unproblematic use of terms such as diversity as signifying ethnic diversity which as des los Reyes (2000,2001) has demonstrated is how diversity discourse have been often conceptualized in Sweden while gender equality is often viewed as a parallel discourse but not necessarily the same. From her statement, it can be argued that Lisa resists the diversity discourse presumption that individuals and social groups can be expected to possess specific qualities based on for example...ethnicity. (Martinsson & Reimers 2008) I read her statement as a resistance against a discourse that makes invisible different intersections of ethnicity and that seek to create static identities.

Lisa notes that whereas her ethnicity does not have an effect on her experiences, her class position in Sweden does. It has given her social capital and access to powerful social networks, through her schooling, cultural heritage through growing up in a wealthy Swedish family and neighbourhood. It is commonly accepted in Sweden that social networks are important in accessing job opportunities something I myself was told during my first day at the University of Gothenburg. Diana Mulinari (2015) in her study on the experiences of women and migrant professional doctors in Sweden confirms this further noting that all the doctors had experienced that 'informal networks were often more important than skills, qualifications and work experience' (Mulinari 2015:670) thus migrant doctors often associated not having access to these informal networks to their lack of career progression.

Lisa's experience demonstrates the complexity of living at intersections of age, gender, ethnicity, and class. It challenges essentialist view of ethnicity as a 'homogenous' group bearing similar culture and experiences. It introduces the concept of class, which shows the ways in which our multiple identities positions us in our environment.

Outsider within

Mariam

Mariam, is a senior manager in Stockholm, she identifies as an Afro-Swede noting that she was born in Sweden to African parents. Reflecting upon gender diversity and diversity management in Sweden, Mariam felt that while gender equality discourses held a promise for the rights of all women, it had in actuality failed to deliver this promise to all women, especially women with a foreign background. She reflects on her experience:

I saw very early that the type of career I wanted to have, I wouldn't be able to have it here. I didn't feel, its weird, my parents have done really well here, but I didn't feel I could do the same. I really felt that there was a separation and there was a lack of opportunity for people who look like me. I grew up in here in the 70s and there were not a lot of black people...I felt I didn't fit in, I felt I needed to get my own sense of identity and get to know my people so I moved to England, all my cousins were living there at the time. I thought that was better for me, and it was, I don't regret that. I managed to build my career there and I honestly don't think I would have been able to get to the level that I got to if I had started here, there is no way I would be at a senior executive role here, I really don't think so.

When it is said that people belong to a particular gender, or race, or class or nation, that they belong to a particular age-group, kinship group or a certain profession, what is being talked about are social and economic locations, which, at each historical moment, have particular implications vis-a-vis the grids of power relations in society. (Niral Yuval-Davis 2006: 199) Taking Yuval-Davis definition of social location, Mariam locates her experience within a broader Afro-Swedish⁸ experience in Sweden, where she notes that growing up, she felt that 'there was a lack of opportunity for people who looked like me' yet this is in direct contradiction with the experience of her parents, who moved to Sweden from the African continent. These contradictions may be explained by numerous reports that highlight the extent to which Afro-Swedes as a group, experience racism and exclusion. According the

⁸ I have adopted the term Afro Swede to include Swedish residents of sub-Saharan African descent including the Americas and the Caribbean.

Mångkulturellt centrum (2014), 'Afro-Swedes suffer from the lowest educational payback, and the risk of being unemployed is significantly higher among university-educated Afro- Swedes'. Mariam's identification with the collective history and experience of Afro-Swedes informed her strategy to leave Sweden in search of better chances; a strategy she says worked. She does not think she would have gotten such a high position in her current workplace if not for this strategic move away from Sweden. Yuval Davis (2006) argues that 'constructions of self and identity can, however, in certain historical contexts, be forced on people... [i]n such cases, identities and belonging/s become important dimensions of people's social locations and positioning, and the relationships between locations and identifications can become empirically more closely intertwined. (Niral Yuval-Davis 2006: 2013) In the case of Mariam, it is her ethnicity not her gender which she considers to be operative in work life opportunities.

In talking about diversity, Mariam saw that diversity strategies especially for Afro Swede women could be one way to access the labour market but she also questioned these kinds of strategies: She noted:

I think its good, we have got to have that in this country, we need to have some form of change, I say that with a question mark. It can be interpreted in different ways, I mean its one thing to say we have diversity because we have one person who is a cleaner from Syria or make a token of that one black guy in IT and say its diverse because of him.

This general suspicion of corporate strategies may stem from the collective experiences of racialized people highlighted above and the invisibility of gendered racism within organisations. Diversity is cited in documents...and becomes a way of imagining organisations as having certain attributes (Sarah Ahmed 2009: 43) as such diverse 'others' become a reflection of the institution. Diversity can work as a branding exercise, a way of re-imagining the organisation as being diverse (Ahmed 2009: 46) therefore those who embody diversity deliver this image of the organisation, they become a 'token' or as Mariam says, 'the one black guy in IT'. Diversity is appealing, as it does not necessarily challenge organisational culture, even if it allows a change in appearance. (Ahmed 2009: 45)

However, Mariam does not completely dismiss diversity, together with her colleagues and friends, she has started an organisation that assists Afro-Swedes get jobs that fit their qualifications. Mariam uses her knowledge as a human resource expert in Sweden to advice Afro Swedes and other racialized groups about the demands of the labour market and the

existing norms and corporate culture to enable them access the job market. Mariam positions herself within the wider struggles of Afro-Swedes in Sweden and I argue that she uses her ‘outsider within’ status to subvert exclusive politics of belongings that create demarcations of who belongs and who does not within the labour market. Mariam’s knowledge being an outsider within is channelled to highlight the inequalities that exist within the private sector but also she uses the information gained within to subvert discriminatory practices. Yet, there are contradictions to this strategy, she is acutely aware that trying to fit into a corporate culture is shooting oneself in the foot:

I am unfortunately part of this, when I coach people, I try to get what’s the best way for them to get a job, that’s my priority. How are they going to get it? Well, they need to know what they are up against and part of this is Swedish ‘etiquette’ and unwritten rules within the job market.

Collins (1984) argues that ‘outsiders within occupy a special place—they become different people, and their difference sensitizes them to patterns that may be more difficult for established [*sic*] insiders to see. (Patricia Collins 1984: 529) Collins argues that this position enables black feminist academics who are outsiders within white academic institutions to use their lived experience as black women, to challenge theory and to use theory to analyse these experiences. In this way, ‘outsiders moving into a community that historically excluded them, Black women's experiences highlight the tension experienced by any group of less powerful outsiders encountering the paradigmatic thought of a more powerful insider community. (Collins 1984: 529) Mariam performs this role of ‘outsider within’ yet the challenge of subverting the organisational culture remains to be seen, could it be as Puwar (2004) argues, a moment of change?

Performing ‘Swedishness’

Jane

Jane is an Executive Assistant; she identifies herself as a Black Caribbean woman adopted by a Swedish family, with her adoptive mother also coming from the same Caribbean Island of her birth⁹. She makes a point that she grew up in a predominantly Caribbean family in Sweden and

⁹ I have chosen not to name the particular country to protect the identity of the interview participant

not as most adoptees in a white Swedish family and therefore she grew up with a strong Caribbean influence in her family and has strong ties with her country of birth. Yet she also notes that growing up in Sweden means that she is also socialized as a Swede, however, she points out that 'Swedish' is what people identify you as and in this regard she feels that as long as she is black she is not seen as Swedish.

Jane acknowledges that both gender and ethnicity have been important markers in her career as she moved between different companies. She highlighted that while in Sweden gender equality has delivered many rights for women, as an executive assistant who has worked in many companies she has observed that women still don't enjoy equal rights. She notes:

It's equal on paper but from a birds eye view as an executive assistant, it not equal when it comes to the pay, women always have less pay...gender equality has meant that in my personal life I can take more space because I know Sweden is a country where its possible to stand up for yourself, if you make your voice heard and if you don't take no for an answer, because its understood without saying it. But of course you still can't make as much money as a man, but because Sweden is very far with this question (of gender equality) it makes me more vocal because I know there is a chance maybe not to get as much as a man but to get more.

The awareness of gender equality discourses and the education that has gone with it in Sweden has influenced the ways that women in Sweden may identify and make claims for gender inequality in the workplace. Jane sees that gender equality discourses give her a foundation to make claims for herself at the workplace despite her racialization. Paula Mulinari's (2015) study on the experiences women and migrant professional doctors in Sweden showed a disparity in how Swedish doctor and migrant doctors named the inequalities in the profession. The Swedish female doctors used gender equality rhetoric and positioning to question gendered and racial inequalities in the institutions where they 'spoke about a gendered organisation and identified men as actors in the furthering of inequalities' (p. 671) while migrant doctors were less willing to be outspoken about ethnic discrimination due to the silent discourses on racism in Sweden.

Jane shared her own experiences as a racialized woman in the workplace she noted the following:

In private companies, its very hard when you get into these companies, I notice I am usually the only one who is not 'Swedish'. The only tool I have is that I speak perfect Swedish so when I talk to them on the phone and apply for a job, they think I am blond and blue eyed but when I come to the interview they are like 'Oh O.K!'. So I have to play the Swedish role, I can't be myself 100%. I have to present myself in bits and pieces when I get the job. However when I am interviewing

for the job, I have to be typical Swedish and calm, and don't stand out in any way. Instead of coming from a place of truth and honesty, I have to tone myself down instead of being real and saying what I really think about something. I will be like *'forglig'* (docile) because I know this is the winning concept for getting the job

When I asked her why she had to perform the 'Swedish role', she noted that Swedish companies do not want people who 'cause trouble' and one must show that they are timid and agreeable and that they can fit into the organisational culture. In Sweden, non-white bodies are read through the lens of a colonial past and a nationalist/Eurocentric patriarchal present. Taking Mulinari, Suvi, and Tuori (2016), concept of 'colonial complicity', we can see how Sweden investment in colonialism and the uptake of 'colonial imaginaries, practice and products' (Mulinari, Suvi, and Tuori 2016:17) have informed ideas about the postcolonial 'others'. In this logical framework, the postcolonial 'others' have been constructed as "holders of deviant experiences, values and behavioural patterns" (de los Reyes 2001: 71) where it is taken as natural that 'there is a correspondence between the degree of difference and antagonism between norms and value systems of the new arrivals and those prevailing in Sweden and the increase in cultural differences (de los Reyes 2001:77) Those people who cause trouble are those who do not fit into the cultural and organisational norm and who do not fit into the construct of 'Swedishness'. Jane highlights that her tool is that she speaks 'perfect Swedish'. Language is used as a marker of ethnic categorisation and by extension, as an instrument of exclusion. (de los Reyes 2000 : 80) The discourse on migrants' low labour participation is often justified due lack of proficiency in the Swedish language, yet it is not clear what is deemed 'perfect' or 'proficient' Swedish. Puwar (2004) argues that in the postcolonial world, 'language is one of the range of methods that have been utilised to induce rationality, civility and civilisation of the foreign body.' (Puwar 2004: 108) Therefore the uptake of language can be an indicator of these ideals of 'civility' or norms in society.

Jane proceeded to say that once she gets into the organisation, she no longer needs to perform her Swedishness, she can be a bit more of herself:

Once I am in the job, being more myself is what has made me kinda climb (the career ladder) because a lot of people want to see me you know, somebody that is different, outspoken and comes with ideas, not a yes ma'am/no ma'am kind of person. Racism is real absolutely.

Jane's experience shows the way that entry into the labour market can be difficult for those that 'look different' yet diversity discourses that appreciate 'difference' can make it possible for some to progress within the corporation once in. In this way, diversity strategies do meet to

some extent the desired effect of levelling the playing field for minorities on condition that these groups show conformity with the normative culture. Processes of inclusion and exclusion are often extremely subtle and involve informal rules of behaviour that are rarely explicitly discussed or mentioned (Puwar 2004: 108) For those who do not have this social capital, infiltrating the labour market becomes close to impossible as is the experiences of many immigrants/ foreign born individuals in the Swedish labour market. I think this is an interesting case, because it shows the ways one has to be socialized within the insider group to be able to take advantage of the possibilities presented to manoeuvre the racialization processes that seeks to stop non-white bodies. Puwar (2004) makes a good point in assessing this strategy and I quote:

Those who don the right ways of speaking and the associated manners as a white mask on their non-white skin do not simply pick it up and put it down as and when its required. This would be too much a mechanical and voluntaristic reading of the mask. Instead, we need to think of it as being acquired slowly through time by moving through white ‘civilising’ spaces (educational, neighbourhood, friends, and institutional positions) (p. 113-114)

Lastly, Jane adds that she resists an assimilationist strategy once she gets in and instead uses her knowledge of the Swedish discourses on gender equality to make claims for her rights because this is a well understood discourse and not as controversial as the discourse on race/ethnicity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have endeavoured to shift the focus towards individual experiences to highlight some of the ways racialized women are positioned and constructed within the labour market and how they challenge these constructions. I have documented my multiple positions as a student/researcher and as a diversity work that embodies ‘diversity’. I have documented the challenges that I faced conducting this research but also some of the opportunities. I have documented individual narratives on how individual racialized women make sense of these concepts of diversity and gender equality. It is clear that gender equality discourse have had some impact in the lives of the women in varying degrees. This can be seen by the way they discuss gender equality and position themselves. They outline some of the challenges they have faced and the strategies they have adopted to manoeuvre these challenges. Their stories

demonstrate how they have employed their various positioning to challenge discrimination in the labour market but also how they also challenge the discursive construction of racialized groups as having similar experiences and positions. In their stories, it is clear that an intersectional analysis is required to understand their individual locations. A generalized reading of them as racialized women fails to pin point the manner in which diversity can be embodied and the discrimination and inequality at different intersections. However, equally important is how they manoeuvre these inequalities and render the reading of racialized women as victims of the sub group's patriarchy false. Indeed these women not only manoeuvre their locations but also subvert power hierarchies by 'infiltrating' the spaces of power.

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Conclusion and Future research

The aim of my thesis was to answer a number of questions. I wanted to know how companies understand diversity in relation to gender equality in Sweden. I have discussed the multiple ways that diversity is understood. I realized that there is no definition of diversity that is operative; instead companies have adopted different ways of understanding diversity. Diversity is sometimes seen as a mobile term that is fluid and can be applied to situations that the company deems relevant. Diversity is also seen as the valuing of difference, this includes different people or different skills, competencies and experiences. Diversity is also seen as a strategy for promoting equality in the labour market by including those who have been historically excluded for example, women, people of foreign background, and so forth. I have documented the tensions and contradictions within diversity discourses, in the first instance, the lack of clarity contributes to hiding what Acker (2006) calls 'inequality regimes' while the focus on essentialized difference creates token diverse 'others' who embody the corporate image of diversity. I have argued for a more reflexive take on diversity that seeks to look inwards into the ways that inequalities are maintained while at the same time taking action to include those who have been excluded. Inward reflexivity would entail allowing discomfort in search for equality, allowing one to see that which is often hidden.

I have discussed the motivations behind diversity, I have shown how companies see diversity as a way to access creative talent and have a competitive edge. I have argued that motivation for diversity has been partly driven by capitalism gain and neoliberal discourses that render invisible power hierarchies. I have argued that neoliberal uptake of diversity tells us, who, how and for what diversity is valued. A neoliberal reading of diversity discourses shows us how individuals become constructed as human capital and the ways in which neoliberal discourses on freedom and independence can obscure how capitalism adapts to new challenges. I have argued that individuals through their presence in organisation still have the ability to resist neoliberal tendencies by making claims for their rights. Therefore understanding the strategy that individuals adopt is useful for those interested in disrupting the status quo.

I have highlighted how racialized women take up positions against inequalities in the labour market. Their experiences show us the ways that different intersections such as gender, class,

age, ethnicity play a significant role in how they are constructed and how they themselves challenge these identity constructions. Their narratives challenge essentialized views of 'racialized women' in Sweden as being homogenous and having similar experiences and positions. It also shows how people resist 'othering' and the strategies they adopt to challenge these constructions of themselves. It shows us how individuals are positioned due to a number of factors including historical and geopolitical location. Discourses on diversity need to see how the inequalities in society have been created and how these have placed individual who meet at the workplace, diversity strategies that fail to address themselves to the effect of 'redemptive capitalism, geopolitical location, postcolonial imageries and neoliberal entanglement are unable to address regimes of inequalities adequately. We do not choose our locations; these social locations have been constructed over time and place and position us in different ways and directions.

Lastly, I want to end with the ways that individual strategies require effort and energy which is not the case for those who are part of the norm. While members of the dominant group are able to live and work with minimal pressure to compromise their cultural values and norms, those deemed outsiders are coerced to relinquish or at the very least hide their foreign languages, clothing, cultural practices, hairstyles, and associations with other outsiders to obtain gainful employment. (Sahar Aziz 2015: 7) Thus the burden of discrimination become double, to resist and take up new identities, to be something other than who you would like to be, to perform the game. This last point is very important and became very clear during my interactions with the all the research participants. This research did not have time to dig deeper into this last point however I think it is important for diversity research to analyse the ways that normative discourses of diversity place a burden on the excluded 'other' to always be witty, calculating and performing. I think this would greatly enrich the discussion on diversity which many times do not take the views of those who embody diversity. This could be interesting for future research to further enrich this thesis.

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Appendix I

Research Introduction and questions

Master's research

As part of my Master's studies, I am undertaking a thesis research project where I am interested in *gender equality, diversity management and labour discrimination* as understood and practiced within the Swedish corporate sector. My research focus is to analyse how gender as a category has been understood and implemented in relation to ethnic/cultural diversity in Sweden. The research project seeks to answer the following broad questions:

1. How do corporations understand and implement gender equality, if so, what intersections and categories of gender are seen as important?
2. How do private companies link gender equality to ethnic/cultural diversity management and labour discrimination
3. What kinds of strategies/initiatives do companies adopt to promote the inclusion of racialized women within the labour market in Sweden
4. How do racialized women experience the labor market and how do they understand gender equality, diversity management and ethnic/cultural labor discrimination?

Aim

The research aims to contribute to the body of scientific knowledge on gender equality and diversity management by documenting strategies that have been adopted and analyzing their effects on the overall promotion of gender equality and diversity in Swedish companies. It is hoped that the results from this study will contribute to bridging the gap between academic theory and actual practice. The study is also aimed at enriching the knowledge of private companies and actors interested in the progressive application of gender equality and diversity.

Methodology:

This will be an empirical research, analysing how concepts are used and applied. The research will adopt multiple methodologies in answering the above mentioned research questions.

- Document analysis: including analysing company reports, websites and any other materials mentioning gender equality and diversity
- Interview diversity managers /human resource managers in charge of the application of gender and diversity initiatives
- Participant observation where I will attend gender and diversity events to capture how these concepts are discussed among private sector actors

Ethical considerations

The research will follow the International Sociological Association's (ISA) Code of Ethics to ensure all ethical concerns are adhered to. Interview participants shall provide their consent prior to their engagement either verbally during the interview (via recording) or in writing. Interview participants have a right to drop out of the interview at any time they choose. All engagements with participants

will be kept confidential and the research will respect the anonymity of the participants unless participants have asked or agreed to be cited in the research.

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