

OPENING UP A SPACE FOR THE POLITICAL?

A study of diversity practitioners in Swedish academia

Abstract

Analysing interviews with diversity practitioners at three Swedish universities, this article explores how diversity is deployed and the ways in which the articulations of practitioners might contribute to politicising issues of ethnicity and race. In the post-political era of New Public Management, audit technologies, quantification and bureaucratisation often render diversity apolitical, and deprive it of its political nature. These processes of depoliticisation tend to downplay political conflicts and ignore or even reinforce social hierarchies such as those based on norms of whiteness and middle-class masculinity. Paradoxically, in this interview study, it is shown how seemingly neutral, apolitical procedures such as mapping, counting and producing statistics led to debates that revealed underlying antagonisms, and opened up a space for rearticulating diversity that could provide a destabilisation of the whiteness of academia.

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Introduction

Multiculturalism and diversity politics have been discussed, explored and above all criticised by postcolonial, anti-racist researchers for more than two decades now (Spivak 1990, Puwar 2004, Ahmed 2012). It has become evident that diversity as a political project does not necessarily lead to the problematisation of power, and it is not certain that it addresses racism either. Instead, diversity politics tends to be about the inclusion, or even celebration, of differences (Puwar 2004). In higher education, diversity policies have come to mean difference in the sense that non-white and otherwise 'different' bodies are on display in course catalogues and on websites promoting the university. As Elaine Swan concludes, the mosaic as an image of diversity acknowledges difference, at the same time, as it displays a homogenising tendency in the sense that it is still an image of unity (Swan 2010a). Diversity plans and images of diverse universities with smiling faces furthermore operate in a way designed to make us think that 'we' are already diverse. 'Diversity becomes about changing the perceptions of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of organisations', according to Sara Ahmed (Ahmed 2012: 34).

Political campaigns and policy plans about multiculturalism and diversity might thus serve as a way of hiding actual problems of racism. Utterances of bad practice (in the sense of 'we have problems with racism') are taken up as signs of good practice ('we are aware of

the problem'). In this way, diversity plans do not do what they say and could certainly be described as 'unhappy performatives', as Ahmed has pointed out (Ahmed 2004). Added to this, it has been shown that the technologies of so-called New Public Management (NPM), such as audits, the commodification of diversity and other market-oriented ways of steering, contribute to depoliticisation and/or limited opportunities for introducing equality policies into higher education (Blackmore 2002; Carbin & Rönnblom 2012; Petersen & Davies 2010; Swan 2010b). Auditing refers to an independent examination and evaluation of policies and programmes, which often also includes gathering evidence to back up the conclusions, often presented in a report. This means that political efforts have to be presented in such a way that they are possible to audit or measure in one way or another. While technologies of audit have been put forward as though they could in themselves provide more emancipatory and enabling tools for professionals, these methods have been shown to have negative effects in terms of policing and disciplining professionals and reducing professional relations to quantifiable templates (Shore & Wright 1999). Audit, with its notions of quantification, detachment and disembodiment serves amongst other things as a way of reinforcing white, academic masculinity as the norm and renders non-whites and women as deviant (Swan 2010b).

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Yet, without rejecting this substantial critique, could another story also be told? Even though diversity has, in many cases, been deployed as a market term that goes hand in hand with NPM and functions as a way for universities to show commitment to inclusion and at the same time, conceal inequalities, this might not be the whole story. When people are employed to work for diversity or against ethnic discrimination, they start doing things that the institution might not have initially thought of. Instead of dismissing bureaucratic practices of checklists, audits and mapping as non-political a priori, I would like to explore the deployment of diversity and the practices of diversity workers more openly. Thus, instead of foreclosing the analysis by dismissing such efforts as (neo) liberal technologies, I seek to explore the effects of these practices in a concrete setting.

One of the reasons why I became curious about how to understand the practices of diversity workers derived from an interview study I conducted with both gender equality and diversity practitioners. Gender equality practitioners were preoccupied with writing policy plans, checklists, best-practice guides and suchlike, and some of them seemed to think that these new types of steering have made the work less creative and have contributed to its depoliticisation (Carbin & Rönnblom 2012), whereas this was not the case in relation to ethnicity and race. The aim of this article is to analyse the ways in which the practice of diversity workers contributes to making issues of diversity and inclusion *political*. What is the political work of diversity discourse? What kind of political discourse, with what social and political effects, is contemporary diversity talk in Swedish academia? Could diversity function as a platform to work against racism and provide a critique of institutionalised whiteness? I have scrutinised how diversity practitioners talk about their everyday practice in order to discuss whether there exists certain strategies that in one way or another contribute to politicising the issue of diversity.

Methods and data

The analysis is based on an interview study with diversity practitioners at three public Swedish universities (one old, one new and one in-between). All three universities in this study have organised equality work through committees with a consultative mandate in relation to the university management. Two of the universities had separate committees for gender equality and diversity, and one had a common committee responsible for both areas. I conducted interviews with the members of these committees.¹ In total, 28 interviews were conducted with gender equality and diversity workers during the spring of 2011; they were semi-structured in character and were based on a schedule of around 20 open questions. The study focusses, particularly on diversity practitioners, of whom 10 were interviewed. Out of these 10, three had migrated to Sweden. Each interview took around 1 hour. I asked the interviewees questions regarding the meanings of diversity, the organisation of their work for diversity, the kinds of strategies they used themselves in order to make changes and the visions they had.

The interviews have been analysed using an open coding. As a first step, I read through the data several times, looking for how diversity workers expressed the strategies they used. The diversity workers in this study did not, however, talk that much about *conscious strategies*. Instead, what I found when I read the interviews was that they talked a lot about the small activities that made up their work (see also Keisu & Carbin 2014). While practitioners found it difficult to answer a direct question asking what strategies they were using in their work, they could easily describe *how* they worked. The empirical analysis thus concerns how diversity workers describe what they

actually do and the concrete details of how they worked. I categorised these stories about their practice into three broad activities: first, *education/information*; second, their efforts to *map racism*; and third, they were engaged in *gaining access to employment procedures*. For this article, I have chosen to discuss the second and third of these activities: *mapping racism* and *gaining access to employment procedures* since these caused more discussion by management in the organisation and also seemed to preoccupy the practitioners.² In the analysis, I will discuss how these activities might disrupt common norms around whiteness, race and ethnicity, and thus, how the articulations of the practitioners could be read as ways of trying to politicise diversity. Before I embark on the analysis, I will give a brief background to official discourses on diversity and ethnic discrimination as well as an overview of earlier research on diversity in Swedish higher education.

Diversity Policies in the Shadow of Gender Equality

Although, on a more general level, one could speak of a Scandinavian model of gender equality, it does not make sense to speak of a Scandinavian or Nordic model encompassing issues of diversity or the 'multicultural society' (Langvasbråten 2008). The so-called 'women friendly state', as the Nordic welfare state has historically been labelled, stressed the inclusion of women, but excluded or downplayed issues of ethnicity and race (de los Reyes *et al.* 2002; Borchorst & Siim 2008: 222). Gender equality has developed a relatively established vocabulary and the discourse on gender equality achieved a hegemonic position during the 1990s when it became constructed as a facet of national character and as part of a liberal political project in which class was seen as a less important element (de los Reyes 2002; Tollin 2011). In the Nordic countries, there has also been a tendency to consider 'diversity' or 'multiculturalism' as a threat to gender equality or, as it is often formulated, 'multicultural challenges to state feminism' (Siim & Skjeie 2008). Today, in Sweden, as in most Nordic countries, gender equality has lost some of its unique status since gender units and diversity units have been integrated, and transformed from single-strand bodies into multi-strand bodies (Borchorst *et al.* 2012: 78). This goes both for the general ombudsman institutions and for the organisation of these issues in higher education.

During the late 1990s, diversity became a relatively common public topic in Scandinavia and the authorities became increasingly concerned about the so-called lack of integration that had to do with a perceived pressure on welfare and the labour market inflicted by the immigration of people from countries in the South (Brochmann & Hagelund 2011). In Sweden, at the time, the term diversity was linked primarily to social liberal discourses on multiculturalism, ethnicity and 'immigrants'. It had clear connotations of multiculturalism and tolerance and was articulated in opposition to approaches of assimilation that were considered to be outdated (Carbin 2010: 52). But diversity was also problematised in public policy by a competing discourse that emphasised equality and talked about structural discrimination against the racialised peoples (Carbin 2010). Although, during the late 1990s, diversity, multiculturalism and structural discrimination were discourses in which 'diversity' was given meaning; today, these terms are used less often and diversity is not necessarily linked to multiculturalism.

The concept of 'diversity' (*mångfald*) has increasingly come to be replaced with terms such as 'equal opportunities' or 'inclusion'

covering 'all categories' and not specifically ethnicity, as was the case back in the 1990s. This tendency to talk about 'all discriminatory grounds' is evident in Norway and Denmark as well and sometimes goes by the name 'intersectionality'. This contrasts with an Australian and British context, where affirmative action and equal opportunities have been replaced by the language and practice of diversity (Ahmed & Swan 2006). Thus, the term diversity as *such* is still used, albeit less frequently and it does not seem to come with the specific chain of associations or attached words associated with *multiculturalism*, *race* and *ethnicity*. In the following, I will discuss how diversity work and diversity policies have found a place in higher education.

Diversity in higher education

Even though diversity has been a relatively central policy discourse in Swedish politics since the mid 1990s, it has not been institutionalised in higher education to the same extent as gender equality (Keisu 2012). For example, there is no legal provision for employers to set up equality policy plans in relation to race or ethnicity, as is the case for gender equality. The 'politics of documentation', as Ahmed describes it (Ahmed 2007), is not present when it comes to diversity policies in Swedish higher education. Compared with British and Australian universities, for example, NPM is a relative newcomer to Swedish academia and has certainly not been introduced on large scale in relation to gender equality and diversity in higher education.³ This is particularly striking in the policy area of diversity. Many European and/or Western countries have long ago built institutions to control, monitor, evaluate and collect knowledge in this area, whereas in Sweden, the existing data has not been used (Mählick 2010).

When I conducted the interviews, I noticed that there are many terms circulating in the policy work of universities at the moment: gender equality (*jämställdhet*), equal treatment (*likabehandling*), equal opportunities (*lika villkor*) diversity (*mångfald*), inclusive university (*inkluderande universitet*), tolerance (*tolerans*).⁴ This means that there is a tendency amongst the interviewees not to know exactly which terms or words to use or what language to turn to when it comes to ethnicity and race. Added to this, in Sweden, 'race' is seen as an outdated category in policy discourses and the European Union race directive is translated in a way that excludes the term 'race' and cannot capture bodily aspects of racism. This means that 'race' is a very sensitive topic in Swedish politics in general, and the discursive silence surrounding processes of racialisation are especially apparent in higher education (Mählick & Fellesson 2014). This relative silence is also visible when it comes to research into the topic. Up until recently, there were few studies on diversity work and ethnic discrimination in Swedish higher education (see for example Fazlshemi 2002; de los Reyes 2007; Sandell 2014). The Swedish state has authorised only a few public inquiries into the issue (SOU 2000: 47; SOU 2006: 40).

Theorising Politics and the Political

As my intent is to discuss the meanings of 'the political' and analyse how diversity work might constitute processes of depoliticisation and/or politicisation, I have turned to political scientist Chantal Mouffe's work for inspiration. In line with Mouffe, I consider the political to be a 'dimension of antagonism', that always involves collective forms of identification. This means that conflict is at the heart of the political. In order for an issue to be political, it has to involve some kind of

choice between conflicting alternatives (Mouffe 2005: 10). Mouffe differentiates between 'the political' and 'politics'. She argues that politics does not revolve around antagonisms, but rather has to do with a set of practices, procedures and institutions through which orders are established (Mouffe 2005: 9). Furthermore, Mouffe distinguishes between the social and the political. The social is a larger entity characterised by practices that are taken for granted, the consensus or the 'natural order' of things. The social is not fixed, but unstable, contingent and temporary, and the lines between the social and the political are thus constantly shifting. The political, however, involves the possibility of bringing the social into question.

Political questions are not only technical issues to be solved by bureaucrats or experts. Liberalism, however, continuously tries to deprive politics of its political dimension. That is, liberal thought is characterised by rationalism and individualism and is based on an understanding of the political that forecloses the possibility of articulating collective interests (Mouffe 2005: 10). Nevertheless, every attempt by liberals to overcome the political (the antagonistic dimension) is bound to fail since the rational, neutral consensus-seeking solutions of liberals pay attention neither to power nor to collective identities (and we/they distinctions). Thus, 'Despite what many liberals want us to believe, the specificity of democratic politics is not the overcoming of the we/they opposition but the different way in which it is established' (Mouffe 2005: 14).

In order to analyse processes of depoliticisation, I have also drawn upon the work of Wendy Brown. Brown discusses issues of politics and depoliticisation in a similar vein to Mouffe.⁵ In her view, depoliticisation is a coherent process that involves ignoring the history of a political phenomenon and the powers that are part of producing it (Brown 2006: 15). Furthermore, in Brown's view, it 'involves casting the existing order of things as inevitable, natural, or accidental rather than as the issue of orders of networks of power that privilege some at the expense of others' (Brown 2006: 212). In line with Mouffe, Brown describes how the very project of liberalism itself involves a practice of rendering all aspects of culture, the social and economics as independent of power. In her view, depoliticisation is discursive and has many sources. Brown lists different types of depoliticisation, which I draw upon in my analysis. According to her, depoliticisation 'involves rearticulating inequality, marginalisation and social conflicts as personal, individual, natural, religious or cultural instead of viewing these phenomena as collective, structural and political' (Brown 2006: 16–17). I am tracking the political in the sense that I am searching for articulations of collectivities, identities, conflicting interests and articulations of power. By examining how the diversity workers describe their practice, I intend to follow Mouffe and Brown in their ambition to analyse the ways in which their deployments of diversity might destabilise the university as a seemingly neutral, non-discriminatory and non-racist space.

Theorising race and whiteness

In order to understand how diversity workers navigate their workplace and try to make changes in Swedish academic settings, the concept of whiteness has also been useful for me in this study. Sara Ahmed's notion of institutional whiteness, in particular, has provided a tool for understanding the deployment of diversity. Ahmed describes whiteness as institutional in the sense that it operates as something that is taken for granted: 'an institution takes shape as an effect of what has become automatic' (Ahmed 2012: 25).⁶ When something has become institutionalised, it has become background, Ahmed

argues. Following Mouffe, I would like to conceptualise institutional whiteness using the term hegemony as that which is not questioned, which is seen as natural, as non-political. This means that whiteness is a tacit and seldom recognised, norm. Richard Dyer, among others, has described whiteness as that which is perceived as invisible (Dyer 1997). This is true at least for white people; racialised peoples have always seen whiteness as a colour, as bell hooks among others has pointed out (Hooks 1997).

The ongoing production of whiteness and its implications for the continuation of domination and privilege depends on white people's systematic ways of forgetting about it or refusing to recognise it (Swan 2010: 478). This ignorance could be read not simply as a matter of a lack of knowledge but instead as an active process - it actually demands some kind of effort *not* to recognise it. It is indeed a 'labour of racial ignorance' (Swan 2010: 500). Diversity work could thus mean challenging or intervening in processes of white hegemony. Furthermore, whiteness is a central signifier of being Swedish, although paradoxically, it is seldom recognised as such. Catrin Lundström and Tobias Hübinette conclude: 'the idea of being white without doubt constitutes the central core and the master signifier of Swedish-ness and thus of being Swedish, meaning that a Swede is a white person, and a non-white person is not a Swede' (Lundström & Hübinette 2011: 44).

Despite the fact that both racists and anti-racists understand Swedishness as white, race is a category that is seldom explicitly mentioned in discussions about 'ethnic discrimination' or the multicultural society. In addition, Swedishness is connected with a sense of being good and tolerant (Berg 2007; Carbin 2010). This means that racism can hardly be understood as an integral part of Swedish society. Rather, racism is constantly described as an exception to the general rule of a liberal society based on principles of solidarity. During the 1960s, Sweden became one of the leading international voices calling for decolonisation and anti-racism; the anti-apartheid movement, in particular, was very strong both at the grass-roots level (dominated by 'white' Swedes) and in the Swedish government, thereby constructing Swedishness as anti-racist (Hübinette and Lundström 2011).

The work of opposing institutionalised racism and sexism must thus be understood against the background of the Swedish nation's investment in promoting itself as tolerant, anti-racist and gender equal, and as a country with no colonial past. Race as a category in the Swedish public sphere is seen as out-dated, as far as the situation in Sweden is concerned. Paradoxically, it might be even more difficult to work against racism and to articulate problems with it in a setting in which the belief is that we are already tolerant and solidarity is seen as part of national identity. It is against this background that the work of diversity practitioners should be understood. I have broadly divided the diversity workers' utterances about their activities into two practices that, in one way or another, are concerned with challenging whiteness and I now turn to the discussion of this. The first concerns *mapping racism*, and the second, diversity practitioners were engaged in *gaining access to employment procedures*.

Mapping racism - A seemingly neutral procedure with political consequences

One problem that occupied many of the interviewees (especially those employed as diversity officers) concerned the interpretation of the law - the prohibition against employers asking about the ethnicity or religion of their employees. The collection of data on ethnic or racial

discrimination is made difficult by the fact that in Sweden, employers and authorities are not allowed to make registers based on race or ethnicity and to ask employees about their ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds. Polls, surveys and statistics based on race, ethnicity or culture are thus, not allowed. Instead, the Swedish state operates with the category 'foreign background' and the terms used are first- and second-generation immigrant. However, as one interviewee says, 'ethnicity is not where you are born'. Collecting ethnic and racial data is a sensitive and very complex issue - whether the state should do so or not is highly debated since it must be asked: for what purposes are these data being collected and how might they be used in the future? (Simon & Piché 2012). Some argue that statistics and information are needed in order to be able to discover the extent and the intensity of discrimination against various groups. Others point to history and the risk of stigmatisation.

Nevertheless, the problem facing the practitioners in this study concerned the need to 'prove' that racism and ethnic discrimination occur at the university, while lacking clear descriptions of what exactly constitutes racism and ethnic discrimination. Many of them told me stories about how they had tried to intervene in order to map out problems of ethnic discrimination or racism. Thus, in our study, the law proved to have troubling consequences for diversity workers when gathering data on the extent of ethnic discrimination at all three universities (at two of the three, this was a major issue). While many of those in management positions interpret the prohibition in ways that make it impossible to collect data, practitioners have found pragmatic ways to do so. At one of the universities, management interpreted the law in the sense that the employee barometer (a questionnaire sent out every second year to all university staff) could ask a question about whether the employee had experienced 'ethnic discrimination', but *not* whether the employee had a foreign background or 'other' ethnicity. Since there was no question about cultural, ethnic and/or national background, the survey could not reveal what percentage of employees with a specific ethnicity or foreign background had experienced harassment. There was no data available for diversity workers to use to show 'how it actually is'. The practitioner said:

The percentage was very low. But the problem was that this percentage didn't really say anything about the percentage of people with an ethnic background feeling harmed or discriminated against. Because there was no information in the statistics about the ethnic background of the people. And when we asked why that was the case, the statistician, who was from the president of the university's office, said that they wouldn't ask this question because people would feel humiliated (*kränkta*).

Asking people about their race or ethnicity is seen as 'harassment' and interference with personal integrity, as this interviewee describes it. The legal paragraph functions as a neat excuse for the institution to continue to ignore racism and institutional whiteness. I would also like to point out that this is similar to a liberal ideal of neutrality, as Morrison has noted: 'the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a grateful, even generous, liberal gesture' (Morrison 1992: 10). This interviewee also said in a cynical way that "it is all about being '*kränkt*'" (humiliated or harmed).

Another practitioner had tried to gather this data despite the general belief that it is impossible:

Whoever I talked to, they said no, and the reason was that it is against the law - it is illegal. But that's not the case, actually. What we did to get the data, just briefly. We just delivered our individual

filters to the National Board of Statistics/SCB, staff data at an individual level, and they used it and ran it against the statistics of the whole population. They have national background, where you are born, but we only got back unidentified data.

What this interviewee experienced was that management was so afraid of violating this law that it did not consider the ways in which it was actually possible to find the data. It also seems that people in management positions believe that ethnicity is the same thing as 'foreign background'. Another practitioner had also intervened in order to get data on diversity despite the university's reluctance:

We could have done interviews, or questionnaires where people could tick a box, but it was not considered ethically right. So we chose this anonymous way. That is, we turned to SCB. SCB delivered the statistics that the university had delivered to them and ran it against the total population. That way we could see what it looks like. (...) But I mean, it is just these ethical reasons, that some might feel offended. Why do I have to fill in this form just because I have a different family name? Or I feel Swedish because I was born here, and so on. So in order to avoid these problems we thought it was better to do it this way.

According to this interviewee, it was not considered 'ethically right' to ask people about their ethnic background. Hard data was seen as one important way of proving that discrimination occurs and when the data does not exist, it is difficult to act. Getting the data was presented as a way to 'see what it looks like', as if it would not be possible to gather it otherwise.

There is a tendency by some of the interviewees to view 'hard data' in a relatively unproblematised way and as necessary in order to act. Numbers and measurements were considered to be very valuable, and there is little discussion as to how such numbers might be interpreted, as though they speak for themselves. Hard data was also represented as a way of seeing changes, and also, as Ahmed has pointed out, as a tool for competing with other universities (Ahmed 2012: 99). The demand for audits was also articulated in terms of making the issues more important when 'being seen' by someone (Keisu and Carbin, 2014). One of the practitioners makes a comment about the search for statistics:

It proved to be a very good way to measure, even though we only go for quantity, it is nevertheless a good way to get a picture of how it is.

However, as Ahmed discusses, if universities were audited in the strict sense, they would have to produce auditable documents, and those that proved to be the highest ranked would be the ones that were best at creating auditable systems (which is not necessarily the same as being best at counteracting racism) (Ahmed 2012: 99). The question is, of course: what kind of knowledge is produced through surveys and these more quantitative methods? As Elaine Swan has shown, audit technologies in the UK university system contribute to legitimising a certain kind of whiteness and masculinity and thereby reproduce knowledge that furthers white privilege. Institutional racism can thus be ignored through audit technologies. Audit functions as a technology of ignorance, according to Swan, since it draws upon a hyper-rational, academic masculinity that could contribute to constituting other subjects (women and non-whites) as emotional and non-rational (Swan 2010: 501). Or, along with Wendy Brown, we could understand the collection of data as a liberal way

of depoliticising an issue in the sense that it is seen as a neutral procedure (and thus it might hide collective interests and differences behind numbers). There is evidently tension between the desire to map racism while at the same time trying to object to these kinds of methods and challenging the assumption that racism can be 'proved', as though it were possible to map out the problem in any easy way (see Ahmed 2012: 99).

The idea of quantifying and mapping out racism in academia was also criticised by one of the interviewees, who put forward an alternative way of developing knowledge on the subject:

I also suggested once, because my colleague in England, who has been in the disability unit at his university for a very long time, they created something like focus groups. So they got together people with disabilities of all kinds in a focus group together, and there were one or two people to get them to discuss, you know, what their issues are. And of course that's much easier if you are in a group like that and somebody starts talking, that other people say "ok I have the same experience," than if you fill in a form and you are asked if anybody has treated you badly or not.

The interviewee here talks about interviews and focus group conversations as a way of producing knowledge collectively (like memory-work). This would represent an alternative method of producing knowledge that could take emotions into account and map out experiences of racism in depth. One of the reasons for suggesting focus groups was that questionnaires were seen as a very limited method for the universities to discover how ethnic discrimination or racism are experienced by those who might be targets.

The collection of hard data as such thus caused major controversies and started a process in which collective identities were discussed. One way of understanding this controversy is to analyse it in terms of articulations that destabilise the white hegemony and support the habit of ignoring ethnicity and race. Thus, paradoxically, quantification and the search for methods to uncover 'how it is' actually made the political side of the matter visible. Thus, in this case, it seems that quantification and mapping as *such* caused major controversies and was highly politicised. Paradoxically, the liberal, rational and seemingly neutral, apolitical technique of counting or quantifying, mapping out the problem, proved to bring its political character into the open.

Gaining access to employment procedures

Gaining access to employment procedures is the second activity that I want to discuss here. Employment procedures also constitute one of the issues that seem to cause conflict when diversity workers try to intervene. Working for diversity means, amongst other things, working towards making it possible for non-whites to enter white academic spaces. One of the diversity practitioners described diversity work as differing from gender equality work in the sense that diversity is about 'being allowed to be here, to have equal access to the university'. The sense of not being allowed to be present, of being a 'space invader', is something that is experienced by people who do not pass as white, in white spaces (Puwal 2004).

In Sweden, there is an extremely high rate of internal recruitment when it comes to both doctoral positions and lecturers/assistant professors. Unnamed preferences for comfort and familiarity associated with whiteness contribute to constituting institutional norms of recruitment that can be described as structural discrimination,

according to researchers Lena Sawyer and Steven Saxonberg (SOU 2006: 40, p.412). The combination of structural rules on the one hand and the opportunity to manipulate specific recruitment processes on the other contribute to the exclusion of external academics, often with foreign backgrounds (SOU 2006: 40 p.447).

One of the interviewees told us about an example of a clearly discriminatory practice in the way in which non-Swedish-speaking people were treated in the employment process:

It concerned an applicant who had applied for a position here at the university, where the experts had written in their pronouncements that they couldn't judge the merits of this applicant because they were published in a language other than Swedish, English or any other European language. But still they had put this application in a non-eligible place. (...) They were not even going to consider this applicant for the position. (...) How can you treat an applicant in this way, and not even react?

The interviewee continues to describe how he had tried to institutionalise practices that would make it impossible for this kind of discrimination to occur in the future:

They thought that this kind of plan was an interruption of academic freedom, one could absolutely not tell them how to handle these issues. (...) they didn't need anybody to tell them how to do it. But I told them exactly what had happened, and as long as it isn't printed you can actually ignore it. We got to a compromise sitting at the table where they said, it would be written into the plan that "all applicants should get fair/equal treatment". So, it was a compromise, so to speak.

This case shows that despite the fact that these employment procedures were clearly discriminatory, the department claimed its academic freedom and navigated in such a way that it would probably be able to continue business as usual. Several interviewees described how their efforts and ideas were celebrated and met with enthusiasm by the other members of the committee, whereas it was more difficult to intervene in the institutional work of the university. One said:

So then at the beginning, because I was new and I didn't know the Swedish system and so on, I suggested things like, for instance, we should control the application process and, for instance, have a group from the committee who go and control, ok, how many applications have come in from people with ethnic backgrounds or disabled people, and how they have been treated in relation to applications from, quote, 'native Swedes'. Oh, of course, you cannot do that, you know. And actually, I must say that the leader of the committee had suggested that himself some years ago, but teachers and people in the department had said that it wouldn't be controlled by anybody, you know. And they were all doing the right thing, and that it was kind of shocking that somebody wanted to control their work from outside.

In the quote above, the interviewee explains that the employment committee at the university did not want to be controlled by anybody. It is a paradox in a way since, on the one hand, the organisation has asked the practitioner to work for diversity and, on the other hand, any suggestions about changing routine procedures are causing conflict. Changes that could provide routines to counteract institutional whiteness seem to be met with reluctance. The ideal

of 'academic freedom' is drawn upon here in order to maintain the status quo and to be able to continue to ignore race, ethnicity and nationality. These processes have also been described by gender researchers, who have shown that allegedly neutral discourses on meritocracy and academic freedom are drawn upon by opponents of affirmative action (Törnqvist 2006; Alnebratt 2011).

Practitioners often experience institutions as a hindrance (Ahmed 2012). There is, according to Ahmed, an institutional wall that keeps the white norm intact. Feminist literature has described this phenomenon as gender equality workers meeting 'resistance' in their organisations. Despite the fact that diversity workers are employed to make changes, the institutions do not always agree about how these changes should be made or people want to 'do things as we have always done them here'. Another way of understanding this is to see that these are ways of trying to resist and *politicise* employment procedures and of opening up for discussion things that have been taken for granted. One could see these interventions as ways of resisting and trying to rearticulate the white hegemony of the university. Thus, bureaucratic measures such as monitoring or controlling employment procedures proved to be double-edged. They opened up space for discussing tacit norms and 'taken for grantedness' related to whiteness.

Conclusions: Diversity work as politicisation or depoliticisation?

Practitioners are doing diversity in multiple ways. Several of the interviewees talked about concrete efforts such as mapping racism and gaining access to employment procedures. Whether these practices represent ways of resisting or ways of reproducing the status quo, is ambiguous. Institutionalising diversity means neither a full co-optation of the anti-racist agenda nor that diversity functions as a clear site of resistance (Fox & Swan, 2010: 585). Diversity as a discourse is heterogeneous and, as Fox and Swan point out, practitioners can make use of this discourse in order to achieve different things (Fox & Swan 2010). This is not only the case with diversity, but also applies to integration policies, for example, which could engender inequalities or forms of resistance, depending on how different elements articulate with one another (Pykkönen & Lippart 2012).

It is evident, for example, that mapping racism and intervening in employment procedures are in line with general liberal, depoliticising trends such as using seemingly neutral techniques of mapping and counting. Clearly, one can question the belief in statistics since, even though these statistics are visible to the organisation, action still depends on how the organisation interprets them. It becomes a way of constructing the problem as being a matter of lack of knowledge, and thus, is clearly a depoliticisation.

On the other hand, these modest strategies, especially the mapping of discrimination, proved to be highly controversial and led to a discussion of what we can or should count. The very counting in itself proved to have a political dimension or, in Chantal Mouffe's terms, the demand for quantification reveals the underlying political dimension of ethnicity and race. It reveals and brings into the light that which is seen as non-political and given. In contrast to the conclusions of Elaine Swan (Swan 2010b), who describes how quantification, detachment and disembodiment reinforce white, academic masculinity as the norm, in this case, it challenges the norm. Diversity is thus double-edged. It is an open concept that could mean many things, and therefore, it can easily be used strategically

by practitioners. If we consider the tacit norm of whiteness within Swedish academia, these strategies make visible things that the organisation has so far been relatively successful in keeping away from meetings and discussions. It brings ethnicity and race to the table and onto the agenda.

Despite the fact that the activities of diversity practitioners are not necessarily revolutionary or aimed at changing the wider structures, they cannot be dismissed as being merely part of processes of depoliticisation since, at the same time, these activities seem to be quite controversial. According to Ahmed, diversity workers come up against an institutional 'brick wall' and she describes how she has analysed diversity workers' efforts as an emotional labour of 'banging your head against the brick wall' (Ahmed 2012: 175) and in that sense, she portrays these efforts as failures. In contrast to Ahmed's reading, I would say that these efforts contribute to opening up diversity as a *political* space. The interventions attempting to monitor and become part of employment procedures did not succeed since they did not lead to any institutional changes at this particular moment, though the efforts clearly involved talking about collective identities and conflicting interests. They brought the social into question. A space has been opened up for conflict and the opportunity to discuss ethnicity, foreign background and race, and the identities and history attached to these concepts. The liberal way of reducing collective identities based on, amongst other things, race and ethnicity into individual, personal traits is questioned and, more importantly, the quantification in itself leads to a discussion of what exactly it is that ought to be mapped. What is race? Ethnicity? Culture? Foreign background? The tendency in Sweden to treat these as all being the same is questioned when starting to produce statistics.

Thus, diversity as a discursive space is open to processes of both politicisation and depoliticisation and these can also become intermingled in the sense that a technicalisation of diversity in terms of counting bodies, for example, could provide a depoliticisation in the sense that it is a bureaucratic procedure, while at the same time, involving a conflict over the meanings of race and ethnicity. What I found in this case was that the technicalisation of diversity in terms of 'mapping' racism had a side-effect that revolved around conflicts and different interests and thus, provided a challenge to norms of whiteness. Thus, the use of certain liberal technologies cannot be dismissed as apolitical in advance, but rather one has to more thoroughly interrogate the processes involved in this work. This argument also highlights new ways of analysing processes of depoliticisation by elaborating upon them in concrete empirical practices.

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Notes

1. The interviews were conducted together with Britt-Inger Keisu, within the project Strukturell hållbar jämställdhet - vision eller utopi? led by Malin Rönnblom. The membership of these committees is somewhat mixed as some members are researchers, some are administrative officers and some are union representatives. Here, I do not analytically distinguish between them.
2. Asking people what they do is not the same thing as exploring empirically what they actually do. I am not interested in mapping out exactly what they do. Instead, I am motivated to understand what troubles the practitioners or what they have been putting effort into that they find important.
3. Swedish higher education is mainly publicly funded, free of charge and most institutions of higher education are public authorities (Mählick and Thaver 2010).
4. Despite the relatively ambiguous status of the concept 'diversity', I have chosen to use the term. Two out of three universities in the study were still using the term 'diversity practitioner' when we conducted the interviews.
5. However, Wendy Brown's approach differs from Mouffe's in the sense that it relies more explicitly on Foucault and the concept of governmentality. I find it useful to discuss them together here in relation to the analysis of depoliticisation since they both discuss liberalism as a depoliticising force.
6. I do not share Sara Ahmed's phenomenological approach, but instead I am inspired by her analysis of the whiteness of academia.
7. Another problem with these ways of gathering data that focus on foreign background is that indigenous people (the Sami population) are not recognised.

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