

Thinking with the Familiar in Contemporary Literature and Culture ‘Out of the Ordinary’

Edited by

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Intersectionalizing the Homogenous Commonplace: Finnish Feminist Party and the Diversification of the Story of Nordic Social Coherence

Kaisa Ilmonen and Leena-Majja Rossi

Abstract

Intersectionality has been a debated concept in recent critical studies. It has been both hailed as the most important contribution to gender studies, and criticized for being an academic buzzword. In our chapter, however, we aim to focus on the potential productive power intersectionality might still have, for example, when critically applied to the narratives of cultural homogeneity and the ‘ordinariness’ of the majority. The narrative of Nordic societal homogeneity is often constructed as unitary and unchanging – the sphere of the ordinary. The white Nordic majority has become the norm against which the other, presented as in need of emancipation, is defined, read and interpreted. In such thinking, both ‘the majority’ and ‘the margin’ are stabilized constructs, even though they both remain inherently multifaceted and ambivalent. We turn the intersectional lens to the ‘homogenous commonplace’ by discussing on which conditions intersectionality could be turned towards the majority, or ‘the ordinary’. After that, we discuss intersectionality ‘in commonplace action’, by outlining a case study: the explicitly intersectional politics of the Feminist Party in Finland, founded in 2016.

Intersectionality has been one of the most debated concepts in recent feminist, queer, and critical race studies as well as in studies concerning neo- and postcolonial situations, multicultural issues, migration, or transnationality. Intersectionality has also been harshly criticized as a “buzzword” without clear methodology, or theoretical premises. It has been feared to become a depoliticized academic concept emptied out of specificity and content by universalizing and abstract talk about “complexity” and “many kinds of differences” (Gressgård 2008; Carbin and Edenheim 2013; Davis 2008; Erel et al. 2008; Salem 2016). In our chapter, however, we focus on the potential productive

power intersectionality might have, for example, when critically applied to the narratives of cultural homogeneity and “the ordinariness” of the majority. This potential may also be called *politics of narrative diversifying*. The notion of diversity has been a highly contested within feminist studies as well,¹ but we use it rather in the complex way defined by Sara Ahmed (2017, 91), to refer to not symbolic or tokenistic inclusion, but real *work for inclusion*: “first, diversity work is the work we do when we are attempting to transform an institution; and second, diversity work is the work we do when we do not quite inhabit the norms of that institution”.

The narrative of Nordic societal homogeneity is often constructed as unitary and unchanging – and as such it constructs the sphere of the Nordic ordinary, a state of normalcy, which can also be characterized as “a dream of the simple life” (Stewart 2007, 1). The white Nordic majority has been discursively grafted into the norm against which the “others”, presented as in need of emancipation, are defined, read and interpreted (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012; also Keskinen et al., eds 2009). In this account, both the majority and the margin are represented as stabilized constructs, even though in societal and cultural lived reality they both are and remain inherently multi-faceted and ambivalent, in a process of constant change. Therefore, we turn our intersectional lens of analysis exactly towards this “homogenous commonplace” in order to render visible the multiplicity and diversity disguised by the performative, repetitious narrative of Nordic homogeneity. First, we will discuss the conditions on which intersectionality, a theoretical and methodological device for analysing simultaneous oppressions and processes of multiple marginalisations, could be turned towards the majority, or “the ordinary”. After that, we will discuss intersectionality in commonplace action by outlining a case: the explicitly intersectional politics of the Feminist Party in Finland. Methodologically, we read both the general program (or platform) of the Party and some of the Party’s media reception in a broader frame of intersectional discussion and in the contexts of Finnish or Nordic commonplace. Thus, our aim is to practice the politics of narrative diversification: if, and on what conditions, the story of Nordic homogenous commonplace could be told in a more complex manner.

1 For instance Sara Salem (2016, 2), in discussing intersectionality’s ‘discontents’, writes on diversity as a neoliberal approach to social inclusion. In her article she traces what she calls the shift of “intersectionality as a moment of resistance to intersectionality as a neoliberal approach that erases equality”.

Intersectionality and the Commonplace

In the context of Scandinavian social debates, the narratives of social cohesion and cultural homogeneity are usually axiomatic. This is the case even though the Nordic countries have historically manifested variations of processes of colonialization, immigration and emigration: from colonizing powers to colonies themselves, from countries with mass emigration to hosting countries of immigrants (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012; Mulinari et al. 2009; Vuorela 2009). The narratively constructed, naturalized and therefore assumed homogeneity of the ordinary is constantly reflected in attitudes towards immigration and national minorities. The idea of the Nordic countries as exceptionally homogeneous in relation to culture and population is, nevertheless, discursively maintained in political, administrative and public media discussions alike, even though the region is composed of different populations with different cultures, histories, and languages (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012, 2).

It is arguable that this imagined exceptional homogeneity has become the master narrative of Nordic self-understanding. Kristín Loftsdóttir and Lars Jensen (2) explicate that Nordic exceptionalism may mean either an idea of the Nordic countries' peripherality in relation to broader colonization and globalization, or a *self-perception* rooted intrinsically differently from the rest of Europe and the world at large. Our emphasis in this chapter is on the latter, or on the *narrative exceptionality*, which we understand as being constructed as a unitary and unchanging sphere of the *ordinary*. Instead, the ordinary or the everyday may also be thought of having "the quality of continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergencies" (Stewart 2007, 2), and as such forming a stage for multiple differences and change. We bring forth ways in which these differences, concealed by the Nordic account of homogeneity narrative, can be, and *are*, made visible and audible. Thus we propose ways to better articulate the way in which "in the micro-spaces of the everyday we are embedded in [...] historical, political, social and cultural complexity" (2). What comes out of the ordinary if we take a closer look at it through the lens of intersectionality?

Intersectionality has often been defined, after Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix (2004, 76), as

signifying the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis [sic] of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts. The concept emphasizes that different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands.

As a research approach, intersectionality is used to analyse the co-constituting processes of social relations and discourses positioning subjects and experienced by subjects, while realizing that these social relations are affected and shaped by historical systems of subordination and domination. Power, understood as networks or relations, hierarchies or exclusions, is and has to be maintained at the focus of intersectional analyses.

It is a problematic and a much-disputed issue, if and in what terms intersectionality can be separated from its genealogy in African American and lesbian feminism, feminism of the Global South, and the study of oppressed positionalities (see e.g. Erel et al. 2008; Salem 2016). However, as Cynthia Levine–Rasky argues, dominant positionality does not exist apart from minority positions. For Levine–Rasky (2011, 243), dominant positionality is embedded in intersectionality in two ways: First, as part of a complex and ambivalent identity formation in which oppression always “co-exists with domination. No ‘pure’ position exists”. Thus, neither identities, nor the processes of power, are static, but emerge from ambiguous ways in which individuals are in relation to power. Second, Levine–Rasky emphasizes relationality “in which oppression and domination are co-conditional” (243). Thus, intersectionality also provides knowledge of the norm which defines the sphere considered “outside” the norm. This is extremely relevant for our task in this chapter, when we unravel the assumed homogeneity of the Nordic commonplace.

Whiteness and middle-classness, for example, are not mere facts, but depend on the symbolic transparency and social capital they enable at the expense of an “other”. Whiteness, as has been repeatedly stated in critical whiteness studies, is an invented construct blending history, culture, presuppositions and attitudes. For Ruth Frankenberg (2000), whiteness is a practice carrying traditions and contexts which have made it invisible. Frankenberg emphasizes that whiteness, too, changes over time and space being a contingent category without an essence. As such, it is also a relational category “co-constructed with a range of other racial and cultural categories, with class and with gender” (450, 454). For Frankenberg, naming whiteness as race displaces it from “unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance” (451). In a way, an intersectional critical inquiry and critical practice force vectors of domination, such as whiteness and middle-classness, to appear as race and class, stripping away their position as numbingly familiar – and thus invisible. We argue, as Vivian May (2015, 23) does, that privilege and oppression are structured simultaneously: they are relational, and “addressing underprivileged requires identifying and dismantling the overprivileged”. Intersectionality provides the possibility to approach familiar, ordinary and unmarked positions, such as whiteness, in

new ways, and in the case of whiteness by contrasting it with relationality and interdependence of oppression and domination.

In their book *Intersectionality*, Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2016, 25) explain that intersectionality consists of six core ideas: inequality, power, relationality, social context, complexity, and social justice. Intersectionality aims toward understanding *social inequality* based on interactions of various oppressive structures. It grasps multi-faceted *power* relations, such as neoliberalism or capitalism through a lens of mutual construction. Intersectionality rejects simplistic binary thinking and focuses on *relationality* of race, class, or gender, for example, while illustrating coalitions and relationships across divisions. In intersectional analysis these conceptualizations of social inequality, power and relationality are always seen *in context*; they are culturally, historically, socially, and disciplinarily grounded matters. Intersectionality considers the *complexities* of lived reality, while being complex itself in analysing contexts, relations, power, and inequalities (25–29). According to Collins and Bilge, this level of complexity restrains scholars from writing manuals or handbooks on how to do intersectional analysis. Each relation of power is actualized differently in different contexts, forcing scholars to form their tools of analysis according to the research question at stake. Finally, the most contentious core idea of intersectionality is social justice. Increasing *social justice* defines the ethos of the study in order to be called intersectional (29–30).²

Is it possible, then, to analyse dominations, commonplaceness, ordinariness, or majority intersectionally? Based on the aforementioned criteria, the answer is yes, if the goal of such a study i) is related to social justice, ii) increases knowledge about the multiply marginalized, and iii) focuses on various changing positions of domination and subordination. Our argument is that stereotypes create stereotypes: If the constructs such as Europe, white, Western, or Global North are seen stereotypically, the outside or the assumed “opposite” of this signifier is also stereotypical. Moreover, these constructs hide a variety of internal others occupying some relational and complex positions of power. For instance, on the institutional level a white Swedish-speaking Finnish fisherman from the Finnish archipelago belongs to the

2 Here our definitions diverge from those of Hill Collins and Bilge. While they acknowledge social justice as the most contentious core idea, they write that “working for social justice is not a requirement for intersectionality” (Hill Collins and Bilge 2016, 30). We understand the core idea of social justice inclusively, for example literary analysis, or cultural analysis at large, may be intersectional even though it is not directly related to social change. For instance literary analysis increases the understanding of the surrounding world more deeply being thus related to social justice on a transcendent level.

white majority of white Finns and his rights for his native minority language are guaranteed by law. However, on the social level, in a room full of Finnish speakers, he might experience subordination, while gender and class complicate his ambiguous position even further. As a male Finnish citizen he has some privileges, but his class status as a fisherman is much lower compared to some of his fellow Swedish speakers, men and women, coming from more affluent social strata.

Besides the six core ideas, Collins and Bilge (2016, 31) emphasize that intersectionality's "two organizational focal points" are critical inquiry and critical praxis. They remind us that the synergy between these two operational spheres "can produce important new knowledge and/or practices" (33). Intersectionality rejects views that see theory as superior to practice (see also Ahmed 2017, 29) and "fosters knowledge projects investigating new areas and questions", especially those that focus "on the interconnectedness of the academy and some aspects of the general public", such as education, social work, or public health (Hill Collins and Bilge 2016, 42, 36, 37–39). We, too, employ the synergy between theory and praxis as we combine our discussion on intersectional theory to the intersectional practices of the Finnish Feminist Party. Next, we analyse the ways in which the party uses intersectionality as political device to dismantle the story of homogenous Finnish society, and it is arguable that their praxis applies to Nordic societies at large.

Intersectional Feminist Politics

Finland is a context particularly in need of intersectionalizing, diversifying and nuancing the ordinary, as the Finnish self-understanding often emphasizes national unity. The narrative of Finnish societal homogeneity and the normality and hegemony of white Finnishness have been performatively produced since the early 20th century. The reiterative construction of white Finnishness intensified in the 1920s, once the promoters of the newly born nation state (independent since 1917) had got through their message that the Finns should be thought of as white – not related to "the Mongols", as was the earlier conception of the Finnish-speaking population (Valenius 2004, 191–97) but having their origin in Sweden. Now, in the third millennium, the much-recited story of national homogeneity and ordinariness of whiteness – as well as of heterosexuality and classlessness – is under deconstruction. That work is done not only by academic feminists, but also political activists who refuse to submit to white-centered thinking and practices. They are making the contemporary factual Finnish diversity and heterogeneity visible.

Intersectionality has indeed circulated widely both as a theoretical concept and as a mode of politics and activism (see e.g. Davis 2008; Erel et al. 2008; Salem 2016), and it has been taught also in Finnish gender studies for more than a decade now. The uses of intersectionality as an analytical tool have been debated in the Nordic universities even to the measure that some scholars have begun to talk about a burgeoning Scandinavian discussion, metatheoretical musings, or a colonizing control of intersectionality (see e.g. Phoenix and Pattynama 2006; Bilge 2013; Salem 2016; Tomlinson 2013). However, because of the hegemonic whiteness of the Finnish academia, one can say that white feminists have up until now dominated the analysis of the co-constitutive relationship between for instance race, gender, sexuality and class in Finland. In 2016, Finland finally got to witness a more diverse group of feminists getting hold of the discussion on intersectionality and using it for expressly activist purposes: the Feminist Party in Finland was first established as an association in June 2016 and then officially registered as a political party in December.³ The Party followed the example of other Nordic countries. Sweden had got its Feminist Initiative in 2005. In Iceland the women's party Kvinnolistan was active already in 1983–1998, but they actually had initiated the first women's party in the world as early as in 1908. The Norwegian version of Feminist Initiative was founded in 2015, and a Danish party is in the process of being established (Coleman 2015; Máwe 2017).

In Finland, the Feminist Party has taken up anti-discrimination as the core value of its politics. In many ways the party's program follows its Swedish sister party's platform published as revised in 2015 (*F! För en feministisk politik* 2015). However, what distinguishes the Finnish party's program from the Swedish one is that it takes up the concept of intersectionality at the very outset of the program (*Feministisen puolueen yleisohjelma* 2016, 2; abbreviated as *FP*). Intersectionality is explicitly mentioned when the party's feminist point of view on discrimination is described in the beginning of the program text: "This multi-leveled view is often called intersectional" (*FP* 2). However, we claim that intersectionality is more extensively present in the program, structuring the way all the sections have been *textually organized* – and thus it can be said that in the program the party practices 'the politics of narrative diversification'. This takes place by addressing the core political issues or problems recognized by the Party through meticulously showing *several social divisions operating together and building on each other* (cf. Collins and Bilge 2016, 4).

3 In the communal elections in April 2017 the Feminist Party had forty candidates for the municipal councils in the whole country, and in Helsinki they received one seat in the City Council, where they also have two vice-councilwomen.

The Party's program begins by boldly stating its agenda:

The goal of feminist politics is a society where everybody can realize their full potential, being equal with others – not depending on their gender or genderlessness, skin colour or assumed ethnicity, sexual orientation, corporeal ability, class, religion or conviction, expression of gender, gender identity, age or nationality. The three main points of our politics are gender equality, human rights and human safety.

*FP*⁴

If intersectionality is defined as a concept referring to “interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power” (Davis 2008, 68), the Feminist Party in effect spells this definition out at the onset of its program. It brings the diversified understanding of the workings of discriminatory power to the fore by taking up several categories of difference and stating that everyone has a *right not to become discriminated on the basis of these categories*. By pointing out the intersectionality of discrimination, the feminist politicians also continue using the term in the spirit of Kimberlé Crenshaw when she began discussing intersectionality in the field of law in the late 1980s. Crenshaw emphasized that both feminist theory and anti-racist policy discourse must be rethought in order to recognize the complex experiences of discrimination (1989). This multifaceted nature of social oppression is also at the centre of the Feminist Party's agenda analysed in the following section.

Intersectionality as Political Tactics

The program of the Feminist Party has been divided into 12 sections: Feminist Politics; Non-discrimination; Welfare; Sustainable Welfare Economy; Work; Education and Schooling; Culture and Media; Dwelling and Environment; Health, Sexuality and Gender; Gendered Violence; Human Safety and Security; and the European Union. Here we are able to touch only some of these topics to show how intersectionality runs through the program as a leitmotif. The program also emphasizes that gendered violence takes place in all classes, that the legacy of colonialism can still be seen in the differences between the

4 Originally in Finnish, translations of the program by LMR.

richest and the poorest countries, and that the environmental problems affect most the poor, women, and the indigenous people (FP 3–4).

Intersectionality is explicitly used as a key concept in the section focusing on anti-discrimination. Here, the program explains:

Feminist viewpoint to discrimination is based on the fact that human life is defined by *multiple intersecting power relations*. Most of us are privileged in some aspects but subordinate in others. This multileveled view is often called *intersectional*. The Feminist Party brings forth different causes of discrimination in order to make sure that everyone's legal protection will be realized.

FP 2; emphases original

The agenda of the party further emphasizes that their politics calls into question the norm of Finnishness exclusively based on whiteness, westernness and (Lutheran) Christianity. They insist that discrimination is often based on multiple issues, and use as an example the fact that women racialized as non-white face discrimination not only because of their gender but also because of their colour (FP 2). This, undoubtedly, echoes the statements and analyses of many previous intersectional feminists, such as the “Black Feminist Statement” by the Combahee River Collective (1982, 13), which already in 1977 stated the following:

The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major system of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives.

The Feminist Party program does not explicitly credit the political work done by the feminists of the Black movement who articulated the principles of intersectionality, or for instance Crenshaw who first came up with the term *intersectionality*.⁵ However, the program mentions groups such as the

5 Among scholars of intersectionality, it has been customary to name Crenshaw as the one who ‘coined’ the term intersectionality. This ‘coining’, however, is a much repeated narrative which dismisses decades of work by feminists of colour in the United States and elsewhere. According to Collins and Bilge (2016, 81, 83), the much repeated *verbatim* of Crenshaw ‘coining’ the term “fits within academic norms of ownership of cultural capital”. On writing styles of academic intersectionality and alternative genealogies see Ilmonen (2017).

indigenous Sámi and the Roma people as national minorities whose rights must be protected as part of the Party's anti-racist work. This recognition of Finland's age-old historical minorities deconstructs the story of the 'original' Finnish social coherence and effectively diversifies the Finnish or Nordic ordinary.

When discussing each and everybody's right to welfare and wellbeing, the party sets to criticize the traditional welfare politics for having been directed by the notion of nuclear family as the basic unit of society. This family, the party program reminds us, has often been imagined as white and fully capable to work, the parents being in a heterosexual relationship and having a certain number of children. In reality, however, families are much more diverse, and many people do not live in families at all. The program states that if well-being in society is built on an exclusive and narrow perception of normalcy, it excludes many who do not fit in the societal norms of parenthood, ethnicity, colour, ablebodiedness, age, health and gender. With this, the party aims to such a redistribution of power and privilege that would *unravel the intersections* of heteronormativity, racialization and racism, colonialism, and the power relations between genders, even between humans and other species:

The concept of welfare needs to be given a new meaning, which is based on genuine solidarity [...]. Solidarity has to be understood both locally and globally. It means understanding the real and lived diversity of the society, and an account of mutual understanding and respect between people who have very different values and ways of life. This means changing and resignifying conventional practices and norms that direct societal decision-making.

FP 3

As for education, the party program brings forth everyone's subjective right to free and equal schooling, starting from the pre-school. Here, again, the feminists stress that this right cannot depend on one's expressed gender or genderlessness, sexuality, conceptions attached to colour or ancestry, ability, class, religion or conviction, age or nationality. They want to enhance "norm-critical and gender-sensitive viewpoints on all educational levels" (*FP 6–7*). This notion emphasizes the intertwined nature of the structural and experiential levels in ordinary lives. They also write about the need to expose the hidden power structures within universities maintaining discrimination based on racism, sexism, and norms of whiteness and gender (*FP 7*). Here, the axis of age seems to be missing from their intersectional critique. This is all the more

noticeable as ageism connected to other factors of discrimination seems to be rampant in the Finnish labour market, including the academia.

Section by section, the party program goes through various societal problems and possible solutions to them, exposing the problems by using intersectional analysis as a critical tool. The program reaches beyond the national politics in Finland – and rightly so, since it challenges the meaning of strictly controlled national borders – pointing out the need for anti-racist feminist politics all over Europe where racist and populist rhetoric has again gained popularity. The program states that European politics of austerity has shaken the most the economic equality and social rights of women, disabled, immigrants, racialized, and gender and sexual minorities (*FP* 13).

Intersectionality, Politics, and Belonging

As we saw in the aforementioned program opening, the Feminist Party recognizes both the structural and the individual experiential levels at heart of their intersectional politics. Hill Collins (1999, 226–27), for one, has emphasized the co-operations of institutional, social, and subjective levels of differentiation in order to capture the everyday workings of power. Rita Kaur Dhamoon (2011, 234–35), for her part, foregrounds the contextualized analysis of both processes of individuation and systems of power in order to best tackle the intersectional analysis on the level of identity and on the level of structures. By these processes she means social operations of differences that produce subjectivities, whereas systems are “historically constituted structures of domination such as racism, colonialism, patriarchy, sexism, capitalism, and so on” (234). By addressing the level of individual experience, and by analysing the level of systems co-constitutively in its epistemological frame, intersectionality does not only ask the question of who belongs, but *how* one belongs.

The Feminist Party discusses the right to belong in their program for instance when dealing with their goal of a non-discriminatory society and they also emphasize the spatial side of non-discrimination: “We want to see a world in which everybody can move freely and feel safe in the public space” (*FP* 1). When writing about the meaning of culture, the feminist politicians emphasize culture’s ability to bring forth different narratives and experiences, and to make possible identifications and self-reflection. In the current Finnish society, they argue, the agencies, stories and viewpoints of women, gender and sexual minorities, disabled and racialized non-white people as well as ethnic minorities are eclipsed by the narratives of the majority. The party wants to make the cultural products by these silenced, intersecting and internally or

intra-categorically⁶ diverse groups more visible, and also to guarantee everyone equal and non-discriminatory access to culture (FP 8). This claim encapsulates the practice of narrative diversifying in a concrete manner. The program also unravels the discriminatory structures of the traditional politics, as we are going to show in the following when discussing their critique of both Left and Right.

In their introductory chapter, the editors of the book *Intersectionality and beyond: Law, Power, and the Politics of Location* remind us that in

the context of the state, intersectionality plays the useful role of challenging nationalized, racialized and sexualized versions of belonging, whether this belonging is linked to citizenship status, legal protection against discrimination, or social policy initiatives.

GRABHAM ET AL. 2009, 10

For them, intersectionality “teases out” the premises of decision-making: what kind of norms they construct at multiple sites of power and identity, and the consequences of these complex norms (10). This practice of teasing out is used by the Feminist Party as well, as they write in the program about the flaws and pitfalls of traditional party politics. They criticize the use of class as a central tool of the Leftist societal analysis – for them class is too narrow a perspective (or in their own words, “concept”, 1). They point out that discrimination, sexism and racism have existed both in capitalist and socialist systems. Furthermore, they also emphasize that classical liberalism has not been able to eliminate structural inequalities either. Neither Left nor Right have managed to solve the discrimination on the labour market or poverty of the immigrants, oppression of the disabled people or mistreatment of children and the elderly. All in all, the program challenges politics based on normative majority: this is why, they claim, the political field needs a new ideology (FP 1).⁷

Intersectionality is often used as the tool for asking the uncomfortable “other questions” which refer to Maria Matsuda’s method of intersectional-type of analysis.⁸ Matsuda (1991, 1189) explains that “when I see something that looks

6 On inter- and intra-categorical intersectionality see McCall (2005).

7 The program of the Feminist Party does not, however, take up the idea of combining intersectionality with Marxist feminist approach, as has been suggested by e.g. Salem (2016), to re-radicalize intersectional analysis.

8 “The other questions” refer to Maria Matsuda’s (1991) articulation of intersectional-type of analysis in her much-cited article “Beside My Sister, Facing the Enemy: Legal Theory out of Coalition”.

racist, I ask, ‘Where is the patriarchy in this?’ When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, ‘Where is the heterosexism in this?’ When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, ‘Where are the class interests in this?’ Intersectional perspective might, for example, address the “latent” heterosexual subject in Marx’s economical theories (Ferguson 2004, 10), or look into the blind spots of for instance some Western-centered post-structural feminist thinking. It may also ask the other questions from the common practices administrated by political parties. In any theoretical work, intersectional perspective renders visible the presumed norms and pre-supposed subjects, such as the imagined homogenous commonplace of the Nordic society we are discussing here.

The Feminist Party program dedicates a lengthy section to a critique of the division of labour in the households, and to the inequalities of labour and working life at large. They maintain that gender or gender expression, sexuality, appearance, or origin should not define people’s possibility of getting work, and insist that all discrimination should be eliminated from the workplaces and that the gendered segregation of the Finnish working life should be dismantled. They also point out that the family or parental leaves should be divided equally between the parents, irrespective of the gender and number of parents and the formation of the family.⁹ They thus point out that the question of labour may also be intersectionally structured through “other questions” of gender and sexuality. The party underlines that not all families are heterosexual, and they also stress that unequal division of care and labour in the households weakens women’s position on the labour market. When talking about the division of the responsibilities in parenthood the program expressly tackles the ordinary, and notes: “However, family policies may influence what is considered commonplace and natural” (FP 5). The intersections of labour and sexual politics highlight the multi-layered nature of the question about *how one belongs*, dismantling the sphere of “ordinary”.

The Finnish Feminist Party has asked many “other questions” by challenging the Nordic normative understanding of gender equality only applying to heterosexual genders, men and women. According to Momin Rahman, the societal knowledge often flows from the whole to the parts, whereas intersectionality

9 In the Finnish family leave system maternity leave with allowance is 105 days, paternity leave with allowance is 54 days, parental leave with allowance (for either of the parents) 158 days, and there is also an option for unpaid care leave (which can be used by either of the parents in two-hetero-parent families) which may last until the child turns three years (see Kela n.d.). The party program notes that “[c]urrently, for instance, in single-parent households and adoptive families the parental leaves are shorter than in other families, and in the rainbow families all parents are not entitled to the leave” (FP 6).

has the potential to turn this flow, to reach the realm of situated experience. Even the pursuit of equality, as a transcendent condition, universalizes that condition if the differences amongst the category of identity are ignored. Rahman (see 2009, 359–62) envisions that by developing intersectional analytics more fully, we may perhaps interrogate the abstract condition of equality – and homogeneity. This means one must insistently ask the uncomfortable questions. Attention must, for instance, be given to the question: what is equality, and on whose terms has it been conditioned? Intersectional lens on equality also demands us to analyse how equality on one level, for instance on the level of race or ethnicity, does not provide a more general sense of equality, or equality on other levels. When pondering the norm-critical perspective towards gender and sexuality, the program of the Feminist Party insists on making the norms of binary gender system more visible and undoing them in the curricula and practices of education, and in the working life as well. The text reminds us of the factual multiplicity of genders and sexualities in the everyday life, therefore *within the ordinary* (FP10).

Embedding Intersectionality in the Media

Throughout the program, the Feminist Party tends to emphasize that there is an urgent need to interfere with the current societal situation by politics that takes into account *multiple vectors of subordination*, a term often used in intersectional discourse. The party has also managed to interfere the everyday and diversify the narrative of the ordinary by introducing the concept of intersectionality to the Finnish media, and thereby to quite a broad audience. Journalists have been keen to “educate” their readers about intersectional politics, and the three chairwomen of the party have all represented the agenda in the media, thus being able to also challenge the individualistic idea of (male) leadership. The interviews and other articles written on the Feminist Party have brought up the problem of racializing power within the Finnish society, and the narrowness in defining the concept of equality. However, the journalists have also emphasized the “difficulty” or complexity of the ideology of intersectionality, and highlighted the inter-generational debates among Finnish feminists.

The educational approach was already evident in the article by the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE in September 2016. Interviewed for the article, one of the chairwomen of the party, Warda Ahmed, emphasized that current conservatism, nationalism and intolerance are visible in people’s everyday at the level of tightened immigration policy and racist hate speech. The principle of

intersectionality, even though the term was not yet used in the interview, was made understandable to the audience by an example of differences between women: “A well-educated, middle-class white female politician’s viewpoint to the most important women’s issues may differ totally from an immigrant woman’s angle”, says Ahmed (cited in Fresnes 2016). Ahmed’s statement actually sounds like an echo to the argument of Kimberlé Crenshaw’s seminal essay from 1989 (140). Crenshaw argued that the focus on the most privileged group members, for instance white women, marginalizes those who are multiply burdened, such as black working-class women. Ahmed brought immigrant women’s viewpoints from the margin right to the centre of the political debate.

Even if the Feminist party itself did not emphasize age as one of the vectors of difference or tool for categorization, the media sometimes picked it up, also using it for playing Finnish feminisms against each other. For instance, when the *IMAGE* magazine,¹⁰ a publication geared towards a reader profile of young professionals, presented the brand new party to its reading audience, the journalist set the young feminist activists of the party against the older generation of “more traditional” feminists (as defined by him). The new party was described to be “loosely part of the third wave, one of the streams of which is *intersectional* feminism, and it is quite a complex thing” (Kartastenpää 2016, 35). The journalist went on to explain the concept of intersectionality to his readers, habitually mentioning Crenshaw as the “coiner” of the term. His example of intersectionality was almost like from a school book: “If you are a woman, you may already experience certain kind of discrimination, but what if you are also dark-skinned, deaf and a lesbian?” (35). The intersectional feminist, he concluded, thinks of the one who is in the most vulnerable position, and tries to recognize her, his or their own privileges (36). In Finland, the article claimed, the biggest challenge of intersectionality at the moment has to do with the position of the racialized minorities, since the large-scale political initiatives this far have been focused on the rights and recognition of sexual minorities.¹¹ Also inequalities in care and working life were mentioned as core issues of the politics, and the diversity of the backers of the party was emphasized. But so, the journalist wrote, was the challenging nature

10 *IMAGE*, established in 1985 as a quarterly ‘cultural album’, is a monthly magazine focusing on issues of culture and politics.

11 Finland did, indeed, get a new gender-neutral marriage law on March 1, 2016, after several decades of gay and lesbian organizations’ and activists’ work. The Ministry of Justice set a committee on the issue in 1997, the Governmental Decree for Registered partnership was passed in 2001, and the Act on Registered Partnerships 950/2001 (Laki rekisteröidystä parisuhteesta) entered force in March 2002 (Ministry of Justice [Finland] 2001).

of intersectionality: “If intersectionality is difficult even for its most ardent proponents [...] it is sure that it will not instantly sink in with the masses” (36–39).

Besides presenting the agenda of the party, the article in *IMAGE* thus brought to the fore internal differences and even conflicts within the Finnish field of feminism: not only the generational differences, but also differences in terms of defining the meaning of equality, and recognizing the racialized and racializing power. The article stated that unlike those white feminists, who might have difficulties in turning their gazes toward themselves and noticing that they may be part of the patriarchy, the intersectional feminists are able to recognize their own privileges and to analyse their positions of power (Kartastenpää 2016, 36). This definition, turning the tables of age and colour, shows that genealogies are never innocent and always political (Bilge 2013, 407), and one may also ask what internal criticism does for feminism; when, what kind of, and in which contexts it is useful. It is crucial to pay attention to the erasure of the radical input of Black feminists and other feminists of colour already during the so-called “second wave” and even before (see e.g. Collins and Bilge 2016; Salem 2016). This erasure has taken place not only in Finland, but elsewhere in the Nordic countries as well (see Salem 2016) and the Feminist Party is struggling against erasing the radical politics of multiple interlocking differences not only from the societal commonplace, but also from the narratives of feminism as they are told in the Nordic countries. However, while telling the story of intersectional feminism one has to be careful of not constructing new feminist hierarchies.

Instead of hierarchies, intersectional feminism may build on associations between allies. This was in the focus when the main Finnish daily *Helsingin Sanomat* published an interview with the three chairwomen of the Feminist Party in November 2016. In the article, intersectionality was explained to the readers again, emphasis now being on discrimination and its multiple factors, such as ethnicity, sexual identity, class and health (Pallastie 2016, 44). This time, the journalist brought up that the Feminist Party is not exclusively a women’s party, even though it criticizes male structures of power and “raises the voice of the subaltern” (44). Anti-racist angle of the party’s politics was discussed, as well as multi-facetedness of white, heterosexual privileges, and discrimination faced by men. By bringing to the fore the latter aspect, the article found yet another way of participating in the discourse on feminism being for everybody, not only for white women. All in all, the follow-up media representations on the Finnish Feminist Party are in themselves teasing out what is at stake in decision-making processes in the Finnish, allegedly equal and homogeneous society, and deconstructing an abstract sense of equality and homogeneity by narrative diversifying. Through the media an ‘ordinary’ person is forced to

see outside the ordinary, the numbingly familiar, but also to see the ordinary through the lens of intersectionality, thus realizing the narratives lost in the homogenizing commonplace.

Conclusion: Challenging the Ordinary

In our analysis, we have used the example of the Feminist Party in Finland, and showed how in their political program the feminists indeed turn the intersectional lens towards not only the identities and categories of the multiply discriminated, but also towards the tops of social hierarchies, societal patterns, policies and practices defined by the white, middle class political elites. As we have shown, the Feminist Party manages to keep several axes of difference at sight throughout the program, and lay out the primary principles of their politics through a genuinely intersectional approach. We have also discussed how intersectionality can form a dividing axis within feminism itself: being erased by some feminists and embraced by others.

In Northern American context, Devon Carbado (2013) has envisioned “A Colorblind Intersectionality”. He argues that if the theory of intersectionality does not seek to map also the top of social hierarchies, and other intersections than race and gender, we risk reifying the idea that Black women are the essential victims and subjects of intersectionality. Carbado speaks about intersectional invisibility, which arises from the epistemological habit of intersectionalizing mere oppressions. Carbado argues that intersectional theory tends not to see other kinds of differences, whereas the experiences of African American women are forever made as an example of multiple oppressions. Therefore, African American women become stabilized as symbolic proto-subjects of intersectionality and as eternal victims. Carbado reminds that African American women too, experience a distinctive matrix of advantages and dis-advantages. This issue is something that many Black feminists have also addressed, namely the danger of stabilizing Black women as example-victims (see Carbado 2013, 811–18). Carbado reminds us that in some cases African American women might also have advantages based on gender. His own example of gender advantage is the recent police brutality certain African American communities have faced. In this context, Black men are more vulnerable to violence than women (836–41).

In this chapter, we have illustrated how, in the use of a feminist political party, in this case in Finland, intersectionality as a methodological tool has potential for challenging the ordinary and normalizing stories of a homogenous white heterosexual middle-class and Lutheran Nordic nation. Using

intersectionality as their critical tool, the Feminist Party has made their politics of equality, rights and diversity intelligible through their general program and even through the media. As Hill Collins and Bilge (2016, 4–5) have pointed out, the core issue with intersectionality is not how academics scholarly define what it *is*, but what it *does* in all its ambiguity and heuristic usefulness; what kind of questions it helps us to pose and what kind of power structures and normativities it makes visible (see also Davis 2008, 68–69; Salem 2016, 3). In the case of the Finnish Feminist Party, what intersectionality as critical praxis does is critical inquiry. By beginning to intersectionalize the Finnish politics, the Feminist Party has the ability to begin to dismantle the narrative unconscious of even the broader Nordic social homogeneity. By intersectionalizing the homogenous commonplace, we are able to diversify the story of Nordic social coherence and challenge its conditions of equality – for the sake of turning the commonplaceness into a multiplaceness.

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