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Zombies and Clones in Diversity Management

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In 1983 Ulrik Beck wrote that categories of 'differences' such as class, ethnicity, and gender can be characterised as zombies. By this Beck meant that at a time dominated by individualisation, traditional categories of identification still exist, but no longer form the basis of structural inequality. I have pursued these zombies in a variety of contexts such as private companies, rehabilitation centres, asylum camps and public schools, and I have tried to figure out how they breathe and what they feed on. Through interviews and fieldwork carried out over the past 10 years in very different contexts I have studied the becoming of subjects in complex professional organised settings. One of my main interests is how social categories like ethnicity, race, and gender continue to work within and intersect with processes of subjectification.

The research projects and the organisations are unconnected, but similar patterns seem to emerge in organisations trying to handle a varied population of clients/users/customers, employees and managers on the basis of the more or less loosely defined concept of diversity management.

In recent years different ways of handling diversity have come into focus in several projects initiated by public and private organisations in Denmark. There is also a growing body of national and international literature on the topic. Diversity management has been spoken into existence as a way of both empowering minorities and taking care of the bottom line. Diversity is conceptualised as the variation of social and cultural identities between humans (Taylor Cox 2001; Brandi & Hildebrandt 2003; 22). Roosevelt Thomas, one of the most experienced writers in the field defines diversity as "any collective mixture characterized by differences and similarities." (Thomas & Woodruff 1999). In a Danish context the diversity

approach is often synonymous with how to tackle ethnic diversity, but other categories and differences such as gender, age, criminality, and disability are also a part of different projects.

Most often diversity is thought of as plurality of the well-established socio-cultural categories of identification and differences like gender, ethnicity, race, age, sexuality and class. According to this perspective the goal of diversity management is fulfilled when these variables are presented in a certain and even amount. In a legal perspective and also an educational perspective, managing diversity means working towards equal rights and opportunities.

American literature on diversity and diversity management is dominated by a market-oriented perspective focusing on issues such as how to comply with a growing number of different customers/users. In relation to gender in particular, but also race and ethnicity, handling diversity implies taking up themes such as how to break the glass ceiling and recruit other and different people to high-level positions. The diversity management approach often operates on the basis of the concepts of inclusion, harmony and consensus. Diversity management seems in general to be the recognition of differences as a way of producing creativity and innovation. The same issues are raised in the Danish contexts I have researched, but the concepts of social responsibility and integration also play significant roles (Brandt & Hildebrandt 2003).

Despite variations in organisations in terms of products, procedures, staff, users etc., there are striking similarities in the emerging paradoxical elements, the zombies, and the counterproductive processes that the intersection of these zombies co-constitutes. In this paper, I outline how “the zombies of difference” are fed by a special kind of diversity management. My analysis contributes to and elaborates on the critical voices that argue that diversity management – just like affirmative action – can become yet another and more subtle process of cultural power (Essed 2002; Wellman 1997). In arguing for this, I will highlight how the approach narrates diversity in special ways that can result in sophisticated processes of cultural cloning, production of zombies, and enhancement of a certain hegemonised ‘unambiguity’. Following this analysis, I will try to create a discursive opening for other ways of working with diversity and zombies.

Intersectionality, subjectification and troubled subject positions

The paper is written in the space between psychology, ethnicity/postcolonial studies and gender/queer studies, and it moves beyond essentialism by pointing to how subjects and social categories are emerging constructions produced, negotiated and subverted in ongoing lived life and meaning-making processes and furthermore in relation to (intersecting) categories and their related normativities.

One aspect of diversity and multiculturalism, the concept of intersectionality, is at the forefront of contemporary feminism, contributing with its examination of social categories as mutually constructing power and social hierarchies (see, for example, Crenshaw 1994;

Collins 1998). In empirical research focusing on meaning-making processes through subjectification in a variety of forms of social life, the concept must be to a certain extent retooled. The concept of intersectionality is often used to grasp the interconnections between the well-established categories of identification like gender, ethnicity, race, age, sexuality and class. A means of grasping the possibilities inherent in lived lives for subjects living in complex professional organised contexts must be developed. When I shift my focus from identity politics to the complexity of lived life it seems reasonable to reconsider the concept of intersectionality in relation to poststructuralist and social constructionist concepts of 'subjectivity', 'subjectification', 'subject position' and 'troubled subject position' respectively as these concepts are developed by researchers such as Butler; Davies; Søndergaard; Wetherell (Staunæs 2003).

My main interest is in finding out how it is possible to become an in/appropriate subject in different professional organised settings and how social categories of identification and difference intertwine with these processes of becoming. To be more specific, I make destabilising discourse analyses and examine how different discursive and social practices co-constitute subjects and the possibilities of becoming subjects in complex professional organised settings. Subjectification goes on in the narrations, representations, and mediations of lived life, and people are positioned and repositioned in these processes in different subject positions. The social psychologist Margaret Wetherell (1998) writes about the spaces in dialogue, interactions and negotiations where subject positions and subjectivities/identities become inappropriate, destabilized, difficult, challenged and in need of repair. The concept of troubled subject positions covers positions that challenge the normativities at stake in certain everyday contexts of lived life. Wetherell uses the concept of troubled subject positions mainly in relation to verbal practices, but I use the concept to refer to difficult positions in both social and discursive practices.

The categories, minorities and majorities are not background variables, something you are or carry, but rather social categories act out. In this sense, social categories are tools for selecting and ordering. They are tools for in- and exclusion and they are tools for positioning and making hierarchies. They show *how* someone becomes un/marked, non/privileged, how these processes are produced, sustained and subverted and how power is part of this.

The need for a non-additional, non-incremental, non-additive approach is another point I would like to clarify in line with a proposal for looking into how subjectivities/identities are constructed through intersections of multiple dimensions. Several feminists have suggested going beyond the additive models of oppression. That means not just adding categories but rather looking into how they interlock with one another (Crenshaw 1994; Razack 1998). On the basis of this I will suggest examining the acting out of intersectionality. This means looking into the practice of the relation between categories, the outcome of this practice, and how this results in either troubled or untroubled subject positions (Staunæs 2003).

Mediating, narrating and co-constituting diversity and power

I have chosen to communicate my argument (how diversity management can narrate diversity in special ways that can result in sophisticated processes of cultural cloning, productions of zombies, and enhancement of a certain hegemonised ‘unambiguity’) through an analysis of the practice of intersectionality by a non-human actor. This non-human actor is a video presented at an EQUAL-conference in Denmark in the spring of 2003 and it is used as a medium of information and education in an organisation, in which different levels are on the verge of implementing diversity thinking. The video crystallises the different lines of my argument very well, but is also important because it works as a mediator in lived life and of lived life. It mediates and narrates how diversity and diversity management can come to terms in an organisation. In this sense, the video is a non-human actor co-constituting what can be said, thought and done in lived reality. It mediates and narrates what can be understood as the zombies of diversity, and at the same time it creates a material structure of power built on these zombies.

Let’s take a look at the video. The movie begins with a 1) ‘black-skinned’ ‘female’ wearing a scarf. She and her female companion are placing oriental carpets on the roof of the company. The music which accompanies their kneeling is Arabic and after few seconds their faces are directed towards Mecca. This is Diversity, the graphics tell us. The frame is followed by several small movie clips of different employees signified by different working situations and different ethnic-racialised, gendered and disabled signs on their bodies. They are all signified by certain socio-cultural categories, and they tell us about the difference that makes them special while we see them at work. In this sense, the content of their work, their bodies and their special ‘differences’ – their social categories - are linked together.

In addition to the scarved females the video presents 2) a ‘white’, ‘Danish’ woman, commuting in a train with her laptop. Technology has turned her into a figure who can balance her duties as a manager and as a mother. 3) A ‘young’, ‘white’, ‘Danish’, ‘criminal’ male working in a blue-collar job 4) a ‘white’, Danish, ‘little office-working “male”’ limping from desk to desk, and 5) a ‘black-skinned’ refugee with an ‘Iranian background’ working with computers.

Along with these figures of diversity we see the face and listen to the voice of the CEO of the company. He belongs to the categories of ‘male’, ‘white’ and ‘Danish’. He is not moving around like the others but sits in his chair, behind the desk, so that only half of him is filmed. His voice is the voice-over of the movie, and he is voicing how the company can include these people, use their competencies and make policies of diversity, for instance, to integrate young criminals, refugees, Muslims and disabled persons and to employ women in top-level positions. All of this can be done *despite* the categorical differences of the people, such as family duties, cultural background or a criminal past. All of this can be done *because* of their individual competencies.

Four processes of feeding zombies and making clones

In several projects and organisations working with diversity management diversity is, as mentioned previously, built on the idea of differences in terms of a *plurality* of categories of identification. Often the organisation chooses to work with only one ‘difference’ or one category. In Denmark the selected difference it is often ‘ethnicity’. The video demonstrates the possibility of working with more than one difference or one single category. Where does this lead to?

The first analysis is as follows: The (mothering) women, the disabled persons, the criminals and the ethnic and religious minorities are those who on some points are different and inappropriate, but the video subverts the inappropriateness and makes the persons visible as potential capacities. Furthermore, the narration in the video challenges people who are ‘in’. By including people who were formerly excluded, the movie troubles the boundaries of what is already fixed as the usual, the normal, the natural, the appropriate and unquestioned. The video disturbs ‘something’ that is discursively constructed as the norm. By recognising differences and using diversity management as a tool for changing the monopoly of those already included is questioned. *The troubling of the usual practices of selection and the normal standards of employees challenge the notion of the Appropriate.*

But what is actually discursively constructed as the Appropriate? The video gives us the answer by contrasting the attention-demanding diversity with the CEO. The CEO signifies what I will term the Triple Combination of ‘white’, ‘Danish’ and ‘male’. This combination is present in the video but not as part of the diversity spoken into existence. The projects construct diversity as a sum of everything this triple combination is not. The triple combination is the opposite of or outside diversity. The Triple Combination is the norm, the majority, around which the organisation is reproduced. Diversity is thought of as something to be highlighted, discussed, helped, and compensated for. In other words, the Triple Combination is not questioned. It is just ‘there’, and not something to which special attention must be paid. In this sense, the norm is excluded from being part of the diversity. In more polemical terms, *the majority is excluded from diversity.*

The Triple Combination of ‘white’, ‘Danish’ and ‘male’ creates a rather exclusive intersecting space of normativities. The refugees, the immigrants and the women fail to conform to some or all of the categories of ‘white’, ‘Danish’ and/or ‘male’. The disabled person and the young criminal can in some sense fulfil and perform the Triple Combination correctly but the category of ‘disability’ and the category of ‘criminal’ will properly overshadow the Triple Combination and trouble their appropriateness. Again, these combinations place subjects in troubled subject positions, which need repair, compensation or further qualification if possible.

The question here is whether this narration of diversity is anything but a disturbance? And is it in fact a quite dangerous and counterproductive disturbance because it re-allocates the taken-for-granted boundaries between the norm and the Others?

The (non-attention-demanding) Triple Combination is present as an implicit norm and by letting this combination take the lead in the narration (it is the voice-over!!!), the Others are spoken into existence precisely as the Others. On the one hand, we have the others: the women, the ethnic minorities, the refugees, the migrants, the disabled, the criminals: those who, despite the fact that they are everything other than ‘white’ + ‘Danish’ + ‘male’, can be included. On the other hand, we have those who are able to ‘include’. The others can be included, whereas the norm can include. It is not the other way around.

What is unfolded here is an old tradition of othering, where the Other must imitate himself in a queer way (see also Wellman 1997 on ministerial shows).

By looking into how the attention-demanding categories (such as ‘female’, ‘non-Danish’, ‘black-skinned’, ‘disabled’, ‘criminal’, ‘Muslim’) intersect with more local categories such as job categories – for example, ‘managers’, ‘support staff’, ‘blue collar worker’) – the status of the group in relation to other groups can be traced as a *hierarchical ranking of minority categories*.

The combination of ‘white’, ‘Danish’ and ‘male’ but ‘disabled’, – and the combination of ‘white’, ‘Danish’ but ‘female’ are situated at an organisational level involving managerial responsibilities – not top management, but certainly management, whereas the combination of, for instance, ‘male’, ‘black-skinned’ ‘refugee’ only shows – access to the organisational level of technical assistants and computer experts. The lack of whiteness and Danishness is linked with lower-level positions with no managerial responsibilities. The category of criminal seems to overshadow ‘male’, ‘white’, and ‘Danish’. Here the level of appearance becomes blue collar work. But the most interesting or the most disappointing point is that the category of ‘female’ in connection with ‘non-white’ and ‘non-Danish’ seems to result in a very low position. The categories of ‘female’ and ‘ethnic and racialised other’ seem to be very troubling intersections resulting in troublesome subject positions.

In this sense, the discursive constitution of diversity in this video re-inscribes hierarchy instead of destabilising arrangements of hierarchies. In terms of diversity thinking, a hierarchy seems to be created among the others so that some others are made more Other than others. The approach operates on the basis of a traditional scale with crossing and position-undermining categories throughout.

The diversity management narrative may be empowering but, nonetheless, there are troubling tendencies that do not only support the existing structure, but in fact construct and emphasise differences in identities, subject positions, and power distributions such as those clustered around categories and around otherness and firstness.

Enhancement of sameness

Some people will probably argue that the video does nothing more than quote or reflect the actual situation of diversity. In my opinion it does more than this. The video voices the idea that the classical categories can be dismantled by focusing on individualism and

competencies. On another level the video demonstrates how very well traditional mechanisms of differentiation can work in more subtle ways and produce troubled subject positions. When the narrative in the video continues the hierarchical ranking and exclusion, old categories come into existence again. The zombies are moving around.

The video does something with the possibilities of subjection for both the others and the 'first ones': it feeds the zombies of difference and it produces a certain hegemonised sameness or unambiguity.

What happens here is that the video mediates a narrative that appropriates and assimilates multiculturalism and differences through commodification and consumption (Mohanty 2004: 505). Difference is something we can use in certain ways. The video conceptualised as a mediating actor contributes to keeping the subjects in line, to keeping the structures in line and to keeping the normativities in line. It constructs hierarchies by using a rather traditional scale. It is a scale with an unquestioned and unmarked white, ethnic Danish male at the top, and it is a scale with criss-crossing and status-reducing, 'compensation demanding' categories underneath. Diversity seems to be all categories other than 'white', 'male' and 'Danish'. In relation to the triple combination of these categories, other combinations become potentially minoritised and inappropriate.

I imagine that these approaches contribute to the construction of the status quo because they do not question the usual order or the usual culture or normativities but only work by including more in the same! It is a picture of including people in different sizes and colours, with different signs on their bodies and different accessories: "Secretaries - now with scarves!" "Management - now in high heels!" At this point the Dutch feminist Philomena Essed's (2002) concept of cultural cloning becomes relevant. Diversity management, she writes, seems to be a process of producing homogeneity while talking diversity. From being different, we are now all the same but in different ways. By employing the different ones the company includes more of the same. This sameness is not questioned by this manoeuvre; rather, the imperative of it is reinforced. By flexibly grasping and including elements, this imperative seems to integrate whatever might be a potential threat or disturbance and make liveable clones. In this way it is not only a question of reproduction but rather of enhancement that makes the clones even stronger and more suitable at an even higher level.

What, then, is this clone? It might be the one Bob Connell (1998) refers to when he talks of transnational, globalised, business-oriented masculinities - the kind of ethnicised, racialised masculinity that Collison and Hearn (1996) believe to be reinforced by the processes of globalisation and global capitalism.

Reversing the discourses of diversity

The question is whether these aspects of the diversity approaches are counterproductive in terms of the diversity one wishes.

In the video diversity means differences as a plurality. In these kinds of approaches it is often appropriate to work with fixed and underprivileged categories. This approach often closes the discourse with the purpose of acting politically and strategically. We know the strategy from affirmative action and from different kinds of identity politics. These are approaches that build on the zombies but not on the clones.

Some researchers suggest a reversing of the minority-centre approach in diversity management, recommending approaches that include all of us as targets for diversity implementation. Others suggest a move towards a more individualised perspective of diversity. In my opinion these suggestions imply the danger of neglecting the actual barriers for certain groups and categories. They deny the existence of zombies and clones.

Instead, I would suggest reversing practice by creating a fruitful discursive elsewhere (Haraway 1992). As John Law (19) points out: to do ethnography is to watch. But it is also to daydream. It is to play games with realities. It is to invent forms of social science fiction. It is to find ways of telling stories that make realities look a little different and by doing so, to push the boundaries and reverse the categories and intersections.

What if we imagined a project with a majority-inclusive non-othering approach that took into consideration the existence of both zombies and clones? And what if the approach did not focus upon typical or representative figures of differences but rather offered fictional figures and reconfigured events. What if, for instance, the commuting woman in the train was black-skinned? What if a video demanded more women, but worked with a notion of gender as not only an issue for women, but also insisted on taking men into account? What if the CEO were disabled? Black-skinned? And/or female? What if religion were a question not only of head scarves and Mecca but also of holidays around Christmas and Easter?

This majority-inclusive approach highlights the social categories of 'white', 'Danish' and 'male' and focuses upon the places where this is synonymous with the organisations' taken-for-granted structures, functions, criteria, norms and values. This approach would be a reversing of who is carrying the troublesome and compensation- and explanation-demanding categories. Furthermore, this strategic approach might also make the diversity approach relevant for white, Danish men. It might also be a way of meeting "the angry white men in white shirts" who oppose the diversity project because they cannot see how it is relevant or even worse, who think that diversity projects are undermining positions that they do not even feel they have yet (Lynch 1997; Brandi & Hildebrandt 2003).

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