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

(In Kuortti, Ilmonen, Valovirta, Korkka (eds.): *Thinking with the Familiar in Contemporary Literature and Culture 'Out of the Ordinary*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 55–74. [2019])

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 bases. 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 & Edenheim 2013; Davis 2008; Erel & al. 2008; Salem 2016). In our chapter, however, we aim to 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<sup>1</sup> (e.g. Salem 2016), but we use it rather in the complex way defined by Sara Ahmed, 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.” (2017, 91.)

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<sup>1</sup> For instance Sara Salem (2016, 2), when writing about 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.”

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 & Jensen 2012, also Keskinen et al. 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. Our aim is to 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 on which conditions intersectionality, a theoretical and methodological device for analyzing simultaneous oppressions and processes of multiple marginalizations, could be turned towards the majority, or “the ordinary”. After that, we will discuss intersectionality “in commonplace action,” by outlining a case study: the explicitly intersectional politics of the new 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 diversifying.

### **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 cultural histories (Lofsdóttir and Jensen 2012, 2).

It is arguable that this imagined exceptional homogeneity has become the master narrative of Nordic self-understanding. Loftsdóttir and Jensen (2012, 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 the Europe and the world at large. Our emphasis in this text is on the latter, or on the *narrative exceptionality*, which we understand as being constructed as a unitary and unchanging sphere of the *ordinary*. However, 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. Our aim is to 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" (Stewart 2007, 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, as Ann Phoenix and Avtar Brah do, 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." (Brah and Phoenix 2004). As a research approach, intersectionality analyzes the co-constituting processes of social relations and discourses positioning subjects and experienced by subjects, while realizing that these social relations are affected by and shaped out of 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 her, 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” (2011, 243). 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” (2011, 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 aim to 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 the critical whiteness studies, is an invented construct blending history, culture, presuppositions and attitudes. For Ruth Frankenberg, whiteness is a practice carrying traditions and contexts which have made it invisible. She 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”. (Frankenberg 1999/1993; 450, 454.) For Frankenberg, naming whiteness as ‘race’ displaces it from “unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance” (1999/1993, 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 does, that privilege and oppression are structured simultaneously: they are relational, and “addressing underprivileged requires identifying and dismantling the overprivileged” (2015, 23). 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 recent book *Intersectionality* (2016), Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge define that intersectionality consists of six core ideas: inequality, power, relationality, social context, complexity, and social justice (25). 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 *complexities* of the lived reality, while being complex itself in analyzing contexts, relations, power, and inequalities. (Collins and Bilge 2016, 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 relationality of power actualizes differently in different context forcing the scholar to form her tools of analysis according to the research question at issue. 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. (Collins and Bilge 2016, 29–30).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Here our definitions separate 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” (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 transcendent level.

Is it possible, then, to analyze dominations, commonplaceness, ordinariness, or majority intersectionally? Based on the aforementioned criteria, the answer is yes, if the goal of the study is related to social justice, increasing the knowledge about multiply marginalized, and focusing on various changing positions of domination and subordination. Our argument is that stereotypes create stereotypes: If the constructs such as “Europe,” “white,” “Westernness,” 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 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 the affluent elite.

Besides the six core ideas, Collins and Bilge emphasize that intersectionality’s “two organizational focal points” are critical inquiry and critical praxis (2016, 31). They remind us that the synergy between these two operational spheres “can produce important new knowledge and/or practices” (Collins and Bilge 2016, 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 aspect of the general public,” such as education, social work, or public health (Collins and Bilge 2016, 42; 36; 37-9). Therefore our aim, too, is 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 analyze 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 the national unity. The narrative of Finnish societal homogeneity, and the "normality" and hegemony of white Finnishness, has been performatively produced since the early 20th century. The reiterative construction of white Finnishness started in the 1920s, once the promoters of the newly born nation state had gotten through their message that the Finns are supposed to be thought of as white — not related to "Mongolians," as was the earlier conception of the Finnish-speaking population (Valenius 2004, 191–197) by the population having their origin in Sweden. Now, in the third millennium, the much-recited story of national homogeneity and "ordinariness" of whiteness, and also of heterosexuality and "classlessness," for that matter, 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 the Finnish gender studies for more than a decade now. The uses of intersectionality as an analytical tool have even been debated in the Nordic universities to the measures that some scholars have started 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 academic world, 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. Yet, finally in 2016, Finland 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. The party followed the example of other Nordic countries. Sweden had gotten its Feminist Initiative in 2005. In Iceland the women's party Kvinnolistan was active already in 1983–98, 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 taking up the concept of intersectionality at the very outset of the program (*Feministisen puolueen yleisohjelma*, from this on *FP* 2016, 2). Intersectionality is not only explicitly mentioned when the party's feminist point of view on discrimination is described: "This multi-leveled view is often called intersectional," the feminists write in the beginning of the program text (*FP* 2016, 2). We claim that intersectionality also structures the way all the sections of the general platform, or program, have been *textually organized* – thus practicing the politics of narrative diversifying. 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* (c.f. Collins and Bilge 2016, 4).

The Party's program begins by boldly stating:

"The goal of the feminist politics is a society where everybody can realize their full potential, being equal with others — not depending on their gender or genderlessness, skin color 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* 2016, 1, originally in Finnish, translation by LMR.)

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 Party pretty much spells this definition out at the onset of their 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. (Crenshaw 1989.)

### **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 European Union. Here we are able to touch only some of the topics to show how intersectionality runs through the program as a red thread. The program also stresses that gendered violence takes place in all classes, that the “legacy” of colonialism can still be seen in the differences between the richest and the poorest countries, and that the environmental problems affect most the poor, women, and the indigenous people. (FP 2016, 3–4.)

Intersectionality is explicitly used as a key concept in the section focusing on non-discrimination. Here, the writers explain:

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 reasons of discrimination in order to make sure that everyone’s legal protection will be realized. (FP 2016, 2)

The agenda of the party further emphasizes that their politics calls into question the norm of Finnishness exclusively based on whiteness, westernness and 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 color. (FP 2016, 2) This, of course, echoes the statements and analyses of many previous intersectional feminists, such as the “Black Feminist Statement” by Combahee River Collective, which already in 1977 stated that

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. (Combahee River Collective 1982/1977, 13)

The program of the Feminist Party does not directly credit the political work done by the feminists of the Black movement who articulated the principles of intersectionality, or for instance Kimberlé Crenshaw who first came up with the term Intersectionality.<sup>3</sup> However, the program writers mention such groups as the 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 “internal others” deconstructs the story of the “original” Finnish social coherence and effectively diversifies the Finnish or Nordic “ordinary.”

When discussing everybody’s right to welfare and wellbeing, the party sets to criticize the traditional welfare politics having been directed by the notion of family being the basic unit of society. This family, the party program writers remind us, has often been imagined as white and fully able to work, the parents being in a heterosexual relationship and having a certain number of kids. In reality, however,

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<sup>3</sup> 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 color in the US and elsewhere. According to Collins and Bilge, the much repeated “verbatim” of Crenshaw “coining” the term “fits within academic norms of ownership of cultural capital (2016, 81 and 83). On writing styles of academic intersectionality and alternative genealogies, see Ilmonen 2017.

families are much more diverse, and some people do not live in families at all. If wellbeing in the society is built on exclusive and narrow a notion of “normalcy” it excludes many who do not fit in the societal norm of parenthood, ethnicity, color, ablebodiedness, age, health and gender, the program of the Feminist Party states. The Party aims to such a redistribution of power and privilege, which 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 2016, 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 color 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 2016, 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 2016, 7). Here, the axis of age seems to be missing from their intersectional critique. However, ageism connected to other factors of discrimination seems to be rampant in the Finnish labor market, including the academia.

Section by section, the party program goes through societal problems and solutions, exposing them by using intersectional analysis as a critical tool. They even reach beyond the local politics in Finland — rightly so, since they are challenging the meaning of strictly controlled national borders — and point out the need of anti-racist feminist politics all over in Europe, where racist and populist rhetoric again has risen its head. European austerity politics, the party states, has shaken the most the

economic equality and social rights of women, disabled, immigrants, racialized, and gender and sexual minorities. (FP 2016, 13.)

### **Intersectionality, Politics, and Belonging**

As we saw in the aforementioned program opening, the Feminist Party recognizes both the structural level and the individual experiential level at heart of their intersectional politics. Patricia Hill Collins, for one, has emphasized the co-operations of institutional, social, and subjective levels of differentiation in order to capture the everyday workings of power (1999, 226-227). Rita Kaur Dhamoon, for her part, foregrounds the contextualized analysis of both, processes of individuation and systems of power in order to best tackle the intersectional analysis in the level of identity and in the level of structures (2011, 234-5). By 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” (Dhamoon 2011, 234). By addressing the level of individual experience, and by analyzing 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. They also emphasize the spatial side of non-discrimination, when they write: “We want to see a world in which everybody can move freely and feel safe in the public space” (FP 2016, 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-categorically<sup>4</sup> diverse groups more visible, and also to guarantee everyone equal and non-discriminatory access to culture (FP 2016, 8.) This claim encapsulates the practice of narrative diversifying in a concrete manner.

In their introductory chapter, the editors of the book *Intersectionality and Beyond. Law, Power, and the Politics of Location* (2009) 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” (10). For them, “intersectionality teases out what is at stake in decision-making processes, how these processes construct norms across multiple sites of power and identity, and the distributive consequences of complicated norms” (Grabham et al. 2009, 10). This practice of teasing out is used by the Feminist Party as well, as they write in their general program about the flaws and pitfalls of the 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”, FP 2016, 1). They point out that discrimination, sexism and racism have existed both in capitalist and socialist systems. Yet, they also emphasize that the classic liberalism has not been able to eliminate structural inequalities either. Neither Left or Right have managed to solve the job-market discrimination and poverty of the immigrants, oppression of the disabled people, and mistreatment of children and the elderly. All in all, the program of the Party challenges politics based on the normative majority: this is why, they claim, the political field needs a new ideology. (FP 2016, 1.)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> On inter- and intra-categorical intersectionality, see McCall 2005.

<sup>5</sup> 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. Sara Salem (2016), to re-radicalize intersectional analysis.

Intersectionality is often used as the tool for asking the uncomfortable “other questions”<sup>6</sup> and looking into the blind-spots of for instance some Western-centered post-structural feminist thinking. 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. Intersectional perspective might, for example, address the “latent” heterosexual subject in Marx’s economical theories (Ferguson 2004, 10).

The Feminist Party dedicates a lengthy section in its program to a critique of the division of labor in the households, and to the inequalities of labor and working life at large. While they maintain that gender or gender expression, sexuality, appearance, or origin should not define people’s possibility for 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 leaves or parental leaves<sup>7</sup> should be divided equally between the parents, irrespective of the gender and number of parents and the formation of the family. They thus point out that the question of labor may also be intersectionally structured through “other questions” of gender and sexuality. The Feminist Party underlines that not all families are heterosexual, and they also stress that unequal division of care and labor in the households weakens women’s position on the labor market. Writing about the division of the responsibilities in parenthood they expressly tackle the ordinary, and note: “However, family policies may influence

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<sup>6</sup> “The other questions” refer to Maria Matsuda’s articulation of intersectional-type of analysis in her much-cited article “Beside My Sister, Facing the Enemy: Legal Theory out of Coalition” (1991). Matsuda states that “The way I try to understand the interconnection of all forms of subordination is through a method I call ‘ask the other question’. When I see something that looks racist, I ask, ‘Where is the patriarchy in this?’ When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, ‘Where is the heterosexism in this?’ When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, ‘Where are the class interests in this?’” (Matsuda 1991, 1189).

<sup>7</sup> In the Finnish family leave system the maternity leave with allowance is 105 days, the paternity leave with allowance is 54 days, the 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-heteroparent families) which may last until the child turns 3 years. See Kela’s *Quick Guide for Families with Children*, <http://www.kela.fi/web/en/families>. “Currently, 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 2016, 6.)

what is considered commonplace and natural.” (FP 2016, 5.) The intersections of labour- and sexual politics highlight the multilayered nature of the question about *how one belongs*, dismantling the sphere of “ordinary”.

According to Momin Rahman, the societal knowledge often flows from the whole to the parts, whereas intersectionality 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 envisions that by developing intersectional analytics more fully, we may perhaps interrogate the abstract condition of equality — and homogeneity. (See Rahman 2009; 359–362.) This means one must insistently ask the uncomfortable questions. Therefore, the attention must, for instance, be given to the question: what is equality, and in whose terms it has been conditioned? Intersectional lens on equality also demands us to analyze, 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. The Finnish Feminist Party has tackled these uncomfortable questions by challenging the Nordic normative understanding of gender equality only applying to heterosexual cis genders, men and women. When pondering the norm-critical perspective towards gender and sexuality, the program of the 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 both genders and sexualities in the everyday life, therefore *within the ordinary*. (FP 2016, 10.)

### **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, which is able to take into account *multiple vectors of subordination*, a term often used in intersectional discourse. They have also managed to introduce the concept of intersectionality to the Finnish media, and thereby to quite a broad audience. This



was proven already in the communal elections in April 2017: the Feminist Party had 40 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.

In their own organization, Feminist Party has deconstructed the traditional, individualistic idea of the leadership of a white man in a dark suit by nominating three women as leaders. The three chairwomen of the party have all represented the agenda in the media. In the interview by the Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle in September 2016, one of the chairwomen, 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 not used as such a term 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." (Cited in Fresnes 2016.) Ahmed's statement actually sounds like a close call to the argument of Crenshaw's seminal essay from 1989.

This focus on the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination. I suggest further that this focus on otherwise-privileged group members creates a distorted analysis of racism and sexism because the operative conceptions of race and sex become grounded in experiences that actually represent only a subset of a much more complex phenomenon. (Crenshaw 1989, 140.)

When the *IMAGE* magazine<sup>8</sup>, 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 the journalist). 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." (Karstastenpää 2016, 35.) The journalist

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<sup>8</sup> *IMAGE*, established in 1985 as a quarterly "cultural album," is a monthly magazine focusing on issues of culture and politics.

even 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 schoolbookish: "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?" (Karstastenpää, *ibid.*) The intersectional feminist, the journalist concluded, thinks of who is in the most vulnerable position, and tries to recognize her, his or their own privileges (Karstastenpää 2016, 36). In Finland, the article told, 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.<sup>9</sup> 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 was the challenging nature of intersectionality. "If intersectionality is difficult even for its most ardent proponents — it is sure that it will not instantly sink in the masses," wrote the journalist in *IMAGE*. (Karstastenpää 2016, 36-39.)

Alongside from presenting the agenda of the party, the article brought to the fore the 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 journalist captured the differences in the following manner:

It may be difficult for a white feminist to turn her gaze towards herself and notice that she may be part of the power structure like patriarchy. The intersectional feminist, again, prioritizes recognizing one's own privileges and analyzing one's position of power. (Karstastenpää 2016, 36.)

As Sirma Bilge (2013, 407) has noted, genealogies are never innocent and always political, and one may also ask what internal criticism does for feminism, when and in which contexts it is useful. However, it is important to pay attention to erasure of the radical input of Black feminists and other feminists of color already during the so

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<sup>9</sup> Finland did, indeed get a new gender-neutral marriage law on the 1st of March 2016, after several decades of gay and lesbian organizations' and activists' work. The Judicial Ministry set a committee on the issue in 1997, the bill for equal partnership passed in 2001, and became a law in March 2002.  
[https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/tietoeduskunnasta/kirjasto/aineistot/kotimainen\\_oikeus/parisuhdelaista-kohti-sukupuolineutraalia-avioliittoja/Sivut/parisuhdelaki.aspx](https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/tietoeduskunnasta/kirjasto/aineistot/kotimainen_oikeus/parisuhdelaista-kohti-sukupuolineutraalia-avioliittoja/Sivut/parisuhdelaki.aspx)

called "second wave" and even before (see e.g. Collins & Bilge 2016; Salem 2016). This has taken place not only in Finland, but elsewhere in the Nordic countries as well (see Salem 2016). In this sense 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.

Also 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 the multiple factors "causing" it (journalist's wording), 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." (Pallastie, *ibid.*) Anti-racist angle of the politics was discussed, as well as multi-facetedness of white, heterosexual privileges, and discrimination faced by men. Thus, the follow-up media representations on the Finnish Feminist Party are in themselves teasing out what is at stake in decision-making processes 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 see the ordinary through the lens of intersectionality, thus realizing the narratives lost in the homogenizing commonplace.

## **Conclusion**

In Northern American context, Devon Carbado has envisioned "A Colorblind Intersectionality" (2013). He 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. 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, 811-818). 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, a Black man is more vulnerable to violence than women. (Carbado 2013, 836-841.) 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.

In our article, we have used the example of the Feminist Party in Finland, and showed how in their political program or platform the feminists indeed turn the intersectional lens towards not only the identities and categories of the multiply discriminated, but also towards the “tops of the social hierarchies,” towards the 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: how it has been erased by some feminists and embraced by others.

Moreover, in this article, our point was to illustrate 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 the 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 Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2016, 4-5) have pointed out, the main thing about 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 and Salem 2016, 3). In the case of the Finnish Feminist Party, intersectionality does critical inquiry and this means critical praxis. By beginning to intersectionalize the Finnish politics it has the ability to dismantle the narrative unconscious of even the broader Nordic social homogeneity.

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