

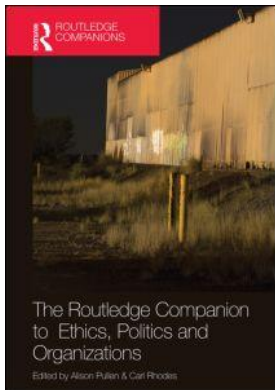
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Part 4

Ethico-political practice in organizations

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Ethico-politics of diversity and its production

Pasi Ahonen and Janne Tienari

Diversity emerged as a concept in the United States in the 1980s to provide a means of discussing what seemed like ever increasing dimensions of difference in society, from race and gender to age to sexual orientation and beyond (Cox and Blake, 1991; Johnston and Packer, 1987). Social inequities identified by the civil rights, feminist and gay rights movements in the preceding decades were being addressed – at least to an extent – and there was an apparent need to move from emphasizing social divisions to the positive aspects of difference (Benschop, 2011; Kelly and Dobbin, 1998). The notion of diversity was borrowed from biology to do the task (Litvin, 1997). Thirty years on, a domain of diversity knowledge has developed that not only encompasses relevant differentiating ‘factors’ at both societal and personal level but also seems to render these differences governable and manageable through various mechanisms and techniques.

In this chapter, we explore the ethico-political character of diversity and its production in and for organizations. Our focus is on the politics of diversity as a form of knowledge, and on the ethics of the means by which that knowledge is produced. Here we build on the work by Barbara Townley (1993, 1994) and her adaptation of Michel Foucault’s notion of power/knowledge to the human resource management (HRM) context. HRM knowledge and its specific forms, Townley argues, are directly linked to the ways in which HRM has and can have effects: ‘HRM serves to render organizations and their participants calculable arenas, offering, through a variety of technologies, the means by which activities and individuals become knowable and governable’ (Townley, 1993: 526). Although HRM still remains one of the key organizational functions where diversity plays a role, our examination of diversity is wider, as we aim to examine it as a broader organizational notion with a number of applications outside the domain of HRM.

The ethical dynamics of diversity research and its politics is an issue that has thus far not received a great deal of attention (Jonsen et al., 2011). However, different approaches and ways of researching diversity lay claim to particular moral and ethical considerations, although the ethical underpinnings of the different approaches to diversity are more often than not left unarticulated and unspecified. They are assumed and asserted rather than argued for. It is here that the work by Foucault and Townley’s (1993, 1994) application of it becomes useful; through unmasking the specific mechanisms by which HRM constructs its object, the employee, by identifying pertinent characteristics and making them comparable and calculable in particular

ways, the ethico-politics of choices that are made in these processes, as well as the effects of the processes that produce the comparable and calculable employee, reveal themselves.

We are particularly interested in the scholarly practices that turn difference in its multiplicity and ambiguity into categorized or categorizable diversity. What drives these practices? More importantly, what are their epistemological and ethical effects? We are interested in the political dimensions of the ethics that are deployed, implicitly or explicitly, in the production of diversity knowledge. At the centre of this discussion is the ethico-politics of the making of the ‘diverse subject’ (cf. Butler, 1990). How does this subject come to be and what are the ethico-politics of that becoming? To paraphrase McMurray et al. (2011: 546), it is in the politics of diversity and its production that its ethics become actualized. Building on the critical tradition in diversity research, we question the understandings and assumptions about diversity and its management and the way research produces knowledge and its objects and subjects. We argue that the divisions between main approaches to diversity – social justice, business case and critical – shift (once more) when we examine the ethico-politics of the means by which diversity knowledge is produced and how it produces the objects and subjects of its knowledge.

We base our treatise of the ethico-politics of diversity knowledge and its production around the work of the French historical philosopher Michel Foucault. While Townley (1993, 1994) built on Foucault’s work on power/knowledge to unmask the dynamics of HRM, we focus here on an aspect in Foucault’s thinking that has received somewhat less attention, that is, his early critique of the ocular preoccupation in human sciences. Politics of ocularity – faith in the power of direct observation – seem to be at the centre of much of diversity knowledge and the means by which it is produced. We draw on Foucault’s work also more broadly and place diversity into the realm of biopolitics (Foucault, 2007, 2008), as an art of governing life itself. Through this examination, we hope, we can better understand the ethico-politics of how ‘diverse subjects’ are made, how they can function and how they are managed.

This chapter is structured as follows. We first discuss biopolitics and the manageability of diversity. We then outline two dominant approaches (social justice and business case) to the concept of diversity in research, and detail some of the ways in which the dominant approaches have been critiqued, challenged and, at least partially, bypassed. We consider points of divergence and convergence of the dominant approaches within the framework of their ethical considerations, discuss critical approaches and their ethics, and suggest an alternative way to make sense of the ethico-politics of diversity and its production.

Biopolitics and manageability of diversity

We have argued elsewhere that diversity knowledge is biopolitical in the Foucauldian sense (see Ahonen et al., 2014). *Biopolitics* is a modality of power that, according to Foucault, emerges in the eighteenth century and has ‘an absolutely new political personage . . . the population’ as its target (2007: 67). This new political personage, brought into sight by a new science, political economy (that then developed into economics), was of central importance to the state as an economy; the state could only be as strong as its population was. Population equalled manpower. The population, it was discovered, is comprised of living beings who are born and die, migrate to or stay in particular areas, have accidents and become ill, among many other equally basic, mundane things. The population, in short, is comprised of humans as living beings, as a species. What was new about this political personage was that the random events of life could not, in principle, be ruled at the individual level by laws or decrees, as the logic of sovereign power would dictate, neither could the basic biological features population be disciplined into something else than what they were.

What cannot be legislated or disciplined into compliance can, nevertheless, be governed, or managed from a distance. It is in this assumed *manageability* that ethico-politics become pertinent. ‘We have a population whose nature is such that the sovereign must deploy reflected procedures of government within this nature, with the help of it, and with regard to it’ (Foucault, 2007: 75). Ethics enters the arena of naturalness of population—of life itself—as these reflected procedures of government, as political action (cf. McMurray et al., 2011; Pullen and Rhodes, 2013). The notion of diversity is best understood within this framework as a concept that enables particular kinds of seeing and perceiving of differences within a population. By extension, ‘the idea—and the very possibility—of managing diversity can be understood as a part of the regulatory apparatus of government that exercises biopolitical power’ (Ahonen et al., 2014: 265).

Diversity as a concept, the forms of knowledge that produce diverse subjects and make it possible to analyse various diversity objects and their constituent parts, the experts that produce diversity knowledge as well as those that develop and implement regimes of diversity practices are all part of the apparatus, the set of mechanisms that render difference governable. Diversity research produces knowledge that renders individuals as objects of biopolitical management through their classifiable differences. Classification is done through naming and ordering, taxonomization, that turns difference visible, seen and perceived in particular ways. These visibilized characteristics are then reflected upon, analysed in various ways, and, in so doing, imbued with moral, political, organizational and economic meanings (Ahonen et al., 2014).

Diversity: a domain of knowledge production

Having originated from the specific historical and politico-cultural context of the United States in the 1980s, diversity has become the vehicle for continuing the work of various social justice movements. In terms of ‘racio-ethnic diversity’, for example, it was grounded in the liberal doctrine sweeping America in the preceding decades (Nkomo and Hoobler, 2014). The notion of diversity was adopted and adapted to serve business purposes, or at least appropriated by business discourses, such as those on team performance, innovation and corporate image management. Critical approaches, in turn, emerged in the 1990s to challenge both of these dominant understandings (Zanoni et al., 2010), that is to say liberal social justice diversity and business case diversity. Critical diversity research became concerned with the processes and practices of generalization and essentialization at play when diversity is organized, operationalized and studied.

Given these heterodox orientations, diversity research as a domain of knowledge production is far from unified. Neither is the nature of diversity or its function and effect in society and in organizations easily apparent or predictable. Research on diversity – especially the kind that aims to determine the ‘impact’ of various diversity ‘factors’ or ‘dimensions’ – often produces inconclusive or contradictory results (Jonsen et al., 2011). Diversity continues to be deployed in discourses of equality and social justice emphasizing that the same opportunities should be available to everyone in society ‘regardless of race, creed or color’, as the American legal phrase goes. Diversity, when not considered to be a threat to team cohesion, tends to be celebrated as a positive force that drives innovation and makes organizations and businesses more responsive to and reflective of the society around them. In this way, diversity is argued or, increasingly, assumed to form the core of modern (Western) organizations and societies and to give them their life force.

Paradoxically, diversity research is not particularly diverse (Jonsen et al, 2011). Much of the research on diversity in organizations seems to have settled into investigating whether one social, organizational or personal dimension of diversity or another has an effect on another kind of

social, organizational or personal outcome. Diversity has become a numbers game. It is not surprising, then, that many scholars in the field have expressed concern over its malaise and sought to find ways to think diversity and its management differently (Ahonen et al., 2014; Calás et al., 2009; Metcalfe and Woodhams, 2008, 2012; Miller et al., 2009; Zanon et al., 2010).

At the same time, it is evident that diversity research functions on the basis of different definitions of its focal concept. One way to make sense of this apparent variety is offered by Mor Barak (2011) who identifies two general guiding principles behind diversity research. She calls these the *narrow-category-based* and *broad-category-based* approaches. The former focuses on ‘core’ social group differences (such as age, gender, ‘race’, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and physical and/or cognitive ability or their combinations) while the latter ‘may refer to any perceived difference among people, such as age, functional specialty, profession, sexual preference, geographic origin, life style and tenure or position with the organization’ (Dobbs, 1996: 351).

The broad approach to diversity seems to accommodate the narrower approaches without much conflict. Gardenswartz and Rowe (2003: 33) in their practitioner-oriented guide to diversity management, in fact, provide a four-dimensional model where diversity is divided into (1) ‘personality’, (2) ‘internal dimensions’, (3) ‘external dimensions’ and (4) ‘organizational dimensions’. In their layered model the elements that are included in the narrow-category-based understandings of diversity tend to be found at the level of ‘internal dimensions’. ‘External dimensions’ include such differentiators as income, religion, hobbies, parental status, appearance, personal habits, experience and education. The ‘organizational dimension’, in turn, includes factors such as seniority, union affiliation and work location. Interestingly, the social category of class is not included in the model as such but broken down into its apparent constituent parts at the level of ‘external dimensions’. The aim of the model is to identify all relevant dimensions of diversity and make them visible and actionable.

Both the broad and narrow definitions of diversity aim to determine what diversity is, what is included and what is excluded, what is at the centre of the focus and what is peripheral. An arguably more ethics-driven – or ethico-political – categorization of scholarly approaches to diversity is the distinction between *social justice*, *business case* and *critical* modes. Historically, the notion of diversity stems from the liberal programme of aiming to address imbalances in access to opportunities. Adopting and adapting diversity to serve business purposes then shifted diversity away from its base of liberal ethics and politics and their judicial and policy focus into the realm of profit- and outcomes-oriented capitalist enterprise. This shift mirrors the ‘fatigue’ in relation to workplace equality in the USA during (and since) the presidency of Ronald Reagan in 1981–1988 (Ahmed, 2007; Nkomo and Hoobler, 2014). Rendering difference manageable in organizations and for organizational purposes became a key issue in this new formulation of diversity, and what is now known as the business case for diversity was brought into being. What is important to note, however, is that this was *not* the shift that made, or sought to make, diversity manageable; the move to address the social justice concerns had already done so. The shift from social justice to business case diversity was not one in the modality of power but one in the ethico-politics. Diversity was now expected to ‘perform’, to contribute to the capitalist enterprise, not be a burden to it. The fact that social justice concerns are also, ostensibly, served by business case diversity adds a certain additional ethical frisson to it.

Critical approaches, in turn, draw attention to the inequalities that are reproduced when diversity is deployed in organizational settings, addressing questions of power and identity. In this way, critical research aims to question the normalization of diversity. It is here that we see yet another ethico-political dimension of diversity emerging. Diversity had earlier arguably

functioned *as* an ethic; in its social justice incarnation it stood for equality and fairness and in its business case incarnation it stood for the good(s) that resulted from working together. The critical perspectives emerged as a part of a renewed interest in morals and judgement in organizational settings and the principles on which judgements are made (Parker, 1998a). At one end of this development was business ethics itself as a field of applied ethics and at the other various critical approaches to business and organizational phenomena. It was these critical approaches that began to ask new kinds of questions in relation to diversity; diversity was no longer necessarily assumed to represent an ethic in and of itself but the politics of diversity and its management became an issue (Zanoni et al., 2010), and with it attention began to turn also towards the ethico-politics of diversity knowledges.

Diversity is a diverse notion, with broader and narrower definitions and a number of framings and ethico-political orientations. However, it seems to us that there is a connection between the narrow-category-based and broad-category-based approaches to diversity we discussed above and the ethico-political modes. Social justice oriented approaches tend to conceptualize diversity in accordance with the narrower definitions that categorize subjects into social groups based on gender, ethnicity, 'race', age, sexual orientation and/or (dis)ability, for example. The business case oriented approaches, in turn, tend to include also other, either personal or skills-related 'dimensions'. These differences between the approaches also reflect their aims. Social justice approaches are, as the name indicates, concerned with fairness and justice at the societal level, with an aim to ensure equal or fair representation, opportunities and treatment of members of all social groups. The business case oriented approaches, in contrast, are interested in diversity and its effects on the level of the firm (or other organization) and its various sub-units. The focus there is not on fairness but on better organizational outcomes. In this context, diversity overlaps with such concepts as talent or organizational capabilities. Diversity is there to perform a function – or just to perform. Social outcomes, outside the bounds set by legislation, are determined by 'the market'.

Finally, critical approaches, especially those that focus on questions of identity and identity politics, sometimes overlap with social justice approaches. When this is the case, the narrower social group based conceptualizations of diversity tend to be used. The focus is on power and gender, 'race', ethnicity, sexual orientation and, sometimes, class, or various combinations of these elements. The aim is to show the relevance of these categories in organizational life and the oppression, discrimination or marginalization suffered by those in less fortunate positions. However, critical diversity research is often critical also of the notion of diversity and its various categorizations, in which case neither the narrow nor the broad definitions are particularly appropriate. Critical approaches may also scrutinize practices of domination and subordination – both in their local and global manifestations – that condition the production of knowledge about diversity (Zanoni and Calás, 2014), and also in this way seek to move beyond the social justice and business case approaches.

Below we examine the social justice and business case approaches in more detail, and then explore critical approaches separately insofar as they offer ideas for doing and researching diversity differently.

Points of divergence

Diversity research as a domain of knowledge production incorporates seemingly different strands of research, but it is the common history of the social justice and business case approaches that is of specific interest here. The genesis of diversity in the particular intellectual, political and cultural context of the United States is significant. It has given the notion of diversity a

distinctive flavour where specifically American political, cultural and social histories, tendencies and preoccupations have become woven into the very fabric of diversity as a form of knowledge (Kandola and Fullerton, 1998; Özbilgin, 2008; Nkomo and Hoobler, 2014). This fundamental question has been highlighted in a plethora of studies that have focused on the ways in which Anglo-American knowledge on diversity and its management is adopted, translated and adapted in different socio-cultural contexts across the world (for an overview, see e.g. Ahonen et al., 2014).

Since the 1980s, social justice and business case approaches have developed as the key ways of understanding diversity-in-general. In terms of social justice, the notion of diversity has been used to highlight processes and practices that give an advantage to some groups of people and disadvantage others, to address lack of representation as well as discrimination, and to foster initiatives for social change (Nkomo and Hoobler, 2014). What these groups are, what disadvantage is, what are appropriate measures to combat it, and what social change is and what direction it should take are all crucial questions.

Taking seriously the emergence of the concept of diversity at a particular time in the USA means recognizing that there is a specific kind of ethico-politics at play in much of diversity research. In the mid-1960s, Affirmative Action, that is the policy of providing special opportunities for disadvantaged groups by legal means, became a vehicle in the USA for righting historical wrongs and compensating for historical discrimination. Becoming attentive to, and addressing, inequalities related to 'race' and also biological sex was the apex of this approach. Importantly, equality of result was emphasized as historically disadvantaged groups were offered (partial) access to positions in society that were previously out of their reach (Nkomo and Hoobler, 2014; Riccucci, 2002).

The tide turned again during the Reagan era in the 1980s and by the turn of the millennium, through a number of US Supreme Court decisions, the idea of equality of result was effectively overturned by a new emphasis. Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) initiatives gradually replaced Affirmative Action (Nkomo and Hoobler, 2014; Riccucci, 2002). Rather than equality of result, EEO policies emphasize equality of opportunity, that is, access to the lower rungs of social and organizational equality. The rest is largely left to the 'market' comprised of competing and seemingly equal individuals. The 1960s to the 1990s mark the historical point where the notion of diversity made its appearance in the USA. Rooted in the civil rights, feminist and gay rights movements, the notion of diversity emerges as the energy of those social movements ebbed with the advent of Reaganism (Nkomo and Hoobler, 2014).

The rationality behind the concept of diversity framed in this way is that of liberalism: ensuring equality of opportunity and access rather than result. Interestingly, social justice oriented approaches have later been dubbed the 'moral case' for diversity, emphasizing the focus on combating discrimination by legal means while fostering social diversity in the workplace (Mensi-Klarbach, 2012). There is an implied connection between social justice and morality. The ethics of the liberal social justice approaches, of equality of opportunity, emerges as the moral imperative that drives diversity policies and legislation. The politics of this ethics is to establish procedures that appear to ensure equal access to all that will then ideally result in organizations as well as society in general having representative levels of 'the diverse' at all levels mostly without interfering with the levels – structures – themselves. The means for achieving these goals are those of encouragement, enticement, support, assessment and evaluation. These are actions-at-a-distance, governing techniques that keep away from interfering with individual cases as long as they take place in accordance with the regulations that are in place to govern the processes. The law, juridical power, will only intervene when the boundaries that establish the spaces of government are transgressed.

The business case oriented approaches, in contrast, are said to focus on the intrinsic added value offered by diversity to organizational performance (Mensi-Klarbach, 2012). In terms of ethico-politics, the interest is not on equality outcomes but on performance-related ones. The ethics of the business case is a Friedmanite ethics of best possible organizational performance as the highest good. The business case approaches to diversity border on the field that is known as business ethics. While business ethics in its normative form approaches diversity in part from the perspective of social justice, as a part of good corporate citizenship, of fair recruitment practices and of compliance with regulations, business ethics is still ultimately interested in business outcomes (Parker, 1998b). Its aim is to ensure that the organizational goals are achieved ethically. Similarly, the business case approach to diversity is concerned with what the organization can *gain* from diversity. While the rationale for social justice approaches (Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunities) were predominantly legal and moral, the business case involves an appeal to rationality and the utilization of talents of all individuals for the capitalist good (Nkomo and Hoobler, 2014).

Although perceiving diversity as a business asset is a somewhat more recent means of understanding diversity than placing it in the trajectory of liberalist aims of equal opportunities, not surprisingly it is the business case perspective that has been embraced in companies and many other organizations. Whilst ‘race’ and biological sex are still considered to be salient markers of human difference, they are increasingly supplemented by other more or less identifiable differences, such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, (dis)ability, age, culture and religion. Diversity is harnessed to improve the organization’s innovative capacity and to make it more responsive to client needs. Diversity is deployed to boost corporate image and used for purposes of advertising, recruitment and corporate responsibility reporting. With regard to advertising, Swan (2010) offers an intriguing analysis of the ‘fantasy of happy diversity’ in visual images produced by corporate communications experts. She shows how diversity is normalized through commoditization and, in particular, how human differences are recognized selectively to manufacture a particular image of diversity that does not make the dominant groups in society too anxious about their responsibilities to work for social change.

In its business case form, diversity is no longer linked to histories of discrimination and struggles for social justice, but rather to identifiable, calculable and to a great extent individualizable diversity attributes upon which performance and competitive advantage can be secured (Ahmed, 2012). If diversity that derives from social justice movements is an expression of liberal governmentality, then, diversity management can be argued to be an expression of its neoliberal counterpart: it renders difference governable as diversity for the purposes of the market. It is also this market that determines the value of diversity, both in general and in its individual factors and dimensions (Ahonen et al., 2014). Through the shift in the ethico-politics as well as a definitional shift in its meaning (from narrow to broad), diversity has all but replaced such notions as ‘gender equality’ and ‘anti-racism’.

Points of convergence

Beyond the differences discussed above, we argue that there are significant points of convergence between discourses of diversity as social justice and as business case. Whether the driver behind advocating diversity is equality or improved business performance, the concept has emerged as something that is geared to adding value of one kind or another (Ahmed, 2012). ‘Diversity’ has become an instrument for some other purpose or outcome, not a virtue or goal in itself. Social justice and business case diversity are both biopolitical, as we have already argued above. In both approaches diversity has to be visible, calculable, accountable (in the many implicit

senses of the word) and manageable. There are also significant similarities in terms of knowledge production. Diversity has come to be conceived as a natural phenomenon and tangible object that can be known and have real effects. It is variabilized and aggregated into populations. The variables are neither good nor evil in themselves but contingent on their use (Ahonen et al, 2014; Omanović, 2011).

The differences among human beings that diversity discourses – social justice and business case alike – recognize and regularize as diversity (such as gender, age, ethnic origin, race, sexuality, level of physical or mental ability, religious affiliation and nationality) are calculated, analysed, reflected upon and, most importantly, acted upon at a distance (that is, managed) to produce a desirable outcome, however defined. The diversity attributes themselves are not interfered with. The individual bodies that represent the regularized differences matter only in so far as they contribute to the aggregate notion of diversity and its rates, ratios and trends (Ahonen et al, 2014). At the same time, particular histories and local struggles that once gave rise to and created energy around questions of diversity are elided. The political and contested nature of talking about diversity is downplayed (Ahmed, 2007, 2012).

It is also useful to note that one discourse on diversity can provide the justification for the other when it is employed in a particular organizational context. As Ahmed (2012) has shown, for example, the business case can be used strategically to further social justice goals. What social justice and business case approaches also share, possibly through their shared origins in liberal thought, is the idea of the possibility and desirability of meritocracy. However, this ethical assumption and others like it can be contested. Moreover, there are signs of diversity fatigue that resemble what happened to ‘equality’ in the USA during the Reagan years. For example, in corporate parlance ‘diversity’ is increasingly substituted by concepts such as ‘inclusion’ (Dahl, 2014; Nkomo, 2013; Nkomo and Hoobler, 2014; Oswick and Noon, 2014).

Points of criticism

Critically informed diversity research has for some time questioned the ideological dominance of the idea of manageability and the individualizing and normalizing tendencies of diversity and the upbeat naïveté of many diversity writings (Litvin, 1997, 2006; Prasad et al., 1997). The framing of diversity as an issue to be solved by individuals, teams and organizations exercising choice is criticized for neglecting established power relations and systemic sources of disadvantage, on the one hand, and for essentializing differences, on the other (see e.g. Ashcraft, 2009; Foldy, 2002; Kelly and Dobbin, 1998; Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000; Zanoni and Janssens, 2004). Crucially, mainstream diversity research in its social justice and business case variations is challenged for reproducing the cultural and organizational contexts where white heterosexual middle-class men are the norm, ostensibly devoid of diversity attributes, and where the rest are cast as different and to be managed (Prasad and Mills, 1997; Ostendorp and Steyaert, 2009; Sinclair, 2000).

Zanoni and Calás (2014) take stock of contributions on diversity published in *Organization*, a distinctly critical journal, over the span of 20 years. In this exercise, their definition of critical diversity scholarship is that it: (1) deals with conceptual representations of diversity, multiplicity and ‘otherness’, and its potential intersections, while contributing to a broad debate on inequality in organizations and organizing, (2) explicitly links such concepts to capitalist processes, including the expansion of global capitalism, and (3) makes a conscious attempt to bridge the symbolic and material dimensions of these processes including social practices, specific artefacts and the distribution of resources. Zanoni and Calás (2014) also articulate the need for diversity research to be more engaged with the politics of its own production. What, then, is the ethico-politics of such critical scholarship on diversity?

Critical takes on diversity seem to share some ground with research that has critically interrogated ethics as it relates to organizations and management. Rhodes and Wray-Bliss (2014) provide an overview of such research that challenges the assumption that organizations will endeavour explicitly to manage their own ethics. They advocate a view that departs from ‘business ethics’ in that it seeks to question and contest those activities that are undertaken in organizations in the name of ethics. This is extended to include attention to the ethics of our own research practices and academic subjectivities (Wray-Bliss, 2002) – something that is seldom done in diversity scholarship, including its critical manifestations.

The lack of self-reflexivity notwithstanding, critical approaches to diversity are attentive to questions of power and identity. They render problematic the language of diversity that suggests that it is inclusive because it attends to a variety of groups and individuals in organizations. As Ahmed and Swan (2006: 98) ask, ‘what are the terms of this inclusion? Who is included by the term? One concern is that the inclusiveness of the term might conceal how social categories such as gender and race work. . . . Diversity may work to negate the specificity of the experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic women.’ To address this problematic, many critical scholars disappointed with the potential of the notion of diversity to contribute to meaningful social change have, for example, embraced the concept of intersectionality (McCall, 2005; Holvino, 2010) and engaged with transnational and (post)colonial feminisms (Calás and Smircich, 2006).

In terms of theory and practice, diversity becomes dynamic, situational and a site of contestation (Ahonen et al., 2014; Ahmed, 2012; Christiansen and Just, 2012; Swan, 2010). Building on the critical tradition, in what follows we turn our attention from the ethico-politics of diversity to the ethico-politics of the production of diversity knowledge.

Politics of naming and representation

At the centre of the problem of ethico-politics of diversity is the question of the formation of the ‘diverse subject’, the person or a group of people who are ‘diverse’. How do they come to be? Above we referred to Townley’s (1993, 1994) work on examining how HRM constructs its object, ‘the employee’, and proposed that this is an ethico-political question. By extension, the question of how diversity (knowledge) constructs its object, the ‘diverse subject’, is also one of ethico-politics. Discussing the subject of ‘women’ in feminism, Butler (1990: 1) notes that much of feminist theory assumes that ‘there is some existing identity, understood through the category of women . . . [that] constitutes the subject for whom political representation is pursued’. Diversity knowledge seems to have a similar relationship with the diverse subject. The aim of diversity knowledge is to identify and enable or set in motion the diverse subject, to make the diverse subject a visible, legitimate, subject. In the case of social justice, for example, the diverse subject is to be made into a discernible political subject for the purposes of equality; we can only have equal representation of women, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and gays if we *have* ‘women’, ‘ethnic minorities’, ‘people with disabilities’ and ‘gays’. “‘Representation”,’ Butler argues, ‘is extended only to what can be acknowledged as a subject’ (1990: 1). This means that ‘the qualifications for being a subject must first be met before representation can be extended’ (pp. 1–2).

Specialist discourses such as HRM and diversity ‘make up’ things and people by *naming*, that is, by identifying and thereby constituting objects of knowledge (Hacking, 1999, 2002). The key element in the dynamic of naming is that objects of naming react differentially to being named. Most of them, in fact, do not react in any way; planets, microbes and camels continue doing what they do regardless of how we name them (Hacking, 2002). Some objects of naming, such as people, are different. When we name and categorize people, what people (those named

as well as other people) do and what they might do change. This, Hacking (2002) emphasizes, is because the possibilities that are available change. When someone is appointed to a position of a CEO, becomes diagnosed as having a multiple personality disorder, or is grouped with Black and Minority Ethnic women, what changes is the realm of possibility for action as well as for subjectivity. These possibilities are nevertheless bounded; they are available in degrees, limiting the ability to and space for doing things (Hacking, 2002).

What does this all mean for ethico-politics of diversity in organizations during times when diversity becomes an all-consuming label for ordering difference? Organizations, organizing and management are principally about ordering, and thus marking people into kinds, categories, positions, and setting the boundaries for the possibilities available to them. These orderings and markings are based on specific forms of knowledge and they are a part of a network of relations of power (Townley, 1993, 1994). These are (in part) questions of ethico-politics. Organizations and organizing are interventions in human action which discipline subject formation (Foucault, 1980, 1983b), and these interventions are intentional human actions and are in turn ‘actions under description’ (Anscombe, 1957, quoted in Hacking, 2002: 108). ‘This is not mere linguisticism, for descriptions are embedded in our practices and lives’ (Hacking, 2002: 108). It matters whether you are ‘white’, ‘black’ or ‘mixed race’, ‘man’, ‘woman’ or ‘trans’. What is possible and what is described are linked in intentional human action: ‘if new modes of description come into being, new possibilities for action come into being in consequence’ (Hacking, 2002: 108). Description is an ethico-political act with tangible effects. To become a visible and legitimate diverse subject (to bring Butler back into the discussion), is to be a subject ‘under description’.

Michel Foucault’s notion of power/knowledge, where knowledge and power have a complex, context-specific circular relationship (rather than power being knowledge or knowledge being power) is central to the politics of naming and the making of subjects (Foucault, 1990, 1998). We have already discussed Barbara Townley’s work on how the discourses and practices of HRM ‘make up’ the employee, the subject/object of organizations. We will now examine the ways in which the complex of diversity power/knowledge ‘makes up’ its subjects under description.

Ethics of the gaze: ocularcentrism of diversity

Above we already referred to Judith Butler’s contention that subjects must first exist before they can be politically represented. ‘Representation’ relates not only to the representation of legitimate subjects in a given setting (how many women there are in top jobs in organizations, for example) but also how these subject are represented, that is how they appear, what characteristics they are given or understood to have. How and what characteristics are assigned to a subject is, again, also a question of ethico-politics. In the case of diverse subjects it is the production of diversity knowledge – by myriad means and by academics and practitioners alike – that produces the building blocks of diverse subjects. The ethico-political question here is the *how* of the making of the diverse subject.

In her influential early investigation of the emergence of workplace diversity as a scholarly preoccupation, Deborah Litvin argues that the logic of diversity discourses, scholarly or otherwise, is that of natural history and medico-biological thought. Together they ‘construct “realities” in which diversity consists of exotic and essentialized “species” of others, grouped by selective observable similarities’ (Litvin, 1997: 205). Much of diversity research and its operationalized or ‘practical’ applications rely on observation, perception and recognition. Diversity research is ocularcentric, driven by the principle of the gaze. The gaze is deployed onto difference through a codification system that renders it visible in particular ways, as

‘observable similarities’ that are organized into categories to produce a taxonomy – or taxonomies – of diversity. The ocularity of diversity spans across the divides between social justice, business case and critical approaches, although it does not cover the whole field. To understand what we mean by ocularity and how it – in our view problematically – produces particular kinds of diversity knowledge, we will revisit the work of Foucault.

Foucault is one of the key critics of knowledge based on observation and perception and of the processes by which these observations and perceptions are rendered into objects that can be known and subjects that can know (Foucault, 1998). Much of Foucault’s work criticizes the oclularcentrism of western scientific knowledge and of the human sciences in particular (Jay, 1986). From his work on the history of madness (2006), of the organizing principles of medical knowledge and practice (1994a), of the development of human sciences (1994b) and, most famously, of ways of managing people through disciplining and surveillance (1979) and beyond, Foucault was interested in unmasking the ways in which particular ways of seeing and perceiving were connected with ways of knowing, organizing and managing. In short, he was interested in the relationship between the subject and truth (Foucault, 1983b, 1998).

The ‘truth’ in diversity research is produced through distinctly oclular practices. The dominant understandings of diversity rely on the taxonomical logic of natural history of the Classical Age (cf. Foucault, 1994b). The faith of dominant diversity research in the power of direct observation has not faltered and neither has the ‘concomitant taxonomic ordering of its findings in the visible space of the table’ (Jay, 1986: 187). This is the logic of natural history that Litvin (1997) identifies as the core, the organizing principle, of diversity discourses: ‘species’ of ‘the diverse’ are identified, observed and organized into visual (or visualizable) taxonomies of factors and dimensions.

Biology, which in many ways is a science of revealing the hidden and making the invisible visible (Canguilhem, 2008), comes into play in diversity research through its preoccupation with bodies and their different sexual organs, physical features and skin colours. These bodies are then placed in the readily available categories of ‘male’ and ‘female’, for example, or into similarly ‘natural’ categories of ‘ethnicity’ or even ‘race’. These processes of categorizing objects, the bodies, effectively constitute the ‘diverse subject’ as an entity that is both made up (Hacking, 2002) and known (Townley, 1993) in particular ways. To complicate matters even more, many of the categories used in the process are historically connected and bear remarkable resemblances to the categories of colonial forms of knowledge, either directly or by sharing the same organizing principles (Stepan, 1982, 1986; Young, 1994). The meanings that these categories are imbued with are taken as descriptive rather than constructive of the bodies to which they are applied. Language is in this process assumed to be neutral; it merely transmits. The connection between the sign and the signifier becomes that of resemblance.

Referring to Foucault’s (1994a) examination of the development of medical perception in *The Birth of the Clinic*, Jay (1986: 182) reminds us that ‘what is in fact “seen” is not a given, objective reality open to an innocent eye. Rather, it is an *epistemic field*, constructed as much linguistically as visually’ (our emphasis; see also Hacking, 2002). In Litvin’s (1997: 207) analysis, the epistemic field of diversity discourses essentializes difference into a taxonomy of diversity categories that appear ‘obvious, natural and immutable and thereby [preclude] any consideration of mechanisms for change’. Thanks to their immutable character, however, the categories can then be factorized, compared across time and space, analysed, tested, applied and, thereby rendered manageable (Townley, 1993, 1994).

The ocularity of diversity knowledge also has another effect. It impedes dialogue between the knower (the knowing subject) and the known (the diverse object). In *History of Madness* Foucault (2006: 487) discusses how madness becomes a spectacle:

Madness no longer exists except as that which is seen. The proximity that comes into being in the asylum, in the absence of chains and bars, does not encourage reciprocal interaction. It is simply that of piercing gaze, observing, scrutinizing, moving pitilessly close the better to see, while remaining sufficiently distant to avoid any contamination by the values of the Stranger. The science of mental illness, such as it was to develop in the asylums, was only ever of the order of observation and classification. It was never to be a dialogue.

We are not arguing that the same processes that produced madness in the asylums are the processes that produce diversity in organizations (through research, managerial practice or otherwise). Asylums are enclosed spaces with their own specific power dynamics that do not operate in the same way in the domain of diversity. What we are saying is that there is something eerily similar taking place. The piercing gaze of diversity research with its pitiless scrutinizing of ever multiplying diversity factors keeps its distance through the very mechanism of factorization. The purpose of much diversity research is to identify objects that fit pre-set criteria. Diversity, also, 'no longer exists except as that which is seen' (cf. Foucault, 2006). Whether the goal is social justice or organizational performance, what is required is identification, observation and verification. These are the conditions of possibility for taking rational action.

It is important to note that direct intervening action is not an integral part of the diversity apparatus. What is important is the *possibility* of further action while, in actuality, *monitoring* constitutes the full extent of action in most cases. In the realm of diversity knowledge, 'the diverse' – or, to use Foucault's term, the Stranger – is an object, a fabrication produced through identification and classification for the purposes of management and government; action-at-a-distance. There is no dialogue.

Such classification schemes are (also) disciplinary techniques. As we know from Townley's (1993: 529) work,

They proceed by operating primarily through enhancing the 'calculability' of individuals, as each classificatory or ranking system designates each individual to his or her own space, and in doing so makes it possible to establish his or her presence and absence. Such classification schemes locate individuals in reference to the whole, and in doing so they operate to reduce individual singularities.

Similarly, diversity categories function to reduce difference. They make it possible to identify, classify, calculate, include and exclude. This is not a question of the sophistication of the taxonomical tool. It matters little, for example, whether diversity is understood in accordance with the narrow or the broad definitions we discussed above. The ethico-political principle in play is the same, even if the political applications may differ, as the social justice and business cases for diversity make clear.

Who or what is then the stranger, 'the diverse'? Are they merely the product of external conditions, a subject that diversity knowledge renders visible and classifies for potential further action? If we continue drawing on the lessons from Foucault's work on madness, we may find some clues. According to Foucault, madness was not only a product of the scrutinizing gaze and categorization. It was also turned into a self-reflective mirror so that madness 'saw itself and was seen by itself – as both pure object of spectacle and absolute subject' (Foucault, 2006: 498). If one function of diversity is to 'see', the other function is to be a mirror in which 'diverse subjects' may find themselves, and align themselves with (in accordance with the categories available). The diverse subject, then, is supposed to embrace diversity and be empowered by the discursive resources provided.

Anyone who has applied for a job in the world where diversity is managed at a distance has encountered diversity-as-a-mirror in one form or another. In the United Kingdom, for example, one encounters the mirror when one applies for a job at a university. On what is referred to as ‘equal opportunities form’ (explicitly ‘for monitoring only’, that is, information is not shared with the interview panel but retained for HR purposes) the applicant is requested to self-identify in terms of ethnic origin, sexual orientation, marital status, age, religion and (dis)ability (see e.g. The Open University, 2013). This self-identification, however, is to be done on the basis of predetermined categories. ‘Ethnic origin’ for someone from a European background (presumably) can be a choice between ‘White British’, ‘White English’, ‘White Scottish’, ‘White Welsh’, ‘Irish Traveller’ and ‘Other White background’ (The Open University, 2013). If you identify as ‘Black’, the choices are ‘Black or Black British – African’, ‘Black or Black British – Caribbean’ and ‘Other Black background’. It is not possible to be ‘Black English’ or ‘White British – African’, for example, although both of these categories could under some other conditions be equally suitable. The ‘diverse’, the Stranger, can only choose from options made available to them on *how* they are diverse. There is no dialogue.

In this case ethnicity, principally a cultural signifier, becomes a signifier of ‘race’ in a taxonomy that can only be understood against British colonial history and its forms of knowledge (cf. Young, 1994). These are not categories that merely describe; these are categories that prescribe and thereby render themselves to be managed for the purposes of social equality or organizational performance. The diverse subject is under such heavy and unyielding description that it becomes prescription and the prescription, in turn, is the signifier that triggers particular technologies of management with their specific ethico-politics. In the case of the diverse subject, the ocular nature of the classification schemes is very pronounced at the same time as it is inflexible and one-directional.

In effect, diversity is panoptical; it sees everything within its own architecture, it organizes subjects within that space and it disciplines subjects to embrace their descriptions and their descriptors. In Foucault’s words, it is ‘a machinery that assures dissymmetry, disequilibrium, difference’ (Foucault, 1979: 202). Importantly, Foucault continues, ‘it does not matter who exercises power. Any individual, taken almost at random, can operate the machine. . . . Similarly, it does not matter what motive animates him [*sic*]. . . . The Panopticon is a marvellous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogenous effects of power’ (p. 202). If our analysis is correct and we may depend on Foucault’s dire take on the power effects of the Panopticon, the ethico-political contestation between the social justice and business case approaches to diversity is not the main problem. There are some significant differences in the ethico-politics of the two approaches but, as we have argued above, both approaches are part of the biopolitical modality of power. They therefore have the same or similar modes of producing the diverse subject, although the content, that is the diversity attributes attached to the subject, may be different.

What seems more pertinent in terms of ethico-politics of diversity are questions of how and on what basis diversity is produced out of difference and what kind of mechanisms and techniques are used in the process. What seems particularly important is the burden of colonial history and colonial forms of knowledge that (still) seem to order much of the way difference is transformed into diversity. It could be argued that, paradoxically, global companies and their diversity policies spread and reproduce the colonial order of things in the name of inherently good diversity. The specific legacies of slavery in America or British colonialism, for example, are hidden but naturalized and reproduced in a new form in the ways diversity and its knowledges order organizational life. Even though many diversity advocates and practitioners represent minorities themselves, as long as diversity and the ways in which it is produced is blind to its own particularity and deaf to the sounds of difference that fall outside of the established categories, ‘it does not matter who exercises power’ (Foucault, 1979: 202), that is, manages diversity.

Do critical approaches to diversity offer a solution? In our view, the crucial line does not go between critical approaches on one side and the social justice and business case approaches on the other. The line, blurred as it might be, is rather between approaches that investigate and interrogate the means with which diversity knowledge is produced and those that take the categories of diversity as a given. This, of course, is a rather uncomfortable conclusion for diversity scholars. The ethico-political point that we are trying to make with our critique of diversity and the ways in which it is produced is the same one that Foucault (1983a: 231) makes: ‘the point is not that everything is bad, the point is that everything is dangerous’. Diversity, then, is not ‘bad’, but it is in many ways dangerous. The ways in which we produce diversity knowledge is, equally, dangerous, regardless of the type of research we do or the kind of concepts we deploy.

The danger should alert us to be vigilant, not to become despondent. As Foucault notes, ‘if everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do’ (1983a: 231–232). Our view is that what diversity research needs to do is to investigate its own assumptions, history and practices. It needs to find ways to break out from the established categories and ways of making sense of difference. Most importantly, it needs to ‘provincialize’ the forms of knowledge, categories and concepts that now reign universally (cf. Chakrabarty, 2000). It needs to investigate the ‘diversity imperative’ that on the one hand drives and on the other hand allows western multinationals to reproduce particular, commodified versions of difference in the form of diversity as a set of policies and practices grounded in liberal thinking of rights but harnessed for the purposes of organizational performance. Finally, diversity research needs to disabuse itself of the dynamic of the Panopticon that renders everything visible and transparent but does not engage in dialogue with the subjects that it produces (cf. Gandhi, 2005). This is the ethico-political challenge for diversity and its production.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored the ethico-political character of diversity and its production in and for organizations. We have argued that diversity knowledge, through its taxonomical logic and preoccupation with the ocular that can be managed, produces diverse subjects that in fact remain objects. Diversity is defined through lack and divergence from the unnamed pure subject at the centre. The object, the diverse subject, is observed from afar by a meta-subject that is never named. They have their difference cast upon them through diversity knowledge and management practices and they are required to self-declare their difference.

Against the backdrop of the ethico-politics of diversity discussed in this chapter the problem of diversity management does not lie so much with the practices of management. As Jack et al. (2008) have emphasized, the problem is epistemological, and epistemological problems cannot be solved by methodological means. Thus far the ethics of diversity have been assessed by researchers on the basis of how ‘well’ the policies and practices have achieved their aims while the politics of naming have largely been left unexamined. This chapter is one modest attempt to show that naming matters.

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