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Article

“White Diversity”: Paradoxes of Deracializing Antidiscrimination

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Abstract: This article questions, at its starting point, the theoretical and epistemic assumptions around the emergence of the concept of (super)diversity, hailed in a growing body of academic literature as marking a “diversity turn”. In the second part, it highlights the issues raised by the organizational applications of the diversity paradigm in three main policy domains: migration, urban planning, and antidiscrimination. Finally, emphasizing the development of white-centered diversity conceptions, particularly in the European and French contexts, it invites a closer look at the intertwining of scholarly and practical elaborations of the diversity frame by considering knowledge as practice.

Keywords: diversity; superdiversity; multicultural; critical diversity studies; racism; discrimination; diversity policies

1. Introduction

Among academic circles, interest in the idea of diversity has recently propelled the social sciences to consider a real “diversity turn” in the study of race, ethnicity, pluralistic societies, cultural heterogeneity, and multiculturalism. This article shall critically examine these developments by comparing the construction of a “generic diversity” norm (Doytcheva 2008; Clarke 2011; Cooper 2004)—in scholarly debates and throughout politics and public policy—with its specific uses and appropriation by social actors and organizations. To do so, I rely on an extensive literature review that brings together findings from multiple fields of research and analysis within a “globally comparative” approach (Wimmer 2006), and, secondarily, on a longitudinal empirical analysis of European and French policies on diversity and non-discrimination (Doytcheva 2008, 2015), particularly in the workplace. One of the main objectives of this paper will thus be to compare the ideational and conceptual assumptions which underpin the academic “normalization” (Wessendorf 2014) of the diversity paradigm, on the one hand, with some of its major organizational applications on the other. As such, it falls within the scope of *critical diversity studies*, a burgeoning field that has emerged from the mid-1990s and onwards in reaction to the appropriation of equal opportunities by businesses (Zanoni et al. 2010).

I argue from this position that the organizational applications of the diversity paradigm are marked by a twofold trend: first, an instrumental view of differences (Zanoni et al. 2010), an issue now documented in a growing body of research; second, the trend towards universalization of patterns of prejudice and discrimination, and the rise of “generic diversity” concepts. However, while in theory advocating a more fluid and inclusive society, these concepts and their implementation have turned out to be increasingly prescriptive in practice, as they are wielded by socially powerful groups to the disadvantage of marginalized, mostly racialized communities (Berrey 2005; Mayorga-Gallo 2014).

This is what I refer to in this article as *white diversity*, lending to this notion a dual sense that is, first and foremost, grounded in the progressive elision of race and ethnicity from the space of diversity politics, as it has been notably documented in the case of France (Doytcheva 2008, 2015);

then, the mainstreaming of diversity ideals into a majority-centered discourse about a diversity that is “beneficial to all”, with both eventually concurring to reshape, rather than mitigate, raced power structures and boundaries within the very procedures designed to pursue equality.

As such, *white diversity* should not be equated solely with “raceless” diversity, or diversity “without race”—although the mere possibility of the latter deserves particular attention (Doytcheva 2015). It should be linked to other “epistemic maneuvers” (Mueller 2017) by hegemonic whiteness to produce everyday organizational, and structural dominance, based, for instance, on colorblindness and “epistemologies of ignorance” (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Mueller 2017), as well as the enduring institutionalization of racial order by organizations (Ray 2019; see also Seamster and Ray 2018).

Indeed, since its origin in the U.S. Supreme Court decision on affirmative action in university admissions in the late 1970s,¹ which emerged as pivotal in reframing affirmative action, the diversity rationale saw its popularity grow quickly beyond strictly antidiscrimination issues and policies. The term became synonymous with a wider vision of a better society, where no cultural reference is prioritized over another, and where national identity originates from a complicated interweaving of themes from around the world—thus, providing a vehicle for an original and unprecedented articulation of concerns for racial equality, on the one hand, and cultural pluralism, on the other (Hollinger 1995).

From my perspective here, three strands of research have contributed, in recent academic debates, to engage with the diversity frame:² first of all, these come from studies in law and society and/or the sociology of organizations, exploring the implementation of policies for equal opportunities (Kelly and Dobbin 1998; Edelman et al. 2001; Edelman 2016; Kalev et al. 2006; Dobbin 2009), whose analyses have converged in highlighting the “managerialization” of antidiscrimination law. Second, work stemming from urban studies of gentrification, which has placed emphasis on the construction and appropriation of social “mixing” practices and norms (Berrey 2005, 2015; Tissot 2011, 2015; Mayorga-Gallo 2019). Finally, a third body of research, focused on the hypothesis of “post-multiculturalism”, builds on categories such as *superdiversity* and *multiculture* (Vertovec 2007; Faist 2008; Kymlicka 2015), which I am particularly interested in here.

Although each of these perspectives and bodies of research have specific space and time locations, my approach will be to place them in conversation, at an analytical level, so as to critically engage with some of the theoretical and epistemic assumptions behind the “diversity turn”, as well as to give account of the increasingly global mobilities and “circulations” (McCann 2011) of these cognitive and policy frames. By doing so, I make a rather methodological and epistemic use of the global and transnational lens aimed at “adopt[ing] a deliberately de-nationalized perspective, and the methodologies that accompany it, in order to explore and theorize social phenomena across borders, involving non-state actors in a privileged way” (Dahinden 2017, p. 1483; see also Doytcheva 2019).

Within this global perspective, the rather consensual reception of the diversity argument at the beginning of the 2000s in France by actors across the political spectrum was, in the opinion of many analysts, the first point for interrogation (Wieviorka 2008, p. 23). Before this, the language used with regard to these issues (e.g., race and ethnicity) had been more critical or uneasy, while with diversity, it was framed as “neatly positive”. The term itself made it possible to think of minorities—whose existence is otherwise denied from a so-called republican stance—in a new “euphemistic, toned-down, and moderate way”. (ibid.) Within the French context, the framework of diversity, therefore,

¹ *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978). Considered as the founding act of diversity policies, the *Bakke* case also laid the foundation for a productive vision of diversity that “benefits all”, and of race as a “plus-factor”.

² However, this outlook does not have the ambition of being exhaustive. Many other disciplinary applications could be mentioned, ranging from microeconomics to biology (with the notion of biodiversity, for example) or geography and linguistics, around work on multilingualism. Here, I focus on those that, in the field of social sciences, most directly address issues of citizenship and inequality. For more on this point, see also Doytcheva (2017).

did introduce some changes in policy, as in debate (Doytcheva 2010; Helly and Doytcheva 2011; Senac-Slawinski 2012).

On the one hand, its semantic plasticity, due to a kind of indeterminacy in the targeted markers of differentiation—race, gender, age, disability, but also “parentality” or education—has made it into consensual and fostered dissemination, whereas arguments over “the right to be different” in the 1980s, and multiculturalism in the 1990s, have been construed as a national threat. On the other hand, the disposition to individuate differences by referring to individuals rather than groups triggered a less contentious vision on society, giving precedence to romanticized narratives about the “diversification of diversity” (Makoni 2012; Venegas and Lozano 2013; Aptekar 2019; Faist 2008). The emphasis has been placed on the individual with regard to merit, productivity, creativity, but also a kind of labor “flexibility” in terms of remuneration, organization, or leave (Bender 2004).

In the first section of this paper, I shall thus revisit some of the theoretical and methodological arguments that have fueled recent academic interest in the diversity framework and even more so in the neologism of *superdiversity*. From my position here, although superdiversity explicitly relates primarily to the specific topic of 21st century migrations to Europe, it could also be used as a comprehensive analytical tool, aimed at investigating some foundational epistemic changes conveyed by the “diversity turn” (Section 2).

Indeed, as some of its proponents and closest advocates assert, the concept of superdiversity “normalizes” (Wessendorf 2014), within academic arenas, the ever-growing interest in “global diversities”. Thus, what are the patterns of novelty it reveals or grasps on issues of migration, integration, belonging, and citizenship? Insofar as its relevance takes shape at the crossroads of social, political, and academic fields, to what extent does it embody not only a new and heuristic analytical tool, but also a successful public policy strategy to deal with these questions? I shall thus, in a second step, supplement the analytical approach to the concept with other sources of critical examination, based, for instance, on empirical scrutiny and public policy analysis that focusses on interventions labeled in diversity terms (Section 3).

Overall, one of the paper’s main objectives is to invite a closer look at the intertwining of scholarly and practical, political, or organizational applications of the diversity paradigm. Making use of Foucauldian (Foucault 1980, 2004a, 2004b) conceptualizations of knowledge as practice, it brings together ideational, social, and technical aspects, often siloed in academic discussions, by considering diversity as a *dispositif*—that is, “the system of relations” between “a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical and moral propositions” (Foucault 1980, p. 194; see also Matejskova and Antonsich 2015). In what follows, first, I engage the ideational aspects through a conceptual inquiry, based on a cartographic approach. Next, I turn to the actual social aspects of organizational appropriation in three main policy domains. I discuss in the concluding section the technologies of normalization and how they apply to manage and reshape the boundaries of race difference, defining who is worthy of inclusion and who is not.

2. A Diversity Turn in Academia?

When I first engaged in scholarly debates on diversity, my fundamental questions were empirical, focused in particular on the (mis)appropriation of the concept by the corporate world and the top business sector (Doytcheva 2008, 2010). Although the international literature on this topic proved very useful in shedding light on the new and swiftly evolving French and European situations, I felt challenged in my efforts to address these processes by the absence of what would be an articulated, critical social theory—and this, particularly in the light of other parallel or competing frames, which are extensively substantiated, be it normatively or positively, in literature.³

³ Such as “recognition”, “multiculturalism”, “intersectionality”, to mention a few.

Thus, it came as a surprise when, a few years later, I was able to pinpoint, if not a comprehensive social theory of diversity, then at least a cluster of theoretical and methodological innovations reflected in the neologisms of superdiversity, multiculturalism, and post-race. While the first is most directly related to the overall purpose of this paper, there are also important analytical connections and common assumptions between them, which I will expand upon in this section.

By mapping out the field's analytical landscape, I argue how, besides the opportunity to reconfigure debates surrounding multiculturalism, these new conceptualizations concur on a twofold hypothesis around, on the one hand, the individuation and equating of differences, regardless of real group disadvantages; and a universalization of the logic of harm and prejudice—and therefore the need for acknowledgment and protection—on the other, beyond the scope of historically disenfranchised and marginalized communities, to an ever-growing number of scattered-diversity situations.

2.1. Superdiversity and Twenty-First Century Global Migrations

Coined by Vertovec in 2007, the concept of *superdiversity*, despite its heralded novelty, was also construed as part of a broader movement across social sciences. Encompassing facts, narratives, and sets of policies (Berg and Sigona 2013; Faist 2008), it has been increasingly referred to as a diversity “turn” (see also Ahmed and Swan 2006). Mapping the historical and intellectual background of Vertovec's (2007) “new theoretical framework”, I first discuss in this section how ideas of fragmentation and increasing individualization within processes of social and cultural differentiation had already been the focus of attention in scholarly debates, particularly in the UK, under the theme of *multiculture* (Back 1994; Hall 1999; Gilroy 2004; James 2015)⁴.

According to Hall's (1991, 1999) inaugural writings, a “multicultural drift” became increasingly visible across British society at the end of the 1990s “as a natural and inevitable part of the scene” (Hall 1999, p. 188). Resulting not from some deliberate or planned policy, it took shape in cities and urban areas in particular, where processes of rapid differentiation definitively undermined the “tired notion” of minority, that is, a group of people thought of as homogeneously characterized by their “otherness”, and opposed to a white, equally homogeneous, majority:

[The first factor is the] rapid differentiation which has been taking place amongst the so-called ethnic minorities, undermining the tired notion of an undifferentiated block of ‘ethnic minority’ people, homogeneously characterised by their ‘otherness’ (Them), versus an equally homogeneous white ‘majority’ (Us) [. . .] These fundamentally binary terms in which British race relations have been mapped have essentially collapsed. (Hall 1999, p. 191)

Multiculture, which should not be confused with multiculturalism, applies strongly to these new, multiple social configurations and shifting relations between class, culture, and race or ethnicity (James 2015, p. 18)⁵. It is a process to be negotiated, rather than an outcome expressed in either a collection of statistics or a particular policy (Neal et al. 2017). Borrowing inspiration from Hall's thesis on “new ethnicities”, other British scholars committed to anti-essentialism have increasingly argued how, in liberal democracies, multiculturalism is allegedly less and less a matter of groups,

⁴ Rather than a sociological specificity—an issue that should not be dismissed but remains outside the scope of this article—I stress here an intellectual and scholarly environment that might have emerged as conducive to the institutionalization of the superdiversity framework; despite or because of the rather “global” proper objectives of the latter from the start. In addition, the important UK scholarship on theories and practices of multiculturalism—although partly skeptical, see Meer and Modood in this section—has offered another important asset for the scholarly reception and acclimatization of these new ideas and debates.

⁵ Following the definition by James, “This notion of multiculturalism is conditioned by, but not fixed to, national boundaries and racialised kinship groups. It attends to the global flows of culture and people that have connected the social life of Newham to the rest of the world. This is multiculturalism in the context of diaspora [. . .] It attends to the performance and citation of diasporic flows in specific locations. It is concerned with how young people's performance of culture today is different from, but related to, what came before” (James 2015, p. 18).

“communities”, or minorities, and more about individuals who are scattered and like detached from the usual ontological distinctions along lines of race, gender, age, and ethnicity.

“Reconciled to multiplicity as an end to itself” (Meer and Modood 2009, p. 488), the multicultural perspective encompasses, on the other hand, consumption and lifestyle-based identities. Adopted in an atmosphere of “conviviality” (Gilroy 2004), these do not extend either to the state. In this context of secular multiculturalism, “without groups” (Brubaker 2002), the concept of superdiversity emerges to initially pinpoint the phenomenon referred to as the “new migration”, reaching the UK since the early 1990s.

Based on the assessment of a “level” and “kind” of heterogeneity and complexity in migration of an unprecedented scope, superdiversity characterizes the new situation by the dynamic interplay between a large number of “new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified” migrations (Vertovec 2007, p. 1024):

Britain can now be characterized by ‘super-diversity,’ a notion intended to underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything the country has previously experienced. Such a condition is distinguished by a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade.

As noted by Meissner and Vertovec (2015) in a subsequent publication intended to broaden the reach of the concept, although the initial data came from the London area, superdiversity was designed to be definitely multisite in scope. The reason lies first with the processes of global migrations—in the past, migrations involved a large number of people, leaving from and going to just a few countries; nowadays, while the flows are said to have reduced overall, they have, however, much more various origins and destinations. This “diversification of diversity”, yielding superdiversity, is not only seen as the result of a larger number of significant variables to be considered—it also implies their dynamic interplay, thus raising unprecedented challenges for both policy and research (Vertovec 2007; Meissner and Vertovec 2015).

Superdiversity is designed to highlight the conjunction of race and ethnicity with a range of discrete categories, such as age, address, legal status, and occupation. These variables are not, of course, new in the studies of migration, nor are many of their correlations. Again, “it is the emergence of their scale, historical and policy-produced multiple configuration” (Vertovec 2007, p. 1026) that calls for conceptual and methodological innovation, namely a multidimensional approach, which moves “beyond the ethnic group” as “unit of analysis” (Glick Schiller et al. 2006, p. 613, quoted in Berg and Sigona 2013).

From this perspective, shifting the analytical lens “from studies of group X in place Y”, to studies of locally grounded forms of diversity, enables scholars to acknowledge a “wider range of differences and similarities” between and within groups than conceptual predecessors, such as ethnicity and race did (Berg and Sigona 2013). According to the evocative title of a think-tank report cited to herald these transformations: “You can’t put me in a box: Super-diversity and the end of identity politics in Britain” (Fanshawe and Sriskandarajah 2010). A (super)diversity-focused approach is therefore hailed in academia as a way to put an end to identarian perspectives and politics, meant to have prevailed before, blaming them for having essentialized subjects and identities, while confining belonging to reified categories.⁶

⁶ It should be noted, however, how this position disregards the work carried out on ethnicity and categorical distinctions from a relational and subjectivist perspective that draws upon the pioneering work by Fredrik Barth (1969) and the important developments it generated on both sides of the Atlantic (Poutignat et al. 2008). For other relational approaches to categorical inequalities, elaborating in particular on Charles Tilly’s work—see Castañeda (2017, chp. 1).

2.2. (Super)diversity and Post-Multiculturalism

In fact, the observation, or rather, the intuition of individualized and scattered diversity cannot be said to be entirely new. Throughout the 1990s, and even before, it has been possible to find analyses that grasp the specificity of contemporary situations of multiculturalism as “deeply individualized” and “radically decentralized”, thus informing “the most intensive” regime of heterogeneity that human societies have “widely experienced” (Walzer 1997; quoted in Doytcheva 2011, p. 12)⁷. Central to social theories of recognition (Taylor 1992; Honneth 2000) is the idea of its profound entrenchment in modern individualism, since struggles for recognition are based on ideals of authenticity and personal achievement, which are specific to modern individuals.

By the end of the 2000s, the framework of superdiversity, along with other efforts to conceptual innovation, could be said to systematize such a view and analysis. As titled by the aforementioned report heralding “the end of identity politics”, its invention also enables a timely and appropriate response to the backlash against multicultural policies that had been orchestrated throughout the decade (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010).

Although the premises of a multicultural backlash have become clear since the late 1990s, initially articulated in the terms women’s rights and the defense of “minorities within minorities”,⁸ the trend indisputably peaked in the repressive and security-focused environment following 11 September 2001. While identifying Muslim communities as a specific threat, many political leaders, including in countries that had never implemented such policies, such as France or Germany,⁹ showed themselves eager to declare the “failure” and “end” of liberal multiculturalism (Lentin and Titley 2011; May 2016). Nonetheless, opinions diverged in other national debates, as in the UK, between condemning multiculturalism as an institutional program and acknowledging it as a de facto characteristic of society. As outlined above, everyday processes of cohabitation and interaction had arguably made multiculturalism an ordinary feature of social life in urban areas and global postcolonial cities around the world, hoping, as Gilroy puts it, that “an interest in the workings of conviviality will take off from the point where ‘multiculturalism’ broke down” (Gilroy 2004, p. xi).

(Super)diversity also embodies this view. It should be noticed that in a significant part of the literature, both terms—diversity and superdiversity—are used synonymously. Elaborating on superdiversity as the conceptual and sociological category, provided with stronger “analytical power”, legitimates this interchangeable use. In the literature, the superdiversity frame has even been construed as an effort towards “normalization”, through knowledgeable academic conceptualization, of “commonplace global diversities” (Wessendorf 2014).

The convergence with the concept of multiculturalism, particularly in urban studies, is explicit, since both make it possible to move beyond the “crisis of multiculturalism”.¹⁰ Inherent is the idea that the failure of official multiculturalism has paved the way for a larger expression and recognition of “different types of differences” that structure society. Fluidity, hybridity, and cross-fertilization are keywords to capture these new patterns, combining them with those articulated previously or in parallel in terms of transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, and globalization (Faist 2008).

⁷ In U.S. scholarship, in addition to Walzer’s reflection on “dispersed diversity”, the notion of “diversification of diversity”, in its positive acceptance, is to be found notably in Hollinger’s (1995) work, although with far fewer ramifications. According to Vertovec (2019) himself, the U.S. forms an exception in the global dynamic of diffusion and enthusiastic reception of the superdiversity concept, which he mainly associates with a stronger “institutionalization” of inter-racial relations.

⁸ That is, children, LGBT people, dissidents of all kinds, subordinated to the patriarchal law and the authority of the community embodied by elder men, cf. Okin (1999).

⁹ See in particular the statements of Nicolas Sarkozy in France: http://www.liberation.fr/france/2011/02/11/sarkozy-estime-que-le-multiculturalisme-est-un-echec_714298; Angela Merkel in Germany: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/17/angela-merkel-germany-multiculturalism-failures>; David Cameron in Great Britain: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference> (accessed on 30 October 2018).

¹⁰ For an illustration, see the session organized in 2013 at the annual conference of the Association of American Geographers: “Superdiversity and urban multiculturalism”; see also Aptekar (2019); Back and Sinha (2016); Hall (2017); Neal et al. (2017). For a critical approach: Sealy (2018).

From this perspective, traditional divisions along the lines of race and ethnicity no longer provide a suitable analytical tool to understand urban multiculturalism. The turn to diversity is said to entail a change from focusing on “entities”, to focusing on “relations”. Hence, within migration studies, diversity would hold the potential to do what intersectionality has done within feminist scholarship, that is, conceptualizing the relationships between multiple processes of categorization (Berg and Sigona 2013, p. 349).

2.3. Superdiversity and Intersectionality

Indeed, unlike a multiculturalist analytical framework focusing on “only cultural differences”, new conceptualizations of diversity should allow for the integration of other variables, such as class and location, as well as the interest in majorities. Three arguments are roughly outlined to highlight the ways in which the two issues share common concerns (Humphris 2015)—both intersectionality and superdiversity target the interaction between different types of inequality and processes of categorization, in a desire to link the everyday with macro global changes; the political aspect also seems a common pivotal concern, with regard to both power and public policy; finally, when analyzing the conjunction of diverse variables in a particular place, both intersectionality and superdiversity make room for a plurality of strategies for research, without methodological dogma.

Work in critical feminist and intersectionalist scholarship, however, has critically assessed the recent alignment between the two frames. According to Bilge (2013, 2015), a Canadian intersectionalist feminist scholar, what current interest in diversity has conveyed within academic debates is, above all, a logic of depoliticizing intersectionality, and more so its paradoxical academic “normalization”. As Bilge writes,

The mutations of intersectionality and its depoliticizing rest not merely on the economic logics of neoliberalism, but also on its cultural logics, particularly the ability of neoliberalism to speak a complex language of diversity. (2013, p. 408)

This process occurred through the gradual erasure of minority and counter-hegemonic voices that articulated local thinking and activism on intersectionality, long before it was encountered by “disciplinary feminism”. The author suggests that the institutional trajectory of intersectionality, particularly in academia, embodies a path similar to that of other concepts originating in the radical feminism of the 1970s. This path of “disciplinary normalization” has stripped the initial political thinking of its impetus and radical vision. Based on the analyses by McRobbie (2009), Bilge claims that post-feminism, which has been dominant since the 1990s, is quite different from the anti-feminism in the 1980s in that it smartly incorporates some elements of feminism, but only to declare it obsolete, and “to be set aside for something better”:

Post-feminism positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasize that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force. (McRobbie 2009, p. 12; quoted in Bilge 2013, p. 407)

As radical feminism has been rendered ineffective and declared out of date, some of its ideas were mainstreamed, such as those that are the most likely to receive strong market value: choice, empowerment, sexual freedom, and self-care. Intersectionality is now undergoing a similar “double entanglement”, as certain lines of debate both “hail” and “fail” it (as post-feminism did feminism). According to Bilge, this double entanglement serves important purposes for the circulation of diversity narratives—across the academe, in social movements, and non-profit and corporate organizations. It is in this context that diversity is being compared to, and events conflated with intersectionality, as both are caught in contemporary logics of “branding”.

By becoming part of mass culture, both concepts have been hyper-individualized, converted into as many “lifestyles” as “forms of consumption”, in tune with surrounding ideologies of neoliberalism.

The aspiration towards universality or generality embodies another critical trend here. In both cases, we face reasoning that tends to retrieve categories built in and by practice, or within specific areas, in order to generalize them and create a “new paradigm”. These tendencies are clearly at work in contemporary French and European, but also global definitions of diversity, perhaps in an even more significant way than how they played out for intersectionality. However, the problem with aspiring to generality is its strong racializing burden. The general/specific distinction, argues Bilge, is a racialized one. The assertion that knowledge should move beyond its “particularistic content” to become a general paradigm reproduces this racialization, since it is often only on the basis of the experiences of the majority that we recognize such a capacity to build general knowledge (Bilge 2015, p. 23, see also Ndhlovu 2016). Defined above all as praxis and the “analytic of power”, intersectionality, in her view, has little in common with diversity, which has instead been celebrated as “happy talk” (Bell and Hartmann 2007) about a society “without oppression” (Andersen 1999).

However, as I hypothesize here, the historical perspective put forward for the concept of intersectionality could also apply to that of diversity, and even more so to its recent epistemological refinements into super- or hyper-diversity. While heralding significant theoretical and methodological changes, the latter may also appear as concealing a retreat from stronger conceptions of justice. As Will Kymlicka ironically states on the subject, it may seem difficult to imagine “what would be the source of solidarity in such a world of liquid mobility” (Kymlicka 2015, p. 13)¹¹. Hence, along with Bilge’s “whitening of intersectionality”, should we not consider the even more paradoxical whitening of diversity?

3. Diversity Policies: Education, Immigration, Corporations

Pioneering research in urban scholarship gives us some initial thoughts in this direction. By exploring the construction and appropriations of diversity, and before *mixité* (mixing), rationales in gentrified neighborhoods of Paris and Boston, Tissot (2011, 2015) shows how these are used primarily by wealthy households as an object of distinction, in a Bourdieusian sense (Bourdieu 1979), thus enabling the incorporation of some types of otherness, yet not all of them, in a logic of stratification and recomposition of the elites. Indeed, the “ethos of diversity” poorly hides the repulsion that some minorities face. Black and Latinx people, particularly, continue to be stigmatized, since their greater visibility in the city still triggers fear and anxiety. Although there is nothing new about this “racial fear”, unprecedented means have been invented in “mixed” neighborhoods to deal with it—gentrifying diversity shapes classed and classifying practices that powerfully organize and redesign boundaries between groups. As also shown by Berrey’s (2005, 2015) work in Chicago, the diversity trope, while less useful for low-income minorities, is strongly embraced by middle- and upper-class majorities that wield it at the expense of marginalized groups. By allowing them to construct a positive identity as open-minded and accepting of difference—or organizations as innovative and cutting-edge—it may help “maintain the social and legal benefits of Whiteness” (Mayorga-Gallo 2019), in the absence of commitment to stronger organizational change.

This brief overview of urban research—where diversity is not only a matter of ideology, but also a practical fact—allows us to move into the second, more empirical part of this study, aimed at questioning the social and political practices that align with efforts to terminological innovation. Indeed, another way of putting concepts under scrutiny is to compare them with policies they have informed. In this section, I outline two analytically distinctive sets of concerns that have been leveled against organizational applications of the diversity paradigm in a growing body of academic literature,

¹¹ “Some people believe that the very distinction between permanent and temporary migration is breaking down and that we will soon be living in a world of “superdiversity” with a multitude of legal statuses that are neither wholly temporary nor wholly permanent, but rather have varying degrees and levels of conditionality and precariousness (...) I am far from sure that such a world is desirable. I am even less sure what would be the source of solidarity in such a world of liquid mobility”. (ibid.)

to which I add a third one, stemming from my own work on corporate diversity procedures and stressing the notion of “white diversity”. Although these strands of criticisms can be associated with three main policy domains—that is, education, immigration, and employment—as I will propose for the sake of clarity, they should also be construed across these areas, in an ideal-typical way. In addition, I suggest a temporal or analytical gradation between them, arguing that, while some arguments are better known and well-documented, others have been less systematically addressed. Thus, such are the intended contributions of my inquiry, stressing in particular the notion of “white diversity”, and drawing, in addition to the extensive literature review, on a comprehensive qualitative dataset that I have collected between 2006 and 2016, mainly but not exclusively on French and EU corporate policies.¹²

3.1. Diversity as Liberal Meritocracy

Unlike other approaches to inequalities that resonate more in terms of collective regulation—such as gender equality or parity measures in France, minority or space-based affirmative action—diversity would be a primarily liberal and individualistic philosophy (Bender 2004). Emphasizing merit, productivity, and individual potentialities, it downplays more collective and structural sources of inequality and subordination. Instead of correcting injustices or redressing wrongs, diversity is about supporting those who contribute to the performance of the organization—with shared benefits for *all*, as under Justice Powell’s dissenting opinion in the landmark *Bakke* case.¹³

In the opinion of many analysts, the diversity debate is therefore in line with the political agenda and a certain neoliberal “condition”, that can be described, following the analyses by Feher (2007, 2018), as the aspiration for everything to “gain in value” and “appreciate”. While the figure of the “free worker” was regarded as the main *dispositif* of subjectivity in the capitalist era, “human capital” (Becker 1964) constitutes its counterpart for neoliberalism, wherein individuals are primarily construed as a “stock of competencies”, aspiring to appreciate. In this rationality of “self-capitalization” (Feher 2007)—ubiquitous today not only in work and marketplaces, but also in education and culture at universities—the diversity doctrine espouses a pacified and productive vision of a society that is built in terms of merit, performance, excellence, or exemplarity. To sum it up in a deliberately oriented way, it is “an inclusion [by the market] without solidarity” (Kymlicka 2015). While the whiteness of liberal meritocracy and its involvement with the justification of social and racial hierarchies are increasingly debunked (Kehal 2019; Littler 2018).

By the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the next decade, the analysis of this instrumental rationale of diversity as excellence, collective merit, and enrichment has been predominantly articulated in terms of “old wine in new bottles” (Kelly and Dobbin 1998; Dobbin 2009; Oudghiri and Sabbagh 1999). Pioneering research from U.S. scholars of organizations highlighted that the new rationale for equal opportunity had not disrupted academic and corporate practices towards women and minorities—practices that were shaped by the antidiscrimination legislation of the 1960s and the case law of the 1970s. The interest in diversity takes part above all in this context of a logic of strategic concealment, that allows organizations to create room for maneuvering vis-à-vis the judiciary and the federal administration, especially as, since the 1980s, they have been increasingly anxious to liberalize a system perceived as too rigid.

However, in recent work, a change appears to be taking place within these grids of interpretation. It goes towards a better understanding of what would be the alienating and dehumanizing nature

¹² This includes a comprehensive dataset of more than 80 in-depth sociological interviews (N = 86) conducted with public officials, political and civil society leaders and organizations, professional associations, activist networks; backed with ethnographic work and biographical accounts by minority students and job candidates mentored through diversity schemes.

¹³ Considered as the founding act of diversity policies, U.S. Supreme Court *Bakke* decision (1978) has been also foundational for a productive and instrumental vision of differences that “benefit all”, as well as of race as a “plus-factor”. This perspective since is upheld in *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003).

for minorities of this solely meritocratic and instrumentalistic vision, as well as the risk of additional marginalization it may entail for them (Alon 2015; Berrey 2015; Warikoo 2016). Hence, the criticism here no longer focuses on diversity as a norm or political category, but rather questions the effect that the arguments mobilized in its defense have on the people these policies should benefit, in theory.

To put it briefly, while resting on an instrumental rationale of “gaining value” and excellence through collective merit and enrichment, we are witnessing attempts to transition from an effort to measure “the benefits of diversity” to that of quantifying “the cost of discrimination”.¹⁴ The fiction of collective enrichment indeed poorly conceals its differential appropriation within organizations: does the added value that elite universities gain from their diversity policies not return overwhelmingly to their white majority students? Moreover, as highlighted by a recent wave of campus protests that have marked the news in the U.S., but also in Great Britain—underscoring remaining barriers to the recruitment of both racialized students and faculty—besides a backlash against persistent discrimination, there is also a “long-lasting frustration” with these problems not being acknowledged and addressed appropriately in the public sphere.¹⁵ Indeed, the enrichment of white students as main rationale for enrolling minorities contributes to greatly undermining the foundational principles of justice of those policies.

In France, according to Anne Revillard, who analyzes a recent government campaign aimed at promoting “universal accessibility”, the praise of accessibility which is “beneficial to everyone” (i.e., deliberately framed from the point of view of the able-bodied majorities) leads to additional risks of marginalization and exclusion for those with disabilities. Their experience is thus once again being denied, as their voices are diminished or erased. This is especially the case as the awareness campaign, launched in autumn 2016, marks a “sad anniversary”—that of a retreat from the “right to accessibility” instated by the French law of 11 February 2005. From “collective responsibility” and “democratic imperative”, the aim of universal accessibility has been transformed into “utility” for a public that it does not primarily target. However, writes the sociologist, “what is at stake here is not the comfort of the able-bodied, but first and foremost the citizenship of people with disabilities”.¹⁶

Highlighted in these few examples, we see the significance of one of the facets that I associate with the notion of *white diversity*, namely the progressive embedding of these ideals into a majority-centered discourse; granting advantage, under the guise of generic rights and universality, to those whose lives are patterned in the mold of the privileged groups (Clarke 2011). As a result, I will argue in the next sections, the cursor seems to be sliding today within public policy analysis, from the critique of the status quo towards a more thorough understanding of the perverse and counterproductive effects fostered by means of commodification of these concerns. It is no longer merely the neoliberal doxa and its depoliticizing effects that are pointed out, but the very real risks of corrupting these frames of action to the direct disadvantage of groups and communities they are supposed to protect from the start (cf. Section 3.3 below).

¹⁴ As it has been also recently the case in France with the report by *France Stratégie* (2016), a public agency under the authority of the Prime Minister, which has been charged to assess “the economic cost of discrimination”: <http://www.strategie.gouv.fr/publications/cout-economique-discrimination> (accessed on 15 October 2019). See also upstream the survey carried out by the Think-Tank Different with public funding: Virginie Martin, Marie-Cécile Naves. 2015. *Talents gâchés* [Spoiled talents]. Editions de l’Aube: 2015.

¹⁵ Sigal Alon, “How Diversity Destroyed Affirmative Action”, *The Nation*, 16 December 2016. The column follows the debates around *Fisher v. University of Texas*, which goes back to the Supreme Court for the second time in three years to establish the constitutionality of diversity policies in university admissions. As reflected in debates relayed by the press on this occasion: “If diversity is the only justification for affirmative action programs at university, what is the justification for diversity?” The latter seems to have changed considerably since the Bakke’s Supreme Court decision in 1978, considered as the founding act of these policies (Alon 2016).

¹⁶ Revillard (2015), “Plus belle la vie pour les personnes handicapées?” *AlterEco*, 4 November 2015.

3.2. Diversity as Immigration Governmentality

The case becomes all the more clearer with the second series of criticisms that coalesce with those exposed above to underline how these developments blend into a parallel, yet related, trend towards reinforcing color-blindness, the refusal to take specific actions targeted at marginalized and racialized communities, within a new global era showily declared “post-racial” (Goldberg 2015). Hence, while its contribution to a non-essentialist approach of intercultural and intergroup relations remains to be assessed so far, the turn to diversity seems indeed to strongly resonate with a particular, ideologically marked, context of reinforced colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2003); translating into both an increased stigmatization and mistrust against groups assigned by religion, skin color, or origin—such as Muslims, migrants, Roma, among others—and the denial or downplaying of racism and race in everyday life and structural inequalities, as well.

In France, recent events have revived the idea of removing the term “race” from the Constitution. Honoring its promise of the 2012 electoral campaign, president Hollande stood by a law that was approved by the French parliament in the first reading, without successfully completing the whole legislative process. The legislative erasure of race thus intervened more recently, in 2018, within a bill to reform the Constitution.¹⁷ Elsewhere, the period following the beginning of the 2000s saw a backward surge, by different means, of multicultural and differentialist ideologies to the benefit of an announced “return of assimilation” (Brubaker 2001), “the end of race” (Gilroy 2000), then the triumph, although short-lived, of post-racialism (Goldberg 2015).

Innovatively, sociological analyses concentrated throughout the decade of the 2000s on how central democratic values of “respect”, “tolerance”, or gender equality¹⁸ have been recast into a *civilizational discourse*—thus, reintroducing with force, through a racialized rhetoric of otherness, the boundaries they were supposed to fight (Brown 2008; Fassin 2010). According to Brown, the resurgence of tolerance at the end of the 20th century—in late liberal, multicultural democracies—provides a blatant example of this. In an ever more culturally and economically integrated Euro-Atlantic world, the term has been uncritically promulgated by actors across the political spectrum and prescribed as the “appropriate bearing” towards a variety of communities (immigrants, Roma, LGBT) and concerns. From a means of protecting civil peace in the time of the Reformation, it has translated into a generalized metaphor for “the good society yet to come”. (Brown 2008, pp. 5–6).

However, above all, in the aftermath of 9/11, tolerance as a domestic governmentality producing and regulating ethnic, religious, racial, and sexual subjects has been supplemented as a civilizational discourse, distinguishing Occident from Orient, liberal from non-liberal regimes, “free” from “unfree” peoples, “the tolerant, and the civilized on one side, and the fundamentalist, the intolerant, and the barbaric on the other”:

[These new meanings of tolerance] include the legitimization of a new form of imperial state action in the twenty-first century, a legitimization tethered to a constructed opposition between a cosmopolitan West and its putatively fundamentalist Other. Tolerance thus emerges as part of a civilizational discourse that identifies both tolerance and the tolerable with the West, marking nonliberal societies and practices as candidates for an intolerable barbarism. (ibid, p. 6)

Consistent with these analyses, an emerging body of research in the early 2000s stressed the risks for diversity policies of being caught within the same racialized rhetoric of otherness, drawing on the strong parallel observed between the spread of these concerns, in Europe and France, and the upfolding of highly repressive policies on migration and “security” (Fassin 2008; Bernardot and Doytcheva 2010;

¹⁷ Although the debate sparked in France as early as the beginning of the 1990s: see the special issue by the journal *Mots*, “Without distinction of ... race”, no. 33, December 1992.

¹⁸ On the language of “gender equality” and “sexual democracy” as a means of Western immigration and integration governmentality (Fassin 2010).

Lentin and Titley 2011). While the creation of the Ministry of Immigration, Integration and National Identity by President Sarkozy in 2007 was the cornerstone and flagship of this development in France, it has in fact translated into a multitude of security and freedom-curtailing measures, which, first aimed at immigrants, were commonly construed as “state xenophobia”.¹⁹ Yet, the goals of diversity and those of strict control over immigration and “security” can only draw a salient contradiction, and even ground the legitimate suspicion of a reciprocal instrumentalization. In words borrowed from interviews that I conducted with institutional and political leaders in the same period, valuing the diversity of French society would also be a means of protecting it against the economic necessity of new immigration, and the risks that it supposedly entails (Doytcheva 2015; see also Hall 2017).

A more explicit articulation of this nexus may be found in Hall’s (Hall 2017, p. 1562) recent critical address of the superdiversity concept,²⁰ which she argues should be moored more strongly to a “brutal migration milieu” and the “liberal paradox”, understood as the profound discrepancy of how “Western capitalism both refutes and requires migration”. These politics of contradiction and ethos of subordination are invested in the fortification of the contemporary European “punitive border complex”. Thus, the processes of diversity-making must be reconnected to its effects—by relying heavily on discrimination, before and after the border complex, the liberal paradox is said to actively produce the “diversification” of people across space.

In France, tracing the genealogy of diversity policies based on a media analysis, Mattelart and Hargreaves (2014) show how these policies focus not only on the integration of minorities, but also, and no less importantly, on the “protection of security”. The authors trace the origin of this ambivalence back to the early 1970s, and the policies then grounded in interculturality, aimed at contributing to the social promotion of immigrants, on the one hand, while maintaining them “in the knowledge of their culture of origin with a view to a possible return”, on the other. In my work on French corporate policies (see point 3 below), I have highlighted the tendency by social actors to construe diversity selectively, importantly dismissing race and ethnicity, but also migration, to the advantage of other, perceived as more socially meaningful status category—such as sex, disability, and age. “Diversity is not for strangers and even less for illegal aliens; hardly it is for immigrants, nor even for their children who, just like veiled women, often tend to get excluded from it” (Doytcheva 2015, p. 178).

The relation to religion and particularly to Islam offers here another immediate illustration and a very compelling case. While the “traditions” of social Catholicism do indeed irrigate certain networks supportive of the corporate diversity agenda in France (Helly and Doytcheva 2011), diversity of religious beliefs is hardly targeted by organizations, neither is it fully accepted, or only on the condition of being rendered invisible through job segregation or technology.²¹ The discourse by diversity actors, therefore, showcases huge ambivalences. While displaying in theory liberal stances on economic and managerial issues, their attitude turns out to be far more conservative, if not assimilationist and restrictive, when it comes to political ones—such as those relating for instance to immigration, religion, or *laïcité* (secularism).

3.3. Corporate Diversity at the Risk of Its Ideological Reversal

As evidenced by the last few examples, there is a palpable risk, attested by empirical evidence, of prescriptive and injunctive diversity conceptions, whereby the *praise for diversity* becomes the praise for “good diversity”, which importantly allows to distance all others—race or faith diversity,

¹⁹ See for example Olivier (2008), “Xénophobie d’Etat”, *L’Humanité*, 24 January 2008.

²⁰ Part of an “anniversary issue”, intended to place “classical papers in context”.

²¹ The most blatant example here is provided by fieldwork with a call centre (Doytcheva 2018b). While employers in the sector use the argument of “some kind of tolerance” (e.g., towards the wearing of the veil) as an employees’ retention scheme within a tight job market, at the same time, they have the usual practice of asking employees to change names—from Fatima to Marie—so as not to shock “clients’ sensibilities”. See also, Léa Balage, “La fin des discriminations au travail, c’est pour quand?” [When will the end of discrimination at work be achieved?], <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/edition/les-invites-de-mediapart/article/170516/la-fin-des-discriminations-au-travail-c-est-pour-quand> (accessed on 15 October 2019).

migration. The shift from presumably comprehensive, or “generic diversity” (Caradec and Doytcheva 2008) categorizations towards normative injunctions to “good diversity”, on a case-by-case basis and depending on the context, has indeed proven to be particularly relevant in France, where nation-building processes have been long grounded in the refusal of minorities and ethnic differentiation (Castañeda 2018, 2019).

Since the early 2000s and under the aegis of new EU legislation, France has gradually built up a legal and policy antidiscrimination framework, with companies being among the very first actors to translate these new legal provisions into categories of organizational change. In a gesture of “mimetic isomorphism” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) with procedures set up by the world’s leading actors, they embraced the diversity rationale, and in particular that of the “business case”, in a seemingly autonomous way, through a wide range of voluntary commitments, materializing in measures such as charters, policy statements, trophies, and quality marks.

However, as I have shown elsewhere (Doytcheva 2009, 2010), although initially centering issues of race and ethnic discrimination, corporate initiatives were marked from the outset by a twofold trend. On the one hand, it stemmed from a rationale of *decategorization*, thus following the path set by EU and French legislations to enact the “legal universality” of non-discrimination, with no less than 25 protected classes under current French law.²² On the other hand, in this context of swift and almost unlimited expansion of the concept, “tactical choices” were discretionarily endorsed by organizations, as to the ways of categorizing diversity and discrimination.²³

Official discourses around a “global” or “generic diversity” norm have thus been effectively coupled with informal practices, based on local arrangements and the statement of “priorities” by each organization. Although highly selective, these tactics nevertheless converged to de facto dismiss issues of race and racism from the space of diversity politics, as those concerns were commonly construed as a matter of “lower priority”, or that which must be “pushed” and “should follow”—thus giving direct advantage to other, perceived as more socially meaningful status categories, namely sex, disability, and age.

Over time, however, and drawing on a longitudinal analysis, these variable-geometry commitments and diversity *à la carte* tactics—initially thought of as transitional and temporary due to the novelty of these concerns—eventually solidified into more binding visions about “good” and “bad” diversities, with the latter—such as faith diversity along with that of race—being definitively banned from corporate plans (Doytcheva 2015, 2018b).

This shift from *comprehensive* to *selective* and ultimately *normative* diversity concepts, yielding the specter of threatening and undesirable otherness, has thus effectively contributed to reinscribe racist structures and boundaries at the heart of procedures heralding diversity. Unlike colorblindness, *white diversity* reinscribes discrimination within purportedly race-conscious frames and policies, designed precisely to right its wrongs. Yet, expanding on Streiff-Fénart’s (2013) analysis, these procedures seem to have become increasingly divisive, drawing a line between minorities perceived as “assimilable”, and other, often racialized, communities who continue to be construed as a “threat”. As also pointed out by Lentin and Titley (2011), against the backdrop of consolidated

²² This increase is also manifest at the EU level. From six categories initially provided for in Article 13 of the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam, which is the founding act of EU legal and policy framework against discrimination (i.e. “racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation”), the protected classes rose to 17 only a few years later in the 2000 EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

²³ Exploring the procedures of their justification, I have shown three main rationales used by companies to selectively categorise diversity: a tactical reasoning, first, predicated on the “most numerous” categories (e.g. sex and age), which are expected to “trigger” the diversity action plans; a participatory approach, second, based on democratic legitimacy and, according to which, since these commitments are voluntary they should “speak to the employees”, perhaps even “touch their heartstrings” (which benefits disability); finally, expertise, which is often self-expertise (based on brainstorming, internal polls), and actually allows for the dismissal of racism, commonly construed as a matter of “lower priority”, or which needs to be “pushed” and ultimately “should follow”.

neoliberal capitalism, where market-based rationales have been given unprecedented legitimacy, the distinction between “good” and “bad diversity” recovers the very expression of racism.

To what extent then, and how does the new frame of diversity, and more specifically in France, where one should not lose sight of the relative novelty and fragility of these concerns, fit in these trends? Or, can the generic and euphemistic dispositions that characterize it be apprehended as a positive qualification strategy, due to its implicit nature, since particularistic designations often trigger the harmful risk of backlash and resentment, or that of becoming in their turn a source of additional stigmatization?

While it is obviously difficult to unequivocally answer such general questions, empirical approaches have the clear advantage of uncovering the blind spots and contradictions triggered by processes of an extreme differentiation across diversity politics (Cooper 2004). Paired with what legal scholars have termed “the universal turn in protections” (Clarke 2011), these processes entail the risk of not only watering down protections, but also of conveying patterns of discriminatory inclusion, likely to privilege those whose lives somehow “approximate the dominant norm”.

This is what I have termed in regard to French settings and borrowing from Michel Foucault’s words, a *normalized diversity* (Doytcheva 2018a), or *diversity through normalization* (Alaktiff and Doytcheva 2018), namely one which is willing to “domesticate” and “naturalize” some forms of difference and otherness, but not all of them, at the risk of reinforcing mechanisms that perpetuate, rather than mitigate, bias and discrimination.

Beyond the case of France, however—which could be a “textbook” one—recent international research in law and society and sociology of organizations displays convergent results (Kirby et al. 2015; Krieger et al. 2015; Berrey et al. 2017). By considering the U.S. situation, the authors show how corporate diversity procedures can prove to be not only more or less (in)effective to combat discrimination, but are now being hijacked and subverted to the very disadvantage of the groups they were perceived as valuing. Relying on communication and other “soft-law” instruments—quality certifications, trophies, and awards—they are used by employers as a means of legitimizing unfair procedures at work (Kirby et al. 2015). In court, judges, who are increasingly deferring to managerial authority, consider the simple existence of an institutionalized organizational structure to infer non-discrimination: “good practices”, “diversity committees” or diversity officers afford organizations with greater legitimacy, and are even taken as evidence for fairness and equity (Krieger et al. 2015; Berrey et al. 2017). In an unprecedented way, when cases are brought before the courts, these policies turn against the employees, by substantially reducing their chances of succeeding in litigation, while making employers more likely to prevail. Similar to what I have observed in fieldwork with French corporations, procedures put in place against discrimination can even overlap with situations of direct discrimination, under the guise of preventing or correcting them.

Emphasizing the standardization of HR procedures, French professional pro-diversity initiatives similarly appear to conceal the reproduction of patterns of systemic and, not rarely, direct discrimination. This mostly occurs in the handling of variables deemed “operational”, “only technical”, and therefore “neutral”, such as *employabilité* (employability), *compétence* (competency), *savoir-être* (which could be imperfectly translated into soft skills), and even that of *personnalité* (personality). While proving hugely racialized (Ray 2019), these are nonetheless given center stage today in corporate efforts towards diversity, while also infusing more broadly the “competency management” that accompanies the French neoliberal rearticulation of *salariat* (Bouteiller and Gilbert 2005). Such practical categories, however, and the efforts they imply towards standardization, poorly hide and cannot exhaust the primarily social, relational, and power-laden dimensions in the valuation of individual skills. While the figure of the “responsible employee”, an actor of his own “employability”, is spreading, if this employee is in a strong position in the labor market, their job security seems to be assured; and if, by contrast, they are in a vulnerable one, they would instead very quickly become marginalized or excluded.

Ironically though, routine HR selection devices and tools are now being rebranded in diversity terms, without any reflexivity by professional actors to critically unpack their own positionality.

In French skill management styles, in particular, the instrumental and individualistic conception attached to *employabilité*—which experts trace back to the late 1980s—has begun to spoil and corrode the diversity standards and practices that were moored to it, thus re-encoding social inequality within *dispositifs* designed for making fair categorical decisions about individuals. Yet, as legal scholar Lochak (2003) puts it, once the practical impossibility of eradicating discrimination through market-oriented categories and interventions is assessed, there is no alternative but to avert and break free from them, whenever market rationales hinder that of equality.

4. Conclusions

In one of his first lectures at the *Collège de France*, in 1978–1979, Foucault (2004a, 2007) made an important distinction between two different forms of *normalization*—one of a set of techniques to exert power and control that are core to modern governmentality. Incidentally, he coined a new term to highlight the distinctions between two competing notions, namely *normation*, as opposed to *normalization*. Indeed, how does one normalize, he asked, in different societies and regimes? In disciplinary rationality—based on the repression of any deviation from the norm—normalization should be understood as the search for an “optimum”. “Disciplinary normalization”, he explains, consists in first positing a model considered as optimal in terms of a certain result, and then trying to get people, movements, and actions to conform with it. In this regime, the norm comes first, with “the normal being precisely that which can conform to the norm”:

In the disciplines, one started from a norm, and it was in relation to the training (*dressage*) carried out in reference to the norm that the normal could be distinguished from the abnormal [...] The normal being precisely that which can conform to the norm (ibid., p. 62) Here, instead, we have a plotting of the normal and the abnormal, of different curves of normality, and the operation of normalization consists in establishing an interplay between these different distributions of normality and [in] acting to bring the most unfavourable in line with those that are more favourable [...] The normal comes first and the norm is deduced from it. (ibid., p. 63)

That is why disciplinary normalization is better understood as “normation”—the process of setting up a norm intended to be replicated—in order to underline the primary and fundamental character of the norm. But in (neo)liberal governmentality, centered on “apparatus of security”, how does normalization work? In this governmentality regime, argues Foucault, normalization is far less about issuing and imposing a general norm; instead, it will primarily consist in plotting the normal and the abnormal on the basis of an empirical “study of normalities”, where certain distributions are considered to be, “if you like, more normal than others”. These distributions will serve as the norm. By bringing into play “different distributions of normality” in relation to each other, the operation of normalization will consist in realigning the less unfavorable with those perceived as more favorable. In this regime, the detection of the normal comes first, and “the norm is deduced from it”. As Foucault further differentiates:

There is and should not fail to be a fundamental relationship between the norm and the law, and that every system of law is related to a system of norms [...] but this normativity intrinsic to the law should not be confused with normalization [...] Techniques of normalization develop from and below a system of law, in its margins and maybe even against the law. (ibid., p. 57)

Ironically though, the normalization of diversity in neoliberal times does not rhyme with its imposition as a general norm (or not only), but equally with what would be its internal transformation towards “good” or “normal diversity”, that is, perceived as socially meaningful, desirable, acceptable, suitable, or favorable. This ultimately meant, in the case of France but also beyond, in the context of recent EU policy initiatives on antidiscrimination, diversity without race, or what I have termed here “white diversity”.

Recent theoretical advocacy of the frame of (super)diversity, intended to mark the epistemic and political “normalization” (Wessendorf 2014) of the global diversity doctrine thus appears to have importantly neglected the historical basis, severity, and foundations of racism and the pervasiveness of power structures and hierarchies of whiteness. These have translated into the capacity of majorities to invade and appropriate these normative spaces by speaking a complex language of inclusion and vulnerability. Borrowing from Foucault’s words, within neoliberal governmentality, whereby an “average normality” is brought into play by presenting it precisely as normal or favorable, this has led to the definition, as in the case of France, of what is, in my sense, a normalized diversity, characterized by both the timely circumvention of antidiscrimination law and the downplaying of certain patterns of prejudice, particularly along lines of race, faith, and ethnicity. In order to give a theoretical account of these phenomena, it would be interesting to link their analysis to classical sociological theories on inequality reproduction, particularly when it occurs within institutions that are considered as paradigmatically meritocratic and egalitarian (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970). Although the classist biases of notions of liberal meritocracy as a technology to manage and selectively include differences have been importantly uncovered and deconstructed, this work is still to be done with respect to race and ethnicity, and even more so in presumably universalistic and colorblind contexts, such as France and the corporate world.

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