Copenhagen Gender Conference 2024 Keynote:

Intersectionality in the Nordics

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ESSAY

Good afternoon, everyone

Thank you to all of you. To those helping make this conference run so smoothly, to the organizers, and to students, academics and others for being here and participating in gender research in each their own way. Thank you for the invitation to speak.

First, a few words of introduction. I work within two main areas. I am an Associate Professor at Aalborg University in Copenhagen and a Senior Advisor & consultant on social sustainability and DEI. Both fall within a social justice framework, and each is informed by the other. My academic research revolves around the study of discrimination and its explicit and implicit forms and expressions. My consultancy work centers on non-discrimination, DEI and social sustainability, how these are interlinked, and how they are integral to the international sustainability framework and requirements to practice.

The aim of this keynote is to highlight some significant issues and challenges related to intersectionality in Nordic contexts. To do this, I discuss and emphasize interconnections between several core tenets in intersectional scholarship. First, I emphasize the necessity of incorporating a structural perspective in intersectional work. This perspective requires an understanding of how intersectionality is intertwined and linked with historical and systemic dynamics that shape social realities.

Second, I argue that these structural dynamics are essential to maintaining a clearly defined and specified intersectionality framework. This framework should, in my theoretical perspective, center around *all* internationally recognized, disenfranchised and minoritized groups, as outlined in the international Human Rights framework. Historical oppression, along with the conditions that perpetuate inequity, is critical for grounding intersectional analyses.

The third issue I raise is the *role of intent*. The *role of intent* (not intent in itself) is closely linked to structural dynamics, particularly the asymmetric distribution of power. I discuss how emphasis and focus on the role of intent manifests as a significant challenge when addressing and navigating issues of intersectional inequity and discrimination.

The fourth tenet I discuss is complicity in connection with our entanglement and imbrication within structural frameworks. Examining complicity, I argue, invites a critical, introspective approach to intersectional work. It centers around how inequity can be unwittingly reproduced, even within intersectional and social justice work itself.

Finally, I address Nordic exceptionalism as a significant barrier to effective intersectional scholarship and practice in the Nordic context. I argue that it operates as a structural dynamic that normalizes specific narratives and myths about equality, thereby limiting how we understand and implement intersectionality. By obscuring the full range of oppression axes — the recognized grounds of discrimination and identity central to intersectional analysis—Nordic exceptionalism undermines the integration of intersectionality into policy and academic work. In doing so, it contributes to the ongoing reproduction of oppression and discrimination, often under the guise of equity and progress.

But let me begin by sharing part of my personal trajectory. I was born here in Denmark and moved to the U.S. as a small child. Being in Denmark during summers and spending time with family gave me a sense of being connected to and part of the concept or notion of Denmark and Danishness. My primary and secondary education took place in the States, where I also attained a degree in philosophy. As a matter of happenstance, I returned to Denmark in my early twenties. This transition brought both gifts and challenges. When I started living here full-time as a young woman, I came to realize that while Denmark was familiar in many ways, it was also fundamentally different. Among other things, the shift of context meant being seen, imagined, and understood through an entirely new lens. This came as something of a surprise.

In the U.S., I was accustomed to being perceived

through the intertwined lenses of "race," class, gender, and other identity markers. I am privileged, highly educated, cis-gendered, able-bodied, primarily heterosexual, and female. I am also non-white, with mixed Danish and Indian heritage. Growing up, I knew how I was viewed, the codes and interpretations connected to my body, skin color, gender, way of speaking, class: in short, where and how I fit within my primary societal framework (the U.S.). However, moving to Denmark, I found myself being read and construed fundamentally differently.

The context had shifted, and with it, so had the interpretation of not only my own identity – but of identity categories in general. The narratives of "race," gender, belonging, and difference that I had lived with in the U.S. didn't quite translate here. That is to say, they were interpreted in very different ways than I was accustomed to. Living here, I encountered resistances in regard to being able to define myself as I saw fit. I had never had my right to define myself challenged until arriving here, where I was met with troubling narratives and experiences based on how my body was interpreted, racialized, sexualized, and gendered. I encountered discrimination and racism on multiple axes, denial of that discrimination, and more.

This experience profoundly shaped my understanding of identity, inclusion, and the frameworks we use to navigate our social realities. It brought with it a new and visceral awareness of what it means to exist and navigate within the perception of others. It brought a sudden loss of what I previously could take for granted. Not only did I experience a personal sense of loss in terms of the entitlement and privilege that came with being perceived as I was in the U.S., but I also encountered a very material loss – of position, status, validity and dignity.

I found myself, now, no longer part of what hooks (1984), among others, might call "the center." Having taken that experience of center for granted, this was an unwelcome change. Being placed in the margin – marginalized – and othered - drastically reduced my material opportunities in terms of employment, academic access, and more.

While quite unsettling, this marginalized position also provided new insights. Tacit positionings and privileges I had previously not directed much attention to, or consciously considered in any deeper sense, were now issues I could reflect on in new ways. As an outsider, and now a target of discrimination and racism, I could see and feel the open, unfettered, and normalized intersectional discrimination (with a heavy emphasis on racism and sexism) in everyday Danish contexts, language, and practices. I could recognize and identify how different, interwoven and linked categories together formed discriminatory patterns. Though I didn't yet have the language for all of it, these experiences with sexism, racism, and ethnocentrism were the catalyst for my trajectory within intersectional discrimination research.

Had I lived here all my life, I'm not sure I would have taken note of or experienced the complex and often denigrating situations I met in quite the same way. They would likely not have been as apparent. Perhaps they would have felt normal. Had I grown up here, I might have accepted the narratives of denial and the discrimination, sexism, racism and so forth that I was experiencing and witnessing. It is likely that I would not have experienced the feeling of disappointment that arose when I realized that Danishness, or Nordic identity more broadly, was not what I presumed it to be, nor what it was widely perceived to be. I would most likely not have found it disturbing that sexism, racism and discrimination were denied or deflected. I may even have been so convinced by and invested in the dominant Nordic ideology of equality (Myong 2009) that any suggestion of inequality would have seemed preposterous. I might have believed, along with many others, that calling these out was due to a misunderstanding and misreading of the different situations.

But I didn't grow up here, and I was deeply concerned about the consequences of this kind of thinking and the practices I was witnessing. How was it

affecting young people, children, *my children,* health, economy? Belonging? What about Danes of color – how were they navigating in this? How could I find a way to talk about these issues? How could I protect my own family? What were some of the reasons that discrimination could exist so openly while being so wholeheartedly denied?

This experience, and the concerns it provoked, not only led me to think deeply about the concept of intersectionality, it was the catalyst for my work with intersectionality for the past 3 decades.

In order to understand why it seemed so difficult to have this conversation and acknowledge discrimination, I delved into my own academic background in philosophy, anthropology, and critical theory. In particular, I found valuable perspectives in gender & Queer studies, feminist & postcolonial theory, critical race theory (CRT), and human rights.

Using this framework, I began working with discrimination as an intersectional concept in everyday and organizational contexts. To do so, I relied on several core tenets. These tenets have been central to my work over the past thirty years. They draw on the intersectional approach pioneered by early black feminists (Collins & Bilge 2020) and cemented in research by Crenshaw, among others (Crenshaw et al. 1995), as well as the work of critical scholars like Spivak (1988) and hooks (1984) – but applied specifically to discrimination. In the following, I will emphasize some of these key themes: 1) a structural perspective, 2) Human Rights, 3) the role of intent, 4) complicity.

1 - A STRUCTURAL PERSPECTIVE:

Firstly, at the core of my own work is the importance of shifting focus from the individual level to include more abstract and structural perspectives and levels. This means directing attention to the mechanisms, norms, and historically anchored, implicit processes that underscore how individuals come to enact, reproduce, accept, excuse, and – importantly – become complicit in oppression, racism, and discrimination. It means focusing on identifying and addressing structural inequities and systems that perpetuate discrimination and racism, how these inform and link to other forms of discrimination, and how these are connected to and enmeshed with individual and collective forms and expressions of discrimination.

Emphasis on the structural means looking at how discrimination is reproduced and carried from generation to generation. One could see it as an inheritance, albeit a questionable one (Skadegård 2023). It means being wary of thinking about oppression, discrimination and intersectionality mainly in terms of personal experiences, prejudice, bias, good and bad folks, or the political right or left.

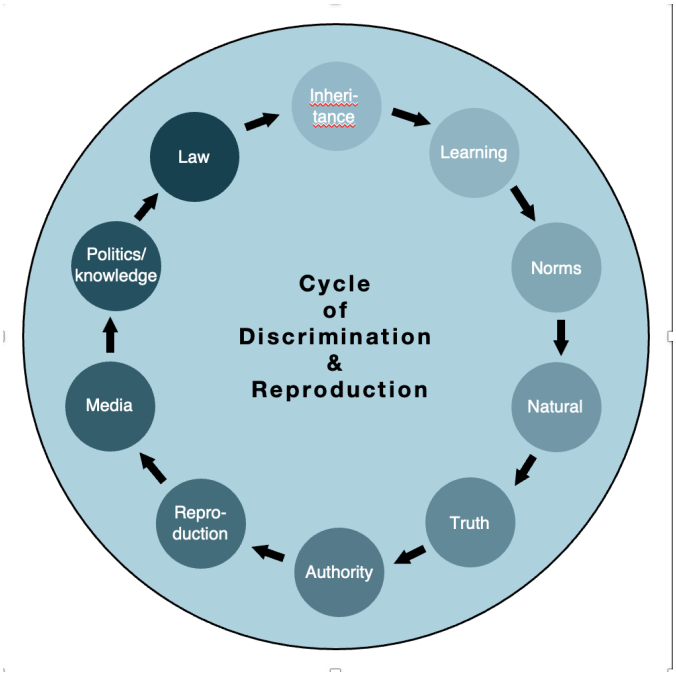

Figure 1

In figure 1, this process is illustrated in the form of a type of cycle. The small circles within the large figure each represent an element of the cycle, and how they are interlinked. The figure describes a process in which structural aspects of discrimination are culturally and historically inherited, and how this inheritance informs, continuously reproduces, and perpetuates discrimination.

These issues are not merely questions of opinions and beliefs, but about practices, systems, structures. They

are about understanding how systems of power operate in ways that maintain inequality – but also how these are enmeshed and normalized within individual practices, bodies, emotions, and so forth.

I should emphasize that I am not, of course, referring to *structuralism* when I use the term structural. I am referring to formative, normative frameworks. Historical processes, naturalized beliefs and habits, social, cultural, historical, ideological and institutional heritage and inheritance. Perhaps this is a moot point here, but I am often asked to clarify, so there you are.

2 – HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE DISCRIMINATION GROUNDS:

In order to address oppression as an intersectional challenge, we need to be able to identify not only how discrimination is reproduced and perpetuated, but also what comprises discrimination more specifically. This requires us to ground intersectionality within clearly defined categories of discrimination, such as race, class, and gender. As Crenshaw (1991) has shown us, it is important to think about these categories not as arbitrary or eclectic choices, but as legally protected categories that are central to understanding power dynamics.

Intersectionality, and understanding discrimination as an intersectional challenge, means addressing and encompassing – focusing – on historically disenfranchised groups. Legally protected groups. In European and international contexts, these are defined within the international human rights conventions. This framework provides a common, normative denominator. That is, it defines and identifies historically oppressed and disenfranchised categories of identity that we have made a commitment to protect, categories that are protected under our national laws (Gerards 2013; Justesen 2003).

In Europe, we must continue to build on this legacy, ensuring that discussions of intersectionality remain centered on historically oppressed and disenfranchised categories of identity. When we prioritize a single group (such as gender) or introduce arbitrary categories, we dilute the integrity of intersectional work, causing it to lose meaning. At its core, intersectionality examines normative power structures, axes of oppression, and power asymmetry which underpin discrimination and the grounds of discrimination (Skadegård & Yang 2025). When we incorporate unrelated or eclectic categories without a historical connection to oppression, we shift away from addressing the core issues and underlying powered dynamics that underscore discrimination and inequity. It is essential to recognize that not all instances of unfairness or unequal treatment fall within the framework of discrimination and intersectionality.

Working with discrimination and intersectionality in practice, be it in educational, academic, organizational, or everyday contexts, requires knowing what we are looking at, understanding the subtle, historical and normative power dynamics that underscore these issues, and even more importantly, which categories are vulnerable and require protection. Without clarity, we run the risk of weakening not only our efforts for social justice, but also the integrity of our work.

An important — and perhaps reassuring — point is that recognized grounds of discrimination are neither fixed nor inherently rigid categories (Banton, 2003). They are fluid and evolve over time, albeit gradually. The nature of intersectional categories also varies depending on the context. For instance, in the United States, they are referred to as "protected classes" and are defined within a civil liberties framework, whereas in Europe, they are grounded in human rights principles. Crenshaw's concept of "axes of oppression" highlights the role of power, encompassing both frameworks while acknowledging their distinctions and ongoing evolution (Crenshaw, 1991).

3 – DISCRIMINATION AND THE ROLE OF INTENT

My third tenet – or point of contention – is the need

to critically examine the role of intent in discussions of discrimination. Let me point out that I am not interested in intent in and of itself. It is rather *the role* of and *emphasis on* intent, which is a somewhat different issue.

These underlie a tendency to overemphasize *the role of intent* in the specific context of inequity and discrimination, while underemphasizing the discriminatory act or practice, as well as the impact of discrimination on the target. Within this understanding, a disproportionate focus on intent serves to obscure the broader structural issues at play in cases of discrimination.

Discussions on the role of intent in discrimination naturally intersect with broader debates in consequentialist ethics and utilitarianism. However, I do not aim to engage in a wider exploration of intent or motivation as stand-alone issues. My focus is guided by a social justice and human rights perspective, highlighting the connections between structural inequalities, historical oppression, and power dynamics. These elements underlie and contribute to a tendency to overemphasize *the role of intent* in discussions of inequity and discrimination, often at the expense of acknowledging the discriminatory act itself and the tangible impact on targets. Within this framework, a disproportionate focus on intent can obscure the broader structural factors at play in discrimination, ultimately reinforcing the power held by those in majoritized positions and positions of authority to define what constitutes discrimination.

To address discrimination requires keeping in mind that discrimination, as defined within human rights and legal frameworks (Justesen 2003), is an action or an identifiable dynamic. It is not necessarily an opinion, belief, moral position, or feeling. I think about it this way: Discrimination can be divided – roughly speaking – into 3 parts. 1) The source of discrimination, 2) the discrimination/discriminatory act itself, and 3) the target or impacted individual or group (Skadegård 2023).

Traditionally, emphasis when discussing and defining discrimination has weighed heavily on the *source* of discrimination and intent. That is — was there negative intent or intent to harm? In contrast, the discrimination itself (the act, law, practice, etc.) in question, and the *impact* of discrimination on the target (as well as the knowledge or experience of the target) has been attributed less focus (Crump 2010). This way of thinking about discrimination is connected to seeing discrimination as a primarily individual and moral issue, rather than a historically and structurally informed, deeply rooted dynamic. It is linked to seeing discrimination as less complex, non-intersectional, and not linked to historical oppressions. It is also a handy way to maintain the power of definition in the hands of the powered positions.

Further, when discussions of discrimination and oppression center on "intent," they frame discrimination as an individualized issue — one contingent on the morality and beliefs of the alleged perpetrator. This perspective not only narrows the understanding of discrimination, preventing it from being seen as a collective, socially embedded, and structural issue, but also provides an avenue for the alleged perpetrator (individual or collective) to claim a lack of negative intent. In doing so, it grants significant authoritative weight to the subjective experience of the alleged perpetrator. Furthermore, because intent and beliefs are inherently inaccessible to others, assessing the truthfulness of such claims becomes a nearly impossible and murky business.

By definition, discrimination involves the negative differential treatment of minoritized groups or individuals by a dominant, majoritized individual, group or representative system. When intent is given undue focus, its subjective nature allows those in positions of power—the very individuals or groups with the ability to discriminate—to control the narrative and define what constitutes discrimination.

Overemphasis on intent thus centers the source of discrimination and shifts attention away from other critical and equally important elements of discrimination, including the discriminatory act itself, the

target of discrimination, and the impact of such practices on those affected. As such, an imbalance emerges when *the role of intent* is given greater weight than other elements of discrimination. Emphasizing *the role of intent* disproportionately prioritizes the perspective of the source of discrimination — who, by definition, belongs to a majoritized group — while diminishing the significance of the discriminatory act, the perspective of the target, and the broader structural dimensions of discrimination (Skadegård 2023).

Moreover, when majoritized individuals hold normative authority to define and validate discriminatory actions, it reinforces and perpetuates existing inequity and power dynamics. Overvaluing intent thus exacerbates the imbalance between majoritized groups (source) and minoritized groups (targets), effectively granting greater legitimacy to the source or dominant position than to the discrimination itself and the lived experiences of targets and the impacts on targets.

Such an imbalance reinforces and legitimizes both systemic and individual discrimination. For both the source and the target, subjectivity plays a role in how intent and experienced discrimination are perceived. Prioritizing the *role of intent* over the lived experience of discrimination assigns greater value to the subjective perspective of the source than to that of the target.

In doing so, disproportionate emphasis on intent perpetuates an inherent discriminatory power asymmetry, legitimizing the viewpoint of the majoritized position while diminishing the validity of the target's experience. This focus on *the role of intent* not only serves as a distraction but also contributes to the further marginalization or erasure of those subjected to discrimination.

4 – COMPLICITY

The fourth theme I want to address is complicity. Complicity refers to the acceptance of wrongdoing or passive acquiescence to injustice. It implies a form of partnership in harmful actions — whether immoral, illicit, or criminal—and carries with it a sense of accountability. In legal contexts, complicity can result in criminal charges. But beyond overt legal violations, we must also consider how complicity operates more subtly within our everyday practices and institutional structures.

In both feminist and postcolonial critiques, complicity — especially in its unconscious forms—remains a persistent force. The acceptance or normalization of oppressive structures, whether through ideological alignment or passive compliance, reinforces existing hierarchies. Transformation begins with recognizing complicity not as inevitable, but as a kind of practice requiring structural change in both thought and action.

Complicity is inseparable from broader discussions of power, ideology, and oppression. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) critiques white, middle-class Western feminists for their role in upholding Western masculinist discourses, demonstrating how certain feminist positions can wittingly and unwittingly reinforce dominant power structures. As she notes, "When publishing women are from the dominant 'culture,' they sometimes share, with male authors, the tendency to create an incohate 'other'" (Spivak 1988, p. 113). In my work, complicity is central to understanding how power and discrimination are sustained—through normalization, inherited practices, assumptions, beliefs, and language (Skadegård 2018). Complicity is embedded in these processes.

As academics and theorists, we are often complicit in power structures, wittingly or unwittingly. Our complicity lies in the forms of knowledge we produce and legitimize, and in the academic norms we uphold. We are complicit when we privilege European epistemologies over others, when we tolerate discriminatory practices in our institutions, or when we allow harmful comments and actions to go unchallenged. It manifests in hiring practices that favor closed,

majoritized networks, and in organizing academic events without ensuring equity in representation or compensation. The list is very, very long.

Complicity is a lived paradox. It reflects our entanglement in social structures that may feel or be unavoidable — shaped by history, norms, and shared conceptual frameworks. The challenge lies in becoming aware of how we are imbricated in systems of oppression and actively seeking ways to resist them. As Spivak (1988) suggests, it is about cultivating awareness and, wherever possible, pushing against the grain.

INTERSECTIONALITY

The above issues are all central to the way in which I think about intersectionality. It is well known that intersectionality as a theoretical and analytical concept was developed to explore the ways various forms of discrimination—such as those based on race, gender, class, and sexuality—are interwoven and enmeshed (Crenshaw 1991). In the U.S., this concept has been deeply connected to the realities of racialization, colonialism, and enslavement. It has served as a powerful tool for understanding the complexity of identity and the multiplicity of oppressions individuals face, and the complexity of that oppression.

However, as intersectionality has traveled across the Atlantic and into the Nordic context, it has undergone significant transformations. In its journey from the U.S. to the Nordics, intersectionality has come to be redefined in ways that often strip it of its central focus on "race" and other key categories of discrimination. Here, the concept has been absorbed into a framework that frequently prioritizes certain identity categories, particularly gender, while sidelining discussions of other discrimination grounds such as "race," religion, ethnicity, age, heritage, and especially the links to historical oppression and systems of power.

In some contexts, we even see arbitrary categories introduced that are not connected to historical axes of oppression and do not address recognized discrimination grounds or protected categories. As a result, intersectionality risks becoming a tool for addressing social differences more generally, rather than a framework for addressing historical and systemic power, inequalities and oppression. To understand this shift or change in how intersectionality translates to the Nordics – and to better understand several of the challenges I have discussed earlier, I look to Nordic exceptionalism.

Nordic exceptionalism is an important factor, one that informs and contributes to these and other related dilemmas. These include denial, complicity, focus on the individual level, normalized discrimination, sidelining race, religion, and so forth.

Nordic exceptionalism is a shared belief that the Nordic countries are fundamentally different from, and superior to, other nations, particularly in terms of social progressiveness, equality, and human rights. This narrative paints the Nordics as essentially non-racist, non-sexist, and inherently egalitarian societies. It permeates public discourse and shapes how these societies see themselves and are seen by others. It was part of the narrative that informed my own expectations when I moved back to Denmark. As a person with Danish heritage, this narrative was a point of pride.

However, exceptionalism has a more sinister side. It functions to support denial and exoneration of these societies from the very issues they claim to have transcended. It shrouds and even contributes to erasures of knowledge and awareness of Nordic colonialism, past and present, of Nordic patriarchy, of the Nordic history of eugenics and other violent, oppressive practices. It contributes to a narrative of saviorism deeply rooted in notions of moral superiority - being "better than" racist and discriminatory "others."

In the context of intersectionality, this means that conversations often shift away from the lived realities of racism, sexism, islamophobia, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, ageism, and other forms of discrimination, instead focusing on maintaining or even

protecting the myth of the progressive Nordic identity. As such, intersectionality risks being co-opted to reinforce exceptionalism rather than challenge it. Instead of exploring the intersecting forms of historical oppression within Nordic societies, intersectionality is too often employed to highlight how these societies *are already* good and progressive. Because of this, they can claim to only need to look at *improving on* a few axes of oppression. Among other things, this has contributed to a disproportionate focus on (majoritized) gender equality — particularly the advancement of majoritized women, while largely ignoring how race, religion, sexuality, gender, age, ethnicity, and other factors complicate these narratives. This reinscription of intersectionality in the Nordic context has several practical implications, for example:

One of these is a tendency to prioritize whiteness. That is, discussions around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) often end up exonerating the majoritized center rather than addressing the actual targets of discrimination, that is, those marginalized due to racialization, ethnicity, religion, ability, sexuality, or other intersecting protected categories. This can happen when we reproduce exceptionalist narratives that tend to seek neo-racist explanations for inequality in challenges presumed to be inherent in constructions of *cultural* or *ethnic* difference. That is, we blame target groups for being "culturally" unable to adapt, rather than address structural and historical discrimination which is likely to play a far more significant role. Further, those of us with platforms within academia, business, leadership, media, politics, etc. may often focus on our own experiences of oppression, centering aspects most relevant to our own lives. However, when we overlook other forms of oppression and fail to critically examine our own privilege, we risk missing how we might be complicit in the very systems of oppression we seek to challenge.

Another consequence of Nordic exceptionalism is widespread denial of discrimination. As described earlier, there is a tendency to defend and protect a good, exceptional Nordic identity. This means that the realities of racism, sexism, and other forms of historical oppression are often downplayed, underdiscussed or denied within educational practices, as well as in policy, practice, political discourse, etc. There is minimal knowledge dissemination in schools, pedagogical contexts, across educational sectors, in research production, etc. There is little or no cross-disciplinary research focus and/or integration of discrimination and racism research perspectives in academic disciplines where such knowledge is highly relevant and would therefore benefit from addressing these issues in their research. For example, in AI, psychology, sociology, medicine and health, organizational studies, DEI, architecture, tech, and much, much more. This is also evident in a widespread tendency to individualize discrimination and conceptualize it as a matter of personal opinion and morality, rather than addressing it as structural, historical, as well as a cross-disciplinary scientific field that has existed for well over a hundred years.

Another related issue or consequence of the above is the way power dynamics in institutions function in practice. Even spaces that speak the language of non-discrimination, diversity, or DEI, and as such claim commitment to non-discrimination & diversity, are often co-opted by persons high on a majoritized spectrum or scale. As such, the power dynamics tend to remain largely unchanged. For example, those in positions of power in universities, research centers, and other institutions are overwhelmingly white. Non-white academics, when and if present, often find themselves sidelined and in precarious positions and employment. This is also the case in many organizations and companies that are obligated to redress inequality and discrimination. As such, the promise of exceptionalism, as well as of intersectionality and non-discrimination, remains unfulfilled. Single-axis approaches and reproduction of power create complicity, regardless of intent.

So, how do we move toward a truly intersectional and inclusive framework in the Nordics?

This is a difficult question. It requires that we confront

what for many of us is rather uncomfortable, perhaps even counterintuitive. Discrimination is too often framed as an individualized problem that can be "fixed" through awareness or attitude changes, rather than as a systemic issue requiring a deeper and collective reckoning with history and power. We need to acknowledge – and recognize - how the narrative of Nordic exceptionalism has shaped and limited our understanding of intersectionality as well as discrimination, equality and oppression. This involves questioning our own motivations, desires, fears, and assumptions, and recognizing that the closed hubs of power and privilege may not be as progressive or inclusive as they claim or seek to be.

We need to expand the conversation beyond a narrow focus on gender, sexuality, and whiteness to include the full spectrum of intersecting identities and oppressions. I fervently argue that our discussions of intersectionality must remain focused on oppressed and disenfranchised categories of identity. This requires a commitment to listening to and amplifying marginalized voices, rather than speaking for them or co-opting their struggles to reinforce existing power structures or our own positions.

We need to be honest about the limitations of the current approach to intersectionality in the Nordics. This means acknowledging that the structures claiming to support diversity and inclusion are often part of the problem. We must be willing to dismantle these structures and build new ones that truly reflect the diversity of our societies. We must remember that intersectionality means addressing axes of oppression and historical disenfranchisement. Intersectionality is not a question of any social difference or randomly selected categories. It is also not sufficient to address the individual level. Structures and systems of oppression are key to intersectional work.

A CALL TO ACTION

My hope is that we raise our hands and voices against oppression. Acknowledging discrimination, intersectionality, exceptionalism and so forth is a first step – but it is not enough. All of us must be willing, and brave enough, to act and engage critically, to speak up, speak out and act on the injustice we see, also when this is uncomfortable.

As I conclude, I want to leave you with a challenge: How do we break the mold? How do we move beyond the narratives of exceptionalism and denial to create a more inclusive and intersectional future? What can we do collectively? And what can we do individually, with whatever platform we may have?

This is a collective task that requires all of us to engage critically with our own positions, to listen deeply to those who have been marginalized, to redistribute power – that is, to be willing to share our power in ways that may be uncomfortable, may even cost us, but are ultimately necessary.

Thank you.

NOTES

[1]This text is a revised version of my keynote address delivered at the Danish Gender Conference, hosted by Copenhagen Business School in early fall 2024. As it was originally presented to a live audience, I refer to the reader as part of a collective — using "we," "you," and "us" to reflect the rhetorical style and inclusive intent of the address.

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