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## What is in the Scandinavian Nexus of “Islamophobia, Multiculturalism, and Muslim-Western Relations”?

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### Abstract

Studies of European political party programmes, social movements, news media coverage, scores of books, and social media networks have embraced a negative dialogue towards migrants, whose identities are increasingly seen as incompatible with ‘Western’ values and presenting a major challenge to democracy. Sponsors of these public discourses support anti-immigration and oppositional stances to ‘migrant sympathizers’, who are often represented as traitors or cowards. They also fuel a process where xenophobia, Islamophobia and zero-tolerance have become naturalized and morally accepted ways to respond to the non-Western migrants. The objective of this article is to explore how this position embeds a number of other negativities, such as multiculturalists, feminists, and ‘liberals’ (left-wingers). The article approaches this coexistence of negativities as a ‘nexus of exclusionary beliefs’ with its blurred relations and taken for granted assumptions in the Muhammad Cartoon Affair in Denmark, the media coverage of the terrorist attack in Norway 2011; a blog entry about Radical Islam, feminism and left-wingers; and discussion about immigrant youth and drinking on a website connected to one of Denmark’s most popular radio programmes targeting younger listeners.

*Keywords: cultural incompatibility, Islamophobia, neo-nationalism, exclusionary beliefs, social media blogs, Scandinavia.*

Since the early 1990s the attempts to strengthen the nation-state and the proliferation of morality in Denmark have become a basis for looking at 'difference'. There is no clear beginning of this neo-nationalism in Denmark, but two milestones stand out in the post-1989 world. A national referendum on the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 about the expansion of the European Union left a populist slot wide open, when Danish voters defied their politicians and voted "No" to the treaty. A few years later groups of politicians in the newly formed radical right wing populist party, The Danish People's Party and a tabloid newspaper, *Ekstra Bladet* opportunistically teamed up and decided to play the nationalist card and to use crass and brutal confrontational rhetoric against foreigners and policies on foreigners in Denmark (Hervik, 1999; 2011). A new emphasis on 'Danish values' as opposed 'non-Western' migrants, particularly Muslims with a 'democratic deficit' and annoyingly different values entered the public debates frequently. Being 'for' or 'against' people, 'liking' or 'disliking' them, and dividing 'different' people into 'good' and 'bad' (Mamdani, 2005), became a new moralizing way of reasoning about other 'different' people that is particularly apt for creating community and negativities toward 'cultural' others (Hervik, 2014).

The totalizing discourses that emerged in the course of the 2000s have reified the different actions and discourse of Muslims in Denmark (and around the world). This happened to such an extent that the news media reified Danish discourses and actions, treating 'Denmark' as a unitary actor that opposes itself to 'Islam', 'Muslim culture', 'The Muslim World', and 'The Muslim Community', and the process recast Danish Muslims as 'Muslims'. The objective of this article is to explore how this position embeds a number of other negativities, such as multiculturalists, feminists, and 'liberals' (left-wingers)<sup>1</sup>.

Robert Miles has convincingly argued that ideologies of racism and nationalism are relational and the ideas of 'race' and 'nation' (the outcome of racial discrimination and 'nationalism') are categories of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion (1993:55). If we follow Benedict Anderson and see nationalism as the idea of an imagined community of cultural homogeneity the implication is that some people are included and others excluded and that those who hold this idea in common decide upon these matters. To build inclusion, neo-nationalism offers a firm control of immigration, a zero-tolerance policy toward labour migrants, and a promise to restore familiar forms of identification, particularly around the nation (Gingrich and Banks, 2006). Since the inclusion/exclusion dichotomy tends to fall precisely along cultural and/or racial lines, neo-nationalism and neo-racism are two sides of the same phenomenon.

The discourse of incompatibility between so-called Western or democratic values and so-called non-Western or undemocratic values along with the 'War on terror' have led to a polarization in society and adaptation of negative dialogue as a dominant approach to newcomers to the country (Hervik, 2011; 2012b; 2014). A negative dialogue is destructive in that it relies on a belief that certain conflicts are unavoidable and certain cultural encounters are impossible to resolve since verbal dialogue was deemed impossible. It is destructive because it constitutes an active refusal to engage in dialogue. Even in those instances when it employs a vocabulary of

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<sup>1</sup> The explorative nature of the article has to be seen in relation to a larger research project embarked upon in 2014.

dialogue this is only to mask what is actually a monologue. These discourses rely on simple binaries that deflect attention from *actual* differences and similarities. By making this distinction, I emphasize the difference between ‘cultures’ and stories about these differences. On closer inspection other differences are implicit and constituted at the same time as anti-migration is.

Another milestone appeared at the start of the new millennium, when a strategy that is known as a ‘cultural war of values’ was instigated by the government of Anders Fogh Rasmussen, when he took over and formed a nationalist populist oriented coalition with a strong anti-migration agenda in November 2001 (Hervik, 2014). This political strategy led to the emergence in public circulation of ideas of cultural incompatibility. It naturalized xenophobic reactions (Bonilla-Silva, 2009; Hervik, 1999;2011). This proliferation of morality in the public sphere is a further mainstreaming of radical right ideas and values.

Oppositional cultural logics seem in the last decades to be particularly important for identity formation in Western thought, not least because actions that exclude and include spring from them. They are exclusionary sentiments and practices based on what scholars characterize as an oppositional bipolar logic between ‘us’ as similar and ‘them’ as different and therefore incompatible. In all ‘us’/‘them’ divisions there is a totality of unequal bipolarity: the ‘us’ (the ‘we-group’ or ‘in-group’) is valued positively and superior, ‘they’ (‘out-group’) are associated with negativity and inferiority (Danesi, 2009).

The news media and politicians’ choice of words and categories like ‘Non-Westerners’, ‘Muslims’, ‘Islamists’, ‘ethnicity’, ‘integration’ and ‘terrorists’ contributes to painting the radical ‘Other’ as threatening ‘national values’. This is made understandable through publicly circulating narratives of clashing cultures operating on strong dichotomies of US, usually the West, the good guys, and those who belong together ‘naturally’ and They, as the out-group, and non-West, who do not belong. This othering process represents a ‘Them’ as negative, and inferior, threatening out of which a new positive national ‘I’ is constructed (Døving, 2010; Gad, 2008). Resistance to an ‘external Other’ and ideas of incompatible values have fostered a surprising agreement among Danes that xenophobic reactions to immigrants particularly from non-Western countries are both *natural* and *acceptable* (Hervik, 2011; forthcoming). In practice of course, such reactions are *naturalized* rather than being *natural* (Baumann, 1999).

However, there is a whole box full of co-existing binaries that are present in the public discourses and strategies, but also in people’s everyday reasoning. I will pursue the argument that the entrenched ‘West’ and ‘Islam’ binary is a gross simplification of what goes on in what I will call the Scandinavian Nexus of exclusionary thinking that primarily seems to revolve around anti-Muslim racism.<sup>2</sup> First, I will briefly introduce a theoretical inspiration for the argument about co-existing negativities. Then I will turn to two recent historical mega-events, the Muhammad Cartoon Story of 2005/6 and the terrorist attack in Norway on July 22, 2011 committed by Anders Breivik. From these I will infer the negativities that risks being devoured by the dominant narrative of a

<sup>2</sup> Increasing such negative sentiments towards immigrants form a ‘problematic nexus of Islamophobia, multiculturalism, and Muslim-West relations’ (Kalin, 2011:xxvi) with new nationalism and Eurocentrism as two exclusionary nodes.

'West vs. Islam' global conflict. After that I turn to two social media entries to explore the debates on issues of Islam and immigration.

### *Who is the target of neo-nationalism, neo-racism and the cultural war of values?*

Hellström and Hervik (2014) found that Danish political parties, including the Danish People's party of the radical right, see non-Western migrants and particularly Islam and Muslims, as 'the beast', which is to be contained, if not kept away from coming to Denmark. The political competition falls along the lines of how far you will go in rhetoric and policies about immigrants. In Sweden, political parties were equally tough in the tone of language against the radical right wing party, the Sweden Democrats. Although changes were taking place in Sweden, the difference was clear: the 'beast' so to speak in Denmark was Islam. In Sweden it was the Sweden Democrats. This difference may explain why Danish politicians favour economic support for initiatives that curb 'radicalization' of Danish Muslim youth, the Swedish counter-reaction apart from addressing this radicalization tend to see the Sweden Democrats as an incubator for Islamophobia<sup>3</sup>.

The Danish strategy of cultural war of value as mentioned above has always been associated with a harsh tone and confrontational language when referring to Muslims in Denmark and in the rest of the world. However, there seems to be a blind spot in the debate about Muslims. The Muslims are the object of the debate, but the very strategy, it can be argued, is not based on an analysis of what Muslims say or do in Denmark or in the world, but is directed at domestic political adversaries and certain opinion makers. When the new government came into power, one of the first things they did was to sign an agreement with the Danish People's Party about closing the Danish Centre for Human Rights and certain semi-public bodies such as The Board for Ethnic Equality on the grounds that their chairpersons were too politically correct. The Danish People's Party was particularly critical of the two chairpersons, Morten Kjærum of the Centre for Human Rights and Kjeld Holm of the Board for Ethnic Equality, whom they accused of being politically correct because of their criticism of the party's politics. After intense discussion and foreign pressure, a new deal was struck. The Board for Ethnic Equality was closed, the Centre for Human Rights was closed as an independent institution, since they had been critical about the Danish People's Party's political statements. The centre was finally saved, but restructured. Nevertheless, the initial agreement shows domestic opposition is central to the cultural war of value initiatives.

In Robert Miles' terms racism correlates with different kinds of '-isms', which share a common content or generalized object, which allows them to be joined together or interrelated, to be expressed in ways in which elements of one are incorporated in the other (1989). For example, 'new racist' ideas are often implied under 'human rights' (with logics like 'veiled, oppressed and in need of rescue (to

<sup>3</sup> Lindberg, A. (2015) Islamofobins motor är SD. Editorial, *Aftonbladet*, January 28. <http://www.aftonbladet.se/ledare/ledarkronika/anderslindberg/article20233193.ab> Accessed: 17-03-2015

restore rights)) (Abu-Lughod, 2013), de-moralization of society and democratic citizenship discourses. Etienne Balibar is operating along similar lines but goes further, when he reviewed political debates in anthropology on the status of migrants and refugees with respect to rights of citizenship and residence, indicated that behind the positions and identity categories a specific we-group emerges that promotes itself through its opposite, which it negates (Balibar, 2005). The we-group does identity-work by opposing the cultural other or establishing 'itself as the other's other' (Balibar, 2005). Contradicting the norm by either deviating from or threatening to destroy it is also central to Michel Foucault's famous argument that the definition of normality takes place through a simultaneous negation of its opposite (Foucault, 2003). By introducing 'normality' as the point of departure for establishing identity through an opposite (Balibar, 2012), in addition to 'nation' (Balibar, 2005). Balibar's call to rework definitions of racism makes sense. The cultural logic of social exclusion understood through the establishment of intrinsic relations to other forms of exclusion entailed by for instance sexism, nationalism, imperialism, social or 'bio-political' marginalization. In other words, neonationalism and neoracism are intrinsically related to other forms of exclusion. Racism is about class (Miles, 1993), but also a political project (Anthias, 2012). Racism is also about whiteness, lost masculine authoritarianism (Keskinen, 2013), and the narcissism of minor differences (Appadurai, 2006, Ignatieff, 1998) so we must think of these as a nexus of not just one form of exclusionary belief or practice. Therefore the question is who are the targets of these accusations of racism, anti-racism, Islamophobia, and tolerance?

Two recent dramatic episodes are particularly relevant in this regard: The Muhammad Cartoon Crisis in Denmark 2005/6 and the massacre on July 22 in Norway (known in Scandinavia simple as '22/7').

### *The debate on integration during the Muhammad Cartoon crisis in 2005/2006*

The Muhammad Cartoon conflict revolves around the Danish newspaper, *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten*, which published 12 cartoons of the prophet Muhammad by Danish cartoonist. The drawings offended Danish Muslims, but stories about what the publication represented and a general denial of dialogue with Muslims about cartoons and other issues lead to strong, violent global reactions four and a half months after the publication. All over the world where the stories were debated and talked about, the debate was first and foremost couched in terms of a global conflict between 'Islam' and the 'West.'

Nonetheless, the Muhammad Cartoon controversy has also shown that there is much more to this than a global narrative of bipolar clashes along the fault-lines of Islam, the so-called West, and Chinese civilizations. In Denmark a study of articles in *Jyllands-Posten* in the first months of 2006 by journalists and external commentators revealed a dominant discourse that we can call freedom of speech as a Danish freedom. This voiced the radical right and anti-Islamic ideology. The study revealed, on the one hand, that the writers were part of a social-political network including the American neo-conservative community on the East Coast of the US (Berg and

Hervik, 2007; Hervik 2012a; b). On the other hand, it showed shared neo-conservative core values and cultural logics that extended beyond the radical right far into the mainstream conversations and exchanges in the Danish media. I found that the identity narrative told as the clash of civilization was based on the question of “who we are not” (or whom we dislike), which creates an empty tautology: “We are who we are not”. The history of this idea can be traced to German ideologue of the Nazi period, Carl Schmitt, and his work on ‘the political’. In his scheme a politician treats his adversary as a ‘foe or friend’ without compromise, apologies or negotiations. However, Schmitt was not talking about Islam, civilizations or cultures, but argued for what was the responsible way to treat a political opponent generally and enact ‘the political’. In recent decades, Schmitt’s critique of liberal democracy has been used against left-wingers, multiculturalists, liberals, relativists, conflict-resolvers who used dollars rather than guns, and the politically correct who stood in the way and hindered the ‘just’ fight against the so-called threatening and dangerous Muslim enemy (Rasch, 2000; Schmitt, [1932] 1996).

Upon analysing the media debate in France and Denmark, Boe and Hervik (2008) found that Islam was not the only ‘enemy’. Specific cultural figures emerged within the rigid dichotomies of Orientalist representations. For instance, non-Muslim opponents of the publications appear as ‘Traitors’ or ‘Cowards’. ‘Traitors’ – politicians and others who had let Muslims into Europe were attacked in equally strong rhetoric, and ‘cowards’ – those who did not stand up to defend ‘freedom of speech’ and ‘democracy’ when it really counted, were also under attack. A third figure emerges that of the ‘apostate’ or the ‘civilized other’, a person of Muslim background who has embraced ‘Our’ values and denounces Islam and ‘Islamism’.

The analysis of the media coverage of the Muhammad Cartoon crisis has shown that the opposition that emerges between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ in their rhetoric is not simply based on a global conflict of ‘the West against the Muslim world’, but subtly includes figures of ‘Internal Enemies’ and ‘Others’ who have adopted ‘Our’ ways.

From this emerges the reproduction the perception of ‘Good’ Muslims and ‘Bad’ Muslims, so familiar in religion, the entertainment industry and in news coverage. A ‘good’ Muslim, explains Mamdani (2005), is a Muslim anxious to detach himself from terrorism and supporting US. Those not proven good become justifiable prey.

### *Terrorist Anders Behring Breivik’s attacks in Norway on 22 July 2011*

Radical and extreme right wing populists are known to subscribe to these narratives of clashing cultures, but they also attack domestic political enemies; cultural personalities; and opinion makers. This became shockingly clear when terrorist Anders Behring Breivik killed 77 people and wounded more in this bomb-attack in Oslo and killing spree on the island of Útøya in the fjord of Oslo. Breivik had attacked young defenseless social democrats at a peaceful summer camp, and became himself an icon of the enemy within: a Norwegian killing Norwegians for their political views.

When Breivik's identity had not yet been revealed, newspapers framed its headlines as an attack on Norway: "This is why Norway has become a target for terror"; "The West condemns Oslo-terror"; "Norway under attack"; "Norway under attack": The most severe terror attack against Europe since 2005' and "Drawings make Norway a target for terror" (Boisen and Hervik, 2013).

Breivik's ideological compendium and assassination of domestic 'tyrants' of course did have an ultimate war against Islam objective. The young politicians were in the way for making the war against Islam efficient. In his copy-past compendium (emailed to more than 1000 people prior to the attacks) Breivik claimed that the 'multicultural elite', 'cultural Marxists', and feminists are responsible for the Islamization of Europe through their support for European multiculturalism; that multiculturalism is "as evil and racist as Nazism and as brutal as Stalinism", and that Multiculturalism is defined as internationalist Marxism (Keskinen, 2013; Bangstad, 2014; Boisen and Hervik, 2013). Indeed multiculturalism was the main motivator for Breivik's attacks (Eide et al. 2013) and one that is often represented by women in powerful positions (Keskinen, 2010).

The research on the Muhammad Cartoon Conflict and the Massacre on 22/7 in Norway illustrate that there is much more to the dichotomization, than a simple global conflict of "the West against the Muslim world", than visually different out-groups of people, but also their sympathizers and supporters regardless of appearance and background.

In the following I will use two debates in the Danish media to illustrate and explore this co-existence, which we can approach as synchronicities. The different 'isms' are clearly meaningfully connected, which is seen in Breivik's self-justification and in the media-coverage of the Muhammad Cartoon affair, but there is no clear causality between them.

### ***Blog: "Radical Islam must be fought by several groups"***

The first blog is a blog connected to the tabloid paper, *B.T.* the newspaper with the fourth largest circulation in Denmark that portrays itself as a popular family newspaper (Hervik, 2011). Former editor-in-chief, Peter Brüchmann, has had a blog since 2012, where he writes his personal opinion stories while still being paid by the newspaper. This particular blog entry series is chosen for its direct commentary on a contemporary theme that combines strong rhetoric on Islam, feminism and multiculturalism. The subtitle: "It would do the debate on Islam good, if left-wingers and feminists would dare to object". Most right-wing blogs have between 100 and 150 comments on popular themes like this. The comments are posted within a few days before the theme loses momentum and commentators move on to new entries. Comments on left-wing blogs follow a different pattern with only a small number of 10-15 entries within a few days.

In the "Radical Islam" blog entry Brüchmann brings up two current incidents in Denmark for discussion,<sup>4</sup> which he finds are examples of incidents that are so clear

<sup>4</sup> <http://blogs.bt.dk/peterbruchmann/2013/06/19/radikal-islam-skal-bekaempes-fra-flere-sider/> Accessed: 18-03-2015.

and indisputable that even left-wingers and feminists should support them. The first incident is the publishing of news coming out about a Danish middle court's verdict concerning a Somali boy convicted of raping a 10-year-old girl. The story is that the court found that the 18-year-old "Somali" is not be expelled from the country after serving his sentence, thus going against the lower court's ruling. This gap between the two court-rulings provided the news and the topic for the blog treatment.

The boy has been found guilty and sentenced, which is not at issue for the new court ruling. For the blog Brüchmann does not, however, raise the question whether or not the boy should be expelled, but why some people (a left-winger and a feminist) in Denmark cannot see the common-sense logic of expelling him.

The second ongoing case discussed in the blog<sup>5</sup> is an incident where a schoolteacher who is in the role of being an external examiner in the school system reportedly refused to shake hands with female students on religious grounds. Being a man of Palestinian and Muslim background triggers strong moral reactions, and as we shall see crude simplifications.

Blogs are by definition personal opinions and as such not restricted by issues of facts (Garden, 2012). Nevertheless, the blogging and how it tells stories does reveal, I argue, important information about how the different anti-beliefs relate. As such they follow the logic of story-telling in the news that emphasize attention to the stories and not the elements that go into them (facts) (Peterson, 2003) and turn stories into simple variations of the same archetypical stories (Lule, 2001).

In the first case the author and commentators leave out information to make their point more simple. Brüchmann edits out that the boy was 16 years old at the time of the rape, therefore a minor; that the court found he had no relationship to Somalia; that he was caught up in difficult family conditions that most likely were resulted in psychological problems that eventually led to the rape that rather than Islam, Somali ethnicity, or "foreign" culture. Generally, Muslims in Denmark are perceived as thinking and acting according to an Islamic way of thinking.

In the schoolteacher's case background articles revealed important details also left out of the blog-entries. The teacher *does* greet people (eye contact and right hand on his heart); weeks prior specific assignment as external examiner he contacts the teacher of the class to be examined by email informing him or her about his practice, thus establishing contact before the examination.

The study of commentaries to the Brüchmann's entry relied on some basic frame-analysis questions developed by Sophie Boisen and Peter Hervik (2013). In these studies the authors' simplified Entman (1993) and de Vreese (2003) and came up with these general questions: What is the problem? Who created the problem? What actors are presented in what roles? Who are the good ones, who are the bad ones? What can be done? What is the language of the frame? (Berg and Hervik, 2007; Boisen and Hervik, 2013).

For this journal article I want to make two points from the analysis of the blog author's entry and the 159 comments it evoked. The debate entries about the Somali boy convicted of rape and the Muslim teacher, who greets female students in an unconventional way, are discussed under the heading of "Radical Islam", which goes

<sup>5</sup> <http://blogs.bt.dk/peterbruchmann/2013/06/19/radikal-islam-skal-bekaempes-fra-flere-sider/> Accessed: 18-03-2015.

unnoticed by commentators. In other words, the blog author and commentaries slip automatically into talking about Radical Islam and the Middle East. At this point the Somali convict, the teacher, Muslims in Denmark, the Middle East and Somalia becomes categories of the same kinds of people. When *maxp* writes “Refugees are welcome, stop Muslims” (*maxp*, 19 June 2013) the automatic slip is obvious and basically appear unrelated to Brüchmann’s call for agreement on expelling persons from the country. The Somali boy’s parents are refugees. If he by that token were a refugee also, being a refugee would outweigh his criminal act. Then again his mother is a Muslim and his father is not mentioned.

In the statement of *Henrik D.*, the idea of a slippery slope is the point of his entry comment.

Obviously, there is far between a handshake to the Pedophile Somali rapist from Gullestrup, but everything begins with a detail. (*Henrik D.*, 10 June 2013)

A point he makes by way of exaggeration and distortion (calling the Somali boy/rapist Pedophile), and by being careless or indifferent to the school teachers’ lack of handshake and choice of a different way of greet female students. In another comment he asserts that:

If you are a Muhammedanian, then you have taken the whole package (*Henrik D.*, 10 June 2013)

In this case the idea is that being a ‘Muhammedanian’ is a total package. If you are Muslim then everything you stand for is troublesome as indicated by the derogatory term ‘Muhammedanian’ - a favourite term chosen by radical right populist, Mogens Glistrup, who established the Progressive Party in 1972, which eventually in 1995 grew into the Danish People’s Party.

Obviously, *Rasmus* is not writing specifically about the two stories, when he declares:

We are in the process of a destruction of the European culture (*Rasmus*, 20 June 2013)

Rather, *Rasmus* is subscribing to a larger narrative, where not shaking hands and a ‘foreign’ rapist not expelled verifies the narrative.

*Thomas H. Rasmussen* connects the two men in the stories, or is it “Radical Islam” to Nazism, which is an often-made link by the radical right populists between Islamism and Nazism.

In 1939 there were also some naive people who did not take a little man with a moustache seriously (*Thomas H. Rasmussen*, 20 June 2013).

Perhaps more importantly are the allusions to certain people, who are “naive”, who in Brüchmann’s blog entry are the left-winger and the feminist. In other words, the

Danish population, by implication, is either naïve, the target of Thomas' critique, or they are like him, people who see what is really going on.

Brüchmann, how many Muslims, Africans and Roma do you think there is room for in Denmark, and how will you stop the current, when the number is reached (*Inga Svångberg*, 20 June 2013)

According to a quick Google search Inga is an experienced debater and provocateur with hundreds of entries. But more interestingly, she is addressing Brüchmann with a question that is both unrelated to the theme he raised, and even missing, that Brüchmann advocates expulsion of the Somali boy and non-tolerance of the school teacher's practice of greeting female students.

This fact is ignored by well intending creators of society since the alternative, to acknowledge that Islam IS radical and IS a death threat for a democracy that builds on equal worth, equality, freedom, individuality, open-mindedness and civilized behaviour. So how is Islam contained? (*Claus*, 20 June 2013)

Commentator *Claus* raises the stake by insisting on Islam being a deadly threat to democracy, and therefore incompatible. At the same time he praises democracy for building on equal worth and being open-minded.

In general, there is little concern with the Brüchmann's original argument or the facts of the two incidents. Instead there is a rehearsal of an antagonistic image Muslims applied to these two migrants in Denmark, who become tokens of European democracy in disarray and not as persons, with unique histories and psychological complexities.

While the gross simplification of the two incidents and the rehearsal of antagonistic relations are fairly direct, the second point is less so. Time and again the authors construct categories of people, who are criticized for their 'tolerance', 'historical openness', 'naivety', and 'humanitarian' points of view, while they make strong calls for more 'authoritarianism', 'firmness', 'guts' and 'punishments'. While this may sometimes be explicitly summarized under the heading of 'multiculturalism'. Or, the theme could just as easily be summarized as what is going on as 'neonationalism' with its celebration of authoritarian values, whose strengthening is proposed as a solution to problems of unruly Muslims, whether through national values, families values, or associated with masculine values. Still, I will rather suggest a linguistic rephrasing of the statements into questions of who causes the problems and who the actors are. If excessive tolerance is attacked, who is too tolerant? If historical openness and naivety, and humanitarian values are causing problems in Denmark, who is it that is historically open-minded, naïve, and humanitarian? All of these people are domestic adversaries, who are attacked fiercely. If authoritarianism is seen as a solution, who are the callers for authoritarian strengthening of national, family and masculine values? If firmness and guts are needed as part of the solution, then who is it that asks for more firmness and gutsy reactions? If more punishment is needed, who is asking for punishment, who is to decide who is to determine the punishment, and whom is it directed against? Certainly, we can argue that the opponents in the

discussion are other Danes, i.e., other segments of the Danish population and not exclusively directed against Muslims or non-Western migrants. These categories are the object of the debate, but they are not talked about or included in the debate.

### *Website discussion: 'Drunk Student: Do I need to be sober at Hasan's place'*

The second theme for debate is taken from a weekly Danish radio show for young listeners, called "*Mads og Monopolet*" Considering the program is 11 years old with a regular audience of 600.000 - 800.000 listeners in a country of 5.5 million people, and a Facebook profile with more than 100.000 likes, it is fair to say that this is a successful mainstream radio program.

At the programme's website listeners can participate actively either by submitted questions or dilemmas or as the commenting audience.<sup>6</sup> This specific story starts with Sarah's question about drinking.<sup>7</sup> She is finishing her three-year intermediary education called the *gymnasium*, which provides access to higher education in Denmark. During the three years students follow different modules, but they also form a basic core group (homeroom, *klasse* in Danish) of 20-30 students who stays together for the three years.

At the end of gymnasium traditional celebrations include the *klasse* visiting every parents' home in the span of a single day. Usually, transportation takes place in a decorated truck or similar vehicle. During the 10-20 minute visits students are served small snacks and small drinks, which are complemented with beer drinking during the truck ride from one home to the next. During this drive students greet every human being in sight with loud cheers.

Sarah is responsible for organizing the transportation for her *klasse*. She explains to "Mads and Monopolet" that one immigrant student asked her to be the first home visited, so that drinking and being drunk would not collide with the parents' wishes. The problem is not, that in the last moment the ten immigrants in the *klasse* all want to be first homes visited, since their families do not want to be visited by drunken people. If we accept this outcome, she complains, "We cannot drink alcohol until after 8 pm".

An overview of the comments shows that the problem is variously represented as drinking; failed immigration; Muslims; old-fashion morality (keeping deadlines); and accusations of racism.

Many of the commentators turn to confrontation as the preferred solution in their entry and refuse to compromise: "Nobody should change Danish culture (including drinking)"; "religion does not come first in this country". "They have to bear the consequences"; "then they cannot participate"; "they can do what they want". "THEY have come to our country"; "they are intolerant since they do not tolerate drinking".

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.dr.dk/p3/mads-monopolet> Accessed: 18-03-2015.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.dr.dk/p3/mads-monopolet/artikel/stiv-studine-behover-jeg-vaere-aedru-hos-hassan> Accessed: 18-03-2015.

One of the keys to understanding how the debate orbits into these generalized narratives of explanation lies in the use of the word ‘immigrant’ as a frame for the dilemma. The term, *indvandrere* (migrant) is generally used in Denmark for migrants who entered the country for the purpose of staying. In the process of integration the term immigrant is applied to visibly different people regardless whether they are parents, children or grandchildren. The category has come to otherness, the problematized collective other that is contrasted negatively with Danes.

However among students in the gymnasium, it is unusual to use of the term for classmates, since they either entered the country at a young age, or more likely, were born in Denmark. Sarah uses this in her question about the non-drinking classmates, who came to her shortly before the deadline. It has not been possible to establish whether she was annoyed with these students’ behaviour and therefore chose the negative term immigrant, or if she used the term on positive occasions as well.

Journalist Tine Godsk Hansen, who is in charge of running the website, reformulated Sarah’s question. In the headline, Hansen uses the name Hassan, although Sarah did not use this name. Thus, the migrants in the class are not simply any migrant, but associated with either Arab or Muslim culture or both. The website also includes a voting possibility with three alternatives:

- 1) Sarah is totally right – the student part is all about drinking
- 2) She is incredible egoistic – Muslims are also part of the class
- 3) They must find a compromise

At this point the category Muslim is used for the first time without Sarah having used it in her question. The term ‘Immigrant’ simply became ‘Muslim’, which is not an uncommon association. But Hansen’s re-framing transforms the story and places it within the media logic, where conflict and controversy are the best stories, which thus ties into the narrative of a global conflict between positively depicted native Danes (Westerners) on one side and negatively portrayed Muslim immigrants on the other.

Three of the categories used in the commentaries are ‘Muslim’, ‘immigrant’ and ‘for religious reasons’, which are associated with foreignness or otherness. A few comments do bring up the issue as a problem of drinking for other categories, but they are few. One could argue polemically, as journalists I spoke to told me, if the issue of limiting the drinking is a problem for indigenous Danish students, the story would not capture much attention.

Using the immigrant frame and seeing students as foreigners, commentators argue that they (the Muslim immigrant students) should follow the Danish culture and norms; adjust or leave the country. However that does not solve Sarah’s dilemma, nor is it relevant for her dilemma.

## *Conclusion*

When doing research on these incidents and the web commentaries, it quickly becomes clear that the original questions are not really being debated. Brüchmann argued that left-wingers and feminist should use common sense and support the

expulsion of the 18-year-old convicted Somali rapist and he wanted them to support sanctions of the Muslim external examiner, who did not greet female students with a conventional handshake. Or, phrased differently: the debate is readily transformed into rehearsing generalized cultural narratives permeating Danish society. The vehicles for this transformation are slips from the specific incidents to the radical Islam and the Middle East, the slippery slope argument, and strategies of exaggeration and carelessness about facts. We can argue that the debate *does not* receive its meaning from the dilemmas of expelling minors; from Danes with minority backgrounds who do not greet female students with conventional handshakes; or Danes who drink heavily. In fact there is hardly any debate.

This should not come as a big surprise. Vertovec and Wessendorf (2009) recently looked at the way the concept of Multiculturalism has been used. Portrayals of multiculturalism they show are “demonstrably partial, erroneous or false” (2009:6). Gavan Titley reminds us that much research showing “that the facts of migration and migrant lives are not only subject to dedicated forms of spin and racial distortion, but that debates on migration are hostage to what de Certeau calls recited truths, social facts produced and made factual through their circulation” (Titley, 2012:54). “They are destroying our culture”, if you are a Muslim you “come with the whole package” and “everything begins with the details” are three such recited truths that are used in everyday conversations about Muslims and then introduced as a blog entry response to what become instances of the recited truths. In Deborah Tannen’s conceptualization ‘argument culture’ is when you are having an argument with someone, your goal is not to listen and understand. Instead, you use every tactic you can think of - including distorting what your opponent just said - in order to win the argument (Tannen, 1999:5).

Rather than a simple bad habit, the political spin communication and media debate during the Danish Muhammad Cartoon Crisis in 2005/2006 with ideological roots in neoconservatism translated into a confrontational approach to the public sphere.

The public sphere is not for dialogue but an area for serious battling and confrontation. Within this scheme, spinning is a weapon on the battlefield, a field where your enemies are known and attacked, since you fear the final outcome. With the philosophy of Strauss and Schmitt in your arsenal, there is no limit to how far your uncompromising stance can go and how radical your language can become, since you seek a confrontation, which is the responsible way to do politics (Hervik, 2008; 2011; 2012a).

In sum, the messages conveyed in the blog exchanges do not come from a meaningful dialogue where participants exchange facts and arguments and respond to them. There is no debate in that sense. There is no opponent. A group forms a community of authors who share the same narratives and there are only a couple of opposing voices.

The two blog-stories (as well as the Muhammad cartoon affair and the coverage of ‘22/7’) must distinguish analytically between the *actual* dilemma (as posed by Brüchmann and Sarah); the *stories of the dilemma*; and the *systems of belief* they

draw on for making sense of these events and producing stories about them. In all four cases the actual dilemma is relegated to the historians' scrutiny of "what actually happened" and soon loses its significance in the gradual forming of social memory. Stories about the dilemma or more precisely, stories evoked by categories and signs within the texts, such as 'Muslim', 'immigrant', and 'foreigner' are simply latched on to the dilemma. They represent what Tannen called 'ritualized opposition': "Each listens to the opponent's statements not in order to learn but in order to refute; the goal is not to better understand the other's position but to win the debate." (Tannen, 2002:1655).

In the stories (the recited truths and the argument culture) one will find the relations to other forms of exclusion such as the populism-based neo-nationalism, authoritarianism, anti-left-wingers or anti-blue-eyed tolerant people. The dynamics of this is a kind of 'predatory narcissism' (Appadurai, 2006), where those who are tolerant, naïve, open and subscribe to humanitarian values are contested, while the commentators celebrate their common sense and dedication to swift action ensures that they are not fooled by tolerance, not blue-eyed and naïve, and with authoritarian values that will offer protection that the liberals do not.

Our future research will address the function of this development in the profound matter that these first findings are indicative of. Yet, we also need to go further and deeper into the shared cultural understandings (what Balibar called intrinsic relations) behind everyday popular reasoning based on large systems of belief to find how the implicitly, out-of-awareness exclusionary thinking and practices work. Not least since at this point of the out-of-awareness they co-occur and appear as inseparable.

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