

## Encountering racism in the (post-)welfare state

Danish experiences

Simonsen, Kirsten

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**Encountering racism in the (post-)welfare state – Danish experiences**

**Kirsten Simonsen**

**Department of Environmental, Social and Spatial Change**

**Roskilde University**

**Postboks 260**

**4000 Roskilde**

**Denmark**

**E-mail: [kis@ruc.dk](mailto:kis@ruc.dk)**

ENCOUNTERING RACISM IN THE (POST-)WELFARE STATE –  
DANISH EXPERIENCES

by

Kirsten Simonsen

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ABSTRACT. Racism, xenophobia and in particular Islamophobia have gained terrain in the European continent during the latest decades, and Denmark has taken a position as one of the iconic cases of this development. In this article, I approach this issue from the point of view of everyday life – from the infinitude of encounters through which we make the world and are made by it in turn. Drawing on material from two recent research projects carried out in Copenhagen, I analyse experiences and feelings generated in cross-cultural meetings in the city. The analysis is informed by theories of embodied encounters, postcolonialism, strangers and emotions, and it addresses experiences and imaginations raised amongst majority and minority population alike. As a conclusion the article aims to lift the view from everyday life to a more systemic level and contextualize the analysis in the broader processes of the neoliberalizing welfare state.

*Keywords:* encounters, everyday life, racism, whiteness, racial neoliberalism

## Introduction

In this article, I am going to address the development of the Danish welfare society, not primarily from the angle of political economy and financial crises, but from the point of view of a cultural-political crisis that pervades the European continent and finds expression in an increasing xenophobic populism. Denmark has taken the position as one of the iconic cases of this development in spite of the country's well developed welfare state, or even in a sense because of it. In this sense, the article writes itself into discussions of the development of 'new' racisms in the Neoliberal Age (e.g. Frederickson 2002; Goldberg 2002, 2009; Lentin and Titley 2011). Goldberg initially describes *racial neoliberalism* as a process in which 'the register of race has shifted from the broadly institutional, from which it is at least explicitly excised, to the micro-relational of everyday interactions, on the one hand, and the macro-political strategizing of geo-political interests, on the other' (2009, p. 25). This definition renders important analyses addressing the appearance of racism in everyday encounters. Nevertheless, most of the new racism literature addresses the issue from a structural or discursive angle. For instance, in Denmark several researchers are addressing racism through media analysis (see e.g. Hussein 2000; Hervik 2002; Eide *et al.* 2008; Andreassen 2007) while analyses from everyday life, from the way in which racism is performed and experienced in everyday encounters, are scarcer. More emphasis on such analyses will allow us to understand racism as a bottom-up as well as a top-down phenomenon.

This imbalance does of course not mean that everyday racism is an unexplored phenomenon. One of the first to use the term is the Dutch sociologist Philomena Essed (1991). She defines it as 'a process in which socialized racist notions are integrated into everyday practices and thereby actualize and reinforce underlying racial and ethnic relations' (p. 145) and explores experiences of black people in the Dutch society. In contemporary geography, the issue is developed in the frame of what Price (2012) calls 'the intimate turn' in geography foregrounding bodies and encounters. It involves spatialities of proximities as well as distancing and borders and the construction of racial and ethnic 'contact zones'. It is done from different perspectives: Some thinks race together with corporeal feminism in order to call attention to the 'fleshiness of bodies' (e.g. Slocum 2008), others employ posthuman theorization to emphasize the materiality of raced bodies (Saldanha 2006; Swanton 2010), and others again turn to theories of whiteness in order to explore the spatial conditioning of (non-)white bodies (Ahmed 2004). To that we could add authors emphasizing how racialized bodies tend to be discussed as 'cultural' rather than as a material phenomenon (Tolia-Kelly and Crang 2010), those who more specifically

address encounters, intersectionality and prejudice (Valentine 2008), and Scandinavian contributions often focusing on racialization in so-called vulnerable residential neighbourhoods (Schmauch 2006; Molina 2011). This article operates within the same bottom-up approach, but sets out from a starting point in practice theory and pursues a double perspective exploring bodily encounters, experiences and emotions from the perspective of majority and minority groups alike. It starts from an analysis of cross-cultural encounters in everyday life for subsequently to conceptualize the way in which participants make sense of them and the way in which they enter into a broader social context. As such, the article continues and extends earlier work on practice theory and encountering Others (Simonsen 2010), on minorities' possibility for identification in different spatial scales (Koefoed and Simonsen 2011), and on Danish nationalism (Koefoed and Simonsen 2007).

The empirical material drawn upon in the article comes from two recent research projects, both carried out in Copenhagen: *The multiple faces of the city* and *The stranger, the city and the nation*. The full analyses are published in Danish in Simonsen (2005) and Koefoed and Simonsen (2010) respectively. Opposite earlier publications issuing from each of these projects, drawing on both of them together renders possible a double approach to (racist) encounters, including experiences, frames of meaning and emotions from majority and minority populations alike. The latter is in this case represented by Danish Citizens having a Pakistani background. The context of the empirical analysis, then, is generally the Danish (post-)welfare society and more specifically the city of Copenhagen. The material employed from the two projects is based on in-depth interviews (37 in all) collected in the period between 2001 and 2010 and selected with an aim of variation in gender and age. The method in both cases was narrative interviews and the interpretative analysis will to a large degree rely on interview extracts illustrating typical frames of meaning from them. The extracts, then, are not results of specific questions but come out of the respondents' general narratives on everyday life in the city. In the text to come, they will be organized by a set of conceptual constructions achieved through the interpretation of the interviews together with theoretical reflections. Using extracts from interview transcripts does not, of course, imply a claim of 'authenticity' or 'verificational realism' (Crang 2002). The transcripts are texts produced in dialogue or 'fusions of horizons' between interviewer and narrator, a joint project aiming to give meaning to the experiences and events unearthed by the narrator (Gadamer [1986] 2004). I do however think that the use of empirical excerpts serves the double purpose of providing the text with 'sensuous substance' and presence and establishing a certain transparency of the interpretations.

After this introduction, the article will proceed in four parts. First, I will shortly outline three connected theoretical concepts working as a framework for the analysis – encounters, strangeness and emotions. They can be understood as the part of my social ontology having specific significance for the present research problem and as such they work as basis for the whole construction of the empirical material. After that, the main analysis is presented in two parts illustrating experiences, meanings and emotions in relation to cross-cultural encounters found in the majority and minority group respectively. In an article of this length, of course, the examples are unavoidably highly selective, but they are chosen in order to illustrate some variations in the material, and they are arranged according to intermediary concepts developed in the interspace between theory and interpretation of empirical material. In the conclusion, I try to lift the analysis from the everyday to a more systemic level and contextualize it in a more general understanding of contemporary (cultural) racisms as they have developed in the processes of neoliberalization of the Danish (and European) welfare states. For that purpose, additional concepts from the current literature of racism are employed, in particular the ones of whiteness and racial neoliberalism. The connections between these concepts and the concepts developed in the analysis are discussed, and it is argued that part of the background for current developments of (cultural) racism in Denmark is an unacknowledged whiteness permeating the development of the (post-)welfare state.

### **Theoretic al starting points**

#### *The primacy of encounters*

It makes no sense to talk about ‘ourselves’, either as individuals or groups, without relating to ‘the other’. Any kind of identification, whatever we talk about internal self- or group identification or about external social categorisation, unavoidable involves social interaction (Jenkins 1996). The designation of an I or a we requires a meeting with others. As such, the meeting takes ontological priority over the being of the meeting parts, as such expressing a relational social ontology based on radical intersubjectivity. When I here use the term *encounter*, however, it is supposed to add to this idea of meeting. The term suggests a meeting, but a meeting particularly involving two characteristics: surprise and time-space (Merleau-Ponty 1968; Ahmed 2000). It involves surprise (and maybe conflict) because of its inevitable content of similarities and difference, processes of inclusion and exclusion, or incorporation and expulsion, that constitutes the boundaries of bodies or communities. Encounters are temporal and spatial in a straightforward way because they

always involve at least two subjects approaching each other, and because they through repetition over time can shift the boundaries of the familiar. At one level, encounters therefore refer to face-to-face meetings as we experience them in everyday life. They are however also temporal and spatial through historical-geographical mediation. They presuppose other faces, other encounters of facing, other bodies other spaces and other times. In this way, they reopen prior histories of encounter and geo-political imaginations of the Other and incorporate them in the encounters as traces of broader social relationships that can fix others in regimes of difference. In other words, particular encounters both inform and are informed by the general: encounters between embodied subjects always dwell between the domain of the particular and that of the general, the framing of the encounter by broader relationships of power and antagonism. More than anything else, the contribution from postcolonial analysis, taking off from Said's (1978) now well-known analysis of Western imaginations of the Orient, informs on the strength and inertia of binary us/them distinctions in historical-geographical imaginations of Other people.

### *Strange(r)ness*

In popular culture the stranger often appears as a pre-given and naturalized figure, but the starting point for the present use of the term is (on the contrary) that nobody simply *is* a stranger. Rather, everybody is continuously constituted in everyday encounters in a continuum of positions between familiarity and strange(r)ness. Strange(r)ness, then, is basically a spatial relation, and the stranger is a *relational* figure constituted in bodily encounters – face-to-face and/or mediated through images formed in encounters performed in other times and other spaces. Such an understanding can already be read out of classic texts on the figure; for example when Simmel (1950b) states that the stranger is a person ‘who comes today and stays tomorrow’, or when Schuetz (1944), along the same line, understands the stranger as always being in a situation of approaching – coming closer to those who are at home. The stranger is a figure living within the spatial ambivalence of *proximity* and *distance*. Listen again to Simmel: ‘[i]n relationship to him, distance means that he, who is close by, is far, and strangeness means that he, who also is far, is actually near’ (1950b, p. 402). The relationship of the stranger to the place of residence is simultaneously one of attachment and detachment (or we could add of inclusion and exclusion). He/she is inside and outside at the same time.

Recently, this relational understanding has been splendidly developed and informed by postcolonial theory in Sara Ahmed's *Strange Encounters* (2000). In line with Simmel she challenges

the assumption that the stranger is simply anybody whom we do not know, but she goes further. To her, the stranger is ‘*some-body* whom we have *already recognised* in the very moment in which they are “seen” or “faced” as a stranger’ (Ahmed 2000, p. 21, italics in the original). The figure of the stranger is ‘painfully familiar’ in its very strange(r)ness. It has already come too close and been recognized as a body out-of-place (Ahmed 2000, p. 21):

[t]he stranger then is not simply the one that we have not yet encountered, but the one whom we have already encountered, or already faced. The stranger comes to be faced as a form of recognition: we recognise somebody *as a stranger*, rather than simply failing to recognise them

Hence the constitution of strangers involves emotionally charged *spatial negotiations* over mobility and home, (imagined) communities, boundaries and bridges and so forth. ‘Like bodies’ and ‘unlike bodies’ do not precede encounters of inclusion or expulsion. Rather, likeness and unlikeness as ‘characteristics’ of bodies are produced through these encounters. Part of that process is the experience of being exposed to oppressive visions or emotions. Fanon (1967) describes the phenomenology of incorporating otherness and the development of a ‘double consciousness’ due to the enculturation of the body. Men and women of colour, he says, develop a third-person consciousness trying to reconcile their own experiences with the operation of a ‘historical-racial schema’ within which their corporeal schema is supposed to fit.

### *Emotions*

Encounters are deeply charged with emotions. The ‘strange encounter’ (Ahmed 2000) is played out *on* the body, and it is played out *with* emotions. It is basically a sensuous process involving an affective opening out of bodies to other bodies. As a basis for interpretation, I here suggest a phenomenologically inspired understanding of emotion starting from Heidegger’s ideas of *moods* (Heidegger 1962; Guignon 2003). Moods or our Being-attuned are, according to Heidegger, basic human attributes, but they are not inner physical and psychic states. We should rather see them as attunements – contextual significances of the world, associated with practices, lifemode and social situation. The same ideas of situatedness and of the collapse of the distinction between inner and outer we find, in a much more embodied way, in Merleau-Ponty’s visions on emotion.



As a first approximation, we can condensate his view as a notion of *situated corporeal attitudes*, understood as ways of being and acting in relation to the world (Crossley 1996). Emotions are inseparable from other aspects of subjectivity, such as perception, speech/talk, gestures, practices and interpretations of the surrounding world, and they primordially function at the pre-reflexive level. They are, in short, ways of relating. This account gives occasion for a double conception of emotional spatiality (Simonsen 2007, 2010). One side of emotions are an *expressive space* of the body's movements, which might be seen as a performative element of emotion. Emotions are something practised and showed and as such connected to the expressive and communicative body. The other side of emotional spatiality is *affective space*, which is the space in which we are emotionally in touch – open to the world and aware of its 'affect' on us. This means that emotions are not just active bodily actions, something that our bodies express or articulate. Another aspect of them is how we are possessed by them or swept into their grasp. It is the felt sense of having been moved emotionally, the more passive side of emotional experience. This doubleness or active–passive duality of emotions is what we shall see played out in the concrete encounters analysed below.

## **Encountering the Other**

This first part of the analysis addresses experiences, meanings and emotions as they appear when representatives for the majority population encounter the Others. It is about how familiarities and differences are constructed, dealt with and enacted in everyday life and about the spatial negotiations of proximity/distance, inclusion/exclusion and visibility/invisibility invoked in these processes. The section is structured according to intermediary concepts developed in between theory and interpretation of the interviews.

### *Practical Orientalism*

In the street, when I meet those of another ethnic origin (it is awful that you don't know what to call them, isn't it?) but people who are different from us [...] What I am fed up with is that they keep on whacking me with their Koran and say 'our Islam'. Because one is supposed to wear a scarf, another one is not [...] And then I'll not call it religion; I'll call it culture.

I think that we in Denmark are too afraid of being called racists. It is not that we won't give them their rights. But we shall not just say, 'well, since you are allowed to come and live here, then we will of course also adjust our society to you'. That won't do – it can't be right that we in our primary schools just say 'of course we rebuild the showers because there are two children who are not allowed to shower'. Then they damned well must refrain from showering [...] And the same about their *halal* meat, it is ridiculous. What about the Danish children? Are they then supposed to eat *halal* meat? (Karin, 39)

Karin in this extract expresses deeply hostile feelings represented in an *orientalist* discourse – an imagination of cultural diversity building upon a binary dichotomy between us and them. In this place most distinctly phrased as 'people that are different from *us*' – that is, performed through use of *deictic* markers, small unnoticed words gaining their meaning through the context in which they are used, such as we, us, here and this. These trivial words naturalize our affiliation to place and estrange 'the others'. The imagined geographies are translated from external to internal strangers and construed in many overlapping scales. Karin for instance in another section of the interview draws a boundary line when telling that 'in our block nobody come from another ethnic origin – there is only Danish people'. In this way she expresses a convergence of nationalism and racism, one that in spite of the 'naturalness' of the deictic markers is moving from the 'unnoticed' towards an articulated discourse arguing up against an implicitly imagined counter discourse. This movement mirrors the more general Danish debate where the limits of legitimate ways to talk about 'foreigners' have continuously become undermined.

Orientalism also operates through stereotyping the Others and imagining them as fixed in their 'original' culture – 'then I'll not call it religion; I will call it culture' – in this way showing the strong cultural element in the current racisms. Significant is also the way in which difference and 'strangeness' are addressed by way of everyday, bodily phenomena such as dress, showers and food. Therefore I, as an addition to Said's textualist perspective on Orientalism (1978), suggest the notion of *practical Orientalism* (see also Simonsen 2005; Haldrup *et al.* 2006). It can grasp how hegemonic ideas translate into everyday practices and how small things such as the sight of anOther outfit, the hearing of Other languages/sounds and the taste of Other food can provoke emotional reactions and permeate cross-cultural encounters.

*Invisible borders in public space*

Ethnic borders cut through the city in many ways, and often the borders are neither visible nor material. They can take form of invisible borders, of nets of differences, inclusions and exclusions, or of separations incorporated into practices and consciousness of the individual citizens.

There are a lot of different people, in particular in Nørrebro and Vesterbro [old working class neighbourhoods in the central part of Copenhagen]. A walk through Nørrebrogade can make you wonder in which country you are. But I think that I go about a bit like in a dome of a cheese dish where I – you now, I actually don't see them where I go. Because in Østerbro [her residential area, which is an old middle-class area also located close to the centre of Copenhagen], it is a very homogeneous population living there. And then I just round the inner city. I actually don't see the big differences. I am aware that it is because I move within narrow circles. I go about in a specific part of reality, and not in the evenings, and yes, there are a lot of things that I don't see. I read about in the newspapers and wonder whether it really happens in Copenhagen. (Nina, 36)

Nina is a financial adviser working in the centre of Copenhagen. She expresses that she is aware that Copenhagen has become more of a multicultural city, but that *that* is actually not her city. She (with others) delimits multiculturalism to specific neighbourhoods where 'you wonder in which country you are'. These respondents do not attend those neighbourhoods, and they might even feel a bit insecure about doing so, even if that feeling is recognised as 'purely prejudices', based on 'more or less serious newspaper writings'. Nina represents this practice through a visual metaphor by saying that she wanders around 'a bit like in a dome of a cheese dish'. In this way she visualizes the invisible borders in public space. She places herself in the position like a cheese covered by a glass dome. The glass walls of the dome render it possible to see the difference, to be aware of its existence. But at the same time they allow her to delimit herself from the surroundings, to live in her own homogeneous space, unaffected by the difference existing on the other side of the walls. It is a delimitation that not necessarily takes the form of dissociation but rather of unaffectedness. It is a division of the city in enclaves of 'our' space and 'their' space where everyday practices delimit one from the other.

But there is more at stake in these statements than practical and discursive divisions of the city. As suggested by Allen (2003), it is a question of power to *represent* space in your own image and from your own practices. One can wonder whether the spaces of the financial workers are as homogeneous as represented. They refer to their spatial practices in relation to work and the central parts of the city. But these parts of the city have other users than financial workers and consuming visitors. Whole ranges of Other service workers are present and make these places work. These people inhabit the same material space, although conducting different practices and different time-space rhythms. The presented image of the inner city, then, becomes an expression of domination of space, a performance of symbolic power. It is an implicit execution of power, working through the ability to represent space in a particular way, to code it in a manner that suggests that only certain groups are present. You inscribe your own rhythms in space and exclude those whose rhythms and movements are not in accordance with the dominant representations and practices. This is not about material barriers or closed doors, neither does it appear as a conscious exclusion, it is rather a question about who is recognised as present. The geographical imagination of homogeneity is produced by way of out-abstraction and *invisibility* of Other actors.

### *Lived multiculturalism*

I love the strangeness of Copenhagen because so many different people are around. There are a whole lot of people from all sorts of countries. In the start I was very confused when I saw a so-called guest worker: ‘Oh man, I have never seen those people at home!’ Yes, we had a Polish or two, but nobody from Turkey or Iran and everywhere else [...] Here at work there are many people from different cultures. It is great. I soak up every day [...] I think about, there are so many people who are afraid of strangers because they have some preconceived ideas about them – instead of trying to give you the chance and the joy it might be to get to know them.

You see, a city is characterized by, what can you say, not multiplicity, but all this difference blended, as in *one big stew*, which sometimes might need hang together a bit better. (Birgit, 47)

A very different mode of encounter is represented by Birgit. In her job as a cleaning inspector, she functions in a multicultural working community – a community, which at the same time is practically given and something they appreciate and consciously try to strengthen. Birgit tells how

she once had the whole group on a visit at her home, at which occasion each of them brought a dish from their own 'kitchen'. Again, as in many other cases, food and meals appear as a practical/sensuous symbol of difference. But in this case it takes the form of fascination and joy. It can be interpreted as a mixture between a practiced multiculturalism and an expression of the exoticizing side of Orientalism. Nava (2002) also talks about 'affective cosmopolitanism' in this connection – that is, an everyday cosmopolitanism based in consumption and the attraction of different or exotic products and body cultures (food, dance, music etc.). On the face of it, this is not a racist attitude. What Birgit performs, is a genuine feeling of fascination and enjoyment. However, it still carries traces of a (post)colonial exoticization of the Other and his/her lifestyle. Paraphrasing bell hooks (1992, p. 21), 'ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture.'

At the same time Birgit connects the multicultural with the city. She has moved to Copenhagen from a small Danish island, and for her the encounter with other cultures did coincide with the encounter with the city. And it counts for her as one of the qualities of the city. She tries in the interview metaphorically to describe how she conceives of the multicultural city and ends up with the metaphor of 'a big stew'. She does so by searching between objects from her everyday, embodied experience for something that can represent what she is trying to express. In accordance with her description of the encounter with different cultures, food is the object to which she resorts in this linguistic act. She does also, however, question the degree to which the mixture that she tries to illustrate actually exists and the xenophobia that have grasped parts of the Danish society.

### **Experienced Otherness**

The other side of the encounters is experiences and emotions developed when being exposed to oppressive vision and racism. It is about becoming estranged and internalizing Otherness or 'historical-racial schemes' – an enculturation of the body that often leads to the development of a double consciousness, experiencing one's body from inside and outside alike (Fanon 1967; Weiss 1999). In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon repeatedly returns to an experience of an encounter with a little boy saying 'Mum, look, a Negro – I am frightened, frightened, frightened!' Similar experiences come from our material where the respondents tell about their feelings when people change to the other side of the street when passing them.

*The phenomenology of being stopped*

Experienced otherness can be described in terms of the bodily and social experiences of restrictions, uncertainty and blockage. Listen, for example, to this respondent:

When I started going out with friends from high school or my workplace it was very, very obvious. Without exaggerating I would say that 95 times out of 100 I was rejected. It was just like getting slapped in the face all the time. ‘No, you can’t enter’. And it was not only when I was together with 10 other coloured people. I have tried *all* combinations. Many times it was when I came together with ‘Danish’ girls and boys from my school class. (Hanif, 27)

In the urban nightlife it often becomes a question of letting the ‘stranger’ in or keeping him/her out of the place. Hanif describes the experiences and emotions of frequently being rejected and stopped at the door when trying to enter into a café or a music club. It is not the exception, he explains, but rather something that happens over and over again.

In the extract, Hanif first describes the experience of becoming the Other in the movement he makes when he tries to enter the place. When rejected, he is produced as a *body suspect* already recognised as a stranger and stopped at the door (‘No, you can’t enter’). He is *made* strange by his bodily appearance through what Sara Ahmed (2000) characterizes as techniques of reading the bodies of others and telling the differences between what is familiar and what is strange. People with darker skin experience more often than others that they are stopped, rejected and excluded from places in the Copenhagen nightlife. This may happen as direct discrimination where people on the background of bodily appearance (skin colour or clothing) are stopped and excluded from a place or on the basis of quota systems for how many ‘foreigners’ the place will let in (Nørregaard-Nielsen and Rosenmeier 2007). The example illustrates how the *technology of racism* operates and incorporates discourses of *stranger danger* in the bodily encounter. The stranger is stopped because he/she is imagined to be the origin of danger, related to trouble and violence or imagined to steal ‘our’ enjoyment and ruin the party (cf. Žižek 1993). Hanif is not a stranger in the sense that he is unknown; he is already recognized as such in the moment in which he is faced.

Secondly, Hanif finds himself slowed down and stopped in his mobility and passage. This and similar stories about being stopped in different situations exemplify concrete experiences with the *uneven distribution of access to places*. These experiences are primarily based on different situations in which people are either incorporated into the community or expelled. Some bodies are blocked in their mobility and access to places while others can freely pass. When stopped, the stranger is produced and appears as the figure *out of place*.

Thirdly, Hanif's description of being stopped is not an experience of a simple delay; it immediately shifts the attention back towards his body and stimulates emotions such as anger and frustration ('Just like getting slapped in the face all the time'). Later in the interview he describes the humiliation he feels when he shows up at a big party with flowers and is stopped at the door. This and similar experiences about being stopped while walking in the city, crossing the national border or trying to enter into a place occur both in meetings with different kinds of authorities and in everyday life. The phenomenology about being stopped is a kind of stopping device that also takes other forms.

### *Banal terrorism*

I take the train to Malmö and back. You should see their eyes when they see somebody like me enter the train. People really stare. For example after what happened in London. Then you think, shit, I'm the problem here. If I had just said 'boom', the two persons next to me would have fainted [...] Sometimes I have experienced people saying 'now we have to look out'. Then I turn around and smile to them. (Abbas, 38)

Abbas already suffers from the 24-year law of marriage by which Danish citizens marrying somebody from outside EU and the Nordic countries are not granted residence permit in Denmark until both partners are 24 years old (see also Fair 2010). Therefore, he has moved to Malmö in Sweden with his wife and commutes to Copenhagen every day. After the terror attack in London he entered a train and suddenly he realized that people were staring at him. Abbas experienced his otherness through the *visual*. He was fixed and dissected under the eyes of the other passengers. An unfamiliar weight burdened him and suddenly he realized ('shit, I'm the problem here'). He was *objectified* by the gaze that with Fanon (1967, p. 111) can be described as a 'third-person consciousness', where the body is surrounded by an atmosphere of uncertainty. It is a double consciousness where Abbas tries to reconcile his own experiences with the operation of

a historical-racial schema within which his corporeal schema is supposed to fit. Abbas tells that he can feel how people around him are frightened and nervous ('If I had just said "boom", the two persons next to me would have fainted'). In this example, the bodily encounter becomes charged with fear for the Other – Abbas was made strange because of his bodily appearance and fixed as the 'other'. He became a figure who posed danger by his very presence. The example illustrates how the global production of fear is played out and experienced in everyday life (cf. Pain et al. 2008). It is a kind of a 'banal terrorism' (Katz 2007) where geopolitical conflicts and the fear for terror become incorporated into everyday embodied encounters.

### *Banal linguistic stigmatisation*

The narrative material also shows significant feelings and experiences of being produced as the other in everyday banal language use.

I have never accepted to be called a second generation immigrant. I am proud of my parent's background as immigrants, and I respect that they have immigrated. But I am not an immigrant coming from any foreign place. At most I might have immigrated from Smørum [small Danish town] to the city. And it hurts me extremely to hear people talking about that now the third generation has been born. (Nasar, 32)

What is raised here is the problem of being *categorized* as strangers and met as persons that are out-of-place. Everyday language use often, intended or unintended, reproduces estranging geographical imaginations. Perceived strangers often are asked 'where do you come from?', and they are expected to give an answer that can explain what is 'suspicious' about them. Small phrases practised as a banal social poetic in everyday language games (à la Wittgenstein) routinely produce the stranger as being *out of place* or not at home. This banal language is an everyday way of talking that forces people to think in us/them dichotomies – a habit that enables an internal orientalization (Said 1978; Haldrup *et al.* 2006) to be (re)produced as a natural form of life. Orientalism and racialization is evident in the everyday use of linguistic markers. Small, unnoticed words naturally appearing in everyday talk such as us and them, theirs and ours produce non-European 'immigrants' as strangers so regularly that it escapes out of sight. The stigmatization, many of the respondents tell, is sometimes so subtle that even their 'Danish' friends do not realize it. Nasar, who grew up in a small provincial town in Denmark, explains that he finds it



strange to be called an immigrant simply because he has *not* emigrated from anywhere. Another respondent states that he over and over again in his everyday life has been met with sentences such as: 'In Denmark we do things like this'. This kind of everyday speak repeatedly excludes him and identifies him as an *outsider* who does not know the codes and stands outside the Danish imagined community.

### **Conclusion and contextualization**

In the above, I have approached contemporary cross-cultural encounters in a Danish city through a theoretical lens combining a practice approach to everyday life, phenomenological understanding of emotions and a postcolonial perspective on encounters. The empirical material is collected through a narrative methodology. This approach allows me to understand everyday racism from a perspective of concrete, embodied encounters and the emotions and attitudes they evoke. It has been a point to me by means of the broad 'double' empirical material available to approach the theme from 'both sides', from representatives from the majority and minority groups alike. Also, it has been a point through the selection of the excerpts to illustrate a variation of experiences and attitudes: in the majority group from strongly orientalist emotions, over more open-minded exoticism to unaffectedness through border construction, and in the minority group through different modes of experienced otherness. This double perspective, with its basis in practices, experiences and emotions, provides a possibility to nuance performance and experience of racism in ways scarcely found in the bulk of geographical literature on everyday racism that is presented in the introduction of the article.

One important link between these embodied, everyday racisms and the development of the Danish welfare state, I would claim, is the unacknowledged mark of *whiteness* embedded in that development. Recent ideas of whiteness (e.g. Dyer 1997; Ahmed 2004, 2006; Shaw 2007) have emphasized how the notion is not just a characteristic of bodies; it is an ordering device getting its power by becoming habitual. As many have argued, whiteness is invisible and unmarked, as an absent centre against which Others appear only as deviants. We do not see white bodies as *white* bodies; we just see them as bodies. Whiteness gets reproduced as the unmarked mark of the human. As such, it represents a process of normalisation that makes it troublesome to absorb cross-cultural encounters. When I above talk about experienced Otherness, it is exactly about the emotions evoked when inhabiting a 'white world' with a 'non-white' body. It is hence also possible to talk about *white space* in the sense that spaces are orientated around whiteness through

the repetition of acts, that is, the passing by of some bodies and not others. Such spaces, however, are paradoxical spaces giving occasion to contradictory spatial processes. On the one hand, non-white bodies often do inhabit white spaces. However, such bodies are *made invisible* when you see spaces as being white. We saw that in the case of ‘invisible borders in public space’ where the majority representatives managed to inhabit their own ‘homogeneous’ space by representing it in their own image and from their own practices. On the other hand non-white people become *hypervisible* when they try to pass, they ‘stand out’ or ‘stand apart’ like black sheep in the family (Ahmed 2006). The moments when the non-white body is sensed as out-of-place become moments of personal and political trouble. The cases of ‘banal terrorism’ and ‘the phenomenology of being stopped’ illustrate this hypervisibility. The minority representatives are made strange(rs) because of their bodily appearance; by means of the gaze, they are fixed in their bodies as being out-of-place.

In the Danish context, these everyday processes inscribe themselves into a cultural-political development characterized by an increasingly populist anti-immigration discourse (see e.g. Wren 2001; Koefoed and Simonsen 2007; Brun and Hersh 2008). This development has occurred in an ambiguous relationship to the welfare state. In the wake of the development of the welfare state during the twentieth century, Denmark as a nation has regarded itself as a liberal and tolerant society that places a high value on social equality and social cohesion, both achieved through the welfare system. It has as well nurtured a long-standing interest in global humanitarian issues, in this way building an image of external as well internal solidarity. This solidarity is the foundation stone of the welfare state, but what has gone largely unrecognised is the degree to which it has been based on a cultural concurrence of equality and likeness (that is, whiteness). In many cases, the unacknowledged presupposition of solidarity is a relatively homogeneous (white) population (for similar trait in the other Scandinavian countries see Molina 1997; Gullestad 2002). The vulnerability of this solidarity stands out in relation to increasing immigration from non-Western countries from the 1970s onwards. This is when we begin to experience the gradual rise of discourses of intruding ‘threatening (in particular Muslim) Others’ who are ‘polluting’ Danish culture, undermining ‘our’ welfare state and exploiting resources created by ‘ourselves’ and our ancestors (see Koefoed and Simonsen 2007; Koefoed 2015, this issue).

In the introduction to this special issue, the guest editors state our common goal as ‘start[ing] a wider dialogue with critical geographers and related scholars working across the Nordic region and beyond regarding the dramatic transformations of society and space being

wrought by the policies, ideologies and governmentalities of neoliberalization'. As indicated in the introduction to this article, this transformation also involves the development of new modes of racism. Racism and whiteness, as performed in everyday encounters, in the current conjuncture work itself into the broader tendency referred to earlier as *racial neoliberalism* (Goldberg 2009; Lentin and Sibley 2011) – a notion meant to emphasize the interrelation between the current development of racism and processes of neoliberalization. Goldberg (2009, p. 181) in his book specifically talks about a 'racial europeanization' that 'resituates the classic mix of institutional and individual racisms, of racisms representative of the state and [as shown in this article] sewn into the fabric of civil society.' In the Danish case this mix takes its own contradictory form in accordance with the contradictory relation between neoliberalization and the defence of welfare state. This contradiction seems to be politically blurred through a populist fuelling of the above mentioned fear of 'the foreigners' as somebody coming to exploit 'our' welfare state, in this way 'scapegoating' the racialized 'undeserving poor' for neoliberal cuttings. This process tends to be reinforced by a cultural-political crisis discussed by several European commentators (see e.g. Ganglbauer 2011; Lentin and Sibley 2011; Žižek 2011). A tendency in neoliberalism to reduce government to a (economic) necessity – a de-politicized expert administration and regulation – seems to create a general insecurity and add fuel to the flames of populism and emotional mobilization around fear and xenophobia. The growth of populist parties such as the Danish People's Party and their infiltration of the political system with politics of (cultural) racism illustrate that. Subsequently, state resources are increasingly directed towards demographic management, including detailed regulation of the presence and mobility of (non-Western) migrants, and policing of welfare dependents primarily coming from poor, immigrant and racially marginalized neighbourhoods.

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*Kirsten Simonsen*

*Department of Environmental, Social and Spatial Change*

*Roskilde University*

*Postboks 260*

*4000 Roskilde*

*Denmark*

*E-mail: [kis@ruc.dk](mailto:kis@ruc.dk)*

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