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Navigating Racialised Spaces

Young Muslims Negotiating a Middle-Class Position in Denmark

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Abstract

The post-9/11 political climate in Denmark has become explicit in its differentiation between white citizens and racialised Muslim citizens in political rhetoric, public policies and media debates. This article looks at how this differentiation trickles down to public spaces affecting young Muslims' social and spatial experiences. Drawing on an ethnographic study of young Muslims in Copenhagen, the article examines young Muslims' ability to navigate through racialised spaces. The cases presented depict the social navigation processes required to achieve a middle-class position in a political context that often seeks to 'otherise' Muslims within Danish society. How do these young people engage, negotiate and challenge an ethnonationalist perception that sees them as the racialised Other?

The research draws on qualitative interviews, participant observations and spatial tours to understand how young Muslims navigate explicit and implicit racialisation in everyday life. The ethnography demonstrates how these young adults create counter-narratives to the construction of the 'Muslim Other' by emphasising their middle-class positioning.

Keywords
Muslims, Denmark, racialisation, spatialisation, minorities, ethnonationalism, social navigation, social mobility, Islamophobia

Introduction

The last 30 years of Danish politics have been marked by a gradual shift towards the right, underpinning the increase in the vilification of ethnic and religious Others (Fekete, 2018; Hervik, 2019; Rytter & Pedersen, 2014). With a critical eye to how such political structures create racial inequalities, this article focuses on the particular experiences of young Muslim Copenhageners' ways of being in the world (Jackson, 1996).

A common thread throughout these young people's narratives is their engagement with their racialisation as Other within social interactions and spatial settings. They *have* to deal with this in ways that were acceptable to themselves as well as their social surroundings. In this sense, the post-9/11 political discourse in Denmark has become explicit in its differentiation between white and racialised Muslim citizens. This article emphasises how young Muslims experience this differentiation in their everyday lives and social interactions. The article draws on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 2013–14, where I engaged with 23 young Muslim women and men (18–25-year-olds). The ethnographic material includes qualitative interviews, participant observations and spatial tours with these young people. The spatial tours were walks through Copenhagen, where I asked

my interlocutors to show me their version of the city. This became an important method to explore my interlocutors' navigation through urban spaces and a way to understand how they construct narratives about their social position.

The taboo of racism, under the guise of being a colour-blind and post-racial Danish society, left the young Muslims I met with little recourse towards their racist experiences. Colour-blindness here is understood as a dismissal of the importance of race in social interactions and structures, which in turn helps sustain racialised structures and power dynamics (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Younis & Jadhav, 2019). How did these young Muslims deal with racial tensions and microaggressions that were made invisible (yet remained present) within a colour-blind liberal framework? I argue in this paper that their agency in these situations was more akin to a *capacity for action* rather than direct resistance, which was made possible by their astute ability to navigate and challenge—rhetorically and spatially—power dynamics imposed by a normalised racialisation of the Muslim Other. I draw on Saba Mahmood's (2011) conceptualisation of agency. Building on Judith Butler's understanding of power as structural and permeating all social life, Mahmood contends that agency is not always direct resistance to subordination. Rather, agency is 'a capacity for action that specific relations of *subordination* create and enable' (italics in original) (Mahmood, 2011, p. 18). In this sense, Danish Muslims' agency—i.e. *capacity for action*—is directed by the structural subordination they experience because of their otherisation. Crucially, this subordination limits Danish Muslims' capacity to resist hegemonic power structures, though they retain the capacity to contest everyday expressions of racialisation and Islamophobia.

Herein lies an interesting dynamic between race and class in the Danish context. For example, my interlocutors invested their energy in resisting the racialisation of Muslims as an 'underclass' of Danish society by demonstrating their rightful position as contributing middle-class citizens. In doing so, however, resistance to Islamophobia did not necessarily challenge the class hierarchies that placed Muslims at the bottom. Going back to my point of agency then, the young people I met could challenge, rephrase and reframe the presumptions of their political subordination, but they were not necessarily able to dismantle, disempower or circumvent these structures of power.

This article is divided into two main empirical segments. First, I explore how these young Muslims navigate racialised interactions and negotiate their belonging. Second, I demonstrate how walking through the city can be a way for young Muslims to emphasise their middle-class social positioning and thereby contest the hegemonic discourse of Muslim inferiority and foreignness. Before introducing the ethnographic narratives, however, I briefly present my conceptual framework of the relationship between processes of racialisation and spatialisation to appreciate the experiences of my interlocutors.

A Spatial Perspective on the Racialisation of Muslims

According to Garner and Selod, racialisation 'draws a line around all the members of the group; instigates "group-ness", and ascribes characteristics, sometimes because of work, sometimes because of ideas of where the group comes from, what it believes in, or how it organizes itself socially and culturally' (2015, p. 15). These representations 'transform the clearly culturally and phenotypically dissimilar individuals […] into a homogenous bloc: this is the basis of the racialization of Muslims (the process), and of Islamophobia (the snapshot of outcomes of this process)' (Garner & Selod, 2015, p. 15). Islamophobia—as with racism generally—is thus a product of a racialised social system (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Islamophobia in this article describes the marginalisation young Muslims experience in

everyday life, as well as the structural racism centring on their Muslimness (Sayyid & Vakil, 2010). In the Danish context, this includes both religious *and* ethnic signifiers within a liberal framework of civilisational superiority (Fadil, 2010). Racialisation in this sense does not focus on prejudices regarding Islam as a religion, but rather focuses on targeting people, groups and minorities who are attributed racial characteristics as Muslims (Meer, 2013).

In my research, I do not focus on Muslims in Denmark simply as a form of religious self-identification. Rather, I emphasise the political dimension underlying the racialisation of Muslims within the Danish public perception—how Muslims embody the de facto Other. By focusing on racialisation, it is important to note how race (and racism) mark 'distinct patterns of social and political subordination and de-subordination, resistance and negotiation' (Gilroy, 2002, p. 5). It is particularly the interplay between Muslim agency and Danish social structures that I am interested in exploring. In other words, the ways Muslims in Denmark negotiate and resist the discourse of their subordination to white Danes, and the ways this experience of subordination comes into play in social interactions.

Drawing on Massey's (2013) idea of space as being essential to understanding social categories and relations, there is a profound connection between space and the processes of racialisation. These processes cannot be untangled from the construction of class and gendered categories but must be understood within the intersection of them (Crenshaw, 2018). As Lefebvre (1991) also argues, social relations are the foundation of spatialisation—the production of space. Massey highlights how this has been well developed by Marxist theorists who have demonstrated the connections between space and class. In her book *Space, Place and Gender*, she builds on this literature (her own included) to emphasise the importance of understanding how gender and the construction of gender relations are profoundly connected to space (Massey, 2013). While she indicates that race is another important social concept that needs to be explored in relation to space, she leaves this point unexplored.

In this article, I build on Massey's (2013) work to interrogate the profound connection between space and the processes of racialisation as well as the construction of racial power dynamics in space. These processes cannot be untangled from the construction of class and gendered categories but must be understood within the intersection of these. In other words, racialisation affects Muslims being in the world through their social interactions as well as their spatial experiences (Razack, 2002, p. 6). In this sense, it becomes important to explore how race, class and gender structure each other in spatial terms (Razack, 2002, p. 15).

By examining processes of spatialisation, I challenge the idea that Danish Muslims inhabit distinct sociocultural worlds within Denmark; touring through Copenhagen demonstrates how their lives are engrained within the public spaces of the city. That being said, my interlocutors have distinctive experiences and histories attached to these urban spaces. These differences are important to highlight, especially as they relate to how Danish Muslims are racialised in the popular perception.

Throughout this article, I use the concept of navigation to describe my interlocutors' agency within a rapidly changing, socio-political field. Vigh (2009) offers a useful conceptualisation of navigation as a *motion within motion*. In other words, navigation is the way social actors manoeuvre terrains/social structures that are themselves changing (Vigh, 2009). My interlocutors' navigation involved different discursive tactics, which they utilised when they experienced overt, covert or even structural Islamophobia. Navigation thus highlights how my interlocutors consciously use their spaces to insist on their belonging, resist their

exclusion and affirm their entitlement to (white) professional/social spaces. In other words, the tactics my interlocutors applied onto spaces demonstrate how visible minorities can disrupt and invade white spaces by their mere presence (Puwar, 2004). In her book *Space Invaders* (2004), Puwar argues that spaces are not neutral but rather contexts where gendered and racial power relations are produced and experienced. She argues that gendered and racialised bodies disrupt male-dominated or white hegemonic spaces; they invade these spaces and challenge the imagined homogeneity and power dynamics. As will become apparent in the following narratives, the young Muslims I met moved through white spaces consciously and deliberately—thereby contesting their spatial and social exclusion (Anderson, 2015). Oftentimes, they did not have a choice; they could not avoid inhabiting the spaces in which they worked, went to school or socialised, despite their hypervisibility. It is in unpacking such racialised dynamics within spatial interactions that we can appreciate how the connection between space and racialised interactions must be placed within larger social power structures.

Contextualising Racialisation in Denmark

When exploring the phenomenological experiences of young Muslims, we cannot disconnect these experiences from the structural realities that privilege white Danishness (Andreassen & Vitus, 2016; Gullestad, 2002; Hervik, 2019). Such nationalism is not merely a question of white Danes' treatment of minorities. Rather, it is ingrained across Danish social structures, from laws privileging single citizenship to housing policies discriminating against citizens with non-Western ancestry (Freiesleben, 2016; Hervik, 2019; Rytter, 2010; Wren, 2001). My interlocutors' knowledge of these structures—and how they play out every day—is what enabled them to resist, challenge and navigate through such interactions. Despite this reality, Danish political discourse readily draws upon racist tropes. For example, it is common to hear that Muslim men are more violent/criminal and Muslim women require progressive liberation (Razack, 2004). Such widely accepted civilisational superiority of nationalist values enforces a racist system without racists (Bonilla-Silva 2006). This ultimately reinforces a power dynamic between white and racialised Muslim Danes that plays out in social interactions and spaces that my interlocutors had to negotiate.

My interlocutors were painfully aware of the existing power dynamics that political and media rhetoric emphasised through their discourse of the inferior Other. Our conversations often led back to the question of representing 'the good/respectable Muslim': a productive, successful citizen that is both Muslim *and* Danish. While Mamdani (2005) has argued that this is the result of the War on Terror's moral dictum—the idea that you are either with us or against us—my interlocutor's performances of the *good* or *respectable* Muslim do not necessarily refer to this moral dictum. In fact, my interlocutors did not hesitate to be openly Muslim and defiant of social expectations, i.e. requesting a prayer space at school or work or wearing hijab or jilbab (long Middle-Eastern dress) in professional settings. In their own terms, if they were contributing members of Danish society, they were also entitled to inhabit its spaces.

It is through the representation of their respectability that these young Muslims were able to resist their Othering. This respectability was based on their social mobility (Higginbotham, 1994). Often growing up in socially stigmatised neighbourhoods, my interlocutors highlighted their academic and professional successes, working their way up from working-class families to a middle-class position. Contrary to many racialised minorities in Denmark, who have historically belonged to a working underclass, my interlocutors represented a privileged group of young, highly educated and professionally

successful minority citizens. This provided them a unique opportunity to challenge social structures, especially those limiting their self-expressions as Danish Muslims. At the same time, their social capital allowed them to resist stereotypes of the inferior Muslim Other by emphasising their success as well as their belonging to Denmark *as* Muslims rather than as Others *because* of their Muslimness.

Navigating the Racialisation of the Muslim Other

Aisha: Emphasising One's Right to Non-Conformity

Most of my interlocutors described frustration with being other-ised in everyday interactions with white Danes, where their perceived 'foreignness' would be emphasised (Simonsen, 2015). One female interlocutor, Aisha,[1] demonstrated how this otherisation is reproduced in everyday negotiations of religious accommodation with white peers. She described a discussion she had with a white friend in her secondary school class a few years prior to our interview. The discussion was about Aisha declining to participate in the graduation festivities because of the alcohol consumption that usually dominates these celebrations:

> Aisha: […] One of my really good white, or light-skinned Danish friends said: 'Well listen, you guys are also immigrants' and stuff like that. I was like, 'Wait a minute, I'm not an immigrant. You have to know my history before you talk! My grandfather was a guest worker; there's a big difference. We're neither refugees nor immigrants. Yes, we migrated, but even an international student is an immigrant here […]. I'm just as Danish as you are, just in a different way'.
>
> Amani: […] Do you think your friend… Did she characterise you as an immigrant because of your darker skin or because you're Muslim?
>
> Aisha: Because I'm Muslim […]. Because if I did what they [non-Muslim Danes] did, she wouldn't have discussed this with me, the fact that I'm an immigrant […] Especially because I'm not that much darker skinned […]. I know for a fact that it's because I'm Muslim and covered [wearing the hijab]. The more practising you are, the more 'immigrant' you are, if you can say it that way. That's how I feel. (Aisha interview, 2013[2])

Aisha stressed her Danishness in this argument with her friend, and thus objected to the invalid representation of her as an immigrant, i.e. a 'guest' that needed to conform to the Danish way of doing things (Hervik, 2004; Jaffe-Walter, 2016). She argued against cultural conformity as a way of determining Danishness and instead emphasised her own sense of national belonging by understating her family's migration history and instead highlighting her entitlement to being Danish.

Over the last two decades, the question of Danishness vis-à-vis non-Western immigrants and their descendants—racialised simply as 'Muslim' in the public perception—has been heavily discussed in public debates (Andreassen & Vitus 2015; Hervik, 2019; Jenkins, 2011; Rytter & Pedersen, 2014; Wren, 2001). These often classify second-and third-generation descendants of non-Western immigrants, such as Aisha, as non-Danes because of their supposed lack of cultural similarity to white Danes (Hervik, 2019).

1 All interlocutors' names are pseudonyms and any identifying details have been obscured to ensure their confidentiality.

2 All interviews were conducted in Danish, unless stated otherwise. The quotes in the article have been translated by the author.

Although this 'us versus them' dichotomy is particularly promulgated by right-wing political parties, the pervasiveness of this political representation has become ubiquitous in everyday life where people, such as Aisha's classmate, experience frustration with Muslims' alleged lack of conformity (Gullestad, 2004; Jaffe-Walter, 2016). Speaking against this, Aisha explained how the unproblematic usage of 'new Danes' to describe ethnic minorities perpetuated her 'foreignness' even three generations after her family's settlement in Denmark. The concept of 'new Danes' is fairly recent and is often used interchangeably for both new immigrants who have recently acquired their citizenship as well as migrant descendants—even if Danish is their only nationality. The term 'new Dane' thus serves as a racialised criterion in public discourse, connoting difference and marginality from wider society (Jaffe-Walter, 2016).

Aisha displayed the discursive effects of this problematic categorisation when she struggled to find the right terms to differentiate between white Danes and racialised minorities. Aisha explained how her white friend was hinting that Muslims were choosing 'immigrant' over 'Danish' by not joining these graduation festivities. In a discourse that associates *difference* with *inferiority*, whereby 'Danish' is the central pivot, all other categorisations are problematic. Aisha thus quickly reacted to her friend's 'accusation' by affirming she 'is not an immigrant' and provided a more detailed description of her family's migration history. It is significant to note that Aisha had internalised the negative connotation that can be associated with the immigrant category. She differentiated between white Danes and minoritised Danish citizens who are deprived of their *social* citizenship because of their racialised differences. Aisha, therefore, responded by opposing the immigrant label as it connoted someone who does not belong in Danish society.

At the end of this excerpt, Aisha clarified that her white friend categorised her as an immigrant, not because of her family's migration history, but because her Muslim lifestyle prevented her from engaging in certain social activities. She elucidated this point further when she compared herself with two white Christian classmates who also chose not to engage in the festivities because of religious concerns. While her choices were considered 'foreign', Aisha noted that her Christian classmates were not assigned such labels. The difference in treatment highlighted to her how her Muslimness would always serve as a classification that excluded her from the Danish 'us' category. Aisha's response demonstrates a critical resistance towards being placed in a position of inferiority to white Danes. Because Aisha saw herself as a Danish Muslim, she resisted her white friend's pressure to conform to certain conventions. She retorted that she was 'just as Danish […], just in a different way'. Aisha's narrative exemplifies everyday confrontations, which enforce the racialisation of Danish Muslims as inherently Other within a racialised social system (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Aisha negotiates her agency (Mahmood, 2011) not by dismantling these structures completely, but by contesting and rejecting her friend's attempts to Other-ise her in the first place.

Ahmad: Poster-Child for Diversity

My interlocutors had creative ways of navigating their racialisation in everyday life that were not always focused on explicitly resisting such racialising processes. One young man, Ahmad, provided an example of more implicit navigation tactics in dealing with racialised stereotypes. Ahmad focused on his positive experiences of growing up in Copenhagen, avoiding discussions of discrimination. He mentioned in detail his active involvement in a national association that seeks to encourage children to play chess. Through this, Ahmad had positive encounters with white peers and adults who shared his interest in chess outside of a school setting. Ahmad was introduced to the chess association when the general

secretary recognised his enthusiasm for the game in primary school. The general secretary encouraged him to join to promote the game among ethnic minority youth:

> Ahmad: […T]he general secretary from the association thought I was pretty good at the game and asked if I wanted to help promote [the chess association] with the sole purpose of showing ethnic diversity. I told him I could understand that; then I said yes [to the invitation]. And then little by little I got more influence and became a member of their board in the [X] branch and was allowed to make decisions. And later on, I was also allowed to participate in projects and help with these, and then I got the opportunity to become a member of the [X] board, and then… I know it's only chess, but it's actually a very big deal.
>
> Amani: How has it influenced you?
>
> Ahmad: […] I was a primary school student, [I didn't know] how to sit in a meeting with adults, how to reach a joint decision as a group, how to set deadlines, how to plan ahead, how to deal with unexpected factors that arise […], how to be considerate of others' opinions. So, it did two things: it shaped me as a person and as a citizen. He [the general secretary] wanted, I think […], to make sure I didn't end up in a bad environment. Later, he got to know me very well and understood that I would never end up in those environments.

Throughout our conversation, Ahmad demonstrated an acute tactical ability to navigate the stereotypes of a troubled immigrant male often attributed to him. The fact that Ahmad's school was located in the inner city close to neighbourhoods of high crime and gang activity seemed to have motivated the white chairman of the chess club to take Ahmad under his wing as a way of protecting him from that environment. But, as Ahmad explained it, the chairman also saw in Ahmad a token of diversity. Ahmad accepted the subtle transaction taking place at the chess club: Ahmed was given the opportunity to demonstrate he was not 'at-risk', and in return became a poster-child for diversity.

Thus, instead of objecting from the outset to the categorisations of 'at-risk', 'troubled' *and* 'immigrant', Ahmad used it as an opportunity to gain social capital within white Danish public life. He was regularly invited to municipal meetings with other local associations as he became older and started coaching chess at a local school as well as coaching other local sports. Ahmad highlighted these experiences to underline the fact that being involved and engaged in local associations gave him experience in dealing with local authorities. In turn, it gave him the ability to navigate these social fields with ease, often bettering his social position through his involvement. Throughout Ahmad's narrative, he demonstrated how he navigated the stereotype of young male Muslims that depicted him as a potential threat (Bhattacharyya, 2013). Ahmad's narrative exemplifies how his close interactions with Danish associations allowed him to develop relationships with people of authority, who, in turn, saw his potential—but only through the racialised stereotypes they attributed to him. The nationalist frame that associates young Muslim men with threat existed *a priori* to Ahmad's engagements in these associations, irrespective of who he actually was. Ahmad could not challenge the root causes of these stereotypes as part of a racialised social system (Bonilla-Silva, 2001), but he learned how to deal with them, even take advantage of the opportunities they provided.

Racialised Encounters

In the two cases presented here, neither racism nor Islamophobia was mentioned in my interlocutors' narratives. Instead, they described racist situations and microaggressions

without explicitly mentioning the inherent racialised logic of white Danish superiority that framed these experiences. There seems to be an inability in the Danish popular discourse to address issues of racism, let alone speak about it. This is a consequence of the hegemonic colour-blindness that reduces racialisation to phenotypical signifiers. Thus, the popular perception is that racism is about individual biases rather than structural inequalities. Danish popular discourse neglects to question the dynamic in which systems of power enforce their authority over minority populations (Andreassen & Vitus, 2016).

Nevertheless, my interlocutors demonstrated creative ways of tactically navigating this terrain of racial taboos by being aware of the inferiorisation underlying nationalist rhetoric. These young Muslims had different tactics for addressing, dealing with and responding to the racialisation of Muslims. The difference in their navigation through such racialised encounters depended on various factors, including what potential they could see for themselves in gaining social mobility as well as ensuring their rights to express their Danishness differently from those of ethnonationalism (Gullestad, 2006).

Navigating the Racial Order of Space

Khadija: Walking Through Affluent City Spaces

For anyone who has visited Nørrebro—a Copenhagen borough that has historically attracted migrants from both within and outside of Denmark (Schmidt, 2015)—the yellow wall that runs parallel to the commercial street is a landmark of the borough bordering the famous Assistentens Cemetery, where Danish cultural icons lie buried. The yellow wall has, in recent years, become a physical symbol of the social divide between the regenerated part of Nørrebro, which has seen a significant rise in young affluent (often white) professionals, and an area that has seen less capital and political investment and that still suffers from social stigma and socioeconomic deprivation. For the young people I walked with, the yellow wall came to represent a symbolic boundary between their middle-class aspirations and the socially destitute image they seek to disassociate from. Although several of my interlocutors lived in less affluent parts of Greater Copenhagen, they were eager to position themselves on the richer side of the yellow wall.

One example is Khadija, a young woman who lived in social housing just northwest of Nørrebro. In contrast to the racialised stereotype of Muslim women from Nørrebro, she hung out with an affluent crowd, went to upscale cafes in downtown Copenhagen, and would not spend much time in Nørrebro, which in her view did not reflect her environment. Nørrebro is anything but affluent; it is more closely linked with subcultural trends, representing both white leftist and Muslim/immigrant minority cultural trends. As such, the neighbourhood attracts a bohemian artistic culture alongside its working-class immigrant citizens of Copenhagen. As I walked with Khadija through her city spaces, her movements and stories expressed an acute awareness of the existing stereotypes of young Muslims. Khadija's self-perception of affluence became more apparent as we walked towards *Nyhavn* (New Harbour), and she explained her love for high culture:

> The Royal Theatre had a summer show, I went to [it] and they showed the previews of the shows, so I already knew which shows I wanted to go see. I wish I could go more often, but it's so expensive and I'm a student. There was a stage, and we were sitting on the grass. And, I like jazz and Frank Sinatra, so they have a show called "Fly Away" that I really wanted to go see, but it was too late. My high school friend Amy and I decided to become each other's culture buddies. She also just finished her BA in social sciences. I'm in my first year.

> [A street musician plays 'What a Wonderful World', and Khadija hums along] I like this atmosphere… It's sitting outside, it's chilling, it's nice.

As we walked through the urbanscape, Khadija often drew attention towards particular spaces to convey her social positioning. Thus, as we passed by large ad posters for the Royal Ballet, she highlighted her love of ballet. Khadija went on to describe her appreciation for other musical expressions, including opera and jazz—all art forms typically not associated with Muslim youth. Although she never made it explicit, Khadija chose to show me sites that represented a rebuttal of the Muslim stereotype throughout our tour—her movements spoke as loudly as her words. Khadija showed me three sites that she identified with her 'imagined' self: The Royal Theatre, the Opera House and Hotel D'Angleterre—all elite white spaces. Incidentally, Khadija was not intimately familiar with any of them. In fact, she had never been inside any of them; yet, their physicality meant a great deal to Khadija. Indeed, they offered her an opportunity to underline her middle-class positioning, resisting the frames of cultural backwardness imposed on Muslims through Danish public discourse. Khadija especially struggled with political and media discourse that racialised hijab-wearing women from Nørrebro as oppressed and inferior. Her hijab highlighted her Muslimness (Garner & Selod, 2014), and this meant that she had to construct a narrative that challenged what she perceived as the popular perception of this female Muslimness.

It was in Khadija's choices of walking through particular spaces that she demonstrated her ability to navigate racialised social structures that often act against young Muslims' opportunities. This is where the challenge often arose for many of my interlocutors. They all emphasised the importance of being Muslim—all in various ways—but none could escape the racialisation of Muslims that nationalist narratives imposed on them; narratives that form the bedrock of the social structures affecting their lives and social interactions (Bonilla-Silva 2001). Instead, they had to create ways to bypass them, resist them and navigate through them in everyday interactions and movements.

Khalid: Bridging Working-Class and Middle-Class Spaces

For many people in Denmark, Nørrebro—'on the other side of the yellow wall'—is an example of a neighbourhood clouded with social issues, not least of which is the result of political rhetoric that seeks to problematise and thus marginalise its local racialised residents. However, one young man, Khalid, made a point to take me to spaces that bridged his inner-city upbringing in this part of Nørrebro with his present status as a young professional. Khalid took me to the new central mosque in Copenhagen and seemed proud to show off the luxurious details. The mosque stood out from the typical makeshift factories-turned-mosque buildings he was used to when he was growing up. Other interlocutors also commented on the importance of this new and modern mosque. It seemed to be a long-awaited landmark of their belonging to Copenhagen and, by extension, Denmark. It was a stamp of their presence in the city's urbanscape that contradicted the other-ised image of Muslim and 'guest workers'—a totalising overlap of race and class (Yilmaz, 2016).

Another stop on Khalid's tour was his part-time workplace—a prestigious company. The company was located in one of the most exclusive addresses on the Copenhagen harbour, and he compared the space to his usual surroundings in inner Nørrebro:

> It's a very classy area. It's not at all what I'm used to in Nørrebro, I can assure you of that. Sometimes you get some weird looks. People thought I was out of place. I've gotten looks from people who thought, what is this guy doing here. But most people have been nice about it. I think I'm the

> youngest person working here as well. It's funny, there are two immigrants or Muslims who work here, there's me and then someone from [the mosque] who works at [X]. I've had lunch with him a few times. But there aren't a lot of Muslims here.

Khalid's description of being out of place speaks to his *feeling* out of place, rather than the actual reactions of his colleagues. He was young and one of only two Muslims in the entire multi-company building. Accompanying Khalid, as he walked me through the large open reception area of the building, I immediately empathised with his experience; I, too, sensed feeling out of place as a racialised Muslim woman. As we stood in the large reception hall, Khalid took a moment to compare his current workplace with his inner-city neighbourhood. It is in this comparison that Khalid displayed his own self-awareness with his change of social position; he was no longer an inner-city Muslim kid resisting ubiquitous stereotypes of Muslim young men. Now he was an accepted part of a professional work environment—a qualified employee. And yet, he still felt he was invading a space to which he was not entitled (Puwar, 2004); he needed to dress the part and live up to the performance of an 'acceptable professional':

> I feel comfortable in this area [of my workplace] when I'm at work. [I'm] also dressed in professional clothes, but it's not really me. You feel most at home where you've lived your whole life and where you grew up. But you have to leave your comfort zone to gain success in life.

Khalid's spatial narrative had largely bypassed the social issues usually attributed to the section of Nørrebro he grew up in (i.e. on the other side of the yellow wall). Showing me his version of inner Nørrebro highlighted the discrepancy between his social position and the stereotype usually attributed to young men like him in this area. The 'deprived' side of Nørrebro was an area that several interlocutors did not want to associate with because of the stigma attached to it. However, Khalid wanted to display what his childhood neighbourhood meant to him—how it was an essential part of how he saw himself. For Khalid and his neighbourhood friends—most of whom had become successful young professionals in their own right—this area was a catalyst for realising the potential they had discovered as children in supportive environments. Khalid never thought of himself as a troubled youth in need of support by inner-city initiatives and (largely white) role models. Rather, he had been surrounded by people much like him, who cheered for him since early childhood. His spatial tour was a guide through the aftermath of this potential that others saw in him. Though the tour started with his present workplace at a prestigious company, it ended where it all began: his childhood neighbourhood in inner Nørrebro. His tour was thus not just a counter-narrative against the ethnonationalist racialisation of Danish Muslims as inferior to white Danes. His movements revealed resistance to an ethnonationalism so ingrained in Danish integration discourse. Khalid's tour thus challenged the racialising structures of contemporary political strategies—such as the Danish government's ghetto policies (Barry & Sorensen, 2018)—which explicitly advocate the need for proximity to white Danish hegemonic culture if Muslims are to gain social mobility.

Spatial Narratives as Discrete Resistance

Conceptualising agency as a capacity of action within the power structures in place (Mahmood, 2011), I provide an alternative way of understanding young Muslims' resistance to their otherisation. My interlocutors challenged stereotypes of inferiority and social marginalisation through everyday interactions and spatial mobility. At the same time, however,

they did not necessarily disrupt or threaten power dynamics but rather sought to challenge Islamophobia through existing structures—in this case, through class mobility.

As young urban Copenhageners, my interlocutors knew how to navigate their city. When it came to showing the spaces that mattered most, they all chose the urban lives they wanted me to bear witness to. They would prefer to show me the trendy café in the gentrified part of Nørrebro, not the cheap shawarma shop in the less regenerated part of the borough. Their movements thus reflected their way of challenging the image of Muslims' socioeconomic inferiority. It was all tactical; every step was a calculated movement through the city, demonstrating their deep knowledge of the hegemonic symbols associated with particular spaces and areas. Their walks through the city demonstrated how spatial narratives can be avenues to understanding the everyday agency needed to navigate through social structures.

Most research on race and space has mainly been concerned with addressing socially constructed categories of difference. The focus has mainly been on class—being concerned with the intersections of economic and political power (Neely & Samura, 2011). My interlocutors' middle-class positioning, however, provides insight to understand spatial power dynamics beyond socioeconomic marginality. In this sense, the focus is on the processes creating an imagined racial homogeneity of space through which *white spaces* are orientated around whiteness, 'the passing by of some bodies and not others' (Simonsen, 2015, p. 8). While in this case, *Muslim* bodies may inhabit these white spaces, they are made *hypervisible* (Ahmed, 2000). Ahmed (2000) emphasises how these non-white bodies are then made strange by their mere presence. As Khalid described so eloquently as we stood in his office building: 'People thought I was out of place'—he *felt* hypervisible and mitigated this feeling by 'dressing the part'.

Although it is important to understand Danish Muslims' experiences of their racialisation and exclusion in nationalist discourses and imagery, this is only one side of the story. Shifting the analytical gaze towards movement—the paths through Copenhagen as deliberate tactical choices made to have a city speak for you—creates a different narrative and thus produces a different representational space (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 42). The spaces that my interlocutors walked me through represent the hierarchal and implicitly racialised differentiation attributed to city spaces. Some areas were deemed fashionable and trendy, while other spaces had a lingering connotation of social deprivation, often politically problematised as racially and socioeconomically marginal. My interlocutors attributed particular social meanings to the spaces around them; they largely drew on the hegemonic representations shared by all Danes.

Through their spatial narratives, my interlocutors creatively manipulated the hidden potential within societal structures to claim their right to the city and emphasise their middle-class positioning. My interlocutors had a deep knowledge of the different spaces of Copenhagen and the connotations they knew these areas represented. This enabled them to navigate these spaces and construct counter-narratives to racialised discourses that highlighted their social mobility, resources and embeddedness in the city.

That being said, for my interlocutors, the resistance of racialisation materialised through the attainment of middle-class signifiers. This point is especially poignant in Denmark, where race and class are so deeply intertwined in the Muslim minority experience.

Conclusion

This article depicts the experiences of young Danish Muslims, who have come of age in a post-9/11 era of increased nationalistic politics and media rhetoric. The burgeoning nationalist

discourse exists concurrently with Denmark's image as a colour-blind, post-racial and progressive society. This combination has made it difficult for the young Muslims in this article to address racialisation that reinforces a perception of Muslims' inferiority.

All four young Muslims in this article creatively navigated their experiences of otherisation in social interactions as well as the urban spaces they inhabited. To understand these tactics, I draw on Saba Mahmood's (2005) conceptualisation of agency, not as an explicit form of resistance to power structures, but rather as the capacity for action within these structures. In this way, through Aisha's contestation of her white friend's Islamophobia in high school and Ahmad's rejection of the 'troubled Muslim male' trope, they were able to resist how Muslim racialisation is expressed through social interactions, although resisting the very structures that produce this racialisation was beyond their capacity. The insights we gain from Khadija and Khalid's spatial narratives expand on these perspectives by allowing us to appreciate the subtleties of how such resistances take place throughout the city spaces, showcasing the need to appreciate the interplay between racialisation and spatialisation. Khadija's deliberate appropriation of 'white spaces' (Anderson, 2015) in her spatial tour became a rejection of the hegemonic inferiorisation of Muslims—both in class and racial terms. Likewise, Khalid's spatial narrative challenged the stereotypes that associate Muslims with a threat to 'social cohesion'. In fact, Khalid's social mobility was derived from the support and encouragement from his neighbourhood Muslim community—not in spite of it.

All four narratives demonstrate the fallacy of Danish alleged colour-blindness. These young Muslims provide an entryway to understand Danish society as a racialised social system, where Muslims cannot escape their racialisation that is built upon age-old Orientalist logic of the 'oppressed Muslim woman' or the 'dangerous Muslim man' (Said, 1979). As part of a middle class, however, my interlocutors had a unique ability—one that is not afforded to Muslims in more vulnerable socioeconomic positions—to resist Islamophobia through their work positions, social involvement and everyday interactions.

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