2 Racialisation in a "raceless" nation

Muslims navigating Islamophobia in Denmark's everyday life

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Introduction

Focusing on experiences of racialisation, this chapter draws our attention to the power dynamics at play that uphold the structures of dominance. Any attention to this from the perspective of Muslims' experiences, inadvertently becomes an attention to the creative ways these citizens contest, negotiate, and navigate through such power dynamics. Agency as a *capacity for action* is not always rooted in overt resistance, but sometimes more implicit—maybe even docile—ways of ensuring one's right to express one's Muslimness (Mahmood 2011). With this emphasis, this chapter unpacks the experiences of racialisation in Denmark, a colourblind progressive liberal society where the academic scholarship surrounding Muslims has too often focused on their "foreignness"; i.e. their religious organisation, integration processes, cultural differences, transnational ties, etc. (Rytter 2019). This has somewhat skewed the academic conversations—possibly even helped reproduce the political reification of Muslims as "Other" in Denmark—with little attention given to structural power dynamics through which Muslim citizens are surveilled and their social lives scrutinised and intervened in. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted among young Muslims in Copenhagen, this chapter demonstrates how they experience racialisation and Islamophobia in everyday life. I use the concept of Islamophobia throughout this chapter, not merely as religious discrimination, but to emphasise how structures of power racialise Muslims as a quintessential Other—diametrically opposite to (and incompatible with) "Western civilisation." In fact, an ethnonationalist shift in Danish political rhetoric since the early 2000s simultaneous with the global War on Terror, has meant that the racialisation of Muslims has become politically pronounced, and Islamophobic legislation has been introduced under the guise of protecting Danish liberal democracy from a "Muslim threat." In this chapter, I argue that this type of structural Islamophobia is promoted through political discourse and mainstreaming of anti-Muslim racism (Fekete 2018), which inadvertently trickles down to everyday social and spatial interactions.

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Racialisation in a nation without race

The dominant national narrative in Denmark emphasises its progressiveness, liberalism, and welfare ideals. It is a political model for the world to admire (Jensen 2018). This is a narrative founded on the premise of a benevolent civilising coloniser, as Lars Jensen demonstrates in his historical analysis of Danish imperial past. This narrative translates into contemporary political discourse, particularly directed at migrants and descendants of migrants from the Global South. The national self-image is of its own goodness—despite its colonial past (and present). The Dane was a different sort of coloniser: "good," "humane," and "benevolent" (Jensen 2018, 67–68). This chapter disrupts this image, not by dismantling the hegemonic narrative but rather by interrogating the repercussions of the narrative on Denmark's racialised Others, particularly Muslims. By focusing on Muslim youth coming of age in post-9/11 Denmark, I want to challenge the idea of Denmark as a post-racial state, both in political rhetoric and popular national imagination. Instead, I suggest a way to understand Danish political structures as a social system in which a racialised hierarchy is infused within both the political and social structures while simultaneously neglecting the significance of racism. Bonilla-Silva's conceptualisation of racialised social systems is useful to think with in this regard, as an expression of how economic, political, social, and ideological structures depend on a racialisation of people (Bonilla-Silva 1997, 469). Bonilla-Silva draws on Omi and Winant's (Omi and Winant 2014 [1986]) theory of the formation of race as a social phenomenon founded in social structures. In other words, rather than discussing race in biological terms, Omi and Winant argue that racialisation is a social process closely connected to social, economic, and political institutions. Quijano (2000) situates this process of racialisation within an analysis of global power dynamics that is closely tied to a European colonial past and an enduring Eurocentrism. In this sense, racialised hierarchies need to be understood as a legacy of colonialism, which have become a stable feature of global (and in this case, national) processes of power (Quijano 2000). By understanding racial hierarchies within the frames of European colonial past, we can understand contemporary expressions of racism, where "race" is never explicitly acknowledged yet remains present in public consciousness (Younis 2021). Rather, "cultural racism" is a way of culturally inferiorising, in this case, the (Muslim) Other. More specifically, Islamophobia becomes a type of cultural racism through which the Muslim becomes the inferior, uncivilised, potentially dangerous barbarian as opposed to the civilised (white) European.

There has been limited attention in academic discourse to understand how racialised social systems exist outside the American or the British context (Gullestad 2002). This is, however, changing, as topics of migration and border control and the integration of migrants and their descendants within the Global North is becoming a political issue with strong racist undertones. This demands a reconceptualisation of what race and racism means within these societies (Hansen and Suárez-Krabbe 2018; Hervik 2019; Suárez-Krabbe and Lindberg 2019; Hassani 2020).

Paul Gilroy (2013) established a long time ago how nationalism and racism are interconnected concepts. One feeds off the other in a racialised social system. And yet in Denmark, nationalism is hailed as the protection of liberal values while racism is tabooed as non-existent. Thus, the Danish political and social system perceives itself as colourblind; race is not and has never been a problem in any serious way (Danbolt and Myong 2019). This means that racialising discourse on the Muslim Other promotes culturalist explanations of "essential foreignness" that need "integrating" into progressive liberal values (Omi and Winant 2014). Nevertheless, there's an erasure of race in Denmark—not in actual effect, but merely in public discourse. One can rarely talk of racism—whether structural or individual—although it permeates through society at the political, economic, and social levels.

By understanding racism as a by-product of racialisation within a racialised social system, the emphasis is on how it rationalises the structures of racialised inequality as well as racist encounters in everyday life (Bonilla-Silva 1997, 474). In the Danish context, the racialisation of the Muslim Other becomes commonsensical (cf. Omi and Winant 2014), for example: Muslims are from non-Western countries, they are misogynistic, they are backwards, and they are "guests" in "our nation" (Hervik 2004; Jaffe-Walter 2016). What is important to draw from this is how the racialisation of Others—even in nations such as Denmark, where the population is over 95% white—becomes fundamental to upholding the power dynamics within society.

The civilised nation and the "threatening" Other

In her book on Dutch racism *White Innocence*, Gloria Wekker (2016) introduces us to a conceptual framework to understand how racism plays out in societies that have neither dealt with their colonial past nor the entrenched racialised structures that have resulted from this past. Like Denmark, the Netherlands perceives itself as a benevolent small and just welfare society. With this self-perception, the very notion of racialisation and racism as integral parts of the social structures beyond an individualised expression cannot be entertained (ibid.). In Denmark, there are laws to prevent discrimination and hate speech against people's race, ethnicity, religion, or sexuality. Nevertheless, the concepts of race and racism are often socially and politically dismissed as not relevant to the socio-historical context (see e.g. Hansen & Suárez-Krabbe 2018). Instead, the idea of ethnicity and other cultural signifiers are emphasised to highlight foreignness and non-belonging in the guise of "inclusion" through integration, which is often meant as assimilation into hegemonic white culture.

Wekker unpacks how race and racialisation within the dominant discourses—in national politics, media, and popular entertainment—goes unchecked because of the national(ist) imagination of the country's progressive liberalism. This progressive liberalism is perceived to have eradicated racial hierarchies and, by extension, racism. Nadia Fadil (2010), focusing on Flanders in Belgium (the Dutch speaking region), connects this idea of the benevolent

welfare state to the notion of Islamophobia. Similar to Wekker, Fadil highlights how in the Flanders discourse there is a racialised differentiation between *autochton* (native Dutch) and *allochton* (often racialised to non-Western people of colour). In Denmark, it is the difference between Danish and non-Western immigrants and descendants (an official category to differentiate non-white people from white Danes), who in the past 20+ years have been racialised as Muslims (Yilmaz 2016).

The similarity in these cases is the national imagination of liberal values, which are inadvertently threatened by "Muslim" illiberalness. Fadil explains this point, describing how Muslims' lives "which fall outside the liberal spectrum, are seen as 'barbaric', incapable of similar liberal values, and even potentially 'threatening' to one's own liberal lifestyle" (2010:249). This dichotomy between the civilised Nation and the threatening Other is not a new phenomenon but has fuelled much of national(ist) rhetoric in the guise of national exceptionalism. While none of the popular images of the nation within these countries would admit a racist past, not to mention a racist present, there is an image of national(ist) exceptionalism based on its progressive welfare. If we understand nationalism as a boundary-making process in which people perceived as Others are excluded, the argument introduced by Paul Gilroy over three decades ago becomes essential to understanding how nationalism within these progressive liberal societies is deeply interconnected with a racialised social system (Gilroy 2013 [1987]).

Making difference palatable

So far in this chapter, I have presented a conceptual framework to understand how Denmark perceives its racialised Others with a particular focus on the Muslim as the quintessential Other. In the following analysis, I draw on ethnographic fieldwork conducted among young Danish Muslims, who are highly educated and socially mobile, and thus able to challenge the dominant racist stereotype of the socioeconomically and culturally inferior Muslim foreigner. Through interviews and urban walks, I sought to understand how these youth came of age in the years following 9/11. How have they experienced the growing political nationalism and explicit Islamophobia, and how have these political tendencies influenced their everyday lives and interactions with white Danes?

For the past two decades, if not more, the hijab and niqab have often become the centre of political attention when discussing overt religious symbols in Denmark with political attempts to regulate Muslim women's dress (cf. the current ban on (Muslim women's) face covering in all public spaces in Denmark). As such, the hijab was a prevalent symbol in my female interlocutors' narratives, whether they wore it or not. My male interlocutors did not face the same kind of overt reification of their Muslimness based on their dress. They did, however, face a different set of challenges, which meant they often put a lot of attention into presenting themselves as *Danish* Muslims as opposed to "non-Western" immigrant Muslims. Yet because of how Muslim

men are racialised in Danish popular discourse, they often felt a need to pre-emptively deal with the idea that they were not just seen as young men but rather as brown/black males = Muslim = immigrant = criminal/radical/violent. These stereotypes of "violent Muslim men" meant that the young men I met invested time and effort in becoming palatable to white gazes. Idris describes this when he explained how he engaged with his high school teacher:

> I make them understand that immigrants aren't criminal or violent. For instance, my English teacher, who used to be very bigoted, actually told me that I changed her mind.
>
> (Idris, interview[1])

Rather than blame his teacher for her racism and bigotry, he emphasised his own ability to perform in such a way that reduced the teacher's racism rather than resist it. This demonstrates the complex challenges that these young men face trying to navigate a system that vilifies them *a priori*. Khalid, another young man, explained this further when we were talking about how his employer initially didn't like him—presumably because of his Muslim and ethnic background:

> […] You have to step up when you need to. You also have to make an effort. You have to build relationships, and that's what I did with my [supervisor]. Initially, she didn't like me and didn't want to hire me [after my internship], but I made a good impression and was open with her, when we spoke about our private life […], so they also know that you're a person. […] The [supervisor] definitely had her prejudice that had to be taken down slowly.
>
> Isn't it annoying having to deal with this type of prejudice?
> It's not annoying. I see it as a necessity. You're not like everyone else in Denmark, and you have to remember you're Muslim first and foremost, and you should show your best qualities, because then you can't fail—to display good manners and *akhlaq*.
>
> (Khalid, interview)

As a Muslim man, Khalid had to respond to his white female supervisor's prejudices against him to develop a better rapport with her. This meant that he had to be sensitive and take the time to answer her questions about his personal and religious life, making his lifestyle palatable to her gaze. However, he described refuting people's preconceived notions regarding him as matter-of-fact; as a *Muslim* minority in Denmark, you are not like everyone else and you *have to* represent good manners—you have to be respectable (cf. Higgenbotham 1992).

My interlocutors often seemed to have to navigate the difficult terrain between respectability and their self-chosen Muslimness, e.g. in attempting to

adhere to their own sense of religiosity. For instance, Musa, a young man working in the hotel business while finishing his university degree, explained:

> Initially […], I try to indicate that I'm Muslim. […] So, if a colleague invites me to go to Christmas lunch or something else non-Islamic, I try to reject it in a subtle way […]. A problem I often face because I work in a hotel … most receptionists are young women, so there's a chance of physical contact, for example shaking hands, so I usually use the line […] "I only shake hands with the old or ugly, and you're neither"—they take that pretty well.
>
> (Musa, interview)

The symbolic gesture of shaking hands has been a contested marker of difference between "the white Danish us and the Muslim Other". It has been interpreted by politicians as a sign of disrespect of gender equality to the point that the now former Integration Minister, Inger Støjberg, passed it into law as part of the citizenship ceremony, arguing:

> If you don't want to shake hands with the mayor [during the citizenship ceremony], it can be understood as a clear sign that you don't believe in gender equality. That's inherently why there are Muslims who don't want to shake hands with the opposite gender. So, I definitely think you can say that this is essential.
>
> (quoted in DR, translated from Danish, Olsen 2018)

It is in this context that Musa attempts to negotiate his position. The only way to make it palatable to his white female colleagues is by being tongue-in-cheek and attempting to flatter them.

This idea of making differences palatable was important to several of my male interlocutors in a different way than to the young women I spoke to. For instance, Iman explained when she decided to wear the hijab—it is difficult make the hijab completely palatable because it is a visible symbol of difference—it was a constant struggle to be reduced to the stereotype of "the oppressed Muslim woman":

> I met resistance from the surrounding society saying I should take it [the hijab] off: "Tell your father you don't have to wear it!". I often felt defensive: "I actually have a free choice. No, my parents aren't strict or have high academic requirements for me, and no I will not be forced into a marriage." It required a lot of energy to continuously try to climb out of the box they put you in, especially in high school.
>
> (Iman, interview)

I interviewed her in 2013 around the same time that the concept of "negative social control" was first introduced in relation to specifically Muslim women's sexual relationships vis-à-vis their parents' expectations. Iman's comment

here demonstrates how this rhetoric of "social control" was based on a racialised understanding of Muslim men as inherently oppressive towards Muslim women. Meanwhile, reality for Iman, who was 21 years old at the time, was that she chose not to disclose to her colleagues or university peers that she was married. She worried they would potentially put her in "a box" as she described it. So, although she was academically and professionally successful, the social consequences of the government's Islamophobic policies and rhetoric meant that she had to censor herself and her personal life to the white gaze.

Structural privilege in spatial interactions—observations

The young Muslims I have presented so far find various ways of negotiating and challenging their positions vis-à-vis their racialisation in everyday spaces and social interactions. In this section, I want to present an experience I had—as a self-ascribed *and* racialised Muslim—in the early days of my ethnographic fieldwork in Copenhagen. In the fall 2013, the newly built central mosque in Copenhagen had an open-door event for *the Night of Culture*—a yearly cultural event facilitated by Copenhagen municipality giving the public an opportunity to engage with local organisations, businesses, institutions, etc. after normal opening hours. I decided to go and take in all the impressions of the new building, its architecture and the people attending. The mosque had not officially opened and there were still parts of it under construction. Nevertheless, it was clear that it was going to be an impressive building with aesthetically pleasing fusion design elements—in the words of the guide: linking the Danish colour palate with Oriental geometric designs and Quranic decorative scripture. On the tour of the mosque, the guide directed my attention to how the organisation behind the mosque was attempting to be inclusive and open to the wider Danish (non-Muslim) society by offering spaces for dialogue and incorporating architectural elements that fit with the Copenhagen urbanscape. They even went as far as including a mural of Copenhagen's skyline which included the mosque; literally painting Muslims' presence into the fabric of Copenhagen's landmarks.

Immediately following the tour, I met two young white non-Muslim women outside the mosque building. They had also been on a guided tour of the mosque that evening, and we were all three processing our impressions. Like me, they also noticed the inclusive narrative throughout the tour and were positive about their experience. One of the women, however, shared that although everything seemed impressive, she was still a bit concerned about the fact that Qatar was the main financial contributor. Who is going to decide who is going to be the imam, she argued, and how will this be displayed? After all, they're Wahhabis in Qatar, she proclaimed. Attempting to ease her worries, I suggested that Qatar was more aware of Western culture. Also, I eagerly continued, if they end up deciding who the imam is, he would not be able to relate to the Danish context anyways. I finally retorted that the mosque activities must be in Danish to be in keeping with the inclusive tone the

mosque presented at the event. She agreed, but again emphasised that she hoped there would be a way to recruit local people to the mosque. Even with this suggestion she seemed sceptical, because how would they choose a person to be the imam? If only Denmark could get it together and introduce an Imam-degree—like Christian theologians—we wouldn't be in this predicament, she insisted. I responded—a bit defensive, perhaps even protective—that I did not see any need for formalising an Imam-degree, but would rather give younger people the opportunity to understand and proclaim their beliefs within the context they live in.

Changing the subject, I asked them if they were actually going to use the facilities in the community centre linked to the mosque. The same young woman responded that she would, especially the restaurant, which she would consider bringing her mother to and challenge some of her prejudices. She told me that she, herself, was not scared of religion, she actually felt very comfortable talking and socialising with Muslims. It was more the older generation—her mother's generation—who were scared of the unknown. She didn't think religion played a role when she socialised with people, and that is also how she thought Muslims in Copenhagen experienced it. You socialise based on similar interests, being from Nørrebro (the culturally diverse area of Copenhagen) and living in this part of the city.[2]

This interaction seems underwhelming; at least it initially was to me. So much so I actually forgot about it while I was processing my fieldwork notes. The ideas of racialisation and space and the interplay between them where not my main objective when I first travelled to Copenhagen to do the first half of a comparative ethnography of young Muslims in progressive liberal societies. However, as an explorative ethnographer, I knew there was something significant about this seemingly unextraordinary interaction with these two young women. It was perhaps less about their responses to my questions that made me describe this interaction in my field journal with great detail. It was more about what I felt as I engaged with them; defensive, insecure, perhaps even out-of-place, or more precisely *put* out-of-place.

Returning back to this journal entry years later, its significance became apparent as I started to unpack the responses of my Muslim interlocutors, their feelings of apprehension in being in "white" spaces (Anderson 2015) or even making claims to spaces where they are perceived to be foreign (cf. the idea of being 'space invaders', Puwar 2004). In this vignette, however, I was not standing in a "white" space: it was a mosque, and although I did not know the mosque or the organisation that runs it, I felt this was at least a "Muslim" space, perhaps even a *safe* space where the only Danes there were either Muslims themselves or felt an allyship with Muslims in their continued struggle to achieve recognition as part of the Danish national image. The conversation with these two young women rattled me, perhaps because I realised that on this *Night of Culture*, it was not about developing a relationship between the mosque and local residents. Rather, I felt it was a way of *consuming* Muslim "culture" and narratives, and by extension *assessing* the Muslim Other (represented by the mosque) based on whatever narrative it presented: "Do they

really see themselves as part of Denmark? Are they really loyal to *our* nation?" In my interaction with these two young women, the space I had thought of as *safe* had become "white," as in "hegemonically white." I wasn't just talking to two young women; I was defending the Muslim Other to the Danish public.

In retrospect it was unnerving, not that I hadn't experienced it before. I've been to many of these events where my *safe* space was turned *public* i.e. where the hegemonical white gaze invaded *my* space. And yet, this does not work quite the same way the other way around. That is not to say the young Muslims I met did not invade "white spaces" all the time, but when they did, they were often conscious of it either as a way of contesting the spatial/social exclusion or as a way of socially positioning themselves within these spaces (cf. Puwar 2004). Either way, as demonstrated in the examples in the previous section, these young Muslims trod deliberately and consciously. In contrast, I don't believe the two women in the vignette were at all conscious about the racial powerplay I experienced in our interaction. They didn't *intend* violence in their suspicions, but intentions mean little when ones' actions uphold and reproduce racialised power structures. In other words, within a racialised social system, these young women were in a position of power: they could interrogate, question, and undermine the Muslim Other within the most "Muslim" space—the mosque—in Denmark.

In the previous paragraph, we see how Idris, Khalid, Musa, and Iman all negotiated their positions with a constant consciousness of being evaluated by a white gaze; they censured themselves, they divulged their personal lives, and they flattered their white superiors, colleagues, and peers to become accepted as respectable (Muslim) Danes. In comparison, these two women did not hesitate to share their concerns and suspicions about the mosque to me, a visibly Muslim woman. Their proximity to political power *qua* their whiteness meant that they felt entitled to question the Muslim space, reproducing the ethnonationalist perspective of responsibilising the Muslim Other to demonstrate their belonging. It is in unpacking such racialised dynamics within spatial interactions that we come to appreciate how the connection between space and racialised interactions must be placed within larger social power structures.

Experiencing Danish Islamophobia

Danish Muslims experiences cannot be disconnected from the structural realities which privilege whiteness and its proximities (Gullestad 2002). Ethnonationalism as the structural backdrop in which Muslims (and other racialised minorities) have to navigate, is not only about how white people treat racialised individuals. Rather, it is a racialised social system that influence most areas of minorities' lives in Denmark. It is their consciousness of this system (although not always made explicit) which enables minorities to navigate, resist, and contest these structures in everyday interactions.

There have been decades of critical race scholarship which has demonstrated how the US operates as a racialised social system (Bonilla-Silva 1997;

Omi and Winant 2014; Anderson 2015). It is, however, more controversial to claim that Denmark is a society which works on a racialised hierarchy. The fact remains, however, that as soon as there is a public perception of who "real" Danes are, there is also a racialisation of the Other which will intrinsically affect the everyday lives and livelihoods of these people. Going back to the point on Muslims—in all their heterogeneity—as a racialised Other, we need to unpack what this actually means within a racialised social system. According to Garner and Selod (2015), racialisation is a tool for the rulers to implement on the ruled: "[i]t 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, 15). The point here is that racialisation is not the same as self-ascription, i.e. Muslims feeling a sense of community based on similar religious beliefs. Rather, racialisation is implemented top-down by the power structures that perpetuate the racialised system (e.g. governments, mainstream media, entertainment industry, etc). 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)" (ibid.). Islamophobia—as with racism in general—is thus a by-product of a racialised social system.

As one of the earliest and most important thinkers in American sociology, W.E.B. Du Bois (2008 [1908]) provides an important reference to understand how racialised people internalise their racialisation through a double consciousness. They "learn to read themselves through the eyes and mindsets of the majority population and regulate their behaviour accordingly in specific contexts" (Garner & Selod 2015, 17). The idea of double consciousness is woven into many of the narratives presented in this paper. While it is expressed in different ways, all the young Muslims I met had to deal with ways of being racialised as Muslims and acted accordingly: they negotiated their self-representation as a "good"/respectable minority and their position within social spaces often as a *response* to their racialisation.

With this understanding of the racialisation of Muslims as a process to *Otherise* them, our attention is drawn to the physical markers through dress and phenotypical signs, but also their practices of Muslimness, such as daily prayers, fasting, halal food, etc. In this sense, it is not only the external signs of Muslimness that are racialised, but their very practice of Islam is racialised as Other.

Racialisation of Muslims and structural expressions of Islamophobia—as a way for political powers to curb and limit Muslim agency (Sayyid and Vakil 2010)—tells us something about the social structures and how racialised power dynamics are upheld from the top, trickling down to real life consequences in social interactions as well as life chances (e.g. educational limitations, employment opportunities, housing inequalities, etc.). They create a powerful infrastructure of subordination through which Muslims in these societies must navigate (Massoumi, Mills, and Miller 2017, 13–14).

The Muslim subject and everyday life

Islamophobia—as a racism towards Muslimness or perceived Muslimness—is becoming increasingly entrenched within the political and populistic Danish discourse (Hassani 2020). The young Muslims I met in Copenhagen were adamant about *being* a part of and being *seen* as part of these cities and nations, and they resisted—sometimes explicitly, but often implicitly—attempts to sideline their belonging. However, their resistance needs to be placed within the realities they reside within: a national(ist) context which perceives them as Other/minority/non-Western which are all racialised to Muslims.

Within this frame, Saba Mahmood's (2011) conceptualisation of agency is useful to think with. Building on poststructuralist theorists' understanding of power as structural and permeating all social life (cf. Butler), Mahmood contends that agency is not merely a resistance to subordination. Rather, agency is "a capacity for action that specific relations of *subordination* create and enable" (italics in original, Mahmood 2011, 18). In this sense, Danish Muslims' agency—i.e. *capacity for action*—is directed by the structural subordination they experience, which curbs their ability to exercise the full breath of liberty that their white counterparts enjoy (e.g. dress, speech, etc).

Otherisation as a form of subordination, in this sense, does not curb all capacity for action. Nevertheless, the capacity to resist and contest the power dynamics is limited to hegemonic narratives. In other words, the young people I met had a capacity to 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.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have argued for a reconceptualisation of Denmark as a nation that is built on a racialised social system through which the Otherisation of its minorities, particularly Muslim minorities, uphold structures of power that subjugate racialised Others and privilege racialised white Danes. Being a racialised Muslim is thus not a question of religious self-ascription but a question of political subjugation that is expressed in social, political, and even spatial terms, where being or being perceived as Muslim is a catalyst for suspicion, questioning, and eeriness in public and political discourse which trickle into everyday life. I have argued that the young Muslims I met in Denmark did not always take a direct stance in resisting these associations with "threat" but rather navigated through them, figuring out ways to become palatable and respectable by their superiors, colleagues, and peers. The ways in which Muslim racialisation permeates through all levels of Danish society means that Muslims have to constantly relate to an almost omnipresent white hegemonic gaze, where even their most intimate relationships are scrutinised for signs of "backwardness" or "threat" to the civilised white progressive liberal nation.

A number of factors have without a doubt influenced young Muslims' everyday experiences and interactions with white Danes: the heightened racialised and ethnonationalist rhetoric in Danish political discourse, the global War on Terror, as well as the hostile border control of asylum seekers and migrants from the Global South, to name a few. Islamophobia in this regard is the act by political powers to (sometimes forcefully) curb Muslim political agency (Sayyid & Vakil 2010). This in turn, I would argue, has created a circumstance where Danish Muslims are required to adhere to (white) hegemonic social values to be acceptable. While my young interlocutors did not wish to give up on their religious values, they knew that some of their religious or cultural practices were "frowned upon" by white Danes. This meant, for instance, that 21-year-old Iman did not tell her peers at university that she was married, because although having an intimate partner at 21 is perfectly normal if not encouraged, having a husband at 21 as a Muslim woman is a potential sign of patriarchal oppression (especially if the woman also wears the hijab).

Why was it so important for the young people I met to be "acceptable/respectable" especially in their interactions with school or professional settings (i.e. white spaces, cf. Anderson 2015)? They came of age post 9/11, and they learnt early in life that to be a "good Muslim" in a political sense (Kundnani 2014) is to not be too vocal about your critique of society, not be too political about your social or political opinions, and not be too angry in your resistance against racism. Instead, you have to be *subtle* in your difference (cf. Musa), *change* racists' opinions by your good behaviour (cf. Idris), take down prejudice *slowly* by being open about your personal life (cf. Khalid), and not disclose aspects of your life that can put you in a *box* (cf. Iman). Meanwhile, the two young white women I met at the open evening event at the central mosque had learnt the exact opposite growing up in the same era: you have to question Muslim Others. In other words, white suspicion is necessary to supposedly protect Danish values of equality, freedom, democracy, from a Muslim Other, which is imagined to represent the quintessential opposite of and threat to these values. The power discrepancy is stark in comparing my cases of Muslim navigation in white spaces vis-à-vis white Danes entering and questioning the Muslim Other in "safe" spaces such as the mosque.

Notes

1 All interviews were conducted in Danish and quotes were subsequently translated by Hassani.
2 Field journal, translated from Danish, October 11, 2013.

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