

Why Can't Hijabs Be *Hygge* Too?
The Development of Islamophobia in Denmark Through Politics & Media

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I have learned about the presence and impact of institutionalized racism while pursuing my degree, and consider myself relatively educated on the topic; but even for me, the summer of 2020, in which protests across the United States and the world at large forced a global reckoning with continued patterns of racism, was something of an awakening. Words like *anti-racism* entered my vocabulary and were used with increasing frequency, as I read and listened in my quest to be an ally and an active participant in the dismantling of this system. This experience brought to mind the old saying that, if someone tells you not to think about an elephant, elephants are all that come to mind—as soon as I realized that systemic racism was so widespread, I saw it constantly and everywhere.

Significantly, this movement spread globally, with protests being staged in European cities as well. This is important because, although the United States has often been scrutinized from both within and without for its racial tensions, these issues are often ignored in European countries, although this does not mean that they do not exist. The United States has struggled with racist institutions and societal structures since the use of the system of chattel slavery in the country's founding and development, and still reckons with the legacy that slavery has left. Even if many white Americans, especially before the movement of the summer of 2020, were in denial or willfully ignorant of the systemic racism that continues to pervade our society, racism is still a

known and widely discussed issue. American children learn about slavery, Reconstruction, and the Civil Rights Movement during their primary education, and if they are granted the opportunity to attend university, there is a wide variety of classes available at the vast majority of institutions that attempt to wrestle with the issue of and develop potential solutions to systemic racism in this country. Racial tensions and disparities are considered in the policy-making process, albeit to varying degrees depending on the lawmaker. As much as some might like to look the other way, it is essentially impossible to disconnect issues of racism with American history, and discussions of race are generally present in politics, media, and civil society, and widely researched in academia.

Contrastingly, European countries have not been forced to acknowledge racism in a similar way, due to the widespread ethnic homogeneity that characterized much of their countries' histories, a "toxic amnesia" about many of the countries' violent imperial histories, and a lack of data collection and research on the topic by both governments and educational institutions.¹ There is a pervading sense that being "color-blind" is better than facing issues of race relations head-on.² Yet as immigration has increased along with expansions in communication and transportation, ethno-

¹ Esther King, "Europe seeks own response to Black Lives Matter," *POLITICO*, June 10, 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/us-style-civil-rights-protests-come-to-europe-george-floyd-black-lives-matter/>.

² King, "Europe."

nationalist and xenophobic rhetoric has also been steadily on the rise in response to fear over a perceived threat against one's national identity. This can be seen in recent parliamentary gains made by radical right parties in many European countries, as well as rising sentiment against European integration.³ Pointedly, even in European countries that have been reluctant to address these issues in the past, protests against institutionalized racism and discriminatory practices also cropped up over the summer of 2020, in major cities like London, Paris, and Berlin.⁴ These protests forced government responses, such as the removal of statues of slave traders and imperial leaders in Belgium, or the banning of the use of chokeholds during arrests in France, which have made this most recent movement especially impactful, creating a sense of hope for future change in Europe.⁵

However, one European country in particular stood out to me for its stark oxymoronic nature in regards to its unwillingness to acknowledge or tackle racism and discrimination. Denmark, which is widely regarded as a bastion of social liberalism and equality, and which prides itself on these traits, is also one of the most resistant to investigate the presence of racism in its institutions, and boasts one of the most restrictive immigration policies in Europe.

³ Nathalie Brack, "Towards a unified anti-Europe narrative on the right and left? The challenge of Euroskepticism in the 2019 European elections," *Research and Politics* (July-December 2020): 1.

⁴ Alasdair Sanford, "Europe 'can't breathe': Protests continue across the continent in memory of George Floyd," *EuroNews*, June 7, 2020, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/06/06/black-lives-matter-protesters-take-to-streets-in-europe-despite-pandemic-restrictions>.

⁵ King, "Europe."

In Denmark, schoolchildren learn about apartheid in South Africa and Martin Luther King, Jr. in the United States; racism is something that happens “over there,” but not in Denmark, where egalitarianism and tolerance reign supreme. If mentioned, instances of racism are considered singular, embarrassing slip-ups applied to an individual, but not as part of a wider system of oppression.⁶ Admittedly, racism is easy for the white majority to ignore in Denmark because, in contrast to the “melting pot” of cultures that characterizes the United States and makes race relations impossible to overlook, Denmark is one of the most ethnically homogeneous countries in the world. It’s also one of the most generous in terms of welfare state provisions, especially universally-applicable entitled benefits, and one of the most equal in terms of income and gender, a point of pride for Danes that I will discuss further later. These characteristics of homogeneity and widespread prosperity allow racism to be swept easily under the rug—even if it is staring you in the face.

I remember visiting Copenhagen, Denmark on a trip through Scandinavia in 2015, and being struck by how happy, friendly, and... *blonde* everyone seemed. I was charmed by the seemingly ubiquitous cozy coffee shops, the beautiful architecture, and the fact that everyone there just seemed so *content*. Denmark, along with the other Scandinavian countries of Norway and Sweden, is often exalted by American social

⁶ Tina Gudrun Jensen, Kristina Weibel, and Katherine Vitus, “‘There is no racism here’: public discourses on racism, immigrants and immigration in Denmark,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 51, no. 1 (2017): 51.

liberals as a progressive Eden: the government provides weeks of parental leave and countless high-quality social services at zero cost, everyone pitching in without a second thought. The provision of social welfare is barely a salient political issue, and is seen as a privilege one earns simply by being a Danish citizen. The contrast with American politics is stark: here, it seems like every single social policy is deeply polarized, wrestled over for months and often ultimately thrown out, much to the frustration of many progressives. Scandinavian countries like Denmark, with their generous social policies, are looked upon almost enviously by liberal Americans: they are doing everything right, while here in the United States, people are being shot by the police in the streets and Congress seems to be in constant gridlock over whether or not to provide benefits as universal as free preschool.

Over the past couple decades, however, racism has increasingly reared its ugly head in Danish politics and media, and the shiny vision of Denmark as a liberal utopia has been tarnished. The blonde homogeneity that historically preserved Danish social cohesion and contentedness is being disrupted by increasing inflows of “non-Western immigrants,” a category that has become racialized. Immigration, especially its restriction, is now a pervasive political and societal topic; yet the problem, it seems, is not with *all* immigrants, only those that don’t fit in with the Danish societal ideal. By framing this as an immigration issue, Danish politicians and journalists successfully avoid the topic of racism, a thorny one that is often skirted for its potential to sow

discord in a country that values cohesion and avoids conflict. However, Danish immigration policies are some of the most restrictive in Europe, and selectively exclude immigrants from Muslim-majority countries, due to their supposed “incompatibility” with Danish society.

I was shocked at some of the statements from Danish politicians that I read during my research for this project, for the way they blatantly accused Muslim immigrants of threatening Danish social cohesion and culture. For example, one immigration minister, Inger Støjberg, said of asylum applicants, “They are unwanted in Denmark, and they will feel that!”⁷ I had previously been one of the American progressives who regarded the Danish social welfare model with envy; but now, I am disturbed by the ethnocentric exclusivity that runs rampant in Danish politics. In the United States, immigration is a polarized issue, heatedly divided between Democrats and Republicans; but in the Danish case, I was struck by the agreement on the issue from parties ranging across the political belief spectrum. The difference between party positions is not the necessity of anti-immigration policies, but rather, how restrictive they should be. This same discourse bleeds into the media: the discourse is not over whether immigrants should be accepted, but how aggressively they should be excluded.

⁷ Isabella Kwai and Jasmina Nielsen, “Danish Official Faces Impeachment Trial Over Migration Policy Separating Couples,” *The New York Times*, September 2, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/02/world/europe/denmark-impeachment-migration.html>.

The disparity here, between the Danish self-conception of openness and egalitarianism, contrasted with its extremely restrictive and clearly racialized immigration policy, is fascinating to me. How can a place that proudly emphasizes tolerance as part of its highly prized cultural values be so *intolerant* of people that don't look like the majority? In this paper, I will investigate how Muslim immigrants and the presence of Muslim culture have created a negative concept of Danish identity, in which Danish culture is defined more by what it is *not*, and by what it *opposes*, than by what it actually *comprises*. I will do so by analyzing the anti-immigration and anti-Islam discourse as enacted through Danish politics and the media, as well as addressing the reactions to and impacts of this exclusion upon the Islamic community in Denmark. The rest of this introduction will explain the definition and racialization of the category of "non-Western immigrants" in relation to the history of immigration to Denmark and recent demographic changes, and conclude with a description of my approach for investigating this conflict in further detail.

Racialization of "Non-Western Immigrants"

Understanding the category of "non-Western immigrants" is key to analyzing the Danish immigration conflict, as it has become a racialized term that is synonymous with being Muslim. It also allows for a distinction to be made, both in civil society and in actual policy-making, between white immigrants from European and North American countries and dark-skinned migrants from the Middle East and Africa. This

means that, by using the racialized category of “non-Western immigrants” instead of an explicit race-based requirement, policymakers can get away with creating laws that discriminate against Muslims, but keep plausible deniability of racist lawmaking.

The implications of the racialization of this category can be seen in the widespread anti-Muslim sentiment that has permeated many facets of Danish life. For example, a young woman called in to a Danish news program to complain that her Muslim classmates ruined a school tradition through their religious abstinence from drinking alcohol, and to ask for listener advice. Interestingly, although the woman only ever refers to her classmates as “immigrants” —although she does not actually know whether her classmates were born in Denmark or in another country—the news program refers to them as “Muslims,” and even uses the Muslim name “Hassan” to refer to the non-drinking students in its headline.⁸ The comments on the article also refer to the students as Muslims, with many complaining that these students should go back to their countries of origin (which are assumed to be Middle Eastern countries) if they do not wish to conform to Danish social practices like drinking-related school traditions. These comments do not actually address the young woman’s question, which asked for a way to modify this tradition so that it could still occur, and instead are simply airings of grievances about the non-conformity of assumed Muslim

⁸ Peter Hervik, “What is in the Scandinavian Nexus of ‘Islamophobia, Multiculturalism, and Muslim-Western Relations’?” *Intersections: Eastern European Journal of Society and Politics* 1, no. 1 (2015): 76-77.

immigrants. This interaction reveals the way that immigrants and Muslims have become intertwined, with all dark-skinned immigrants that do not practice traditional Danish customs being assumed to be Muslim, and all Muslims being assumed to be foreign-born migrants. This definition facilitates widespread exclusion of all those who are assumed to be Muslim, and are stereotyped into holding certain traits which are seen to be incompatible with Danish cultural norms.

References to non-Western immigrants are not limited to societal exclusion, but are also included in government policies, designed to systematically discriminate against Muslim immigrants. In the early 2000s, the Danish Parliament agreed to prioritize skilled migrants from other European countries over “non-Western” migrants, and to limit immigration as much as possible, even though Denmark would experience negative population growth without migrants.⁹ This was achieved through a series of Integration Acts, which established stringent requirements for immigrants to follow in order to receive permanent residency in Denmark, such as learning Danish language and history, acquiring job skills, and entering the workforce, putting such a workload on potential migrants as to discourage them from even applying.¹⁰ However, family dependents, European Union and Nordic citizens, and participants in the Job Card Scheme, which allows companies to facilitate the migration of highly skilled

⁹ Bjarne Hastrup, *Social Welfare: The Danish Model* (Copenhagen: Multivers, 2011), 43.

¹⁰ Gudrun Jensen, Weibel, and Vitus, ““There is no racism here,”” 60-61.

workers with much less bureaucratic interference, were all exempted from fulfilling these requirements, clearly prioritizing European migrants over those from other countries.¹¹ In addition, in 2001, the Danish government created the Ministry for Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs, with the goal of reducing the numbers of immigrants and increasing the integration (or conformity to Danish values, which will be discussed further in the next chapter) of existing migrants from “non-Western countries”.¹²

As immigration continued to increase, especially throughout the 2015 Migrant Crisis, the government began to tighten its restrictions even further, announcing the goal of having “zero asylum seekers” in 2020.¹³ The association of immigrants with Muslims is most clearly represented in this quote from Danish Immigration Minister Mattias Tesfaye, who, in defense of the zero asylum seekers policy, stated, “The fight against Islamism is about the survival of the welfare state. Denmark must not adapt to Islam. Islam must adapt to Denmark.”¹⁴ Interestingly, Tesfaye is a member of the left-leaning Social Democratic party and is the son of an immigrant father himself, yet still is known for his controversially tough stance on immigration. This reveals that the

¹¹ Ulf Hedetoft, “Denmark: Integrating Immigrants into a Homogeneous Welfare State,” *Migration Policy Institute*, November 1, 2006, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/denmark-integrating-immigrants-homogeneous-welfare-state/>.

¹² Peter Hervik, *The Annoying Difference: The Emergence of Danish Neonationalism, Neoracism, and Populism in the Post-1989 World* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), 168.

¹³ Soeren Kern, “Denmark: ‘Our Goal is Zero Asylum Seekers’,” *Gatestone Institute International Policy Council*, February 2, 2021, <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/17025/denmark-asylum-seekers>.

¹⁴ Kern, “Denmark.”

systematic exclusion of non-Western immigrants is not perceived as a political issue divided along party lines, but rather as a universal and noble fight to protect positive Danish values against negative Muslim ones, a cause that is connected to the survival of the Danish welfare state as a whole. These policies will be discussed at length in Chapter 3.

Dr. Chenchen Zhang, professor of anthropology, philosophy, and politics at Queen's University Belfast who previously taught at the University of Copenhagen, says that the statistical creation of the group "non-Western immigrants" allows people from over 150 countries to be treated by the Danish government as a monolith that shares the same characteristics and practices.¹⁵ She further explains that this distinction creates a "West vs. the Rest" conflict, as seen in Tesfaye's statement regarding the Danish "fight" against Islam, and allows the Danish government to create policies that specifically target Muslim-associated cultural preferences and practices, in an attempt to eradicate these characteristics through shame and discrimination.

The creation of the category of "non-Western immigrants," used statistically, socially, and politically, is essentially a euphemism for "Muslims," and allows for the systematic exclusion of and discrimination against Muslims in Denmark, deemed to be

¹⁵ Chenchen Zhang, "The Epistemic Production of 'Non-Western Immigrants' in Denmark," *The Disorder of Things*, September 30, 2020, <https://thedisorderofthings.com/2020/09/30/the-epistemic-production-of-non-western-immigrants-in-denmark/>.

part of a moral conflict between the supposedly morally right Western world and the morally wrong Islamic one.

Danish Demographics and Immigration History

Denmark has long had a relatively homogenous population, with the majority of Danish citizens claiming Danish ethnicity. Its small size and relatively sequestered location in Northern Europe kept the country insulated from migration through much of history. As the world, and especially Europe, has become increasingly connected, immigration has increased, although not to the level that one might guess from listening to politicians and media statements. In 1990, when the issue of immigration came to the forefront of the national conversation, foreign-born migrants occupied less than 5% of Denmark's total population, and the amount of non-Western residents in Denmark is estimated to increase to less than 10% of the population by 2050.¹⁶ Currently, according to the World Atlas, about 13% of Denmark's population is comprised of foreign-born residents, with only about 5.5% of these coming from Muslim countries, while the other 87% identify as Danish.¹⁷ The official religion of Denmark is Evangelical Lutheran, as stated in the Danish Constitution, with around 75% of citizens identifying as Lutheran, and only around 4% identifying as Muslim, although even at that small percentage, Islam is still the nation's largest minority

¹⁶ Hastrup, *Social Welfare*, 211.

¹⁷ Kern, "Denmark."

religion, revealing the homogenous nature of the beliefs of the majority of its population.¹⁸

Although Denmark took in laborers from Yugoslavia throughout the 1960s, their small numbers, labor force participation, and relative cultural assimilation ensured their mostly positive representation in society.¹⁹ The first truly salient wave of immigrants that received a backlash in politics and media began with refugees fleeing the Iran-Iraq conflict in the mid-1980s, with politicians just beginning to capitalize upon the potential for anti-Islamic rhetoric for gaining electoral support, and with one journalist characterizing refugee inflows as an “invasion” influenced by “elite traitors.”²⁰ At this point, the category of “foreigner” or “immigrant” had not yet been fully racialized, so it was not as synonymous with being Muslim as it would become. Anti-immigrant reactions, however, were still strong, as evidenced by the 1994 “Day of Hatred,” in which a parliamentary debate over the citizenship status of Bosnia-Herzegovina refugees went sour, creating a palpable and passionate division between right and left wing parties that is usually less strong in Danish politics.²¹ Right-wing parliamentarians advocated for temporary asylum, while leftist members made humanist appeals on behalf of the migrants. Ultimately, sympathy for the refugees’ wartime experiences

¹⁸ “Religion into Denmark – People beliefs and identity,” *Denmark.net*, <https://denmark.net/denmark-guide/religion-denmark/>.

¹⁹ Hervik, *Annoying*, 22.

²⁰ Hervik, *Annoying*, 25.

²¹ Hervik, *Annoying*, 49-50.

allowed them to be accepted into society, because they were more easily assimilated due to similar religious practices and outward appearances.²²

The rate of immigration into Denmark has been steadily increasing since the 1990s, and took a significant leap with the 2015 Migrant Crisis in Europe, which saw rates of immigration into the European Union jump dramatically, due to refugees fleeing the Syrian Civil War and other conflicts.²³ In Denmark during the crisis, the number of asylum applications surged by 182%.²⁴ This led to a noticeable tightening of application requirements, restrictions for achieving permanent residency, and a notable reduction in social benefits for refugees, which set Denmark apart from its Scandinavian neighbors, of which Sweden is significantly more accepting of immigrants, and Norway occupies a median position.²⁵ The interestingly disparate reactions of the Scandinavian countries to higher rates of immigration will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

As the media made increasing forays into shaping the discourse around immigration, with the anti-immigrant stances of many publications and news programs becoming steadily more Islamophobic and inflammatory, anti-immigrant sentiment swelled and became intertwined with anti-Islamic sentiment. Soon, opposition to ideals

²² Hervik, *Annoying*, 50.

²³ Vilde Hernes, "Cross-national convergence in times of crisis? Integration policies before, during, and after the refugee crisis," *West European Politics* 41, no. 6 (2018): 1312.

²⁴ Hernes, "Cross-national convergence," 1312.

²⁵ Anniken Hagelund, "After the refugee crisis: public discourse and policy change in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden," *Comparative Migration Studies* 8, no. 13 (2020): 2.

associated with Islam would become essential to Danish identity, the definition of which became increasingly exclusive and racialized, and this development bleeds into the country's integration, immigration, and social spending policies. This has led to Denmark's development of the most restrictive immigration policy in Europe, and the exclusion of Muslim immigrants from political and social spheres that are so essential to participation in the Danish welfare state. The development of this negative conception of Danish identity—defined by what it is not—through the government and the media will be the focus of Chapters 3 and 4, respectively.

Approach

I will first discuss the existing literature on this topic, in which I will describe the neo-nationalism theoretical framework through which I will be analyzing the production and application of Danish national identity, and review the Danish cultural characteristics that have led to the creation of an exclusionary ethno-nationalism. Next, I will address the role of politicians and the government in establishing immigration and integration policies that discriminate against Muslims in the name of facilitating “integration,” as well as contrast Denmark's political reaction to Muslim immigrants with that of its Scandinavian counterparts, Norway and Sweden. Then, I will address the role of the media in forming the Islamophobic national discourse in Denmark, through a series of formative media events in the post-1990 world that established Muslims as enemies of Denmark, and as figures to be excluded from Danish society.

Throughout, I will address the response of the Muslim community in Denmark, and the struggle of Danish-born Muslims to define their identity in a country that insists on categorizing them as foreigners. Finally, I will conclude with a discussion of the implications of this conflict, any recent developments in the formation of Danish identity and in immigration politics, and make recommendations as for possible avenues for reconciliation and positive multiculturalism in the future.

Denmark has the potential to be an example for other countries to follow, in its generous social welfare policies and emphasis on tolerance and egalitarianism. Yet this example is spoiled by its increasingly exclusive national identity and restriction of social benefits only to those who fit the proper characteristics of Danishness, as defined in opposition to Muslim characteristics. It is important to investigate the features of Denmark that have shaped its stringent anti-immigrant and Islamophobic politics, media, and society, in order to work towards a more inclusive and multicultural society, in Denmark and other Western countries as well.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The year 1989 marked a transformational global shift: after the fall of the Berlin Wall, globalization, communication, and international exchange exploded. This contributed to a rise in “general anxiety about the future,” both in Denmark and in the world at large, in an age of such rapid and salient transformational change. This anxiety, for many, was channeled into opposition to foreigners and immigrants, and as such, “even a small number of foreigners can be seen as threatening the national identity and the welfare of the state.”²⁶ This protective outlook contributed to the racialization of immigrants, the development of anti-immigrant and increasingly anti-Islamic rhetoric, and the urge to restrict the benefits of the welfare state only to those considered included in the nation.

Denmark is a particularly salient example of the influence of neo-nationalism on national identity. As the media became one of the most influential players in shaping the national discourse on immigration, anti-immigrant sentiment swelled and became intertwined with anti-Islamic sentiment. Soon, opposition to ideals associated with Islam would become essential to Danish identity, the definition of which became increasingly exclusive and racialized, and this development has bled into the country’s integration, immigration, and social spending policies. The development of this

²⁶ Peter Hervik, *The Annoying Difference: The Emergence of Danish Neonationalism, Neoracism, and Populism in the Post-1989 World* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), 31.

negative conception of Danish identity—defining what it means to be Danish by what it is *not*—through the narrative crafted by media and politicians will be the focus of this paper.

The anti-immigrant and anti-Islam discourse in Denmark is just one example of the wider neo-nationalist and anti-immigrant sentiment across Western countries. In this chapter, I will introduce the framework of neo-nationalism, through which I will be analyzing Danish identity and its relationship to Islamophobia. Next, I will narrow my focus to the specific aspects of Danish culture that make it vulnerable to creating an exclusionary national identity and enacting this through anti-immigrant policies, focusing on the cultural concepts of *janteloven* and *hygge*. Finally, I will provide an overview of the Danish social welfare state structure, and outline the ways in which non-Western immigrants are systematically excluded from the benefits of this system, due to the Danish view that only those who are included in the Danish nation—as defined by certain cultural characteristics and practices—deserve to reap the benefits of the Danish welfare state.

Neo-nationalism & Neo-racism

Some suggest that the world is entering a “post-racial” era.²⁷ In a world that is increasingly cosmopolitan and diverse, it is tempting to believe that we as humans have

²⁷ Chenchen Zhang, “The Epistemic Production of ‘Non-Western Immigrants’ in Denmark,” *The Disorder of Things*, September 30, 2020, <https://thedisorderofthings.com/2020/09/30/the-epistemic-production-of-non-western-immigrants-in-denmark/>.

moved beyond the race-based conflicts of history. Yet contemporary scholars that study racism say that although global society has overwhelmingly moved beyond the *biological* racism that many of us associated with racist acts, we have entered a new era of *cultural* racism, or “neo-racism.”²⁸

In the post-colonial era, states no longer relate to each other in terms of colonizer and colonized states, but instead exist within the same political realm, an international community that attempts to prioritize cooperation and communication on a global stage.²⁹ This change would seem to facilitate equality and interdependence, eliminating the need for the core/periphery, colonizer/colonized hierarchies of the old system. In reality, a new division between superior and inferior groups has been delineated. This new division has been codified in the ideology of neo-nationalism, elements of which can be clearly seen in the rising rates of antagonism against Islamic immigrants in Denmark. Danish opposition to immigrants is defined by cultural incompatibility and the conception of the importance of preserving the nation, both ideals studied by these ideologies.

Etienne Balibar, a French philosopher and professor, has written extensively critiquing the nation-state and contradictions present in nationalist rhetoric, and provides a clear definition of the transition to neo-racism. In the past, the inferiority of

²⁸ Etienne Balibar, “Is There a ‘Neo-Racism’?” in *Race and Racialization: Essential Readings*, ed. Tejas Das Gupta (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2007), 83.

²⁹ Balibar, “Is There a ‘Neo-Racism’?” 84.

certain groups was justified by crafting certain biological characteristics that made certain groups less smart, capable, worthy, or whatever the justification might be; this was known as “biological racism,” based on characteristics attributed to the biological makeup of certain races.³⁰ “Neo-racism,” on the other hand, supposedly agrees with the belief that all cultural groups are equal, but argues that some have “insurmountable cultural differences,” that, when these groups are placed in close contact, naturally lead to xenophobic reactions and cultural conflict.³¹ These groups are thus better off separated, not because one is inferior to the other, but because they are so different, they can never live compatibly or cooperatively together in society, and are better off each conforming to their own specific norms and values.

Ultimately, although neo-racism presents itself as a post-racial, non-hierarchical ideology, it still perpetuates the hierarchies of the colonized world, and is based not on the equality of cultures, but on preserving the “purity” of Western culture and its insulation from the thread of “Third World-ization.”³² It explains away the “cultural handicaps” of the dominating class as the result of undesirable “mixing” with the “backwards” cultures of the non-Western world, therefore clearly delineating a hierarchy in which Western neo-liberalism is at the top, and all other cultural groups filter to the bottom.

³⁰ Balibar, “Is There a ‘Neo-Racism’?” 84.

³¹ Balibar, “Is There a ‘Neo-Racism’?” 85.

³² Balibar, “Is There a ‘Neo-Racism’?” 86.

Neo-nationalism is the social and political application of neo-racism, specifically in reference to preserving national identity in response to some perceived outward threat, and is the most applicable framework through which to address the Danish neo-nationalistic hostility towards Muslim culture. According to Danish scholar Peter Hervik, neo-nationalism creates a binary between who belongs in the homogeneous nation and who does not, and delineates the acceptable characteristics of members of the nation through tactics such as immigration control and campaigns to restore familiar forms of national identification.³³

In Denmark, neo-nationalism comes in the form of the “cultural war of values,” a campaign popularized by former Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen’s government, naturalizing xenophobic reactions to immigrants and normalizing far-right rhetoric, and is indicative of the wider trend towards reactionary neo-nationalism that has recently been spreading in Europe.³⁴ Neo-nationalism seeks to create an “us vs. them” mentality, regarding those who are included in the nation as the superior, positively-associated “us” group, diametrically opposed to the inferior, negatively-associated “them” group, which is presented as seeking to destabilize and disrupt the social cohesion that preserves the nation, through the introduction of unfamiliar and

³³ Peter Hervik, “What is in the Scandinavian Nexus of ‘Islamophobia, Multiculturalism, and Muslim-Western Relations?’” *Intersections: Eastern European Journal of Society and Politics* 1, no. 1 (2015): 67.

³⁴ Hervik, “What,” 68.

threatening cultural traits and practices.³⁵ In Denmark, the threatening out-group is Muslims, the characteristics and goals of whom, as perceived by Danes, are fundamentally incompatible with those of Danish culture, especially because some of these traits are so visible, such as the practice of many Muslim women wearing some form of headscarf, and have become salient markers of Muslims' differences from Danes, producing annoyance and even hostility in many ethnic Danes.³⁶

Neo-nationalism is not just a political strategy; it combines other aspects of exclusion – class, whiteness, sexism, masculinity – to create a holistic rejection of anyone seen as non-conforming to the behaviors and characteristics deemed acceptable for inclusion in the nation.³⁷ This ideology is presented as one of unity, encouraging cooperation and national pride amongst those who are included in the nation; but in reality, neo-nationalism fosters disunity through its exclusionary and generally racist discourse. This makes it an appropriate framework through which to study the systematic and holistic exclusion of Muslims from Danish civil society and the welfare state, which is excused by the supposed incompatibility of their cultural characteristics.

Danish Egalitarianism: Conformity and Cohesion

There are certain aspects of Danish culture that have made it particularly susceptible to neo-nationalism. The Danes have a highly salient and proud national

³⁵ Hervik, "What," 68.

³⁶ Hervik, "What," 73-75.

³⁷ Hervik, "What," 70.

identity, developed due to their country's history of ethnic homogeneity, small size, and historical territorial loss.³⁸ Danish culture emphasizes equality, cohesion, and general contentedness, illustrated by the cultural concepts of *hygge* and *janteloven*, which create a society that values conformity and pleasantness over difference and controversy. These cultural characteristics have resulted in an environment that is poised to view immigrants less than favorably, yet also be unwilling to address the racism inherent in Islamophobic reactions to immigration, contributing to the pervasive anti-immigrant discourse that has progressed as diversity in the country has increased.

Paradoxically, Danes proudly view themselves as an egalitarian, tolerant, and overall content society, and prefer to see instances of racism as isolated and personal, rather than address racism head-on as a pervasive structural and/or societal issue.³⁹ One reason for this is Denmark's relatively lesser participation in the project of colonization as compared to other European countries: the Danish colonization of Greenland and the West Indies is relatively glossed over in Danish education curricula, and it divested its colonies earlier than many other states, leading many to feel removed from the critiques of colonization and its lingering effects that many governments of Western Europe and North America have been forced to reckon with in recent years.⁴⁰ Racism is often

³⁸ Tina Gudrun Jensen, Kristina Weibel and Kathrine Vitus, "'There is no racism here': public discourses on racism, immigrants and immigration in Denmark," *Patterns of Prejudice* 51, no. 1 (2017): 51.

³⁹ Gudrun Jensen, Weibel, and Vitus, "'There is no racism here,'" 58.

⁴⁰ Gudrun Jensen, Weibel, and Vitus, "'There is no racism here,'" 54.

studied as an unfortunate trend that happens in other, less-developed, less-happy countries, and is generally associated with the Holocaust and Nazi ideologies of WWII, the Civil Rights Era in the United States, and apartheid in South Africa.⁴¹ As American university professor Dr. Lisa Richey, who has lived and worked in Copenhagen, Denmark for over twenty years, told me, her Danish students were all familiar with Martin Luther King, Jr., but were highly uncomfortable with discussing or even acknowledging racism and race relations in their own country.

This avoidance of topics that are seen as unsavory, like racism, is due in part to the Danish conception of social cohesion and conformity as essential for ensuring an egalitarian society, encompassed by the cultural concepts of *janteloven* and *hygge*.

Janteloven, or “The Law of Jante,” comes from a 1933 satirical fiction story, *A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks*, based on author Aksel Sandemose’s upbringing in a small Danish town, and refers to the unwritten rules for inclusion in Danish society.⁴² In the novel, *janteloven* are a set of ten commandments required for acceptance in the fictional small town of Jante; in effect, they enforce equality “by ensuring that attention-seeking or individualistic behavior result in ridicule or alienation.”⁴³ In Danish society, to ensure equality, conformity is expected, and if the code of acceptable behaviors and

⁴¹ Hervik, *Annoying*, 35.

⁴² Ahmad Beltagui and Thomas Schmidt, “Why Can’t We All Just Get Along? A Study of Hygge and Janteloven in the Danish Social-Casual Games Community,” *Games and Culture* 12, no. 5 (2017): 405.

⁴³ Beltagui and Schmidt, “Why Can’t We All Just Get Along?” 405.

characteristics is not followed, one should not expect to participate in the benefits of an egalitarian society. This is an equality that is not purely based on altruistic motivations, but at least partially due to “jealousy, the fear of somebody getting a bigger slice of the welfare cake.”⁴⁴ As described in Bjarne Hastrup’s overview of the Danish social welfare model, upon which I will expand later in this chapter, “Danes hate differences, and nobody is allowed to deviate significantly from the flock norm.”⁴⁵ The ramifications of this ideology are clear: although those who conform benefit greatly from their inclusion in open, egalitarian, supportive Danish society, those who do not are sharply excluded from these benefits. The emphasis on conformity not only has the potential to discourage authentic self-expression or creativity, but also clearly has implications for excluding non-Western immigrants, whose cultural values and practices do not fully overlap with those of Denmark.

Another Danish cultural concept that has a more positive connotation, yet still contributes to an avoidance of racism and a disapproval of immigrants, is *hygge*. *Hygge* encompasses a range of cultural values and their associated behaviors that is ubiquitous in Danish society and viewed by Danes as uniquely Danish. Often translated into English simply as “coziness,” *hygge* refers to the sensation of comfort, warmth, relaxation, and belonging that is curated by easygoing, laidback socialization with close

⁴⁴ Beltagui and Schmidt, “Why Can’t We All Just Get Along?” 407.

⁴⁵ Bjarne Hastrup, *Social Welfare: The Danish Model* (Copenhagen: Multivers, 2011), 432.

friends and family, and is closely associated with the home.⁴⁶ For example, a *hyggelig* (the adjective form of the term) time might involve sharing a bottle of wine and a charcuterie board with close friends, in the comfort of one's home, laughing, chatting, and generally forgetting the stresses and worries of everyday life. The appreciation and active practice of *hygge* is extremely widespread in Denmark; the term is familiar to every Dane, and the phrase "Now we are going to *hygge*" is commonly used to refer to the act of engaging in these cozy-making activities.⁴⁷

Hygge encompasses the Danish concern with "a safe, balanced, and harmonious everyday sociality," which seems like a positive societal characteristic; however, according to Jeppe Trolle Linnet in her PhD research on consumerism and *hygge*, it can also be used as a method of social control, similar to the *janteloven*, and discourages discussion of difficult topics like racism. *Hygge* is characterized by positive interactions and equal participation of all involved, with no one monopolizing the conversation, and with everyone cooperating to facilitate a calm, safe, positive environment.⁴⁸ Participants, then, view those that bring up potentially divisive topics as ruining the careful cultivation of *hygge*. Inclusion in *hygge* environments signals one's successful conformity to Danish values: maintaining a happy family life, refraining from sticking

⁴⁶ Jeppe Trolle Linnet, "Money Can't Buy Me Hygge: Danish Middle-Class Consumption, Egalitarianism, and the Sanctity of the Inner Space," *Social Analysis* 55, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 22-24.

⁴⁷ Linnet, "Money Can't Buy Me Hygge," 23.

⁴⁸ Linnet, "Money Can't Buy Me Hygge," 24.

out or acting “better than” others, avoiding sowing discontent, having a healthy social life—essentially, looking and acting like a Dane.⁴⁹ Non-Western immigrants are viewed as acting outside of these boundaries—they dress differently, live in alternative family arrangements, practice another religion, often have different conceptions of family and gender roles; the way they “stick out” makes them automatically excluded from enjoying *hygge*. This means that, due to the ubiquity of *hygge* and the values it represents, immigrants are often excluded from participation in society.

Furthermore, *hygge* romanticizes the “inside” space, which is seen as safe, cozy, comfortable, in contrast to the “outside” space, which is seen as “morally inferior,” a space of conflict and discomfort.⁵⁰ Thus, those who are unwelcome *inside* the realm of *hygge*—namely, non-Western immigrants—are associated with this sense of moral inferiority, and seen as a threat to the comfort and warmth created through *hygge*. This focus on interiority, of a space defined in response to and protection against a threatening exterior, lends itself to a valuation of repetition and routine, prioritizing the safe familiar over the risky unfamiliar, and creating a hierarchy that values the practices and beliefs of the interior over those practiced outside.⁵¹ This, too, contributes to the exclusion of immigrants, whose practices that are seen as contrary, and thus threatening, to those of the familiar routine, are then characterized as morally inferior.

⁴⁹ Linnet, “Money Can’t Buy Me Hygge,” 31.

⁵⁰ Linnet, “Money Can’t Buy Me Hygge,” 32.

⁵¹ Linnet, “Money Can’t Buy Me Hygge,” 36.

Ultimately, “*hygge* manifests itself as simultaneously a national icon, a contested ideological ground, and a ubiquitous feature of everyday sociality,” thus making it an important factor to consider in a discussion of Danish identity.⁵²

For ethnic Danes, Danish culture is a source of deep pride. According to Hastrup, 87% of Danes are proud to be Danish, and identify respect for Danish institutions, being born in Denmark, speaking the Danish language, expressing loyalty to Denmark, and holding Danish citizenship as objects of high importance.⁵³ These are all characteristics that non-Western immigrants are viewed as lacking, whether this is true or not. Danish culture is seen as unique and special, and is highly salient, so is viewed as worth taking care of and protecting. Danes also include a high level of “democracy and enlightenment” in their national cultural pride, and this focus on democracy has characterized the Danish fight against Islam.⁵⁴ Hastrup notes, however, that this cultural pride and effort to insulate Danish culture from outside influence, could lead to an unraveling of the careful equality established by social cohesion, as “it rejects foreign influences and in this way rejects the global reality that the Danish model will have to exist within.”⁵⁵ Although Danish society prizes tolerance and contentedness, it is these

⁵² Linnet, “Money Can’t Buy Me Hygge,” 40.

⁵³ Hastrup, *Social Welfare*, 430.

⁵⁴ Hastrup, *Social Welfare*, 437.

⁵⁵ Hastrup, *Social Welfare*, 451.

values that have created a society that is widely intolerant to those that are seen as different.

Denmark's Social Welfare System

Denmark's extensive and generous social welfare system is a significant source of pride for Danes, and is seen as part of the country's national identity; in fact, "Danes almost equate the concept of social welfare for all with the concept of 'Danishness'."⁵⁶

Welfare policies, unlike in many other countries, are not a political battleground; parties on both ends of the political spectrum include welfare provisions in their agendas.

However, participation in Danish culture by assimilating to the standard of conformity and not standing out is key to benefitting from the welfare state.

Bjarne Hastrup, CEO and founder of DaneAge, a Danish nonprofit that works to ensure the rights and further the interests of Danish senior citizens, is also a professor on social policies and the Danish welfare model at the University of Copenhagen, and condensed his research into his book *Social Welfare: The Danish Model*. Hastrup defines the Danish model as the plan to use the state, the market, and civil society to create an economically prosperous, socially secure, and egalitarian nation.⁵⁷ As stated earlier, welfare is not a high-salience political issue—in fact, the first welfare policies were implemented by the Conservative party in the 1890s, although significant expansion of

⁵⁶ Hastrup, *Social Welfare*, 433.

⁵⁷ Hastrup, *Social Welfare*, 32-33.

the public sector occurred once the Social Democrats gained the majority after World War II—so the welfare state has been well-developed across Danish history, allowing it to be incorporated into national identity.⁵⁸

Hastrup identifies five key elements of the Danish social welfare model: a high per capita income; active public participation in a democratic government; extensive social security provisions; a free market economy, gently corrected by state measures when necessary; and equitable economic distribution.⁵⁹ These elements combine to create a welfare state that is viewed, especially on the international level, as extensively generous and mostly successful in creating an economically well-off and content populace. This is evidenced by the fact that Denmark consistently ranks near or at the top of global rankings by spending on benefits for families, disability support, pensions, and labor market support.⁶⁰ Indeed, Denmark has one of the lowest rates of income inequality in the world, and the lowest poverty rate in the world, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).⁶¹

Universalism is a central facet of Danish social policies: citizens have equal rights to access social services and receive state financial support, and benefits are generally unrestricted, as opposed to the means-tested policies that are more common in the

⁵⁸ Hastrup, *Social Welfare*, 35.

⁵⁹ Hastrup, *Social Welfare*, 76.

⁶⁰ “Data on Denmark,” Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), accessed October 2021, <https://data.oecd.org/denmark.htm>.

⁶¹ “Data on Denmark,” OECD.

United States (benefits that only apply to certain groups that are determined to have sufficient need, such as food stamps). Universal policies are seen as entitled and natural; there is “no connection between duty and responsibility on one side and care on the other,” but rather, everyone stands on equal footing in terms of benefits.⁶² Most Danes receive cash transfers from the government, whether or not they are necessarily needed by the household for survival.⁶³ This is an interesting contrast from most social welfare policies in other countries, in which the “winners” of benefit systems are mostly lower-income groups that receive contributions through taxation on middle- and upper-class citizens; in Denmark, everyone has the potential to be a “winner.” Hastrup identifies the only potential “losers” of the system as those who are the most financially bereft, and the least educated and informed.⁶⁴ Interestingly, these characteristics apply to many immigrants to the country, who often arrive with very little possessions, an inability to speak the local language, and a lack of knowledge about the systems and benefits in place; and, as we will see, immigrants do tend to miss out on the benefits enjoyed by native Danes.

Gender equality is also an important priority for the Danish welfare state. The country’s official website, run by its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, lists gender equality, as

⁶² Hastrup, *Social Welfare*, 81.

⁶³ Hastrup, *Social Welfare*, 119.

⁶⁴ Hastrup, *Social Welfare*, 119.

well as the “cultural importance” of income equality, as one of its key objectives.⁶⁵

Denmark is ranked as having the second-lowest rate of discrimination against women globally by the OECD, and the least discriminatory family code (referring to the equality of men’s and women’s rights as relating to divorce and marriage).⁶⁶ The country’s government is also inclusive to women, with 40% of the Danish parliament being comprised of women, and many ministers as well.⁶⁷ In fact, Denmark elected its first female minister in 1924, and its first female Prime Minister in 2011.⁶⁸ Furthermore, parental leave in Denmark is generous and extended to both women and men, with women receiving 4 weeks prior to and 14 weeks after the baby’s birth of paid leave. Fathers are guaranteed 2 weeks post-birth, and then both parents have 32 additional weeks of leave that they may split however they choose.⁶⁹ Denmark’s website emphasizes the involvement of men in the household as important to ensuring gender equality, in that Danish men do more housework than in any other country in the world, and often fulfill the role of picking up children from school and preparing dinner. Gender equality is prized as a cultural value, and men and women working together in the labor force and the home is important. This contributes to the feelings of confusion, annoyance, and disconnect often expressed by Danes towards Muslim

⁶⁵ “Income and gender equality in Denmark,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, accessed October 2021, <https://denmark.dk/society-and-business/equality>.

⁶⁶ “Data on Denmark,” OECD.

⁶⁷ “Income and gender equality in Denmark,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

⁶⁸ “Income and gender equality in Denmark,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

⁶⁹ “Income and gender equality in Denmark,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

immigrants, as Islam is viewed as old-fashioned and discriminatory against women, and this has influenced reactions such as policies limiting the wearing of the headscarf, or accusations that all Muslim men are sexist, that will be addressed in depth later.

Participation in and adherence to Danish culture is also seen as essential for participating in the benefits of the generous welfare state: confidence in the state is cultivated through a sense of reciprocity and social trust. Danish society is characterized by high levels of public participation and organization, which are used to build connections that create the trust and kinship that knit society together.⁷⁰ Over 90% of citizens claim membership in some sort of official association, which exist for each sector of society and provide for their members a sense of community, practical social and employment connections, and an avenue for participation in civil society and political dialogue.⁷¹ Whether one belongs to a labor union, an interest group, a recreational club, or something else, participation in these organizations, and civil society at large, is seen as essential to earning inclusion in the national identity and state benefits. Immigrants and refugees are often excluded from these groups, due to combination of a lack of knowledge of these complex social networks, difficulty with the language, and/or cultural dissonance and alienation. This exclusion makes Danish

⁷⁰ Hastrup, *Social Welfare*, 440.

⁷¹ Hastrup, *Social Welfare*, 250.

citizens' distrust of immigrants, and disinclination to extend to them the usual benefits enjoyed by Danish citizens, even more deeply entrenched.

The Danish social welfare model, although admirably generous to those it considers worthy members of the Danish nation, has become increasingly restrictive due to a rise in neo-nationalist sentiment, a discourse that has been crafted through media representations of immigrants and political statements and immigration policies, which will be discussed in detail in the next two chapters.

Chapter 3: Political Discourse

Though immigration is an extremely polarizing issue elsewhere, in Denmark, there is a remarkable level of consensus on a restrictive immigration platform across the political spectrum. Although some politicians occasionally speak out against the poor treatment of non-Western immigrants in Denmark, political debates over immigration policy generally focus more on the level of and paths to migration restriction, rather than whether or not to impose it. Immigration is framed not as a humanitarian cause, but a threat to Danish nationality, social cohesion, and the welfare state. Welfare chauvinism, or the restriction of the welfare state to those who are considered part of the national in-group, is practiced thoroughly, as limited social benefits are used to discourage immigrants and refugees from migrating to the country.

This is made more problematic by the fact that immigrants have become a racialized category in Denmark, so policies that limit immigrants' participation in social programs actually discriminate against Muslims without explicitly addressing race. The racialization of immigration policy is further compounded by the complete refusal to acknowledge any systemic issues or race-based discrimination in the country, which places the burden of social acceptability on the immigrants themselves, and does not encourage widespread societal reflection or change.

In this chapter, I will describe the political environment in Denmark, including the development of the specifically anti-immigrant and blatantly Islamophobic Danish

People's Party (DPP), and describe the policies that systemically exclude Muslim immigrants from social and political participation, lest they "integrate" successfully into the Danish mainstream. I will also contrast Denmark's hostile stance on immigration with those of its Scandinavian neighbors, especially Sweden, which have extremely similar statistical profiles to Denmark and yet vary significantly on their immigration policies, to illuminate the specific characteristics of Danish politics and society that make it so resistant to immigration. Through these analyses, I will examine how this exclusion from Danish national identity has affected Muslims' abilities to participate successfully and fruitfully in civil society.

Defining Discourse

I will be taking a discursive approach in my analysis of the influence of Danish politics in shaping national perception of both national and foreign identities. According to scholar Vivien Schmidt, who developed the discursive approach to policy studies, political science in the past focused mainly on political institutions and structures; looking at the big picture rather than the details, those in power rather than the individuals that make up the political entity.⁷² This led to a focus on the resulting policies, rather than *how* specific pressures and circumstances were interpreted and translated into legislation. Yet these policies do not appear out of nowhere—as Schmidt

⁷² Vivien A. Schmidt, "Does Discourse Matter in the Politics of Welfare State Adjustment?" *Comparative Political Studies* 35, no. 2 (March 2002): 168.

says, “there is nothing inevitable about discourse.”⁷³ She argues for the necessity of including the study of discourse, “understood as whatever policy actors say to one another and to the public more generally in their efforts to construct and legitimate their policy programs,” through the use of official channels and, increasingly, mass media, in explanations of policy changes in the welfare state, because discourse can just as often have a *causal* effect on policy change as it can be an expression of existing interests and institutions.⁷⁴

Schmidt describes a successful discourse—that convinces its audience of the inevitability of the policy changes for which it argues—as one that combines both empirical arguments and appeals to values, communicating both the “functional necessity and normative desirability of change,” as summarized by sociology scholar Anniken Hagelund.⁷⁵ The interactive aspect of discourse also contains two main elements: the *coordinative* and the *communicative*. Coordinative discourse occurs between policy actors, to establish political coalitions and construct policy programs, while communicative discourse occurs from policy actors to the public, and involves both explaining and seeking popularity for the specific policy program.⁷⁶ Hagelund expands upon Schmidt’s discursive framework by emphasizing the importance of

⁷³ Schmidt, “Does Discourse Matter?” 169.

⁷⁴ Schmidt, “Does Discourse Matter?” 169.

⁷⁵ Anniken Hagelund, “After the refugee crisis: public discourse and policy change in Denmark, Norway and Sweden,” *Comparative Migration Studies* 8, no. 13 (2020): 4.

⁷⁶ Hagelund, “After the refugee crisis,” 4.

understanding the wider political and societal contexts in which this discourse occurs. These contexts differ from country to country, so understanding the context in which the media discourse surrounding immigration and Muslim vs. Danish identity in Denmark is essential to understanding subsequent policy development.

In Hagelund's analysis of the political discourse surrounding immigration and the policy response to increased immigrant inflows during the Refugee Crisis in 2015, Danish media articles focused more on the political negotiations required to secure support for *specific* restrictive immigration policies, rather than the arguments made by politicians explaining the *necessity* of these restrictions. This emphasis on the coordinative aspect of discourse during the Refugee Crisis was because, according to Hagelund, an anti-immigration communicative discourse had already been established in Denmark.⁷⁷ Restrictions were expected in response to increased immigration, because a discourse that viewed immigration as a threat was already pervasive by 2015: "There is no path-breaking in the Danish government's self-preservation, it is continuing along an established path of restrictive policies. There is no need to apologize and justify the changes... On the contrary, there is reassurance of continuity."⁷⁸ Hagelund also notes that this discourse only appealed to the values of those included in the definition of Danish national identity, "the basis of community in the shape of a national 'we',"

⁷⁷ Hagelund, "After the refugee crisis," 11.

⁷⁸ Hagelund, "After the refugee crisis," 12.

emphasizing exclusion and protection of an inner sanctum over any international solidarity or refugee protection.⁷⁹

The coordinative discourse preferred by Danish politicians regarding immigration policy, especially in response to the influx of migrants caused by the Migrant Crisis, reveals the widespread acceptance of policies that emphasize protection of a purely Danish national identity over inclusion of vulnerable populations that do not fit the lifestyle standards set by Danish society. This tendency to establish restrictive immigration policy has only become more obvious as immigration becomes more common in the years since the 1990s.

Anti-Immigration Policy

“Integration,” or the goal of the seamless assimilation of non-Western immigrants into Danish society, became an official Danish policy objective in the mid-1980s, but did not become a significant feature of policy programs until the mid-1990s, coinciding with an influx of Somali migrants.⁸⁰ Along with integration came the strategy of selective welfare retrenchment, also known as welfare chauvinism: the implementation of policies that selectively affect Muslim immigrants at a higher level, thus systematically excluding them from welfare benefits. Rigorous integration programs and social benefits exclusion are key elements of the Danish strategy of

⁷⁹ Hagelund, “After the refugee crisis,” 13.

⁸⁰ Tina Gudrun Jensen, Kristina Weibel and Kathrine Vitus, “‘There is no racism here’: public discourses on racism, immigrants and integration in Denmark,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 51, no. 1 (2017): 59.

| Fig. 1. Danish Parliamentary Coalitions & Corresponding Anti-Immigrant Political Events | | | |
|---|--|------------------------|---|
| Election Year* | Coalition Government* | Prime Minister | Pertinent Political Events* |
| 1982 | Conservative People's Party + Liberal + Center Democratic + Christian People's Party | Poul Schlüter | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1987 Impeachment of Minister of Justice for unfair treatment of Tamil and Sri Lankan refugees |
| 1992 | Conservative People's Party + Liberal | Poul Schlüter | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1992 Granted temporary asylum for Bosnian refugees • 1992 Rejection of first Maastricht Treaty referendum, "no" campaign used nationalist rhetoric |
| 1993 | Social Democratic + Center Democratic + Radical Left + Christian People's Party | Poul Nyrup Rasmussen | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1993 Passage of second Maastricht Treaty referendum after amendments to protect Danish sovereignty |
| 1994 | Social Democratic + Center Democratic + Radical Left | Poul Nyrup Rasmussen | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1994 "Day of hatred" in <i>Folketing</i>, argument over treatment of Bosnian refugees • 1995 Creation of the Danish People's Party |
| 1996 | Social Democratic + Radical Left | Poul Nyrup Rasmussen | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1999 Integration Act |
| 2001 | Liberal + Conservative | Anders Fogh Rasmussen | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2001 Immigration Package • 2005 Action Plan for Employment, Participation, and Equal Opportunities for All |
| 2009 | Liberal + Conservative | Lars Løkke Rasmussen | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2010 Point system added to Integration Act |
| 2011 | Social Democratic + Radical Left + Socialist People's Party | Helle Thorning-Schmidt | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2010 Amendments to Integration Act |
| 2015 | Liberal + Liberal Alliance + Conservative People's Party | Lars Løkke Rasmussen | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2015 Restrictive immigration package (asylum qualification and social benefits reduction) in reaction to Migrant Crisis |
| 2019 | Social Democratic | Mette Frederiksen | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2018 "Ghetto laws" • 2018 <i>hijab</i> ban • 2021 "Zero asylum seekers" policy |

*Elections for the *Folketing*, the Danish Parliament, take place at least every 4 years, but the Prime Minister may call an election at any time. I have only included elections in which significant information, such as parties in charge or the Prime Minister, have changed.

*Denmark employs a negative parliamentary system, in which parties must form coalitions to reach a majority. I have highlighted in blue the coalitions that lean towards the left of the political spectrum, and orange those that skew more towards the right.

*This is not an exhaustive list of pieces of integration/immigration-focused legislation/political events made during this period, but rather examples meant to illustrate the continuous implementation of anti-immigrant policy/rhetoric across different coalition governments.

limiting immigration by making life in Denmark for an immigrant seem unappealing. This strategy has been steadily applied in Danish policy, increasing throughout the twenty-first century and especially in response to spikes in migrant inflows during the 2015 Migrant Crisis in Europe, regardless of the party with parliamentary majority (shown in Fig. 1). Legislation intended to “integrate” immigrants has been presented as beneficial for all involved, pitched as creating a more cohesive and harmonious society, but in reality has contributed to negative stereotypes of and discrimination against those originating from non-Western countries.

The 1999 Integration Act, which was the first policy established by any Western country with the goal of immigrant integration, is a salient example of the Danish belief in the necessity of conformity for a well-functioning society. The Integration Act’s main purpose was to “ensure that newly arrived aliens are given the possibility of using their abilities and resources to become involved and contributing citizens on an equal footing with other citizens of society.”⁸¹ On the surface, this sounds positive; but the policies contained in the act are riddled with contradictions, as the true purpose of the act—to achieve social cohesion and eliminate cultural practices that are viewed as incompatible with Danish life—is hidden behind professed goals of achieving equal opportunity and self-sufficiency. In Denmark, equality is not seen as equal acceptance *despite* differences,

⁸¹ “Act to integrate foreigners in Denmark,” *International Labour Organization* NATLEX Database, https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_isn=50810.

but rather due to the *elimination* of them, to avoid conflict or discomfort (recall the discussion of *hygge* and the sacred safe space in Chapter 2). So, integration is seen as an individual effort to subscribe to the norm and contribute to an equal society.

The central feature of the Integration Act is the Integration Program, a three-year process that migrants can undergo to facilitate their integration into Danish society, the goal of which, essentially, is to prove the superiority of the Danish lifestyle over those of Muslim immigrants. Participation in the plan involves signing a contract outlining a personal strategy to achieve employment or educational goals, which is monitored by local authorities. Participants must also sign a “declaration of active citizenship,” the purpose of which is to “make the values of Danish society visible to the individual foreigner and to point out that the Danish society expects the foreigner to make an effort to become integrated,” and includes the recognizance of specified Danish values and customs. This division between the unacceptable customs of non-Western cultures with the superior practices of Danish citizens suggests the superiority of Danish ways, problematizing immigrants and labeling them as separate and inferior. The “us vs. them” dynamic is thus reinforced, and the boundary line around membership in the Danish national identity is drawn ever darker.⁸²

The Integration Act was established by the then-majority Liberal-Conservative coalition, but certain more controversial elements were eliminated after 2010 once the

⁸² Gudrun Jensen et. al., ““There is no racism here,”” 64.

center-left coalition led by the Social Democrats began to take power.⁸³ However, it is interesting to note that the Social Democratic-led coalition did not just remove elements of the Act, but also established new amendments that still emphasized the importance of assimilation to achieving acceptance in Danish society, highlighting again the ubiquity of immigrant suspicion across the Danish political spectrum.

One aspect of the Integration Act that was eliminated was the “point system” to measure a migrant’s level of assimilation, which had been introduced earlier that year by the previous center-right coalition. Under this system, applicants must acquire a minimum of 60 points if over 24 years old and 120 points if under 24, which were gained through achieving levels of success in certain key areas deemed necessary for integration. These included work experience, educational performance, Danish language skills, labor market participation, and economic self-sufficiency. If enough points were gained over four years, immigrants could then obtain permanent residency. These qualifications drew lines between immigrants deemed “good” enough (Danish enough) to stay permanently, and those who were “bad” at integration and had to leave, firmly establishing the moral conflict at the heart of neo-nationalism.⁸⁴

Another controversial policy that was eliminated was the “introduction allowance,” which was a lower dollar amount than the typical social welfare benefit

⁸³ Gudrun Jensen et. al., ““There is no racism here,”” 60-63.

⁸⁴ Gudrun Jensen et. al., ““There is no racism here,”” 62-63.

received by Danish citizens and was granted to migrants for three years after their arrival, for extra support until they were able to enter the job market. This lower payout was meant to incentivize immigrants to gain employment more quickly, but was ultimately criticized for contributing to poverty and marginalization among ethnic minorities, a category that has become conflated with immigrants in Denmark.⁸⁵

This series of changes also included two amendments meant to clarify the definition and expectations of integration, but which ultimately placed the burden of assimilation, and achieving economic self-sufficiency and societal acceptance, on migrants themselves. This was done by stipulating that “successful integration” is a requirement for immigrants to obtain permanent residency in the country, and that it is the responsibility of individual foreigners to intentionally integrate into Danish society and adopt Danish customs, in order to receive the benefits of living a Danish lifestyle.⁸⁶

In 2001, the government established the Ministry for Refugees, Immigration, and Integration, to handle the administration of both asylum policies, regarding entry to Denmark and residency permits, and integration policies, addressing the obligations of immigrants already living in the country.⁸⁷ By 2002, the center-right government, led by Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, implemented the Immigration Package, a set of restrictive asylum requirements that significantly restricted the eligibility of asylum

⁸⁵ Gudrun Jensen et. al., ““There is no racism here,”” 63.

⁸⁶ Gudrun Jensen et. al., ““There is no racism here,”” 63.

⁸⁷ Gudrun Jensen et. al., ““There is no racism here,”” 60.

seekers and the rights of immigrants once in the country. The package included laws for asylum seekers that limited spousal entry; required seven years of residency for receiving permanent resident status, an increase from the previous three; excluded non-permanent residents from full access to social benefits for their first seven years, only allotting them 40-70% of the usual rate, because “foreigners coming to Denmark must support themselves,” according to the Ministry; and required a Danish language and citizenship test.⁸⁸

These laws generally worked as intended, diverting asylum applicant inflows to neighboring Sweden, as asylum applications to Denmark dropped by 38% in the same year the laws were implemented, while applications to Sweden rose by 68%.⁸⁹ The package also included a set of laws targeting integration, which were implemented later that year, and which focused on economic integration and self-sufficiency, as well as programs that taught Danish customs and language under the observance of local municipalities.⁹⁰

In 2005, the government implemented the Action Plan for Employment, Participation, and Equal Opportunities for All, which included initiatives intended to streamline the integration process and make it more effective. This plan regards cultural

⁸⁸ Graham Jones, “Denmark defends tough migrant laws,” *CNN*, May 30, 2002, <https://www.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/europe/05/30/denmark.asylum/index.html>.

⁸⁹ Jones, “Denmark defends,” *CNN*.

⁹⁰ Notification of the Act (No. 792 of 2002) to integrate foreigners in Denmark, https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_isn=63712

practices of non-Western immigrants as the main barriers to societal acceptance, as other integration initiatives that we have discussed have implied.⁹¹ However, policymakers did not acknowledge the possibility of widespread or systemic discrimination, instead suggesting that individual instances of discrimination were self-inflicted by the migrants themselves. Scholar Tina Gudrun Jensen points out that the plan argues that clothes are an important factor in limiting employment, and suggests that immigrant women “break down specific gender specific prejudices and sexual role patterns within families” to combat this issue, which is really just a veiled advisement to cease wearing the hijab. The plan does not address or dismantle the negative stereotypes associated with wearing the hijab, or admit that this discrimination is a significant barrier to non-Western immigrants finding jobs, which in turn perpetuates beliefs about the burden migrants place on the welfare state. Instead, it places the task of changing to achieve societal acceptance *on the individual immigrant*, and does not accept the responsibility of Danish society as a whole to change in order to accept Muslim immigrants without the need for their assimilation.

This denial of structural racism is seen even in policies that, on the surface, appear to directly tackle discrimination. The two most significant government policies that addressed this issue were the 2003 Action Plan to Promote Equal Treatment and Diversity and to Combat Racism, and the 2010 Action Plan on Ethnic Equal Treatment

⁹¹ Gudrun Jensen et. al., ““There is no racism here,”” 65.

and Respect for the Individual.⁹² Both plans, outside of their titles, avoid references to race or racism to avoid any negative connotation, and instead use positive phrasing like “equal treatment,” an example of the Danish cultural tendency to avoid difficult or unpleasant topics due to a general aversion to conflict or anything that would disrupt the sacred *hygge* environment.

The Action Plans present acts of discrimination as committed only by small groups of unenlightened individuals, with one member of the Ministry, in an interview conducted by scholar Tina Gudrun Jensen’s team, asserting that, “Fundamentally there are no structures in Denmark that are discriminatory. Individual people or actions may be discriminatory, but we do not have a discriminatory education system, for instance.”⁹³ This bold statement stands in stark contrast to the picture painted by the implementation of policies such as one law passed by the Danish town of Randers, which required the serving of pork in school lunches and at daycares, even though (or perhaps because) the meat is forbidden under Muslim *halal* dietary restrictions, supposedly to “preserve Danish food culture.”⁹⁴ This occurred in a town that one city council member described as being “on the forefront of integration.”⁹⁵ The continued

⁹² Gudrun Jensen et. al., ““There is no racism here,”” 59.

⁹³ Gudrun Jensen et. al., ““There is no racism here,”” 58.

⁹⁴ Karen Lo, “Denmark Clashes with Asylum Seekers Over Pork in Children’s School Lunches,” *The Daily Meal*, January 21, 2016, <https://www.thedailymeal.com/travel/denmark-clashes-asylum-seekers-over-pork-children-s-school-lunches/012116#:~:text=Both%20Islam%20and%20Judaism%20forbid%20the%20consumption%20of,as%20a%20matter%20of%20preserving%20Danish%20food%20culture>.

⁹⁵ Fatma Cetinkaya, qtd. in Lo, “Denmark Clashes,” *The Daily Meal*.

unwillingness of the government to acknowledge the presence of structural racism in Denmark is a key feature of neo-nationalism: by presenting laws that discriminate against Muslims as “integration” laws that preserve societal peace and are not racial in nature, and by taking performative stances that appear to combat discrimination but in reality characterize any discrimination as a personal problem as opposed to a societal one, the government can avoid the association of racism with its restrictive policies.

Restrictive immigration and integration policies have only increased in their stringency in response to the 2015 European Migrant Crisis. The influx of Muslim asylum seekers from the Middle East into Denmark during the crisis prompted nervous lawmakers to implement restrictive social policies that applied disproportionately to non-Western immigrants, in addition to asylum reduction policies implemented in 2016, which were the most restrictive across European Union countries. This was done to make seeking asylum in Denmark both difficult and unappealing. For example, in 2018, the government introduced a ban on the public wearing of the *burqa* or *niqab*—religious headpieces worn by some Muslim women which cover the face—that passed with support from both right and left parliamentary coalitions. Justice Minister Søren Pape Paulsen argued for the necessity of the ban, saying, “some people do not want to be a part of Danish society and want to create parallel societies with their own norms and rules... We want to live in a society where we can see each other in the eyes... As

Danes, this is the way we must live together.”⁹⁶ This reasoning is illustratively paradoxical: Paulsen rejects the idea of “parallel societies” and advocates for Danish unity, yet creates legislation that alienates and ostracizes Muslims, which in turn discourages them from participation in mainstream Danish society. The message is clear: Danish unity is important to the government, but only as it applies to those who are considered to be part of the (white, blonde, ethnically Danish) national identity.

Furthermore, in early 2021, the government drafted legislation that would require all sermons and homilies to be translated into Danish. This move was condemned by religious leaders—not necessarily for its discriminatory nature, but rather due to its ineffectiveness on actually “[protecting] our community from the spread of radical Islam,” criticizing instead its potential to affect smaller Jewish or Christian religious communities.⁹⁷ This is another example of a law that creates the impression of the supremacy of Danish culture, including language and religion.

Recently, the Danish government has taken the stance that if Muslims will not willingly fall in line with acceptable cultural values and societal behaviors, then they will be forced to do so, seen in the implementation of the “ghetto package.” These laws identify 25 low-income and majority-Muslim communities in Denmark, and if citizens in these areas do not comply with specified integration initiatives, they risk the loss of

⁹⁶ Kern, “Denmark,” *Gatestone Institute*.

⁹⁷ Soeren Kern, “Denmark: ‘Our Goal is Zero Asylum Seekers,’” *Gatestone Institute International Policy Council*, February 2, 2021, <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/17025/denmark-asylum-seekers>.

welfare support.⁹⁸ One law stipulates that “ghetto children” receive 25 hours of instruction in Danish values, religion, and language each week, once they reach the age of one; contrastingly, Danish citizens outside of the ghettos may enroll their children in school as late as age six. Another law that was proposed by the Danish People’s Party would have imposed an 8pm curfew for “ghetto children,” who would be monitored by electronic ankle bracelets, but this proposal was deemed too radical. Yet another law makes sending one’s child to their country of origin for an extended period of time punishable by prison time, because it damages the child’s “schooling, language, and well-being.” Similarly, misdemeanors committed by those in these neighborhoods carry double the penalties as those committed elsewhere.

Minister Søren Pape Poulsen defended the laws against accusations of discrimination, saying, “To me this is about, no matter who lives in these areas and who they believe in, they have to profess to the values required to have a good life in Denmark.”⁹⁹ This statement, although it was made in defense of the laws, is telling: finding success in Denmark hinges on one’s subscription to a certain set of values, on one’s commitment to maintaining societal conformity. To those living in the ghettos, however, the laws are clearly racially motivated: one resident lamented that “Danish

⁹⁸ Ellen Barry and Martin Selsoe Sorensen, “In Denmark, Harsh New Laws for Immigrant ‘Ghettos,’” *The New York Times*, July 1, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/01/world/europe/denmark-immigrant-ghettos.html>.

⁹⁹ Barry and Sorensen, “In Denmark.”

politics is just about Muslims now. They want us to get more assimilated or get out. I don't know when they will be satisfied with us."¹⁰⁰ Another argued against the idea that by keeping Muslim practices, she lived in a "parallel society" to the rest of Denmark: "We actually live in Danish society...The only thing we don't do is eat pork."¹⁰¹

In 2021, a review of the legislation led to the passage of a law which would limit the amount of "non-Western" residents in the ghetto neighborhoods to 30% or less, in order to combat "an emergence of religious and cultural parallel societies."¹⁰²

Immigrants have become so problematized in Denmark that their mere presence is seen as a "risk." Ironically, the problem is circular: by refusing to accept those with different cultural practices into mainstream society, the Danish government *creates* these "parallel societies"; yet the proposed solution to this segregation is not acceptance by the wider population, but assimilation of the minority. The neo-nationalist rhetoric of politicians presents intercultural discord as natural, when in reality, laws aimed at separation and "othering" create this animosity and misunderstanding.

One of Denmark's most unapologetic anti-immigration proponents, former Immigration Minister Inger Støjberg, was faced with a federal lawsuit in 2021 for illegally separating married refugee couples. The lawsuit alleges that Støjberg's

¹⁰⁰ Barry and Sorensen, "In Denmark."

¹⁰¹ Barry and Sorensen, "In Denmark."

¹⁰² Agence France-Presse, "Denmark plans to limit 'non-western' residents in disadvantaged areas," *The Guardian*, March 17, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/17/denmark-plans-to-limit-non-western-residents-in-disadvantaged-areas>.

legislation, which mandated the blanket separation of refugee couples if one spouse was underage, even if the couple shared children or were pregnant, violated Danish law and the European Convention on Human Rights, because it did not individually assess each case.¹⁰³ Støjberg has become infamous in Denmark for her restrictive legislation and inflammatory anti-immigration rhetoric. In 2015, Støjberg took out advertisements in four Lebanese newspapers, strongly discouraging asylum seekers from applying to Denmark. In 2018, she participated in a plan to relocate migrants who have been convicted of crimes, but whose home countries remain unsafe, to the secluded Lindholm Island in Denmark, which previously housed contagious animal disease research centers, saying, “They are unwanted in Denmark, and they will feel that.” Støjberg even celebrated the passage of her 50th immigration restriction law in 2017 with a cake, which she posted to Facebook with the message, “This must be celebrated!” The law in question mandated that asylum seekers relinquish any jewelry and gold to pay for the expenses of their stay in Denmark, and has been extremely controversial.

Støjberg ultimately resigned from her position in the face of her trial, but stood by her actions, presenting them as a fight for gender equality and women’s rights, implying that Muslim immigrants have “child brides” and contributing to the backwards and medieval stereotypes surrounding Muslims in Denmark. In her farewell

¹⁰³ Isabella Kwai and Jasmina Nielsen, “Danish Official Faces Impeachment Trial Over Migration Policy Separating Couples,” *The New York Times*, September 2, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/02/world/europe/denmark-impeachment-migration.html>.

speech, Støjberg concluded, “We must not forget for even one second that we are in a struggle of values every day.” Courts found in December of 2021 that Støjberg had neglected her ministerial duties through the implementation of the spousal separation law, and sentenced her to sixty days in prison.

Also in 2021, the Danish government, which is now under a Social Democratic majority, announced its plan to achieve “zero asylum seekers” in the country. Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen explained in February of the year: “We must be careful that not too many people come to our country, otherwise our social cohesion cannot exist. It is already being challenged.”¹⁰⁴ This quotation from the country’s leader is in line with trends we have seen throughout Danish society, addressing directly the importance of cohesion for Danes, and the view that equality is achieved through sameness and conformity. Immigrants are seen as threatening this easy unity, and therefore must either conform to the lifestyles and expectations of Danes, or leave. The threat of non-Western immigrant presence has caused an increase in neo-nationalism even at the highest level of government, a fear that has been repeatedly articulated by the leader of a left-wing party.

The Danish People’s Party

The Danish People’s Party (DPP) developed concurrently with the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment in Denmark, and is an important symbol of the neo-nationalist

¹⁰⁴ Kern, “Denmark.”

movement in the country. The DPP grew out of the populist Progress Party, as party leaders capitalized upon and escalated negative attitudes towards Muslim immigrants. The party also used the media to gain popularity and spread exaggerations and stereotypes about immigrants, which I will discuss further in Chapter 4. Analysis of the rise of the DPP illustrates the success of nationalist appeals in Danish society, and highlights the fear of the loss of national identity that has caused such hostility towards other cultures.

The Progress Party came to prominence in the 1970s, and quickly became the strongest populist party in the world, winning 16% of the vote in its first election in 1973.¹⁰⁵ The party was created on a neoliberal, anti-tax program, but did not initially have a notably right-wing social policy, declining even to address immigration in its first platform.¹⁰⁶ Although the Progress Party adopted an anti-immigrant stance in the mid-1980s once the issue of immigration became salient in Denmark, the party was founded more on neoliberal values than using a specifically neo-nationalist frame.

In contrast, the DPP was built on a neo-nationalist and anti-establishment basis, and social policy, especially concerning immigration, is a key feature of its platform. The DPP broke away from the Progress Party in 1995 under the leadership of Pia Kjaersgaard. Kjaersgaard had previously taken a lead role in the Progress Party to fill in

¹⁰⁵ Jens Rydgren, "Explaining the Emergence of Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties: The Case of Denmark," *West European Politics* 27 no. 3 (2004): 474.

¹⁰⁶ Rydgren, "Explaining," 480.

for a fellow party leader, Mogens Glistrup, after his imprisonment for tax fraud in 1984.¹⁰⁷ After Glistrup returned to the party in 1987, Kjærsgaard had already built a following and gotten accustomed to leadership, and eventually left the Progress Party with a group of other politicians to head the DPP on a neo-nationalist, anti-European integration, and anti-immigration platform.¹⁰⁸ Since the party gained 12% of the vote in 2001, as Parliament changed hands from the previous Social Democratic majority to a Liberal and Conservative coalition that included the DPP, it has remained one of Denmark's top political parties in the legislature, and a key pillar of support for the right-wing coalition.¹⁰⁹

The DPP's foundational views are staunchly neo-nationalist and welfare chauvinistic, and emphasize the threat of Muslim immigration and the need for protection of ethnic Danes by restricting welfare state benefits only to nationals. According to the party platform, "Denmark is not a nation of immigration and has never been one. We cannot therefore accept a multiethnic transformation of the country... A multicultural society is a society without coherence and unity...characterized by a lack of solidarity and often by open conflict."¹¹⁰ The platform

¹⁰⁷ Rydgren, "Explaining," 480.

¹⁰⁸ Rydgren, "Explaining," 480.

¹⁰⁹ Romana Careja, Christian Elmelund-Præstekær, Michael Baggesen Klitgaard, Erik Gahner Larsen, "Direct and Indirect Welfare Chauvinism as Party Strategies: An Analysis of the Danish People's Party," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 39, no. 4 (July 2016): 440.

¹¹⁰ "The Party Program of the Danish People's Party," *Dansk Folkeparti*, 2002, <https://danskfolkeparti.dk/politik/in-another-languages-politics/1757->

further argues that “The way of life we have chosen in Denmark is outstanding,” making the point that welcoming the customs and values of other cultures threatens the happiness and social cohesion that is so highly prized in Danish culture. The neo-nationalism present here is clear—cultural conflict is presented as a natural result of cultural proximity—but so too is the specificity of the Danish context: the balance enjoyed currently by Danish citizens is viewed as fragile, and defining an exclusive national identity—a sacred, *hygge* inner sanctum—is seen as essential to preserving that balance.

The party’s individual leaders have made more explicit references to the threat that Islam presents to Danish culture. European Parliament member from the DPP, Mogens Camre, blatantly remarked in 2000 that “It is...naïve to think that you can integrate Muslims into the Danish society... Islam is not only a religion but a fascist political ideology mixed with a religious fanaticism of the Middle Ages... We cannot force another culture on the Muslim countries, we cannot prevent them from ruining their societies, but we ought to protect our own society.” The message is that Muslim immigrants are a threatening monolith, and collectively share a political objective of domination and imposition of their religious convictions on Danish society. The average Muslim in Denmark is equated with fundamentalists, and is not viewed as a fellow

[2/#:~:text=The%20aim%20of%20the%20Danish%20People%27s%20Party%20is,and%20our%20responsibility%20towards%20each%20other%20as%20people.](#)

citizen or even a human, but rather a soldier in, as Camre puts it, “a holy war.”

Presenting Muslims as a threat to the stable Danish way of life is part of an extremely important tactic used by the DPP to gain political support: *fear*. By convincing ethnic Danes that their Muslim neighbors are conspiring to destroy their way of life, the DPP can then promise that only its policies can protect Danish nationality from this impending threat, and this translates into votes.

The DPP grew in cooperation with the Danish Association, a far-right intellectual organization, which also publishes a right-wing journal, *The Dane*. Danish society, as mentioned in Chapter 2, is highly organized, with over 90% of the population claiming membership in at least one organization, whether related to employment, recreation, politics, or otherwise, of which the Danish Association is a prominent upper-class example. The Association’s focus is, in its own words, to “secure Danish culture, language and mode of life,” and cautions against “the disintegration of our cultural and popular unity, which is caused by an excessive influx of people from overpopulated countries,” adding that “nobody has the right to force one’s way into another country at the expense of the people in that country.”¹¹¹ The Association’s demonization of immigrants from “overpopulated” countries—a euphemism for non-Western states—and exaltation of the purity and perfection of Danish culture epitomizes the thesis of the

¹¹¹ Rydgren, “Explaining,” 481.

anti-immigration debate in Denmark, and the view that the very presence of foreigners threatens the social cohesion and happiness that ethnic Danes currently enjoy.

Also in its official program, the Association makes explicit references to the danger posed by Muslims: “when a foreign culture is pressed on another country, there will be a shower of sparks...For most Muslims there is no equality for women and people of other religions. And the supreme law is not the one that is stipulated by our democratic institutions, but Allah’s law, the Koran. This order they will try to implement here.”¹¹² This statement is blatantly neo-nationalist, both in its monolithic interpretation of the threatening views of another culture, and in its presentation of culture conflict as the inevitable result of intercultural interaction.

The Danish Association and *The Dane* have been influential in spreading the key ideas of the DPP throughout Danish organized society. The two entities address both the societal and political aspects of anti-immigrant sentiment: the Danish Association proliferates neo-nationalist and xenophobic views throughout society, and the DPP advocates for welfare chauvinistic policy in the legislature. Multiple prominent members of the Danish Association have become members of parliament with the DPP, revealing the cooperation between the two groups.¹¹³ As the Danish Association has increased the popularity of Islamophobic sentiment in Danish society, the DPP has

¹¹² Rydgren, “Explaining,” 482.

¹¹³ Rydgren, “Explaining,” 482.

established corresponding policies to restrict Muslim participation in the welfare system, in the name of protecting Danish nationality and of preventing Muslim immigrants from being an economic burden on the welfare system.

The party explicitly acknowledges the exclusionary nature of these policies, and regards the disproportionate effects these policies have on immigrant families as a victory. For example, one party member said of the 2002 More People Into Work reform, which restricted social assistance benefits for people under 25 years old and required those unemployed to accept jobs even if they were prohibitively far away, “It’s true that this hits hard on the huge Somali family living in a big apartment. But that is exactly the purpose.”¹¹⁴ Another said of the 2011 Higher Ambitions reform, “The proposal is exactly as we wanted it: It applies to all, but the majority of those who will be affected are non-Western immigrants and descendants” (note the mention of the racialized term “non-Western immigrants” here, which has come to refer to all Muslims in Denmark).¹¹⁵

Statements like these may seem overtly racist, but because they are framed in neo-nationalist terms, they are seen instead as rational, responsible reactions to a real threat that is economic, political, and societal in scope. The DPP and Danish Association have played a significant role in the spread of Islamophobic views and harmful

¹¹⁴ Careja et. al., “Direct and Indirect Welfare Chauvinism,” 448-450.

¹¹⁵ Careja et. al., “Direct and Indirect Welfare Chauvinism,” 449-451.

stereotypes of Muslims throughout Danish society, and have translated these views into electoral support, allowing them to create welfare chauvinistic policies which have real consequences for immigrant families in Denmark.

The Migrant Crisis in Scandinavia

The 2015 Migrant Crisis in Europe was a powerful exogenous shock that escalated the development of restrictive immigration policies in Denmark. Yet Denmark's reaction to the crisis was significantly more hostile than that of Sweden and Norway. These three countries are often included together under the umbrella of "Scandinavia," and share many similar characteristics: they have similar language families, comparable Lutheran religious connections, high rates of membership in organized groups, relatively homogenous populations, generous welfare states, general Social-Democratic party hegemony, and have shared territory and leadership at different times since the Viking era, making them apt for comparison.¹¹⁶

The political environments and national identities of each country developed in different ways during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which contributed to differing views on immigration. In the mid-nineteenth century, Denmark lost around a third of its territory to Germany, which left behind feelings of vulnerability and weakness, and sparked an early rise in nationalist views.¹¹⁷ World War II had a

¹¹⁶ Jostein Gripsrud, "Comparing Public Discourse on Immigration in Scandinavia: Some Background Notes and Preliminary Results," *Javnost – The Public* 26, no. 2 (2019): 9-10.

¹¹⁷ Gripsrud, "Comparing," 14.

powerful impact on nation-building in these countries: Denmark and Norway were both occupied by Nazi Germany, and so developed strong protective and patriotic views, making prominent nationalism more acceptable; however, Sweden stayed neutral, and therefore did not have to build up a strong defensive nationalism because its national identity was not under similar threat. Furthermore, Sweden has consistently had around double the population of either Denmark or Norway, and industrialized at a faster rate and on a larger scale due to vast natural and financial resources, which led to the recruitment of foreign industrial workers earlier and in larger numbers.¹¹⁸ Sweden, with its larger initial population and longer immigration history, thus perceives influxes in immigrants in a less shocking and threatening light.

These differing levels of nationalism were made clear with the 2015 Migrant Crisis, in which refugees fleeing the civil wars in the Middle East overwhelmed Europe. The task of accepting refugees fell most heavily on the European Union's southern border states, leaving the northern states like Scandinavia to decide how much of this burden they wanted to lessen, as an increasing number of applicants began to move throughout the European Union. All three Scandinavian countries received increases in asylum applications varying from 160% to 200% between 2013 to 2016, with Denmark alone receiving 182% more asylum applications.¹¹⁹ However, in 2015, Sweden took in

¹¹⁸ Gripsrud, "Comparing," 10-11.

¹¹⁹ Vilde Hernes, "Cross-national convergence in times of crisis? Integration policies before, during, and after the refugee crisis," *West European Politics* 41, no. 6 (2018): 1312.

156,110 asylum seekers, in contrast to the 30,470 accepted by Norway and the even smaller 20,825 taken in by Denmark (a proportion of only around 3,700 asylum seekers per 1 million inhabitants).¹²⁰ Although all three countries restricted their immigration policies in response, influenced in part by a “race to the bottom” mentality in which countries competed to make themselves *less* desirable to refugees, the political explanations for these and the degrees of restriction varied significantly, and illustrate the differences in conception of national identity across the countries.¹²¹

According to a study conducted by political scientist Vilde Hernes, changes made with the goal of decreasing immigration occurred in four main policy areas: permanent residence, citizenship, family reunification, and social benefits. In each of these four areas, Denmark had the most significant restrictions, because the country already had a conservative immigration program, and responded to the Migrant Crisis by tightening existing constraints. Sweden mainly imposed temporary crisis measures slightly restricting its permanent residence and family reunification processes, but only in response to an immediate crisis, while Norway focused on tightening its permanent residence and citizenship requirements, imposing measures such as language tests and a requirement for a year of residency.

¹²⁰ Hagelund, “After the refugee crisis,” 5-6.

¹²¹ Hernes, “Cross-national convergence,” 1320.

Importantly, Denmark was the lone standout in using social benefits as a form of discouragement for immigrant application; by reducing immigrant access to social welfare, the government hoped to make the country less attractive to asylum seekers. Norway and Sweden both continued with their established universalist welfare systems, but Denmark made it more difficult for immigrants to qualify for family benefits programs, as well as reduced migrant shares of welfare benefits to less than 50% than those extended to citizens.¹²² The introduction of welfare chauvinism in response to increased immigrant inflows illustrates the overprotective nature of national identity in Denmark: a homogenous national identity is viewed as key to a successful society, yet also as vulnerable and needing of protection, resulting in the perception of immigrants with different customs and practices as a threat that must be contained.

The difference in discourse surrounding political discussion of the Migrant Crisis and responding policy changes in each country is striking. Sweden and Denmark had strikingly different political responses to the Migrant Crisis, which illuminate the characteristics of each country that led to such disparate reactions. The Swedish government initially supported refugees, with politicians presenting it as the country's humanitarian duty to accept asylum seekers, and accepted relatively large numbers of applicants. However, the country's resources were overwhelmed by winter of 2015, and

¹²² Vernes, "Cross-national convergence," 1318.

the government was forced to impose immigration restrictions, but made sure to stress that the decision to limit acceptance was made under duress (the Prime Minister even cried during the restriction announcement) and was only a temporary emergency measure, then encouraged other countries to pick up the slack.¹²³ Politicians still appealed to the same values of humanitarianism, multiculturalism, and international cooperation, presenting the restrictions as temporary “breathers” to ease the pressure placed on the Swedish welfare system; according to researcher Anniken Hagelund, “the changes do not represent a change of heart, merely of methods.” Sweden employed a communicative discourse, in which politicians had to explain the reasoning behind their actions to the public, signaling that immigration restriction was not characteristic of Swedish politics, but rather a departure from the norm.

In contrast, Denmark reacted much more hostilely to increased numbers of asylum seekers from the outset, despite already having tight applicant qualifications. These restrictions had occurred under the historically dominant Social Democratic party, but the rise of conservative leadership such as the Danish People’s Party facilitated tightening, although these new policies received support from across the political spectrum.¹²⁴ While Swedish politicians criticized other state governments for their lack of support for refugees, Danish politicians criticized *refugees* for coming to

¹²³ Hagelund, “After the refugee crisis,” 9.

¹²⁴ Hagelund, “After the refugee crisis,” 11.

their country in the first place, and admonished other governments for being too lenient with their immigration policies.¹²⁵ Swedish politicians also presented the issue as an international humanitarian tragedy which other countries were morally obligated to mitigate. Danish politicians, on the other hand, were much more inwardly focused, and were more concerned with how the presence of refugees in Denmark would affect Danish citizens and society, than with how Denmark could alleviate the international crisis. Policymakers focused on how best to *minimize* refugee effects on Denmark, rather than *maximize* Danish impact on the refugee crisis.¹²⁶ Politicians employed a coordinative discourse, focused more on securing specific policy measures than on explaining the reasoning behind them. This shows that immigration restriction was not path-breaking for Denmark, but rather represented a continuation of an established environment of suspicion towards immigrants.

This reaction also had a distinctly nationalistic focus: the state of Danish social cohesion and nationality was seen as the issue at stake, not the health and safety of refugees. This reveals that Danes view their national identity, and the general levels of happiness that are so highly valued in society, as vulnerable and worth protecting at the cost of restricting the rights of refugees. This approach was ultimately successful with voters: the Danish People's Party achieved its highest share of the vote in the 2015

¹²⁵ Hagelund, "After the refugee crisis," 11.

¹²⁶ Hagelund, "After the refugee crisis," 11.

election, winning 21.1% of ballots, revealing widespread agreement among Danish citizens that migrants threatened national identity, and highlighting the usefulness of fearmongering and “us vs. them” language for achieving political growth.¹²⁷

Conclusion

Throughout changes in parliamentary majority coalitions and levels of refugee inflows, the Danish government’s commitment to implementing restrictive immigration and integration policies has stayed consistent. Policymakers have created a system that not only makes immigrating to Denmark difficult, but also makes life for migrants difficult once they have overcome the initial hurdle of entry. Immigration restriction and welfare chauvinism, justified using neo-nationalist rhetoric, create a clear designation of “non-Western immigrants” and Muslims as the “out-group” in Denmark, firmly excluded from consideration in the Danish national identity or reaping the benefits of membership in Danish society.

Policy and mass media work together to systematically exclude Muslims from Danish society at every turn. In the next chapter, I will discuss the way the Danish media has crafted and proliferated negative stereotypes of Muslims, which has contributed to their exclusion from society as harmful images and associations of them are created and reproduced continuously by widely-read media sources. The negative perceptions of Muslims created by the media are then used by politicians to legitimize

¹²⁷ Gudrun Jensen et. al., ““There is no racism here,”” 60.

discriminatory and Islamophobic policies. This collaborative discourse contributes to the sense that the exclusion of Muslims is the natural response, because other, more cooperative avenues are not even discussed, much less pursued.

I will also address more in depth the impact that these harmful stereotypes have had on Muslim immigrants and their children living in Denmark. Neo-nationalist rhetoric and policies have presented Muslim immigrants as following a specific, antagonistic, anti-Danish agenda, and are viewed as a group that shares the same broad characteristics and values. In reality, Muslims in Denmark cannot be viewed as a monolith, but have individual beliefs and desires, and many expressed the difficulty of reconciling both the desire to live as a practicing Muslim, as well as participate equally in Danish society. Although their voices are excluded from the media, I will provide a small glimpse into the views of Muslims in Denmark beyond their negative portrayal.

Chapter 4: Media Discourse

The negative impression of non-Western immigrants in Denmark, and the establishment of the supposed moral contest between the Western and Muslim worlds, did not develop organically, or even from Danish citizens themselves, at least independently. Rather, this discourse was orchestrated and developed by two main institutions, Danish politics and Danish media. In the last chapter, I focused on the contributions of the government in creating anti-Muslim policies. Here, I will first describe the destructive, negative dialogue created by the Danish print and news media in relation to immigrants and Muslims in Denmark, which have contributed to a Danish nationalism that is increasingly shaped by its opposition to Muslim identity, and established a host of offensive yet widely held stereotypes of Muslims. Next, I will analyze three significant media events that illustrate the development of this discourse over the past two decades, addressing both the perception of immigrants and conception of national identity in Denmark. I will lean extensively upon Peter Hervik's work, *The Annoying Difference*, which scrutinizes the elements of Danish society, especially the media, that impact the salience of the "annoying difference" that Danes perceive between "non-Western foreigners" and themselves.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Peter Hervik, *The Annoying Difference: The Emergence of Danish Neonationalism, Neoracism, and Populism in the Post-1989 World* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), xii.

Hervik has identified these three media events, and I will expand upon his work to connect it more closely to the development of Danish national identity, and incorporate further the response of individuals in the Muslim community to their representation in the media. First, the publication *Ekstra Bladet's* "Foreigners" newspaper campaign sought to define the category of "non-Western immigrant" and shame the morally incompatible Muslim. Next, the media treatment of the rise and fall of a young political hopeful and Muslim woman, Mona Sheikh, cemented the exclusion of young Danish Muslims, many of whom were born in Denmark, from participation in politics and identification with any sort of Danish identity. Finally, and most famously, the Mohammad cartoon controversy, in which the publication *Jyllands-Posten* provocatively requested its satire cartoonists to submit depictions of the Prophet Muhammad, despite the stipulation against the depiction of the Prophet in art according to Muslim religious texts, brought international attention to the Islamophobia present in Denmark. An in-depth analysis of the media presentation and handling of these events reveals the way the debate around immigration in Denmark has shifted and become not only increasingly Islamophobic, but also connected to the definition of Danish identity. Before I address these specific incidents, I will outline the stereotypes generally established about Muslims in Denmark through the destructive dialogue created by the media.

Negative Dialogue: No Space for Muslim Voices

The Danish media has been free to create its own (critical) definition of what it means to be Muslim, because it has established a negative dialogue on this topic, meaning that there is complete unwillingness on the part of the media to respectfully engage in conversation with Muslims with the goal of reaching shared understanding.¹²⁹ Dialogic language is used by the media to create the illusion of communication, but in reality, it only disguises the monologic nature of the Danish media's presentation of Muslims. This is done by, for example, hosting Muslims for interviews on television networks, but using these interviews as a place to attack Muslim values and spin the interviewee's responses to fit the established narrative, as opposed to actually asking questions with the purpose of learning; or by presenting supposed facts about Muslims, as occurred in *Ekstra-Bladet's* "Foreigners" campaign, without disclosing that these facts were actually inflated and often gleaned from questionable sources.

The media's negative dialogue is further entrenched by its presentation of Muslims as enemies to be fought and defeated, as opposed to fellow citizens deserving of open communication and respect. This has created a "clash of civilizations" narrative, which depicts Danes as free, enlightened, morally superior individuals, and Muslims as chained, morally inferior, and a threat to utopic Danish society.¹³⁰ This cultivation of a

¹²⁹ Peter Hervik, "What is in the Scandinavian Nexus of 'Islamophobia, Multiculturalism, and Muslim-Western Relations'?" *Intersections: Eastern European Journal of Society and Politics* 1, no. 1 (2015): 67.

¹³⁰ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 237.

moral war of values allows the Danish media to unabashedly criticize Muslims and Islamic culture, because they have presented this campaign as a battle between good and evil, as opposed to a lack of understanding between cultures due to miscommunication. When morality is on one's side, it is one's duty to spread one's message to the rest of the world; in this case, it is the Danish media's responsibility to educate Danish citizens about the danger of the Muslim way of life, and encourage its elimination in favor of the Danish moral ideal. Peter Hervik describes this phenomenon by quoting political scientist Samuel Huntington: "When identity is in play, danger lurks, since 'enemies are essential' and you cannot love what you are unless you hate what you are not."¹³¹ The enemy stereotyping of Muslims contributes to a wholly positive characterization of Danes, as they are presented as the superior antithesis to everything that is deemed wrong about Muslims by the media. One does not engage in dialogue with one's enemy, but instead attacks and attempts to destroy them; and this can be seen in the Danish media treatment of Muslims.

The unwillingness on the part of the media to engage with Muslims in any productive way has contributed to a lack of Muslim representation in this debate, because it is *not* actually a debate, but rather a unilateral characterization of Muslims as a monolith by the Danish media. As we will see when discussing the *Jyllands-Posten* Mohammad cartoon controversy, the Danish media came under fire internationally for

¹³¹ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 237.

its offensive production of cartoon images of the Prophet Mohammad. The Danish government supported the publication, and used a “zero-tolerance policy” in response to allegations of Islamophobia.¹³² Zero-tolerance policies, originally developed in the judicial system to prosecute even the smallest offenses to discourage larger crimes,¹³³ have also been used by the state to shut down communication with persecuted minority groups. Instead of having zero tolerance for crimes, the government decided that there would be zero tolerance for communication: “no apologies, no compromises, and no dialogue with concerned Muslim citizens or with ambassadors from Muslim countries.”¹³⁴ The Danish media adhered to this policy as well, making no attempt to engage productively with Muslim citizens, despite the occasional, performative use of dialogic language. Furthermore, the media depicts Islam as “medieval” and “in the past,” in contrast to forward-thinking and advanced Danish society.¹³⁵ This rules out the possibility of any current dialogue, because Islam is viewed as having no place in modern society, and engaging in conversation with those who have been left behind by the forward progress of civilization is pointless.

This toxic media environment further excludes Muslims from participating in any exchanges about their own religion because it perpetuates a racialized “guest/host

¹³² Hervik, “Scandinavian Nexus,” 67.

¹³³ James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, “Broken Windows: The police and neighborhood safety,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (March 1982), 1-8.

¹³⁴ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 232.

¹³⁵ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 141.

relations” framework.¹³⁶ The media presents Muslims as unwanted guests and Danes as their reluctant hosts, so they cannot be considered as part of the national identity, and their presence is still seen as temporary, despite the increasing number of second- and third-generation Muslims in the country. As guests, Muslims should conform to the rules, practices, and expectations of their hosts, ethnic Danes.¹³⁷ When Muslims, who do *not* see themselves as indebted guests, continue to engage in traditional cultural practices, such as abstaining from pork and alcohol or wearing the headscarf, Danes perceive this as an offensive rejection of their lifestyle.¹³⁸ Under this framework, Muslims should be grateful for even being allowed to live in Denmark and to have the opportunity to partake in the benefits of the superior Danish society, and therefore are not seen as peers worthy of respect and communication if they do not provide the “reciprocity” in complying with local customs that Danes expect to receive.¹³⁹

Danish citizens notice this one-sided dialogue: according to a 2018 Eurobarometer questionnaire, Denmark had the largest percentage of respondents, at 59%, believe that their media “portrays immigrants too negatively,” out of all European Union countries surveyed.¹⁴⁰ Yet even though Danes are aware of the media presentation of immigrants, this does not stop the constant barrage of unflattering

¹³⁶ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 99.

¹³⁷ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 100.

¹³⁸ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 101.

¹³⁹ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 102.

¹⁴⁰ “Integration of immigrants in the European Union – Infographics,” *European Commission* (April 2018).

coverage of non-Western immigrants from having an adverse effect. Ultimately, the negative dialogue created by the media has contributed to a harmful stereotypic depiction of Muslims as an enemy monolith, as opposed to fellow citizens worthy of inclusion in a respectful conversation, which creates a communication problem that is self-reinforcing and continues to spiral and expand.

Ekstra Bladet's "Foreigners" Campaign

By the late 1990s, Danish politics had already undergone heated discussions over immigration, and had put in place restrictive immigration policy, in regards to the status of Bosnian refugees in the country. In 1994, the "Day of Hatred" occurred, in which parliamentary debates over the future of the refugees became unprecedentedly heated, with those on the right arguing that "refugees" should not also become "immigrants," and those on the left making arguments appealing to the human rights of the refugees.¹⁴¹ Ultimately, Bosnian refugees gained sympathy due to their war-torn origins and the squalid conditions in refugee camps, and were eventually integrated into the wider Danish society. The government and media had not yet racialized their status as "refugees" or solidified the group as an identifiable "Other" against which ethnic Danes could project wider fears and resentments, due in part to their relative similarity in appearance and lifestyle to those of ethnic Danes; and thus the Bosnian

¹⁴¹ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 49.

immigrants were not considered so different from Danes as to be culturally incompatible with Danish society.

However, for the Somali refugees who came to the country in the late 1990s, it was a different story. Scholar Jan Nederveen Pieterse describes the process of ethnicization, or the identification of an ethnic group and the delineation of the characteristics seen to define belonging to this group, as an “othering” process that often occurs from the outside in, and is imposed by a dominating group: “ethnic identity may not derive from roots but from politics of domination and exclusion, imposed through labeling and legislation from above and subsequently internalized.”¹⁴² In Denmark, media sources ethnicized the category of “non-Western immigrant,” imposing and defining it from the outside. The racialization of immigrants started with the arrival of Muslim Somali refugees in the late 1990s, and was increasingly developed until “immigrant” became interchangeable with “Muslim.”¹⁴³ This racialization of a non-racial category made it easier to discriminate against Muslims while explaining away accusations of racism.

Beliefs about Muslim immigrants also became intertwined with national identity, as Danes began to define themselves by the characteristics they did *not* share with the foreigners they feared. By 2000, according to that year’s Eurobarometer, 24% of Danes

¹⁴² Jan Nederveen Pieterse, “Varieties of Ethnic Politics and Ethnicity Discourse,” *Working Paper Series* no. 154 (June 1993): 9.

¹⁴³ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 66.

surveyed found “disturbing” the “opinions, customs and way of life of people different from themselves,” the second highest percentage of all countries surveyed.¹⁴⁴

Furthermore, 23% of Danes found the presence of other races disturbing and 31% of Danes, the highest percentage of all countries surveyed, found the presence of another religion disturbing.¹⁴⁵ Clearly, Danish society had already developed a wary and suspicious attitude towards Muslims had already developed by this point.

The “Foreigners” campaign by the newspaper *Ekstra Bladet* worked in tandem with the development of the anti-immigration Danish People’s Party to take the first steps in racializing the category of non-Western immigrant in Denmark. *Ekstra Bladet* is a Danish newspaper that sees itself as presenting the opinions and outlook of the “everyday Dane,” and often criticizes those in power, such as politicians, academics, and the “extravagant bourgeoisie” – groups that epitomize the Danish mistrust of anyone going against the grain, of failing to follow the law of *janteloven*; so it makes sense that the magazine would be the one to solidify the newest “Other” that stepped outside of societal definitions of acceptable behavior: immigrants.¹⁴⁶ In 1997, *Ekstra Bladet* ran a two-month campaign against the presence of immigrants in Denmark, and presented the campaign as a critique of the perceived imposition of the “crime” of a

¹⁴⁴ “Standard Eurobarometer 53 – Spring 2000,” *European Commission* (October 2000): 82.

¹⁴⁵ “Standard Eurobarometer 53,” 83-84.

¹⁴⁶ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 55-56.

“multi-ethnic society” on Danes by politicians.¹⁴⁷ At this point, *Ekstra Bladet* was at its highest level of circulation in recent years, at around 169,000 copies on weekdays, and was the second most widely read paper in the country, behind *Jyllands-Posten*, although readership has steadily declined since.¹⁴⁸ The campaign took off and sparked a moral panic which spread throughout Danish society, as politicians capitalized upon the fear of immigrants and used anti-immigrant rhetoric, in tandem with media displays, to gain political power.

Ekstra Bladet's campaign used the example of one particular Somali immigrant, Ahmed Hassan Ali, who allegedly used his multiple “illiterate” wives and children to game the generous Danish welfare system to gain more welfare funds, although this was not actually an accurate depiction of the situation.¹⁴⁹ The main argument of the campaign was that foreigners, who have lifestyles that are incompatible with those accepted by Danish society, do not deserve to reap the benefits of the Danish welfare system, a clear example of welfare chauvinism, in which the welfare state is not rolled

¹⁴⁷ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 56.

¹⁴⁸ “Statistical Ten-Year Review 2002: Culture,” *Danmarks Statistik* (2002): 45.

¹⁴⁹ According to the campaign, Ali achieved permission for family reunification for two sets of wives and eleven total children, and used this to cheat the Danish welfare system out of 631,724 kroner (approximately 83,500 Euro). This figure was found by adding up the welfare benefits received by Ali, his wife, his ex-wife, and his children, and attributed all of these funds to Ali alone, which is not how benefits are usually measured. *Ekstra Bladet* compared this 631,724 kroner amount to the average Danish yearly income of 220,000 kroner, but did not take into account the benefits that Danish households of a similar size would have received on top of this income. By October 1997, the magazine finally admitted that Ali had only received about 6% more welfare benefits than he should have, and that this was due to a mistake on behalf of the government and not to fraud committed by Ali. (Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 62.)

back, but rather restricted to those who are included in the national identity. The campaign described Ali as living “according to Somali custom,” presenting him as someone who doesn’t know how to use a toilet, who practices polygamy, and whose children aren’t allowed to play outside with others, unfavorably and unfairly contrasting Somali identity with Danish customs. *Ekstra Bladet* also repeatedly used the Danish word *fremmede*, which means “foreigner” or “alien,” to refer to immigrants like Ali, even second-generation ones, consistently creating and reinforcing a combative “us vs. them” relationship.¹⁵⁰

Beyond the example of Ali, the campaign presented Somali refugees as “backwards,” their customs so far behind those of Danes as to be morally inferior and fundamentally incomprehensible. The publication lamented that Somalis “are everywhere, and they live in a primitive manner,” simultaneously deriding Somali culture and stoking a fear of the refugees’ encroachment on and takeover of Danish life.¹⁵¹ The campaign presented Somalis as hurting both themselves and Danish culture by refusing to conform, highlighting the consistent thread of the Danish cultural value of equality through conformity: by insisting on sticking to their cultural traditions, Somalis were not only hurting themselves by living “primitively,” but also threatening the fragile social equilibrium held so dear by Danish society. This campaign contributed

¹⁵⁰ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 57.

¹⁵¹ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 67.

significantly to the ethnicization of refugees in Denmark, imposing a categorization and its accompanying characteristics from the dominant group and institutions.

The campaign was neo-nationalist in nature, characterizing foreigners as incompatible with Danish identity and focusing on the differences between cultures as unavoidable and as provoking culture clash. A particularly salient example of this comes with one of the letters to the editor included in the campaign, whose author observes, “Muslims are reasonable people—so are Germans south of the border. Only when different religions or nationalities have to live together will problems arise.”¹⁵² Neo-nationalism, as defined in Chapter 2, argues that oppositional reactions to exposure to other cultures are the *natural result* of placing these cultures in proximity, yet avoids accusation of racism by extolling the benefits of each culture—as long as they are kept separate, as they naturally should be. Clearly, *Ekstra Bladet*’s campaign had a neo-nationalist agenda: the magazine presented and derided a stereotypical example of a Muslim foreigner, comparing and contrasting them unfavorably with ethnic Danes and Danish life, to argue against the development of a multiethnic, diverse Danish society.

¹⁵² Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 59.



This headline from *Ekstra Bladet*'s "De Fremmede," or "Foreigners" campaign, reads, "Somalis have sent 58 million out of Denmark." Interestingly, I found this headline featured on a website complaining that *Ekstra Bladet* has declined since its heyday of this campaign, and has become full of "Islamophile lies." (Uwe Max Jensen, "Ekstra Bladet before and after editor-in-chief Poul Madsen," *Voice of Freedom*, April 3, 2020.)

Ekstra Bladet's campaign worked in tandem with the development of an Islamophobic, anti-immigrant political rhetoric, as the popularity of the campaign and the spread of the moral panic regarding Somali refugees—even though, at the time, there were only 12,000 Somalis in the entire country—coincided with the rise of the explicitly anti-immigrant Danish People's Party (DPP) in 1995, as discussed in Chapter 3.¹⁵³ The party capitalized upon the fervor and fear surrounding immigrants, and made anti-immigration policies foundational to its platform. *Ekstra Bladet*, during this campaign, featured multiple opinion pieces and letters to the editor from DPP members and supporters, pieces which espoused explicitly far-right and neonationalist views. However, because *Ekstra Bladet* presents itself as the mouthpiece of the everyday Dane,

¹⁵³ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 66.

these far-right opinions were also presented as widespread, commonplace views, and not those of fringe extremists.

This placed pressure on existing political leaders on both sides of the aisle to respond to the supposed welfare fraud crisis. The Minister of Social Affairs, from the left-wing Social Democratic Party, expressed annoyance that immigrant families did not know how to use welfare funds correctly: “They receive a lot of money—but they don’t get enough out of them, since everything is so foreign to them...they do not lead to a happy life here, and [they] clearly have their roots in Africa.”¹⁵⁴ More bluntly, the vice president of the right-wing Liberal Party made a clear response in the nature of welfare chauvinism: “I am totally outraged. In my opinion it raises the question whether it is reasonable that non-Danish citizens have access to precisely the same welfare benefit as Danish citizens.”¹⁵⁵ Comments like these gave legitimacy to the campaign, and contributed to the panic about foreigners and the rising anti-immigrant sentiment, leading true everyday Danes to further question their own views on foreigners in Denmark.

Ekstra Bladet’s “Foreigners” campaign was damaging because it furthered the racialization of the “immigrant” category in Denmark, spread harmful stereotypes about Muslims and refugees, and contributed to the rise of an Islamophobic, far-right

¹⁵⁴ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 61.

¹⁵⁵ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 61.

political party. This campaign is a salient example of the destructive dialogue created by the Danish media: no Muslim voices were included in a respectful or accurate manner in this discourse; instead, the publication developed harmful stereotypes about Muslims and used them to argue for the exclusion of Muslims from the Danish national identity and any benefits that come with Danish citizenship.

The Young Muslim Politicians

The next stage in the development of the destructive media discourse surrounding Muslims was to further solidify the incompatibility of Muslim and Danish identities, by presenting young Muslim aspiring politicians as threats to not only the Danish lifestyle, but also its political system, through a series of harmful news interviews that reproduced stereotypes and contributed to media control of the narrative. This narrative presented young Danish Muslims, many of whom were actually born in Denmark, as foreign interlocutors seeking to exploit the political system for their own gain, and were quickly shut out of the political system through a combination of media and political machinations.

The story, which began in 2001, spread across multiple news media platforms, and filtered even to the upper echelons of Danish political leaders, centered on the Muslim group Minhaj-ul-Qur'an, which was accused of "infiltrating" the Social Liberal Party through its influence over up-and-coming young Muslim politicians.¹⁵⁶ This

¹⁵⁶ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 113.

storyline revealed the assumption that one could not both be a member in a Muslim organization and a political one, and continued the “othering” process of Muslim Danes by presenting them as “invaders” and “foreigners,” invading a political sphere that had no space for them. Journalists at this time also referred to many young Muslims as “new Danes,” even if they had been born and raised in Denmark, presenting them as foreign spies lacking agency or worthiness of inclusion in any sort of dialogue, as opposed to eager young participants in their country’s political system.¹⁵⁷

A powerful example of the way the news media twisted circumstances and used questionable sources and journalistic tactics is the unfair treatment of Mona Sheikh in an interview on the Danish news station, *TV-avisen*. The interviewer interrogated Sheikh over her membership in both Women Youth League, a subunit of Minhaj-ul-Qur’an which focused on facilitating cross-cultural understanding through lectures and dialogues on both Muslim and Danish culture, and in the Social Liberal Party, with which Sheikh was in the process of campaigning for a position. The *TV-avisen* journalist accused Sheikh of “working for Muslim supremacy,” even though Women Youth League is an explicitly apolitical organization that has no goals of spreading Islam.¹⁵⁸ Sheikh diligently tried to steer the interview back on course and away from these accusations, saying, “My political membership engagement is taken on insofar as I am a

¹⁵⁷ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 118.

¹⁵⁸ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 116.

fellow citizen in the Danish society. A Danish society that I feel responsible towards. My Muslim religion and my affiliation with the Women Youth League are something else.”¹⁵⁹ This statement reveals powerful characteristics of the divide established between Muslim and Danish identities. Sheikh was forced to explicitly separate her association with Islam from her association with Denmark, as it had already been made clear that these were incompatible. She also expressed a sense of responsibility for the upkeep of Danish society, which she intended to fulfill through her political work, yet was immediately shut down by her interviewer, admonished for being an “invader” instead of praised for being a responsible young citizen.

Sheikh was poorly treated throughout the Danish news media, which presented her as a believer in sharia law, the strict code of law based on the Qur’an that is followed in several Middle Eastern countries. Sheikh continually repeated that, although she personally did not believe in the death penalty due to her religious beliefs, she respects the democratic process and would have to support it if the Danish people voted for it, and contrasted many of her personal views with sharia law.¹⁶⁰ Instead of viewing these statements as proof of Sheikh’s dedication to democracy, the news media twisted them to present Sheikh’s views as antithetical to those that make up Danish society.

¹⁵⁹ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 116.

¹⁶⁰ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 117.

Sheikh pressed on with her political ambitions in spite of her poor treatment in the media, as she attempted, along with several other aspiring Muslim politicians in the Social Liberal Party, to go against the standard of conformity so prized by Danish society. According to Peter Hervik, Sheikh's efforts to embrace her intersectionality, to be "a politician, a Danish citizen, and a Muslim religious practitioner," were simply unacceptable in light of the Danish cultural customs which scoffed at those who proudly displayed their differences, who were seen as unnecessarily flashy and uppity.¹⁶¹

In contrast, Nasem Khader, another Muslim politician in the Social Liberal Party, denounced his Muslim religion and culture, pronouncing his love for beer and saying he only avoids pork because of personal dislike and not an adherence to a halal diet. Khader became an example of the "good Muslim," the successfully integrated immigrant who easily and happily conformed to Danish cultural values, espousing the superiority of Danish customs over Muslim ones.¹⁶² Many, especially in the Muslim community, viewed Khader as intentionally choosing to elevate his Danish identity and denounce his Muslim one as a political strategy, which further harmed the social image of Muslims by perpetuating the impression that immigrants should conform because they *want* to, because the Danish lifestyle is better.¹⁶³ Ultimately, though, Khader's

¹⁶¹ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 127.

¹⁶² Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 127.

¹⁶³ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 155.

controversial strategy paid off; he rose quickly in the ranks of the Social Liberal Party and was elected to Parliament in November 2001, aided by his appearances in the media as the positive foil to the “invading” young Muslim politicians who attempted to proudly reconcile their two identities, while Sheikh and her contemporaries were forced to quietly leave the political sphere.

The story about the presence of young Muslim politicians in Denmark is an example of media spin, in which media sources twist the facts to fit a storyline that is more exciting and engaging for viewers. Fear is a strong motivator, so Danes are more likely to buy newspapers and turn into interviews that address fears about immigration and the collapse of cultural cohesion, as opposed to those that praise the political aspirations of young Danes from less traditional backgrounds. The story was changed from the tracking of up-and-coming politicians to a condemnation of what was seen as inferior Muslim values. As Hervik succinctly puts it, “What began as a competition for the nomination became a moral question discussed in the media about what is right and wrong with Muslim values,” perpetuating the “enemy image of Islam” instead of embracing a more multicultural Denmark. This story is an example of the “cultural war of values” being orchestrated by the media and politicians in Denmark, in which the superior Western world is pitted against the inferior Muslim world in a battle for moral supremacy.

***Jyllands-Posten's* Mohammad Cartoon Controversy**

The most egregious example of Islamophobia in the Danish media, which solidified the hostile media environment towards Muslims and sparked international outrage was the Mohammad cartoon controversy of 2005-2006, in which the nation's most widely circulated newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, openly mocked and provoked the Muslim community in Denmark. Although the use satirical cartoons to make fun of the Muslim belief against creating reproductions of the Prophet was not an exclusively Danish practice,¹⁶⁴ the justification of the cartoons as furthering a pro-free speech stance and salient connection to national identity, set the Danish instance apart.

Jyllands-Posten had already established itself as a publication with Danish neo-nationalist views, posting a piece about the threat posed by immigrants to cultural uniformity and daily life in Denmark entitled "Immigration Will Change Denmark" in 1999, which accused immigrants of intentionally attacking and destroying Danish values, as opposed to living out their own cultural realities in a Danish context.¹⁶⁵ The paper also actively participated in spreading the moral panic caused by *Ekstra Bladet's* "Foreigners" campaign, and in further developing negative stereotypes of Muslims.

Jyllands-Posten's Editorials section contained the most explicitly Islamophobic content,

¹⁶⁴ For example, the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* came under fire for enacting a similar campaign around the same time, and was sued by the French Council for the Muslim Faith. The controversy positioned *Charlie Hebdo* as the target of horrific terrorist attack undertaken by Islamic extremists in 2015, who identified themselves as members of al-Qaeda and pronounced that their attack was "avenging the Prophet." This incident in turn unfortunately led to an increase in negative attitudes and discriminatory policies towards Muslims in France. (Norimitsu Onishi, "Charlie Hebdo Republishes Cartoons That Prompted Deadly 2015 Attack," *The New York Times*, Sept. 1, 2020.)

¹⁶⁵ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 134.

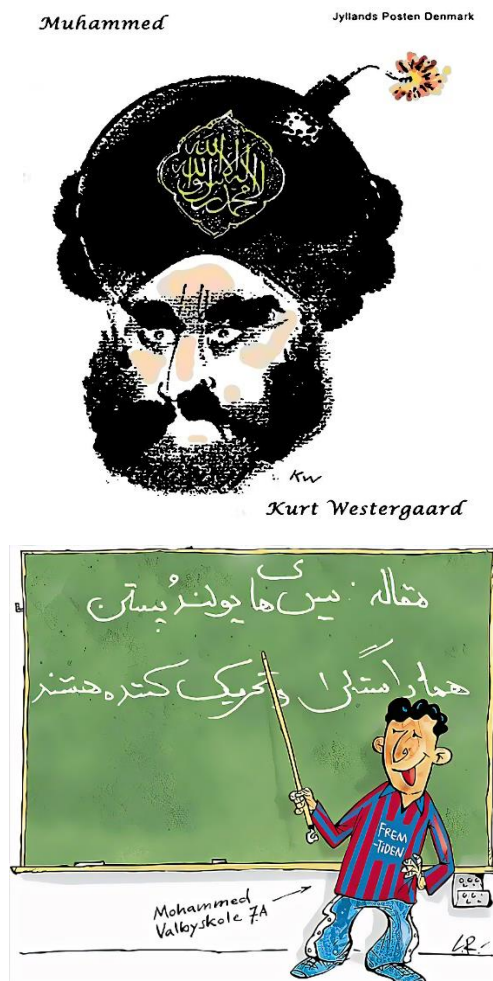
including articles like “Islam’s Dirty Face,” which essentially equated the Taliban and Islam; “Forces of Darkness,” which called upon Danish women to fight the anti-feminist “abhorrence of Islam”; and “Muslim Demands,” which contrasted the apparent practicality and normalcy of Christianity with “reactionary and mystical” Islam.¹⁶⁶

Jyllands-Posten continuously characterized Muslim values and beliefs as medieval and backwards, both antithetical to and incompatible with Danish lifestyle and culture. This attitude came to a head when, in 2005, *Jyllands-Posten* called on the country’s satirical political cartoonists to fight the supposed spread of Muslim values in Denmark by submitting cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammad, in direct opposition to the Muslim practice that the Prophet should never be drawn out of respect.¹⁶⁷ In the end, only 12 cartoonists submitted drawings, many of which were used to satirize *Jyllands-Posten*’s blatantly provocative actions, and the four most offensive of which were created by cartoonists with direct ties to the publication.¹⁶⁸ These cartoons satirized both the Prophet as a figure and daily Muslim practices, thus not only degrading the most important and revered symbol of Islam, but also Muslims themselves.

¹⁶⁶ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 138-140.

¹⁶⁷ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 180.

¹⁶⁸ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 184.



The figure on the left is a photo of the spread in *Jyllands-Posten* that featured the cartoons. To the right are examples of the different kinds of cartoons submitted: the top cartoon, by cartoonist Kurt Westergaard, who was directly employed by the publication, depicts Muhammad as wearing a turban that disguises a bomb, and was seen to be one of the more offensive depictions. In contrast, the cartoon underneath, by Lars Refn, features a second-generation immigrant boy named Muhammad, pointing at Arabic text that reads, "The editorial team of *Jyllands-Posten* is a bunch of reactionary provocateurs," and clearly was meant to satirize the magazine itself, rather than Islam. Refn criticized the magazine's prompt, and argued that it placed journalists in a double bind, forcing them to choose between offending Muslims or participating in self-censorship. ("The face of Muhammad," *Jyllands-Posten*, Sept. 30, 2005.)

Jyllands-Posten's Mohammad cartoon stunt allowed the publication to blatantly make racist and stereotypical comments towards Islam and contribute to an uncomfortable and unwelcoming societal environment for Muslim citizens under the

guise of a “free speech debate.”¹⁶⁹ Those who orchestrated the stunt presented it as an attempt to fight “self-censorship” on behalf of artists, caused by what they viewed as encroaching Islamic influence and intimidation across Denmark.¹⁷⁰ The publication framed the issue as a debate between enlightened and free Western societies like Denmark and the medieval, restrictive Muslim world. This spin allowed *Jyllands-Posten* to provide a more socially acceptable excuse for publicly disparaging Islam, and to accuse any who criticized the publication as proponents of censorship setting out to destroy free speech.¹⁷¹ It also connected the importance of free speech as a cultural value to the Danish national identity, tapping in to the ever-growing neo-nationalist fervor and urge to “protect” Danish culture and values, and discrediting any criticism as anti-Danish.¹⁷²

In reality, of course, this spin is absurd, because the creation of any sort of debate is an *example* of free speech, and *Jyllands-Posten*’s efforts to discredit anyone who criticized their publication of the cartoons were actually the most salient example of true censorship. Yet at least domestically, the publication’s version of events was successful. Internationally, the cartoons were met with outrage, with eleven ambassadors from other countries sending a letter to request a meeting to discuss the

¹⁶⁹ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 177.

¹⁷⁰ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 180-181.

¹⁷¹ Peter Hervik, “Ten Years After the Danish Muhammad Cartoon News Stories: Terror and Radicalization as Predictable Media Events,” *Television & New Media* 19, no. 2 (2018): 148.

¹⁷² Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 229.

prevalence of Islamophobic rhetoric in Denmark with the Prime Minister (their request was denied, and instead, Prime Minister Rasmussen went on to announce that “There is a crisis between Denmark and the Muslim World”).¹⁷³ But within Denmark, the characterization of the cartoon publication as a fight for free speech was generally widely accepted, used to promote free speech as a feature of Danish national culture as opposed to recognizing the growing Islamophobic sentiment.¹⁷⁴ The blatant disrespect of Islamic sacred beliefs and the blunt refusal to include or consider any input or feedback from Muslims on this topic reveals how destructive the media’s dialogue on Islam has become.

Conclusion: Muslim Response

The negative portrayal of Muslims by the media, and the lack of willingness to engage in any sort of productive dialogue, has created a hostile environment for Muslims living in Denmark. There is no true inclusion of Muslim voices in the media, which only includes examples of “good Muslims,” who have renounced Islamic values and embraced Danish ones, or depictions of “bad Muslims,” reproducing the negative stereotypes previously discussed. According to Muslims in Denmark that were interviewed in multiple focus groups conducted by Peter Hervik, this barrage of negative media portrayals have contributed to a sense of extreme discomfort in

¹⁷³ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 189-194.

¹⁷⁴ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 195.

expressing their cultural identity or engaging in traditional cultural practices. The one-sided media coverage has made many Muslims feel like “villains,” and has made salient the distinction that they will always be considered “foreigners,” no matter how long they have lived in Denmark.¹⁷⁵ This has made many Muslims less likely to attempt to engage in any type of dialogue, as the media characterization of them as an enemy monolith, as well as the media’s historical unwillingness to include Muslim voices and intentional representation of Islam, has discouraged any communication, which of course contributes to a continued lack of understanding and the spread of stereotypes rather than accurate portrayals. Unfortunately, this issue is then compounded, as Danes take pride in their participation in a myriad of social, political, and recreational organizations; so, the lack of membership of many Muslims in these organizations is added to the laundry list of complaints about them, which also contributes to Muslims feeling unwelcome and unwanted, creating a self-reinforcing system of barriers to understanding.

Furthermore, this monolithic characterization by the Danish media has created an identity crisis for many second-generation Muslims who were born in Denmark. Many of those interviewed in Hervik’s focus groups expressed a desire to embrace both Muslim heritage and their Danish nationality, but admitted that they felt pressured to distance themselves from their Muslim identity to achieve acceptance in Danish

¹⁷⁵ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 164.

society.¹⁷⁶ Some also expressed frustration with the media's lack of distinction between Muslim immigrants with younger generations, lamenting that its presentation of these groups as interchangeable and with overlapping ideals limited young Muslims' ability to participate in politics or civil society in meaningful ways.¹⁷⁷ This further excludes Muslim voices from being represented in political decision-making or mass media, thus allowing the media to completely control the narrative and reinforce their monolithic stereotyping of Muslims as a whole.¹⁷⁸ Muslim interviewees also pushed back against the lumping together of all Muslims and "non-Western immigrants," which did not allow them to embrace their own individual cultural identities as Sunni or Shiite Muslims originating from a wide variety of countries; they were instead seen under one banner of foreign, Muslim, enemy, and inferior.¹⁷⁹

The impact of the Danish media in creating this impression of Muslims cannot be overstated. The presence of mass media is pervasive, and not only reproduces but also influences public opinion. The media completely controls the narrative of the way in which Muslims are characterized in Denmark, and has consistently refused to allow for any meaningful contributions by Muslim voices to the discussion, allowing these stereotypes to become increasingly widespread and believed across Danish society.

¹⁷⁶ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 163.

¹⁷⁷ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 160.

¹⁷⁸ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 166.

¹⁷⁹ Hervik, *The Annoying Difference*, 158.

Interestingly enough, one of the main critiques of Muslims by the media is that their presence in Denmark is a direct threat to Danish values and culture; yet in reality, the Danish media itself attacks and threatens Muslim values and culture on a daily basis. However, the media does not have to acknowledge this hypocrisy, because it has aligned itself with the “right” side of a moral debate, which shuts down any opportunity for receiving criticism or different perspectives. This has led to a conception of Danish identity as morally superior, and an increased definition of this identity in direct contrast to that of Muslims, thus excluding Muslims from any meaningful participation in Danish society and contributing to growing intolerance and Islamophobic rhetoric within the country.

Conclusion

The development of negative stereotypes of Muslims through the Danish media, and the implementation of corresponding discriminatory policy through the government, have contributed to a society that is, in many ways, contrary to the values that ethnic Danes say their country holds. “Danishness” is supposedly characterized by tolerance, equality, and harmony, yet Danish society is increasingly divided and unwelcoming towards “non-Westerners,” or those whose lifestyles have been deemed incompatible with the Danish way of life. The negative perception of those who are not included in the Danish national identity is pervasive in Denmark. It is difficult to see how to fight the neo-nationalist appeals used to justify anti-Muslim discrimination, because they play to such instinctual fears and desires. If the issue stems from basic societal values, then the solution must come in the form of broad societal change, in a development of a multicultural Denmark that is truly welcoming.

Although the media cases profiled in this thesis are from the 1990s and early 2000s, and the 2015 Migrant Crisis feels increasingly far away, the Islamophobia these events revealed still runs rampant in Denmark. The Danish attitude towards non-Western immigrants has once again come under the international microscope, due to the flood of Ukrainian refugees fleeing the Russian invasion of the country that began in late February of 2022. The mass exodus of Ukrainians into neighboring countries is the “fastest-growing refugee crisis in Europe since the second world war,” with 1.5 million

Ukrainians displaced in the span of ten days, and numbers steadily growing.¹⁸⁰ For comparison, in 2015, the most impactful year of the Refugee Crisis in Europe, which was caused mainly by conflict in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, and prompted significant restrictions on immigration and asylum seekers' rights in Denmark, around 911,000 refugees had arrived in Europe by the end of the year.¹⁸¹

Denmark's response to the influx of (white) Ukrainian refugees stands in stark contrast to the restrictions imposed upon (brown) non-Western immigrants. Instead of imposing increased constraints in response to refugee inflows, the Danish government actually passed laws exempting Ukrainian refugees from the dehumanizing entry processes faced by those perceived to be non-Western, including the controversial law that required refugees to turn in possessions valued at over 10,000 kroner to the Danish government upon arrival.¹⁸² The government is also currently working on laws that will give Ukrainian refugees full access to Danish social services, and expedite residency permits so that refugees can access the workforce and easily enroll their children in school.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Peter Beaumont, "Ukraine has fastest-growing refugee crisis since second world war, says UN," *The Guardian*, March 6, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/ukraine-fastest-growing-refugee-crisis-since-second-world-war>.

¹⁸¹ William Spindler, "2015: The year of Europe's refugee crisis," *UNHCR*, December 8, 2015, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2015/12/56ec1ebde/2015-year-europes-refugee-crisis.html>.

¹⁸² "Danish government likely to exempt Ukrainians from controversial refugee 'jewelry law,'" *The Local*, March 3, 2022, <https://www.thelocal.dk/20220303/danish-government-likely-to-exempt-ukrainians-from-controversial-refugee-jewellery-law/>.

¹⁸³ "Danish government and industry agree on deal for Ukrainian work permits," *The Local*.

Government officials have explained this exemption through familiar neo-nationalist appeals. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen stated in an interview that Ukrainian refugees were treated differently than non-Western foreigners because “Ukraine is in our immediate region. It is part of Europe. It’s our backyard.”¹⁸⁴ She elaborated that Ukrainian refugees are under a uniquely dangerous threat, because they are “on the run from Russian missiles and cluster bombs.”¹⁸⁵ Immigration Minister Mattias Tesfaye concurred, saying that for fleeing Ukrainians, “the Danish door is open.”¹⁸⁶

The contrast between the statements made by government officials regarding Ukrainian refugees versus those fleeing comparable levels of violence and threat¹⁸⁷ in the Middle East is stunning: instead of viewing Ukrainian refugees as a threat to Danish society that must be stopped at all costs, the government welcomes them with open arms. “Immigrants” have become a racialized category in Denmark, essentially a euphemism for Muslims, which was then used to pass discriminatory laws while avoiding accusations of racism. However, the government’s stance towards Ukrainian

¹⁸⁴ Atila Altuntas, “Denmark will not seize jewelry from Ukrainian refugees: Prime minister,” *Anadolu Agency*, March 5, 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/denmark-will-not-seize-jewelry-from-ukrainian-refugees-prime-minister/2524701>.

¹⁸⁵ Altuntas, “Denmark.”

¹⁸⁶ “Denmark says its doors are open for refugees fleeing Russian invasion of Ukraine,” *Alarabiya News*, February 27, 2022, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/world/2022/02/27/Denmark-says-its-doors-are-open-for-refugees-fleeing-Russian-invasion-of-Ukraine>.

¹⁸⁷ In fact, the Russian intervention in Syria began in 2015, so the Syrian refugees may have actually been fleeing *the very same* missiles and cluster bombs as those currently threatening Ukrainian citizens.

refugees reveals that the problem was never with immigrants, but with *Muslim* immigrants, and that these discriminatory anti-immigration laws *were* based on racist stereotypes.

The Danish society and government's hostile stance towards non-Western immigrants may seem counterintuitive. As increased numbers of immigrants from a variety of countries make Danish society more diverse, one might think that interacting with immigrants on a daily basis would make ethnic Danes more resistant to stereotypes. The problem is, despite the increased *presence* of foreigners in Denmark, society is deeply segregated due to the negative image of immigrants perpetuated by the media, so non-Westerners and ethnic Danes develop few meaningful interactions or close relationships. Sociology scholars Ryan D. Enos and Noam Gidron argue that groups living in close proximity yet lacking frequent interaction are actually *more* likely to develop prejudices and strong "us vs. them" boundaries than if these groups were not in proximity at all.¹⁸⁸

Enos and Gidron outline three mechanisms that explain the relationship between increased diversity and corresponding social inefficiencies such as lower trust levels across society and poorly distributed social goods, both trends that we see occurring in Denmark.¹⁸⁹ The first, "other-regarding preferences," argues that "individuals derive

¹⁸⁸ Ryan D. Enos and Noam Gidron, "Intergroup Behavioral Strategies as Contextually Determined: Experimental Evidence from Israel," *The Journal of Politics* 78, no. 3 (July 2016): 851.

¹⁸⁹ Enos and Gidron, "Intergroup," 852-853.

more utility from the welfare of an in-group member than an out-group member,” which explains the welfare chauvinism, or restriction of welfare benefits only to those considered part of the Danish in-group, that Danish social policies have adopted. The second, “strategy selection,” posits that the willingness of individuals to cooperate with others is based on views about others’ likelihood of participating equally in the cooperation efforts. If the in-group believes that the out-group is comparatively less cooperative, they will be excluded from public goods. This can be seen in the Danish exclusion of non-Western foreigners from benefits, due to beliefs that immigrants exploit, rather than contribute to, the welfare state. Finally, the third mechanism, “efficacy,” addresses the degree to which in-group members find it easier to work with each other than with others, especially due to shared language or customs. This is evident in the Danish resentment of immigrants who are not fluent in Danish or have differently structured lifestyles, and the subsequent restriction of public goods from these immigrants. Increasing out-group size and strong residential segregation compound these trends; accordingly, as the size of non-Western immigrants in Denmark increased, because these immigrants stayed segregated in specific neighborhoods and were excluded from participation in social organizations, neo-nationalist and anti-immigrant sentiments correspondingly grew as well.

In order to combat these harmful trends, Enos and Gidron argue, there must be repeated, sustained, and meaningful interactions between members of both groups.¹⁹⁰ These interactions create relationships that dispel the harmful stereotypes that create the low levels of trust and cooperation throughout society and contribute to welfare chauvinism. Although the Danish government has taken a clearly Islamophobic stance on immigration, which has also become consensus in society through media corroboration and sensationalization, there are still individual nonprofit groups in Denmark that work to support refugees and dismantle the harmful stereotypes that are repeated about them by facilitating these meaningful interactions.

One such organization is the Trampoline House, which operated from 2010 to 2020, until it was forced to shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but reemerged as the Weekend Trampoline House on a smaller scale by partnering with a local church in 2021.¹⁹¹ Trampoline House was founded “as a result of the common work among asylum seekers, refugees, artists, scholars and journalists in their efforts to break the social segregationist tendencies dominating the Danish asylum system.”¹⁹² It functions as both a gathering place for ethnic Danes and immigrants of various backgrounds to foster connection through activities like children’s and women’s clubs, board games,

¹⁹⁰ Enos and Gidron, “Intergroup,” 865.

¹⁹¹ “About Us,” Weekend Trampoline House, accessed March 7, 2022, <https://www.trampolinehouse.dk/about>.

¹⁹² Julia Suárez-Krabbe, “Anti-Racist Resistance and Political Existence in Denmark: Trampoline House and CAMP,” Visible Project, 2019, <https://www.visibleproject.org/blog/text/anti-racist-resistance-and-political-existence-in-denmark-trampoline-house-and-camp/>.

and community dinners, as well as a source of assistance and social support for refugees, through services like legal counseling, emotional support, and democracy class.¹⁹³ The work of Trampoline House is important because it not only facilitates genuine, low-pressure, positive interactions between refugees and ethnic Danish citizens—the organization’s website uses the Danish cultural term *hygge* to describe its activities—but also provides refugees with practical tools that enable them to participate further in Danish society more broadly. This creates the potential for the establishment of closer community engagement and respectful intergroup relationships, which is key to dismantling the negative beliefs about foreigners proliferated by the media and government.

The work of Trampoline House in assisting refugees with not only the practical elements of being a refugee in a new country, but also the social adjustments that this transition requires, is an example of cultural brokering, a concept that I learned about when I worked with refugees at WorldRelief Seattle, a government-contracted refugee resettlement agency. Cultural brokering was first defined by Mary Ann Jezewski as “the act of bridging, linking, or mediating between groups and persons for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change.”¹⁹⁴ Having a helpful organization of cultural

¹⁹³ “Counseling and Activities: Weekly Program,” Weekend Trampoline House, accessed March 7, 2022, <https://www.trampolinehouse.dk/program>.

¹⁹⁴ Mary Ann Jezewski, “Cultural Brokering in Migrant Farmworker Health Care,” *Western Journal of Nursing Research* 12, no. 4 (1990): 497.

brokers is essential for easing a refugee family's entry into a new country, which is often extremely complex. Upon arrival, refugees have to wade through many layers of bureaucratic red tape, fill out a seemingly endless stream of paperwork, attend important appointments regarding healthcare, housing, and employment, find jobs that may be completely outside of the field in which they worked at home, register their children for school, and more, conducted primarily in a foreign language. Beyond the governmental aspects of this transition, refugees also have to learn about the culture, lifestyle, social structure, customs, public services, and institutions of their new country. All of this must happen, of course, under the stress of moving thousands of miles away from your home, often with only the clothes on your back, and with immense worry for the state of the family, friends, and livelihoods you left behind.

Cultural brokers work to help refugees and migrants make connections between their old countries and their new one, to find pockets of familiarity in a strange new land, and act as friends and advocates. As an intern at WorldRelief, I participated in cultural brokering through a diverse array of activities, such as taking families to get Social Security cards, finding primary care doctors and dentists and accompanying patients to their first appointments, enrolling children in local schools, conducting mock job interviews, guiding migrants through the bus system and the grocery store, and inputting asylum applications at Immigration & Homeland Security. I also listened to stories of home and the families left behind, comparisons between life and society at

home versus in the United States, concerns about making a completely new life. I danced in the rain with three refugee women from Ukraine while we waited at a bus stop, because that activity transcends any language barrier. I shared a traditional Afghani meal with a family with whom I had become close throughout their transition. I held a woman's brand-new baby, her first child born in the United States.

These are the experiences and emotional connections that the Danish government and media do not show. Neo-nationalism argues that animosity and violence are the natural result of close contact between diverse cultural groups, that a multicultural society can only bring the destruction of the harmonious, *hygge* society that Danes prize so greatly and that is seen as essential to their national identity. Yet if, instead, leadership placed an emphasis on cultural brokering, facilitating mutual connections and learning between groups, and seeing differences as opportunities for growth rather than nefarious threats, then a successful, vibrant, equitable, *and* multicultural Denmark could thrive.

The question remains as to who will lead this drive towards an emphasis on cultural brokering, rather than segregation and discrimination, in Denmark. According to a 2018 Pew Research Center survey, Denmark was one of only a few democracies classified as having high government restrictions on religion and high social hostilities

surrounding religion.¹⁹⁵ Immigration restriction continues to be an agenda that is pursued by Danish parties spanning the political spectrum. Yet younger generations in Denmark have the potential to lead a change, and have shown more willingness to point out and condemn the racism that Danish politicians and media conglomerates would rather blame on immigrants' behavior.

Jonas Eika, a thirty-year-old Danish writer, won the 2019 Nordic Council Literature Prize for his book of short stories, *After the Sun*, which "exposes the absurdity and harm of class, capitalism, and global oppressive structures through glimpses into the lives of a wide range of characters and the way they do or do not cultivate connection or community."¹⁹⁶ Eika used his acceptance speech for the prize to point out the hypocrisy present in the Danish social welfare system, even criticizing specifically the poor treatment of immigrants and asylum seekers, and called for a global fight to dismantle oppressive state systems that perpetuate white supremacy worldwide. In an interview, Eika pointed out the contradiction that is central to this thesis:

Even with the state imprisoning asylum seekers under torture-like conditions, kicking residents out of public housing based on their class and ethnicity, making "non-Westerners" a problem through statistics and law, and much more—even then, many (probably mainly white) Danish citizens will think of this country as egalitarian and inclusive and non-racist. So, there is this

¹⁹⁵ "In 2018, Government Restrictions on Religion Reach Highest Level Globally in More than a Decade," *Pew Research Center*, November 10, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/2020/11/10/in-2018-government-restrictions-on-religion-reach-highest-level-globally-in-more-than-a-decade/>.

¹⁹⁶ Sarah Nielson, "Reimagining the State: Jonas Eika Interviewed by Sarah Nielson," *BOMB*, August 25, 2021, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/reimagining-the-state-jonas-eika-interviewed/>.

seemingly infinite gap between reality and national self-perception, which of course impedes resistance and solidarity.¹⁹⁷

It is a positive development that Danish citizens like Eika are not only speaking out about the harmful effects of neo-nationalism perpetuated by their governments onto non-white migrants, but also encouraging other Danes to do the same. The cultural brokering for which Eika advocates is essential to the development of positive relationships between immigrants and ethnic Danes in the country.

Furthermore, the anti-racist activism of the Black Lives Matter protests in the United States in the summer of 2020 led to global developments in the examination and dismantling of institutionalized racism, and these did not go unnoticed in Denmark. Although there was minimal governmental response, especially in regards to actual Danish policy, Danish citizens staged a Black Lives Matter protest in Copenhagen that drew over 15,000 protesters.¹⁹⁸ Jette Moeller, head of the Danish chapter of the international anti-racism organization SOS-Racism, commented, "In Denmark, white people are colorblind. They cannot see the racism that exists. That is embarrassing."¹⁹⁹ I spoke with Dr. Lisa Richey, an American university professor in Copenhagen, who noticed that, in tandem with increased worldwide attention being placed on systemic racism that often goes unnoticed by white citizens, more and more students in her

¹⁹⁷ Nielson, "Reimagining."

¹⁹⁸ Jan M. Olsen, "Rights activists say Danes unaware of racism in their nation," *The Associated Press*, July 2, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/rights-activists-danes-unaware-racism-nation-71575150>.

¹⁹⁹ Olsen, "Rights activists."

classroom were beginning to acknowledge and take responsibility for racism in Denmark. She recalled that recently a student in class called out *hyggeracisme*, or the way that racist jokes are seen as acceptable in *hygge* environments because they are “safe spaces” where conflict is avoided at all costs, and noted that this would not have happened merely five years ago.

Cultural brokering and the facilitation of meaningful, sustained interactions between Muslims and ethnic Danes are key to the dismantling of the Islamophobic immigration policies and social attitudes that have been perpetuated and exacerbated by Danish media and government. But a solution cannot be implemented until the problem is acknowledged. The Danish government must take responsibility for, truly examine, and work to change the racism and discrimination present in its immigration and social policy. The Danish media must recognize its own role in the sensationalizing of the perceived threat of Muslims in the country, and work to include more Muslim voices in its productions and publications. Ultimately, though, the work must come from Danish citizens, because it is the conflict avoidant and conformity-based society that has allowed Islamophobic sentiment to become so widespread. Preserving *hygge* environments can no longer be an excuse for letting racism go unchecked.

Organizations like Trampoline House and SOS-Racism are doing important work in fighting these harmful perceptions by practicing cultural brokering and calling out

institutionalized racism, and are important models for ways that this racist system can be rehabilitated.

The most important change that Danish policymakers and media companies can make is including more Muslim voices in the policymaking process and in coverage of immigration and social welfare issues. Presenting a diverse range of perspectives from a variety of Muslims in Denmark would be a significant step towards dismantling the negative stereotypes that are perpetuated by the media and used as evidence for creating discriminatory and racist policies by politicians. When Muslims are seen as individuals and peers instead of a monolith, increased meaningful interactions and cultural brokering are more likely to begin. Systematic racism and discrimination may finally be acknowledged and broken down, if Muslim experiences with these issues are shared and heard. It is important to note that this does not mean that the solution to this issue is placing all of the effort on the backs of Muslims themselves; rather, it is about a collaborative societal effort to see each other as individuals and celebrate differences, rather than fearing them. A multicultural Denmark does not have to be the violent, anarchic mess that neo-nationalists predict. If cultural brokering is earnestly undertaken by the government, media, and Danish citizens, then Denmark can become *hygge*—a safe, welcoming space—for people of all cultures.

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