

MUSLIM WOMEN AND INTERRACIAL INTIMACIES

Abstract

This article focuses on media debates about interracial and interethnic marriage practices. In 2012, Danish immigrants and descendants, especially Muslim women, were accused of harming the integration processes as they were not marrying ethnically Danish men. Through analysis of newspaper articles and Internet debates the article shows how Muslim women became excluded from the national community in these debates. Drawing upon previous debates about interracial/ethnic relationships, the article illustrates how the contemporary criticism mirrors historical criticism of sexuality. Moreover, the 2012 debate provides new insights and reveals how we need to nuance previous understandings of interracial relations.

Keywords

media / Internet debates • interracial relations • gender • history

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1 Introduction

In the spring of 2012, the Danish news media carried two debates about marriage patterns among migrants and descendants. The first debate was sparked by the national *Statistics Denmark* which had published figures of marriage patterns for ethnic Danes, migrants, and descendants. The figures showed that ethnic Danes, migrants, and descendants all had high rates of endogamy, i.e. they married members of their own ethnic group. In the news media, this became a story – and a debate – about how migrants and descendants did not marry ethnically Danish spouses. The second debate took place a few months later when the newspaper *Politiken* published interviews with four young, well-educated, racial/ethnic minority women who talked about their difficulties finding a well-educated spouse. The level of education for young racial/ethnic minority women is much higher than the level of education for young racial/ethnic minority men in Denmark; just as the level of education for young women in general is higher than the level of education for young men in Denmark. This article was followed by a series of Internet debates, as well as follow-up articles, in *Politiken* and in the tabloid newspaper *Ekstra Bladet*.

The article begins with an analytic description of the newspaper articles, including the material from *Statistics Denmark*. This is followed by an analysis of the Internet debates; a central part of this analysis draws upon historical understandings of, and historical debates about, interracial relationships.

2 Empirical sources and analytical framework

The empirical sources for this article consist of the following articles and their Internet comments: Three articles from the conservative *Jyllands-Posten*; one article from the regional *Nordjyske*; two articles from the left-wing *Information*, one of them accompanied by 41 Internet comments; one article from the Christian *Kristeligt Dagblad* followed by 12 Internet comments; three articles from the tabloid *Ekstra Bladet*, one of them with 366 Internet comments; one article from the tabloid *BT* followed by 55 Internet comments; three articles from the center/left-wing *Politiken* followed by 95, 31, and 43 Internet comments respectively. Several of the articles are followed by a long series of Internet posts where readers comment on the article and discuss with each other.

I see the articles as well as the Internet comments accompanying them as discursive media practices (Jørgensen & Phillips 1999; Mouffe & Laclau 1985) which are part of larger societal discourses, continuously produced and reproduced in for example public debates. The previous decades have seen increasing political tension in relation to migration and minorities in the Nordic countries, and much of this tension is taken up by media debates (Eide & Nikunen 2010). While there is a strong tendency to essentialize racial/ethnic minorities in the Nordic media, minorities are also increasingly given room to express individuality (Ibid). In the analysis, I interpret the discursive practices in my material in relation to already existing discourses, and I aim at showing how this material both confirms

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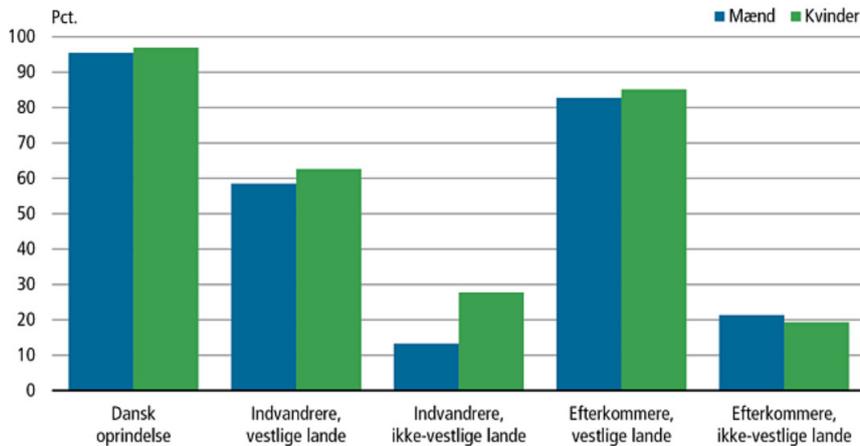


Fig. 1 The Danish population is divided into the categories 'Dansk oprindelse' (Danish origin), 'Indvandrere, vestlige lande' (Migrants from western countries), 'Indvandrere, ikke-vestlige lande' (Migrants from non-western countries), 'Efterkommere, vestlige lande' (Descendants from western countries) and 'Efterkommere, ikke-vestlige lande' (Descendants from non-western countries). The blue column represents men and the green women.

Source: *Efterkommere har sjældent dansk partner, 2011*, NYT fra Danmarks Statistik, December 7.

existing discourses as well as opens up to new discursive meanings. Where the newspaper articles are part of a well-established media discourse, the Internet comments can be interpreted as 'non-elite voices' (Horsti & Nikunen 2013: 9), allowing other perspectives to surface. The newspaper articles and the Internet comments constitute an intermediality, as different media genres interrelate in the debates. Rather than viewing the newspaper articles and Internet comments as separate, I therefore want to stress their interrelatedness (Horsti & Nikunen 2013). However, I specify when I cite from a newspaper and when I cite from an Internet comment. Due to ethical consideration (Ess & AoIR 2002) I refer to the commentators anonymously; I have provided them with pseudonyms similar to their signed name.

Analytically, I am indebted to feminist theorists who have shown how women produce and reproduce the nation and the national community through discourse and constructions of belonging (Warring 1998; Yuval-Davis 1997; Helma, Phoenix & Yuval-Davis 1995), as well as theories of gender as a social construct (Butler 1990). My way of performing the analysis has been to critically look at the articles and especially the many Internet comments while paying special attention to gender and intimacy. By looking at how gender, relations of intimacy, and sexuality are constructed, performed, and imagined, it is possible to grasp an important layer in the media debates about migration and minorities. Media debates concerning minorities often have a gendered edge (Andreassen 2007), and national constructions can become visible by highlighting gender and sexuality. While I am inspired by these feminist insights, I am also looking for instances where my empirical material might challenge these theories. In addition, I draw upon post-colonial theory and apply Gayatri Spivak's influential text "Can the Subaltern speak?" (1993) to my analysis. Here Spivak shows how colonizers (white men) in their attempts to save colonized subjects (women of color) from their local culture and traditions have silenced the women as well as prevented them from acting autonomously. This colonial saving of supposedly oppressed women has functioned to justify other agendas, e.g. the colonization itself; for my contemporary Danish material, I examine how a similar salvation discourse might function to legitimize other agendas. Finally, I also draw upon Sara Ahmed's notion of politics of emotions in my analysis. (Ahmed 2004).

As backdrop to the analysis, I use examples from previous Danish debates about interracial relations and intimacies in order to illustrate how this 2012 debate builds upon a long tradition of debating interracial relationships as well as regulating women's sexualities. For this analysis, I include analysis of newspaper articles from the turn of the twentieth century as well as fiction literature from the 1970s and 1980s. While the historical data is analyzed with the same theoretical approach as the contemporary data, the historical sources primarily serve as a perspective and an illumination to the contemporary debates.

3 It is about 'them' not marrying 'us' – not about 'us' not marrying 'them'

Potentially, the statistical material which sparked the first debate could be interpreted in various ways. As shown in the figure above, the so-called migrants and descendants from non-western countries marry ethnic Danes to a much lower degree than migrants and descendants from western countries and ethnic Danes.

These statistics could potentially lead to two kinds of stories: One about how almost all ethnic Danes marry other ethnic Danes, and another story about how migrants and descendants from non-western countries do not marry ethnic Danes. The first story was only briefly taken up by the media (*Ritzau* December 7, 2011; *Nordjyske* December 7, 2011; *Information* December 7, 2011), whereas the second story led to several articles and dominated the debate.

Jyllands-Posten carried two longer articles about how descendants tend to marry other descendants. One of the articles featured an interview with Jalal Sarwar and Shazia Perveen Dad, a married Danish couple of Pakistani origin, who tells their story which is full of love and romance. *Jyllands-Posten* portrays the couple as an 'ordinary' young Danish couple. It opens the article with the following sentence: "Jalal Sarwar and Shazia Perveen Dad are both of Pakistani origin, both children of immigrants, and married to each other. How do you think they met? In the mosque? During a visit to Islamabad? Or was it a meeting arranged by their parents? Wrong – wrong – wrong. It was in a hip bar with a dirty name: Supergeil

in Nørrebro in Copenhagen" (Broberg 2012a). Here *Jyllands-Posten* deliberately plays upon their readers' potential prejudice against immigrants and descendants, and shows how young descendants behave as most young people do. *Jyllands-Posten* is known as a right-wing newspaper and became infamous for publishing cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in 2005. But despite this, research has also shown that *Jyllands-Posten* is a newspaper which at times gives voice to marginalized people who rarely get heard in the media (Andreassen 2005: 198 f.). In this instance, *Jyllands-Posten* gave voice to Jalal Sarwar and Shazia Pervenche Dad, and it was their version of their marriage which was published.

Another *Jyllands-Posten* article carried interviews with (ethnically Danish) experts and (ethnically Danish) politicians. Here a member of the Danish People's Party (*Dansk Folkeparti*), Martin Henriksen, argues that a marriage pattern featuring descendants marrying descendants is a sign of a "parallel society", which must be fought. He argues: "We must work towards limiting the immigration from Muslim countries completely" (Broberg 2012b). To which the Social Democrat Minister of Integration, Karen Hækkerup, comments: "To restrict a certain kind of immigration or to make quotas for who can marry whom will not happen" (Ibid). Instead the minister will make restrictions as regards "Sharia marriages" (Ibid). Both politicians use the situation of marriage patterns as a platform to speak about other issues. Henriksen argues for restrictions on immigration, despite the fact that he is asked to comment on the marriage patterns of descendants born within Denmark, i.e. not immigrants, and Hækkerup introduces the issues of 'Sharia marriage' even though she was asked about 'original' marriages. By naming her rejection of Sharia, she appears as 'tough on multiculturalism'. The two politicians illustrate how the signs of 'Muslim' and 'descendant' carry with them associations of 'parallel societies', 'mass immigration', and female oppressive structures, here exemplified by Sharia law (Ahmed 2004: 45).

Jyllands-Posten's focus on descendants' marriage patterns gave rise to a series of articles (followed by Internet debates) in other news media; articles which – unlike *Jyllands-Posten* – did not give voice to immigrants or descendants. The majority of articles referred to the statistics from *Statistics Denmark* and copied *Jyllands-Posten's* statements from the politicians cited above, hence making the question of marriage appear as an issue regarding immigration and Sharia law (*Ekstra Bladet* 2012a; *Information* 2012; *Kristeligt Dagblad* 2012). Conclusively, data from *Statistics Denmark*, which potentially could have led to a number of different stories, primarily became a story about descendants marrying each other; a marriage pattern which was criticized and followed by political demand for stricter immigration laws and the clamping down on potential Sharia laws.

Similarly was the case with the second debate in *Politiken*. Here it could have been possible to debate various issues, but the debate focused on one aspect, namely a group of Muslim women's presumed lack of wish to marry ethnically Danish men. The debate began with an interview with four young, well-educated, racial/ethnic minority women, who talked about their difficulties finding a partner with a high level of education. The women did not say that they only wanted a Muslim or ethnic minority partner, but this became the focus of the following debate. The first comment on the Internet debate following the article in which the four women were interviewed illustrates how readers interpreted the women's difficulties as a question of religion and ethnicity. Here reader Tom Hansen writes: "One could also ask why these young girls are so concerned that their intended groom must be a Muslim?" (*Politiken*, April 21, 2012).

4 Failure to marry ethnic Danes harms integration

There are a number of Internet comments which condemn Muslim women for not marrying ethnically Danish men. Several of these comments connect the lack of wish to marry ethnic Danes to a lack of integration into the Danish society.

One *Politiken* reader writes:

The problem for these well-educated young new Danish girls is that they insist on marrying a Muslim man ... but a complete integration can only happen when the majority of our Muslim immigrants accept this [inter-marriages] (Frederik Jensen, *Politiken*, April 21, 2012).

Integration, and especially the lack of integration, has been a debated topic in the Danish news media since the 1980s. The concept of integration has seldom been defined, and integration has seemed like a floating signifier with different meanings, rather than a specific meaning, ascribed to it. Despite this lack of consensus regarding the content of integration there has been a strong consensus about integration as a goal (Andreassen 2005: 234 ff.). In the comment cited above, integration becomes closely connected to interracial/ethnic marriages. It seems like the foundation of integration is marriages between members of the ethnically Danish population and members of the ethnic minority population. In these debates 'integration' becomes an intimate phenomenon, an emotional and sexual experience. As one commentator writes: "I hope that the future will bring us closer to each other, which will make us experience real integration, also in relation to marriage and co-habitation" (Keld Jorn, *Politiken*, April 24, 2012). Similarly, another commentator argues: "The right way to assimilate foreigners is to mix the families. Families with ethnically mixed children should therefore receive special financial benefits" (Henrik Dahl, *Information*, January 29, 2012). Here intimate demands are put on individuals, as their choice of spouse is framed as a question about the betterment of society as a whole.

A large number of commentators blame Danish Muslim women for the lack of integration in Denmark. According to Frederik Jensen, cited above, "complete integration" can only happen when Muslim women marry ethnically Danish men. Similarly, in another comment in *Politiken*, the blame for the lack of integration is put on the Muslim women:

While it is overwhelmingly positive that Muslim women receive higher education and want to spend their lives with a well-educated man, I do find it a problem – as do many other commentators here – that they apparently only can spend their lives together with a Muslim man, and that a Christian, Protestant man like myself cannot be an alternative. ... We will not achieve integration before girls with a Muslim background can marry men with a Christian background (Dennis Buhl, *Politiken*, April 21, 2012).

Muslim women are held responsible for the lack of interracial/ethnic and interreligious marriages. They are called upon to change their marriage practices and put aside their potential wishes to benefit the Danish nation.

The many Internet comments do not accuse ethnic Danes for not wanting to marry ethnic/racial minorities or Muslims, just as they do not accuse ethnic Danes and their marriage practice of endogamy

for harming integration. However, there are a few comments which argue that the will to marry people who are different from oneself is a task for everybody, as illustrated below:

I am also indignant with those four new Danish women ... because of their biased views about future husbands. For them it was definitely not an option to marry one of the many Danes at the university. The day when one chooses one's spouse because of love and opinions, and not because of financial, ethnic, or religious considerations, we have come far. Integration is when we marry across all ethnic and religious divisions (Jakob Frederiksen, *Politiken*, April 28, 2012).

5 Blame the parents

Not only the Muslim women but also their parents are blamed for the lack of integration. One commentator writes: "Imagine if the [Muslim] girls' parents encouraged them to marry well-educated ethnically Danish men because that would promote integration" (Dennis Buhl, *Politiken*, April 24, 2012). This scenario is framed as a utopia, as if it is unrealistic to imagine Muslims encouraging their daughters to marry ethnic Danes. Furthermore, Muslim parents and family members are criticized for being oppressive towards women.

Muslim girls and women are subjected to such massive social control that it would be a miracle if they, when they reach high school age, would dare choose differently than choosing a man with the same religion and/or ethnic origin ... I have seen several examples of the massive ex-communication that these girls/women experience when they don't follow the family's wishes (Martin Jyderup, *Information*, January 29, 2012).

Here the parental control becomes the obstacle to integration, and sympathy is expressed for the women who potentially might want to marry ethnically Danish men. The criticism of the parents is combined with a criticism of Islam. The parents' strict control and potential violence towards their children is interpreted as a sign of Islam which is also seen as an impediment to integration. As one commentator writes: "Islam is the greatest hindrance to integration" (S. Monton, *BT*, January 30, 2012). According to him, it is an Islamic practice for parents to "control their children's lives, and if a Muslim girl falls in love with a Danish boy, it will be stopped or she might risk her life" (Ibid).

6 Women as agents of social change

The majority of comments holds the women and not their parents or Islam responsible for the marriage patterns and hence lack of integration. However, the overall image of the Muslim women seems to be characterized by ambivalence. On one hand, their marriage pattern is interpreted as a sign of Islamic practices; a religion under which they are oppressed. On the other hand, they are made responsible for these marriage practices and prompted to change them in order to improve integration. This can be interpreted as an illustration of how Muslim women are the embodiment of their religious and ethnic communities. By way of their bodies the women mark a division between 'their' (oppressive, Islamic) community and 'our' national (liberated) Danish community (Andreassen & Lettinga 2010). In her analysis of Swedish and Finnish media coverage of

the so-called honor killing of Fadime Sahindal, Suvi Keskinen (2009) has shown how minority women can become figures of transgression between 'their' community and 'our' community. Sahindal was positioned both as a victim of her patriarchal 'other' culture and as a heroic liberated woman who belonged to the Swedish nation (Keskinen 2009: 265). Like the Muslim women in the Danish debate, Sahindal was positioned as an agent of potential social change. In the media debates, racial/ethnic minority women are contributed with the capacities to create social change. The young men are not called upon to form sexual relations with ethnically Danish women in order to promote integration; rather they are seen as incapable of creating this social change. They cannot perform the transgression between 'their' patriarchal culture and 'our' liberated culture – they cannot become 'us'.

7 Historical criticism of women

When the racial/ethnic minority women refuse, or are seen as refusing, ethnic Danish men as spouses, they are accused of harming integration in Denmark. This accusation brings associations to the many historical accusations leveled against Danish women when they have chosen a non-Danish, non-white partner; they have been accused of harming the nation.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Denmark hosted a number of human exhibitions in which people, often of African or Asian origin, were on display for the curious Danes. During these shows, several Danish women got involved romantically and sexually with the men on display (Andreassen 2012). These relationships received series of criticism, as illustrated below:

If one is near Tivoli's Chinese village [The amusement park Tivoli hosted a 'Chinese exhibition' in 1902] in the morning hours before it opens, one can see several young ladies and young women outside the locked gate. They communicate with the sons of the East in English or by using sign language or by means of a kiss... This is not much different from what we have seen repeatedly every time a group from distant countries has visited Tivoli. When there is a Bedouin or a Negro in the Danish landscape, a number of girls become unfaithful to the domestic ideals and happily give themselves to the unknown. However, there is one difference from the past. Previously, it was mainly petty girls with open-minded and cosmopolitan views who became voluntary victims of the invasion. This year it seems as though young ladies from high society have also lost their heads along with their hearts (*Politiken*, July 31, 1902).

In 1902, Danish women's interracial relationships with the Chinese men are seen as an "invasion", associating foreign men's engagements with Danish women with an unwanted occupation of (national) territory. The women are accused of being "unfaithful to the domestic ideals", which underscores how white Danish women are expected to be attracted to, and form relations with, white Danish men. The women's engagement in interracial relations could potentially undermine contemporary ideas about white masculinity and white superiority. Where Danish women in 1902 were held morally responsible for the nation and the race, today's racial/ethnic minority women are held responsible for integration, and hence social cohesion.

Throughout the twentieth century, women's interracial relations have been disciplined through legal measures, policing, physical

punishment, and public criticism. Until 1925, Danish women's citizenship followed men's citizenship, first their fathers' and later their husbands'; this meant that a Danish woman lost her Danish citizenship if she married a non-Danish man. From the 1930s to 1960s, the Danish police patrolled bars and restaurants known as meeting places for non-married young men and women; here the police were especially concerned with Danish women's engagement with soldier and sailors, i.e. non-Danish men. The police were not primarily concerned about women engaging in prostitution; rather they were worried about 'ordinary' women whose sexual behavior challenged established gender and sexual norms (Spanger 2002). With the outbreak of the Second World War, both police and women's organizations became worried about Danish women's potential involvement with foreign soldiers. The Danish National Council of Women and Danish Women's Society encouraged the police to appoint responsible women to assist in the policing of bars and restaurants in order to prevent young women from engaging with soldiers (Spanger 2002: 171). During the war, and especially after the war, several Danish women who had been involved with German soldiers were subjected to physical violence and had their heads shaven, stigmatizing them as national traitors (Warring 1998: 156 ff.). The women were not only treated harshly because German soldiers represented the war enemy; Danish women involved with allied soldiers were similarly exposed to policing and criticism in the post-war years. Systematic violent attacks were limited to women engaging with German soldiers, but all women publically involved with foreign soldiers suffered condemnation; with black US soldiers causing a special concern (Spanger 2002: 172).

More recently, labor migration in the 1970s and refugee migration in the 1980s led to conflicts and debates about Danish women's engagement with the recently arrived male migrants. Phrases like "they steal our women", used as accusations against male migrants in the 1970s and 1980s, indicate a patriarchal view of women as objects belonging to the nation's men. Two novels written for teenagers, Leif Esper Andersen's *Fremmed* (*Stranger*) from 1975 and Aage Brandt's *Altid og for evigt* (*Always and forever*) from 1987, are good illustrations of the time's debates. In both novels, a young Danish woman falls in love with a young male immigrant, and they experience a romantic relationship which is complicated by the racism of their surroundings. Both relationships are characterized as 'true love' (e.g. Brandt 1987: 187). In the novels, the couples are tolerant and open-minded, unlike their families and friends who display racist attitudes. Both stories follow a classical dramatic narration, where both the relationship between the couple and the external conflicts are intensified, only to culminate in a sexual intercourse followed by the death of the migrant. The authors show empathy with their main characters, presenting the young lovers as likeable and the rest of the characters as violent, hypocritical and narrow-minded. The female characters embody an emotional cosmopolitanism (Nava 2007) that apparently only small segments of their society boast. Both novels focus on the sexual interracial relationship. In *Fremmed*, the girl Hanne is called a "bitch" (*mær*) because of her intimate relation with the migrant Josef, and in *Altid og for evigt*, Mia is called a "migrant whore" (*perkerluder*) (Brandt 1987: 138). The death of the migrant lover indicates that while the interracial relationship might be beautiful, it is doomed to failure, as it cannot exist in these non-supportive surroundings. During the previous decades, the two novels have been widely popular. Both books have won prizes and have been included in Danish school curricula; they still figure in contemporary assignments and essays in Danish schools (Studieportalen.dk 2012; Opgaver.com 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011; Studienet.dk 2011).

In scholarly analysis of interracial and international relationships, two interpretations have dominated. Firstly, women have been seen as national symbols and reproducers of the race and the nation, and foreign men's involvement with them has therefore been perceived as a threat to the nation (Warring 1998; Yuval-Davis 1997; Andreassen 2007). Secondly, interracial relationships have been understood in a historical context characterized by fear of interracial intimacies (Young 1995; Stoler 1995). According to both interpretations, which have often been interwoven, interracial relations are seen as dangerous and a threat to the nation and race. However, it might be possible that women's involvement with foreign men – and the condemnation of such relations – is not so much about the involvement with the foreign men as about the rejection of the national men; i.e. it is not necessarily the interracial intimacy itself which is considered dangerous, but rather the rejection and exclusion of the white, national men accompanying this intimacy. If this is the case, then the 2012 debate can be seen as a continuation of a century-old practice of condemning (certain) women for rejecting (certain) men.

8 If 'they' do not want 'us', 'they' should leave 'our' country

Several commentators connect marriage patterns to national belongings. One commentator asks:

I don't understand why young people of foreign descent absolutely have to marry someone with the same ethnic/religious belonging as themselves. Why can't they marry 'outside the walls'? Are Danes really so horrible? And if so, why do they remain in Denmark? Wouldn't it be more obvious to move to the homeland of their parents or grandparents and find a spouse there? (Kim Larsen, *Politiken*, April 28, 2012).

Here racial/ethnic minority descendants' belonging to the Danish nation is questioned. Most "young people of foreign descent", as the reader calls them, are born in Denmark and hold Danish citizenships; a large part of them are educated in Denmark; they work here and pay taxes, and they want to marry and raise a family here. Legally and practically, they belong, participate, and contribute to the Danish society. Despite this, their national belonging is questioned because of their potential lack of a wish for an intimate relationship with an ethnically Danish man. Another commentator expresses a similar view: "What I don't understand is that these Muslims come to our country – try to foist us their religion and marry 'one of their own' in order to preserve their culture and religion. Fair enough – but please do it in your own country" (Hans Frem, *BT*, January 29, 2012). In other words: Do as 'we' do, i.e. marry 'us', or leave the country. In Denmark, the proverb 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do' translates as 'Follow the customs or leave the country' (*Skik følge eller land fly*), and that seems to be the message here. Customs do not refer to citizenship, education or language but mainly to engaging in heterosexual marriage practices with a specific kind of people, i.e. ethnically Danish men.

Some commentators point to racism as an explanation for the racial/ethnic minorities' marriage patterns; they interpret minorities' potential rejection of 'us' as spousal partners as a sign of racism towards 'us'. As this comment illustrates:

If old [i.e. ethnic] Danes had the same practices and were not allowed to marry other people than old Danes, they would be

labeled intolerant and racist. But apparently the situation is completely different for Muslims (Ali & Fahad, *Politiken*, April 23, 2012).

This comment is both a criticism of Muslims marrying other Muslims, indicating that this is a racist practice, as well as an indirect criticism of the Danish conditions of debate which are conceived to be too politically correct. This criticism is raised by a few other commentators as well:

I wonder what the reactions would be if a white Danish man said that he would only marry white Danish women. Most likely that would make some politically correct people sit up. But of course it is alright if it is ethnic [minority] women who only want ethnic [minority] men (Bjørn, *Ekstra Bladet*, April 30, 2012).

In both comments, irony is used to criticize 'politically correct' Danes and to point to a situation where the writers find that ethnic minorities and ethnic Danes are treated differently, to ethnic minorities' advantage. Horsti & Nikunen have shown how anti-immigration rhetoric and online debate in Finland often deploy irony, and they interpret this as a sign of shared community and identity among the participants (Horsti & Nikunen 2013: 10). In the Danish online debates, one could argue that the majority of commentators form a community of shared attitudes and identities, i.e. white, ethnically Danish men who criticize Muslim women. Furthermore, the commentators position themselves as representative of the Danish nation, and integration is presented as an ideal situation that this specific community will benefit from.

9 Physical availability, heterosexuality, and national belonging

In the debates, a connection is established between being physically available and belonging to the national community. Women produce and reproduce the nation, and their bodies symbolize the borders between 'us' and 'them' in national narratives (Warring 1998; Helma, Phoenix & Yuval-Davis 1995). These theoretical insights are based on empirical analysis of white European women's sexual relations with non-white men, and white, European men's condemnation of these relations. Historically, white women engaging in sexual relations with non-white men have been accused of easy virtue, and their chastity and moral conduct have been criticized (Warring 1998: 198; Gouda 1995/2008: 157 ff.; Spanger 2000). But in these recent Danish debates, the situation is different. The Muslim women's chastity and moral conduct is not questioned or criticized. They are not accused of moral laxity; they are too chaste rather than too lax. Where white women and their bodies marked the border between the white community and 'others' – causing their engagement with 'other' men to be interpreted as an attack on the white community – these contemporary Muslim women do not mark the border between 'us' and 'them'; rather, they destabilize the national 'us'. If national belonging depends on physical availability, then consolidation of that same national community might depend on access to female bodies in the community as well as on the borders of the community. When this access is denied, it might not only lead to an exclusion of the Muslim women but also to a destabilization of the national community. Ahmed argues that a contemporary idea of national multiculturalism involves a transformation of heterosexuality into a certain performance of good citizenship which evokes the figure of

the ideal woman (Ahmed 2004: 136). This multiculturalism involves a love of difference, i.e. the white majority subject claims a love of ethnic/racial difference. In order for racial/ethnic minorities to be part of the (multicultural) nation, they must share this love of difference by sharing themselves: "The ideal [of the multicultural nation] is not premised on abstraction ... but on hybridity as a form of sociality, as the imperative to mix with others" (Ahmed 2004: 134). In this Danish material, the women must quite literally mix with the white men to become a part of the national community. If they refuse to engage in this hybridity, they are seen as not loving difference and hence not loving the multicultural nation – and they become the reason for the failure of the national ideal.

others [racial/ethnic minorities]... in their perceived failure to love difference, function as 'a breach' in the ideal image of the nation. Their failure to love becomes the explanation for the failure of multiculturalism to deliver the national ideal (Ahmed 2004: 139).

Interestingly, all the comments position Muslim women as heterosexual and interested in engaging in a romantic and sexual relationship. It is apparently not an option for these women to be happily single, engage in a lesbian relationship, or in other ways live their lives outside the normative institution of (heterosexual) marriage. The women's subject position is narrowed down; their only 'freedom' becomes the question of whether they marry a Muslim, a racial minority man, or an ethnically Danish man. It seems unimaginable to combine their Muslim female identity with other life choices than heterosexual marriage.

10 Platform for discussing gender roles and gender relations

Like many other Internet debates, these debates also serve as a platform for debating other issues than the specific issue in question, and hence provide a space for uttering stereotypical comments about women and Islam. As illustrated below, attitudes towards gender and race are often expressed as humorous jokes, and these comments can be interpreted as both sexist and Islamophobic.

A male writer explains why he personally would not want to marry a racial/ethnic minority woman:

Forget about it. They become so ugly when they are a little older. Why else do you think they have to wear a burka/hijab [sic] (Ejner, *Ekstra Bladet*, April 30, 2012).

Another male writer also writes humorously: "I would like to date someone with a burka. It is like playing the lottery where one can anxiously wait to see what is under :-). Most blanks but also some real prizes now and then. Besides this, a burka would look good on several Danish women" (B, *Ekstra Bladet*, April 30, 2012).

The debates are also used to criticize contemporary femininity, masculinity, and feminism more directly. An ethnic minority commentator writes: "Danish men are far from what Danish women want. This is also why your own women don't want you" (Ian, *Ekstra Bladet*, April 30, 2012). As a response, another commentator answers: "Ian is partly right, it is sad but true. There isn't much of a man in Danish men any longer, as they have let feminism oppress them (Michael, *Ekstra Bladet*, April 30, 2012). Very few commentators touch upon the possibility of ethnic Danes as non-attractive, as this

would potentially entail a self-examination and self-reflection with the potential hurtful result of discovering one's own lack of attractive masculinity. However, in the comment cited above about Danish men's non-attractiveness, it is not the men themselves but feminism which has led to the castration of men's masculinity.

The question of one's own masculine fragility is seldom brought up. Instead, performances of traditional masculinity are often at play in the comments which also frame ethnically Danish men as ideal partners for racial/ethnic minority women:

It is about time that some of the nice, hot, exotic girls find a nice Danish boy who will behave well, take care of his education and behave socially correct ... They will live happily ever after (Erik Larsen, *Kristeligt Dagblad*, January 29, 2012).

Since a Muslim man has not been taught to show consideration for other people but himself. ... It is a mystery that Muslim women do not run into the arms of Danish men. Here they have the opportunity to find a man who has learnt to respect women – not like many of their fellow countrymen who only want a nonentity (Paaske, *BT*, January 29, 2012).

Here racial/ethnic minority women are presented as objects of a masculine gaze and potential desire. The comments play upon the centuries-old tradition of sexualizing women of color (hooks 1992; Young 1995; Andreassen 2012). The writers confirm their own masculinity by positioning themselves as active in potential sexual engagements; they are the observers who can choose (at least in theory) between the women they observe. They are also representatives of the Danish nation, in a traditional gendering of the nation where the nation takes itself to be a masculine active subject defined through the feminine object it has possessed (Ahmed 2004: 136). But the objectification of women is accompanied with a complaint about how difficult it is to get physical access to the women.

I think that very many Scandinavian men really would like to be more involved with these beautiful women. The problem is that they are 'hidden' between the four walls of the house and don't really mingle, so we don't get the chance to talk to them, and that is such a shame ... and I still don't get why it is not legal for their sweet girls to rub shoulders with us. It would be so great if it was possible (Lars K., *Ekstra Bladet*, April 30, 2012).

Many immigrant women are hot babes [*lækre godter*] – it is just a pity that it is so complicated to obtain an audition (Martin Jyderup, *Information*, January 29, 2012).

11 New voices

In Denmark, as in most other countries, the news media are dominated by men (Who makes the news 2010). There are no specific surveys about Internet debate comments, but these might be compared to letters to the editor where surveys show that only one third of the letters are written by women (Infomedia 2009). These surveys do not measure race/ethnicity but only gender; other surveys show that racial/ethnic minorities are underrepresented in the news media (Kontrabande 2012). The underrepresentation of women and racial/ethnic minorities leads to a double underrepresentation of minority women in the news media (Andreassen 2007: 35 ff.). These debates

about marriage patterns reproduce the white male dominance, as the absolute majority of comments are written by ethnically Danish men. However, the men's dominance is also challenged, as a number of racial/ethnic minority women also get a voice, especially in *Politiken*. Here young minority women are interviewed in the article which sparked the debate, and several minority women participate in the following Internet debates. As mentioned above, the interviewed women talk about their difficulties finding a well-educated husband; they struggle to maintain this as a topic in the following debates, where a number of commentators introduce other topics, especially Muslim women's rejection of ethnically Danish men. One woman, Aala Akram, who is one of the interviewed women in *Politiken's* article, participates in the Internet debate. She writes:

It is not mentioned anywhere in the article that one should choose a man according to religion, but unfortunately it seems like most participants in the debate have chosen to attack the girls because this was what they assumed was the case. I am one of the girls in the article, and I have only, like the others, talked about the potential problems that may arise when women get education and men don't, especially in relation to marriage. It is not mentioned anywhere that the girls don't want to marry an ethnically Danish man. ... Neither I nor any other of the girls are trying to position ourselves as victims because we are not victims – on the contrary, we've got plenty of grit [*ben i næsen*] (Aala Akram, *Politiken*, April 21, 2012).

Despite this, Akram is not able to change the focus of the discussion away from the question of which men Muslim women will marry, and back to the question of education. But the minority women's voices and participation in the debate do challenge existing debate patterns. Analysis of previous media debates about Muslim women (Siim & Andreassen 2010) has shown how these debates can be interpreted as illustrations of Spivak's "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak 1993: 93), where white men's rescue of brown women serves as a pretext for carrying out other (white and/or male) agendas. In these 2012 debates about marriage practices there are traces of 'white men saving brown women from brown men', for instance in the claims about how racial/ethnic minority women should marry ethnically Danish men, as they (apparently) should treat the women better; a claim that might serve as a pretext to gain the much desired physical access to the women. To Spivak, it is important who has the power to speak for others. She argues that the subaltern is not given voice but is merely represented. In these debates about marriage, I would argue that the racial/ethnic minority women refuse to be represented; they will not be positioned as voiceless victims ready for rescue by the white, Danish men. Here it does make a difference to have the women's voices heard, and their participation in the debates destabilizes the pattern of white men saving brown women from brown men.

12 Conclusion

The dominating focus in these 2012 debates about migrants' and descendants' marriage patterns is the criticism and condemnation of Muslim women's (presumed) refusal to marry ethnically Danish men. This criticism is carried forward mainly with contempt, anger, and disappointment. Using Ahmed as my theoretical framework opens for seeing these emotions as having a function; they do something

(Ahmed 2004: 63). In these debates, the emotions of anger, contempt, and disappointment produce distance and differences between the ethnic minority population and the majority ethnically Danish population. Emotions produce surfaces and boundaries, as they circulate between bodies and align different subjects (young Muslim women) with each other, as well as making those subjects the sources of other people's (ethnically Danish men) feelings (Ahmed 2004: 6 ff., 46 ff.).

The contemporary criticism of racial/ethnic minority women mirrors a historical criticism of Danish women who were involved with non-Danish men. As feminist scholars (e.g. Warring 1998; Yuval-Davis 1997) have shown, the historical criticism of these relationships has been interpreted as a fear of interracial relations, related to the women's role as symbolic reproducers of their nation and race. However, based upon my findings, I would argue that not only 'the nation's women' but also 'women on the border' of the national community play important roles for constructions of national narratives. Rather than viewing the 2012 debates as a break with previous views of women and interracial sexuality, I suggest that the 2012 debates are a continuation of the historical debates – as the important point in these debates (both historically and contemporary) might not be whom the women choose to be with, but whom they reject. This opens up for new understandings of interracial relationships and nationalism.

As in many Internet debates, these debates serve as platforms for debating other issues and promoting other agendas. The point of departure, i.e. marriage practices and men's lack of education, was reduced to a question of Muslim women's refusal of ethnically Danish men. Applying Spivak to my analysis makes it clear that where the historical criticism of Danish women engaging with foreign men did not include the women's voices or their sides of the story, these new

debates do include voices from Muslim women – and often these voices challenge the interpretations of their situation uttered by the many ethnically Danish men who dominate the debates. Including this perspective in the analysis, opens for a potentially more positive and reparative reading of my material. While the 2012 debates seem like continuations of previous historical debates, the Internet opens for small changes in the debates, as it provides a space for the women to defend themselves and deliver their version of the story. The interaction of the Internet makes a difference, as women's voices are heard, and their participation in the debates destabilizes the well-known picture of white men saving brown women from brown men.

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Notes

1. The distinction between migrants/descendants from western countries and migrants/descendants from non-western countries is commonly made in statistics in Denmark.

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