CHAPTER 4

Refiguring the Public, Political, and Personal in Current Danish Exclusionary Reasoning

Peter Hervik

INTRODUCTION

The theoretical shift in psychological anthropology that came with the “cultural models” school of thinking grew out of the inadequacies of existing theories of assigning cultural meanings directly to language. Roughly put, earlier traditions reduced the meaning of objects and events to the meaning of the words that label them (Quinn 2011). Cognitive schemas and cultural models, as introduced in the 1980s and early 1990s (D’Andrade 1995; Strauss and Quinn 1997; Quinn 2011), were new ways of thinking about how cultural knowledge was organized. Cultural knowledge, among cognitive anthropologists, at least, came to be regarded as the outcome of “interactional properties” (Lakoff 1987), patterns of accumulated experiences that stuck in memory (Hervik 1999), or the emotionally charged regularities in our understanding that people and groups brought into interaction (Holland and Quinn 1987). Those elements that “stuck” did so because they were repeated, tied to emotional involvement, or to moralizations about what was “right,” “wrong,” or “natural” (Holland 1992; Lutz 1992). Roughly

P. Hervik
Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark

© The Author(s) 2018
C. Strauss and J. R. Friedman (eds.), Political Sentiments and Social Movements, Culture, Mind, and Society, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72341-9_4
overlapping with this development in psychological anthropology, practice theory brought (among other things) a shift from focusing on rules to regularities and schemas, both corporeal and cognitive, and new terms, such as habitus, that were close kin of cultural models (Bourdieu 1977, p. 27; Hanks 1990) in that they mostly go unquestioned by their bearers (Quinn and Holland 1987, p. 14). The confluence of cognitive anthropology and social practice theory (e.g., Holland et al. 1998; Holland and Lave 2001) led scholars to emphasize the ongoing formation of the actor in spatially distributed sites of practice interpreted against collectively performed cultural worlds.

In another confluence of practice theory and the study of cultural models, these cognitive anthropologists and many who have come after them have viewed cultural models as often being profoundly political in a manner that shares much with Bourdieu’s notion that the field of play is always a space of politics. However, the explosive post-millennial growth and professionalization of political communication, the commercialization of the news media, the mediatization of society, and the ubiquity of the Internet and social media present a challenge to traditional notions of cultural models. The overall aim of this chapter is to (1) refigure the public-private divide in psychological anthropology in light of these structural changes; (2) consider how the post-millennial rise of new media impacts the evolution of public battles about collective meaning; (3) examine how political power can influence cultural models, social memory, and common sense through these public battles; and (4) argue for psychological anthropology’s potential to contribute to the study of political subjectivity today. Throughout, I will insist that it is imperative to understand and study the extent to which hegemonic understandings and commonsense reasoning work in the contemporary global media context, particularly since this is where political subjectivity comes into being along with the emergence of a critical sense (Green and Ives 2009).

In a volume on political anthropology, Marc Swartz and collaborators have emphasized one widely noted observation, namely, that a “political process is public rather than private” (Swartz et al. 2002, p. 105) and following from this, that “politics always involves public goals” (ibid.). These goals concern the best management of scarce public resources and the allocation and possession depend upon a group’s consenting to a proposed allocation. This implies that the wider sociopolitical field is part of “the political.” However, some fields perceive the political as primarily being limited to broadly “newsworthy” public state activities and the political culture that supports those activities. In distinction to this state-focused view of the political, “the political” in political anthropology concerns topics such as power, nationalism, resistance, the state, citizenship, forms of exclusion, discursive formations, and controlling mechanisms that not only do not have to be directly tied to state activities, but are also personal and intimate processes that shape the meaning and experience of political being (Spencer 2001). Struggle, then, over the collective meaning and the meaning of signifiers of identities is always a political process (Aronoff and Kubik 2013, p. 24).1 As Dirks, Eley, and Ortner note: “In effect, politics consists of the effort to domesticate the infinitude of identity. It is the attempt to hegemonize identity, to order it into a strong programmatic statement” (Aronoff and Kubik 2013, p. 24).

To illustrate this approach to understanding politics and political subjectivity formation, we begin by describing Ann—a passionate Danish critic of Islam for the last 15 years. Her story, and the other stories used here, comes from a pool of 18 interviews and 35 major and minor critical media events addressed online, which dealt with issues relating to the presence of refugees, migrants, or Danes with ethnic minority backgrounds.2 She told us:

I have been... well, I do not think it is too much to say: desperate. In despair of what I see is happening to my country. I love Denmark, and right now my country is being undermined by an inward migration of people that for the most part do not fit in our culture. It is that simple (Ann, adult education teacher, 04).

Ann’s political subjectivity has been shaped by a number of active behaviors that she used to cultivate her particular way of being in the world: she had read the Koran, as well as reading prominent critics of Islam; she remains updated on migration statistics; she maintains a web site; she runs a regular copy-paste news entry and link distribution service to like-minded Islam critics; she contributed to the formation of a new political party; she attends countless meetings; she writes articles, op-ed’s, commentaries, and letters-to-the-editor for newspapers; and she maintains an active presence on social media, through web commentaries, blog entries, and Facebook comments as well as posting, reposting, liking, and using emoticons.
All of these efforts have shaped her particular views of not only herself, but, others, who she feels have not put the "effort" into doing the hard work necessary to understand the threat that she perceives. She explains, a "self-education" is necessary for what she does.

They [most journalists] do not know what they are up against. They have no idea of the destruction that is taking place in Europe at the moment. Because you only know that if you inform yourself in alternative ways.

We interviewed Ann recently but have followed her public interventions for almost 15 years (Hervik 1999, 2002, 2011). Her political awakening and her presence in public political activities are spread over the media landscape and tap into streams and streaming of news, propaganda, and messages. Through this media landscape, she makes her voice and beliefs known wherever she can, both as an ongoing engagement through her own writing and copy-pasting what fits into her scheme of things. She is a new kind of political activist working within a public space that is not what it used to be.

Ann’s case is interesting because it illustrates one of the key aspects of our argument—that personal meaning and public practices in the context of post-millennial new media intersect in critical ways to both create and recreate political subjectivities through the working of scalar processes whereby single instances of Islamic threats become, like a fractal, structural representations of global threats to the Danish nation. For the present purpose, we are interested in the energy and a certain scalability of Ann’s arguments, which leads her to apply her anti-Islamic ideas in increasingly new, expansive, and generalizable domains. As we will show, the fractal scalability of her beliefs is a critical part of her political subjectivity, and is central to the political subjectivities of most neototalist Danes. Specifically, as we will see below, for Ann, it is the headscarf worn by Muslim women that acts as a spearhead of Islamism.

"Fractal scalability" refers to the replication of categories across scales and spaces. This term encompasses Irvine and Gal’s specific construct of "fractal recursivity" (Irvine and Gal 2000), which is applied to the category of domestic collaborators below. We approach the scalability in the thinking and behavior of people like Ann by examining what we refer to as “Danish exclusionary reasoning”—a political narrative that has emerged in the last several decades that stresses the gaps in Danish society between those who fit and those who do not fit, local versus national, dominant, and opposing views. The relationships we examine in our explorative endeavor, operate in a generative and nonconsciously reflective manner. In this way, our approach is partly inspired by Gramsci’s analysis of modes of thought and common sense. The latter, he argues, must be identified, analyzed, and critiqued as an elementary phase in the struggle for hegemony. The nonreflective qualities of Danish exclusionary reasoning show a lack of full awareness of the power at work in political subjectivity formation, for this is where we find hegemonic representations, those representations of the world that “are so habituated, so deeply inscribed in everyday routine, that they may no longer be seen as forms of control— or seen at all” (Strauss and Quinn 1997, p. 39).

Exclusionary reasoning replicates across scales and spaces and its complex and folded shape softens binaries. It is the scalability and the move away from simple binary oppositions that makes the cultural logic of exclusionary reasoning fractal in its structural reproduction of perceived threats, slights, and insults to Denmark. The fractal qualities of this cultural logic of exclusionary reasoning are also useful for characterizing and conceptualizing the relationship between public and personal. We will show that racialized reasoning regarding Muslims in Denmark instantiate the cultural logic found in circulating images, soundbites, visual signs, metaphors, and narratives created in political communication, news media, and everyday conversations. Thus, within a mediated society, the supposedly private thinking and feeling of the citizens is replete with public circulating conceits. The fractal qualities of the cultural logic of exclusionary reasoning, then, appear in the consumers’ own rhetoric and perceptions of foreigners, migrants, refugees, and immigrants’ descendants as these are expressed in interviews and semipublic fora at the same time that they become the active tools through which citizens cultivate and express their political subjectivities.

In sum, we explore in this chapter the introduction of the cultural logic of exclusionary reasoning to understand the fractal scaling of arguments, from—as we shall see—the personal level to the global level. We use the logic of Danish exclusionary reasoning to help refigure the relationship between the public, private, and political. We organize the chapter in a set of argumentative steps. In a first short section, “The Public Space Is Not What It Used to Be,” we portray some of the structural changes in society that challenge the role and nature of the concept of public space as the space for democratic dialogue and information. Specifically, we find a new type of political activist, which Ann, whom we
introduced earlier, is but one example. In the next section, we draw on 20 years of ongoing research in discourses and reasoning about inclusion and exclusion in Denmark, to argue that one specific Danish exclusionary narrative, which we call “the nation in danger,” can be regarded as one key feature around which most debate and reasoning revolves. In the next two sections, we introduce two media events from our larger research pool to discuss contradictions within the exclusionary reasoning. Finally, we will draw up what we see are the implications for doing psychological anthropology within these new practices and understandings of social media.

**The Public Space Is Not What It Used to Be**

For Jürgen Habermas, a public sphere is “a sphere which mediates between society and state, in which the public organizes itself as the bearer of public opinion” (Eley in Aronoff and Kubik 2013). In Habermas’ interpretation of the political philosophy of the day, participants were expected to bracket individual interests and social status in order to understand themselves as acting for the collective good (Cody 2011, p. 39). Habermas wrote 25 years ago that dialogues in a coffeehouse or salon were the shaping media in the early bourgeois public sphere, through which the mutual exercise of reason could lead to decisions about the “proper” distribution of collective resources. Later, this face-to-face dialogue was transformed and transcended by “newspapers and periodicals, radio and television” as the public sphere where the general public discussed “objects connected with the practice of the state” (Habermas 1991, p. 398). The public sphere “has since degenerated in industrialized mass-welfare democracies through processes of commoditization, monopolization, and competition among private interests over state directed resource allocation” (Cody 2011, p. 39). In the early days of the emergence of nations, the sense of belonging to a mass political subject was mediated, says Anderson, through print capitalism that “allowed for a new sense of contemporaneity to arise as the condition of horizontal solidarities among fellow members of a nation” (ibid., p. 39). Today’s equivalent media is quite different than in the periods Anderson describes. Social media provides an illusion of simultaneity and connectedness that offers a sense of being part of public spheres and in direct communication with publicly known actors. Moreover, the direct and largely unfiltered process of publishing forces us to refigure relationships between public and private worlds. One of our interviewees, Michael, exchanges with high-profile commentators and politicians, surfs news sites, responds swiftly on Facebook and web-news commentary sessions and much more, while he reveals an elaborate, complex analysis of Danish politics and its leading voices. He explained how he wrote longer pieces and letters-to-the-editor to newspapers 20 years ago. They had to be well structured and logical in order to be accepted and included. Today, he noted, you just need to “click” to publish your opinion. However, the ease with which one can express oneself also comes with the risk of having one’s signal lost in the noise. Michael, recognizing this risk, described how the new “hard work” of political communication involves understanding the way that the Internet functions and the ways in which one can create the illusion of a bigger audience: “You can have 30 different names, and sit there debating with yourself, or make it look like there is a whole popular movement.” In the process, then, he has learned that it is most effective when commentator, “Otto is a Rhinoceros,” writes a web comment, to ensure that it will be followed by his friend, “Guy in Red Underwear.” In this manner, Michael seeks to reproduce the coffeehouse-like conversational dialogues described by Habermas—those dialogues that shaped public understandings of the political—without actually engaging with the public.

Michael’s practices are not unique to individuals, but, have become part of the mainstream in political communication. The political communication industry has undergone what some have called a paradigm shift of its own from a belief that “informing the public” of facts will itself alter the perception of consumers, to “audience based” approaches (Curran et al. 2012). In these audience-based approaches, messages are designed on the basis of knowledge about the audience acquired through research using focus groups, national surveys, test frames, ethnographic methods, and scientific knowledge. As such, there is now a general recognition in public engagement approaches that communication is not simply a communication of facts but, rather, a calibration of meaning with an eye toward persuasion (Nisbet 2010) and producing news that taps into and reproduces the bias and preunderstandings of the audience.

The fluorescence of this audience-based approach to political communication has emerged at a critical moment when the Danish political trajectory and its imprint on popular cultural understandings can be seen as part of a larger set of events and processes underway throughout
Europe. With the mainstreaming of the European radical right (Hervik and Berg 2007; Feischmidt and Hervik 2015; Mondon 2013), the cultivation of a politics of fear (Wodak 2015), the securitization of migration (Kaya 2009), the strengthening of authoritarian values and continuing claims to the moral superiority of Western cultural values (Gingrich 2006; Hervik 2011), vehement battles over collective identity and belonging are raging both in the media and in people’s navigations of their emergent political subjectivities. The result of this confluence of new media and the rise of the new political trends in Europe is such that almost any media coverage of issues of migrants will be advantageous for parties with a radical right-wing agenda (Ellinas 2014). We concluded in the wake of the Muhammad Cartoon Crisis in 2005 and 2006 that the contemporary public sphere is not treated as a space for dialogue but an arena for serious battle, manipulation, and confrontation. Thus, spinning is a weapon on the battlefield, a field where your enemies are known and attacked, and where you need not fear any standards of truth and veracity (Hervik 2008, 2011, 2012b). There is, in other words, little meaningful dialogue where the Habermasian “logic of reason” could lead people to make “informed decisions” about the future of liberal democracy.

THE NATION IN DANGER: DANISH EXCLUSIONARY REASONING

Neonationalism

A nation can be seen as the imagination of a community of people, real or construed, who consider themselves culturally homogeneous (Anderson 1983), while nationalism consists of actions and arguments based on the claim that this community of people should be given certain special rights within the state (Hervik 2011). In the last two decades, the Nordic countries have witnessed a new populist focus on nationalism, democratic values, common history, ancestry, and descent. This new interest is nourished by a division between a nationalist, positively represented “we-group” and an external “them-group.” The “them-group” is, perhaps unsurprisingly, frequently depicted in negative terms; what has been more surprising is the negative depiction of what has become seen as “domestic collaborators.” These collaborators are individuals or groups, belonging to the we-group, that, in one way or another, are viewed as supporting the them-group at the expense of “their own.” Simply put, these “domestic collaborators” have, in the increasingly vitriolic nationalist narrative, been deemed traitorous. Applying Irvine and Gal’s (2000) logic of fractal recursivity, groups that belong to the same category at one level (Danish) are subcategorized at another (really Danish/not really Danish) at another. We have characterized these changes in Danish society as reflecting neonationalism, where the prefix “neo” refers to the development, predominantly since 1989, where migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, and descendants became the target of antagonistic discourses and policies. This neonationalism sees the “migrant” as a hyper-visible figure of the enemy “Other.”

The kind of nationalist ideology that has emerged in Denmark relies on a polarisation of an in-group and an out-group, where the latter are seen as intruders or temporary guests, and, thus, should have fewer rights and more obligations (van Dijk 1998; Hervik 2011). But, as has been pointed out before, this Other is best understood as a product of the nationalist Self, and, therefore, the Other’s other (Balibar 2005), or the social image of Others with their fixed identities, which is rendered between fact and fantasy (Wesler 2004). The us–them division is an ideology of opposition where social inequalities are embedded, but, for the holder of these nationalist ideologies, it is always viewed as a good, positive, and normal perspective in light of the threatening, evil, deviating, and negative Other (Danesi 2009). Neonationalism, then, is an exclusionary ideology with a nation-state that has the power and privilege to decide how a stranger becomes a member and how a member can be expelled (Baumann 1999).

My own research on the Danish situation during the past 20 years has traced the changes and emergences of different enemy Others during this period. While the Danish Culture War of values initiated in 2001 and led to the Danish Muhammad Cartoon Crisis (2005/2006) (Hervik 2014), the modern history can be traced back to the fallout from the fall of European Communism. Thus, cultural Others went from “Bosnian” refugees in the early 1990s, to “Somali” refugees around 1997, to “Muslims” in 2001, and “Muslims”/“Islamists” in the mid-2000s (Hervik 2011). Morally based simplifying and essentializing divisions have resulted in a number of common tropes, including the idea of the “Good Muslims” and “Bad Muslims” that emerged in the early 2000s (Mamdani 2004)—“Good” Muslims are with “us” (and therefore liked and accepted) and “Bad” Muslims are against “us” (disliked, blamed, and sanctioned). However, while the Good/Bad Muslim might
carry the implication that the threat of the alien Other depends on personal behavior, other tropes have been less open to the possibilities of integrating these them-groups into Danish society. One dominant moralizing generator that has emerged in the last decade can be epitomized by the neoconservative, anti-relativist, neocolonial mantra “There can be no moral equivalency” between our Western democratic values and their non-Western ones. This narrative leads to the categorical belief that there is a fundamental and irrecconcileable “incompatibility” between Danish and Muslim cultural values (Hervik 2008, 2011, 2012a). Research done in the early 2000s on the media representation of Muslims in Denmark included focus-group interviews with a total of 47 people, 19 of whom were Muslims. The outcome showed clearly that the Muslims did not recognize themselves in these representations (Hervik 2002). By examining the narrative of “the nation in danger” in our earlier work, we were able to illustrate the asymmetric relationship over the semiotic machinery that shaped the meaning of “us” and “them.”

Nationalism and Narcissism

Nationalism is—among other things—also a kind of narcissism of minor difference that produces inclusion and exclusion. Michael Ignatieff captures this eloquently in his work on Balkan nationalism in the early 1990s.

A nationalist takes the neutral facts about a people—their language, habitat, culture, tradition, and history—and turns these facts into a narrative, whose purpose is to illuminate the self-consciousness of a group, to enable them to think of themselves as a nation with a claim to self-determination. A nationalist, in other words, takes “minor differences” indifferent in themselves—and transforms them into major differences. So traditions are invented. (Ignatieff 1997, 50)

The theory goes that, in the pathological gaze of narcissism, small differences between self and others reflect an exaggerated sense of self and distancing from an Other, followed by an attempt to eliminate the difference itself (Ignatieff 1997; Appadurai 2006). Thus, “the root of intolerance lies in our tendency to overvalue our own identities; by overvalue, I mean we insist that we have nothing in common, nothing to share. At the heart of this insistence lurks the fantasy of purity, of boundaries that can never be crossed” (Ignatieff 1997, p. 62).

The focus on minor (and disturbing) differences produces what Arjun Appadurai calls “predatory identities” “whose social construction and mobilization require the extinction of other, proximate social categories, defined as threats to the very existence of some group, defined as a we” (Appadurai 2006, p. 51). Two similar arguments in this predatory endeavor include portraying oneself as a threatened majority, and claiming that “we” could become a minority in our own country (ibid., p. 51ff).

Reflective of these views of nationalism is the fear of “stealth Islamization” (stigende islamisering), which originated in Islam-critical thinker, Robert Spencer (Bangstad 2016). Again we can return to Ann, whom we introduced above, to exemplify this fear and the reproduction of this “creeping threat” as embodied in a number of “small differences.” She said:

[...] the big concern: the stealth islamization, which many people do not understand. ‘Ah, it doesn’t matter that we serve only halal-butchered meat in the kindergarten.’ ‘Ah, it doesn’t matter that we do not eat pork in the kindergarten.’ ‘Ah, it doesn’t matter that we don’t serve pork in the cafeteria at IKEA.’ ‘Ah, it doesn’t matter that we have gender segregated Swin classes, since the women then do get out and the girls will also be like more integrated and get used to swimming.’ ‘Ah, it is great that we have some little-bit sharia-like courts that can solve family problems.’ And I can go on and on and on. Yes, this is deadly.

Any presence, any initiative and apparently innocent, small-scale instance of the Other is characterized as part of a “slippery slope” of Islamization. What Appadurai calls the “the anxiety of incompleteness” and the “fear of small numbers” arises from the majority’s strong adherence to nationalist thinking, where a single “colored” body will remind it of its incompleteness. This broken reflection causes anxiety and anger, which are expressed in blame. “Fear” follows a similar pattern—feeding the defensiveness and the desire for elimination—of “predatory” reactions.

For Ann, the Muslim headscarf is a symbol that evokes such visceral and emotion-inducing unwanted presences. Ann not only said, “I believe that the headscarf is the spearhead of Islamism,” and that “in the very moment women wear the headscarf they mark the presence of Islam. This is the most visible symbol apart from the very-bearded men,” but, she went on to say,
I do not want to be hospitalized and served by a woman with a headscarf, because I know what the headscarf means. As long as it is not a free choice on a world-wide level that a Muslim woman wears a headscarf or not, that long it will be a symbol of coercion, regardless of what the individual wearer of the headscarf may say.

The idea of the endangered nation is rethought and recast in acts’ discourse of the annoying and threatening presence of migrants. The fractal nature of this cultural logic propels acts’ discussing specific cases and introducing new ones to locate these as part of a greater threat to Denmark, or Europe more generally. In the context of, and as a constitutive element in, this exclusionary reasoning, an imagined dichotomous division between an “us” and “them” is continuously nourished and produced by generalizing and essentializing through fractal scalarity of a different Other who threatens to irrevocably change the nation.

AN AMUSEMENT PARK CONTROVERSY

In the course of the last two decades, debates concerning certain racial signifiers in Denmark have occurred in many different venues across the country. Examples include objections to the racialized black silhouette of an African woman as a coffee brand and poster in high-quality cafes and elsewhere; the equally racialized image of a Caribbean woman on Vanilla Sugar packaging; and the racialized images on “Haribo Skipper Mix” (a bag of candy). These images appear in contemporary Denmark as residues of historic racism that justified transatlantic slavery, colonialism, and a view of other “races” as people who were morally and intellectually inferior. Recently, the location of critiques of racially charged signifiers traveled from images on food products to amusement parks.

In the summer of 2015, the Danish Amusement Park Djurs Sommerland, situated in central rural Jutland, became the center of attention in a discussion on racism and racial signifiers. The political activist Jinvilsgaard had publicly contacted Djurs’ administration through the company’s Facebook site asking them to consider the racist aspects of having a theme park named Africa-land with rides called the Hostetnott Carousel and Cannibal Pots. Vilsgaard was subsequently supported by different groups of people identifying themselves as racialized minorities, among others the African Empowerment Centre (AEC). The AEC President, Josef W. Nielsen, for example, described Africa-land as

“extremely dated and with racist caricatures of African tribal people and stereotypes” (Politiken 2015).

Djurs, however, decided to do nothing about their popular, 20-year-old rides, and the company received great support from much of the public. Rather than engaging with the activists, they went on to block the activists from their Facebook site. As a response to a petition started by Everyday Racism Project DK, urging the park to reconsider the Africa theme, a counter-petition supporting Djurs was started. Support for the latter, by far, outran the first. Furthermore, Vilsgaard received a storm of outraged, racist, and threatening comments from offended, angry, confrontational Danes: “Go home!” (Hans); “Damn, they are not racist” (Mikkel); “The racism card you draw in a desperate action must taste bad in your mouth” (Søren); and “So what? Let Djurs Sommerland be racist! WE ARE IN DENMARK!!! GET LOST!” (Christian). These are just some of the examples Vilsgaard posted in a closed Facebook group that I am a member of and which she gave permission to quote.6

One of the most elaborate and provocative comments was sent anonymously to Vilsgaard’s personal e-mail address, and she shared it with us:

Listen here Miss Dumb: It is, damn it, because of fools like YOU that there IS racism in Denmark at all. Yes, it is because of idiots like YOU that racism emerge at all anywhere on this planet. Now I shall tell you one thing: Denmark is in no way a racist country and neither are the Danes – as a point of departure. BUT when foolish foreigners like YOU are coming and trying to change OUR things in OUR country, in DENMARK – yeah then this is precisely where racism emerge!! Yes, it may be that you have a nice Danish name, but you ARE really not a Dane, everyone can see that. It is damn tragic that you ever had children, for again ... it is because of people like YOU that children grow up and learn what racism is. You are simply too dumb and foolish and if you have such a big problem with what DANISH rides in DANISH amusement parks are called, well why don’t you disappear to another country? You could just eventually to clear out and go home to the country where you come from, OR, maybe you are too dumb for them to want you there! But find yourself another country to be a guest in, for with your retarded brain then there is, damn it, nothing we can use you for here in Denmark.

Away you go – FAR away from OUR country!!!!

Damn, we call our things exactly what suits US!! (emphasis original)

In the above e-mail, much like in other comments, Vilsgaard is rhetorically excluded from being part of the Danish community. She is reframed as a foreigner and asked to return to the country where she originated.
In fact, she, as a person, is turned into an attacker of Danish culture, thus, the exclusionary narrative outlined earlier is in play. The substance of the criticism of the park was never debated.

How can we understand the link between Djurs and Denmark? With Irvine and Gal (2000) we can theorize the line of argument in the reactions as affected by fractal recursivity, in two ways. First, those in favor of the park call for defending any changes—even the small changes that might be seen as a concession to a more respectful and expansive view of what it means to be a Dane—because they might threaten an idealized, “pure” Danish culture. Such comments, as exemplified in the quote, show fears of a general threat against Denmark. In the lengthy e-mail quoted above the original topic around names of certain rides is scaled out to a general “racism in Denmark.” Second, the author takes a strong position of ownership and entitlement when stressing “OUR” country in a manner that excludes the “YOU” and “YOUR” used to characterize Vilsgaard’s position. Vilsgaard is conceptualized as a domestic collaborator, a foreigner pretending to be Danish. It is really the contention over the perceived subterfuge of Vilsgaard’s Danish name that is most illustrative of the exclusionary logic inherent in contemporary Danish nationalism. When Vilsgaard, who was adopted from Korea as an infant, is reframed as a foreign intruder, this act of semiotic violence functions to both remove her right to critique the amusement park (specifically) or any aspect of Danish society (generally) as well as entitling the e-mail author to target her in vicious personal attacks in the name of safeguarding “our” Danish cultural space.

This analytical scaling of exclusionary (us vs. them) thought illustrated in this case sheds light on the source of emotion and energy associated with the incident. In characterizing any attack on Danish culture that, simultaneously, appears to respect non-Danish culture as representative of a hidden “foreignness,” Vilsgaard becomes another agent of danger to the nation, and, thus, open to exclusionary attacks. The fractal scalability of these exclusionary cultural logics permits the author to easily move from the discussion of an amusement park and its rides to Vilsgaard’s national membership (e.g., Vilsgaard is told to leave the country instead of staying away from Djurs Sommerland). What is at stake is a cultural logic that operates at different levels excluding certain people from the Danish nation.

A Missing Handshake: From Gender Discrimination to Radical Islam

On June 14, 2013, the Danish news media told the story of a teacher who, in his role as a public examiner, did not shake hands with female students. On the basis of his conservative religious conviction, every year Youssef Manawi would send out e-mails to the teacher at the school where he would be involved in the examinations, and let female students know that he would not be shaking hands with them. In this way he wanted to avoid any confusion. What is interesting about the story is not the case of gender discrimination, as ruled by a Danish authority, but the easy and unnoticed way in which this case was transformed into an issue of radical Islam in Denmark.

Two weeks after intense media coverage had evoked encouragement by politicians to file an official complaint to The Danish Board of Equal Treatment, a student, Michala Mosgaard, filed a complaint. The Board deals with all forms of discrimination laws required by the European Union, and it consists of mostly lawyers. On January 22, 2014, the Board ruled that the school’s forwarding of the e-mail to the female students (and not male students) constituted an incident of gender discrimination. The schools involved were to pay a fine of 2500 Danish Kr. (appr. 400S) plus interests to the complainant.

According to the Board, avoiding the handshake was not the issue of discrimination. Rather, they argued that, to meet the nondiscrimination rules, either all students should receive a message about not greeting by shaking hands or no one should. Whether the origin of Manawi’s reasoning was cultural, idiosyncratic, political, conservative, religious, or misunderstood, was not the issue. Manawi, the examiner, could hold his belief as he wished; but, the moment he formalized them in an e-mail and the e-mail was forwarded by the teachers to the female students, such an act constituted discrimination (Ligebehandlingsnævnet 2014).

Nevertheless, when the story broke in the media in June 2014, headlines focused predominantly on the examiner’s wish not to shake hands and the examiner’s religion:

Minister for Equality; It is not ok that the examiner does not want to shake hands with women. (Politiken 2013b)

Examiner refuses to shake hands with female students. (dr.dk 2013a)
S [the Social Democrats]: Equality is more important than freedom of religion at the exam. (politikodk 2014)

May an examiner refuse to shake hand with female students? (Information 2013b)

Spokesperson for Integration, and later Minister of Integration, Inger Støjberg, followed the now-common fractal scaling of his rhetoric when she used this single, fairly mundane "scandal" to comment on its place in the struggle over perceived threats to Danish national identity and the Danish nation: "This behavior does not belong at all in Denmark. To shake hands is a common gesture, and if you do not share this value, you should not be a public examiner" (dr.dk 2013b). Støjberg is also quoted as saying: "Imagine that we have come to a point in Danish society, where, for example, examiners do not fully accept common norms and values in Denmark. This is alarming." (Information 2013a). Also reproducing the discourse of "the nation in danger," but from a different perspective, member of Parliament, Rasmus Horn Langhoff characterized Manawi’s "offense" as being more of a threat to liberal democracy because of its "assault" on "equality" rather than its reflection of the values of freedom of religion: "Even if you, according to your religion, do not feel like shaking hands with women, then paying attention to the students is more important" and "The most important thing that we can do is to send a clear and explicit signal that of course you shake hands with your students, regardless if they are men or women" (politikodk 2014).

The verdict from the Board for Equal Treatment came seven months after the event (January 2014). The national news agency, Ritzau’s Bureau, wrote a story that was published by several newspapers with the headline: “HF- student receives compensation after examiner refused to shake hands” (Information 2014). The complainant, Michala Mosegaard, who found herself in shock when she first read the message from the examiner, is quoted as saying that: “I do not think something like this should take place in contemporary Denmark” (Berlingske 2014). A member of the Danish parliament demanded a new law: “DPP [Danish People’s Party] demands a new law on handshakes” (dr.dk 2014), in which, according to Martin Henriksen, DPP’s spokesperson for Foreigners and Integration: “All public employees should be obliged to shake hands with the citizens” (ibid.). Henriksen further asserts that “We see that in different areas, Danish culture and norms are under pressure – we have institutions for children that ban pork, and here we have an institution of education with an examiner who did not shake hands with female students” (ibid.).

A couple of weeks after the incident, a newspaper brought an article headlined "Hi, hug, or a handshake: How should we greet each other?" (Politiken 2013a) followed by a photograph of Adolph Hitler and Neville Chamberlain shaking hands in Munich in 1938. Responding to the Manawi case and the scandal it has produced, the article draws on cultural experts on greeting, emphasizing that, as a form of greeting the handshake came to Denmark only in the middle of the 1800s and continued as the most common form of greeting until the end of the 1960s, when one began to say "hi" or give a hug (ibid.). One article, written by a Muslim expert, was entitled “Muslim: No religious reason for not shaking hands” (Tønnsen 2013).

The many articles that dealt with the examiner’s story illustrate the workings of fractal scaling—the way that a minor incident viewed as dangerous due to its association with Islamic Others, becomes a threat to the nation. In the process, the nature of the concern shifted. The different articles that deal with the examiner’s story reveal a scaling away from the original dilemma concerning the practice of sending e-mail messages to female students only. Støjberg uses the case as an “example” or “case” of something larger and more comprehensive, reflective of trends that are occurring on the national and global level. Likewise “listing” in the news of prior events “in the same category,” “of the same kind,” and implying a “slippery slope” are important rhetorical features used to rationalize the fractal scaling of Danish exclusionary reasoning to counteract these so-called trends (see Peterson 2007 for an analysis of “listing”). Authorities are called upon to sanction the “annoying difference” (Hervik 2011) before it becomes even more dangerous.

While the Manawi case shows all of the signs of the application of fractal scalability to Danish exclusionary reasoning, a few days into the coverage, the media began to expand the implications of the unshaken hands by framing the incident as linked to broader “nation in danger” narratives. Specifically, the examiner’s story was linked, in a tabloid newspaper blog, to an article entitled “Radical Islam must be fought by several groups. It would do the debate on Islam good, if left-wingers and feminists would dare to object.” In this blog entry, Bruchmann brings up two current incidents in Denmark for discussion, which he finds are examples of incidents that are so clear and indisputable that even
“left-wingers” and “feminists” should support them. The first incident was the news coming out about a Danish middle court’s verdict concerning a Somali boy convicted of raping a 10-year-old girl. The story was that the court found that the 18-year-old “Somali” should not be expelled from the country after serving his sentence, a ruling that went against the lower court’s ruling.

The second ongoing case discussed in the blog was the story of the examiner. Perhaps unsurprisingly, critical details were excluded from media coverage in both cases. In the first case, the author and commentators leave out information to make their point simpler. Brüchmann edits out that the boy was 16 years old at the time of the rape, therefore, a minor; that the court found he had no relationship to Somalia; that he was caught up in difficult family conditions that most likely resulted in psychological problems that eventually led to the rape rather than any reason connected to Islam, Somali ethnicity, or “foreign” culture. In the examiner’s case, background articles revealed important details also left out of the blog entries. A single article based on a visit with Manawi, revealed that he does greet people (eye contact and right hand on his heart); weeks prior to his specific assignment as external examiner he contacts the teacher of the class to be examined by e-mail informing him or her about his practice, thus establishing contact before the examination (Nabil 2013).

The blog author’s entry evoked 159 comments. The entries about the Somali boy convicted of rape and the Muslim teacher who greets female students in an unconventional way were both discussed under the heading of “Radical Islam,” reflecting a scaling practice that goes unacknowledged by commentators. In other words, the blog author and commentators slip automatically into talking about Radical Islam and the Middle East. At this point, the Somali convict, the teacher, and Muslims in Denmark, the Middle East, and Somalia become conflated categories of the same kinds of people representing “the nation in danger.”

The idea of a slippery slope is the point of Henrik D.’s comment.

Obviously, there is far between a handshake to the Paedophile Somali rapist from Gullestrup, but everything begins with a detail. (Henrik D., 10 June 2013)

He supports his point by way of exaggeration and distortion (calling the Somali boy/rapist a pedophile), and by being careless or indifferent to the fact that the examiner did not ignore female students, but, rather, greeted them in a different way.

Obviously, Rasmus is not writing specifically about the two stories when he declares:

We are in the process of a destruction of the European culture. (Rasmus, 20 June 2013)

Rather, Rasmus is subscribing to a larger narrative, where not shaking hands and a “foreign” rapist not expelled will lead to the catastrophic decline of a continent.

Thomas H. Rasmussen connects the two men in the stories to Nazism, which is a frequent link made by radical right populists, between Islamism and Nazism.

In 1939 there were also some naïve people who did not take a little man with a moustache seriously. (Thomas H. Rasmussen, 20 June 2013)

Perhaps just as important are the allusions to certain people, who are “naïve,” who in Brüchmann’s blog entry, are represented by the Danish “left-wingers” and “feminists.” Here, we return to the accusations of treachery—the “domestic collaborators” mentioned above, for, when one cannot see the “common sense” (in the multiple uses of the term) that would link an unshaken hand to the collapse of a nation, then, by this logic, that part of the Danish population that disagrees with this exclusionary discourse are either naïve (the target of Thomas H. Rasmussen’s critique) or they are true enemies of the Danish people.

In many ways, the debate is readily transformed into rehearsing generalized cultural narratives, i.e., the exclusionary reasoning of “the nation is in danger.” The vehicles for this transformation are slips from the specific incident to generalizations about radical Islam and the Middle East, the slippery slope argument, and strategies of exaggeration and carelessness about facts. In fact, there is hardly any debate. The messages conveyed in the blog exchanges do not come from a meaningful Habermasian dialogue where participants exchange facts and arguments and respond to them. There is no debate in that sense. There is no opponent. A group forms a community of authors who share the same narratives and there are only a couple of opposing voices.

In the post-millennial media environment, it is increasingly difficult, often, for an actor to exit from their community of shared beliefs or to maintain the capacity to genuinely engage with, and be changed by, information and experiences that might contradict the key pillars
that support their political subjectivities. This, at its heart, is the essential challenge that Gramsci posed in the interaction between “common sense” and hegemony. In the cases we have considered above, the actual dilemma is relegated to the historians’ scrutiny of “what actually happened” and soon loses its significance in the gradual forming of social memory. Stories about the dilemma or, more precisely, stories evoked by categories and signs within the texts, such as “Muslim,” “immigrant,” and “foreigner” are simply latched on to the dilemma. They represent what Tannen called “ritualized opposition”: “Each listens to the opponent’s statements not in order to learn but in order to refute; the goal is not to better understand the other’s position but to win the debate” (Tannen 2002, p. 1655).

**CONCLUSION**

Fractals appear in nature and in the human body. Anywhere you zoom in or out at a fractal structure, the features are self-similar. With social media, politicians, reporters, and commentators have been able to cultivate the politics of fear around the nation in a way that has generated a widely distributed logic of a Danish nation in danger. Psychological and linguistic anthropologists may hypothesize that some human reasoning also works as fractals so that the same structure appears self-similarly at different levels. While, for many Danes, divisions that may, at the outset, look like a firm line which cleanly divides us from them, when we study this divide more closely, zooming in, it appears not to be so clear-cut but rather wrinkled and complex. In this chapter, we explored the “fractal logic” as a way to explain how scaling takes place in Danish reasoning, in news articles, web commentaries, blogs, and Facebook posts about Muslims. We focus on one particular logic, which we called “nation in danger.” We now argue that the fractal logic is a fragmented one. The fractal appears and is used as a commonsense logic that appears as a rational one that gains its strength from scaling up to higher levels where the stakes are higher.

We believe that this cultural logic is a fragmented one, but, also, that it is mobilized, actualized, and given life through logics of fractal scalarity that allow actors to move from small-scale particularity to generalizable patterns that are understood to threaten the whole of the Danish nation. Exclusionary reasoning thought through the mechanisms of fractal scalarity shapes the political subjectivity of people like Ann because it has become naturalized as a commonsense logic. From the external examiner to stealth Islamism and the destruction of European culture, the fractal reproduction of “the nation in danger” and exclusionary reasoning work to reinforce the political subjectivity of Danish nationalism.

In Gramsci’s philosophy “common sense,” such as the cultural logic of Danish exclusionary reasoning, cannot be eliminated, but, rather, is “what is at stake in the struggle for hegemony” (Green and Ives 2009, p. 7). Transformation of this common sense requires a critique, which, again, is the first step of theoretical consciousness. Theoretical consciousness involves the development, through a process of critical self-reflection, consistency, and sociohistorical situatedness. For Gramsci, then, the emergence of a theoretical consciousness is more important than “simple” activism which is not troubled by inconsistency or incoherence (Green and Ives 2009). Psychological anthropologists are positioned to identify the erasures and contradictions at the heart of common sense. If, as Linger (2005) has noted, psychological anthropologists rarely view persons as reduced to effects of discourse or an unthinking mélange of virtual identities, we believe that psychological anthropology is well positioned to study troubling political challenges like the ones facing Denmark. If we wish to supersede commonsense modes of thinking or break the nationalist narcissistic reflection in order to provide a spark for change, psychological anthropology needs to analyze the mechanisms of the dominant hegemonic understandings in order to build a new political subjectivity.

**Acknowledgements** I wish to acknowledge the comments and exchanges with the team of researchers in the SERR-research project on racialization, Carolina Sanchez Bae, Manté Vertelytė, Tess S. Thorsen, Lene Myong, and Anne-Sofie Thorsen. The article could not have materialized without Anne-Sofi’s immense groundwork and insights. The input of SERR is why I prefer to use “we” in the article rather than “I”, even though I take full responsibility for the content. Thanks to the VELUX-Foundation and Henrik Tronicke for believing in our project. Thanks to the workshop participants at Columbia University for the Political Selves workshop, and not least to the discussant Kevin Birth’s comments and encouragements. Obviously, I owe my deepest gratitude to the two editors, Claudia Strauss and Jack Friedman, and to Dorothy Holland for believing in what I do, for keeping an eye on the bigger lines of the book, and for helping me unfold ideas that are not always easy to follow. Parts of the article have been presented at the University of Jyväskylä, Tampere University, Aalborg University, Humboldt University, EASA conference in Milan 2016, and Stockholm University.
NOTES

1. In anthropology, these struggles over meaning are referred to as “cultural politics” (Alvarez et al. 1998).

2. The research for this article builds, on the one hand, on several studies of large media events during a nearly 20 year period (Hervik 2011) including a team research project from 1996-1999 on the emergent multiculturalism in Denmark (Hervik 1999); a one-and-a-half-year project on Danish news media coverage of religion and religious minorities 2001-2002 (Hervik 2002); and two international projects on the Danish Muhammad Cartoon Crisis (Hervik 2008, 2012a, b). On the other hand, the article draws from a new ongoing team research project on experiences and resistance to racialization in the Nordic countries. One subproject focus is on social media and forms of racialized exclusion. We carried out repeated individual in-depth interviews and focus group interviews; attended rallies and meetings; and monitored certain radio shows and exchanges on web-news exchanges, Facebook, and blogs. The project is still in progress. Most of the interviewees were found via their active presence on Facebook, blogs, and web-news commentaries.

3. This can be contrasted with an earlier Danish nationalism associated with the original formation of the nation-state that perceived neighboring countries or hegemonic social groups as its “cultural” Other. Earlier, Danish nationalism was predominantly articulated through social images and stories about Sweden and Germany.

4. The Cartoon Crisis refers to the turmoil associated with the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten’s publication of 12 cartoons on 30 September 2005 that led to violent global reactions and the deaths of more than 150 people in early 2006.

5. The petition to reconsider the names of the rides was signed by more than 1200 people, whereas the counter-petition supporting DJsrs “as it is” was signed by more than 16,000 people (AFP/The Local 2015).

6. The comments were sent to her by people using their own names. Following an interview, Vilsgaard gave permission to use them.


8. We are using the original names in these public commentator threads. Commentators provide information to the newspaper-and decide at that point, whether they will use pseudonyms or own names.

REFERENCES


Ligebehandlingsnævnet. 2014. “Ligebehandlingsnævnets Afgørelse Nr. 16/2014.” [The Board of Equal Treatment’s Verdict no.16/2014].