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Redaktionsledelsens forord

Det er med stor glæde, vi præsenterer dette særnummer af *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning*, et *open issue*, der søger at indfange åbenhedens mange betydninger – som nysgerrighed, som plads til eksperimenter, og som et rum for uventede forbindelser. Dette særnummer repræsenterer netop denne åbenhed og tilbyder et bredt spektrum af nye indsigter og idéer inden for kønsforskning i form af forskningsmæssige bidrag fra især yngre forskere.

Med ti artikler, to rundbordssamtaler, to essays samt anmeldelser af både ph.d.-afhandlinger og bøger er dette nummer ikke kun fyldigt, men også mangfoldigt i sit udtryk. De mange bidrag spænder over en række forskellige tematikker og metodiske tilgange og har især fokus på den vigtige forskning, som yngre forskere bringer til feltet. Dette nummer af *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* er dermed ikke bare et *open issue* i form, men også i ånden – et rum for dialog, eksperimenter og nytænkning, hvor uventede perspektiver får plads til at folde sig ud.

En særlig tak skal rettes til temareaktionen, der, som yngre forskere selv, har påtaget sig den krævende opgave at forme og samle dette åbne nummer. Med stort engagement har de skabt et

nummer, der både udfordrer eksisterende viden og åbner for nye samtaler.

Vi glæder os samtidig over, at *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* endnu engang har modtaget økonomisk støtte fra Danmarks Frie Forskningsfond, hvilket sikrer, at vi kan fortsætte med at udgive tidsskriftet i yderligere tre år. Dette nummer markerer dermed også, at tidsskriftet nu har været fast forankret på *Center for Køn, seksualitet og forskellighed* i tre år, hvor vi i samme periode har oplevet en fordobling af vores læsertal. Denne udvikling afspejler en stigende interesse for kønsforskningens mange facetter og for tidsskriftets rolle som en platform for både etablerede og nye stemmer i feltet.

Vi håber, at I vil lade jer inspirere af de mange spændende indsigter og bidrag, som dette særnummer bringer.

God læselyst!

På redaktionens vegne

*Camilla Bruun Eriksen,
Michael Nebeling Petersen
& Mons Bissenbakker*

Opening by the Editors

by Anton Juul, Ahrong Yang, Kai Roland Green and Molly Occhino

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‘Open issues’ trace unknown territory. Even the form is ambiguous. Are they a “well-stocked and themed smorgesbord” for the discriminating palate (Jacobson 2009)? Or a space for “issues as they open” (Judkins and Bowman 2018), like a handful of tickets to inaugural destinations?

Openness to new directions is an orientation often associated with younger researchers before they have been moulded by institutions, directed to plough old furrows into new fields, or tempted to chase the elusive ‘academic niche’. The pressures on ‘openness’, however, are great. Young researchers are encouraged to brand themselves, push ahead strategically in an area of expertise, and avoid the distractions of the speculative and experimental. Equally, the dynamics of academic career production inevitably present a stark future for many early career researchers. They walk a difficult line of conformity, lest they risk being marked as too niche to be employable, particularly within the established disciplines in contemporary academia run according to neo-liberal capitalist logics. What kinds of feminist knowledges and what kinds of feminist knowing do we leave out when we orient ourselves most towards established,

senior academics’ contributions? Whose or what kinds of perspectives might we let slip through the cracks in favour of more established knowledge producers?

With this open issue, we directed our call primarily toward younger scholars early in their careers, not because we are naïvely invested in youth, but because we wanted to encourage young scholars in gender studies to share their research with the interdisciplinary audience of *Women, Gender & Research*. As we in the editing group of the issue ourselves are scholars early in our careers, we wanted to acknowledge that finding an audience for your research is one of the struggles that early career scholars are grappling with in establishing themselves as a voice within a field of study.

We encounter gendered forms of ‘openness’ across this issue, beginning with the radical reckoning that Scandinavian countries are facing with their colonial histories and racist migration practices, past and present. Our texts from trans and queer narratives perform openness by their insistence upon openings towards t4t readings in literature, in counter archives and counter-narratives to produce other trans becomings. The politics

of openness for media discourses and the public come to the foreground when we encounter the unwillingness of Greta Thunberg to close herself to the anger of injustice, and the “semiotic openness” infused in feminist cartoon practices on Instagram. Channelling our final piece on masculinist privileges of the manifesto genre and the call for genre experiments, this collection of younger scholars double-down on the clefts and valleys attendant to the open issue form. We, as editors, and as ECRs ourselves, try to follow them along these pathways.

With 10 articles, 2 round-table discussions, 2 essays, 2 PhD dissertation reviews and 2 book reviews, this open issue is fairly large and covers a variety of different subjects, creating new and exciting theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and empirical openings by a wide range of younger researchers.

In her article, “Embodied Coloniality: Affective experiences of Muslim immigrant women living in Norway”, Nezihat Bakar-Langeland’s research delves into the affective and embodied experiences of Muslim immigrant women in Norway, investigating the enduring impacts of coloniality on their lives. Drawing on in-depth interviews, she explores how colonial legacies shape racialized power dynamics and dehumanization, leading to marginalization and “resulting in feelings of non-relationality, suffocation, survival, resignation, and a loss of futurity”. Through the concept of “colonial wounds,” Bakar-Langeland analyzes the epistemic and ontological/aesthetic injuries experienced by participants. These narratives uncover the persistence of racism and exclusion within Norwegian society, emphasizing the complexities of identity negotiation in a context steeped in colonial structures and racial hierarchies. By situating these stories within broader discourses of decolonial feminism and affect studies, the work illuminates the oppressive and transformative potentialities of resistance in the face of systemic inequities.

Anna Meera Gaonkar’s work explores whiteness, racialisation and affectivity in the contemporary Danish (and Nordic and European) context, set against the backdrop of European post-WWII obsessiveness with issues of migration and

integration. Gaonkar applies an ‘economic’ approach to affect, concerned with exchanges and negotiations, to analyse how *Tryghedspakken* in 2020 (the Security Initiative) and *Parallelsamfundsløven* in 2021 (the Parallel Society Law) manifest white homesickness and affective evictions. Both these actions are explored as ways to “construct instrumental figures that are both racialised and migrantised in opposition to the Danish majority white population”. Such imaginaries have not only historical roots but very present implications, as Gaonkar accounts for through the material threat of eviction and being cut off from welfare experienced by racialised-migrantised residents across Danish society.

Jenny Andrine Madsen Evang produces a multi-layered analysis of the 2016 Black feminist film *Serpent Rain*, separating out the semiotics of the film against the backdrop of other artistic representations of its central story: the sinking of the 18th Century slave-ship *Fredensborg*. Dissecting its sensory aesthetics, Evang describes a set of fragmented ontologies floating to the surface of the film, from its interrogation of typical Scandinavian images (such as of tranquil water) to reliance on the “self-image as a racially innocent, peaceful region”. Beginning with analysis of the role of oceans in Scandinavian imagery, Evang takes us through *Serpent Rain*’s representational spinning around the circuits of capital, followed by its critiques of the spectated gaze and evocation of soundscapes in the synaesthesia strategies of the film’s feminist and post-colonial critiques.

In their article, “Extrapolating the Faroese history of abortion: A material-rhetorical archival analysis of rhetorical accretion”, Turið Nolsøe and Lena Nolsøe investigate the underexplored abortion history of the Faroe Islands, focusing on the case of Anna Maria Jacobsdatter, who was accused and later acquitted of abortion in 1843. Drawing on newly localized archival records, the authors expand the concept of “rhetorical accretion” to examine how administrative and archival practices shape historical narratives. They highlight how gendered, class-based, and national power dynamics under Danish rule influenced the formation of sources and contemporary abortion

discourse. Through a material-rhetorical lens, this research underscores the interplay between geopolitics and biopolitics in constructing Faroese abortion history, offering insights into the socio-political structures that continue to shape reproductive rights debates.

In their article, “Negotiating Trans Affect in Luka Holmegaard’s *Havet i Munden*”, Tais B. Terletskaja sets out to understand how Holmegaard’s book of poetry negotiates the polarized field of trans affect that dominates contemporary trans discourse. Restricting trans experience within a binary of either positive or bad affect, this polarization has serious consequences for how trans folk become visible within the highly pressurized field of cultural and political discourse on transness. Turning to Holmegaard’s book of poetry, Terletskaja shows how it disturbs neat demarcations between feeling good and bad, pleasure and pain, and how it, through what they call an affective attunement, carves out a space for a more ambivalent, open narrative for trans experience. Terletskaja persuasively argues that Holmegaard’s poetry, in its affective attunement to subtle bodily sensations and delights, dares to interrogate the limitations of constrained identity markers and gestures toward another vision for transness that is both rich and varied, even if it is minutely articulated.

Interested in how the gaming community has been fragmented, diverging in polarized directions concerning LGBTQ+ issues and inclusion since the 2010s, Kim Minuva’s article “‘Queerness is unstoppable’ – How video game publications frame LGBTQ topics” maps the terrain of LGBTQ+ topics in gaming culture. Employing a framing and discourse analysis through a queer feminist lens, Minuva works to understand the ways in which LGBTQ+ topics are represented and framed; specifically, their work analyzes how and if the right-wing backlash against LGBTQ+ issues, and the diverging, polarized attitudes surrounding queer and trans issues is reflected in the content in gaming publications. To do so, their article explores the coverage of the three most influential gaming magazines and media, analyzing content written between 2002 and 2020. Through Minuva’s careful

mapping and analysis, they found that though conservative campaigns like GamerGate employ right-wing, queer- and transphobic philosophies and discourse to oppose diversity and inclusion within the content of video games, the overall rhetoric and framing of LGBTQ+ inclusion used in gaming journalism is egalitarian and neutral.

In their article, “Archiving our bodies - trans corporeal traces and t4t archival reading”, Storm Madsen engages with the work of three non-binary or trans-masculine artists, Kris Grey, *No title* (2019), Emmett Ramstad, *The good ones* (2006) and Marie Ahlberg Andersen, *My Dick Clit has many forms* (2022), exploring the corporeal traces of trans becomings that, as Madsen argues, resist hegemonic, linear, medically assisted transition narratives that focus on the physical body in full form. Indeed, the artists’ insistence on displaying nipple scabs, blood stain drops, and crotch imprints as transition documentation allows for, as Madsen argues, another kind of t4t archival material to emerge; one that highlights the slowness, the heterogenous temporality, the ungraspable ambiguity and complexity of trans embodied becomings, and thus, the impossibility of a singular one-directional narrative of trans embodiment and transition. As they eloquently argue and exemplify with their own t4t auto-ethnographic engagement, Madsen contends that t4t counter archival offerings, and the directionality of t4t archival gestures, are important to allowing for other kinds of trans engagement and becomings.

Frida Hviid Broberg’s important contribution, “Hvor vover hun! Vrede og autisme i mediedækningen af Greta Thunberg” (“How Dare She – Anger and Autism in the Danish Media Coverage of Greta Thunberg”), analyzes the rhetorical circulation of the Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg’s speech at the UN’s climate action summit in 2019 in Danish media, exploring how feelings anger and worry ‘sticks’ to Thunberg and the youth climate movement. Hviid Broberg demonstrates how the Danish media frames Thunberg’s anger as something to be problematized and pathologized: her anger is often framed as childish, hysterical, and linked to her autism spectrum diagnosis, rather than as a valid reaction to political issues,

specifically climate inaction. The article argues that Thunberg's anger is portrayed as a threat to the mental well-being of other children, making her a subject of societal concern. In an important conceptual contribution, Hviid Broberg proposes understanding Thunberg's figuration in Danish media by introducing the concept of 'the impossible child', a figure who is both a child and not a child, whose anger must be controlled not to protect her, but to safeguard other children from her.

Fabricius's article explores the sharing of comics and cartoons on Instagram as contemporary feminist activism. Through the case study of Mary Catherine Starr (Instagram profile @mom-life_comics), Fabricius investigates the power and potential of "digital feminist consciousness-raising" in an era where the desire for creative expression, the aspirations of activism, the emotional labour of platform community management, and the need to 'side-hussle' become entangled in online action. Starr's work came to prominence for many through a viral vilification of her work in 2022, in which Starr's expressions of gender inequality in cishetrosexual marriages and her 'momfluencer' style came under ridicule and critique. Both her underpinning aesthetic style (with its economic interests) and her subsequent responses to the scandal are analysed by Fabricius from different vantage points of feminist epistemology: the semiotic openness of Starr's discourse, the history of visibility in the meaning-making of feminist texts, and the politics of complaint in response to Starr's justifications. The work illuminates these tensions within the increasingly influential medium of instacartooning.

In her contribution, Kira Skovbo Moser asks what potentials the manifesto genre, qua its masculinist past, can be said to hold for a feminist project of establishing new speaking positions within public discourse. Through a rhetorical analysis of genre as a form of action, Moser analyzes how two Danish feminist manifestos, *LUDERMANIFESTET* (2017) by the fourth-wave feminist collective #GirlSquad and Signe Ulbjerg's "Manifesto for Writing Victimhood" (2021), experiment with the genre's possibilities and limitations for creating positions through which a feminist politics can be

enunciated. Combining the manifesto with other genres (e.g. the women's magazine, the academic article), Moser argues that it is through genre experiments - unexpected genre combinations and embeddings - that these manifestos attempt a renegotiation of who gets to speak for whom within different discourses of feminist concern.

This open issue features two roundtable discussions addressing critical social issues. The first, "(De)Humanising People in Discussions around Race and Religion", led by Lea Skewes with Iram Khawaja, Lene Kühle, and Christian Suhr, explores racialization and Islamophobia in Denmark, focusing on media and political roles in dehumanizing minorities. The second, "On the All-Inclusive Society, or How to Leave No One Behind", organized by The Bevica Foundation's Universal Design PhD and Postdoc Research Network, includes Dan Goodley, Yanki Lee, Jos Boys, and Sarah Glerup discussing inclusivity in disability studies, addressing neoliberal ableism, "super cripple" stereotypes, and equity tourism.

Furthermore, the issue contains two essays. The first, entitled "Gatekeeping Science with The Master's Tools – How Methodological Critiques Police Feminist Research" and written by Jan Thohauge Frederiksen and Simone Mejding Poulsen, explores how feminist knowledge production is often challenged and discredited by (positivist) researchers under the guise of "methodological critiques" that assume a universal acceptance of positivist epistemologies. The authors argue that the "scarecrow" arguments brought forth by such feminist critiques aims not to engage in scientific discussion, but rather to dismiss feminist knowledge production and gatekeep science. The second essay, entitled "Beskattet og Ubeskyttet: Refleksioner over sexarbejde og sexarbejders vilkår" by Camilla Brokholm Pedersen, traces some of the arguments used against sex work in the Danish media and politics; countering these arguments she instead outlines why rights and legal protections for sex workers is a better model for regulating sex work than criminalization, as providing legal protections has the potential to greatly improve the working conditions and lives of sex workers.

Finally, the issue also includes two book reviews of Margretha Järvinen and Nanna Mik-Meyer's *Køn og Karriere i Akademia. Bag Facaden* (2024) and the anthology *Det aktivistiske museum: praksisser, teorier og aktører* (2023) respectively, as well as reviews of both Anna Meera Gaonkar's and Elizabeth Löwe Hunter's PhD dissertations.

It is our hope that each voice within this open issue will find an audience of readers both within and beyond their 'proper' disciplinary frameworks and that this open issue might reflect the truly rich interdisciplinarity of gender studies as such.

Together and apart, they push the boundaries of feminist and gender studies—while many of them are also simultaneously resisting the boundaries of the more 'established' disciplines. However, we also want to stress that so many threads of solidarity intertwine the contributions. We end this open issue open-endedly: it is on account of – and not despite – the important differences in our academic orientations that we have so much to learn from each other.

Happy reading!

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On the all-inclusive society, or how to leave no one behind – A conversation with Dan Goodley, Yanki Lee, Jos Boys, and Sarah Glerup

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the US disability rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s, the establishment of disability studies as an academic field the following decades, and the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006; inclusion as a political, scientific, and legal phenomenon has been widely debated, investigated and celebrated as a common goal for societies all over the world (Barnes & Mercer, 2010, p. 255f; Oliver & Barnes, 2012; Slee, 2018). This development has gained traction recently because of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) agenda with a pledge to end discrimination and exclusion by reducing the inequalities and vulnerabilities that undermine the potential of individuals (United Nations, 2015).

The Bevica Foundation's *Universal Design PhD and Postdoc Research Network* is an

interdisciplinary network whose aim is to facilitate and strengthen academic work with universal design (Ostroff, 2001; Story, 2001) as a research-based field of knowledge in Denmark. To discuss questions of how to create an inclusive society the network organized a conversation between Sarah Glerup, a Danish activist, disability advocate and cartoonist; Jos Boys, an architect, author, and activist working at The Bartlett School of Architecture at University College London; Yanki Lee, an architectural designer, design activist, and expert in social innovation and design research for social inclusion and participation; and Dan Goodley, Professor in Disability Studies and Education at the University of Sheffield. What follows, is an edited version of the conversation that took place in late 2022. We conclude by carving out key learnings that, in light of the recent Danish national campaign #UndskyldViErHer (see e.g., Eric, 2023), remain current.

Look, it's a bird! It's a plane! It's the Super Cripple!

Yanki: Let me be the devil's advocate. First, I always ask my students: why are you doing all this inclusive design; *universal design*? Do you only want to feel good, or do you actually want to be critical of society? I always say, are we making a mess or are we trying to contribute? I was surprised, here it's still quite extreme that you either become a superhero to inspire the others when you have a disability, or you will be totally discriminated. What is the in-between? I think it's not about the inclusive society; society itself is a problem. Because an inclusive society means there's a lot of judgement. But by having the freedom to confront, to be critical, and be part of society is important, rather than naming it inclusive. In the UK, my mentor always says that it's not about inclusive design, it's about the design of social inclusion. It's ongoing, not a naming thing.

Sarah: When you say that you can either be a superhero or a tragic victim, I guess those are the two options you have in Danish society now, and that just brings us back to the question of responsibility. Because when someone wants to cast you as a, I would say, *super cripple*, then what it means is that you get applauded for doing something that other people wouldn't get applauded for. Like saying to someone like me, "It's so impressive that you smile" or "It's so great that you're here at this bar". And to some extent, it might not be completely untrue. Because if you've been pestered by people like that all evening, it is a little bit impressive that you keep smiling. Also, if you have to get four big guys to carry you up the stairs to the bar. Then yes, that's a little impressive too. But aside from that, a lot of the time, it's a way of putting the entire burden on me. It's only something special if you acknowledge that surroundings are really, *really* shitty. Raising me as someone who is a super cripple that's a way of saying: "See, she can do it, so everybody else can do it", so we don't have to change anything in society. If anyone questions whether this is what happens in Denmark right now, just go out and see the election posters that

have still not been taken down, because the party that got the most votes from young people has had posters up that reads "I am weak". But on the poster, the word "weak" has been crossed out and replaced with the word "strong". So now the poster reads: "I am strong". It's about individualizing issues that should be something we all deal with together and saying: if you have the right attitude, if you decide that you're *not* weak, then you're strong and you will find a way to conquer those stairs on your own and keep on smiling.

Disability and ableism in neoliberal times

Jannick: I wonder if there is a connection between this example from the recent Danish election and then this term that I've found in some of your writing, Dan, *neoliberal ableism*. Can you unpack this a little, because I think it might help us understand what's going on with this discourse of everybody being able to do anything if they set their mind to it.

Dan: From Boris Johnson through to Marxist organizations in the UK, there is still an ableism in place. An ableism—precisely like what you described Sarah — that disability is not expected to be here, and that given the right conditions, people are ready, willing, and able to get on with their lives. It's clear that we are still not prepared to interrogate our own ableism, our own assumption of ability, of an able body/mind. There's so much work to do there. And the starting point for any of this work must be with disabled people's organizations. I think that what disability studies has done is, it's said a lot about disablism but has more to say about ableism. This is also where we connect with other political organizations. We talked in the break about queer activism and disability activism. I think we're challenging something together that could be called a particular kind of neoliberalism, which is neoliberal ableism.

Jos: The concept of ableism is incredibly useful; so is the concept of sexism. Which also didn't really

get developed until the 1970s. Language really helps you say things; it unpacks for the non-disabled too. We have societies that emphasize individualism, productivity, competitiveness, and work obsessiveness, and see this as aspirations, when actually they harm non-disabled people too. It's harmful to us all that way of operating. Within the built environment discipline, there is a culture of overwork, of working all hours of the day, of being unencumbered and not ever mentioning that you've got caring responsibilities, or that you're ill. Not to say that ableism isn't dangerous, but this is something people can connect to because it's affecting everybody's lives.

Can the blind see? Ways of knowing in disability research practice

Jannick: You are all, in one way or another, knowledge producers. You're engaged in research, activism, and other critical practices that often draw on activist experiences. But how do you avoid becoming overly focused on observation and visible data when producing empirical research? Yanki, you mentioned the possibility of conducting an event like this in the dark, which would necessitate immersive listening and the use of other senses. Do you incorporate these alternative sensory methods in your own knowledge production?

Jos: At the DisOrdinary Architecture Project we do something different. We're really interested in provocation. To go back to the issue about how you might think about things differently from the perspective of blind or visually impaired people. We run a foundation course into architecture at the Bartlett School, led by blind and partially sighted designers, artists, and architects. It has 10 to 12 blind, visually impaired participants every year. The whole point is to critique the extent to which architecture is a visual profession, as well as building confidence and enabling those people to get portfolios to go into architecture schools, as they are very often and still met with an attitude of; "*what*, a blind person being

an architect!?" We also explore different design methods that are non-visual, like audio description and performance, and then we bring those into mainstream design education. This we do by making things and experiencing how you change the assumptions you have about how you design by learning to change your own body and map things out and perform different ways of being in the world. It's small scale but hopefully it has big ripples.

Yanki: We use the term body-storming instead of brainstorming. What we did is we invited a group of older people coming into the school and using their bodies to design the housing for themselves in the future. The experts are those already living in existing elderly housing. They know how bad it is. Then they use their bodies to draw on the floor and walk around and the students just become the workers, following them, making the map on the floor. For us, this is co-creation, but then, it needs to be led by another expert, which is the designer. I think this knowledge transfer is very important. Also, how we make our knowledge accessible for others to make decisions with us. It's a power thing.

Dan: I think you're both talking about "ooh" and "aah" moments. One "ooh" and "aah" moment that disability studies and activism bring to the table is the idea that disability is sort of something to desire, which is a very different conception from how we know it. An example: we have a research project where I interviewed a young disabled man who had a colostomy bag and during school time, he told one of his friends that the reason he didn't play sports was because of his colostomy bag. His friend told two school bullies about this, and he was then known around the school as piss boy. Don't worry, the story ends well. The next day, piss boy decides that he's had enough of this, gets his colostomy bag and empties it into the school bag of one of the bullies. We chatted to him about this, and he said, this colostomy bag is really helpful. A very different notion of the colostomy bag to perhaps what it was designed for.

Sofie: We can all agree that research is important, also for this area. But in Denmark, we don't have a lot of researchers in disability studies. So, how do we make disability research cool?

Sarah: I wish I could give an answer, but the sad truth is that right now, in this moment in time, there's a huge backlash against anything that could be considered identity politics in Denmark. A lot of disability studies and activism would fall under that category. I think, sadly, that the only way you can make anybody want to fund disability research right now is if you claim that, "Oh, this is a way of getting more people into the workforce". If we make an inclusive society, then more disabled people will work, and capitalism will rule! Unfortunately, that will only help the disabled people that are able to work.

Dan: I think you may need to do several things. One, we need to bring disability studies and disability activism into the center and not the periphery of all disciplines. This is a demand of every single discipline to engage with disability studies. And two, we need to have disabled academics and researchers. It's obvious. But they're not there, they're not present and when they are there, they have to be careful that they work harder than non-disabled people to keep their jobs and for goodness sake, don't mention access or support. The third area we can exploit is the global trend within higher education around things like intersectionality, equality, diversity and inclusion.

Sarah: Usually there are two ways in. Either you convince people that they can make money on anything related to accessibility like, "Oh, you'll get so many customers, if you make these ramps". Which usually doesn't work very well because disabled people are also generally poor, so we don't have a lot of spending power. The other way is to go, "If you live long enough, you're going to be disabled too" and this holds true for almost everybody in this world.

"Piss on Pity!"

From the audience: A book has just come out written by a super athlete who is the world paralympic champion table tennis player. He's got one and a half legs and only two fingers. The name of the book is *Pity? No, thank you* or, in Danish, *Fri os fra medlidenhed*. I would like to hear the panel how best to address pitifulness?

Jos: I have to butt straight in there because there's a very famous campaign in Britain from the 1990s which involved the powerful slogan "Piss on pity". It was from disabled people campaigning, handcuffing themselves to buses, to get public transport improved, disrupting charitable telethons where you go on a telephone and people give money to poor disabled children and it's all based on exploiting pity.

Sarah: When I saw the book you mentioned, I thought, oh no, this is a perfect example of inspiration porn! In the interviews I've seen with him, he talks a lot about how his attitude made everything possible for him. In that way he plays right into that neoliberalist way of thinking that if you have the right attitude, then you can do anything regardless of your disability. But no matter what kind of attitude I have, I won't be able to climb stairs right now. As for the pity, I love the piss on pity. I wish we had a similar term in Danish. But I actually don't think pity is a big problem in a Danish context. I think it's something that, again, the neoliberalist trend would like to tell us is a problem, because then the solution would be to stop the pitying, stop paying taxes to help disabled people because they don't need the money nor the pity. They can just change their attitude. The only reason I'm here today is because I have a guy with me who can help if my ventilator stops working. But I know people who are not getting these hours anymore so they can't leave their homes. And in that case, I think pity is in place. It is pitiful that some people don't get the right to leave their homes. But we should also act on that pity and change society so that no one is stuck at home just because they need assistance to get

out. I think we're almost at a point where we (society) don't even feel pity anymore. We just think that people should get a different attitude.

Jos: In terms of discussing inclusion, it must be disability-led. For the DisOrdinary Architecture project, we have 25 artists that we work with all the time. And when we work internationally, we tend to work with disabled artists in those different countries. The reason I'm going this long-winded way around, what we mean by inclusion is in some ways the wrong question. I want to change the mindsets of people, particularly non-disabled people. That's the goal. It's an impossible goal, but it's contained. I studied architecture in 1970s and now here we are, and disabled people are still being asked: What are the barriers for you? I mean, this is really important, but disabled people were also being asked that 40 years ago. So, we know. That information is already there. And then the other aspect: when we talk about inclusion or *universal design* there's this idea that it is somehow common sense. That we should just do it. But it doesn't happen. It is not like people in the world in which I operate would say, "Ha ha, we're not letting those disabled people in". They don't mean to do that. Instead, it's about a set of attitudes. What we understand as inclusion from an architectural point of view is design solutions, a one-off answer or a notion of *universal design*; that at some point we can design things that work for everybody. For me, inclusion starts with recognizing that this is more nuanced; it's very contradictory that the different types of access needs that people have are really complex and they don't fit together. There is no single solution. If we aim for this notion of finding *the* solution, we're just in the wrong space. Disability and difference are a good creative generator that if we start from the obvious, from body/minds that are different rather than from norms and standards. Then we might have some fun and find out something interesting about the things we can do to make change.

Equity tourism

Jannick: Yes, I can relate. I come from a business school in critical management studies focusing on diversity and inclusion. And my take would be that inclusion is one of those buzzwords, fad and fashion in management that we can all only really agree with, but it also easily becomes an empty signifier. Which is why a lot of people are putting different meanings into it; and culturally, historically, and socially "diversity" will change then. It's the same with a term like inclusion - what do we mean by inclusion? Because hopefully, society will become increasingly aware of its own diversity. Then again, from my critical background in queer studies, we would ask: *who is to include whom?* It kind of assumes that there is an original; people fitting organizational and societal norms already, who are in a position to include the other. How do we not just work with the people we want to include, but engage everyone and make it "majority-inclusive", if you will?

Yanki: Ultimately, the more interesting question is, what does exclusion mean? Who is being excluded? I remember meeting Professor Roger Coleman, the godfather of inclusive design, who turned the whole thing about "we need to design for social inclusion" on its head. For me, inclusion is an ongoing questioning: who is being excluded by our discipline? There's never one answer because it varies. When Roger did his work in the 1990s in the UK, those being excluded by design were older people and people with disabilities. You're asking how we can create an inclusive society for all. As an educator, I would change it to "Why do we need to make an inclusive society?" Because I think you're asking the question of who are the others, right? Who is part of "all"?

Dan: I consider myself a recovering psychologist. Disability in psychology is always present as a problem and it's rarely as a scholarly authority. That is to say, disabled psychologists, there's not many there. So, I understand, like people have been saying here, that inclusion immediately evokes exclusion. I'd like to borrow the words of a friend of

mine, Roger Slee, who said that inclusion is not dead, but it smells funny because it's still not really something we're interrogating politically. One of the main reasons that inclusion fails, for me, is because inclusion practices often do not work with disabled people as the experts, with disabled people as the designers, or as knowledge generators. I think inclusion has become part of *equity tourism*. Equity tourism is the idea that, in the UK for example, if you want to get research money, you've got to show that you're engaging with equality, diversity, and inclusion. It's hilarious watching some of my colleagues demonstrate that they are into this. Right now, they are equity tourists and that's why I throw bricks through their windows. Metaphorically, obviously not literally. Inclusion can only be something that we grapple with critically, if we do so alongside the expertise of disabled people.

Sarah: I went psychologist browsing for years until I found this one person in Copenhagen who calls herself a norm-critical psychologist. I came to her, saying that I have these issues, these vulnerable spots, that sometimes I will easily feel like a burden. And this is a button that people can push. I wanted her to help me get rid of this button. But she looked at me and said, "I don't think you can do that, because that's not a problem with you, that's society telling you that you're a burden". So, to remove the button would mean to change all of society. And frankly, that's a lot to take upon yourself. Really, you just have to stay with people that are not going to push the button even though it's there. Years ago, when I was a student at University of Copenhagen, we all had this one obligatory talk with a student counselor. A lot of people wanted to study abroad for a semester. I also considered it because there was no such thing as disability studies in Denmark at the time. So, I went to the counselor thinking that I'm going to talk to this guy about finding disability studies abroad. But the guy just looked me up and down and said, "Well, I guess you can't really go anywhere, can you?" I know I technically probably could, but when that's the level of assistance you're given from the official counselor at the university it just becomes too much. That's for me a pivotal point in this

discussion: whose responsibility is it? Is it the university's, should they be prepared for a student like me to show up? Should this event that we are part of be prepared for deaf people to show up? Or is it the person who shows up? Whose responsibility it is to explain their needs and ask for them to be met? I think that's tricky.

Normality and responsibility

Jannick: There are two things, I'd like to pick up on. One is what Yanki mentioned about the context and the situation being important, it reminded me of one of my all-time favorite texts by Rosemarie Garland-Thompson. In the text she introduces the term *misfit* as a feminist materialist disability concept. I think she would say that you can be impaired one way or the other, but you become disabled in certain situations. She is using this metaphor of a square peg in a round hole. Many of us, I guess, played with this toy when we were kids, where you have these little figures, like the triangle, the circular shape and the square and then you have to put them into the corresponding holes. But of course, if you put a square peg in a round hole they don't fit, and the question is; is the problem the square peg or the round hole? You can work with one or the other. But the problem only really emerges as these two shapes meet. Hence the context and the situation being very necessary to look at. The other thing is what you said, Sarah, about responsibility - because, at least in my case, working with businesses, there are more and more workplaces where they establish employee networks to include the groups of people that they want to attract and retain. The diversity subjects, if you will. They include them in this diversity work, so you don't just assume on their behalf what they need. But the employer also potentially exploits freely this diversity labor, which often sits on top of regular work as interest hours and non-promotable tasks.

Yanki: I'm known in the design school for being honest and giving people critical comments. The one I made earlier about no sign language in the

room we're currently in is actually a drive for innovation. Have you guys heard of Dialogue in the Dark? It is a German concept where all go into a dark space and then you have a conversation with people who have a visual impairment. Essentially changing the concept of the environment. And now I'm thinking: can we have a conference in the dark? Or in silence? When doing a conference like this about disability, could we try to have a dark session and then people with visual impairment will be the ones guiding us around? This is a disability inspired innovation.

Sarah: I agree that it's probably wise to see it as a tool for how you could do things differently. But I also think it's very important not to go into what I would call *disability tourism*. This is something that I see a lot, especially when elections are coming up. Then people will come to town squares and try to be blind for an hour. So, you'll know what it's like. And that's usually quite misleading because if you've never been blind and then are blindfolded, you'll be completely lost and it will be nothing like what it's like to have been blind for ten years. What happens when someone "tries on a disability" for a few minutes, is that all you can really focus on are the differences, as opposed to the things that connect and unite us.

Jos: I think it is a good question about exploiting disabled people's labor. We have a rule in The Dis-Ordinary Architecture Project, which is that the artists and the disabled architects that we work with always get paid. And the non-disabled people don't get paid.

Sarah: And the thing about free labor is that sometimes you also have this situation where somebody else does the work, but then you are expected to be grateful for it and make sure that people see the work they did. Like, if I've been in charge of accessibility for something, then everybody just kind of expects it. That's fine. But I've had a couple of experiences where someone has called me and said "We're going to try to get a ramp this time for the premiere of this film festival, so can you explain to me how I get a ramp?" And then I

give them a bit of information and they do the rest. On the night of that premiere, I might have a cold. But if I don't show up - if nobody in a wheelchair shows up - then they'll think that they shouldn't have spent time getting a ramp and they'll never do it again. So, if I'm too sick to go, I have to make sure that at least a friend in a wheelchair will show up. You have to be there, or it will ruin it for the next generation! And that's also something we should talk about because whose responsibility is it that something is in place? I have another example, which is a bit more extreme. I used to work for a political party, and we had this yearly Christmas lunch. Part of it was in a relatively accessible room. I don't think I could go to the bathroom, but that's pretty common. At least I could eat with everybody. The problem was that they only had the room until 11 pm, so what to do when the clock stroke 11? It's like a Cinderella story. Will I turn into a pumpkin? My boss called me. He's heard that you should ask your disabled employees about their needs. So, he says, "Sarah, do you think that after dinner you want to stay all night, or do you think that maybe you just want to go home? Because if you're going to go home anyway, then we could just proceed to the inaccessible bar across the street. But of course, if you want to stay, we'll think of something else, so you can come along". Obviously, what happens is you go, oh my, if I say I want to stay and then I'm tired because I had too much schnapps, then what am I going to do? Then everybody will think that it was just me being difficult. So, you just go home.

Dan: One theme that seems to be emerging here is "access work". There are expectations about what happens when disability turns up, and when it does turn up it's very much expected to stick with the norms of that space. For me, the definition of true inclusive education in schools would be when disabled children are excluded from schools for taking drugs and having sex rather than for having a disability. When the doors are open, the ramps are up, are we prepared to continue to be open to disruption? According to Alison Kafer and Robert McRuer one of disability studies' great political offerings is disruption. Disruption to norms, you

know, not this either/or, are we going to go accessible or not? But to actually say: How might we re-think spaces – collectively – in a more disruptive fashion?

Design a hammer, not a ramp

Barbera: This is making me think of the history of disability activism and how it has informed the design of the built environment. If you think of Berkeley University and the wheelchair users there smashing the concrete and creating ramps, there is so much political intention, like the beginnings of universal design and inclusive design. We now live in a time where, as you said Jos, we've mapped out all the barriers, but we're still asking the same questions. We have forgotten about all the incredible initiative, activism, knowledge making, and culture that is led by disabled people, and that is somehow never recognized in the same way as neutral design. I was wondering if we could all think together about whether universal design or inclusive design could ever be neutral or if we need to be political? And whether, in our different disciplines, we need to take a stance because otherwise how can we create change? The knowledge, the people, and the communities are there. But somehow, especially within academic contexts, we still have to act and be an activist in disguise.

Yanki: I think they should think about designing a hammer, not a ramp. Because the ramp is already there. This is what we tried to talk about, moving from equality to equity. And then also ask our students: "Do you really care about people having access to your design?"

Jos: It becomes about professional compromise and battles. In disability studies, activism in particular, it's the language around social, spatial, and material justice. And once you start talking about justice, you bring in power and really flip the debate. But I'm very aware there are certain circumstances where I use that expression (justice), I think, to many audiences that I speak to it's a step

too far. Whereas for me, it's like the first step really, to think about it as justice.

Sarah: I think the context is a bit different here in Denmark because we are very much behind in many of these debates. You brought language up to begin with, and it got me thinking about the whole distinction between being disabled and having a disability. And then personally, when we're having this discussion in English, I use disabled because there's this whole change within disability justice activist groups in English speaking countries where you ask why would I take my disability out of myself and make it something that's separate? Something to be ashamed of? Why would I say I'm a person with a disability when it's also part of my identity? I am also gay. I wouldn't say I'm a person with a gay sexuality. But the thing is, that when I speak Danish, I do not do this. Because we have not had that discussion.

Concluding remarks

While bringing together Dan Goodley, Yanki Lee, Jos Boys, and Sarah Glerup constitutes a contribution in allowing for interdisciplinary scholarly dialogue, we would, conclusively, like to foreground another two key insights that emerged from the conversation. First, thanks to the diverse backgrounds of the panelists the conversation spanned several countries, thereby highlighting important differences across these contexts. In Denmark, as Sarah Glerup points out, the critical vocabulary with which to conceptualize, problematize, and, eventually, become agenda setting politically as well as in research is underdeveloped. As such, we hope that the conversation will inspire the use and further theorization of the concepts that surfaced. These include neoliberal ableism, the super cripple, and equity tourism.

Combined, these three concepts enable us to understand how neoliberalism and ableism feed off each other in presuming and prescribing that we "Live alone. Atomised. Self-serving. Never needy" (Goodley & Lawthom, 2019, p. 237). They enable us to realize that when elevating and

celebrating people as super cripples, that is, someone who—despite disabilities—achieves what other people would normally not get applauded for achieving, we are indulging in ‘inspiration porn’, reinforcing neoliberal-ableist individualism. Finally, they enable us to grasp the phenomenon that previously unengaged researchers and practitioners alike with no prior experience or commitment latch onto accessibility and disability as well as other issues related to diversity and inclusion, just touring for funding opportunities or due to

institutional demands while paying lip service to equity, SDG, and LNOB more generally (see e.g., Lett et al., 2022). Yet, going from theory to practice—and this is the second key insight – things get muddy, as it is difficult to keep up and, thus, operate from neat and clearly defined categories of difference. In lieu of simple solutions to the initial overall question of how we can create an inclusive society for all, we leave this conclusion open-ended, offering only extra layers of complexity.

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(De)Humanising People in Discussions around Race and Religion – A conversation with Iram Khawaja, Lene Kühle and Christian Suhr

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Introduction

Social psychology shows that majority groups typically are allowed greater latitude in defining who they are, while minorities, on the other hand, typically are labelled narrowly and stereotypically. This means that everybody does not have the same starting point in social interactions. One's starting point is shaped by the social labels others - such as politicians and the media - and we ourselves, associate with us and the multiple social groups we belong to.

How we choose to speak about, and to, concrete people and social groups matters for how they are perceived by others and by themselves. The more powerful a position one speaks from the greater effect one's choices of words and labels have – especially for the people who are being spoken about. Politicians and media outlets are particularly powerful players in shaping discourses around social groups. The way in which Danish politicians and Danish media speak about religious minorities and race matters.

There are many different kinds of social categories – for instances gender, sexuality, race,

ethnicity, and nationality – but in this conversation we have chosen to focus on religion (particularly Islam) and race, or rather racialisation (that is how race is done in social interactions). We have chosen to discuss these two social categories and their intersections because the discourse around these have become increasingly hostile – and often even hateful – in both Danish political discourse and in the Danish media coverage of people categorised as belonging to these social groups (we see this in discussions around religious minorities' right to wear a veil or circumcise their children). This often rather hostile discourse functions as great clickbait but can make it difficult to contribute constructively to the conversation as a researcher with knowledge about minority groups.

The following panel discussion was part of a *Gendering in Research* seminar which took place the 26th of May 2023, at Aarhus University. We invited three speakers from three different disciplines to offer their take on how racialisation and religion intersect in different Danish contexts. Coming from the field of Educational Psychology Associate professor Iram Khawaja from Danish

School of Education spoke about *Muslimness as a racialized category*. In her talk she offered examples from her interview data about how religion and race intersect in Denmark, especially in the educational system where discourses contrasting religiosity and secularity govern. Professor Lene Kühle from the Department of the Study of Religion at the School of Culture and Society offered a talk entitled, *'Is the regulation of religious individuals and communities in Denmark discriminatory or racist?'* As the title indicate she offered a more judicial take on how we navigate religion in a Danish context. And finally, we had Professor Christian Suhr from the Department of Anthropology, at the School of Culture and Society offer the talk *'Muslims, Muslims, Muslims: flimflam about Muslims in Europe'*. Suhr's talk was based on his experiences as a filmmaker, and he drew attention to how the framing of movies about minorities (like Muslims) shape our understanding of what it means to belong to a particular minority. So, this is where our conversation starts.

Positioning the researcher in a dehumanising discourse

Lea Skewes: I would like to start with a very open question about whether you have any reflections, or comments, to each other after hearing each other's different takes on things?

Iram Khawaja: At the end of his presentation Christian [Suhr] showed two film clips: one from the documentary *"The mosques behind the veil"* (TV2 2016, in Danish *"Moskeerne bag sløret"*) and the other clip from his film *"Light upon light"* (Hassala Films 2022) in which a Muslim person describes how they had experienced a religious light. It was very powerful to see these images – there is just something about the visual media that is very powerful. What struck me about it was the contrast between the documentary *"The mosques behind the veil"*, and the clip from your own movie Christian [with the person describing their experience of religious light]. It was clear that you used the medium of film to humanise this person.

And I think a very important part of countering racialisation is actually the process of humanising, exactly because part of what racialisation does is to dehumanise. And it is important that we, as researchers, strive to counter processes of racialisation and dehumanisation. In the first documentary [*"The mosques behind the veil"*] where Muslims are cast as the bad guys, there is this use of a shaky camera; the images are blurry and graded in certain dark colours. This creates a distance between the viewer and the Muslim people depicted in the documentary. Whereas you have chosen to place the person you are talking to in your documentary in a soft light. The way you have centred the person in your movie helps create a human being – a human being who happens to be talking about an experience that has had a deep spiritual effect on him. This contrast made me think of how dehumanisation can be countered by humanisation through the visual medium. And it made me wonder, how we as 'normal' researchers might achieve this – when we do not have your visual means. How do we humanise people? How do we counter some of the very toxic dehumanising, racialising, and discriminatory rhetoric, which we sometimes are invited into by the media, or more broadly in relation to the political debates? We have had this discussion in regard to the banning of head scarfs. We were debating whether we should become part of this discussion by answering the different journalists' questions, or whether we thereby become part of reproducing a certain discourse that has dehumanising effects. We were discussing whether we were actually able to contribute with something that could add nuance to this discussion, or whether we would just fuel a toxic debate?

Lene Kühle: That is true we have had this discussion about how to engage with discourses like that. I completely agree that we need to counter the dehumanisation. But I think it is also important that discussions of racialisation are not used to dehumanise those who hold these opinions – even if they are hurtful to others. As researchers, we should strive not to make the debates more polarised or more hostile. It is important that scholars strive to heal some of the wounds in both

camps. We should not take up too explicit positions. Of course, we are never completely neutral, and of course we are all influenced by what we see when we do fieldwork, or by what we hear in political discussions. But I think it is important that we continue to speak with journalists and that we continue to talk to politicians. We should try to understand why they think the way they do, and why they are acting the way they do. This is important because we should strive to avoid becoming part of the conflicts ourselves.

Christian Suhr: But we do have a position. We need to take a position. There is no neutral space in this discourse. It is an illusion that we can be neutral. However, it is important to be attentive to the fact that this so-called 'neutral position' is how we, as scholars, are cast in the media. I remember seeing myself with the label of 'expert of Islam' – but what does that even mean? I do not know. It was in the news – and I was being cast as one of the 'neutral experts'. We have a responsibility to be reflective around the positions we speak from. Because we are not neutral. We have a position. This concept of 'objectivity' that journalists sometimes speak of is nonsense. It really is nonsense when journalists claim a position of objectivity – they are never completely objective, and they are never completely neutral. Neutrality when used in this way is usually a cover for a serious bias. And I think it is important to be aware of that. I do agree that we should continue speaking with journalists. And there are a lot of great journalists! Sometimes journalists are better than scholars at identifying these positions and problems. But maybe we, as researchers, need to be pro-active and identify which problems are the relevant ones. It is not always easy, or even possible. Sometimes we are just in the position of being called by a journalist from *Ekstra Bladet* who wants to discuss what Denmark would look like if the Islamic State took over. But with such a journalist, it might still be possible to point out that there could be other, more urgent or relevant questions. But it is not easy because how do you change the parameters of a whole debate? And this becomes particularly complicated when it is as harsh a debate as this

one about Islam and Muslims has been. Perhaps now there is a moment with some breathing space – we hear a little less about Muslims and Islam, perhaps because the Russians have taken over as the main threat to our society. But back in 2015-2016 the debate about Islam was very intense. I found it very difficult to manoeuvre.

Iram Khawaja: I actually do not agree that there currently is some breathing space on this topic. There is no peak right now in the focus on the subject of Muslims and Islam, but I think it is continuously there as a theme. And I think it pops up in different ways – specifically around election time. Unfortunately, I think it is a very stable current theme, and it is something which appears in Mette Frederiksen's speeches as well. For example, recently, she introduced a discussion about the safety in apartment blocks' basements where you might have to do laundry. This discussion was centred around which types of people might be lurking around there. Or the discussion around train stations and specific people occupying those spaces – and the laws that are associated with this. The fact that you can actually take away young peoples' belongings, their coats, and so on, in the name of safety. I also hear this from the people I interview – that if they turn on the TV or the radio – they are worried that there will be more news targeting people like them. So, they constantly have that as a backdrop. We might not be at the peak of a wave – you know we have these news waves for instance with the ban of hijabs in schools which was quite an intense wave – but no matter whether we are at the peak of a new wave, it is there lurking. We also see it in the focus on negative social control in schools. It is constantly there in different ways. Exactly, because it is always there, I agree with both of you, that we need to keep talking to journalists and keep trying to shape what we are discussing. My strategy has been to always base what I talk about on research. So that becomes my position. I speak about what the *research* is saying, not what *I* am saying. Maybe, also because I am positioned in a very different way than you [Christian Suhr and Lene Kühle] are. I am seen as someone who has a personal opinion about this, because I am read as

a Muslim and of ethnic minority background. So, I really have to tread very carefully and struggle to maintain an authority as a researcher. So, I do not automatically get the expert position – I have to argue for that – which is interesting as well.

Christian Suhr: That is interesting!

Iram Khawaja: And that is why, for me, it is a very strategic and a very conscious strategy to say something which is always based on research.

Signe Vogel [GIR coordinator and audience member]: I think this positionality is very interesting. The fact that it varies to which degree you need to position yourself as a researcher. I am personally very inspired by Nancy Scheper-Hughes work *“The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology”* (1995) – I am a really big fan of hers. I do not necessarily think it should be an imperative, but I do think it is okay for researchers to take a moral stance. For instance, I research gender discrimination, and I find gender discrimination morally wrong. This is a normative and subjective standpoint. But, like Christian [Suhr] said, there is no objective or neutral position to occupy. But some people still think that researchers are not allowed to position themselves morally at all.

Lene Kühle: But on the other hand, I do think that people expect some degree of positionality from researchers. I think people would find it weird if a researcher did not support democracy for example, or if they said that racism was great.

Signe Vogel: And yet, many researchers, within our fields, have been accused of not doing research, but activism.

Christian Suhr: ‘Research’ is a complex word with complex meanings. And there are different ideals for what we consider to be ‘proper research’. When I present my opinions then I hope my opinions are informed by my research. But research is inevitably also impacted by the opinions and sensibilities we have as researchers. However, I agree that if we use our authority as scholars in the media and

use people’s time, then there needs to be a foundation for what we are saying. We must consider in which ways we are qualified for the discussion. There are many opinions about what ‘proper research’ is. And in your case Iram [Khawaja] it sounds like you have developed a concrete strategy out of necessity.

Iram Khawaja: Yes, I have.

Christian Suhr: I am rarely positioned like you Iram [Khawaja]. I am not questioned as an authority like that – at least not unless I have shown some very far out videos.

Iram Khawaja: Whereas I recently got the question, before we went on air for a radio program, whether I was speaking as a *debater* or as a *researcher*. And those positions, or labels, matter – it makes a great difference where I am speaking from.

Signe Vogel: Yes labels matter. Words matter, which leads me to another thing I find difficult. Sometimes you cannot use the words you would like to use if you want to be part of the conversation. I mean, sometimes you will be excluded if you use too confrontational vocabulary. But if you accept that as a premise for participation in the conversation, then you end up indirectly agreeing that this cannot be spoken about or addressed. For instance, when we are not allowed to label racism exactly that – racism. But on the other hand, if we do not participate in the conversation then we cannot contribute to any change either.

Christian Suhr: I felt exactly like that at some point in the discussion around Islam. I felt like I was called in to speculate about who those Muslims were. I was drawn into a debate about how they might not be as bad as expected – but *how* bad were they then? In that discussion, there are no nuances. The discussion is kept within very specific parameters. Whenever there is a scandal – such as the sense of scandal raised by TV2s’ *“Mosques behind of the veil”* - then you seem to end up contributing to it and keeping the momentum of the scandal going – no matter what you say.

Lea Skewes: So, you might end up contributing to an othering, or a dehumanisation, even when your intentions were different.

Is there anything unique about religion and racialisation in Denmark?

Lea Skewes: Over the last few years, we have seen a right-wing or maybe even fascist turn all over the globe. This is a turn which shines through in the Danish political context as well. But is there anything unique about how racism and Islamophobia gets entangled in Denmark, compared to the rest of the world, or are we just copy-pasting what all the other countries are already doing?

Lene Kühle: I think there is something unique about Denmark. In Denmark we do see a right-wing turn, but I think that many of the discussions here are not driven solely by the right-wing. For instance, the green-left has been quite prominent in some of the discussion around social control and the ban on hijab. It used to be the case that the political scene was very polarised, but that is no longer the case. And I think that might be unique to Denmark.

Christian Suhr: I think there are two other things as well. If you take the US as an example, then there is a different socioeconomic composition amongst people who identify as Muslim, compared to Northern Europe. So, there is a class and educational difference. In the US – at least until recently – there was an idea that Muslims might actually be well-off or highly educated, whereas in the Danish or Scandinavian welfare states, many Muslims came as refugees, and you have people who took up jobs in production during the 60's and 70's. I think this has shaped the perception of 'the Muslim' as someone who is uneducated. So, this is unique to our context. But this is changing – the statistics on education are changing rapidly. Apparently, coming from a traumatised background in Lebanon does not translate into your children becoming unemployed or uneducated at all. So,

that is the positive side of this. Another unique thing about Denmark, is that we have a strange kind of secularism. Secularism has roots in Protestantism, and in Denmark, and other Northern European countries, we combine this with a preservation of the State Church. So, we have a kind of normative secularism that insists on having a State Church as a kind of Cultural Christianity. I think this is different from the American context. It is a different relationship between the State and the Church.

Iram Khawaja: I think there are some things that I would like to highlight that make Denmark, or the Scandinavian context, different from the rest of the world. We have this basic discomfort when talking about differences. We have this ideal of equality – which is a very humanitarian and a humanistic ideal – but in practice it is often translated into *sameness*. This is what we have seen when we do research in educational institutions – in daycares and schools – there is this ideal of equality that becomes restrictive of difference. This is called *Nordic exceptionalism*. We have a concept for this difficulty in talking about differences. And it is particularly difficult to talk about differences associated with racialisation or religion. We might be able to talk about gender differences by now because we have had a historical and political focus on that. But for Danes, this *Nordic exceptionalism* is also expressed as a discomfort in talking about, or not being open to, able to, or having experiences with talking about, our colonial past and race. Having a discomfort in talking about race might stem from the fact that we have a certain history with Nazism and Germany. So, we are entangled in certain sorts of discursive restrictions which makes it difficult to talk about issues which are related to religion, racialisation, and diversity itself. That is unique to Denmark.

Lene Kühle: Yes, our society is built on the idea of cohesion, and an expectation that we all have to negotiate, and that we all have to avoid conflicts. We have to strive, to not have conflicts, which makes it more difficult to talk about the thorny issues.

What does it require to be Danish?

Lea Skewes: The Danish discourse around who we are as Danes often positions us as liberal and open-minded, but at the same time the Danish cultural script for what it requires to be Danish seems to be quite narrow. Do we all have to be white and secular (or Christian) in order to be read as Danish?

Iram Khawaja: I think this ties into how we conceive of integration. One thing is how we understand Danishness, which is a place we could start. But we could also look into what it is we expect of people, and when it comes to people from different ethnic backgrounds and different religions, then we have this idea of integration. In research, we need to look very critically at what this concept of integration actually entails. Mikkel Rytter has done great work on how the concept of integration – also in research – is carrying certain ideas of the Nation, certain ideas of the ideal citizen, and how those ideas are restrictive of who you can become. And I think we need to look more into this. We have a tendency of mentioning integration as a goal in itself and not explore what we mean by this. In fact, it is not so much *integration* as *assimilation* which we seem to be expecting of people. This means that you can strive as hard as you want, but you will never be accepted as a Danish person or citizen on equal footing with others. Like the examples I showed in my presentation of the interviews I have done with young students in high schools and higher education. They feel that no matter how much they study, how much they contribute to society, or how well they do in life, they will never be accepted as people who rightfully belong in this society. Many young people are losing hope because they are seen as ‘perpetually arriving’ never really ‘here’, even though we are speaking about 2nd and 3rd generation immigrant youth. So, I think we need to unpack what we mean and also change the way in which we are using the word ‘integration’. It is a word which carries a taken-for-granted notion of otherness, which we reproduce when we use it.

Lene Kühle: I think the Danish state is also a very intrusive state. It interferes in the lives of everyone, not just people with an immigrant background. For instance, the school will be interested in what is in the lunch box – is it healthy enough? It is a very demanding relationship which every Dane has with the state. And the debate on integration is just one part of that relationship. The Danish state also requires quite a lot of us when it comes to religion. I have just written an article about this paradox of freedom of religion. Because Denmark is one of the greatest promoters of freedom of religion in the world – it is part of our foreign policy – but on some measures we have problems living up to those ideals ourselves. The narrative, which we tell about ourselves as Danes, and our own expressions of the ideal often clash. I do not mean to say that there is something wrong with being Danish – or that we cannot be proud of being Danish – but we also need to critically explore which kind of society we are creating. We need to explore how we, as researchers, can help produce a better society with less exclusion and more room for everyone.

How do we become more inclusive?

Lea Skewes: How can we become more inclusive? How can we make Denmark a better place for everyone? Where can we find inspiration – maybe in other countries?

Lene Kühle: Everything is better in Norway (laughing).

Lea Skewes: So, we should all go to Norway – we should all immigrate! (laughing).

Iram Khawaja: The question you are posing is what we can do about it, right? I think there are many levels of potential solutions. For me, it is about shifting the discourse and showing nuances. What it means to be a Muslim is not one thing. There are many different ways of doing Muslimness. So, the theoretical and political movement we have had in *Gender Studies* around gender – as something that you *do* – can be an inspiration.

Talking about gender as a *doing* has opened up a space for talking about different ways of doing gender. For me it has always been very important to do the same with the category of Muslimness – to show that this is something we do. This helps us to open up spaces where we can have these conversations about how there are different ways of being Muslim. It might seem very banal to show that – but that is actually where we still are, because the stereotypes about what it entails to be a Muslim have actually not become less stereotypical, they have become more stereotypical. That is, it has become more and more fixed because of what you mentioned Lea [Skewes] with the right-wing political movement on the rise. This movement has normalised certain ways of talking about this group and certain ways of understanding Muslimness. For example, it has great consequences when the Prime Minister is singling out a specific group of Muslims, a specific ghetto, or a specific area – pointing towards a specific segment of the population and describing that group, or that area, in derogatory ways. It normalises that others speak about Muslims in that way as well. So, I think shifting the discourse at the theoretical level is important. On a more practical level, it is important to go out to educational institutions and speak with practitioners in different places. Because I am from educational psychology, this is where I see a great potential for change. And I see a lot of practitioners who are hungry for knowledge and ways of thinking and doing things differently. So, we can help them by giving them some tools. First, we need to give them a sense of what is problematic. We need to look at how we think about this field. How might we unwillingly be reproducing *othering*? How can we do things differently? There are lots of studies internationally, but also within the European context, on how we can think about diversity, how we can think about social justice, and how we can think about norm-critical leadership. All of this research can be brought into high schools, schools, or daycare institutions. We can address how Muslimness is done there in that concrete setting or context in order to move away from generalising and stereotypical understandings. It is very important not to focus on the

'other' or the person being othered – the minority (which we often do when we stay within the discourse of integration) – and instead focus on the spaces we create for all of us. We need to pay attention to how these spaces include and exclude certain bodies, topics, and social categories.

Christian Suhr: When you asked the question, I was thinking about these wonderful teachers in Berkeley. We had our children in a public school in the US – and we had imagined that public schools in the US would be awful, but actually it was amazing. It was also Berkeley, but Berkeley has more social problems than the neighbourhood we live in here in Aarhus, and much more inequality. But the teachers did an amazing job. For example, they did not just celebrate Christmas but also Eid and Hanukkah. They invited parents into the class to describe these different religious practices. When it was time for the Eid, a parent might come into the class and speak about what the Eid is like. It created this atmosphere where it was possible for the children to be proud of their backgrounds, and to share in the joy of these different traditions. I thought that was a beautiful practice that I have not seen in Denmark. Here, everything but this cultural version of Christianity is often looked upon with scepticism and as something that potentially could be dangerous. It would be interesting to see what would happen if we included more diverse practices and cultures in our schools. Back in 2009-2010 I worked with a group of young men who later became so-called radicalised Muslims. I have often thought about how they could have benefited from being invited to give a presentation in their school about the meaning of the word 'Salaam' (a greeting which they used), but their schoolteacher tried to stop them from using the word. Or perhaps they could have been invited to give a presentation about how they went about their praying rituals, or what they felt like when they prayed. Instead, the school reacted by trying to prevent them from praying. For some reason there is a taboo around the topic of religion. What would happen if it was possible for schoolchildren to talk openly about these things just as they can talk openly about other things.

Lea Skewes: That beautifully ties in with where we started with this humanising perspective. The challenges get cemented if we dehumanise or reproduce othering; maybe we need to create more spaces to have these open expressions of difference.

Lene Kühle: I would like to add that I think it is positive that Danes think of their own society as one

of the best societies in the world – but maybe we need to understand it as an *aspiration*, rather than a *reality*. That is, maybe we should keep striving for a better society for everyone, rather than assume that we have already achieved it.

Recommended readings

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Embodied Coloniality: Affective experiences of Muslim immigrant women living in Norway

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Abstract

This comprehensive study examines the lived experiences of Muslim immigrant women in Norway, focusing mainly on the colonial wounds as a manifestation of the enduring impact of coloniality on daily lives. The research illuminates the profound influence of colonial legacies on social structures, cultural norms, and power dynamics through meticulous examination and analysis of in-depth interviews. The participants' narratives, including Amal, Ayse, and Zahra, provide crucial insights into the challenges of marginalization, dehumanization, and the struggle to forge a coherent sense of self within a society shaped by colonial structures. This study underscores the normalization of dehumanization and sheds light on the constraints imposed by the majority society, resulting in feelings of non-relationality, suffocation, survival, resignation, and a loss of futurity. By addressing the intersection of coloniality, racism, and the lived experiences of Muslim minority women, this research offers valuable contributions to the academic discourse on decolonial feminist studies of affect, providing a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at play in contemporary Norway.

KEYWORDS: Muslim Women, Immigrant, Norway, Coloniality, Decolonial Feminist Studies of Affect

Introduction

Nezihat: "How do others relate to your Muslim identity?"

Zahra: "You see, the dehumanization of Muslims is so normalized—the one where you are worthless [...] in a way that you are not equal. You are always a second-class citizen [...] This applies to all the possibilities you get, no matter where you move, also, in Norway."

Zahra's description of life in Norway as a Muslim is at once shocking and unsurprising; though Norway prides itself on its progressive politics and social equality, the abounding accounts from minority women in recent years have regularly articulated the existence, persistence, and affective impact of everyday racism (Bahar, 2017; Mehsen, 2017; Joof, 2020; Ali, 2018, 2023). Avowedly cast as "second-class citizens," Muslim minority women feel burdened by expectations to prove their humanity in ways that white Norwegians are not (Minotenk, 2017), confirming that labels such as "Muslim woman," "immigrant," "foreigner," and "Muslim Norwegian" deny them recognition "as fully Norwegian"—they are excluded from the concept of "Norwegianness" (Thun, 2012b, pp. 19, 1).

These women live in a society shaped by coloniality which often marginalizes and dehumanizes them, producing enduring colonial wounds. *How do they establish a sense of coherence between their past, present, and future within such an erosive and erasive context?* This article aims to answer this question, building on the recognition that dehumanization is central to racism (Mignolo, 2021, p. 144) and that it functions as a "denial of humanity" that deprives certain people of their "status" and identity "as human beings" (Stauffer, 2015). Examined as a form of colonial wound, which Mignolo (2021) understands as "the consequences of systemic and hierarchical social classifications," "inflicted epistemically," yielding "ontological/aesthetic" effects, these experiences of

racism and sexism impact the individual's beliefs and emotions, wreaking epistemic and aesthetic injury. They fundamentally alter the individual's "senses, beliefs, and emotions" ontologically and aesthetically (pp. 9–11).

In using the concept of the *colonial wound*, my aim is to deepen our understanding of its connection to the affective and embodied experience of racism, such that this knowledge can enable the emergence of "border thinking" (Mignolo, 2005, p. 62; Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012, pp. 36, 60) and contribute to decolonizing knowledge, as it can illuminate how prevalent epistemic frameworks for Muslim women continue to perpetuate coloniality. Recognizing colonial structures rooted in global systems of imperialism, slavery, and the colonization of Sápmi in the Nordic region is essential to this task. Writing from my own position as someone with an "immigrant consciousness" situated within the realms of "decolonial and border thinking" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 274), I parse the narratives of three Muslim minority women living in Norway and explore how they navigate their past, present, and future while embodying coloniality.

Muslim women in the western racial imaginary

Though this article zooms in on Norway, the experiences of Muslim immigrant women are influenced by the broader legacies of colonialism, which extend beyond historical events to persist in contemporary social structures. The classification of certain groups as "irrational, 'raw,' underdeveloped, or sexually deviant" has long functioned as "colonization of being," perpetuating racial and patriarchal hierarchies within the modern colonial knowledge system, as elucidated by Tlostanova (2010, p. 22). Therefore, prevailing modes of classifying Muslim women is thus part of "the Eurocentric system of knowledge production, based on colonial and imperial epistemic differences" (p. 22).

In this sense, Muslim women are often reduced in the Western racial imaginary to a mere 'figure' (Ahmed, 2000)—devoid of flesh and bones,

situated within a framework, as Tlostanova (2023a) demonstrates, in which they are transformed into “tokens of culture, religion, sexuality, race, or gender” and their subjectivity negated (p. 148). This colonial portrayal of immigrant women, particularly Muslims, works to bolster gender equality as a ‘core Western value’ and to cast Muslim women as “backward” (van Es, 2016; Hassani, 2023). These colonially inflected portrayals not only perpetuate harmful stereotypes, but they also deny humanity, or what activist Semra Ertan specified (prior to her self-immolation in protest of Germany’s racism in the 1980s) as “the right to be treated as human beings” (Henneberger, 2021).

The fixity of this conceptualization of Muslim bodies under the racializing gaze denies them any other ontology in the Western imaginary—what the Muslim Iraqi diasporic feminist decolonial scholar Alia Al-Saji (2014) describes as “an inability to see otherwise” (p. 139). Accordingly, this can read as a product “of social-cultural horizons, historically tied to modernity and colonial expansion in the West and motivated by imaginary and epistemic investments in representations and subject-object metaphysics” (p. 139). The racialization of Muslim bodies, Al-Saji (2014) continues, “not only structures the ways in which bodies are represented and perceived, it describes the ways in which colonialism and White supremacy divide bodies politically, economically, spatially, and socially in order to exploit and dominate them” (p. 137). Thus, the affective experiences of racialization in this article can be understood as a manifestation of what Al-Saji (2020) describes as the “repetitive colonial duration,” encompassing the enduring economic, military, material, and cultural impacts of colonialism. Thus, it is “a wounding [...] in terms of affective experience and dismembered possibility” (pp. 821, 825).

Norwegian contexts

Studies on the experiences of Muslim immigrant women indicate that they regularly encounter marginalization. As various researchers have shown, individuals from ‘third-world countries,’ particularly

Muslims, are often subject to racialization within contemporary Norwegian society (Bjoernaas, 2015, p. 79). Muslim immigrants are consistently framed as a distinct threat [*trussel*] due to the perceived incompatibility between “their culture and values” and those of the “Western and European” project (Fangen & Vaage, 2015, p. 38)—a view that perpetuates historical representations dating back to the colonial era (Stokke, 2012). Anti-Muslim hostilities, such as hate speech and discrimination, persist as significant challenges faced by the Muslim community, shaping their daily experiences (Ellefsen & Sandberg, 2022). Indeed, Muslim youth in Norway commonly encounter widespread racism as a normalized aspect of their everyday online interactions (Nadim, 2023).

Such habitual social racism aligns with representations in political and popular discourse, in which Muslims are portrayed as ‘undesirable’ or ‘challenging’ immigrants, at the center of integration and gender equality policy debates (Fangen & Vaage, 2018; Helland, 2019). Norwegian far-right groups regularly deploy gendered rhetoric and imagery “in arguments against Muslims and Islam,” contributing to the societal division of “us and them” (Fangen, 2020, p. 451). This participates in the broader discourse surrounding Islam in Western Europe, which coalesces around gender inequality within the racialized Muslim community, often rendering Muslim women as passive victims rather than active participants shaping their own lives or narratives (Helseth, 2018).

Discourses of emancipation and integration, in which Muslim immigrant women are imagined as “other” and as passive victims of an oppressive culture or religion (van Es, 2016, 2019), promise partly to proximate them to white middle-class women, thereby rendering them “like us” (Berg et al., 2010)—in a way that excludes different practices rather than strives towards more “pluriverse ontologies” that could encompass the diverse experiences of immigrant women. While this dynamic is perhaps built on Norway’s self-regarded state feminism and gender equality (Skjelsbæk, 2013; Hernes, 2013), ironically immigrant and minority women are not included in the prevailing vision of Norwegian women, thus implying that

“immigrants/ethnic minorities and Norwegians are constituted as mutually exclusive categories” (Thun, 2012a, p. 46). The exclusion of minority women from mainstream feminism not only underscores the unacknowledged racial biases and power differentials between ‘immigrant women’ and ‘Norwegian women’ but also points to the frequently disregarded issue of racism in the country and of marginalized viewpoints in its feminist discourse (Thun 2012a).

Though many of these dynamics are rooted in larger structures of race that stretch far beyond Norway, race as a category of difference is largely absent from the prevailing Norwegian narrative, as select researchers have pointed out (Berg & Kristiansen, 2010; Berg, 2008; Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021; Führer, 2021; Gullestad, 2002; Myrdahl, 2010). There is a noticeable dearth of studies (or even wider discourse) focusing on theories of racism and colonial history to understand social disparity, minority experience, and dehumanization—even though Denmark-Norway participated in colonial projects (including the slave trade), Norway’s independent identity was forged out of the subjugation of Sápmi, and modern-day Norway has been involved in various imperial operations, such as the ‘War on Terror.’ Despite increased attention to racism in Norway following the July 2011 terrorist attacks, research has primarily centered on right-wing extremism and labor market discrimination, overlooking the importance of phenotypical traits and colonial racist notions in fostering anti-Muslim attitudes and actions (Døving, 2022), and prioritizing explorations of immigrant integration over studies of racism (Synnes & Iversen, 2023). In Norway, race is “an analytically problematic term” because it is often “substituted for concepts such as ‘ethnicity,’ ‘culture,’ ‘multiculturalism,’ ‘diversity,’ or ‘Muslim,’ terms which indirectly signify racialization” (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021, p. 2). By situating the lived experiences of Muslim immigrant women within larger discourses, theories, and dynamics of race, racism, and coloniality, this article aims to redress these national and epistemological distortions and omissions.

Colonial structures

Norway has been represented as exceptional or external to colonial and racial developments that shaped the modern world, but recent research has demonstrated that this is more of a politicized forgetting than a political reality (Sawyer & Habel, 2014; Alm et al., 2021; Keskinen et al., 2009; Habel, 2015; Keskinen et al., 2020). Tlostanova (2023b) urges us to rethink our views on memories, particularly those that have been overlooked or expunged, while Sawyer and Habel (2014) ask “what stories are erased and silenced in the branding of the Nordic region?” (p. 1). They question the prevailing (and carefully constructed) image of the Nordics, which has traditionally treated imperialist expansion, “colonialism, engagements in the trans-Atlantic slave economy, and racist categorizations” as problems for only continental Europe (p. 2). This distortive sense of “Nordic exceptionalism” has, until quite recently, helped conceal their active and “deep colonial roots” at home and abroad (Diallo, 2023, p. 134; Dankertsen, 2021, p. 136; Groglopo & Suárez-Krabbe, 2023). Considering the colonial paths in the Nordics, it becomes imperative to remember what has been silenced as these trajectories have had a significant impact on “racial formations and divisions in the Nordic region [...] shaping human taxonomies” (Tlostanova, 2023a, p. 156).

This reorientation has been formed partly by broader research on colonialism and race, and this article is situated amid current work in Decolonial feminism, drawing on the perspectives of Decolonial Sami-Indigenous, Black, and Anti-Racist-Muslim feminist scholars. As Dankertsen and Kristiansen (2021) argue, placing “research about race and ethnicity [...] in a larger social context, including the colonial structures in the past and present” is worthwhile, since “racial practices and colonial structures continue to be important parts of the power relations in Norway” (pp. 14, 1). Thus, the experiences of racialized Muslim women in Norway can be connected with historical colonial power dynamics, which have wielded a considerable influence over the lives of the Sámi Indigenous people (Dankertsen, 2014, 2016, 2019, 2021).

The stakes of such conceptual reconfigurations are eminently tangible. Despite the ongoing genocide in Palestine, the city council of Drammen's decision to accept only Ukrainian refugees, explicitly excluding those with 'non-Western backgrounds' (NRK, 2024) demonstrates a clear hierarchy of values, with concern regarding 'integration work such as social control, honor-related violence, poverty. This approach coopts the bodies of Muslim immigrant women as "battlegrounds" in the construction of national identity, deploying tropes of both inclusion and exclusion (Keskinen, 2009) which underscores the utilization of equality ideals not just as "a symbol of Western democracy or civilization," Gressgård (2022) explains, but also as a "political instrument for distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable groups and practices" (p. 133, my trans.).

In Norway, the hierarchy of Western and non-Western is specifically inflected by ideas of 'Norwegianness.' As Dankertsen and Kristiansen (2021), with reference to Keskinen et al. (2009), point out, the stereotypical representation of diverse cultures "as racialized and essentialized units [is] connected to 'colonial ties' in the past and present" (p. 11). The authors suggest that "colonization, welfare policies, assimilation policies towards the Sámi, and racialization went hand in hand," contributing to a hierarchy separating those considered self-sufficient, rational, and civilized from those "who are not"—a binary which necessitates "a superior category" of 'Norwegianness' against a racial, inferior category of 'otherness' (p. 3). In recent work from Diallo (2023), she explores how the category of Norwegianness perpetuates anti-Blackness, establishing a "racial hierarchy where people who are visibly of black African descent are deemed non-belonging, always foreign, less intelligent, hypersexual, unskilled, and more likely to be criminal, thus often exposed to policing" (p. 15). Diallo aims to deconstruct the intimate connection between Norwegian anti-Blackness and Norwegian slavery and colonialism (p. 14).

Though the phenomena impacting Muslim women in Norway should not be simply conflated with anti-Blackness, the underlying dynamics of 'Norwegianness' affect them in comparable ways.

In particular, the concept of the colonial wound is useful when parsing the affective and emotional aspects of these experiences, allowing us to connect the sense and perception of these women with their experience of a racializing gaze rooted in colonial difference—"a classification established in and by the colonial matrix of power" (Mignolo, 2021, p. 444). This article thus underscores the importance of recognizing coloniality/modernity as the context of oppression and the need for resistance to generate "new meanings that reject, resist and decry the coloniality/modernity relation and its logics" (Lugones, 2020, p. 30).

Methods

This project employs a feminist biographical method, a qualitative interpretive approach aimed at providing deep insight into the lived experiences of participants within their larger socio-historical context (Popadiuk, 2015, pp. 394–396). This method seeks to understand how individuals "partake in social contexts and make sense of them"; and it elucidates "the structures of personal and social processes of action and suffering and potential resources for coping and change" (Gültekin et al., 2006, p. 51). My analysis draws on interviews conducted between 2022 and 2023. Participants were identified using snowball method. The only requirement for participation was self-identification as Muslim woman with immigrant background. Interviews were conducted both digitally and in person (workplace and café). Verbal/written consent was obtained from all participants. The Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research was consulted to ensure the confidential and anonymous treatment of sensitive information. The interviews were conducted in Norwegian, with selected portions translated to English, and all names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Feminist epistemologies prioritize positioning work because all knowledge is created from a distinct vantage point, and the knowledge a knower develops is inherently influenced by their situatedness (Harding, 2004). Therefore, the

researcher's positionality and personal history profoundly impact their fieldwork, shaping it into a dialogical process structured by the researcher and the participants. A valuable strategy for performing positioning work is to discern personal identity markers (Berg, 2008); in this study, I consciously position myself as an individual from southern Turkey, born to and raised within a family of lower socioeconomic standing, who has and continues to navigate Westernization policies in public spaces while embracing Anatolian-Islamic values at home. My relocation to Norway over a decade ago through family reunification further informs my perspective. Drawing from Amani Hassani's teachings, I understand that "what I carry leads me in the research" (Ph.D. course, "Race, Space, and Affect"). In other words, I acknowledge that my investment in this topic originates partly from my racialized position as a Muslim immigrant woman in Norway. My personal experiences as a racialized individual have significantly influenced my research and my interactions with the women participants in this study. During the interviews, the participants articulated emotions that I shared, feelings that resonate with me and, in doing so, highlighted the importance of affectively embodied sentiments in this research endeavor. Consequently, what I carry with me also affects the analysis of this study.

Convergence and Divergence: Experiences of Embodied Coloniality

This paper presents the biographical narratives of three women: Amal, who is now in her fifties, Ayse, and Zahra, both in their thirties. Amal is of Arabic descent, Ayse is of African descent, and Zahra has Macedonian origins. Amal arrived in Norway in her thirties as refugee, fleeing war in her home country. In contrast, Ayse has spent nearly her entire life in Norway since arriving at the age of four through family reunification. Zahra arrived in Norway at ten years old through family reunification. All three women diverge in terms of racialization, which alters the forms and intersectionalities of racism they experience.

Non-relationality and living "in a wrong place"

Amal sought asylum in Norway with her family approximately fifteen years ago, fleeing the violence of wars and conflicts that dominated her upbringing and adulthood. Her experiences mirror those of the other women interviewed for this project, as she was affected by the prolonged suffering attendant to political sanctions, bombardment, malnutrition, hunger, lack of healthcare, and an absence of educational resources. In his work, *The colonial present*, Derek Gregory (2004) explores the forceful imposition of colonial power in areas such as Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq. He notes that *orientalism* continues to exert an abiding influence over contemporary colonial thinking, evidenced by ongoing conflicts in these regions, in which places have been taken "in the most extraordinarily violent ways," but also that this violent influence is "not confined to the legacies of empires old or new, formal or informal"; instead it forcefully "dyes" the way we think, act, and experience "in the colors of colonial power" (p. xv). Amal's account highlights the profound impact of this destruction and stain on the lives of countless women and the enduring legacy of colonial power for future generations.

While Amal's narrative reflects a palpable sense of originary displacement, she feels out of place in Norway. As a visibly Muslim woman wearing headscarf, she narrates an experience defined by a sense of landing in the wrong place. Even though she has resided in Norway for over a decade, Amal struggles to feel a sense of belonging in her country of residence. She yearns to be part of a network and community: "I am a social person who enjoys being with others, but I ended up in a wrong place here," she laments. This sentiment of isolation resonates with Al-Saji's (2021) concept of "non-relationality," a feeling of a "missed encounter" with the white other, in which "coexistence," reciprocity, and mutuality are "absent" (p.184). Al-Saji describes this experience as "a sense of temporal non-relationality or disjuncture" (p. 184). Amal's sense of displacement reflects both spatial and temporal non-relationality, as she feels out of place in her current physical and

social environment and disconnected from the social bonds that would provide her with a sense of belonging over time.

Amal wonders why she cannot find joy in returning home to Norway after a short stay abroad.

"I have never had that feeling here in Norway. I have been living here for fourteen years. Unfortunately, I don't feel I belong here. People think, 'why do you say so? Because you are not integrated, or because you are not part of society?' I don't know why, but I should be feeling happy to come back home after being away. But when landing in Oslo, I feel that 'I am back again.' So, in my explanation, I don't enjoy myself here; otherwise, why don't I get happy?"

A common thread in the women's narratives is that they contrast their navigation of white spaces with their experience of more culturally diverse spaces. At her new workplace, for instance, Amal, instead of enjoying time with others in the community during lunch breaks, feels burdened in a way that those who take Norwegianness for granted do not. She feels compelled "to play" a role, which she describes as "tiring" and burdensome. Consequently, she withdraws herself from social gatherings, unlike at her old job, where her colleagues were from various countries, and she was able to have fun with coworkers. While Amal presents her previous workplace as a "pluriversal" place in which multiple ontologies and worlds coexist (Escobar, 2017), at her current workplace she is the only non-Norwegian "in the sea of whiteness" (Ahmed, 2007; Andreassen & Myong, 2017), one whose body is racialized as 'dark' and as not-belonging. In Amal's narrative, withdrawal becomes a means of self-protection—a way of surviving in a space that fails to acknowledge ontologies like hers. This lack of validation implies that she is not considered an equally valuable subject. Withdrawal becomes a manifestation of resistance to the invisible exclusionary racist structures ingrained in society and habitually perpetuated by the majority.

Though Amal initially denies having experienced discrimination based on her beliefs, she

soon describes a highly refined hierarchy of racial identity that prevails in everyday life:

Amal: "No, to be honest. I may interpret it this way [...] but, for instance, when crossing the street, and the driver does not stop, I may think of being treated differently. Oh, maybe because I am not only Muslim, but I'm that black, or dark, as they call us, but not sure."

Nezihat: "You said that they call us black..."

Amal: "No, dark. We are dark. Because we are not Norwegian, but it doesn't matter that we are dark. [...] As long as we are not white by Norwegian standards, we are dark. Although we are brighter than many of them. I also have such brighter face."

Amal is labeled as "dark," a racialized categorization that she and others hailing from the Global South are burdened with. Amal is self-reflexively aware of this label, so much so that she is able to critique its flaws and inconsistencies—but not, of course, to repudiate it entirely, since it is *always already* imposed on her; Amal's body was interpreted, assigned its value, and marked long before she arrived in Norway. As Fanon (2021/1952) puts it, "I did not create meaning for myself; the meaning was already there, waiting" (p. 113). The time to establish or define one's own meaning to others is past long before one even meets them. Amal's awareness of being perceived as "dark" underscores the all-encompassing nature of coloniality and the imperative to critically interrogate how bodies are assigned meaning and value. According to Kelly Oliver's (2004) interpretation of Fanon, the inability to create one's own meaning triggers crushing alienation, with the most profound pain arising from the predetermined meaning of one's body. Consequently, one who "does not mean" or is sealed into "objecthood" is thus deemed "not fully human" (p. 15).

The interview with Amal was both enhanced and complicated by my own position as researcher. My encounter with her was one of profound emotional intensity, as I could sense the immense

weight of sorrow structuring her world. As I interpreted it, a profound and open wound was revealed, exposing deep-seated sadness, loss, and grief that had long been hidden beneath the bodily surface. As Ahmed (2017) notes, “the past can be what is sealed. When the seal is broken; pain floods in” (p. 61). It was my impression that this seal had been broken during the interview, and that an overwhelming wave of sorrow, grief, and suffering had been set free, like a metaphorical dam breaking. Amal’s lived experiences, shaped by the violence of war, conflict, displacement, marginalization, racialization, and alienation, as an “affective weight of the past” had come to structure her sense of present and future possibilities (Al-Saji, 2018, 2021).

Racial violence at the intersections

Ayse arrived in Norway at age four, and her experience in the country demonstrates the complexities of negotiating identity in a white space. Brought up in a small neighborhood known for its diverse population, Ayse only felt isolated once she reached secondary school. In elementary school, she explains, “all of us were foreigners (*utlending*)” so we weren’t that different. We were different, but not that different. We were all foreigners. Then we got to secondary school.” It was not until this level that she first interacted with (white) Norwegian youth. Reflecting on her first visit to a Norwegian friend’s house, she recalls how it felt like stepping into “a completely different world.” The sentiment highlights Ayse’s nuanced perception of her interactions with non-Norwegian children in elementary school and white Norwegian children in secondary school. She expresses a sense of shared identity with non-Norwegians, despite their differences, while viewing her encounters with white Norwegians as entry into an entirely distinct societal sphere: the ‘white space.’ In other words, race and class intersect in powerfully felt ways. The larger context of these affinities is housing market segregation, which impacts Ayse’s experience of disparities between majority and minority groups.

But negotiating her minority identity in racialized white spaces is not something that resolves or ends; Ayse’s relationship to Norwegianness, and thus her relationship to herself, is continually changing, raising questions about “who she is and who she can become.”

“Now, I’m very much proud [of] my culture again. When I was younger, I was occupied with being accepted by Norwegians. That I am part of society, and being Norwegian can also be me. But now it is OK [laughter], whether you see me as Norwegian or not. I am proud to be myself and being from [country name] is an essential part of me. I want, if I have children, to teach them about that culture and identity.”

Ayse strikes a clear contrast between past and present, a sense of pride allowing her to narrativize and process feelings of difference and exclusion. Though she remains ambivalently connected to Norwegian identity, there is a sense that such connection is neither essential nor even necessary, since white Norwegians control the recognition of identity; this is an unattainable ideal, and as such not worth pursuing. As she puts it, for her this means that “you are not one of us; there is no room for that.” This sentiment echoes what Diallo (2023) describes as the impossibility of being Black and Norwegian at the same time, a dynamic that can be traced back to “Norway’s involvement in the transatlantic slave trade” (pp. 135–136). Instead of desperately striving for such recognition, Ayse embraces her family background as an integral part of her identity, expressing a desire to instill this “inherited culture and identity” in her future children. In this sense, she aims to prevent a cycle of alienation, inculcating a pride in her children that will anchor them—even if not in the majority identity.

Although she does have a strong sense of Norwegian identity, by rejecting the pursuit of recognition and embracing her cultural heritage, she exemplifies practices of disobedience and ‘living otherwise’—yet, not entirely without feelings of resignation.

"Some days I am [from that land]; then fuck Norway and [laughing]. I grab my passport to move back. But on other days it is okay: let it be Norway. I need to change it to make space for people like me and the next generations."

As Ayse suggests, everyday events often shift the dynamics of her identity, which is evidently both insignificant and deeply frustrating. It is a commitment to intervene in Norwegian culture, perhaps even to transform it in ways unsought by white Norwegians, which makes it possible for her to remain connected to Norwegian identity. Among other examples, she recounts several incidents in which she was perceived as an outsider or alien other, often with the implication that she lacked the intelligence to articulate herself in Norwegian. This aligns with Al-Saji's (2014) argument that "racialized bodies are not only seen as naturally inferior, they can't be seen otherwise" (p.138). Such racialization is built on a hierarchy around Norwegianness and Eurocentrism that stretches back several centuries, one in which anti-Blackness—keyed to a broader denigration of 'darkness' as foreign, other, and ignorant—plays an integral role (Diallo, 2023). One specific incident that stands out for Ayse is from her college days: a fellow student opined on race, categorizing whites and non-whites by ranking them based on intelligence, citing 'research' that seemingly demonstrated the intellectual superiority of the white race.

Ayse's experiences with racialization thus span a wide spectrum, from everyday happenings that unsettle her identity to encounters with antiquated theories of racial superiority. As a Black, Muslim woman, Ayse recounts experiences punctuated by everyday microaggressions and humiliations. That her skin color and religion are interconnected—as markers of foreignness and otherness—is clear from her account, and it aligns with theory on this affiliation. Diallo (2023) emphasizes the interconnected nature of anti-Blackness and anti-Muslim racism within the Norwegian context, underscoring the reciprocity of these two forms of racism which cannot be effectively addressed in isolation (p. 136). Sumaya Jirde Ali (2023), a Black Norwegian Somalian Muslim

woman, elucidates the intersection of anti-Black and anti-Muslim racism through the dehumanization of the Black Muslim woman's body. She shares that personal attacks targeting religion were not as distressing to her as comments about skin color or immigrant background; the most dehumanizing, in her opinion, was when someone made comparisons to reptiles or insects—such rhetoric left her feeling 'knocked down' for days, weeks, or even months (p. 125). This narrative aligns with Ayse's experiences and serves to articulate the intricate imbrication of anti-Blackness with anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant racism. For example, when asked if she has ever been treated differently because she is Muslim, Ayse pauses hesitantly before confirming. In the end she finds it difficult to untangle which elements are connected with her Blackness and which with her religion:

"Yes, I have, also as Muslim... People can talk shit about Islam, so I say, 'but I'm Muslim', then start discussing it with me... but if I have been treated differently, I most likely have, but I don't know if it is because I am Black or is it because I am Muslim."

When questioned about the inclusion of Muslims in society today, Ayse's response reflects the interplay of anti-Black and anti-Muslim racism in her narrative. While Black bodies are seen immediately as *utlending*—"always foreign" (Diallo, 2023, p. 15)—Muslim bodies represent a threat. She explains that being a Muslim is perceived as the worst status from a societal perspective, particularly due to the enduring association of Islam with terrorism.

"Being Muslim is the worst you can be. We have had for years focus on terrorism, only linked to Muslims. Every time something happens in Norway, everyone stops breathing because the fear of it can be related to Muslims."

Ayse exposes the emotional ramifications of discrimination and the covert impact racial violence has on her psychological well-being. Her account

illuminates the affective responses she experiences in light of these occurrences, encompassing from anger to frustration to humor to activism to resistance. Yet her everyday interlocutors sometimes resist her responses. In her encounters with people using the N-word, for instance, attempts at resistance or critique are dismissed as overly sensitive: “stop being so offended [...] for everything,” she is told. In other words, the affective and emotional effects of racialization are easily overlooked by others who demonstrate neglect that entails “a denial of the capacity to sense suffering in those marked as different from oneself” (Guilmette, 2019, p. 74).

Dehumanization and racist representation

Hailing from Macedonia, Zahra was brought up in a region that, while not directly affected by war, was plagued by a constant fear of annihilation—a feeling that she articulates clearly. Zahra describes her secondary school as comprising diverse cultures and backgrounds. She felt a sense of freedom in expressing herself without the need to compromise on her identity. She and her peers built a group of friends with multicultural backgrounds, among whom she did not have to negotiate her identity and could truly be herself. Khawaja (2023) highlights “the strength of seeking out communities sharing similar experiences with discrimination and othering,” emphasizing their “healing,” “strengthening,” and “humanizing effect against the forms of objectification and dehumanization experienced by many ethnic, racialized, and religious minorities” (p. 101, my trans.). Zahra’s experience exemplifies this notion, as she derives strength and a sense of completeness from her participation in a circle of friends that enables her to express her entire self.

However, Zahra’s narrative is also marked by experiences of dehumanization, insignificance, and inequality—of feeling like a second-class citizen. When asked if she can be open about her religious belonging, Zahra asserts:

“You must be prepared if you are going to be open. The fact that there are reactions shows that you are second-class citizens—not second-class citizens, but third- and fourth-class citizens, at the bottom of the hierarchy.”

Khawaja (2023) emphasizes the concept of “the white gaze” and its implications for the acknowledgment of one’s identity and humanity, which can result in a denial of opportunities to be recognized as a legitimate subject. She posits that the recognition of one’s humanity is crucial to overcoming the dehumanization and objectification inherent in racialization. In doing so, Khawaja brings to light a duality at the core of this issue: while an individual may “be seen, designated, and visible,” “their existence may be simultaneously denied, rendering them invisible as an unworthy subject” (p. 99, my trans.). Similarly, Lugones (2020) argues that “denial of humanity” also involves exclusion from participation in societal structures, as continual dehumanization signifies a lack of inclusion in civil society (pp. 44–45).

Thus, even as Zahra is a successful student during her school years, she is simultaneously denigrated as a racialized minority pupil. “As a minority,” she explains, “you are always something much more.” Throughout her school years Zahra has come across teachers who either expressed their disdain of “foreigners” or mistreated Zahra and her fellow Muslim students. Other times, she felt the impossibility of being seen as a “neutral” student by some teachers. For example, she recalls how certain teachers treated her differently, making her feel as if her views and opinions were biased or partial, while everyone else was considered “neutral”. Even today, Zahra often faces skepticism about her motives. She feels that her voice does not hold the same weight as that of a white Norwegian: “and as a minority, you will always be asked questions about whether you are biased.” The feeling of not being seen as “neutral” aligns with the colonial classification of Muslim as “epistemically deficient and ontologically inferior” (Mignolo, 2021, p. 539). The differences denigrated by colonialism have accrued epistemological and ontological meaning, marking certain bodies with

an “incapacity to think rationally” (Andreassen & Myong, 2017, p. 99).

Since connected with assumptions about rationality and intellectual ability, it is not surprising that much of this marginalization occurs in the education system; Zahra recounts several instances in which teachers facilitated the marginalization and degradation of Muslim students. Zahra singles out a religious teacher whom she describes as “the most racist” for conducting interrogations that delved into private matters, touching on questions about finances that would not be asked of Norwegian students:

“She asked utterly absurd things and then dug into private things. [...] Like, can you take out a loan? [...] you would never have experienced that if you were Norwegian. [...] But the worst thing was that it created acceptance that others could treat us badly.”

This type of treatment, as Said et al. (2004) explains, reflects the perpetuation of negative representations that are rooted in the racist colonial imaginary: from ideas or fantasies about the Other derived from an ancient representation of Islam to the construction of an exclusionary educational environment for Muslim students (p. 110). Zahra’s teacher’s actions not only reinforce the essentialized and fictitious characteristics of the Other that Said identifies, but they also foster an environment in which the mistreatment of Muslim students was tacitly accepted and modeled, leading to a shift in how their “majority Norwegian” peers viewed and engaged with them.

“It also ruined how my friends in the class, the majority Norwegian, saw me. I started to withdraw more and began to feel much worse about myself. Then, I became more religious because I thought I had to know when she asked.”

If one of the roles of education is to help enter social life, here it has failed remarkably; Zahra becomes more withdrawn, repudiating a burgeoning connection to her fellow students. Ironically, the

heightened scrutiny of her religion pushes Zahra towards it, but not as a source of fulfilment, but rather as self-defense. Though this was an especially painful incident, Zahra makes it clear that it was representative, rather than unique. “The dehumanization, the racist representation,” she discloses, “it was like everywhere: books, students.”

When later asked about her children and whether she hopes they remain linked to their cultural-religious background, Zahra responds enthusiastically:

“Yes, it is essential. I don’t want them to grow up with contempt for who they are when they are only so few. They should instead feel its beauty and warmth. This applies not only to my ethnic or religious background but also to meeting other multicultural people. That is the most important thing.”

Zahra’s concerns about self-contempt resonate with the writing of Ali (2018), who struggled with such feelings for being Somali, Black, and Muslim in Norway: “I went around with baggage of self-contempt,” Ali confesses, and “I just wanted to erase what made me different” (pp. 42–43, my trans.). To resist, Zahra hopes to develop in her children an appreciation for and pride in their cultural and religious heritage as an antidote or salve to colonial wounds of self-contempt.

Discussion

Though describing distinct experiences, the accounts of Amal, Ayse, and Zahra can be parsed together in relation to the concept of coloniality, which refers to the enduring effects of colonialism on social structures and cultural norms. It is within these parameters of coloniality that these three Muslim women are forced to navigate their identity and attempt to establish a coherent sense of self amid a past, present, and future fragmented by the affective influence of marginalization and dehumanization in Norway. From this perspective, the experiences of Amal, Ayse, and Zahra illustrate the existence and persistence of colonial

wounds—injuries inflicted by the legacy of colonialism as it manifests through the power dynamics impacting their everyday lives.

As my interview with Amal demonstrated, the researcher's position is never irrelevant. Though the meeting was relaxed, gathering at a café after work during the Christmas holiday, the interview eventually became emotionally overwhelming. I felt almost suffocated at one point, a sensation that evoked the powerful constraints attendant to coloniality. The profound impact of war and conflict on Amal's past in her home country, the subsequent challenges she faces in Norway as a racialized and gendered individual in the present, and the diminished futurity offered to her became almost unbearable to hear. This suppressed temporality and spatiality was translated affectively and corporeally. The profound sadness and sorrow I sensed, that permeated her world, left a lasting impression on me. It took a year to conduct another interview with a new participant, which became the final one.

A kind of grim humor can also serve as a way of processing such feelings, as my interview with Ayse showed. For instance, when asked how she starts the day, she answered: "I open my eyes, and hate life." Alternatively, when probed on the purpose of life, Ayse expressed that it is purely "to survive," repeating that the meaning of life is rooted in "survival." Amidst the laughter, I sensed something hidden beneath the humor—a hint of resignation and despair. Her statement about "losing faith in society" resonated with me, providing context to the perceived flatness of her delivery. Her sequential storytelling seemed to conceal a deeper well of emotions, leaving me with a lingering sense of unspoken turmoil. Disempowered by majority society over her own definition, Ayse endures the pain of daily microaggressions, often dismissed by the wider community. Such dismissals work to conceal the colonial wounds of minority women, causing them to fester and dehumanize, thus forestalling the possibility of healing.

Ayse's narrative evokes a Black life concentrated around surviving racial violence. When queried on how her experiences with racism have impacted her psychological well-being, Ayse's

response powerfully sheds light on the ordinariness of racial violence endured by the Black body: "it's just part of being Black or looking different. But then you're so used to it that you don't know." This racial violence is so normalized—systemically and structurally—and so extensively inscribed on the Black body that it is a challenge to envision what it is like to live without it. But existence oriented towards survival can be seen as a pursuit of human dignity and meaning-making in a hostile environment.

Humor-laden resignation is not the only strategy for resilience. In my interviews with Zahra, which had to be postponed a few times due to illness, I found that withdrawal can also be a survival response, particularly to the dehumanization facing Muslims. When we finally met online, I found her worn out by the weight of being a minority in Norway, finding refuge in social isolation. In professional life, as in school, withdrawal serves to resist the exclusionary dehumanizing structures in white spaces. I could only listen and offer empathy—to acknowledge her injury and to heed Fanon's (2021/1952) enjoinder to "touch with our finger all the wounds that score [the] Black livery" (p.164).

All three accounts express a shared sense of constraint, self-fragmentation, and partitioning; in this society, these women must conceal, suppress, or even destroy parts of themselves. Hemmed in by colonial assumptions and presumptive gazes, Zahra is unable to exist on her own terms. Ayse and Amal express a similar sentiment, the former acknowledging the impossibility of being a Black Muslim and a Norwegian simultaneously, the latter recognizing that she is perceived primarily as "dark." Both categories, in hierarchies intertwined since the colonial period, are marked as inferior and different—incompatible with 'Norwegianness'.

Conclusion

The intertwined narratives of Muslim minority women in Norway provide a poignant portrayal of the lasting impact of coloniality. The narratives of Amal, Ayse, and Zahra offer insight into the

profound challenges encountered while striving to establish identity within a society shaped by the legacy of colonialism. Their experiences—from the emotional and physical suffocation caused by power differentials to the fixation on endurance and survival in the face of routine microaggressions—vividly illustrate the pervasive influence of coloniality on their day-to-day existence. These narratives underscore the dehumanizing structures present in white spaces, structures that not only restrict existence but also dictate the terms by which identities as Brown Muslim women and Black Muslim women are formed and recognized.

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Affective Evictions: A Cultural Analysis of Contemporary Danish Housing Politics

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Anna Meera Gaonkar's research examines (post)migration, racialisation, and the politics of emotion as formative contexts of artistic, cultural, and political production in the Nordic countries.

Abstract

The article suggests that government statements on anti-ghetto (2021) and security (2020) initiatives feature expressions of 'white homesickness' that manifest as longings for a national past and future with less or no migration to Denmark from outside Europe. The analysed statements justify the planned evictions of racialised-migrantised residents of social housing areas. The article argues that the statements also perform 'affective evictions' of racialised-migrantised members of society from the community of the imagined national home. Drawing on critical postmigration studies and a media-analytical approach to affect theory, two instrumentalised figures are accentuated as the haunting specters of this homesick politics: the figure of insecurity-creating immigrant boys and the figure of parallel societies inhabited by a 'brown underclass.' The article concludes that for racialised-migrantised residents of social housing estates in particular, the threat of 'affective eviction' paradoxically involves the material threat of eviction from society's overarching welfare shelter, that is the threat of being deprived of the right to social security.

KEYWORDS: The Ghetto Law, racialization, migration, insecurity, social housing, immigrants

Who can feel at home in nation-states like Denmark continually shaped by past and ongoing migrations, and on what basis is the citizen constructed as an affective figure? In light of intensifying nationalist mobilisations across Europe, these questions resonate far beyond the borders of Danish society. Dismissals of certain citizens' claims to national belonging spur both legal and political deliberations, but also raise a deeply cultural question: *What affects are mobilised, exchanged, and negotiated when racialised-migrantised members of society are excluded from the community of the imagined national home in our historical present?*

To answer this question, the article presents a cultural analysis of three contemporary political articulations arguing for the evictions of racialised-migrantised residents of Danish social housing areas. By establishing the notion of 'affective eviction', I suggest that the analysed articulations not only address the material evictions of housing residents but also perform affective evictions of racialised-migrantised members of society, destabilising their attachment to the national home as an imagined community. I further propose that the examined affective evictions are closely tied to expressions of a political longing towards a national past and future with less migration from outside Europe, a longing that creates what I understand to be an affect of 'white homesickness'.

By establishing the notion of affective eviction, the article develops an understanding of how affects related to racialised migrancy circulate and gain meaning through media transmissions within Danish society (Ahmed 2014; Lehmann et al. 2019). Adopting an economic approach to affect, the analysis focuses on its relational and collective dimensions – specifically, how affects are mobilised, exchanged, and negotiated through written and oral articulations (Lehmann et al. 2019, 144). Following cultural studies scholars Hauke Lehmann, Hans Roth, and Kerstin Schankweiler, for such a study of the distribution of affects: “the starting point [...] is not an individual, autonomous subject, but rather the relational forces and entanglements from which subject-positions emerge in the first place” (Lehmann et al. 2019, 140).

The analysis is also informed by the framing of European societies after World War II as 'post-migrant societies' that are discursively obsessed with issues of migration and integration (Espahangizi 2021; Petersen and Schramm 2017; Spielhaus 2012). Historian Kijan Espahangizi contends that a postmigrant society is characterised by two opposing yet coexisting interpretative regimes which relate to migration as “integral to society and as foreign to it – as threat and enhancement, as risk and potential [...]” (Espahangizi 2021, 68). Although migration-positive affects and inclusive cultural engagements are also a pronounced feature of “the postmigrant condition” (Schramm et al. 2019), Espahangizi maintains that a postmigrant society is most noticeably marked by the rise of the figure of the migrant as a permanent problem-causing figure of the nation (2021: 68). In a similar vein, Islamic studies scholar Riem Spielhaus observes that the “visible otherness” of migrants and their descendants continues to “trigger unease and public debate” in postmigrant societies, even though racialised individuals and migrant populations have always been integral to these societies (Spielhaus 2012, 97). Thus, the prefix 'post' in 'postmigration' does not suggest that Europe has moved beyond migration-related issues or racism, but rather that the responses to migration and its societal impacts are historically delayed. Building on this perspective, the article adopts an affect- and discourse-oriented postmigrant analytic.

In the following pages, I analyse a speech by the Danish Prime Minister and two strategy papers concerning the so-called anti-ghetto and security initiatives (Frederiksen 2020; Regeringen 2018, 2020).¹ I treat these texts as discursively interconnected, as they focus on the political management of the social housing sector and its populations. Although the initiatives do not explicitly use the term 'race', I highlight how they nonetheless construct instrumental figures that are both racialised and migrantised in opposition to the Danish majority white population (Svendson 2014). Race does not, however, serve as the only organising category of distinction for these figures. As we shall see, perceived differences pertaining to class and religion

also contribute to the framing of their affective otherness (Ahmed 2014; Andreassen 2005; Spielhaus 2012).

Since housing politics lie at the heart of Denmark's national discourse on migration and integration, focusing on the governance of the social housing sector is essential for understanding the cultural dimensions of the affective evictions of racialised-migrantised members of society. Furthermore, the current management of the social housing sector enjoys broad support in the Danish parliament, with backing from parties ranging from the centre-left to the far-right.

A contemporary politics of homesickness

According to political scientist Kristina Bakkær Simonsen, integration became a hot topic in Danish parliamentary politics in the 1990s (Simonsen 2016, 84). At the time, a "nativist conception of Danish community" was established by the Danish People's Party, which has since spread to mainstream parties such as the Social Democrats (Simonsen 2016, 84, 97). While it is possible to trace the figure of the migrant as a problematic resident further back in time by studying the national discourse on the so-called 'ghetto' from 1908 and onwards (Schmidt 2022; 2021), Simonsen's analysis of the political management of migrant residents in social housing focuses on a post-millennial policy lineage starting in 2010. Here, the liberal Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen used the term 'ghetto' in his call for action against growing migrant populations in social housing developments. Løkke spoke of "the people living behind the walls", arguing that social housing areas are "holes in the map of Denmark" and places in which "Danish values are obviously no longer leading" (quoted in English by Simonsen 2016, 85). In this first strategy paper concerning the regulation of social housing, known as *The Ghetto Plan* (2010), Simonsen traces instances of "nationalist othering" and a hostile construction of the "immigrant Other, portrayed as an 'enemy within'" (Simonsen 2016, 97). The text, she argues, constructs the ghetto as

a spatialised antagonism within the nation that not only alienates but antagonises migrant residents and their children (Simonsen 2016, 97). Simonsen emphasises a distinction between "the enemy" and "the adversary" of the nation, stressing that while adversaries are regarded as "legitimate" and "tolerated" opponents in a democracy, the enemy is to be "destroyed" (Simonsen 2016: 97).

More recently, gender studies scholars Mons Bissenbakker and Michael Nebeling have suggested a similar propensity in the anti-ghetto initiatives of 2018, referred to widely as the Ghetto Law and renamed the Parallel Society Law in 2020, albeit this is no law in juridical terms but rather policy initiatives embedded in the Social Housing Act and other legislative frameworks, as we shall see. The researchers perform an affect-oriented reading of the strategy paper on which the Ghetto Law and the Parallel Society Law are founded (Regeringen 2018). Like Simonsen, they highlight a politically produced figure of the ghetto and a figure of the resident of the ghetto. Based on notions of ethnicity and class, they argue that contemporary social housing areas are rendered as a figurative and implicitly "racial place" (Bissenbakker and Nebeling 2020, 16).² In short, the ghetto is articulated as being inhabited by so-called 'non-western' populations, described as less educated and affluent as well as more often unemployed and criminal than the average Danish citizen (Regeringen 2018). Yet, the ghetto-resident is not only configured in racial and socioeconomic opposition to the majority white population. The ghetto-resident is also configured in affective opposition to the citizen of the imagined national home because the ghetto-resident feels at home in the ghetto (Bissenbakker and Nebeling 2020, 16–17). Precisely because the ghetto is produced as a territory outside of the affective jurisdiction of the national home, the citizen is assumed to dread the ghetto. With reference to queer-feminist scholar Sara Ahmed, the two researchers advance that the figure of the ghetto produces an economy of fear, constructing the ghetto-resident as multiple figures of danger, including the gang member, the religious extremist, the foreign fighter, and the terrorist (Bissenbakker and Nebeling 2020, 18). These figures are

all male-connnotated, and many of them draw associations between criminality and Islam. In political terms, Bissenbakker and Nebeling submit that the ghetto thus signifies obstacles to national happiness: “The reader is promised an Ideal Denmark and is offered the Ghetto Law as a means to fulfilling the moment in which there is no longer a difference between the ideal and reality” (Bissenbakker and Nebeling 2020, 20).³ The imaginary of Denmark as an ideal society thereby involves a temporal projection – a promise of a less troubled future.

I suggest that the imaginary at play in the anti-ghetto initiatives also conjures up a narrative of a less troubled national past – an imaginary of a lost golden age of the Danish welfare state. In effect, the sense of a loss of security induces a longing for a time when migration did not pose a threat to social cohesion, and a fear that social cohesion may never be achieved again so long as the presence of migrants and their offspring is not regulated more strictly. Migration is thereby framed as a disruption and not as a historical continuum in Denmark. As the two researchers make clear, the notion of an “Ideal Denmark” is underscored by a desire for the *imagined* ethnic homogeneity of the national past – a longing that I describe as an affect of ‘white homesickness’ in this article. Expressions of white homesickness seem to be temporally suspended between national imaginaries of pasts and futures as well as affectively suspended between feelings of loss, fear, nativist nostalgia, and postcolonial melancholia (Gilroy 2005). The strategy paper’s articulation of the government’s desire for “a coherent Denmark”⁴ speaks to the affect of white homesickness. As I will argue, expressions of white homesickness and affective evictions of racialised-migrantised residents of social housing areas belong to the same political discourse as those outlined by Simonsen, Bissenbakker, and Nebeling. Within this discursive logic, the nation is constructed in opposition to the figure of the ghetto and its residents as well as to migrants and descendants of migrants in general (Regeringen 2018, 4). I propose the term affective eviction as it connects to the actual evictions of racialised-migrantised members of society from

social housing areas. However, while being evicted from one’s physical home marks a definitive act, affective evictions are dynamic in the sense that the subject is never fully evicted. While being affectively evicted from the national home, the figure of the migrant resident is kept hostage and made the scapegoat in the same political imaginaries that work to consolidate the possibility of a future Denmark in which national cohesion is achievable as a permanent societal situation. As the analysis will underline, the political regulation of racialised-migrantised members of society increasingly takes place through these complex and ambiguous affective modes of governing (Bissenbakker and Myong 2019).

In *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005), cultural studies scholar Paul Gilroy gages national longings from a broader historical perspective. He presents ‘postcolonial melancholia’ as a political structure of feeling that not only characterises Britain, which is the focus of his work, but all European nation-states in which colonialism is a part of the national historical account, such as Denmark (Gilroy 2005, 100; Williams 2009). Departing from Freud’s focus on individual grief, Gilroy applies melancholia in the vein of German social psychologists who deal with Germany’s post-World War II reactions to “the loss of fantasy of omnipotence” (Gilroy 2005, 99). For the British, Gilroy suggests that postcolonial melancholia is not only a mournful reaction to the atrocities of the colonial era and its racist hierarchies. This form of melancholia also marks a sense of loss of “British greatness” and imperial potency, a loss of order and stability within society, and a troubling recognition of the “fragility of national life and the real value of empire” for British citizens (Gilroy 2005, 100–101). Gilroy proposes that because former colonial subjects – embodied by the figure of the migrant – now reside *in* Britain, the nation is faced with “the discomfiting ambiguities of the empire’s painful and shameful but apparently nonetheless exhilarating history” (Gilroy 2005, 100). Postcolonial melancholia thus involves affective elements of longing and unhomeliness that relate to the nation in ways similar to white homesickness. Like Danish political expressions of white homesickness,

postcolonial melancholia *also* includes a longing for an imagined time before migrants came to the nation. Postcolonial melancholia similarly includes white feelings of unhomeliness that arise as the racialised figure of the migrant becomes a permanent body in Europe. Postcolonial melancholia also highlights the sense of security that comes with the ability to govern migrant bodies as a part of a neo-imperialist politics, as well as a longing for the power to be able to do so again. For while postcolonial migrants are central to Gilroy's formulation, he maintains that other migrants ignite similar political sentiments: "Later groups of immigrants may not, of course, relate to the history of empire and colony in any way whatsoever. However, they experience the misfortune of being caught up in a pattern of hostility and conflict that belongs emphatically to its lingering aftermath" (Gilroy 2005, 101).

Cultural studies scholar Tobias Hübinette and sociologist Carin Lundström discuss the notion of 'white melancholia' in a similar vein in the context of contemporary Sweden (Hübinette and Lundström 2011). The researchers argue that the Swedish political Right and Left mourn the loss of both "'old Sweden', i.e. Sweden as a homogenous society" and "'good Sweden', i.e. Sweden as a progressive society" arguing that these imagined pasts are "perceived to be threatened by the presence of non-white migrants and their descendants" (Hübinette and Lundström 2011, paragraph 3). Following Espahangizi, Spielhaus, Gilroy, Hübinette, and Lundström, the affective propensities of postcolonial society are quite analogous to the affective propensities of postmigrant society: Both thrive on antagonistic feelings toward the presence of racialised-migrantised bodies *within* the nation-state and in turn foster a nationalist nostalgia for uninterrupted whiteness. As the conceptualisation of postcolonial melancholia also suggests, the political configuration of the migrant is, for the most part, a racialised configuration (Gilroy 2005, 101). To this extent, I hold on to Gilroy's premise that "the political language of race", however convoluted or silenced it may be on the policy level in countries like Denmark, exposes the nation's imaginings of itself and its histories of

colonialism, also in postmigrant society's affective economy (Gilroy 2005, 149). What also becomes clear is how the categories of 'race' and 'migrant' continue to overlap in intricate ways within the Danish context – and how it is not always possible to draw definite lines between processes of racialisation and processes of migrantisation.

In the following pages, I outline the so-called anti-ghetto and security initiatives. While the concrete policies are not the subject of my analysis, an introduction to the legislation is needed to understand their political power to regulate.

Tryghedspakken: The Security Initiative

In October 2020, the Danish government released a strategy paper called *Tryghed for alle danskere*⁵, which I will refer to as the Security Initiative (see fig. 1). This initiative was part of a police settlement, commonly known as *Tryghedspakken*, introduced by Social Democratic Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen. Frederiksen first presented the initiative in August 2020 and highlighted it in her opening address to parliament that October.

The Security Initiative proposes several measures to address insecurity in residential and public areas, including social housing. It suggests increasing police authority and staffing to restore security by targeting "instigators of unrest"⁶ (Regeringen 2020, 2). The initiative also proposes giving authorities the power to ban residents of social housing from gathering in public spaces like parking lots, train stations, and shopping arcades for up to 30 days (Regeringen 2020, 2). Additionally, it would allow police to fine individuals who violate these bans, impose penalties of 10,000 DKK, or seize valuables such as smartphones and expensive clothing without court approval. In serious cases, offenders could face up to 30 days of imprisonment (Regeringen 2020, 2). While a majority in parliament supported the initiative in June 2021, the most controversial measure – the imposition of temporary public residence bans – was rejected for violating fundamental freedom rights for *all* members of society (Jørgensen 2021).⁷

Before the Security Initiative, an initiative known as the Law on Insecurity-Creating Camps gave police the authority to shut down homeless camps and evict individuals from public spaces.⁸ The Law also allows fines and restraining orders for homeless individuals, even restricting them from entire municipalities. Unlike the anti-ghetto initiatives, this law does not target people based on ethnicity or race, though authorities note that most individuals charged under it are foreign nationals (Nordvang Jensen 2018).

Parallelsamfundsloven: The Parallel Society Law

In March 2018, a series of so-called anti-ghetto initiatives, often referred to as the Ghetto Law or Parallel Society Law, were passed by a large majority in the Danish parliament. In 2019, the government shifted from the Liberal Party to the Social Democrats. Both parties had supported the initiatives in the strategy paper *Ét Danmark uden parallelsamfund – ingen ghettoer i 2030*⁹ (Regeringen 2018, see fig. 2). A political agreement to end the official use of the term ‘ghetto’ was reached in 2021 (“Aftale mellem...” 2021, 4) and the anti-ghetto initiatives are now commonly known as the Parallel Society Law. I refer to the Ghetto Law only when referencing discussions about the anti-ghetto initiatives before 2021.

In brief, the Parallel Society Law aims to prevent social housing estates from becoming so-called ‘parallel societies’, previously called ‘ghettos’ and, before 2010, ‘socially vulnerable housing areas’ (Simonsen 2016, 85). Each year, the ministry in charge of the social housing sector publishes a list of estates designated as parallel societies (“Liste over...” 2021). Housing estates are added to this list if they have a high percentage of migrants and descendants from “non-western countries” (Regeringen 2018, 11). In addition to ethnicity, four socio-economic factors – unemployment, crime rates, education levels, and wealth – are used to categorise these estates.¹⁰ Once an estate is listed, authorities must implement various social initiatives within the housing estate. Estates

that have been classified as parallel societies for consecutive years may face demolition, evictions, or privatisation.¹¹

According to Statistics Denmark, the category ‘non-western countries’ includes all countries not considered ‘western,’ which are defined as 28 EU countries, the UK, Andorra, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Norway, San Marino, Switzerland, the Vatican, Canada, the US, Australia, and New Zealand (Elmeskov 2019). This classification has led to widespread criticism of the Parallel Society Law for disproportionately affecting ethnic minority populations in Denmark, particularly those racialised as ‘non-white.’ While racialised individuals from ‘western’ countries are not targeted by the initiatives, the primary criterion still predominantly impacts ‘non-white’ residents of social housing areas.

In addition to categorising estates as ‘parallel societies,’ the Parallel Society Law – which, as noted, is not a single law but a set of initiatives embedded in various legislative frameworks – includes punitive measures aimed at improving integration within social housing areas. For example, courts are required to double sentences for specific crimes committed in designated zones within social housing areas (Regeringen 2018, 22–23). Children over one year old must attend daycare for at least 25 hours a week (excluding naps), where they are taught “Danish norms and values,” such as “equality, community, participation, and responsibility” (Regeringen 2018, 24). Families failing to comply may have their social benefits reduced.

The Parallel Society Law continues to face intense national and international criticism (Barry and Sørensen 2018; O’Sullivan 2020; O’Brien 2022). Danish media have described it as “the biggest social experiment of the century” (Reiermann and Andersen 2019). The Danish Institute for Human Rights and the UN’s Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism have criticized the law for racial discrimination, as it primarily targets residents from ‘non-western’ countries (Hvilsum 2022).

The Law has also sparked aesthetic and cultural criticism. Activist movements have directly challenged its material effects. This counts a civil movement of residents from social housing areas

that surfaced in 2018 under the hashtag #ViFlytterIkke, ‘we are not moving’ (Bissenbakker and Nebeling 2020). This movement, Almen Modstand, meaning ‘common resistance’, provides legal support and social networks, and facilitates cultural events to tackle local housing evictions, the subsequent splitting of communities, and the gentrification and privatisation of the social housing sector in general.¹² Another example is the Danish-language podcast series *Mere end Mursten* (2020), ‘more than bricks’, hosted by historian and journalist Farhiya Khalid. Several artists have moreover created impactful works that address the affective consequences of the Parallel Society Law and its perceived racism. One example is Aysha Amin’s video artwork *Demolition Tour: A Sonic // Virtual Walk to Gellerup* (2020), where Amin’s voice guides viewers through Gellerup using Google Street View. Amin discusses the brutality of the evictions and demolitions but also highlights the cultural abundance and emotional resilience of Gellerup’s inhabitants. Another example is the experimental podcast *Generationen*, ‘the generation’, by rapper

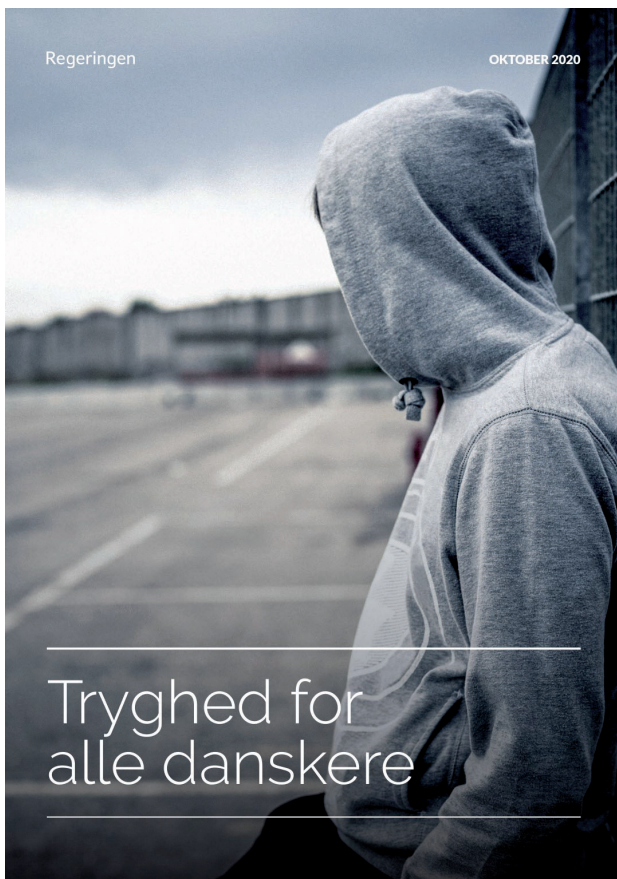
and radio documentarist Babak Vakili. Mixing hip-hop, radio montage, interviews, staged dialogues, and archival recordings, the podcast explores the political regulation of the social housing sector from the point of view of racialised-migrantised residents. Vakili contends that political hostility toward the social housing sector has been growing for two decades and interprets this hostility as an expression of opposition to the “brown underclass” (Blokken 16:24–16:30). Like Bissenbakker and Nebeling, Vakili emphasises that the “brown underclass” is a politically produced figure based on notions of both ethnicity and class.

The scope of this article does not allow me to unfold how the works of Khalid, Amin, and Vakili offer highly critical perspectives on Danish housing politics. Their artistic and cultural productions emphasise that the Law stirs feelings of unhomeliness in the targeted residents. To this extent, expressions of white homesickness, like the ones I will analyse, seem to cast off an inverse mode of homesickness, which is expressed by racialised-migrantised artists and cultural producers and mobilised through the circulation of their work. This homesickness can be understood as an affect of racialisation – as an emotional response to political acts of unhoming and a reaction to the nativist vision of the national home and its imperatives.¹³ Artistic expressions of this homesickness – the experience of being made to feel unhome – may serve as a reminder that, unlike children born to families *outside* social housing areas, children born to racialised-migrantised residents or their offspring are targeted by the nation from the day they are old enough to attend day-care.

The figure of insecurity-creating immigrant boys

The news of an upcoming police settlement hit Danish media in August 2020 (Regeringen 2020).

Fig. 1.
Tryghed for alle danskere (2020),
‘Security for all Danes’.





At a press conference following the Social Democrat's summer group meeting, Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen presented an initiative to combat insecurity in and around social housing areas. Together with the Minister of Justice, Nick Hækkerup, Frederiksen proclaimed that the government intended to target groups of "immigrant boys",¹⁴ whom she argued were making ordinary people feel insecure in public spaces (Ritzau 2020). The immigrant boys – an expression I employ when referring to Frederiksen's configuration – were not being targeted by the government for violating any specific laws. Rather, the Prime Minister suggested that the immigrant boys were producing a sense of insecurity in other people and spaces and that the creation of insecurity was what needed regulation. While Frederiksen's definition of 'insecurity' remained unclear throughout the briefing, the government's tactic was clearly communicated. The plan was to get rid of public insecurity by ridding the public of its alleged makers.

The Minister of Justice was likewise incapable of defining how insecurity is produced and induced in public spaces by individuals or groups

Fig. 2.

Ét Danmark uden parallelsamfund. Ingen ghettoer i 2030 (2018)

'One Denmark without parallel societies. No ghettos in 2030'.

who are not breaking the law. Frederiksen explained to the media that "this is about the fact that when you use the S-train lines in Greater Copenhagen, you should not be afraid to go home in the evening because there are 15–17 immigrant boys who cannot figure out how to behave properly" (Ritzau 2020).¹⁵

News agencies reported that none of the ministers explained how they would assure "security and freedom" – how they would govern these affective experiences of feeling insecure in public (Ritzau 2020). Frederiksen's image of immigrant boys entering a train and making fellow commuters feel insecure does a better job of illustrating what the administration meant and still means by 'insecurity'.

Reflecting upon the scenario, we can ask how the so-called immigrant boys make others on the train feel insecure, to begin with? From Frederiksen's example, we gather that insecurity is tied to improper behaviour as well as to the 'immigrant' label. The insecurity referred to is not created by any random group of misbehaving children or teenagers entering a train or a station late at night. The targeted troublemakers are 'immigrants.' In affective terms, Frederiksen migrantises and racialises insecurity by migrantising and racialising its source. What makes the boys come across as *immigrant* boys and not just any boys? The most obvious answer relates to the boys' appearances – their perceived differences in terms of ethnicity and race, and potentially also class. Here, we are reminded of Gilroy's and Spielhaus' points that the visible otherness of migrants and their descendants continues to trigger unease in postmigrant and postcolonial societies (Gilroy 2005, Spielhaus 2012). It also aligns with media studies scholar Rikke Andreassen's research on the representation of visible minorities in Danish news media. As

Andreassen suggests, the visible minority man is often framed as violent and as an inherent threat, and thus, as a maker of insecurity (Andreassen 2005).

Several media outlets circulated Frederiksen's affectively stimulating configuration of racialised-migrantised boys as a socially disruptive force and her wish to combat 'insecurity-creating immigrant boys'. The term stuck to popular discourse, even as months passed (Zamani 2021).¹⁶ The cover of the strategy paper concerning the Security Initiative further enlivens the figure and its stickiness (Ahmed 2014): We cannot see a face, though a lock of black hair peeps out from beneath a hooded and male-connotated silhouette leaning up against a fence in an empty parking lot (Regeringen 2020, see fig. 1). This silhouette could be any dark-haired young person who hangs around in public. However, a comment in a press release by the Minister of Immigration and Integration at the time, Mattias Tesfaye, elucidates how specifically immigrant boys are targeted by the Security Initiative:

I am tired of hearing that society is always to blame. Denmark is a fantastic country that provides young people with all opportunities. This also counts for the youth of immigrant families. Now, those, who create the insecurity in our local communities, must decide whether they want to be a part of Danish society or not. If the answer is no, they must know that they will be faced with restraining orders and confiscations ("Nye tiltag..." 2020).¹⁷

Reflecting upon the title of the strategy paper, 'Security for all Danes', as well as its visual cover, a concrete distinction is made between those in need of security – the unmarked category of all Danes – and the makers of insecurity – the dark-haired cover boy.

Like most deliberations on issues of migration and integration in Denmark, the Security Initiative caused a public uproar of disapproval and justification. The Prime Minister was accused of stigmatising an entire generation as troublemakers

(Cekic and Zamani 2020). Critics dismissed Frederiksen's singling out of racialised minorities from social housing areas and rejected her culturalisation of the social challenges at hand (Ritzau 2020). Some critics noted that the term 'immigrant boys' was inappropriately used by the Prime Minister, as the targeted young men were born in Danish hospitals as Danish citizens (Cekic 2020). The Danish Institute for Human Rights expressed concern that the Security Initiative failed to legally define what 'insecurity' and 'creating insecurity' means, stating that it is a mandatory requirement for the law to be apparent to everyone ("Beslaglæggelser, bøder..." 2020). The chairman of the Danish Police Union disassociated from the initiative, which was, as already mentioned, planned as a part of a new police settlement. He stated that the proposed laws had not been requested by or discussed with the police but represented a "political desire"¹⁸ ("Beslaglæggelser..." 2020). Contrarily, other observers praised the head of state for not problematising migration and migrants in general. They applauded Frederiksen's approach to concretely tackle the challenges in social housing areas concerning a specific group of young men (Zamani 2021). In short, while some voices emphasised that insecurity seems to be the government's own creation, others highlighted that insecurity is a social and not a cultural or racial problem, while yet others sided with the government and called for disciplinary measures and legislative expansions.

This reading has highlighted how the political deliberations on insecurity present a clear-cut problematisation of the migrant as a racialised, gendered and class-coded figure as well as the political management of migration as an affective matter. Frederiksen configures the makers of insecurity as immigrants who trouble the feelings of citizens with the promise that the government can protect their feelings. The insecurity-maker thus resembles Simonsen's description of "an enemy within" who cannot be tolerated (Simonsen 2016, 97). Nonetheless, the internal enemy cannot be definitively destroyed or evicted as the figure works to convince us that insecurity is not the consequence of a failed social politics. As Gilroy points out, group identifications within "the precarious

nation-state” often develop “in opposition to the intrusive presences of the incoming stranger”, and so the figure of the insecurity-creating immigrant boys contributes to an imaginary of Denmark as a secure national home if only the insecurity-creating immigrant boys were not around to instigate unrest (Gilroy 2005, 101).

The Security Initiative illustrates, I argue, how Danish political discourse on integration and migration involves intense affective circulations in which the migrant as a problem-causing figure is both affectively evicted and held hostage within the imaginary of the national home in a discursive mode of house arrest. To draw on the illustrative phrasing of Ahmed, the Prime Minister’s configuration of insecurity-creating immigrant boys demonstrates how speech acts produce affects that stick to certain figures or stick certain figures together, “a sticking that creates the very effect of a collective” (Ahmed 2014, 19). As Ahmed writes, “emotions *do* things, and they align individuals with communities – or bodily space with social space – through the very intensity of their attachments” (Ahmed 2014, 19). The term ‘boy’ can of course evoke innocence by association to childhood, but ‘boy’ also alludes to the family unit. In the previous quote, Tesfaye specifically describes the immigrant boys as “the youth of immigrant families”. The insecurity-creating immigrant boys, and in extension their families, are produced as the locus of insecurity – the logic being that wherever they go, insecurity follows. While the immigrant boys are not framed as criminals, they stick to social housing areas as well as to other figures of potential danger such as gang members (Bissenbakker and Nebeling 2020). I propose that the initiatives to restrict the movements of this figure – as well as the movements of racialised and male-connnotated bodies to whom the figure sticks – are partly made possible through their affective eviction, through the unhoming of their bodies from the imaginary of the national home.

Following the passing of the initiatives concerning security in 2021, it came as a surprise that the government’s suggestion to impose temporary public residence bans to combat insecurity

near social housing areas was rejected by a majority in parliament. The main opposition party, the Liberals, stated that it had realised very late in the hearing process that the ban would affect *all* members of society – and not *just* the troublemakers (Jørgensen 2021). While the ban was terminated, the Security Initiative’s racial configuration of insecurity-creating immigrant boys lives on in new headlines and public discourse.

In April 2024, the figure of the insecurity-creating immigrant was for an example radicalised further by Frederik Vad, the Social Democrat’s spokesman on immigration. During a speech in parliament, Vad expressed a “realisation” concerning the integration of migrants and their offspring in Denmark: “the realisation that work, education, housing, access to associations and a clean criminal record are not enough if you also use your position to undermine Danish society from within” (Klingenberg 2024).¹⁹²⁰ Vad added that social housing areas are no longer the only “parallel societies” that exist in Denmark: “It can also be a canteen table in a government agency. It can also be a pharmacy in North Zealand” (Klingenberg 2024).²¹ Racialised-migrantised members of society are described by the Social Democrat as potential producers of insecurity in *all* layers of Danish society – affectively evicted from the imagined national community and simultaneously promised conditional belonging if only they learn to behave in accordance with the affective imperatives of the national home. Referring especially to patriarchal religious and cultural values, Vad concluded his speech by expressing that integration is only achievable if immigrants fully commit to Danish values like gender equality. The question remains what it entails to prove or pledge full affective commitment to the nation, and who holds the power to decide this in everyday situations during lunch in the canteen or over the counter? While Vad’s articulations were fully supported by the Prime Minister, they were heavily criticised by several Social Democrats accusing Vad of creating a new foundation for racism in Denmark (Ritzau 2024).

“All you who want to be a part of Denmark”

Political sociologist Bilgin Ayata examines state-subject relations and posits that European nation-states are increasingly managing issues of migration through affective governing. Employing the concept of “affective citizenship”, Ayata contends that belonging to the national community remains in question for citizens who are perceived as different in terms of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and religion (Ayata 2019, 330–331). These citizens are often asked to perform additional efforts to confirm their rightful belonging within the nation, as previously stated by Vad. Following Ayata, affective citizenship is a useful concept to think with in relation to subjects who are, legally speaking, at home in society but made to feel unhome because of their perceived differences in comparison to the majority population. Ayata argues that the affective management of migrants and their descendants in Europe has been fuelled by the War on Terror, which was led by the US and its allies, including Denmark (Ayata 2019, 331). The war has especially contributed to the “problematization of migration, difference, and plurality as potential threats to social cohesion and national security”, she argues and concludes: “Thus, it no longer only matters where ‘one is really from’, but also ‘how one really feels’ (toward the nation, state, or political community)” (Ayata 2019, 330–331).

In the following reading of a speech by Mette Frederiksen, I suggest that the Prime Minister relies on the threat of affective eviction to formulate her imagining of the ideal national home. In her opening address to parliament in October 2020, Frederiksen deliberated on what she believes to be pressing challenges facing the Danish welfare state. These challenges included organised crime, unemployment, gender-based oppression, and insecurity in social housing areas (Frederiksen 2020). The Prime Minister narrated how she convened with residents from Motalavej, a social housing estate in Korsør. At the meeting, a female resident made an impression on Frederiksen. Described to us by Frederiksen

as “in some way related to a minority”, the woman complained that the current regulations in social housing areas were too soft: “Why don’t you just take the social security from the troublemakers?”²² the woman asked (Frederiksen 2020, 6–7). The head of state intuitively seemed to understand to whom the woman was referring: “I understand her frustration. Insecurity has been allowed to grow in far too many places” (Frederiksen 2020, 8). By entertaining the woman’s question, the thought of depriving troublemakers of their rights to social benefits was not Frederiksen’s inclination, nor was the configuration of the maker of insecurity. The troublemaker was introduced to us by a resident of Motalavej, by a native informant, so to speak.

Though neither ethnicity nor race are mentioned as markers of difference, Frederiksen does make several affectively excluding distinctions during her elaborations on the challenges of the social housing sector. We do not know how she determines the woman’s status as being “related to a minority”. This becomes more apparent as the Prime Minister starts to address the woman’s peers by saying: “Many of you, whose roots lie outside Denmark” (Frederiksen 2020, 14). No borders are specified, but she continues to draw on euphemisms like “imams”, “non-western” and “brothers” that largely connote Muslim and racialised minorities (Andreassen 2005; Frederiksen 2020, 27, 42, 89; Svendsen 2014). In the following two examples, Frederiksen configures a collective “you” that sticks the figure of the troublemaker to their parents as well as to a broader community. In the first example, the Prime Minister addresses a feminised “you”, in the latter example, the “you” is masculinised:

Many of you are in a battle of values – a battle for freedom – a struggle to escape from the archaic and obdurate culture that, unfortunately, still controls some social circles. Whereas the fight for women’s rights in Denmark in the 1970s happened publicly, in broad daylight, with marches and television campaigns, your fight happens in places that are more hidden away. This makes your fight more difficult than ours. Therefore, everyone’s effort

is called for. This also applies to the imams who are residing in Denmark (Frederiksen 2020, 21–27).

All of you who want to be a part of Denmark. Hold on to that. And to all of you young men who, via social media, dissociate from the murder in Brønshøj²³ last week: Keep on doing that. Dissociate from what is wrong – take on responsibility for doing what is right (Frederiksen 2020, 28–31, 35–37).

In the first example, we are told that the collective “you” is fighting against an unspecified yet Muslim-connnotated patriarchal culture, as suggested by the metonymical referral to “imams”. Although the Prime Minister notes that everyone’s effort is called for in the present, a distinction is made between “your fight” and “ours”. In favour of Frederiksen, one could argue that she does not address feminism as a universal matter. However, her distinction idealises the Danish nation’s past by suggesting that Denmark won the fight for women’s rights in the 1970s. Moreover, Frederiksen implicitly produces a distinction between racialised men and unmarked Danish men as feminist allies. Hübinette and Lundström register a similar political idealisation of a Swedish past, noting that the nationalist “[...] Sweden Democrats’ longing for ‘old Sweden’ is expressed as a wish to return to a time when there were no ethno-racial conflicts and no non-western ‘patriarchal excesses’ (Hübinette and Lundström 2011, paragraph 25).

In the second example, we gather that being “a part of Denmark” necessitates the action of the collective, masculinised “you”. Thinking back to Vad’s speech, being a law-abiding member of society does also *not* automate inclusion into “Danishness” for Frederiksen. In line with Ayata’s formulations on affective citizenship, young men are asked to dissociate from an unsolved murder to prove their feelings towards the nation (2019). Frederiksen thereby creates an affiliation between the collective “you” and the supposed killer, a gang member. Across the country, young men “whose roots lie outside Denmark” are thereby indirectly

rendered as potential supporters of gangs or, worst, potential supporters of murderers.

Frederiksen’s opening address also engages with a third collective “you” determined by class and social status as a marker of perceived difference. This “you” is not a resident of social housing areas, though it denotes a racialised minority. Frederiksen states that she is aware that some minorities encounter “prejudices” in their daily life (Frederiksen 2020, 54). The troublemakers, she explains, are to blame for these prejudices, which are “caused by the wrong behaviour shown by others” (Frederiksen 2020, 54–55). We are not told what links the troublemaker to the third collective “you”. We do not know whether the “prejudices” are founded on perceived commonalities relating to race, culture, or religion. Meanwhile, Frederiksen blames the troublemaker for turning social housing areas into unhomey places within the nation. Again, Frederiksen paints the picture of a bright national past – a time in which the social housing areas were comfortable bastions of the welfare state:

The residential areas, which today are spoken of as socially deprived areas, were originally built in order to provide more freedom and an improved quality of life for ordinary people seeking to move out of the cities. [...] But now, in too many places, the opposite has happened. In the socially deprived areas, one per cent of the residents commit almost half the criminal offences when you take the seriousness of the offences into consideration. In that way, it actually is an ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Frederiksen 2020, 56–62).

Frederiksen antagonises a majority “us” outside the social housing areas and a minoritised “them” within the social housing areas. Once again, the current residents of social housing estates are rendered as the locus for insecurity. But the opposition does not insinuate “white against brown” or “young against older”, the Prime Minister assures, as she mentions “white” and “brown” as racialising markers for the first and only time during her speech (Frederiksen 2020, 63). Instead,

she distinguishes between “those of us who want security, decency, democracy, equality, freedom” and “those who want the direct opposite” (Frederiksen 2020, 63–66). The division conjures up an image of “them” as intentionally lawless individuals. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister argues that police should be able to prohibit not only “the gang member” but also “the rest of the group” from making public spaces feel insecure. What is ultimately at stake in this example is the project of protecting the feelings of “ordinary people” by restricting the movements of residents of social housing areas.

Although Frederiksen asserts that insecurity is not a racial issue of “white against brown”, she resolves her thoughts on how to combat insecurity by generating yet another nativist idealisation of the national past. In this past, Denmark had fewer problems, she notes, referencing the post-war years before labour migrants and refugees came to Denmark in large numbers from outside Europe: “The immigration policy of the past was a mistake; it is as simple as that” (Frederiksen 2020, 114). To protect the future of Denmark and reinstall a sense of security, the Prime Minister determines that Denmark is to “deal with asylum cases away from Denmark – in countries outside the EU, which can provide security for those in need of protection” (Frederiksen 2020, 129–130).

Once again, insecurity is affectively structured by migration. Labelling the Mediterranean as a “cemetery”, Frederiksen argues that outsourcing the Danish asylum system to a country outside of EU-Europe will prevent Denmark from making the so-called migration mistakes of the past and prevent the deaths of migrants at sea (Frederiksen 2020, 123). We are to understand that it is in favour of everybody’s sense of security if Denmark helps asylum seekers from their own “regions of origin” (Frederiksen 2020, 129).²⁴ The abstract notion of a “region of origin” as opposed to a “country of origin” prompts the question of how Frederiksen constructs ‘home’ not only in national but in translational terms. Frederiksen does not mention which nations are to house future asylum seekers hoping to reach Denmark. However, the media covered the Danish government’s negotiations

with the Rwandan government to install permanent asylum camps long before the UK announced its first plans to do the same in April 2022 (Høj 2022). The inclusion of the Rwanda plans illustrates the depths of the problematisation of the presence of the migrant figure for the nation. The plans to outsource asylum also expose the affective intensity at play in connection to the future-oriented fear of a larger influx of climate refugees from the Global South.

Social housing, a site of homesick contestations

This article has analysed how three political parliamentary articulations of white homesickness are founded on imaginaries of national pasts and futures structured by the migrant figure as a racialised problem-causing figure *for* rather than *in* Denmark. I have examined how Danish Prime Ministers since 2010 have outlined a present in which affective commitment to Denmark is required for certain groups of racialised-migrantised members of society to be acknowledged as “a part of Denmark”. The analysis has also made clear that both the Security Initiative and the Parallel Society Law set out to eradicate ‘insecurity’ as a migration-related and publicly circulating affect. However, for racialised-migrantised residents of social housing estates in particular, the threat of affective eviction involves the material threat of eviction from society’s overarching welfare shelter: namely, the threat of being deprived of one’s right to social security. Drawing on critical postmigration studies and a media-analytical approach to affect theory, I have accentuated two figures that come into being as the haunting specters of this homesick politics: the figure of insecurity-creating immigrant boys and the figure of parallel societies. Interestingly, the political articulations of white homesickness seem to depend on the figure of the problem-causing migrant to maintain that insecurity is *not* a product of political neglect. Critiques of the security and anti-ghetto initiatives are, however, also mobilised and circulated within contemporary Danish society, just as its political figures

are heavily contested. Especially within art and culture, the material and emotional consequences of the political acts of unhoming and affective evictions for racialised-migrantised members of

society are powerfully depicted by artists and cultural producers like Farhiya Khalid, Aysha Amin, and Babak Vakili.

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Notes

- ¹ In Danish, the Security Initiative is broadly referred to as *Tryghedspakken*. The Parallel Society Law is referred to as *Parallelsamfundsloven* but was named *Ghettoloven* until 2021. The decision to depart from the term 'ghetto' was made by the same parties in parliament who voted in favour of the initial Ghetto Law in 2018 ("Aftale mellem..." 2021: 4). The official usage of 'ghetto' ignited national as well as international criticism. The term has a loaded history, as it connotes Nazi Germany's separation of Jewish people during WWII. The term also denotes older spatial separations in Copenhagen as well as more recent spatial separations within urban US American and European contexts (Schmidt 2022; 2021, Simonsen 2016). For an English-language overview of the Danish debate, see: Barry and Sørensen 2018.
- ² "så defineres den først og fremmest som et klassemæssigt og etnisk (og dermed implicit racia)l sted."
- ³ "Læsere bliver lovet et Ideal-Danmark og tilbydes ghettoloven som midlet, der skal sikre, at vi når frem til det øjeblik, hvor der ikke længere er forskel på ideal og virkelighed."
- ⁴ "et sammenhængende Danmark"
- ⁵ In English, 'Security for all Danes'.
- ⁶ "uromagere"
- ⁷ In November 2021, the government published a supplementary strategy to improve security. As this strategy does not specifically tackle social housing areas, I do not include it in my analysis.
- ⁸ In Danish, *Loven om utryghedsskabende lejre* or *Lejrloven*.
- ⁹ In English 'One Denmark without parallel societies – no ghettos in 2030'.
- ¹⁰ As an example, social housing estates considered in the risk group of becoming a 'parallel society' consist of 1,000 residents minimum. Of those residents, 30% or more are migrants or descendants of migrants from 'non-western' countries. Additionally, the residents meet two of the following four criteria pertaining to 1) higher rates of unemployment, 2) higher crime rates, 3) lower education levels, and 4) lower gross income than the rest of society ("Aftale mellem..." 2021: 2).
- ¹¹ For instance, in June 2022, housing evictions began in Mjølnerparken in Copenhagen. Residents were rehoused by authorities and had no choice on the location or cost of their new housing. Private real estate investors have bought significant shares of the estate's flats (O'Brien 2022).
- ¹² In Danish, social housing is referred to as *almene boliger*, with *almen* meaning 'common' and *modstand* meaning 'resistance'. As such, the movement refers to itself as a resistance group consisting of 'common people'.
- ¹³ I unfold the notion of a subversive 'postmigrant homesickness' in art and culture in my PhD dissertation *Feeling Sick of Home?* (2022). This article is a shortened adaptation of a chapter from the dissertation which includes a thorough analysis of Babak Vakili's *Generationen*.
- ¹⁴ "indvandrerdreng"
- ¹⁵ "Det her handler om, at når man bruger S-togslinjerne i Storkøbenhavn, så skal man ikke være bange for at tage hjem om aftenen, fordi der er 15–17 indvandrerdreng, der ikke kan finde ud af at opføre sig ordentligt."
- ¹⁶ "Utryghedsskabende indvandrerdreng"

- ¹⁷ “Jeg er træt af at høre om, at det altid er samfundets skyld. Danmark er et fantastisk samfund, der giver unge alle muligheder. Det gælder også unge fra indvandrerfamilier. Nu må dem, der skaber utryghed i vores lokalsamfund, beslutte sig for, om de vil være en del af det danske samfund. Hvis svaret er nej, skal de vide, at de vil blive mødt med opholdsforbud og beslaglæggelser.”
- ¹⁸ “et politisk ønske”
- ¹⁹ For Vad’s full speech in Danish see: Klingenberg 2024.
- ²⁰ “en erkendelse af, at arbejde, uddannelse, bolig, turpas til foreningslivet og en pletfri straffeattest ikke er nok, hvis man samtidig bruger sin position til at undergrave det danske samfund indefra”.
- ²¹ “Et parallelsamfund er ikke længere kun et boligområde i Ishøj. Det kan også være et kantinebord i en statslig styrelse. Det kan også være et apotek i Nordsjælland”.
- ²² The Office of the Prime Minister provides an English-language version of the Danish-language opening address. As I draw on the official translation, I do not provide Danish original quotes in the footnotes. I refer to the numbered lines of the official translation.
- ²³ The “murder in Brønshøj” refers to the murder of Kevin Ibrahimovski. At the time of the speech, Danish police assumed that the murder was a gang-related crime, though the case was formally unsolved.
- ²⁴ In the Danish version of the speech, the Prime Minister uses the term “nærområderne” meaning ‘proximate areas.’ The term is, however, officially translated into “regions of origin.”

“Here Lies the Possibility of Bodies Turning Elemental”: Oceanic Remembrance, *Serpent Rain* (2016), and Scandinavian Racial Climates

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Abstract

This paper explores the (non)representational aesthetics and politics of *Serpent Rain*, a 2016 Black feminist film inspired by the recovery of a Danish-Norwegian slave ship. Despite ample historical evidence, Scandinavia’s involvement in the transatlantic slave trade remains an underdiscussed topic; when the history is broached at all, it tends to be relegated to a distant ‘dark chapter’ already overcome. I argue that *Serpent Rain* rejects this binary of erasure vs. contained representation in its treatment of slavery, enacting instead another type of (non)representation that moves beyond “the limits of most available narratives to explain the position of the enslaved” (Hartman and Wilderson 2003, p.184). Taking its meandering and associative form from *Serpent Rain*’s experimental aesthetics, this article draws on Black feminist theory—particularly Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake*—to argue that the film unsettles visual and ontological certainty to dramatize the repetitive structure of racial capitalism and its ongoing reiterative violence, from the sunken slave ship to the ongoing extraction of oil on indigenous land. Ultimately, the film makes us question not only the hegemonic mediation of the enslaved, but also the orthography of the (white) human and the seeming serenity of Norwegian oceanic landscapes.

KEYWORDS: Black feminism, Nordic Exceptionalism, the Sonic, Temporality, Slow Cinema, (Anti) Humanism.

Introduction

We are never as steeped in history as when we pretend not to be, but if we stop pretending, we may gain in understanding what we lose in false innocence.

– Trouillot 1995, p.xxiii

How do we memorialize an event that is still ongoing?

– Sharpe 2016, p.20

Ocean waters [are] themselves an archive, an ever-present, ever-reformulating record of the unimaginable.

– Tinsley 2008, pp.193-194

On December 1, 1768, the slave ship *Fredensborg* (“Freedom Castle”) sank outside a small coastal city in Norway called Arendal. The shipwreck lay at the bottom of the ocean for more than 200 years, until it was recovered by a historian and a crew of divers in 1974-1977. In addition to ivory, cotton, and tobacco, the ship had also carried 265 captured Africans from Ghana to be sold in the Danish colony of St. Croix as part of the transatlantic slave trade.¹ Many of the enslaved people onboard *Fredensborg* died during the transatlantic journey, their bodies thrown overboard to be buried in the ocean. The discovery of *Fredensborg* challenged Scandinavia’s self-image as a racially innocent, peaceful region—an image built on the myth of Nordic exceptionalism, which frames the region’s welfare states as “icons of tolerance, humanism, and equality” (Lykke, p.112). How could Norway and Denmark, often celebrated for their progressivism, be responsible for one of the world’s ‘best-preserved’ slave ships? (Lauvland 2019).²

While the discovery of the ship might have at first shaken some of the foundational assumptions of the region’s self-image, by asking Scandinavians to grapple with their (our) historical entanglement with slavery and anti-Blackness, this moment was quickly relegated to a footnote in the grand narrative of Danish-Norwegian history, either to be completely erased or framed as

an already-mitigated ‘dark chapter’ to be locked squarely in a distant past irrelevant to the present. This marginalization reflects a broader structure of colonial amnesia in Scandinavia. As Blaagaard and Andreassen note:

Denmark was the seventh largest slave-trading nation during colonial times, [yet this history remains] invisible to most Danes (...) The Danish relationship to the former colonies and to the history of slavery and the slave trade is today characterised by both non-memory and a national romantic reproduction of the past (2012, pp.84-85).

In recent years, artists, activists, and some scholars have worked to confront this colonial amnesia. Initiatives include the 2017 “Unfinished Histories” symposium, the “Blind Spots: Images of the Danish West Indies” exhibition, the 2017 exhibit “What Lies Unspoken” at the National Gallery of Denmark, and the *I am Queen Mary* monument at the Copenhagen waterfront—Denmark’s first monument dedicated to a Black woman, honoring Queen Mary, who led an anticolonial revolt in St. Croix. These important efforts, however, tend to be relegated to the realm of “special interest” rather than being allowed to shake up the general structures of Scandinavian exceptionalism.

In relation to the specific history of *Fredensborg*, there have been several efforts to circulate the history of the ship and its excavation, including a permanent exhibition at the KUBEN Museum (established in 2018), two books (1978, 1996), a documentary (2020), a comic series (1997), and numerous media articles from the time of the excavation. These representations, however, tend to “anaesthetize” the slave ship’s history and the (absent) stories of its ‘human cargo’, ensuring that “the dead [are] formally prohibited from stirring up disorder in the present” (Mbembe 2002, p.22). The most extensive portrayal is at the KUBEN Museum in Arendal, where the ship was recovered. Part of UNESCO’s *Routes of Enslaved Peoples* project (1994), the exhibition includes the original excavated objects, the captain’s logbook, and footage of the excavation.



Image 1: Two stills from the entrance of the permanent exhibition “Slavegjort” (“Enslaved”/ “Slave made”) at the KUBEN museum in Arendal. To enter the exhibit, you walk through a tunnel made from a shipping container. The walls of the container are covered with screens showing the faces of mostly white children. These examples have two excerpts from the UN declaration of universal human rights written on them; article 15: “everyone has the right to a nationality” (left), article 3: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person” (right). Photographs courtesy of the author.

At KUBEN, the visitors enter the permanent exhibition through a tunnel made out of a shipping container covered in screens displaying images of mostly white children, accompanied by excerpts from the UN Declaration of human rights. The entrance to the KUBEN exhibition reflects the ideological conduits through which the history of Scandinavia’s colonial past is often conveyed. Key elements of this mediation include: 1) Denmark and Norway’s embrace of “post-racial” egalitarianism and the universality of human rights, 2) the reparative distance between the liberated present and the brief past of a momentary entanglement with the larger history of colonialism and slavery,

and 3) the framing of Denmark-Norway as having been the kindest and gentlest colonial power in Europe—described by Andersen as an exceptionally “benevolent type of colonizer” (2024, p.99). Together, these three pillars produce a sense of “innocent colonialism”—surely, as long as Denmark and Norway clings to the idea of “[their own] humane...colonialism, there is no recognition of any debt, and thus no reason to feel guilty, to apologize, or to ‘repair’” (Körber 2018, p.26).³

The affective invocation of racial innocence at the exhibition’s entrance is evident. The young white faces serve as a more recognizable conduit for sympathy than the 265 enslaved Africans who

were forcefully carried on the ship some 250 years ago. These white faces embody the heightened sensitivity and impressibility of the white body, displacing yet again those that the exhibition’s empathetic architecture allegedly should make us “feel for.” Coupled with human rights language, the exhibition frames slavery as an attack on the universal human, rather than a racialized crime against Black people, in which Denmark-Norway remains complicit. Thus, the exhibition uses slavery’s history to emphasize the progress of the (white) human figure, whose universality can only be realized through deracialization (Hartman and Wilderson 2003, p.184). The exhibition rehearses what Wekker calls “white innocence,” where whiteness is understood as the unmarked, the universal, the easiest conduit for empathy (2016, p.59). As Mendes argues, “Black pain [...] does not illicit the compassion, horror, or intervention of a dominant Nordic public (which quickly relieves itself of all accountability) but instead becomes utilitarian” (2024, p.1). The exhibition repurposes Black pain as a spectacle of absence, repurposed—through the language of the universal human—as a utilitarian vessel for Nordic progress narratives. Indeed, the representations of the slave ship in the mainstream sphere enact “the desire to look at the ravages and the brutality of the last few centuries, but to still find a way to feel good about ourselves” (Hartman and Wilderson 2023, p.184). The ghosts of the past—those enslaved people who were ‘produced’ through the chain and the whip as what Hortense Spillers calls “Black flesh” in the course of the Middle Passage—remain unnamed, unknowable, and ungrievable in the exhibit, replaced by the winsome faces of white children more adept to produce the designated identificatory emotional responses (of empathy but not guilt, pity but not rage) in the visitors (1987).⁴ Afro-Nordic thinkers, activists, and artists have recently criticized this racialized emotional architecture that recenters the plasticity and universality of the white body. For example, Camara Lundestad Joof’s play “De må føde oss eller pule oss for å elske oss [They must give birth to us or fuck us to love us]” addresses the indifference and disidentification that uphold white innocence and post-racial inclusion

in Norwegian society. Similarly, Black feminist writer Sumaya Jirde Ali articulates the way that white, seemingly “empathetic” bodies are recentered even in moments where their racism is called out: “speaking about racism out loud places me in a process of negotiation that demands me to do care work. This means that my job is in the first place to reassure and safeguard everyone else’s feelings” (2023, pp.14-15, author’s translation).

This article examines *Serpent Rain*, a 2016 Black feminist experimental film that intervenes in Denmark-Norway’s dominant post-racial affective architecture by refusing to recenter the white human—or any human form—as the point of identification. Inspired by the 1970s discovery of the Fredensborg shipwreck, the film was commissioned for an exhibition on “Shipping and the Shipped.” I argue that *Serpent Rain* disrupts the erasure vs. anaesthetized representation dichotomy that characterizes dominant portrayals of slavery and its afterlife in Scandinavia. Instead, the film embraces an experimental audiovisual form to question the affective registers of nature, history, and humanity themselves. Part of the ongoing collaboration between Denise Ferreira da Silva and Arjuna Neuman, *Serpent Rain* features long shots of forests, waters, and glaciers around Bergen, Norway, interspersed with computer-generated images of oil refineries, underwater life, and repurposed footage of anti-Black violence from London, Ferguson, and Baltimore. Towards the end, we see brief images of two drawings of *Fredensborg* and J.M.W. Turner’s *the Slave Ship* (1840). The film also uses blackouts and intertitles extensively, accompanied by voiceovers where da Silva weaves together a Black feminist critique of linear temporality with an affective and poetic performance that decentralizes the ‘human perspective’.

While the excavation of Fredensborg serves as the catalyst for *Serpent Rain*, the film cannot be said to be simply ‘about’ the slave ship or the captured Africans onboard in any straightforward way. As I trace in this article, the film contains neither plot nor human characters nor direct narration about the ship, instead reimagining Scandinavian oceanic nature as materially, symbolically, and economically tied to a(n ongoing) history so

often negated or used to reinforce Scandinavian exceptionalism. I understand the film as a cinematic experiment that produces a sense of haunting in the spectators to open up a space not only for grappling differently with the assumed racial innocence of Denmark-Norway’s past, present, and future, but also the very categories of past, present and future themselves. Drawing on Sharpe’s concept of “the wake” of slavery, I argue that the film’s temporal blurrings resist closure and linearity, rendering spectators themselves ghost-like. Rather than merely highlighting an overlooked part of Scandinavian history, *Serpent Rain* questions the very representability of slavery and its afterlife. Through black cuts, enigmatic oceanic landscapes, and sound, the film pushes viewers to confront the issues at the heart of the hegemonic historical record. This approach critiques the liberal tendency to ‘fill the gaps’ in history, which often depoliticizes the very history it seeks to restore by imposing closure where none exists. The film asks us, in the words of Black feminist thinker Christina Sharpe, riffing on Dionne Brand, to “sit in the room with history” (2016, p.12) and confront the disorder that “the dead” might stir if we refuse to lay them neatly to rest by pretending that there is no debt to be paid (Mbembe 2002, p.22). Aesthetically and politically, *Serpent Rain* participates in a broader effort to recognize the “afterlife of slavery” as an ongoing crisis that unsettles our categories of place, being, and time (Hartman 1997).

This article is structured in four sections, each exploring how *Serpent Rain* enacts a refusal of representation vs. erasure: “Shipping and the Shipped,” “That’s the Smell of Money,” “Looking Too Closely for Hydra, Everything Fell Overboard, Into the Cut,” and “The Cut, Like a Womb, Sings Together Life.” The first section examines the role of the oceanic in Scandinavian landscapes while introducing the theoretical framework of “the wake” of slavery to complicate those landscapes’ seeming serenity. The second section explores how the film links past and present, local and global, by reflecting on the circuits of capital. The third section addresses the film’s critique of the gaze as a dominant epistemological structure, while the fourth examines its use of soundscapes to evoke the

ocean’s womb-like resonances—simultaneously tied to a history of violence and offering possibilities for new ontological modes beyond the current conceptualization of the human.

“Shipping and the Shipped”: Norway’s Oceanic Mediations

Inspired by Norway’s grip on the sea, “Shipping and the Shipped” is for all those who long to be transported and all those who have long been transported.

– Harney 2016

In 2016, the Freethought Collective⁵ was invited to be one of the three conveners for the second edition of the Bergen Triennale. The Collective structured its commissioned exhibit around infrastructure and divided it into six subthemes: “Shipping and the Shipped,” “End of Oil,” “Spirit Labour,” “Infrastructure of Feeling,” “Archives of Substance,” and “The Museum of Burning Questions.” One key member, philosopher Stefano Harney, known for his work with Fred Moten in Black studies and critical university studies, commissioned a piece by filmmaker Arjuna Neuman and theorist/artist Denise Ferreira da Silva⁶ for “Shipping and the Shipped.” This collaboration resulted in *Serpent Rain*, which also led to a longer partnership between Neuman and da Silva, producing films like *4 Waters: Deep Implicancy* (2018), *Soot Breath / Corpus Infinitum* (2020), and *Ancestral Clouds, Ancestral Claims* (2024). These works continue their exploration of racialized (dis)embodiment and nonhuman intimacies across global landscapes of violence.

Serpent Rain uses the theme of “shipping and the shipped” to present an alternate history of infrastructure, embedding Norwegian waters within the histories of the transatlantic slave trade and oil extraction. The focus on “the shipped” shifts attention from the smooth logistics of the shipping industry to the commodities moved through it, including the historical and ongoing forced movement of people reduced to living,

fleshy commodities. The film thus denaturalizes the serenity of shipping landscapes—ports, fjords, and oceans—highlighting the submerged histories of “the shipped.” I argue that the film thus links these global systems of racialized violence, where bodies and commodities move across waters, to specific representational tropes in Norwegian national imaginaries.

Scandinavia is deeply tied to what Mroczewicz calls “eco-exceptionalism,” where the region’s pristine nature, clean energy, and dramatic landscapes are cornerstones in the region’s self-image (2020). Norwegian eco-exceptionalism has roots in the 1800s, when the nation-building project (following independence from Denmark) romanticized Norwegian coasts and waters. The iconic painting *Brudeferd i Hardanger* [Bridal Procession in Hardanger] epitomizes this serene vision, depicting a peaceful boat trip across a fjord, set

against timeless, stoic mountains and tranquil waters, symbolizing the idealized vision of the Norwegian “folk” and their way of life (Image 2).

More recently, nostalgia for the serenity of Norway’s oceans helped explain why 2.6 million Norwegians tuned into *Hurtigruten: Minute by Minute*, billed as the world’s longest consecutive reality show. The series captured a ferry’s 134-hour journey along Northern Norway’s coastline. Promoted by NRK as “the world’s most beautiful journey by sea,” the series represented the tranquil waters in real time, disturbed only by the ferry’s wake. In this slow-moving imagery, the waters are not sites of shipping or extraction, but pristine backdrops for the enduring spirit of the Norwegian people.

The persistence of the Scandinavian image of pristine waters is striking, especially considering that Norway is one of Europe’s largest oil exporters. The offshore oil industry and extraction



Image 2: “Brudeferd i Hardanger” [Bridal Procession in Hardanger] by Hans Gude and Adolph Tidemand (1848). The painting—which is the most canonical national romantic painting of its time—showcases the oceanic imaginary of Norwegian landscapes as the backdrop for authentic folk culture and tradition.

on Indigenous Sámi land are a central backbone in Norway’s economy and culture, yet they are either erased from the imagery of Norwegian oceans in a “nothing-to-see-here mode of visibility” (Leyda 2023, p.50), or reframed as leading the way toward green innovation. Many Norwegian politicians argue that phasing out the oil industry would be morally perilous, claiming that Norwegian oil is the “cleanest” in the world, unlike the “dirty oil” from elsewhere. As Vangen ironically puts it, “our oil is better, more beautiful, more sympathetic. More Norwegian” (2023).

Dominant representations of Norwegian nature are racialized precisely because the country’s “white ecology” seems not to be so (Mrozewicz 2020, p.94). The calmness and whiteness of the landscape are infused with the absent-presence of Norwegian racial innocence (Wekker 2016). In these hegemonic depictions, the troubling histories of oil extraction on Indigenous land, slave ships in Norwegian waters, and racialized immigrants left at sea are washed away by the tranquil waves. The landscape is portrayed as timeless, without history, and unchanging. The material and symbolic wakes of the ships seem to vanish into the still waters, leaving no lasting marks on the environment or the national attachment to its tranquility.

It is this oceanic imaginary of innocence that *Serpent Rain*’s Black feminist affective and ontological interrogation intervenes in, refusing to ignore the wakes of slavery, colonialism, and environmental destruction. It makes the ghosts of the “shipped” palpable within the landscape, challenging the seeming innocence at the heart of Scandinavia’s “white ecology” by examining the residues of extraction and exploitation. In her landmark book *In the Wake*, Christina Sharpe traces the marks that slavery has left on the political, symbolic, and environmental climate, rejecting the post-racial erasure of reiterative anti-Black violence. She writes:

Living in the wake means living the history and present of terror, from slavery to the present, as the ground of our everyday Black existence; living the historically and

geographically dis/continuous but always present and endlessly reinvigorated brutality in, and on, our bodies while even as that terror is visited on our bodies the realities of that terror are erased (2016, p. 15).

Contrary to dominant representations of the slave ship’s history—such as those at the KUBEN museum or in media archives that frame the ship’s excavation as a moment of closure—*Serpent Rain* refuses to erase the interconnected terrors that ripple through bodies, places, and structures. *Serpent Rain*’s cinematic enactment of “the wake” crosses several of the wake’s metonymic registers. A wake can refer to “the track left on the water’s surface by a ship; the disturbance caused by a body swimming or moved in water; the air currents behind a body in flight,” or the vigil held after someone has died (Sharpe 2016, p.3). The wake is thus oceanic in both a literal and metaphorical valence: while it names the materially continued disturbances of movement in water, the rippling effects of a ship—perhaps *Fredensborg*—crossing the oceans, it also functions as a metaphor for existing in the ongoing afterlife of slavery, an event which ripples through the present to infuse it with ongoing (social) death. As Christina Sharpe writes, “In the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present” (2016, p.9). In *Serpent Rain*, the past reappears in/as the present both materially, aesthetically, and politically to point us towards the anti-Black *climate* of the world—from premature death to the disproportionate effects of climate change on racialized communities. In mediating the wake, *Serpent Rain* manages to cross between the natural and historical; the film pushes us to recognize the violent material and cultural history of Scandinavian waters by throwing us into an affective experiment where the ghosts of “the shipped” disrupt the serene surface of our often-cherished fjords and oceans just as much as they disturb the blank surface of our racially innocent self-image.

The first shot of the film—much like the celebrated slow TV show “Hurtigruten: minute by minute”—presents us with a ship moving at snail like speed (Image 3). The opening long shot is also

a long take—it lingers on screen for much longer than expected, drawing the spectator’s attention to details of a shot which at first glance seems to be a still image.

The shot depicts a hybrid landscape at sunset: a sky in shades of pink and blue fills the top two-thirds of the frame, while the middle is dominated by a snow-covered Norwegian mountain chain. While these elements could be lifted from a Norwegian national romantic painting, the foreground disrupts this serene image with the presence of an oil refinery at Mongstad, revealing the absent presence of oil in imaginaries of Norwegian coastal nature. At the center of the shot, two tall towers emit flames, marking the refinery’s role in climate gas emissions. At first, the only movement is the burning flames; after looking at the shot for a while, however, the spectators begin to sense something in the background of the shot moving; a long red shipping vessel, initially inseparable from the large red oil containers on shore, creeps slowly across the screen. The vessel’s sluggish pace mirrors that of the shot itself, lingering uncomfortably longer than expected. Unlike *Hurtigruten’s* seamless blending into the tranquil Norwegian fjords,

this ship’s slowness disrupts the landscape both visually as well as literally through the ongoing destruction of marine life and fossil fuel emission. The ship creates a “wake” that cracks open the innocence of Norwegian waters, allowing the ripples of oil extraction and industrial capital to resonate in the viewer as their eyes search for meaning on the alarmingly, rather than soothingly, still screen. As the spectator watches, they may wonder: why does a film “about” slavery begin with a slow-moving oil ship? As they search for meaning in the slow-moving shot, viewers might imagine this vessel as haunted by another ship that crossed these same waters—one that didn’t carry oil, but human cargo.

“That’s the Smell of Money”: Capital and the Absent-Presence of “The Shipped”

After what feels like an uncomfortable, yet undecidable, stretch of time spent on the opening shot of mountains, the oil refinery, and the shipping vessel,



Image 3: A still from the opening shot of *Serpent Rain*. The frame shows a long shot of the Mongstad oil refinery in Norway, cradled by mountains and a sunset sky in the background. Image courtesy of Bergen Kunsthall.



Image 4: *the first of many intertitles in the movie, which reads “an acrid smell bites at the back of your throat.” Image courtesy of Bergen Kunsthall.*

the film cuts to a black screen with the words: “*An acrid smell bites at the back of your throat*” (Image 4). The abrupt shift from the lingering shot to the minimalist screen makes the words land like a cut. Perhaps one starts imagining the harsh smell of oil being refined, perhaps the sentence brings back other embodied memories of acrid tastes.

After the intertitle, the film cuts to pixelated footage of human figures moving chaotically between burning buildings, seemingly captured by an infrared camera. Though perhaps not immediately recognizable as such, the shots are appropriated footage from riots in London, Baltimore, and Ferguson following the anti-Black police murders of Mark Duggan, Michael Brown, and Freddie Gray. The grainy images, reminiscent of low-quality surveillance footage, show lagging movements and indistinct faces. Following this, another intertitle reads: “The refinery’s press officer jokes in a thick Norwegian accent... That’s the smell of money.” The film then cuts to a shot that is so quick that its significance only hits us after the fact; it is of a white police officer beating a Black man lying down the street. The rapidity of the shot emphasizes the gratuitousness of the violence without indulging in

the fetishization of Black suffering seen in many media representations. These moments—some of the only when the film shifts from non-representational to representational aesthetics—explicitly comment on the contemporary global circuits of consumption of this type of footage, whereby the selective (non)recognition Black humanity is tied to voyeuristic modes of witnessing that doubly occlude the person. The grainy, panoptic quality of the images also foregrounds the violence of the camera itself. The rapidity of this footage undercuts the dominant modes of representation that haunt Black suffering—even in their representation, their politics of visibility are troubled through drawing attention to everything that remains unspoken and unseen. This incorporation of riot footage also explicitly ties the Scandinavian landscape to global structures of anti-Blackness, refusing to treat racism as an issue confined to other regions. Four years after the film, the global resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, sparked by the murder of George Floyd, ignited large protests in Scandinavia as well.⁷

It is against this larger affective backdrop that we are to understand the thoroughly

disorienting first moments of the film—the intertitle, the appropriated footage, and the slow-moving video of an oil refinery. In the complete absence of didactic representation and narration, the spectator must actively piece together meaning from these fragmented elements. Seemingly disparate phenomena are juxtaposed: the often-erased infrastructure of oil extraction against tranquil Norwegian mountains, riots in the UK and US against racialized police brutality, the acrid taste of oil, and a PR officer’s comment about the “smell of money.” As these images linger, the film introduces another intertitle: “What he actually meant was... that’s the smell of the forced decomposition of organic matter.” This shifts the focus to the relationship between money—as a seemingly abstract medium of exchange—and the smell of decaying organic matter. The decomposition of organic matter refers simultaneously to the breaking down of oil—the most immediate referent for the officer’s comments—but also the forced decomposition of Black people that attempts to turn them into disposable and commodified flesh, symbolically and literally. The shot of a police officer beating a Black man becomes the most concrete and visceral reference to this forced decomposition, but the intertitle also evokes the decomposition of the bodies of enslaved people at the bottom of the ocean and the decomposition of the *Fredensborg* wreck. The invocation of the forced decomposition of organic matter becomes the first concrete hinge within the film that brings the two ships—the oil vessel and the slave ship *Fredensborg*—and their wakes together, ever so opaquely.

Towards the end of *Serpent Rain*, an intertitle deepens our understanding of the connections being hinted at in these first moments of the film. The intertitle reads “as money, slave-labor lives in/ as capital.” The smell of money is directly linked to slave-labor; the intertitle invokes the “smell” of slavery for the spectator, and with it, the smell of the exploitation and forced fungibility of the “Black flesh” of enslaved people, robbed of the self-possession of their bodies (Spillers 1987). *Serpent Rain* articulates slavery as the negated ground of capital, marking its absence-presence through its aesthetic, natural, and sonic landscape. The wake

of colonialism and slavery remains an abyss that cannot be fully captured in the image or contained as a singular event to be represented.

The film understands slavery and racial capitalism as embedded in the complex climate of the world, and of Scandinavia, in several ways: it lives in resource extraction, in the infrastructure and finance of shipping and profits, and in the political climate that devalues certain lives as ungrievable. The climate is, as the environmental humanities emphasizes, profoundly hard to fully visualize without falling back on apolitical imagery of tranquil nature; the *climate* in all the senses of the word marks the constitutive background of being and meaning, but is rarely centered in itself. *Serpent Rain* shines a “blacklight” on the climate itself to highlight “what is there as a filler, a detail, as means, or a raw material” (da Silva quoted in Mendes 2018). This method of blacklight highlights the way that “Black being is perpetually yet unnoticeably situated” as the constitutive outside of Nordic landscapes of belonging (Konaté 2020a).

“Looking Too Closely for Hydra, Everything Fell Overboard, Into the Cut”

When Hercules lopped off one of the hydra’s heads, two new ones grew in its place.

– Linebaugh and Rediker 2002, pp.3-4

Visuality is not simply looking. It is a regime of seeing and being, and any so-called neutral position is a position of power that refuses to recognize itself as such.

– Sharpe 2023, p.123

Slavery, that which the spectators are expecting to ‘see’ on screen, enters the picture precisely through the *absence* of a picture—it haunts the blackout intertitles, the smells and tastes being invoked, and the hints at the accumulation of wealth through Norwegian waters. In fact, even though

Fredensborg was the inspiration for the film, the ship is not explicitly introduced until the very end of the film in a quick glimpse of a drawing at the moment of wreckage (Image 5). Through its (non) visual aesthetic language, *Serpent Rain* marks that “something has become too strong in the image,” as the reiterative violence of racist climates across time will always escape the frame of the shot (Deleuze 2013, p.18).⁸

Contrary to mainstream representations of the ship, *Serpent Rain* does not rely on transmitting facts or truths to emphasize the violence that the enslaved Africans onboard endured or the ‘resistance’ they might have shown⁹; nowhere in the film is it mentioned, for example, that several of the captured Africans of the Akwamu tribe were planning a revolt and takeover of the ship (Svalesen 2000, p.144). An elucidation of these important facts seems not to be within the purview of *Serpent Rain’s* aesthetic language, which instead chooses to enact a refusal of the term ‘historical fact’ itself.¹⁰

Throughout the film, the spectator’s gaze is continually unmoored, shifting between long takes of landscapes, fleeting glimpses of appropriated

footage, sound and water waves, and lingering black cuts. The rejection of documentary style re-presentation of the past also entails an almost complete rejection of sustained images of recognizably human figures. The only human forms are seen in the appropriated footage of anti-Black police violence, riots, and a recurring motif of hands shuffling tarot cards. As such, the film resists the urge to produce a humanizing counter-archive of any iteration of “the shipped” to counteract their continuous erasure, precisely because the orthography of the human relied on Black people as its constitutive outside, only ever to be contingently and strategically assimilated through selective re-humanization (see Jackson 2020). The film enacts a fundamental refusal of representation as reparation, without then accepting erasure and absence as sufficient registers for dealing with the ghosts of those people so often left behind in the past. The film rejects the terms of the binary of erasure vs representation—terms that dominate so many attempts at doing justice to ‘marginalized history’—all together, enacting another type of molecular and elemental (non)representation beyond and beneath the human.



Image 5: A brief shot of a drawing of *Fredensborg* at the moment of wreckage shown towards the end of *Serpent Rain*. Drawing created by Ants Lepson, and Image courtesy of Bergen Kunsthall.

The film was, as the story goes, catalyzed by Neuman looking at the image of *Fredensborg* and asking da Silva an enigmatic question; “how do we get to the posthuman without technology?” The posthuman they want to invoke in the film is not the hybrid, futural cyborg—half human, half machine—which often dominates the so-called ‘ontological turn.’ The posthuman that *Serpent Rain* chases is neither utopian nor post-racial—instead, it can be sensed in turning to the fragmented ontology of those “shipped” who were never fully accepted into the dominant genre of the human. The line between the posthuman and the dehumanized blurs, as does the temporal divide between the ‘post’ in posthuman and the ‘pre’ of history. In asking how to reach the posthuman without technology, Neuman and da Silva seem to narrow technology’s scope to machines, digital media, automation, and the like. Of course, the film’s notion of getting to the posthuman *without* technology is an illusion, albeit a productive one; as media studies has been investigating for a while, technology represents an inescapable facet of the production of subjectivity. The film is itself full of technologies, from the camera and post-production editing, the use of CGI, to the ways race functions as an epistemological and ontological technology (see Chun 2009 and Benjamin 2019).

In *Serpent Rain*, the ocean is the dominant medium for exploring the ontologically complex posthuman, subverting the myth of Scandinavian waters as tranquil and innocent. The ocean has long been seen as “the place where history ends and the wild begins: the abyss, unrecorded, unknown, unmapped” (Peters 2015, p.53). In contrast, the film reimagines the ocean as a deeply historical space, even as it uses the oceanic to upset the vey category of ‘the historical.’ Rather than being unrecorded and unrecordable, the ocean bears the traces of racial capitalism’s violences, disrupting positivist notions of recording, mapping, and knowing. As Tinsley writes, the ocean is an “ever-present, ever-reformulating record of the unimaginable” (2008, p.194). This turn to the opaque, oceanic archive is also material in a rather literal way—not only does it recenter the racialized infrastructure of oil extraction, but the film

also invokes those captured “Africans [who were] thrown, jumped, dumped overboard in Middle Passage” as still existing “in hydrogen, in oxygen; in carbon, in phosphorous, and iron; in sodium and chlorine” in the ocean itself (Sharpe 2016, p.21). The turn to the ocean also invokes the crosscurrents between the history of colonialism and slavery and the contemporary oceanic imaginaries of the so-called refugee crisis. It might bring to mind the imagery of rescue boats ‘saving’ refugees crossing the waters to get to the European shore; imagery that often frames the rescue boats as heroic all the while covering up the fact that governments use them as alibis for limiting the safe ways to traverse the oceans, framing the refugee crisis as a “state of exception” rather than a produced zone of inhumanism where people are often left to die. The ocean is also, then, the “graveyard for [many] hapless immigrants” that remain every so opaquely and materially in the ocean (Peters 2015, p.53).

Serpent Rain interrogates the fragmented ontology of those for whom the ocean has been a tomb, focusing on the molecular traces left behind. Through underwater close-ups, the film submerges the viewer in the medium of water, revealing how molecules remain in the seemingly still ocean, stirring disorder. By imagining the material remnants of slavery and capital at the bottom of the ocean as a starting point for thinking about the posthuman and the entangled ontology of matter, *Serpent Rain* points us towards a mode of breaking down the human/nonhuman and natural/cultural binaries without letting our attention to such ontological entanglements become deracialized or ahistorical. The film does not entertain a Deleuzian turn away from the ontology of the molar towards the transgressive capacities of “becoming-molecular”, as an easy line of flight away from capital’s centrifugal force of coherence (as some (post-) Deleuzian theorizations in the academy might be accused of doing). Neither is the film turning to the elemental constitution of matter to make a grand gesture of universal (in)humanism—something like that we are all cut from the same cloth, that we are all in the same boat. Instead, the film seems to be saying that if we want to use the model of

the fragmented body as a way to orient ourselves towards the potentialities of the post-human, then we cannot forget that the violent production of Black flesh as raw material during chattel slavery took place precisely through the fragmentation of the idea and materiality of a self-possessed body. *Serpent Rain* critiques the colorblindness in many new materialist celebrations of ontological entanglement, reminding us that racialization is a key force in de-, post-, and re-humanization (see Jackson 2020; Weheliye 2014).

The unimaginable, material record of the waters is affectively enacted in the film, not only through the sustained long takes of watery imagery but also through the recurring black cuts. The intertitle that gave the name to this section of the article describes the cut as something one falls into when trying to look too closely: “looking too closely for hydra, everything fell overboard, into the cut.” The attempt to master the gaze when searching for Hydra, the mythical serpentine water monster who grows more heads as they are cut off (a fitting metaphor for the unseen monstrosity and complexity of racial capitalism), plunges you into the black waters of the cut. The phrase “falling overboard” also evokes the cinematic cut as the opaque waters traversed by slave ships and shipping vessels.

The use of intertitles is reminiscent of films from the silent film era, but their writing tends to be confusing, rather than explanatory. The black cuts draw the viewer into discomfort by rejecting the stability of visual representation, instead of stitching the spectator into the diegesis as is customary in classical cinema. These cuts amplify the viewer’s bewilderment: Where are these words coming from? How do they connect to the surrounding shots? What lies beyond or behind the blackness? The film’s (non)representation of slavery emphasizes absence, confusion, and withholding, challenging the dominance of the gaze as a carrier of certainty. The cuts bring our attention to that which has been absented or relegated to the margins within history, casting a blacklight on the human’s constitutive outside without reifying its return to presence and visibility. The film ‘speaks’ from inside the cut, without

affording coherence to the speech and sounds that emerge.

The Cut, like a Womb, Sings Together Life”: En-sounding the Oceanic Archive

Black (...) wombs are thus not only factories of abjection but (...) death machines: reproducing those oriented toward social death and a negligible physical death.

– Mendes 2020, p.62

These peri-acoustic express the feelings of an embodied singularity. Here, inside the cut, lies the possibility of bodies turning elemental.

–Serpent Rain, intertitle

In *Serpent Rain*, the cinematic cut is also directly associated with the imagery of the ocean as a womb; one set of intertitles reads “the cut, like a womb, sings together life.” This womb functions on several metonymic registers; it can be understood as referencing the “womb” of the slave ship— “this boat is a womb, a womb abyss... This boat: pregnant with as many dead as living under sentence of death” (Glissant 1997, p.6). To me, it also references “the shipped” as the negated womb of the modern world and the figure of the human; as Wilderson and Hartman write, Black people give the world and the nation “its coherence because we’re its *underbelly*” (2003, p.187, emphasis added). The cut as womb also contains within itself, however, the possibility of giving birth to an ontology that remakes the human from the traces of the dead that remain in the ocean, without forgetting the violence that produced those fragments by turning absence into coherent presence. Indeed, the film never quite resolves how we are to embrace that “inside the cut, lies the possibility of bodies turning elemental.” But then again, resolution is not in its aesthetic purview, rather, the film aims to trace entangled violences and potentials while staying with the trouble. As I have

emphasized, the film centrally suggests that these ontological ripples in the ocean—the ripples of bodies turning elemental—have to be approached through senses beyond the visual. The filmmakers actively encourage synesthesia, the melding together of several senses in a complex conglomerate; the film urges us to taste acrid smells, for example, as the film’s first intertitle states, or—as I expand in this section—to *listen* beyond or beneath the image. The ontological disorientation of synesthesia comes to us aesthetically through the film’s use of the sonic and the haptic which envelop the spectator within a dark, womb-like space where ripples of history resonate above and below the threshold of hearing. As media theorist Peters writes, “underwater, light is scattered and absorbed but sound speeds at a quicksilver pace; optics are discouraged, and acoustics encouraged. ...The ocean is a murky place, and light effectively vanishes once you reach a certain depth” (2015, p.61). Perhaps the aptitude for sound to travel further than light in water is one of the reasons that the intertitle reads “the cut, like a womb, *sings* together life.” The ‘sings’ in this sentence points us directly towards the importance of the sonic for the reformulation of life beyond the current regimes of visual and ontological domination.

Neuman himself turns to the potentials of the sonic realm in his later writing. Against the dominance of the visual and its accompanying “fad of representation-based neoliberal reparations,” he advocates for a turn towards the acoustic;

this move cannot only be a ‘redistribution of the sensible,’ something like substituting the ears for the eyes (...). No single sense exists uncontaminated by cultures of domination, yet shifting emphasis to hearing and even touch is certainly a start, especially since these senses are activated inside the womb—meaning they come to the fetus/mother when the fetus/mother is yet to be separated and sovereign...While colonial determinations have been encoded into all our senses, monstrous, prenatal, multiple existence and its potential synesthesia might help us begin to undo some of the collateral damage that

noble predatory eyesight has unleashed on the world (2018, p. 98).

In this excerpt, the womb reappears as a literalized metaphor for the ontological realm that precedes and exceeds the construction of the singular, coherent human—the one who recognizes itself in the mirror at the expense of those not deemed ‘human enough’ for self-possession. Hearing inside the womb unfolds within a liquid abyss, where, like the oceanic, acoustics travel where light cannot. *Serpent Rain* refers to this type of sound as “peri-acoustic”: “In this more-than-individual state, we hear through multiplicity and mutuality, we hear through four points in space, we hear both internally and externally, and we hear our speech as both our own and not our own (alien)” (Neuman quoted in Mendes 2018).¹¹

The use of peri-acoustics in *Serpent Rain* invites a new type of haptic listening from the spectators—perhaps “spectator” is even the wrong word to describe the sonic enveloping the film enacts. Listening here is “an attunement to sonic frequencies of affect and impact. It is an ensemble of seeing, feeling, being affected, contacted, and moved beyond the distance of sight and observer” (Camp 2017, p.42). The sonic regime of *Serpent Rain* pulls the audience into the oceanic depths of the opaque archive of racial capitalism, without reproducing the fantasy of ‘giving voice’ to the remnants of the shipped, rippling symbolically and materially through the wake. In contrast to some thinkers who see the sonic as untainted by colonial regimes of knowledge, *Serpent Rain* avoids representing the sonic multiplicity of the womb as a simple line of flight away from the violent (visual) regimes of the present-past, or as a leap towards a futural ‘tabula rasa.’ The peri-acoustics of the womb are intertwined with the abyss of the non- or sub-human; the womb is not a neutral space for an ahistorical fetus, but is embedded within a history of filiation and ontological production that is deeply racialized and gendered (see Hortense Spillers’ “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe” (1987) and Jan-Therese Mendes’ “Black Death, Mourning and The Terror of Black Reproduction: Aborting the



Image 6: A still from *Serpent Rain* showing a frozen waterfall in the vicinity of Bergen. The shot is taken from the ground, looking upwards onto the icicles. Image courtesy of Bergen Kunsthall.

Black Muslim Self, Becoming the Assimilated Subject” (2020)).

While cinema is an audiovisual medium, audio has long been relegated to a secondary role compared to the visual—indeed, when reading a lot of classical film theory, one might get the impression that all cinema is silent cinema.¹² Against this visual dominance, the soundscape in *Serpent Rain* often takes center stage, resonating across the natural and cultural. It weaves together the sounds of the ‘natural environment,’ electronic music, Goldie’s atmospheric “Timeless,” and the rhythmic shuffle of cards. The soundscape becomes, in a sense, the “main image,” alive with vibrations and flows that escape the frame. As Deleuze notes, the “sound image imposes a dissociation between it and the visual image, a disjunction which must not be surmounted: an irrational cut between the two” (2013, p.279).

In one key long take in *Serpent Rain*, the sonic realm takes precedence over the visuals. The shot shows a frozen, unmoving waterfall (Image 6). The stillness lingers for an unnerving duration, making us lose our sense of time and duration.

Accompanying this still image is a loud soundtrack of ice melting and droplets falling on a microphone. The soundscape seems too abrupt, too loud, in relation to the complete stillness of the image, imbuing it with an intense sensation of time passing too quickly. The sonic element evokes the direct experience of ice melting, even as the process itself remains largely invisible to the human eye. It is the soundscape that transforms this frozen image of Norway’s white ecology—often depicted through tranquil imagery of snow and ice—into something that feels deeply significant, disorienting, and troubling. The sound of droplets falling pulls the spectator into the heart of time itself, on a scale we rarely have access to, emphasizing the uncontrollable effects of climate change rippling through the wakes of slavery and colonialism. Indeed, the film’s focus on peri-acoustics and the sonic as its own realm of perception reorients us toward the disjunctive intensity of history’s temporality—for while an image can remain as a still snapshot, sound always exists in/as time.

Coda: “How Do You Mourn Something that is Ongoing?”

Time’s ethical force is perhaps the most important obstacle to a political program that deals with the challenges of the global present, in particular the pervasiveness of racial violence and of the colonial juridical mechanisms that facilitate extraction.

—Ferreira da Silva, quoted in Mendes 2018

How do you write a conclusion to accompany a film with an ontological project that refuses closure, that resists the gesture of laying to rest and “moving on”? How can one hold together the violence and potential of “bodies turning elemental” in the face of ever-expanding neoliberal regimes of visibility and containment? What can cinema do to leave history open, unresolved, in ways that dominant museal and archival remediations of the slave ship cannot? I hesitate to conclude an article on *Serpent Rain* with anything but more questions. And what better question to turn to than the one da Silva posed in response to Neuman’s catalyzing query, “How do we get to the posthuman without technology?” She replied: “Perhaps we can make a film without time.”

Serpent Rain’s disruptions of ontological and political closures are multiple—from its sonic unsettling of gaze to the destabilizing of the subject-object relation and the assumed ahistoricism and innocence of the natural landscape of Denmark-Norway—but perhaps nowhere is the film’s disorienting force more palpable than in its (dis)embodiment of time and linear history themselves. The film plays with time by throwing the spectator into a web of temporal scales. While it runs for just 30 minutes, its experience of time feels both to stretch far beyond that half hour and, paradoxically, to have no duration at all.

Let us return, then, in a non-linear fashion, to the opening shot of the film—the slow-moving shipping vessel, the still mountains, the burning flames of the fossil industry—to examine how the film “(un)does time” itself, resisting the teleology of endings and progressions. The tension

between the temporalities in the film’s opening shot ties together timescales that are often thought of as separate: the scale of the climate, of human history, and of industrial capital. As Chakrabarty argues:

anthropogenic global warming brings into view the collision...of three histories that, from the point of view of human history, are normally assumed to be working at such different and distinct paces that they are treated as processes separate from one another for all practical purposes: the history of the earth system, the history of life including that of human evolution on the planet, and the more recent history of industrial civilization (for many, capitalism) (2014, p.1).

If the sky and snow-covered mountains in the opening shot of the film encapsulate the history of the earth system, the industrial landscape at the front simultaneously marks the longer history of human evolution and the specific subsection of the history of modernity and coloniality driven by capital accumulation and industrialization. The collision of these temporalities within this first shot is indicative of the continuous collision of temporalities which (un)marks the film as a whole. *Serpent Rain* suggests that the total climate of racial capitalism, and the ongoing afterlife of slavery, continues to crash against the shores of the present, operating on a temporal scale that defies the chrononormative regimes of measuring and structuring time. The film’s temporal un-doings echo what Deleuze calls the “time-image,” where distinct durations coexist, and “a single event can belong to several levels [as the] sheets of the past exist in non-chronological order” (Deleuze, 2013, p.xii).

Another shot particularly adept at capturing the undoing of singular temporality in *Serpent Rain* shows a forest slowly swaying in the wind (Image 7). The shot is taken from the perspective of the soil—unlike the disorienting bird’s-eye view of the film’s opening, this angle feels unnervingly close to the ground, too near to the camera to be comfortable. The separation between seer and

seen begins to falter, as the grasses almost seem to brush against the spectator’s face.

The temporality of this perspective feels almost geological. Sensing from the ground shifts the spectator away from a linear sense of time and into the cluster of separate timescales Chakrabarty describes. In one of her voiceovers, da Silva asserts, “if we take fossilism as a model for our categories, a completely different notion of time could become available.” An intertitle follows: “The fossil is a reminder that what has happened has not gone away... The product of slave labor remains in our lives.” The temporality of the fossil is marked precisely by *remaining* beyond a singular historical event, beyond a singular frame. The fossil, often seen as the symbol of something hardened and unmalleable, becomes plastic and changing within the temporal purview of the film.

Taking its mark from the timescale of the fossil, the film turns toward the “long residence time” of Black life—“residence time tells us that traces of the flesh of the dead slaves remain here/now as part of the composition that is the ocean” (da Silva, quoted in Mendes, 2018). The invocation

of residence time—a scientific term that names the average time that a substance or a particle *remains* in a given location or condition—brings us back to the temporality of the oceanic archive and its ripples in the present. The water and the oceanic remnants of the dead operate on an elemental, earth-scale temporality: “human blood is salty, and sodium has a residence time of 260 million years” (Sharpe, 2016, p.21). Recalling the film’s earlier reference to the forced decomposition of organic matter, the focus on the deep tempos of trace molecules in the water offers a new ontological and temporal framework for considering the material re-compositions of those who were shipped and forcefully decomposed.

If *Serpent Rain* is “timeless,” it may be because the dominant categories of time unravel under the climatic pressures of racialized violence. Its multifaceted temporalities do not suggest a return to a timeless ahistoricism—like the frozen Norwegian landscape’s dominant innocence—nor a linear narration of a “dark chapter” in the nation’s history, as in typical representations of the slave ship. Instead, it turns towards the scale



Image 7: Still of a Norwegian forest that enters the film approximately halfway through *Serpent Rain*. The perspective of the camera is from the soil, invoking a telluric sensation for the spectators. The perspective makes the size of the straws compete with the height of the trees.

of residence time, of remnants and ghosts that persist beyond historical or ontological containment—in museums, archives, or at the bottom of the ocean. Through shots, silences, and sound, the film enacts a temporality where, as Toni Morrison puts it, “everything is now. It is all now” (quoted in Sharpe 2016, p.21). If cinema is, as Jacques Derrida claims, the art of letting ghosts return, how can we remain with *Serpent Rain*’s invocation to listen for the ghosts of “the shipped” on and beyond the screen, without demanding they be easily recognizable, like the white faces at the entrance of the *Fredensborg* exhibition? A strength of *Serpent Rain*’s political approach is its rejection of didactics in favor of an affective, aesthetic experiment that troubles the spectator. But the question remains: how can we spread *Serpent Rain*’s lesson of unlearning beyond the confines of the museum and cinema? How do we extend its affective and ontological ripples beyond the dark movie theater? How might we make Scandinavia sit “in the room with [its] history,” rather than turning the room into

an anesthetized museum of an already overcome past (Sharpe, 2016, p.12)? If ‘applying’ *Serpent Rain*’s approach to something like the KUBEN exhibition on *Fredensborg* seems antithetical, how might we reimagine public memory spaces to foster broader engagement rather than closure? In line with the film’s temporal wedge, I will let these questions remain open.

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Notes

- ¹ Denmark-Norway was directly involved in the forced displacement of around 110 000 enslaved Africans during the triangular trade of transatlantic chattel slavery.
- ² The prideful narration of this slave ship as one of the, if not *the*, ‘best preserved’ slave ships in the world warrants deeper interrogation. For whom and on whose premises is the slave ship preserved?

This is a particularly pressing question, given not only that Norway still owns all of the goods recovered from the slave ship, including ivory elephant fangs and mahogany, but also that the very fascination with the discovery and preservation of the ship continually recenters the white divers and historians while marginalizing the enslaved people who were captured and transported on the ship in the Middle passage.

- ³ Indeed, neither Denmark nor Norway have paid any reparations to the descendants of those shipped and colonized on whose backs so much of their economic wealth was built, despite a rather large public demand for apologies and reparations in 2017 (the 100 year anniversary of Denmark selling the virgin Islands to the U.S).
- ⁴ Hartman and Wilderson encapsulate the pervasiveness and violence of this; “It’s as though in order to come to any recognition of common humanity, the other must be assimilated, meaning in this case, utterly displaced and effaced: Only if I can see myself in that position can I understand the crisis of that position” (2003, 189).
- ⁵ The Freethought Collective is comprised of Irit Rogoff, Stefano Harney, Adrian Heathfield, Massimiliano Mollona, Louis Moreno and Nora Sternfeld. The collective “aims to blur the boundaries between thought, creativity, and critique and meld them into a trans-language practice, working with and as artists and knowledge producers in a new way. Making radical combinations of critical work and practice in the arts freethought strives to place these new models in unexpected contexts” (freethought collective).
- ⁶ Denise Ferreira da Silva is an artist-scholar, philosopher, and professor who works at the University of British Columbia. Her work explores post-enlightenment thought from anticolonial and Black feminist perspectives, with a specific focus on the racialized construction of the human, and her books include *Unpayable Debt* (2022) and *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (2007).
- ⁷ As Konaté writes, there is a new wave of activists and artists explicitly grappling with the complex relations between police brutality and anti-Blackness in the US and the racial politics of innocence that have dominated Scandinavia; “This is one of the first times in Nordic history that so many Black people have come together collectively. Not just to extend solidarity abroad; but also us coming together on a larger scale to challenge anti-Blackness within our own region of Europe” (2020b, p.1).
- ⁸ In describing the “time-image,” Gilles Deleuze writes that “something has become too strong in the image” (18). Contrary to Deleuze’s historical mapping, however, which relies heavily on world war two as the breaking point for the image, *Serpent Rain* forces the spectators to relate this “too strongness” back to slavery and the birth of racial capitalism and forward to its present and future afterlife. As such, the film performs Black studies critiques of the exceptionalization of the camp as “the first” moment of utter dehumanization (see Weheliye 2014; Fanon 2008 [1952]; Mbembe 2002).
- ⁹ I enclose ‘resistance’ in quotation marks to allude to the complex and ongoing discussion regarding the term in Black feminist theory.
- ¹⁰ The sustained structure of the white gaze relies on enacting a sense of bodily and sensory mastery through asserting a distance between the subject of the gaze and the object of the look. Frantz Fanon describes the position of Blackness as frozen in the position of “looked-at-ness” by the white child. “Not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. (...) The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man” (p.110). Several Black feminist thinkers argue that this structure is so deeply entrenched in visibility itself that even attempts at “doing justice” to Black people often rely on the very same parameters of representation.
- ¹¹ *Serpent Rain*’s use of peri-acoustics has inspired an artwork by the artist Anna Frei titled “Consent not to be a Single Being- a Set for Peri-Acoustic Attunement.”
- ¹² Against this backdrop, there have been sustained efforts towards solidifying “sound studies” as a field within film studies by scholars such as Kaja Silverman, Britta Sjögren, and Jean Ma.

Fremskrivning af færøsk aborthistorie: en materiel-retorisk arkivanalyse af retorisk tilvækst

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Abstract

Extrapolating the Faroese history of abortion: a material-rhetorical archival analysis of rhetorical accretion

The history of abortion in the Faroe Islands is an under researched aspect of both local and Nordic gender history, and analyses of historical cases of abortion are still as absent as the legal right to elective abortion in the Faroe Islands. This is not due to a lack of historical records, but to their entanglements with the gendered, class-based and national power relationships defined by the Danish kingdom's administration of the subject.

This article focuses on the trial of Anna Maria Jacobsdatter who in 1843 was accused and acquitted for abortion in both the Faroese Court and the Danish Supreme Court. We analyze newly localized archival records, apply the concept of rhetorical accretion (Collins, 1999; Chaput & Mitchell, 2000; Clary-Lemon, 2014), and expand its focus to include the accumulation of meaning added by administrative and archival practices. By asking how the formation and becoming of historical sources is an access point for knowledge about Faroese abortion history, we contribute to the methodology of rhetorical-material archival studies, and show how they can emphasize national-linguistic power relations and their consequences for both history and current studies of it.

KEYWORDS: abortion, archival research, rhetorical accretion, Faroe Islands, geopolitics, biopolitics

*“Min Datter har ikke Samvittigheden til lønli-
gen at bære dette”*

Den 15. august 1843 skriver Jacob Pedersen af Viðareiði et brev til landfogeden i Færøerne, Jacob Andreas Lunddahl, med det formål at rense sin datter, Anna Maria Jacobsdatter, for rygter om “Utroskab og Ukyskhed”. Anna Maria havde i perioden 1839 til 1842 tjent i huset hos skolelærer Simon Stephensen i Kunoy, og Jacob Pedersen beskriver årsagen til de rygter, der går:

*Efter at han [Simon Stephensen] havde gi-
vet hende Ægteskabsløvte og begaaet den
ukydske Gjerning at forkrænke min Datter,
begyndte han med at aftappe hendes Blod
deels af Arme og deels af Been; men hun
som en uerfaren Pige gav ikke synderlig be-
tænkning derom, førend hun i Eftertiden lær-
te at kjende Følgerne deraf. Det Foster som
saaledes blev behandlet, modtog hans egne
Hænder, og af dem blev leværet han til Søen,
hvor det blev begravet. (Sorenkrivneren: Do-
kumenter til Justitsprotokollen, 1843-1844,
Justitsag nr.7/1843)*

I sin vidneforklaring i den retssag, som fulgte efter landfoged Lunddahls behandling af sagen, forklarer Jacobsdatter, at Stephensen havde opsøgt hende fra begyndelsen af hendes ansættelse. Altså mens hans kone stadig levede, men at det var først efter, at han var blevet enkemand, at hun havde indledt et forhold – og efter at han havde lovet hende ægteskab. Historier som disse er almindelige, og ligeså er det udfald, at Simon aldrig indfriele dette løfte. Jacobsdatter beskriver under retssagen to aborter, som skolelærer Stephensen fremprovokerer. Dette er i en periode, hvor livet i Færøerne er præget af geografisk isolation, og hvor ‘almindelige menneskers’ viden og adgang til abort har været defineret af lokale traditioner og hjælp fra mennesker, der risikerede alvorlige straffe.

Flere af disse aspekter gør sig også gældende i 2020’ernes Færøerne. Selvom abort er lovlig i tilfælde af helbreds- eller livsfare for den gravide eller fosteret, graviditet grundet voldtægt, genetiske

sygdomme hos fosteret eller den gravides manglende evne til forældreskab, så anerkender den færøske lovgivning i dag stadig ikke en ulyst til at blive forælder (T. Nolsøe, 2023a). Gennem råd og vejledning fra andre, der måske har været i en lignende situation, finder færøske gravide måder at enten overtale egen læge eller få kontakt til det danske sundhedsvæsen og få den ønskede abort (Hermannsdóttir, 2023). Derudover er Færøerne blevet kritiseret af FN’s CEDAW-kommission for ikke at sikre retten til abort, som, kommissionen understreger, har særlige konsekvenser for en befolkning, der er så isoleret som den færøske (United Nations, 2015).

Forskellen på praksis og muligheder i dag og for 180 år siden er naturligvis stor. Men forskning i færøsk aborthistorie har ikke fundet sted indtil nu, så der er indtil videre intet grundlag for at forstå, hvordan Færøernes lovgivning og diskurs om abort er blevet til den, som vi har i dag. Vi ved ikke, hvordan abort er blevet praktiseret, opfattet og disciplineret, selvom litterære tekster og deres behandlinger giver os glimt af det (Marnersdóttir, 2024). For at forstå, hvordan abort blev praktiseret, og hvornår abort blev grundlag for politianmeldelser og retssager, skal der et omfattende arkivarbejde til, som ligger uden for denne artikels omfang.

Denne artikel er dog en begyndelse på at af-dække og fremskrive færøsk aborthistorie, hvor vi lægger vægt på, hvordan udformningen af kilderne skal ses som et ekstra lag i den viden, vi kan danne os. En form for tilføjelse, som vi vil analysere ved hjælp af begrebet *retorisk tilvækst* (Chaput and Mitchell, 2000; Clary-Lemon, 2014; Collins, 1999), som vi mener er et nødvendigt perspektiv og analytisk snit at lægge for arkivanalyser af denne karakter. Et perspektiv, som er nødvendigt i forhold til den overordnede analyse af færøsk aborthistorie, -nutid og -fremtid, hvorfor vi kalder dette en *fremskrivning*: Hvor indsigt om det historiske bør være del af analyser af det nutidige og fremtidige.

Vores analyse har til henblik at svare på følgende spørgsmål: Hvordan tilføjer kildernes udformning, i form af publicerede lokalhistorier og arkivalier i form af for eksempel domprotokoller og afhøringer, til vores viden om færøsk

aborthistorie? Og hvordan kan den erkendelse, at kilderne i sig selv skaber et lag af viden, være et element i, hvordan færøsk aborthistorie skal forstås og fremskrives?

For at nærme os et svar på disse, begynder vi med at udfolde, hvordan ovennævnte forskere har defineret begrebet *retorisk tilvækst* og tilføje vores eget fokus på den sproglige genfortælling, som det færøsk-danske forhold indebærer. Vi analyserer derefter sagen om Anna Maria Jacobsdatter; først ved en gennemgang af de lokalhistoriske udgivelser, der indtil nu har været den eneste udlægning af sagen, for siden at analysere de primærkilder, vi har lokaliseret. Ved hjælp af retsprotokoller, afhøringer og domsafsigelser vil vi således rekonstruere sagens forløb med fokus på, hvordan kilderne afspejler den geopolitiske situation, der rammesætter den biopolitiske tematik. For at foregribe et af vores centrale argumenter, så er det nødvendigt at undersøge, hvordan den geopolitiske ramme både begrænser og muliggør den biopolitiske handlekraft i sager som Jacobsdatters.

Hvorfor retorisk tilvækst?

Fra et historiografisk perspektiv er den rolle, som abort (ikke) har fået i færøsk historieskrivning, et udtryk for en kønsmæssige skævvridning af hvilke oplevelser og hverdagserfaringer, der er blevet dømt værdige til behandling. Dog gør der sig andre forhold gældende end den patriarkalske fortielse af, hvilke konsekvenser sex og magtforhold har haft for mennesker, når vi vil undersøge færøsk aborthistorie. Nemlig de materielle vilkår, som det danske kongeriges lokaladministration har arbejdet under, dengang Anna Maria Jacobsdatter vidnede om sin abort, og som gør sig gældende, når vi i dag vil lokalisere de kilder, der dokumenterer hendes erfaring. Begge dele udtrykker det, som Vicki Tolar Collins (1999) og senere Jennifer Clary-Lemon (2014) definerer som *rhetorical accretion*; den retoriske tilvækst som narrativens bevægelse gennem genskrivning medfører (jf. Collins), og som arkivernes materielle omstændigheder tilføjer arkivalierne (jf. Clary-Lemon).

Vores argument i denne artikel bygger på, at denne form for kønshistorie skal undersøges med blik for den retoriske tilvækst, som publikationspraksisser og arkiv-materielle forhold forårsager, og tilføjer, at den samme lagvise forøgelse af betydning knytter sig til sproglige og administrative forhold, der gør sig gældende i asymmetriske nationale forhold. Dermed kan de geopolitiske aspekter af biopolitiske problemstillinger undersøges med blik for, hvordan aborthistorie er eller kan blive fremskrevet. For at udfolde denne metodologiske potentiale ønsker vi derudover at tilføje en materialistisk dimension af den karakter, som Catherine Chaput og Danielle Mitchell kritiserer Collins for at overse (Chaput & Mitchell, 2000), og således understrege forskellen på *det retoriske*, *det materielle* og *det nymaterialistiske* niveau af tilvækst i en arkivanalyse.

Retorisk tilvækst

Vicki Tolar Collins understreger i "The Speaker Respoken: Material Rhetoric as Feminist Methodology" (1999), at undersøgelser af, hvem der får mulighed for at tale, og hvem bliver tiet bort, er centrale feministiske spørgsmål i både retoriske og litterære studier (1999). Collins trækker på Carla Kaplans argument om, at feministisk litterær kritik har til formål at afsløre mekanismerne bag kulturel fortielse, reevaluere afviste eller ignorerede tekster af kvinder og genfinde alternative former for kvinders kreative udtryk (Collins, 1999, 545; Kaplan, 1996). Derudover fremhæver Collins også Patricia Bizzels pointe om, at feministisk retorik skal fokusere på modlæsninger (*resistant readings*) af traditionel retorik, at reclaimere retoriske værker af kvinder og værdsætte dem på niveau med mænds, og udvide definitionen af retorik, så den bliver inkluderende, især af kvinders værker (Collins, 1999, 545; Bizzel, 1992). Vores projekt er et lidt andet, fordi de tekster, vi behandler, ikke engang er skrevet af de kvinder, som de omhandler. Men vi følger anvisningen til at se på mekanismerne bag kulturel fortielse og modlæse det materiale, der indtil videre findes om emnet, vi undersøger. Collins' centrale argument er dog det primære fokus for

vores projekt, idet hendes formål er at spørge ind til, hvordan andre (og andet) materielt føjer lag til den oprindelige udsigelse og bliver en del af den tekst, vi som kritikere kan tilgå i dag:

Once an author has composed a text, in what material ways do others layer their desires on the text? In what ways, over time, can a speaker be respoken? (Collins, 1999, 547)

Denne genfortælling af den oprindelige taler analyserer Collins gennem undersøgelser af en række genudgivelser og tilføjede kommentarer til den britiske metodist Hester Ann Rogers' fortælling om sit liv, *The Account of Hester Ann Rogers* fra 1793, der er trykt i mere end 40 forskellige udgaver. Rogers førte dagbog over sit liv, og den første udgave af hendes *Account* bestod kun af hendes egne ord om sit asketiske liv og relation til Gud og methodismen; de efterfølgende tilføjer en prædike holdt ved hendes begravelse, et essay forfattet af hendes mand, efterord og forord og hendes egen tekst bliver i tiltagende grad redigeret af udgivere (Collins, 1999, 556). I de mange genoptryk akkumuleres konsekvenserne af en publikationsproces, der tilføjer andres udsagn til rammesætning af Rogers' egen tekst. Dette er ifølge Collins med til at gøre Rogers' eget udsagn tavst, mens det påvirker, hvordan hendes virke som metodistisk mystiker kan forstås af nutidens læser. Potentialet med den materialistiske tilgang, understreger Collins, er at undersøgelser af denne lagvise tilblivelse kan forstås i kontekst af deres diskursive fællesskaber. Undersøgelser af en teksts omgivende retoriske tilvækst kan fremhæve, hvordan kvinders stemmer materielt bliver gjort tavse og bevidner en historisk-kulturel "muting" (Collins, 1999, 549); en nedtoning eller dæmpning af visse udtryk eller stemninger, affødt af den omgivende diskursive praksis.

Materiel og nymaterialistisk retorisk tilvækst

Catherine Chaput og Danielle Mitchell kritiserer i en kommentar til Collins' artikel i samme tidsskrift

Collins' brug af termen *materiel retorik* (Chaput & Mitchell, 2000). I Chaput og Mitchells optik er det at se på publikationspraksis og retorisk tilvækst af diskurs, i form af tilføjede tekster, ikke tilstrækkeligt i forhold til at udgøre en materialistisk kritik, da Collins' blik undviger et fokus på de ideologiske og klasse-mæssige antagelser, der fordrer skribenter eller redaktørers styring af det analyserede materiale (Chaput & Mitchell, 2000, 532). Deres kritiske tilgang til materialitet er øjensynligt baseret på den marxistiske tradition, som følgende citat understreger:

The process of accretion is not simply men overpowering women, but a complex manifestation of traditional gender roles deeply embedded within the cultural consciousness of both men and women that serves to secure the dominant relations of production (Chaput & Mitchell, 2000, 532-533).

Ifølge dem er Collins' materielle retorik forenkende, da den ikke tager højde for de mange forskellige klasse- og kønspositioner, som hendes materiale er skabt ud fra. Vi er tilbøjelige til at være enige med Chaput og Mitchell og mener også, at der skal en bredere forståelse for den materielle basis til, for at en analyse af retorisk tilvækst når sit fulde potentiale.

Mens Collins' fokus er den retoriske tilvækst over tid analyseret gennem forlagspraksis og tilføjede tekster, billeder og former, så tager Jennifer Clary-Lemon begrebet videre ind i en ontologisk udfordrende forståelse af tekstens væren og tilblivelse. Clary-Lemon tager så at sige hele arkivet, alt indholdet i arkivkassen og forskerens placering i forhold til arkivalierne med i det undersøgelsesfelt, en arkivanalyse bør involvere. Dette reflekterer den metodologiske vending, hvor stadig flere humanistiske fagretninger har taget arkivanalyse til sig, hvilket også bør tilgås med metodologisk klarhed i forhold til retorisk tilvækst (Clary-Lemon, 2014; Morris, 2006). Clary-Lemons overføring af begrebet fra bogudgivelser til arkivalier fremhæver også Collins' projekt som mere diskursivt end materielt, idet tilvæksten, der analyseres, deltager i tekstens udsigelse som læsbare betydninger og

i formater, der mere umiddelbart kan afkodes. Det fraskriver ikke Collins' bidrag dets betydning, men understreger snarere det analytiske potentiale i at tilgå retorisk tilvækst på flere epistemologiske niveauer.

Collins, Chaput og Mitchell samt Clary-Lemon repræsenterer forskellige forståelser af materialitet: den skriftlige overdøvelse af andres udsagn; den marxistisk definerede kritik af, hvordan materiel basis skaber menneskelige udsagn; og den nyere vending mod nonhuman handlekraft som medskabende af og ligestillet den humane. Brian Ott og Greg Dickinson opfordrer til en begrebsmæssig klarhed ved at skelne mellem *materiel retorik* og *retorikkens materialitet*, for at understrege validiteten af de forskellige tilgange, så længe ens videnskabsteoretiske tilgang er gennemsigtig (Ott & Dickinson, 2019). Clary-Lemons er en nymaterialistisk tilgang, der anerkender Karen Barads (2003; 2007) efterhånden famøse formulering om at "matter matters". Ved arkivundersøgelser er der en lang række materielle forhold, der former undersøgerens møde med arkivalierne: den fysiske og geografiske placering af arkivet; arkivhylderne og -kassernes fordeling og opbevaring; den systematik, der organiserer det enkelte arkivalie i form af journalnøgler og indleveringstidspunkt; den enkelte arkivkasses opbygning, arkivmappernes udformning og sidernes rækkefølge; tilføjede kommentarer og notater, som undersøgeren bliver bevidst om i løbet af undersøgelsen. Denne materielle tilvækst og intra-aktioner med andre fysiske genstande påvirker den enkeltes erkendelsesproces i mødet med arkivaliet og er del af analyseprocessen.

Helt konkret understreger Clary-Lemon *nærhed* (proximity) som en epistemologisk faktor i arkivundersøgelser og skelner mellem *affektiv*, *geografisk* og *virtuel nærhed* som fordrende og begrænsende for undersøgerens valg og fokus (Clary-Lemon, 2014, 388).

Using both notions of proximity and rhetorical accretion resonates with Ritter's call for "archival ethnography" (466), which places emphasis on the social processes, institutions, and relationships inherent both in

archival research and writing history based on that research (Clary-Lemon, 2014, 389).

Vores affektive, spatiale og teknologiske forudsætninger påvirker vores forståelse og valg i ethvert henseende, og som arkivundersøgende, materiel-retoriske kritikere bør en refleksion over disse forhold være aktiv og strategisk, idet den understreger den tilgængelighed til historiske materialer, som færøsk aborthistorie også illustrerer.

I vores søgen efter kilder har det været en fordel, at så mange arkivalier er digitaliseret, og vi således kan få adgang til kilder opbevaret i Danmark og Færøerne. En sag som Jacobsdatters bevæger sig geografisk fra retten i Færøerne til Højesteret i Danmark, og dens spor af protokoller knytter sig således til den administrative infrastruktur, som det danske kongerige havde på det tidspunkt og til dels stadig har (eftersom retsvæsenet i Færøerne stadig er et rigsansliggende). Dog er en del kilder ikke digitaliseret, og deres registrering spejler historiske logikker, der kan gøre dem utilgængelige. Som for eksempel når abortloven, der indføres i Danmark i 1937, først tinglyses i 1939 i Færøerne, og når 1956-loven arkiveres under den politiske behandling af jordemødre i Landsstyrets protokoller, til trods for at loven ikke involverer jordemødre. Ethvert historisk studie baseret på arkivalier må anerkende, at deres fysiske placering og udformning vil påvirke forskerens indsamling. I vores kontekst vil vi understrege nødvendigheden af et kritisk blik på, hvad vi har adgang til, og hvordan vores affektive, geografiske og virtuelle nærhed er medskabende af analysen.

Således når vi til en lang række af elementer og stadier i arkivundersøgelsen, som kræver en afklaring i materialistisk forståelse og materialets betydning i forhold til både undersøgelsen og den fremskrivning af historien, som vores formål er. For at illustrere, hvordan en arkivanalyse af færøsk aborthistorie bør være materiel-retorisk i sin erkendelse og fremgangsmåde, vil vi nu se nærmere på sagen om Anna Maria Jacobsdatter.

Sagen om Anna Maria Jacobsdatter

Anna Maria Jacobsdatter blev født 2. juli 1818 i Viðareiði, arbejdede som tjenestepige og fik ikke børn. Det vi ved om hendes liv, udover grundlæggende data opført i kirkebøger og folketællinger, er knyttet til hendes tid i Kunoy i huset hos Simon Stephensen og den efterfølgende retssag. I lokalhistoriske udgivelser er der samlet mundtlige og skriftlige erindringer fra lokale samt gengivet oplysninger fra kirkebøger og folketællinger, mens detaljerne om forløbet vedrørende aborterne er dokumenteret i sorenskriverens (dommerens) og Færø Rets retsprotokoller, hvilke ikke inddrages i lokalhistoriske udgivelser.

Lokalhistoriske kilder

Hændelserne i Anna Maria Jacobsdatters liv er blevet fremhævet i de følgende lokalhistoriske undersøgelser.

I *Tey bygdu land* har forfatter Símun Hansen indsamlet og beskrevet lokalhistoriske kilder for Norðoyggjar, den nordligste gruppe øer i Færøerne, og bogserien udgør en form for slægtshistorie for området (Hansen, 1972). I bogen om Kunoy beskriver Hansen sagen om Jacobsdatter således: "i Maj året efter [1841] døde Elsebeth Sofía [Stephensens kone] i barselsseng og barnet med. Anna Maria blev i huset og holdt hus med Símun i to år, men så blev han anklaget i en barnesag, og tog sig det så nær at han begik selvmord ved at kaste sig i havet" (Hansen 1972, 112, egen oversættelse). Den korte beskrivelse uddyber ikke karakteren af Jacobsdatters forhold til Stephensen og ikke hendes rolle i barnesagen. Hansen skriver dog, at hun holdt hus "med" og ikke "for" Stephensen (på færøsk "við" i stedet for "fyri" eller "hjá"), der kan indikere en form for samliv uden at det dog uddybes.

I *Úr Oyndarfjarðar søgu* beskriver forfatter Freydis Poulsen forløbet med præcis de samme formuleringer som Símun Hansen gør i *Tey bygdu land*, men tilføjer en uddybning af Anna Marias videre forløb, og definerer hende som "den anden part i sagen" (Poulsen, 2004, 313, egen

oversættelse). Poulsen udfolder således relationen mellem Jacobsdatter og Stephensen og understreger, at det var Jacobsdatter, der klagede. Poulsen skriver videre, at Jacobsdatter blev frikendt i retssagen om aborterne, men dømt til at betale udgifterne, da Stephensen var død. Udover hendes efterfølgende ansættelser i Eysturoy, som var forholdsvis langt fra hendes hjembygd, tilføjer Poulsen en anekdote om, at hun til tider rejste med handelsbåden, der på sin faste rute sejlede forbi Klaksvík i Norðoyggjar, men aldrig satte sin fod i Norðoyggjar igen. Poulsen inddrager således Jacobsdatters perspektiv, og giver læseren et indtryk af, hvilken påvirkning opholdet hos Stephensen har haft, men uden nogen direkte henvisning til Jacobsdatters ord eller afhøring.

I præst Kristian Osvald Viderøs *Saga Norðuroya*, som er udgivelsen af hans indsamling af de lokales erindringer, nævnes Stephensens skæbne også. En lokal mand berettede således for Viderø: "Han skulle være dømt for fosterdrab. Han forventede intet godt og løb af sted nordpå. Politiet fandt ham ikke igen. Min oldemor sad med min bedstemor og så ham løbe af sted nord for bakken. Det sidste de så af ham, var da han rakte sine knyttede næver i vejret" (Viderø 1994, 203, egen oversættelse). Igen er det kun Stephensens handlinger, der beskrives, og Stephensens perspektiv, der reflekteres over.

I historiker Hans Andrias Sølvarás *Klaksvíkar Söga* inddrages en dagbogsbeskrivelse af Stephensens selvmord (Sølvará, 2010). Dagbogens ejer, Christopher Michael Olsen, arbejdede ved den Kongelige Monopolhandels filial i Klaksvík, og beskrev den 12. september 1843 følgende hændelse:

"Imorges kom Sorenskriver Thillisch til Kunøe, for at tage Forhør angående Skolelærer Simon Stephensen ibidm, der først skal have besøvet en Pige, og siden fordrevet Fosteret, han har i nogen Tid siddet i Arrest i Thorshavn; men kom med Sorenskriveren til Forhøret, og da Ingen videre var at passe paa ham; rendte han fra dem, og drukkede sig (det var før sagens Optagelse), der er 3 Gange lyst til Ægteskab for ham, med en anden Pige" (Sølvará, 2010, 120).

Sølvará beskriver videre, hvordan folketællingen i 1840 dokumenterer, at Stephensen var gift, og at han i 1841 blev enkemand, da konen Elisabeth Suffía døde i barselseng sammen med barnet. Sølvará noterer, at tjenestepigen Anna Maria blev i huset herefter, og at kirkebøgerne for Norðoyggjar bekræfter Christopher Michael Olsens dagbogsnotat om, at Simon Stephensen druknede sig den 12. september 1843. Sølvará understreger derefter, at selvmordet kan sættes i forbindelse med den "nådeløse" Norske lov fra 1688, hvor der stadfæstes at "Letfærdige Qvindfolk, som deris Foster ombringe, skulle miste deris Hals, og deris Hoved sættis paa en Stage" – men påpeger desuden, at der ikke er bemærkninger om hvorvidt dette gælder den mandlige part (Sølvará, 2010, 120). Sølvará understreger også at "(d)et hører til historien om Simon Stephensen, at der aldrig var bevist at noget foster havde været eller var skaffet af vejen" (Sølvará, 2010, 120).

Som det fremgår af disse lokalhistoriske kilder, der omfatter alle publikationer vi kan finde om sagen, begik Stephensen selvmord under behandlingen af sagen, hvilket gøres centralt i de fleste af disse gengivelser. Det fylder mere end Jacobsdatters oplevelser i de narrativer, der er offentligt tilgængelige, og det er hermed vigtigt at understrege den begrænsede adgang til Jacobsdatters liv, og oplevelser vi får.

Historier om abort er selvsagt blevet tiet bort eller ignoreret på grund af emnets følsomme og transgressive karakter. Når Símun Hansen skriver om Anna Maria Jacobsdatter, så er det måske med samme ønske om at undgå rygter om ukyskhed som hendes far, Jacob Pedersen, forsøger at afvise med sit brev. Tavshed som handlekraft er et komplekst, men relevant, aspekt af, hvordan reproduktiv handlekraft kan udøves – især for dem, hvis reproduktive manøvrer er normbrydende (Hermannsdóttir, 2022).

Den lokalhistoriske behandling, vi har skitseret ovenfor, understreger allerede den pointe, som Collins bidrager med. Vi ser, hvordan fokus primært er på den markante skikkelse i bygden, skolelærer Simon Stephensen, og hans selvmord. Freydis Poulsen, den eneste kvindelige historiker, der skriver om emnet, tilføjer detaljer om Jacobsdatters

liv, men de mest uddybende beskrivelser udlægger lokalbefolkningens oplevelser og reaktioner på Stephensen. Når Sølvará for eksempel gennemgår kildematerialet, så er det Stephensens liv og levned, han undersøger, og Jacobsdatter nævnes kun kort. Det publicerede materiale om hændelserne i Kunoy fremstiller Jacobsdatter som tavs.

Samtidig er de fleste af disse lokalhistorier udgivet, før mange færøske arkivalier er digitaliseret. Adgangen til de kilder, som kunne udfordre eller nuancere de hændelser, der beskrives, har været begrænset i teknologisk og geografisk forstand, mens spørgsmålet om abort i Færøerne i den offentlige diskurs har haft begrænset følelsesmæssig vægt. I løbet af de seneste 180 år har diskussioner om abortrettigheder i Færøerne aldrig været så fremtrædende som nu, og indtil 2017, været en sjældenhed i politisk debat (Persson & Jóhansdóttir, 2024; West, 2024). Der er således åbenlyse materielle forhold, der har gjort, at sagen om Anna Maria Jacobsdatter ikke har fyldt på samme måde som historien om Simon Stephensen. Vores adgang er defineret af den tekniske, geografiske og affektive nærhed, som nutiden rammesætter.

Arkivalier

Lokaliseringen af Anna Maria Jacobsdatters sag er del af en større arkivanalyse med formål at finde og kortlægge alle arkivalier vedrørende abort i Færøerne. I vores søgen efter sager om abort i Færøerne er vi begyndt med medicinalindberetninger, som er den færøske embedslæges årlige indberetning til sundhedsmyndighederne i Danmark, og strafferegistre, som er en oversigt over de personer, der er tiltalt i en straffesag. Vi har søgt i perioden 1820 til 1950.

Den lokale færøske administrations arkivalier fra omkring 1820 er organiseret mere systematisk end den ældre del. Dette skyldes utvivlsomt, at Færøerne på det tidspunkt er blevet et selvstændigt amt, med en fastboende amtmand som øverste embedsmand, som har haft brug for et velorganiseret arkiv. Amtmandens fysiske tilstedeværelse i Færøerne har således affødt en omstrukturering

af den dokumentationspraksis, hans embede har efterladt. Den historiske administrationspraksis har således formet sagens tilgængelighed fysisk, for at gentage Clary-Lemons argument om geografisk nærhed og påvirkning (Clary-Lemon, 2014). Det betyder dog ikke, at der ikke kan have været andre retssager om abort end dem, vi har fundet, men dette ville kræve langt flere arkivstudier af materiale, som er svært tilgængeligt grundet arkivaliernes usystematiske organisering. Den nedre grænse af perioden – 1950 – er valgt for at undgå at skulle ansøge om og behandle ikke-tilgængelige og ikke-forældede oplysninger. Den affektive nærhed, som et hensyn til menneskers levetid og sårbarhed medfører, er således også en konstituerende faktor i vores undersøgelse.

Efter at have identificeret sager i strafferegisteret, har vi søgt i sorenskriverens retsprotokoller. Poli- og justitsprotokollen, som indeholder referater af de forhør, som er blevet holdt ved en såkaldt *extraret*. Extraret kaldes de retter, hvor alvorlige kriminalsager behandles. Til justitsprotokollen hører arkivalier, som f.eks. de dokumenter, som sorenskriveren har rekvireret, og som er forelagt extraretten. Desuden har vi undersøgt domprotokoller, hvor domme bliver nedfældet.

Den ældste sag, vi har fundet, er således den omhandlende Anna Maria Jacobsdatter, og i forberedelsen af vores analyse har vi gennemgået alle de arkivalier, som vi har fundet. Enhver udlægning af historiske hændelser er et spørgsmål om perspektiv, og dermed en retorisk handling, der udtrykker ideologi (Black, 1970, 109). Alle kilder, der findes om hendes oplevelser i 1841-43, kan påvirke, hvordan hendes historie kan forstås i dag. Da en nærlæsning af alle arkivalierne ikke kan rummes af nærværende artikel, har vi fremhævet passager, der giver et overblik og understreger vores argument.

Ved lokalisering af de retsprotokoller, der omhandler retssagen mod hende og forberedelser til sag mod Stephensen, har vi adgang til kilder, der mere umiddelbart end de lokalhistoriske undersøgelser er dokumentation af de involveredes udsagn og handlinger. Vi har Jacobsdatters afhøring med uddybende beskrivelser af hendes oplevelser, Stephensens samme, samt vidneforklaringer fra

mindst 12 mennesker, der var tæt på de anklagede og på forskellige vis kendte til aborterne. Heriblandt Jacobsdatters far, hvis brev til landfoged Lunddahl satte den retslige undersøgelse i gang, og samtidig fremhæver den allestedsnærværende genfortælling af Jacobsdatters oplevelse, som sagen er defineret af.

Sagen genfortalt

Jacobsdatters far, Jacob Pedersen, udlægger hendes oplevelse i brevet – som vi begyndte artiklen med at citere – hvilket han dikterer til skolelærer i bygden, Hans David Matras. Matras er blandt de vidner, der afhøres i sagen, og om ham står blandt andet følgende:

“For Retten fremstod efter Tilsigelse Skolelærer Hans David Matras af Viderøe og formanet til Sandhed forklarer han paa given Anledning, at han har comuniqeret og skrevet det fornævnte Brev fra Jacob Pedersen til Landfoged Lunddahl, men han forsikrer, at han kun gjorde det efter Jacob Pedersens Begering og overensstemmende med den af ham givne Fremstilling af den omhandlende Sag, ligesom han og forelæste Brevet for Jacob Pedersen forinden han satte hans Navn under det.” (Sorenskriveren, Politiprotokol, 1837-1846, folie 178)

Matras understreger således kraftigt, at han ikke selv er årsag til brevet, men blot kommunikerer, det som Pedersen har dikteret. Som lærer har Matras haft en vis autoritet, og muligvis højere troværdighed end Pedersen, men citatet gør det også relevant at fremhæve forhold, der rammesatte livet i Færøerne dengang. Sandsynligvis talte Jacobsdatter ikke dansk; hendes far måske heller ikke, og han har tilsyneladende ikke lært at skrive, eftersom han får en skolelærer til at skrive for sig. Den klassemæssige forskel og kontekst, der kommer til syne, og som Chaput og Mitchell understreger som nødvendig for en materialistisk analyse af retorisk tilvækst, har således også en sproglig dimension. Jacobsdatters ord formidles

således gennem hendes far til en lokal autoritet via dansk. Hermed kan vi øjne de tilføjede lag: faderens gengivelse af hændelserne i form af diktat til skolelæreren og skolelærerens formulering (og sandsynlige oversættelse til dansk) i henvendelse til landfogeden.

Pedersen understreger, at hans datter ikke har "Samvittigheden til lønligen at bære dette" (Brev fra Jacob Pedersen, 1842). I brevet beskrives Jacobsdatter som en samvittighedsfuld og "uerfaren Pige", der er "villig til at aflægge Ed når og hvor det forlanges i Jesu Christi Navn" på, at hun blev "forkrænket, efter at Ægteskabsløvter i Forveien høilig er forsikret imellem dem selv indbyrdes" (Brev fra Jacob Pedersen, 1842). Disse genfortællinger af historien, fortalt af og til personer af forskellige samfundsroller, bør analyseres som udtryk for, hvordan kønsmæssige, klasse-mæssige og nationale magtforhold kommer til syne og har påvirket den gengivelse, vi kan læse i dag.

I opsummering af hændelsesforløbet kan vi, ud fra vidneforklaringerne, der er dokumenteret i sorenskriverens politiprotokol, fastslå, at Jacobsdatter begyndte at tjene hos Stephensen i vinteren 1839. Da hustruen i huset, Elsebeth Suffía, der havde været jordemoder, dør i barsels seng i 1841, fortsætter Jacobsdatter som tjenestepige, og indvilliger i Stephensens seksuelle tilnærmelser, da han efter hendes udsagn lover ægteskab. I sin vidneforklaring beskriver Jacobsdatter sin første graviditet og abort således:

Om Sommeren 1841 (nærmere seer hun sig ikke istand til at angive Tiden) var hun een-gang paa Søen og da der kom Uveir paa, blev hun saa forskrækket at hun maatte gaae til Sengs, da hun kom hjem; hun vidste den Gang ikke rigtigt om hun var frugtsommelig eller ikke. Da hun var kommen i Sengen bad hun Simon om at søge hende Raad, men dette nægtede han, hvorimod han gav hende en Hornspiseskee fuld af Noget, der smagte bægst og smigersødt bægst er hendes Forklaring det samme som bittert og smigersødt skal ligeledes efter hendes Forklaring, betyde at det havde først, da hun fik det i Munden, en sød Smag, men efterlod en bitter

og sammensnærpene Smag; Omtrent en Time efterat hun havde taget dette ind, aborterede hun. Det der gik fra hende, bestod af store Blodklumper og smaae Been, disse var dog ikke samlede, men laae adskilt mellem Blodklumperne. (Sorenskriveren, Politiprotokol, 1837-1846, f. 179)

Den næste graviditet og abort beskriver hun som følgende:

I Efteraaret 1841 mærkede hun, at hun var frugtsommelig, men Simon, til hvem hun talte derom, sagde bestandigen, at det ikke var sandt; da hun imidlertid mærkede, at Barnet bevægede sig i hende, forlangte hun af Simon, at han nu skulde tage hende til ægte. Han benægtede dette, men sagde, at han nok skulde sørge for, at Barnet ikke kom til Verden med Liv. Hun befandt sig ilde, hvorfor Simon aarelod hende først paa den høire Arm og derefter paa den venstre og da hun ikke syntes, at dette hjalp hende, aarelod han hende samme Dags Aften paa begge Beenene. Da hun seenere blev sygere, end friskere heraf, aarelod han hende en 14 dage derefter anden Gang paa begge Beenene og da hun, der den Gang laae i Sengen, var for svag til selv at vaske sig og, tog han hende ud af Sengen og satte hendes Fødder i varmt Søvand; saaledes blev hun siddende, saavidt hun kan skjønne, omtrent i 1 ½ Time. Omtrent 2 Timer efter gav han hende atter én Skeefuld af det fornævnte Fluideum hvilket hun dog ikke vilde tage før han havde forsikret hende, at det ikke var det Samme som hun havde faaet om Sommeren (Sorenskriveren, Politiprotokol, 1837-1846, f. 179)

Jacobsdatter aborterer for anden gang, og Stephensen vil stadig ikke holde sit løfte om ægteskab. Når Stephensen indleder et forhold med en anden pige, flytter Jacobsdatter til Stephensens bror for at tjene, og herefter tilbage til sin hjembygd Viðareiði, hvor hun taler med sin far, og den offentlige behandling af sagen går i gang efter hans kontakt til landfogeden.

Hverdagstale og tavshed

Den videre vidneforklaring understreger, at Jacobsdatter ikke holdt sine aborter hemmelige, men snarere følte berettigelse til at klage over Stephensen, da han ikke har holdt sit ægteskabslofte. Dette til trods for, at der i 1840'erne stadig var dødsstraf for abort i Færøerne. Ifølge afhøringerne har Jacobsdatter snakket med flere i sin omgangskreds om sine oplevelser: hun fortæller det til Stephensens bror, kongsbonde Johan Stephensen, mens hun tjener hos ham, og han har lagt mærke til, at hun ser ud til at have det dårligt; hun fortæller sin far det; hun havde talt med "Isak Jacobsen Kunøes Kone om, at hun havde været frugtsommelig, men derimod ikke om Grunden til at hun havde aborteret" (Sorenskriveren, Politiprotokol, 1843, f. 178). Under afhøringen beskriver Jacobsdatter abortforløbet og, at "Hun fortalte strax efter, at dette var passeret, det hele til Michel Simonsen og Daniel Niclassen, begge Huusmænd paa Kunø, men de svarede hende, at det ikke kunde nytte noget, at hun sagde det til dem", hvilket de også selv bekræfter i egne vidneudsagn (Sorenskriveren, Politiprotokol, 1843, f. 178).

Anden gang hun får en abort, fortæller hun det også:

Hun fortalte det hele atter til de 2 nævnte Huusmænd paa Kunø, men de gave hende det samme Svar, som første Gang; hun har desuden talt noget lidt om det til flere, men især til Gregers Jacobsens Kone paa Kunø (Sorenskriveren, Politiprotokol, 1937-1846, f. 179b).

Jacobsdatter har således gjort sit for ikke at bære ansvaret og hemmeligheden alene. Blandt sin omgangskreds har hun beskrevet sine oplevelser, måske i forventning om, at de vil støtte hendes kritik af Stephensen, og tilsyneladende uden umiddelbar forventning om, at hun ville blive understødt i samfundet. Den skam, som Pedersens brev til landfoged Lunddahl beskriver, udtrykkes ikke i samme grad, når Jacobsdatter, i sin vidneforklaring om sin hverdag i forbindelse med aborterne, beskriver sin ærlighed.

Hendes ærlighed bliver dog udfordret, når Stephensen vidner i sagen. I de mange siders forhør fremstilles deres udsagn som ord mod ord, hvor Jacobsdatter først påstår ikke at kende konsekvenserne af den væske, som Stephensen får hende til at drikke, samt de åreladninger han foretager. Stephensen påstår derimod, at hun har bedt ham hjælpe med at foretage aborterne, og i dommen i sagen beskrives hendes meddelagtighed således:

Med Hensyn til den første Abort er der ikke fremkommet Noget, der kan godtgjøre, at hun har havt Grund til at nære Mistanke om, at Simon vilde fordrive hendes Foster, og end mindre, at hun derom har været vidende. Hvad den anden Abort derimod angaaer, da er der unægteligen fremkommen en Deel, der synes at hentyde paa, at hun i alt Fald ikke har været uvidende om Simons Forsæt og om Hensigten med de Midler, han anvendte paa hende (Sorinskrivarin, Justitsprotokol, 1836-1847, f. 240b)

Jacobsdatters påstand om ikke at kende til Stephensens handlingers konsekvens ved den første abort anerkendes således, mens den i andet tilfælde betvivles.

I domsafsigelsen understreges, at Jacobsdatter må have været "undrende" over, hvad Stephensen har foretaget sig, til trods for at hun er over den kriminelle lavalder, og alene det at kende til en forbrydelse vurderes ikke som tilstrækkelig årsag til at dømme hende skyldig – undtagen hvis "det maatte findes, at hun ved de fornævnte Fosters Fordrivelse har udviist en saadan positiv eller negativ Deelagtighed, at hun derfor kvalificerer sig dertil" (Sorinskrivarin, Justitsprotokol, 1836-1847, f. 239b). Det vurderes ikke, at hun har udvist delagtighed, og Anna Maria Jacobsdatter frifindes i sagen.

Et centralt argument i den endelige frikendelse af Jacobsdatter var den konstatering, at hun var *enfoldig*.

Hun blev først confirmeret i sit 20de Aar og det endda med Characteren "maadelig" for

Kundskab, og dette Factum synes i og for sig tilstrækkeligt til at godtgjøre, at hun er enfoldig, ligesom der ikke er oplyst nogen Ufordeelagtigt om hende før hun kom i Tjeneste hos Simon Stephensen (Sorinskrivarin, Justitsprotokol, 1836-1847, f. 240b)

I kirkebogen, hvor præsten har registreret konfirmationen, noterer han også, at hun kan stave, men ikke læse på sit konfirmationstidspunkt, men at det er nødvendigt at blive konfirmeret. Konfirmationen i 1840'ernes Færøerne (og Danmark) markerede overgangen til voksenlivet, og gav mulighed for at stå fadder, blive gift og så videre, hvorfor 20 år er en sen alder. I 1840'ernes Færøerne er manglende læsekundskaber måske reduceret til et udtryk for "enfoldighed" uden hensyn til de utallige årsager, der kan være til, at en tjenestepige i Færøerne ikke har lært at skrive og læse dansk.

Strategisk enfoldighed

En fremstilling af kvinder som enfoldige og dermed uvidende om deres handlingers konsekvenser er gennemgående i de sager, vi har fundet om fødsler i dølgsmål og abort i det færøske nationalarkiv. I en sag, hvor en kvinde blev dømt for fødsel i dølgsmål og barnemord i 1861, understreges det, hvordan hun påstod ikke at vide, at hun var gravid, før hun fødte (Sorinskrivarin, Justitsprotokol, 1858-1861, f. 169b). Da hun fødte i det ene af to værelser i sin families hus, påstod hendes mor, bedstemor og søster heller ikke at vide, hvad der foregik. Dette selvom vidneforklaringerne understreger den anklagedes omfattende viden om cyklus og menstruation, og ikke fremhæver andre udtryk for, at vidner eller anklagede ikke skulle være ved fuld klarhed over sine handlinger.

Det strategiske i at fremstille den anklagede som uforstående for, hvad der er foregået, skal ikke underkendes, og kan modlæses som et empatisk argument for at undgå straf. Dog vil vi også understrege den sproglige forhindring, som færøsktalende tiltalte kan have oplevet i forhold til at blive set som kompetente talere. En bevidsthed om, hvordan den sproglige forskel gør sig

gældende i danske institutioners vurdering af færingers kompetence, bør derfor gøre sig gældende i en materiel-retorisk analyse. Et udtryk for, at politiprotokollen er skrevet af folk, der både taler og skriver færøsk og dansk, kommer til syne i for eksempel denne sætning fra Stephensens vidneforklaring: "Strax efter spiste hun noget Tvøst og drak dertil noget koldt Vand eller Suben, hvilken af Delene erindrer han ikke" (Sorenskriveren, Politiprotokol 1837-1846, f. 180). *Tvøst* er det færøske ord for hvalkød, mens *Suben* er en fonetisk stavning af, hvordan "suppe" udtales på færøsk. Traditionelt har den administrative rolle som sysselmand (en form for politimester og derfor ansvarlig for politiprotokoller) været udfyldt af færinger, og dermed haft en lokal forankring af embedsmænd, der talte færøsk og havde indsigt i færøske samfundsforhold (L. Nolsøe, 2007).

Vi inddrager dette perspektiv for at understrege kompleksiteten af den sproglige dimension. Var Jacobsdatters sprogkundskaber en årsag til, at hun blev vurderet som enfoldig, eller blev de fremhævet for at etablere et billede af hende som uvidende og dermed skåne hende for straf?

Domafsigelsen understreger Jacobsdatter som dels uvidende, og i al fald ikke ansvarlig for hændelserne, hvilket også afspejler andre strukturelle betingelse for hendes position i samfundet. I 1840'erne var kvinder ikke myndige og havde dermed ingen mulighed for at anklage eller føre sin sag. Jacobsdatters bevidsthed om dette kommer til udtryk i hendes henvendelser til mændene i bygden:

At hun to Gange havde aborteret og at Simon mod hendes Villie havde aareladt hende fortalte hun omtrent ved Fastelavn 1842 for Daniel Niclassen og Michel Simonsen, begge af Kunøe, anmodede dem om at melde det for Øvrigheden (kursivering tilføjet), og da Simon begyndte at frie til en anden Pige, sagde hun sin Tjeneste op og forlod den i Mai 1842 (Sorinskrivarin, Justitsprotokol, 1836-1847, f. 240b).

Hun udtrykker således klarhed over den krænkelse, hun havde været udsat for, og forsøger at få

hjælp til at melde Stephensen. I sidste ende er det hendes far, der melder sagen til landfogeden, og igen bliver anledningen til hans brev relevant at problematisere. Har Jacobsdatter bedt sin far om at sende brevet, eller er det hans egen vurdering, at det er nødvendigt? Spørgsmålet er til dels arbitrært, da Jacobsdatter som sagt ikke er myndig, fordi hun er kvinde, og således igen ikke vurderes kompetent af sine samtidige.

Som færøsk tjenestepige er Jacobsdatters position i sagen således defineret af de køns-mæssige, klasse-mæssige og nationale magtforhold, der var afgørende i 1840'erne. Disse forhold kommer til syne i den dokumentation af hendes oplevelser, som vi har lokaliseret og gengivet her. De publicerede lokalhistorier fremstiller Jacobsdatter som tavs, mens primærkilderne understreger hendes tale; en handling, der ikke blev straffet i dens samtid, selv om den var transgressiv, og understreger, at abort ikke altid er blevet tiet bort. Kilderne, som vi har fremlagt, understreger, hvor komplekst den geopolitiske situation påvirkede den biopolitiske handlekraft, som abort i Færøerne var i 1840; det rigsadministrative system betød, at Jacobsdatters erfaringer blev genfortalt gennem kønsmæssige, klasse-mæssige og sproglige lag, som måske har begrænset hendes handlekraft – og måske muliggjort den. Denne kompleksitet og konsekvenser af en dansk genfortælling af færøske abortforhold gør sig stadig gældende i dag (T. Nolsøe, 2023b). Denne erkendelse er nødvendig for at forstå, hvilke indsigter historiske kilder kan give i dag, hvordan retorisk-materiel arkivanalyse er led i en fremskrivelse af aborthistorie, og hvordan den retoriske tilvækst i sig selv er et lag af viden om abortforhold.

De mange andre spor til viden

I analysen har vi haft et afgrænset fokus på Jacobsdatter og den national-sproglige tilføjelse til analysen af retorisk tilvækst. Sagen indeholder dog en række andre elementer, der kan udvide forståelsen af historiske abortforhold og knytter denne hændelse til andre historiske kilder og globale abortforhold.

I sagen beskrives, hvordan aborterne blev udført, og hvilken viden om reproduktion og seksualitet, der blev antaget af myndighederne og cirkuleret blandt lokalbefolkning. For eksempel fokuseres der i afhøringen af Jacobsdatter på, at hendes afdøde arbejdsgiver, Elsebeth Sofie (Uttari í Húsi á Syðradali), Stephensens kone, var eksamineret jordemoder. Under afhøringen spørges Jacobsdatter, om hun nogensinde har bistået sin arbejdsgiver under fødsler, og Jacobsdatter benægter dette:

Paa Anledning, forsikkrer hun, at hun aldrig har hjulpet Simons Kone, naar denne har betjent nogen Barselkone, ligesom at hun i det hele ikke forstaar sig noget paa hvorledes frugtsommelige Fruentimmere befandt sig, undtagen forsaavidt hun selv har erfaret det (Sorenskriveren, Politiprotokol, 1837-1846, f. 179b).

Der findes ingen undersøgelser om, hvorvidt jordemødre skulle være vidende om abortpraksis eller bistå dertil i Færøerne på dette tidspunkt. Annika Skaalum har undersøgt den påfaldende hyppighed af dødfødte børn af ugifte kvinder i afgrænsede områder i Færøerne, og diskuterer den mulighed at jordemødre og andre, der bistod fødende, hjalp disse kvinder med ikke at hjælpe deres børn med at overleve (Skaalum, 2014). Undersøgelser af jordemoderpraksis i Færøerne har ikke fokuseret på rollen i forhold til abort, men sammenkoblingen til jordemodervirket har været led i begrænsningen af adgang til reproduktiv hjælp på verdensplan (Cliff, 1997; Reagan, 1995). Hvorvidt Elsebeth Suffia havde nogen viden om abort og havde delt noget af denne viden med sin mand eller tjenestepige, vil vi ikke spekulere i, men afhøringen af Jacobsdatter giver anledning til at undersøge dette emne videre.

Stephensens udtalelser og adfærd vedrørende abortpraksis understreger relevansen af dette. Under afhøringen af Stephensens elever vidner den unge Frederikke om, at Stephensen har omtalt abort i klasselokalet:

Hun erindrer, at Skolelæreren Simon Stephensen for omtrent 1 ½ Aar siden talte til

Børnene i Skolen om, at man kunde fordrive et Foster ved at tage Muld i Kirkegaarden og lægge det mellem Brysterne, men han tilføiede, at de ikke skulde gjøre det. Noget længere tilbage i Tiden sagde han Børnene eengang, at Sjælen var Blod, men den nærmere Forklaring han gav herover seer hun sig ikke istand til at erindre (Sorenskriveren, Politiprotokol, 1837-1846, f. 180)

To andre elever vidner om samme hændelse, hvor Stephensen "havde fortalt Børnene i Kunø, at naar de bleve frugtsommelige skulde lægge Muld fra Kirkegaarden mellem Brysterne, for at fordrive Fosteret" (Sorenskriveren, Politiprotokol, 1837-1846, f. 180). Disse forklaringer om Stephensen stiller ham i et dårligt lys, og hvorfor han fortæller sine elever om abort, beskrives ikke. Stephensen tilstår at have sagt det, som Frederikke påstår, men understreger selv, at han formanede børnene til ikke at gøre dette (Sorenskriveren, Politiprotokol, 1837-1846, f. 181).

Til trods for at kirkegårdsjord må vurderes som overtroisk og i hvert fald ueffektiv til abortfremkaldelse, så viser sagens forløb hans kendskab til at fremprovokere abort. Under afhøringen beskriver både Jacobsdatter og sidenhen Stephensen, hvordan aborterne er fremprovokeret. Første gang havde han givet hende en spiseskefuld bitter væske (som han fortæller, at hans kone har modtaget), og efter en time aborterede hun (Sorenskriveren, Politiprotokol, 1837-1846, f. 178). Anden gang årelod han hende på armene og senere på benene, for siden at sætte hendes fødder i varmt søvand, hvorefter hun aborterer igen (Sorenskriveren, Politiprotokol, 1837-1846, f. 178). Ingen af aborterne kan betegnes som lægmandspraksis.

Fodbad i varmt søvand nævnes i beskrivelserne af færøsk folkemedicin, *Gomul føroysk heimaráð*, som R. K. Rasmussen samlede under "månesygen", og hvordan den udeblivende menstruation kunne fremkaldes (Rasmussen, 1959, 26-27). Ingen direkte benævnelse af abort er i samlingen, men udover udeblivende menstruation nævnes også råd *mod* at få børn, hvilke er at lægge sælskind i sengen hos parret, der vil undgå graviditet. Dog beskrives spontan abort, at *hitta reis*,

og der beskrives, at spontane aborter ofte forekom mellem nymåne og fuld sol. Intet blev gjort ved disse aborter, og kvinden måtte ligge i sengen i 1-3 døgn, til blødningen stoppede. Fosteret skulle begraves, men det skulle holdes hemmeligt hvor, hvilket også er tilfældet i sagen om Jacobsdatter.

Stephensens handlinger lægger op til en væsentlig mere professionel tilgang til abort – set bort fra kirkegårdsmulden – end den færøske folkemedicin officielt har omfattet, og som man måske ville forvente i et geografisk isoleret område som Kunoy i 1840'erne. Det kildemateriale, vi har fremlagt, giver anledning til at undersøge disse forhold nærmere.

Historiens tilgængelighed

Tobias de Fønss Wung-Sung spørger i sit essay "Hvilke historier og hvordan? Hiv/aids i danske arkiver og biblioteker", hvordan forskellige samlinger af kilder påvirker, hvilke historier vi i dag kan skrive om hiv/aids (Wung-Sung, 2023, 150). Spørgsmålet om tilgængelighed, og hvad man kan gøre ved den, minder på mange måder om vores projekt med at fremskrive færøsk aborthistorie. Wung-Sungs refleksioner har resonans, idet de bygger på den erkendelse, at arkivalier og arkiver allerede er produkter af kulturelle dynamikker, der udtrykker magt og privilegier, og er "skabt ud fra visse samfundsgruppers behov og interesser" (Wung-Sung, 2023, 151). Den færøske aborthistorie findes ikke i særskilte arkivkasser eller som et selvstændigt emne med tilhørende journalnøgler, men skal klippes sammen ud af den dokumenterede, men fragmenterede, historie i form af medicinalindberetninger, politi- og justitsprotokoller og andre administrationskilder.

Til forskel fra hiv/aids som tema i det proportionelt meget større land Danmark, så består aborthistoriens materiale i Færøerne ikke af hundredvis eller tusindvis af digitaliserede kilder. Men der findes materiale, som vi kan og bør følge, for at se på, hvad det har gjort og stadig kan gøre i det færøske samfund. Mens Wung-Sung understreger Maryanne Devers pointe om arkivet som et "site of power", der afspejler eller styrker den

magtstruktur, det er formet af, vil vi også fremhæve Barbara Bieseckers argument om arkivet som et "site of invention" (Dever, 2017, 1; Biesecker, 2006). Som Biesecker slår fast:

Whatever else the archive may be – say, an historical space, a political space, or a sacred space; a site of preservation, interpretation, or commemoration – it always already is the provisionally settled scene of our collective invention, of our collective invention of us and of it (Biesecker, 2006, 124).

Det at fremlægge de kilder, vi har lokaliseret, kan ses som et forsøg på at påvirke den forståelse af, hvad abort er og har været i det færøske samfund; en måde at påpege de magtstrukturer, der stadig gør sig gældende, såsom relationen til Danmark, og konsekvenserne af, hvad fortielsen eller genfortællingen af Jacobsdatters oplevelser kan have i dag. Hvad gør det ved vores forståelse af abort i dag, at vi ved, at Jacobsdatter i sin samtid kunne fortælle offentligt om sine oplevelser – og hvilke forståelser af offentlighed, giver materialet os anledning til at diskutere videre? Det er nødvendigt at tilgå de emner, vi undersøger, som materialer, der har *gjort* noget i deres samtid, ved at se på, hvilke aftryk de har sat – eller ikke har fået lov at afsætte. Og det er samtidig nødvendigt at understrege, hvordan vi som historikere, retorikere og kritikere også aktivt henter ressourcer til de argumenter, vi vil fremføre, og således anerkende historieskrivning som et udtryk for daværende, men også nutidige, interesserer.

Denne "double invention", som Biesecker kalder den tovejs påvirkning, som arkivarbejde har på nutiden og fortiden, understreger det ultimativt retoriske i enhver historiografi og arkivundersøgelse, og ved at anerkende arkivet som både et "site of power" og som et "site of invention", står vi ved vores position som kritikere med et todelt formål: At påpege, hvordan sagen vedrørende Jacobsdatter viser, at kildernes udformning i sig selv giver indsigt i, hvordan færøsk aborthistorie er betinget af geopolitiske faktorer; og hvordan en arkivanalyse kan fremhæve ligheder og forskelle imellem datidens og nutidens forhold til abort. I en tid, hvor

aborts betydning i Færøerne efter årtier står til at destabiliseres med en offentlig og politisk debat om, hvorvidt abortlovgivningen skal "sættes fri", er historien en tom betegner, som indtil videre ikke tilegnes nogen særlig betydning i debatten. Den vil forhåbentlig fortsætte med at være ustabil og indetermineret, efter vi har fremskrevet vores analyse, men den offentlige debat bør være informeret af de retorisk-materielle forhold, som vi kan påpege.

Konklusion

Det undersøgte materiales tilgængelighed og tilblivelse har været betinget af en lang række både affektive, geografiske og virtuelle faktorer, som understreger retorisk tilvækst som en retorisk-materiel dimension af arkivanalyse. I vores tilfælde synliggør denne form for feministisk metode, hvordan den geopolitiske relation til emnets biopolitiske karakter er afgørende. Den kontrol med især kvinders seksualliv og reproduktion, som abortlovgivning og -retorik rammesætter, forstærkes af de lag af forskellige udtryk for politisk magt, som en proces som den, som Anna Maria Jacobsdatter var igennem, dokumenterer.

Jacobsdatter blev ansat og lovet ægteskab af Simon Stephensen, der også foretog hendes aborter; hendes far ønskede hendes navn rensat og genfortalte hendes historie i brevet til landfogeden, som var dansk embedsmand; landfoged Lunddahl iværksatte en undersøgelse, og i løbet af den efterfølgende retssag er hendes vidneforklaring nedfældet på dansk af mennesker, der har forstået færøsk og har oversat det til de myndigheder, der har kommunikeret på dansk. Jacobsdatter har aflagt forklaring for embedsmænd, jurister, dommer og læge, og hendes fortælling bruges til at fremstille hende som enfoldig – måske for hendes egen skyld. Hendes sag gentages og genfortælles i arkivalier, der gemmes i Færøerne og i den Højesteretssag, anklagerens anke af dommen i Færøernes ret førte til. Hendes del i færøsk aborthistorie er et udtryk for, hvordan den er indflettet i dansk administration af oversøiske territorier, og illustrerer den komplekse tilgængelighed til viden

om, hvordan abort blev omtalt, praktiseret og administreret før vores tid.

Som en begyndelse på en fremskrivning af færøsk aborthistorie har vi ville understrege, hvordan den ikke er undersøgt, hvordan den skal forstås retorisk-materielt, og hvordan den administrative

relation til Danmark er en del af de magtforhold, der har skabt de kilder, vi har. Den fortsætter med at påvirke forståelsen af, hvad abort betyder i Færøerne, og som højst sandsynligt vil fortsætte med at påvirke den, som et udtryk for krydsfeltet mellem geopolitik og biopolitik.

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Negotiating Trans Affect in Luka Holmegaard's *Havet i munden*

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Their PhD project investigates the ways in which trans-queer imaginaries navigate a cultural moment shaped by the current surge of trans visibility.

Abstract

Identifying a dominant affective polarization pertaining to contemporary trans discourse and the constraints this poses in accounting for trans experience, the article turns to the sphere of trans poetics. Through a reading of *Havet i munden* (2023) [The Ocean in Your Mouth] by Danish author Luka Holmegaard, the article discerns poetic strategies for navigating the politically pressurized present. The article argues that in troubling the relation between pleasure and pain, exhibiting representational restraint, and attuning to bodily sensations, *Havet i munden* offers a renegotiation of trans affect, exhibiting the desire to move beyond the constraints of marked identity entirely.

KEYWORDS: affect, transgender, queer, poetry

Introduction

"Is it cold in the water?"

-- SOPHIE, *OIL OF EVERY PEARL'S UN-INSIDES*

På vej tilbage til huset spørger E, hvordan det føles at bade. Om jeg er nervøs, selvbevidst. Jeg siger nej, siger: Jeg har det, som om min krop er fyldt med lys.

[On our way back to the house E asks me how it feels to swim. If I am nervous, self-conscious. I say no, say: It feels as if my body is filled with light.] (Holmegaard, 2023, p. 10)

Poetic images of lightness, ease, and pleasure radiate from Danish author Luka Holmegaard's recent book of poems *Havet i munden* [*The Ocean in Your Mouth*] (2023), a collection in four parts "about pleasure, pain, testosterone, and swimming in the ocean" as the back copy reads. The work opens with a bathing scene. The narrator and a friend, named only with the initial V, have been training outdoors, a bit outside of Copenhagen. It's mid-May, still off-season in terms of bathing in the chilly coastal waters of Denmark. The bathing scene describes an encounter of mixed pleasure as the narrator submerges his body in cold water (it is 13 degrees we are told). The meeting between body and environment is rendered with precision and restraint:

Til at begynde med gør det vildt ondt i benene. Så bliver det bedre, men ikke meget. [...] jeg er jo allerede herude og ved, at først bliver det koldt, og så bliver det dejligt. / Havet bliver blødere i løbet af sommeren, lige nu er det hårdt som glas.

[In the beginning it just really hurts in the legs. Then it gets better, but not by a lot. [...] I already know that first it will feel cold, then good. / The ocean becomes softer over the summer. For now, it is hard, like glass.] (Holmegaard, 2023, p. 7)

This is simply an act of exposing the body to a different milieu--another temperatural surround--something the body needs to get accustomed to. An astute and razor-sharp awareness is directed at this--for people living in the vicinity of water at least--fairly common and familiar activity.

The trans and queerness of the scene is introduced from the outset by the mention of the friend's pronoun "den" (it)--which is not unusual in the Danish queer community, where "de"/"dem" (they/them) and/or "it" are the most commonly used pronouns to signify a nonbinary or gender-queer identification--and the mention of scars on the narrator's body. But there is no explanation or further context provided in reference to either pronoun or the origin of the scars: "The scars have healed, but I can still hardly lift any weight in the arms" (p. 7) is the only description provided. Indeed, an unceremonious descriptiveness attends to the markers of gendered difference²: Without any prior knowledge of the signs particular to trans and queer people and communities, a reader would most likely find themselves in the dark as to the meaning of the friend's pronoun and the narrator's bodily status.³ The author's initial description is reduced to a bare minimum; we get a hint at the location of the scars as probably somewhere on the upper body, since lifting with the arms poses a challenge, and scars in plural also gives a hint by ruling out certain scenarios. But for a readership in the know no further clues are needed for it to be clear, that the narrator is healing from top surgery.

The poems actively engage the power dynamics of familiarity/unfamiliarity: a personal intimacy with the language and bodily sensations relating to trans-queer experience allows for a certain access to the material--which my reading of *Havet i munden* will surely reflect. The author's way of conveying lived experience of transness is clearly informed by a mode of trans-for-trans (t4t) ethos; that is, it exhibits a conscious privileging of trans mutual understanding while foregoing the oftentimes tiring labor of explaining what is common knowledge for trans people, but might not be immediately accessible from a cis-gendered perspective.⁴ Yet, this is not to claim the work as an example of a literary trans separatism. In fact, the

text seems quite uninterested in sharply defining or delineating transness (the word 'trans' does not even appear in the book. The word "transsexuals" appears once as an explanatory aside). But neither is trans experience rendered in the metaphorical: Unlike the epigraph by musician and producer SOPHIE, water and bathing are not readily evoked by Holmegaard as allegories of gender transition.⁵ Rather, as I will demonstrate in the following, the work in poetically juxtaposing concrete bodily sensation and evocative poetic imagery actively pushes against established cultural narratives of transness. Indeed, in the poetic questioning of the expected affective demarcations of 'trans,' the poems speak into a central impasse currently pertaining to the very category of trans as a marked identity.⁶

As much of the overall positive critical reception of *Havet i munden* takes note of, there is something inherently *out of the ordinary* in the very reticence, the restrained stylistic lucidity and tranquil sensory delight with which this contemporary narrative of gender transition presents itself. The book's "tender simplicity and undramatic lightness" is "striking", one critic noted (Gregersen, 2023); "surprisingly subtle" remarked another (Nexø, 2023); "[...] it feels unusual that a narrative about trans experience centers on pleasure" a journalist interviewing the author candidly points out (Adamsson, 2023). As I will discuss in the following, it's not that difficult emotion is at all missing from this poetic account—there are sections touching on humiliation, dysphoria, disorientation, and numbness—it's just not the book's dominant mood.

Reading the critical reception of the work there is something telling—perhaps even borderline absurd—in the very fact that poetic motifs of quotidian experience spur such attention when narrated from the perspective of contemporary trans experience. Indeed, the fact that until recently accounts of trans pleasure have been virtually absent from the Danish cultural sphere (and beyond) seems to illustrate the very narrowness pertaining to the narrative parameters of contemporary trans representation. But considering the long history of association of transness with 'bad

feeling'—arising from the self-alienating distress of gender dysphoria and intense social stigma alike—this may hardly come as a surprise. As a matter of fact, since its very conception the term 'transsexual' has been inseparably tied to negative affect (Amin, 2022). So, seeing as the book centers a trans masculine narrator in the process of transitioning, and given that the writer himself has openly transitioned (though, the two do not necessarily correspond) activates a set of culturally and politically coordinated limitations on the imaginable, and indeed on trans imaginability beyond the already established trajectory of misery.

Yet, if the (trans)gendered framing of this poetic narrative leads to an impasse of imaginability, and given the text's own insistence on rendering some trans-specific markers opaque, does it mean that a reading of Holmegaard's work would be more solidaric in de-centering the work's gendered situatedness and significance? And does the focus on pleasure and ease within a narrative of trans experience signal a form of apolitical contentment; that is, that we have finally reached a longed for "trans paradise" (See Raun, 2010)? In both cases I would argue to the contrary. In this article, I wish to demonstrate that understanding the cultural and political mechanisms governing narratives of trans representation is vital, not only for grasping the range of poetic strategies deployed by Luka Holmegaard, but also the political trajectories of their poetic imaginary.

The following analysis is part of my wider PhD study on the poetic and aesthetic strategies for countering representational violence in contemporary trans-queer cultural production. My aims in this article will be twofold: Firstly, I want to illuminate the narrative and affective constraints impacting contemporary trans intelligibility and, by extension, transgender modes of being in the world. Here I attend to work within contemporary affect theory concerned with the uneven distribution of affect among differentiated bodies to sketch out the polarized affective terrain shaping the conditions of possibility of trans narratives (Malatino, 2022; Ahmed, 2010; Love, 2009; Amin, 2022). Secondly, through a reading of Luka Holmegaard's *Havet i munden* as embedded within

and deeply concerned with these conditions and constraints, I shed light on the possible poetic strategies for navigating this highly politically pressurized field—and possibly transcending it. In this part, I begin by turning to the status of difficult affect in Holmegaard's book before shifting my attention to selected poetic images of attunement to sensory pleasure. Overall, I seek to demonstrate how a deeper understanding of the gender political context in which a trans imaginary is rooted may work to elucidate the political openings such work gestures towards. In carefully choosing its mode of (non)engagement, I contend that Holmegaard's book exemplifies a way of negotiating the parameters of trans narrative economies: by textually weaving a different, sensuous mode of being in the world.

Affective polarization

Structured in four parts, beginning and ending with encounters of bathing in the ocean through the duration of a season, *Havet i munden* follows a transmasculine narrator as he gets acquainted with the inner and outer effects of taking testosterone. Snippets of text document him bathing, attentively registering his surroundings, and hanging out with friends in everyday scenarios such as going to a wedding, helping a friend move, going on dates. The longest poem attends to the humiliating and drawn-out process of going through the Danish state's gender clinic in order to access trans-specific health care, while meditating on the conditions for transforming pain into pleasure (for instance through consensual BDSM-play—or indeed, through the act of writing). The poems dwell carefully and caringly on the body's sensations: touching and being touched, what feels good. Not least, the poems highlight the surrounding presence of community, most notably in the final part gathering reassuring voices of trans and queer friends; quotes of common things friends would say are interspersed throughout the pages, mingling encouragingly in between the everyday scenes of bathing.

What seems to be especially noteworthy in the foregrounding of scenes of pleasure, leisure, and caring community in *Havet i munden* is the active downplaying of difficulty and tension that usually accompanies narratives rooted in the experiences of socially marginalized identities. This tension is what usually comes from displeasure, dissatisfaction, commonly signifying wrongdoing and mobilizing towards political change. Pleasure may indeed seem like an odd bedfellow for politics suggesting—through for instance a series of leftist ideological stances—stagnant contentment at best, and harmful hedonism at worst (See Jameson, 2008). The orientation towards pleasure in *Havet i munden* however is not, I argue, to be understood as a privileged expression of indulgence, but rather as expressing a desire to move away from a particularly tired script of trans people as tragic and suffering social pariahs. Again, it's not that displeasure, difficulty, or even violence is absent from the narrative, but rather that the author seems to be playing with levels of intensity and tension in the poems, sometimes deliberately zig-zagging between 'negative' and 'positive' affective poles, sometimes conflating them, sometimes simply lingering in comfortable sensory delight, testing the waters for different trans affective narratives. Before unpacking the role of sensory attunement to (dis)pleasure and its mixtures in *Havet i munden*, it will be useful to map out the contours of the politically charged affective terrain of contemporary trans experience.

As a minoritized group, the act of sharing experience through different forms of self-narration is of particular importance for trans and gender variant communities.⁷ But given that gender transition is a highly politically pressurized and regulated issue, trans narratives are brought to bear nearly impossible political weight: In sharing trans-specific experiences and concerns in a given (cis majority) public arena, there is, from a trans perspective, always a sense of risk that one may unknowingly tip some uncertain political scales, potentially affecting trans people as a whole. Moreover, the often strictly gatekept routes to trans-specific health care tend to put a considerable burden on the affective self-narration of trans

subjects in need of treatment (See Friborg, 2023). These amorphous pressures are some of the more dubious aspects of the tendency towards public representations of 'trans joy' as a means of countering the historically pervasive perceptions of trans people as miserable, suffering, and mentally ill.⁸ Trans pleasure, joy, and affirmation--as genuine as they may be, and are--are nevertheless "mediated by the deeply bifurcated affective discourse that governs tropes of trans representation" as trans scholar Hil Malatino notes in his recent book *Side Affects: On Being Trans and Feeling Bad* (2022). In this timely defense of what we may call "the right to feel bad" within a trans affective discourse, Malatino seeks to counter the affective flatness too often assigned the socially marginalized. "Trans people should not feel compelled to sweep self-narrative clean of [...] negative affect, or be corralled into associating bad feeling exclusively to the "pre-" of transition," he writes, arguing for trans people's right to multidimensional and complex personhood (2022, p. 3). Indeed, even beyond a medical context, high levels of pre-transition distress and the sometimes elusive promise of post-transition alleviation form the narrative arc structuring trans existence, allowing for a restricted affective palette.

The difficulty of accounting for lived experience with a sense of depth, nuance, and complexity is part of a history and politics of trans and queer misrepresentation where a persistent lack of words, images, and archive material form a shadow of denied existence and misrecognition hovering over trans- and queer life-worlds, still impacting trans lives. Considering this history, making space for negative affect and experience--or even, polemically, embracing it-- can feel like a breath of fresh air. The perspective of embracing various accounts of negativity gained notable traction in queer theory with works as otherwise varied as Lee Edelman's *No Future* (2004), Sianne Ngai's, *Ugly Feelings* (2005), Heather Love's *Feeling Backward* (2007), and Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011). From a trans studies perspective, a renewed preoccupation with 'bad feeling' was stirred by trans thinker and critic Andrea Long Chu's polemic opinion piece in *The*

New York Times, "My New Vagina Won't Make Me Happy. And It Shouldn't Have To" (2018). This longstanding line of critical engagement serves to underscore the immense importance of negative affect in trans and queer studies: "To narrate unhappiness can be affirmative; it can gesture toward another world, even if we are not given a vision of the world as it might exist after the walls of misery are brought down," writes queer affect scholar Sara Ahmed, simultaneously acknowledging the pervasiveness of unhappiness as a trope within narratives of queerness, with all the tolls it can take on queer lives (2010, p. 107). Unhappy narratives then, are a central part of trans- and queerness; they may feel disparaging or empowering, stifling or liberating, depending on the context within which they are wielded.

This 'reversible' quality of hurtful discourse is something that queer resistance to stigma historically has been especially adept at tapping into (the most notable examples off course being the notion of 'pride' as an antidote to 'shame,' or indeed the claiming of 'queer' as a positive descriptor of selfhood.) (See Butler, 1993). In her book, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007), queer scholar Heather Love describes what she calls the "turn to the negative" in queer studies. She attests a large part of the scholarly preoccupation with queer suffering to the engagement with the work of Michel Foucault, and especially his notion of the "reversibility of power", that is, the ways in which dominated groups may 'flip' instances of domination to their advantage. Queer identity is built on and shaped by the effects of this reversibility of discourse:

[O]n the one hand, [homosexual identity] continues to be understood as a form of damaged or compromised subjectivity; on the other hand, the characteristic forms of gay freedom are produced in response to this history. Pride and visibility offer antidotes to shame and the legacy of the closet; they are made in the image of specific forms of denigration. Queerness is structured by this central turn. (Love, 2007, pp. 2-3)

Following Love's inquiry we may ask: are there parts of queerness so fundamentally tied to forms of "feeling backward" that the prospect of relinquishing the clusters of negative affect shaping queer as a marked identity would also mean altering queerness itself beyond recognizability? Love ultimately points out an impasse here: Without queer misery, there would de facto be no (need for) queer resistance.

A similar paradox around negative affect is currently receiving invigorated critical attention in trans studies. Trans scholar Kadji Amin, in tracing gender dysphoria as "the definitional symptom of transness," goes on in claiming transness as discursively "soldered to negative affect" (Amin, 2022, p. 33). In following the burgeoning accounts of trans misery in sexological archives and medical definitions and tracing their effects in the social world, Amin identifies a sociogenetic impulse: that narratives of trans misery ultimately *generate more trans misery*. This is not to say that trans negative affect cannot be productive. After all:

"Negative affect is powerful. It can inform us of social oppression and draw us toward others similarly oppressed; its very discomfort can serve as an incitement to move or to do something—to transform ourselves, our communities, and our larger life worlds. [...] But that does not mean that shame, stigma, and dysphoria are thereby left behind forever. Affect is non-linear, and shame, stigma, and dysphoria live on in the very selves—the very transsexual flesh—formed in and through them." (Amin, 2022, p. 40)

Negative affect, according to Amin, is thus an inherent part—both socially and bodily—of what it means to be trans. Against this bleak backdrop notions of post-transition 'trans joy,' circulating vehemently for instance in YouTube transition videos and popular media, may constitute the "opposing" affective end, yet are fundamentally bound to the same affective mechanisms, forming an overall tendency of affective polarization in contemporary trans narratives.

In the following, I turn my attention to the poetic strategies of *Havet i munden*, demonstrating the book's way of working through this seeming dichotomy.

Like you can't see the air

There are important reasons, then, for continually engaging with negative affect, especially in a trans and queer context. Even if the pleasurable takes center stage in *Havet i munden*, the book in fact addresses trans-specific difficulty, albeit in a deliberately restrained manner.⁹ The most comprehensive accounts of working through this difficulty are to be found in the book's longest poem "No face, no match". Here, the trans masculine narrator processes his experiences in going to the gender clinic for trans-specific health care. This narrative account is crosscut with—and in some places seamlessly blends into—scenes of dating, flirting, and engaging in consensual BDSM-power play. Actively resisting writing about 'trans suffering'—"I will never write what they ask me at the clinic. / I will never write it down and send it to print," the narrator asserts with tangible anger (Holmegaard, 2023, p. 47)—the poem nevertheless remains ambivalent. In flowing in and out of specific instances of pain and juxtaposing them with pleasure, the poem meditates on broader questions like: Is it possible to write about the experience of a violence without reproducing it? How and with whom can one share experiences of painful emotion? Under what conditions can pain become pleasurable? And how to begin the labor of taking care of oneself and others?

The poem registers the violence of the clinic as dull and stupid: easy to see through, to anticipate, to pick apart "like a roasted chicken." And yet, as the body can attest to, it works:

Jeg kan skrive, hvordan det føles; / varme i kinderne, hænderne, maven / noget, der trækker fremad i brystet og / en enorm utålmodighed. / Vipper med foden hele vejen hjem i toget / [...] denne her lyst til at

*brænde et eller andet ned, men / det må nok
blive mit eget liv igen, / for jeg har jo brug for
recepten.*

*[I can write how it feels: / A heat in the stom-
ach, the hands, the face, / a forward pulling
feeling in the chest and / this immense im-
patience. / I tap my foot all the way back on
the train, / [...] this desire to burn something
down but / it might have to be my own life
again / because I need the prescription.]
(Holmegaard, 2023, p. 47)*

There is a trans-specificity to this rage; one that a trans subject can impossibly direct at its proper target—an amorphous system of medical, cultural, juridical, and governmental actors—and losing one's composure in front of 'well-meaning' medical professionals only risks blowing one's chances to gain access to treatment.¹⁰

The text's way of laboring through these instances of emotional strain is to go first through the body, its singular sensations and their reverberation within wider webs of power. Here language itself is littered with pitfalls, and the text moves in and through the points of convergence between the lack of language, or its not-being-enough, and the violence of language, its being-too-much. The text examines alternative routes. BDSM-play is introduced as one counterweight (jokes and laughter being another) to the subject's loss of self at the clinic: In the consensual play with power, the loss of self may be inverted, and an agency gained in a different loss of power and control, this one willfully given. A passage rendering the drawn-out humiliation of 'playing the part' of the 'good' trans subject before the clinic personnel, is mirrored formally in the text with line-spacing becoming more frequent so that only one or few words are left before the line breaks. Words become sparser and sharper. Jagged and irregular and demanding attention. The extended lingering on the trans subject's subordination at the clinic then blends almost unnoticeably into a BDSM play scene, where the narrator willingly offers his body to receive pain:

*hvordan vil de have mig / til at tale / hvor /
vil de have mig / til at sidde / dér, på stolen
/ og / hvad står jeg til rådighed for / og /
for hvem / vil / jeg / skal / jeg / være / en /
stakkels lille dreng / Vi gennemspiller / en
scene / Jeg elsker / virkelig / at blive / slået
i / ansigtet / beder / ofte / om det / Min el-
sker siger / at jeg skal / holde munden holde
øjnene / åbne*

*[how do they want me / to speak / where /
do they want me / to sit / there on the chair
/ and / what am I available for / and / for /
whom / will / I / do I have to / be / a / poor
little boy / We are / playing / out / a / scene
/ I / really / love / being hit / in / the face / I
/ often / ask / for it / My lover says / to keep
/ my eyes my mouth / open] (Holmegaard,
2023, p. 49-50)*

In her essay "Dungeon Intimacies: The Poetics of Transsexual Sadomasochism" (2008), trans historian Susan Stryker eloquently argues for BDSM's capacity for bringing about new configurations of trans existence. In this auto-theoretical account, through a flash-back to the dim depths of a once regularly visited dungeon, whip in hand, she meditates:

*I envision my body as a meeting point, a
node, where external lines of force and so-
cial determination thicken into meat and cir-
culate as movement back into the world. So
much that constitutes me I did not choose,
but, now constituted, I feel myself to be in
a place of agency. I occupy a critical space,
a distance between stimulus and response
created by the complex social pathways con-
verging in the dungeon, in which through my
presence I gain the capacity to choose which
patterns I will repeat, or which new patterns
I might envision and enact. I invent new cho-
reographies of space and time as I dance my
whip across the creature's ass. (p. 42)*

Similarly, in Holmegaard's text we get a glimpse into the ways in which power and positionality

work to condition our given constitution in space and time, offering an embodied perspective of navigating within and at times gesturing beyond their given configuration. In the passage above, the poem formally redirects its focus almost seamlessly from one constellation of power to another in one uninterrupted stream of words; across the page a different whip does its dance.

But the poem also meditates more explicitly on shifting attention away from being restrained to telling tales of suffering. It would much rather attend to pleasure, rather than write about the clinic, yet seemingly, almost performatively 'gives in':

Klinikken, et powerplay jeg aldrig vil genopføre. / Bliver ved med at tænke på de der små plastikkrus / en umådeligt usexet beholder, giftig, uduelig og uholdbar, / jo, jeg kan skrive et spørgsmål, de stillede mig: Vil du have noget vand? / Fuck medlidenhed.

[The clinic, a powerplay I have no interest reviving. / Keep thinking of these small plastic cups / a tremendously unsexy container, poisonous, useless and untenable, / yes, I can write one question down, that they asked me: would you like some water? / Fuck pity.] (Holmegaard, 2023, p. 49)

The narrator seems to be caught in a trap of representational restrictions: On the one hand, not wanting to keep reproducing tales of trans suffering, and on the other, acknowledging the need for documenting trans existence, still haunted by historical erasure, still lacking the words for sharing our experience.¹¹ How to tell and not tell at the same time? In refusing to narrate humiliating experiences at the gender clinic, yet continuously edging on this very refusal, Holmegaard also refuses to abide by a particular script of suffering, one that has come to be tacitly expected of trans people in need of trans-specific health care.¹²

Another complex and somewhat thorny element at play in the author's ambivalent withholding of poetic images of trans suffering relates to the intense stratification of the category of transness and the narrator's position within wider structures

of power. Because—and this relates to Hil Malatino's "right to feel bad"-line of argument, only from the opposite affective end—there are also, importantly, contexts and moments where trans people are *not* suffering. After all, everything indicates that the text's narrator is a young adult, a white, able-bodied, trans man living in a country with state-secured trans-specific health care, a caring and understanding community of friends and lovers around to support him, and generous amounts of free time for bathing and connecting with others. *I am not arguing whether this is an easy or difficult position to inhabit.* However, I do want to point to the narrator's inhabiting, from a structural perspective, a new and less hostile relation between disadvantage and privilege, something the text demonstrates an awareness of (Holmegaard, 2023, p. 41). This is, of course, a difficult discussion, especially within the parameters of trans and queer studies where high levels of suffering are associated with 'outsiderhood' and thus 'radical' political potential (Amin, 2017). When painful affect is presented in *Havet i munden*, rather than taking center stage, these feelings are "held" within the text as affective conditions one may float in and—crucially—out of again (Holmegaard, 2023, p. 47). The narrator experiences instances of systemic violence that are in moments *analogous with* but, importantly, *not the same as* what may be experienced by those incarcerated or waiting indefinitely in asylum centers.

Er begyndt at tænke på fængsler på grund af de meget lange køer, jeg står i. / Systemerne, klinikkerne, sluger min tid, vores tid, / skødesløst og i store portioner / Det er ikke på grund af noget, vi har gjort.

[I'm thinking of life in captivity because of all these very long queues, I'm in. / A system is spending my time, our time, recklessly, in big chunks, / it is not because of something we've done.] (Holmegaard, 2023, p. 47)

I read these points of convergence as crucial points of alliance among those in positions of disadvantage in relation to hegemonic power (See

Cohen, 1997). In part, the strategic refusal to narrate trans pain and humiliation is a way of forwarding a more capacious understanding of what trans life may look and feel like in moments unhinged from its co-constitution with misery.

Finally, the ambivalent resistance to narrating trans-specific pain also signals a way of working through complex states of absence of feeling entirely. Dysphoria—the trans-specific state of not feeling at home in the gender one has been assigned at birth—is mentioned only once in the entire book (p. 42). Here, the narrator's account of dysphoria indicates not only an individual body's take on handling difficult emotion, an 'internal' condition designated as 'personal' or 'private', but poses it in direct relation to an external element: "Har ofte sagt, at jeg ikke var særlig dysforisk / men det var bare den eneste følelse, jeg hele tiden havde / Ligesom man ikke kan se luften [I often said I wasn't that dysphoric / but it was just the only feeling I had all the time / Like you can't see the air]" (Holmegaard, 2023, p. 42). The air here suddenly appears suffocating, like an inescapable ambiance. The contrast—from minimal feeling to the *only* feeling—produced by the affective delay serves to underscore the intensity harbored in this state of numbness.¹³ As if frozen in time and space, the poem lends us a snapshot of the collision between the void of unfeeling and the sense of complete absorption leaving it unresolved. But "the air" is important here. Rather than placing the dysphoria solely within the suffering trans subject, here it is mirrored by an outside force. The subjective experiences of dysphoria are, as Kadji Amin argues, deeply interwoven with external factors—access to health care, cultural discourse, social position. Once gender dysphoria becomes expected and required of trans people—as the ultimate "proof" of our transness—it is inserted in the perpetuating circuits of negative trans affect forming a seemingly inescapable loop of trans misery (Amin, 2022). In this way, trans people are—through socially identifying as such—"onto-etio-logically soldered to negative affect." (Amin, 2022, p. 33). It is this very co-constitution with misery that Holmegaard's narrative pushes back against.

This is no small thing to be up against. Another way of conceptualizing the current impasse in the contemporary configuration of trans possibility and livability also latches on to the evocative poetic imagery of air. In *Atmospheres of Violence: Structuring Antagonism and the Trans/Queer Ungovernable* (2021), abolitionist trans and queer theorist Eric A. Stanley suggests thinking about the structuring conditions of trans/queer existence in the present moment—one they describe as deeply marked by the interlacings of gendered and racialized violence and its stratification—through the vocabulary of atmospheres. Following Franz Fanon, Stanley provides a way of thinking anti-trans/queer violence as an enveloping totality:

For Fanon, atmospheres summon the plastic totality of colonization. Rather than an event, or an era of imperial expansion that has a beginning and end, for him, and for us now, atmospheres describe not simply the assemblages of gendered and racialized force and their contestation but the thick hang of fog that allows us to know little else. (p. 16)

Holmegaard's subtle and intimate poetry and Stanley's sweeping analysis of modernity might at first glance have little in common, yet Holmegaard's text also grapples with the atmospheric, enveloping background hum of violence, albeit in a considerably less forceful register than Stanley's horrifying archive of trans/queer death demands. Holmegaard's narrator breathes the same air.

Skifter trøje / til en der er alt for stram / og tager ud for at mødes med en / jeg lige har mødt

Og så er det, som når nogen taber et glas / eller kaster det? / At blive trukket tilbage / hårdt og pludseligt som med et reb

Jeg når ikke at forstå / om det er mig eller den, jeg er på baren med / de taler om / spørger til

*de griner / de taler norsk / vi kender dem
ikke*

*de har væddet, siger de / vi har en
konkurrans*

*[Change / into a sweater that is way too tight
/ and go out to meet someone / I just met*

*And then it's as if someone drops a glass /
or throws it? / Being pulled back / hard and
suddenly like with a rope*

*I don't have time to understand / if it is me or
the one I'm at the bar with / they are talking
about / asking about*

*they are laughing / they are speaking Norwe-
gian / we don't know them*

*they have a bet going, they say / vi har en
konkurrans [we have a competition]]*

(Holmegaard, 2023, p. 28)

As if performing an optical illusion in the form of a poetic narrative, *Havet i munden* may overall read as a narrative of trans pleasure. Yet, the downplaying of pain and difficulty is not, as I have argued, a way of sidestepping dysphoria, transphobia, and other sources of trans misery—they are after all right there in the text. Rather, the narrator's stated desire—in all its ambivalence—of narrating pleasure rather than hurt works as a tentative way of confronting the long-standing co-constitution with misery; not looking away from difficulty and *simultaneously* allowing for different trans narratives to emerge.

Tuning in

Tuning in and being present in the plethora of affective and sensory impressions coagulating in a singular experience of trans embodiment is at the heart of *Havet i munden*. In the following, I will illustrate how the poetic space created by Holmegaard

carefully and attentively carves out space for trans existence in the world, a place to be present, through a poetics resonant with the method of affective attunement described by Hil Malatino as “a heightened, though not necessarily conscious, awareness to the affective dimensions of trans living” (Malatino, 2022, p. 4). Malatino's theoretical account is directed specifically at making space for negative trans affect and intentionally naming and categorizing a selection of affects found to pertain especially to the specificity of trans experience—numbness, disorientation, envy, rage, burn-out—as *trans* affects, and part of a trans affective commons. Holmegaard's poetics, in contrast, is oriented primarily toward pleasurable sensation, shifting between the trans-specificity of sensations emerging from a subjective experience of taking testosterone and sensations available to trans and non-trans individuals alike—the feeling of water and wind on skin, touching and being touched. As opposed to classifying encountered affects as trans, Holmegaard's poetry rather shies away from deliberately naming experience as necessarily trans at all, leaving it up to the reader to decipher (or not). For example, placed in the long poem “No face, no match”, amid what resembles an uninterrupted stream of thought ranging meditations on prisons, tenderness, belonging, and the function of writing, there is also this: Det er morgen nu, / jeg sidder ved skrivebordet og har glemt at tage en trøje på. / Det er rigtigt, jeg har glemt det [It is morning now / I am sitting at my desk, I forgot to put a shirt on. / It's true, I forgot] (Holmegaard, 2023, p. 48). This at first glance perhaps trivial and inconspicuous-seeming scene hides powerful trans affects in plain sight. The new and downy transmasculine experience of entering the longed-for, luxurious realm only afforded those with breastless torsos—actually *forgetting* to cover one's upper body—even takes the narrator by surprise. The quiet onset of extraordinary glee following the moment of noticing is evidenced by the repetition of “It's true, . . .” It's almost as if the narrator is having one of those moments where you have to pinch yourself in the arm to know what you experience is real: “It's true, . . .”. The narrator insists on sitting with it, on taking it in, on being present.

In an earlier work, *LOOK* (2020), Luka Holmegaard writes about a differently difficult time:

The feeling of being far away from my own surface, of not being able to notice anything, just looking at the world and instantly forgetting it again, that is what the stress illness consists of. [...] The trouble is everything to do with the surface. No impressions can adhere, no expressions are coming out right. I cannot 1: make myself comprehensible. 2: feel anything. The boundary between myself and the world has gotten infected. (Holmegaard, 2020, p. 38, my translation)

Even though the passage does not revolve around trans experience but a work-related burnout,¹⁴ there is a trans-specificity to be found in this state of disconnect from the world at large. “[A]s trans subjects in this transphobic world, we are encouraged and forced into a position of not being present. We are dissociated from our bodies, our loved ones, and our general environment,” attests trans scholar Atalia Israeli-Nevo (2017, p. 38). Seen in this context, Holmegaard’s restrained, hyper-present writing that insists on being to the point about felt bodily sensations can be read as a strategy for connecting, holding on, staying with the body’s surroundings, attuned and in the moment: textually weaving trans existence into the world, into existence. Despite their different approaches and orientations towards ‘opposing’ affective ends, both Malatino’s and Holmegaard’s attunement efforts are ultimately intent on providing more richness and complexity to trans narratives, countering the abounding representational violence, and making more room for trans people to simply ‘be’ in the world.

As opposed to the hyper-polarized affective sphere of trans representation in the contemporary discursive field sketched out above, where trans lives are made to be either traumatized and suffering or euphorically triumphant after finally eclipsing such heavy turbulence, Holmegaard’s subtle poetic approach clearly troubles this polarization of trans affect, as already evidenced in its zigzagging and fluctuating movements through

painful emotions and their relief in pleasure, effectively collapsing their distinction. In *Havet i munden*, there are glimpses of affective states where there is essentially no clear distinction to be made between the painful and the pleasurable, but rather, simply, sensations to be felt. Indeed, *Havet i munden* pushes the boundaries of the very notion of ‘trans affect’ by imagining a (queer) horizon of trans existence—impossibly—freed from the narrative constraints pertaining to the very category of ‘trans’.¹⁵ To further illustrate this, I turn to the poetic image giving the book its title, *Havet i munden*, or, *the ocean in your mouth*.

This titular image summons multiple contrasts: at once elusive, yet irreducibly tangible, it titillates and overwhelms at the same time. The point of contact between the wet fleshiness of an intimate inner world and the vast seemingly boundless exterior comes to the fore. In an almost surprising twist in this poetic image, the mouth and the ocean switch positions so that the ocean turns small and interior, the mouth assuming the position of the absorbing exterior—how huge it must become to be able to hold within it the entire ocean! Immense pathos is conjured as the weighty aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the sublime—think of painters like Monet attempting to capture the fleeting splendor of the ocean on canvas—through the Western philosophical canon. Through the poetic image of the ocean, Holmegaard latches on to the power lent by this tradition in order to illuminate a different fleeting splendor: that of the trans body in transition. And then, for another twist, about half-way into the book, we encounter the image again:

Fylder munden med vand fra et glas / Vipper hovedet frem og tilbage

Det føles virkelig som havet / i munden

Samme kølige tyngde / som at røre ved en bevægelse

[Fill the mouth with water from a glass / Tilt the head back and forth

It really feels like the ocean / in your mouth

*Same cool heaviness / like touching a
movement] (Holmegaard, 2023, p. 43, my
translation)*

So grand and awe-inspiring at first, this image of the all-consuming ocean, tamed, mastered, and consumed by a human mouth. And how in fact small and silly it turns out, this act of tilting one's head back and forth with one's mouth filled with water. Through this intimately embodied perspective there is a gesture toward something boundless entirely. Then, however, we are lead right back down to earth again. A place that also exists.

Conclusion

Luka Holmegaard's poetry collection *Havet i munden* emerges from within the narrative terms set by a cultural moment of—for better and for worse—increased trans visibility. High strung political debates over basic trans rights are commonplace in many national contexts; institutionalized cis-centrism, intense social stigmatization and the dissociating effects of gender dysphoria together form a pervasive association of transness with negative affect. In this context, accounts of 'trans joy,' in all their sincerity, wind up bound in the polarizing affective discourses on transness limiting trans imaginability beyond the existing trajectories. The affective constraints on trans self-narration are powerful.

As I have demonstrated throughout this article, Holmegaard's poetic account of a trans

masculine experience of taking testosterone, bathing, and hanging out in everyday scenarios shifts the gears on the established affective narratives on transness. In focusing on subtle bodily delights, crosscutting pleasure and pain, and presenting poetic images both grand and quotidian, it offers new vocabularies for narrating trans experience—but also rails against the limitations of 'trans,' in instances of (impossibly) dreaming of leaving behind the constraints of marked identity altogether. As such, it puts forth a vision of transness, ever so indistinctly defined, yet, as something other than what the seemingly inescapable ambiance of trans misery has to offer. Following this lead, what might this sort of ambivalently affirmative stance have to offer a trans political imaginary? Perhaps we may further elaborate the multiple ways in which trans life animates our common world—both within and beyond trans(-for-trans) relationality: fostering openness for change; a slow staying with sensations; affective attunement; and more.

Havet i munden is not invested in furthering a linear progress narrative of trans experience. Nor does it subscribe to a sensationally triumphant account of trans pleasure as a way of dispelling subjective experiences of distress. Rather, in insisting on slowing things down and staying with the existing, sometimes elusive, sometimes contradictory, affects circulating around trans experience, it offers a glimpse into what actual trans life—in one of its richly varied iterations—might look and feel like. And that, in and of itself, is an infinitely valuable contribution in a current state of politically charged and intensely polarized trans discourses.

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Notes

- ¹ English translations of parts I and III generously provided by the author. Unless indicated otherwise, this is the translation I use throughout the article.
- ² On queer reading methods and the 'descriptive' mode, see: Jenny Björklund and Ann-Sofie Lönngrén, "Now You See It, Now You Don't: Queer Reading Strategies, Swedish Literature, and Historical (In)visibility" in *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 92, nr. 2, summer 2020.
- ³ Tellingly, the above quoted passage is highlighted in a cis-gendered critic's reception of the work as 'non-inclusive', as he was obliged to seek out information outside of the book (Bakkendrup 2023).
- ⁴ For more on the concept of t4t, see the special issue of *TSQ* edited by Cameron Awkward-Rich and Hil Malatino *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 9 (1), February 1, 2022.
- ⁵ For more on the literary strategies of new Danish trans literature, see Mons Bissenbakker: "Transkønnethed som tema og æstetisk form" i Camilla Schwartz, Anne-Marie Mai, Karen Hvidtfeldt og Anne Scott Sørensen (red.): *Queering Nordisk Kvindelitteraturhistorie*, Syddansk Universitetsforlag 2024. (Forthcoming)
- ⁶ An in-depth consideration of this state-of-the-field discussion lies outside the scope of this article, but will be unfolded elsewhere in my forthcoming PhD dissertation on contemporary trans-queer cultural production. (See Amin, 2023; Aizura et al., 2020 and Chu and Drager, 2019).
- ⁷ See for instance the editors' introductory discussions on the role of trans and genderqueer poetics in *Troubling the Line: Trans and Genderqueer Poetry and Poetics* (Tolbert and Peterson, 2013).
- ⁸ This affective polarization is an intensifying engine in the ongoing gendered "culture wars" most vividly present in a U.S. public sphere. Yet the tendency can also be seen in Danish media. For an example of a fear driven opinion of trans people being represented as too happy, thus influencing potential trans youth, see Toft, 2023. For the organization LGBT+ Denmark's response to the opinion piece, see: LGBT+ Danmark, 2023.
- ⁹ I echo Jennifer Doyle in an effort to not reduce an array of complex emotional states by assigning them the 'simpler' label of 'negative' affect—since Holmegaard's writing precisely works to evade such simplifications. See Jennifer Doyle, *Hold it Against Me*, 2013.
- ¹⁰ Also featuring a Danish translation of Susan Stryker's canonical essay on transgender rage, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix" (1994) a lucid auto-poetic account of the specificities of the rage stemming from encounters with the Danish gender clinic, see Gry Stokkendal Dalgas, *At performe transkønnet vrede*, Forlaget Amulet, 2022. On the emergence and implications

of 'well-meaning concern' in Danish trans discourse, see Mons Bissenbakker and Tobias Raun, "Transbekymringens cisnormative økonomi. Nye grænser for køn i diskurser om behandling af trans børn", *Lambda Nordica* 1/2023.

¹¹ For a conceptualization of this trap of representational restrictions and the politics of contemporary trans visibility, see *Tourmaline et al.*, 2017.

¹² See Friborg, 2023.

¹³ On queer delays in trans temporalities, see Israeli-Nevo, 2017.

¹⁴ Burnout in fact is one of the "side affects" explored and explicitly analyzed within a trans affective framework in Malatino, 2022.

¹⁵ For a conceptualization of queerness as an ever-unattainable horizon, see Jose Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Duke University Press, 2009.

Archiving Our Bodies: trans embodied becoming and t4t archival reading

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Madsen is a performance studies and trans studies scholar, dramaturg, and curator. Their dissertation engages with archival, embodied, and affective activations in trans cultural production through the lens of t4t, especially within the genre of performance art by trans and gender nonconforming artists.

Abstract

This article analyses artworks by three non-binary or trans masculine artists: Kris Grey, *No title* (2019), Emmett Ramstad, *The good ones* (2006), and Marie Ahlberg Andersen, *My Dick Clit has many forms* (2022). I look at the corporeal traces the artworks display: wound scabs, blood drops, and crotch imprints, and find that they present a proof of trans becoming which, I would like to suggest, counters hegemonic narratives of transition and disturbs the notion of proof in relation to trans life; to highlight instead, the slowness, temporal multiplicity, and volatile uncapturability of trans embodiment. Through the article, I analyze Grey's, Ramstad's, and Andersen's transition documentation as forms of counter-archiving, as well as how they function as t4t archival offerings – an invitation for other trans people to engage with their transition documentation and the potential of shaping their trans becoming through them. Through my personal narratives as reflexive, personal introductions to the analysis, the artworks, as a t4t archive, shed light on the moments and experiences that in small steps gets us, as trans people, closer to the way we want to be seen and feel about ourselves.

KEYWORDS: Archive, embodiment, becoming, t4t, transition, temporality, proof.

In this article, I will engage with the artworks of three non-binary or trans masculine artists: Kris Grey, *No title*, 2019, a series of two photographs, first exhibited as a part of Grey's first solo exhibition *Conduit* in 2019 at Sleeth Gallery at West Virginia Wesleyan College, Emmett Ramstad, *The good ones*, 2006, surgical remains, tin box with glass lid, velvet, cotton stitching, exhibited online, and Marie Ahlberg Andersen, *My Dick Clit has many forms*, 2022, watercolor on paper, series, 186 prints, 6 prints sent to me, 9 prints, first shown at the 8th Nordic Transgender Studies Conference in Tampere, FI, 2023.

When I first encountered each of the artworks over the course of several years, they appeared to me as significant in the ways they documented the embodied processes of medically assisted transitioning. A corporeal change captured, not through the representation of the fully visible trans body, but instead within the material object of the blood drops from injecting testosterone, the nipple scabs after gender-affirming surgery, and the imprint of a trans crotch.¹ I was drawn to these artworks as they resonated with me and my own becoming transness.² Transness, often, as in my own case, can be experienced as an embodied knowing that happens over time through different and sometimes divergent experiences, affects, and encounters.³

In this article, I analyze the artworks of Grey, Ramstad, and Andersen as medically assisted transition documentation. I will discuss the counter-archival potential of the works as well as how they function as t4t archival offerings of trans becoming and engage with the potential of encountering them as a trans person. I understand the archive as aligned with feminist and queer studies scholar Ann Cvetkovich's queer archives of feeling; as archives of lived experiences and emotions, preserved and documented in ways that extend beyond traditional archival practices, and which make room for the multiplicity of experiences and affects of marginalized communities and histories (Cvetkovich, 2003).

As I will suggest in this article, Ramstad, Grey, and Andersen, through capturing, saving, and sharing their embodied processes, artistically

reclaim trans embodied capture from the medical, judicial, and legal system. They take up and disturb 'proof' as related to archiving, defining, and monitoring trans embodiment – e.g. the demand to show proof of one's transness to access gender-affirming care – troubling hegemonic narratives of transition, and highlight instead the slowness, temporal multiplicity, and volatile uncapturability of trans embodiment.

The absent body, the present corporeal trace

The artworks in this article are all invested in documenting their bodily process of change but do not show the physical body in its full form. Though different in their strategies for documenting and capturing the transition process, the works of Grey, Ramstad, and Andersen all share the absence of a body but the presence of a corporeal trace. In Grey's work: the blood drops, in Ramstad's: the nipple scabs, and in Andersen's: the imprint of their crotch. As I would like to suggest in this article, the absence of a body in the documentation of bodily change alters the ways the artworks form a narrative and proof of transitioning. They do not figure the body in its whole form, thus disturbing the notion that transness can be known by looking at the body: an assumption that transness is found in the visible and that trans experience is representable through the body – to be looked at, understood, and known by others. The artistic strategies at play in Grey's, Ramstad's, and Andersen's work is partially aligned with abstraction which, according to queer and trans studies scholar Jack Halberstam, offers a "method of representing, complicating, dispersing and concealing trans embodiment" (Halberstam, 2022) with a potential for creating freedom from representation and open for negotiations of gendered and bodily norms (Getsy, 2015). But what I find important is that the works by Grey, Ramstad, or Andersen do not leave the trans body behind – nor do they represent their body in other forms, detached from the corporeal materiality of their body. They do not abandon the

material or embodied experiences of trans life for abstraction, within which lies a risk of making trans experience a concept of generalized gender fluidity - universalized and apolitized. Instead, they figure the trans body in the trace, remnant, and imprint of their transitioning body – the body present and absent at the same time – making it possible to stay with the body and the corporeality of transitioning but offer a space for rethinking and reconceptualizing transition.

Questions of the archive

Within cultural studies as well as other academic disciplines, common understandings of the archive as brick-and-mortar buildings, museums, libraries, or photo albums and drives – storage units for documents and materials - have been the center of critical attention, focusing on questions of selection, exclusion, and relations of power within the archive. It is the very process of choosing and categorizing that “makes an object archival” (Taylor, 2003, p. 19), as such questions on archiving always involve questions of power (Derrida, 1998). Placing an object as archival material gives it status as proof: “It is proof that a life truly existed, that something actually happened” (Mbembe, 2002, p. 21). Importantly though, the true power of the archive lies outside its own materiality, in the stories the proof makes possible.

Critical engagements with the archive within feminist theory, queer theory, and more recently transgender studies, which this article aligns itself with, have noted the archive’s exclusion of certain stories and lives, questioned what is understood as an archive, and developed new approaches to engaging with archival material as well as new strategies for (counter)archiving. Jack Halberstam as well as queer theorist José Muñoz have called for alternative archives and archival materiality to grasp and account for the subcultural and ephemeral quality of queer life (Halberstam, 2005; Muñoz, 1996). Especially Cvetkovich’s work in *An Archive of Feeling* (2003) has been central in emphasizing how archival materials contribute to the construction of personal and cultural histories,

and how the lack of attention to the affective dimensions of archival materiality excludes specific experiences and stories from the archive. Cvetkovich has effectively argued for archives as sites for healing, community-building, and resistance, challenging traditional notions of archival neutrality (Cvetkovich, 2003), and for artistic engagements with the archive as perhaps better able to document areas of experience that are difficult to chronicle through the materials of a traditional archive – emotions, activism, and everyday experiences (Edenheim, 2014).

The relation between the archive and trans life has historically been one of domination, violence, and absence, as trans bodies have entered the archives through medical and police records or death lists – or often not entered at all (Rawson, 2015; Stone and Cantrell, 2015). For many years, the archive has neglected and omitted livable trans existence; a cultural erasure of particular knowledge and lives which has had dire social consequences (Namaste, 2000). Several trans scholars have sought to challenge this gap between trans life and the archive. They have, in numerous ways, engaged critically with the formation of contemporary or historical archives, and these archives’ ability to include and form counternarratives of trans life. I take my point of departure for the discussions on the t4t archive, in this article, from some of the trans studies scholars who have engaged critically with the concept of the trans and queer archival work and the concept of the archive, such as Danish trans scholar Tobias Raun and his work on YouTube Vlogs as documentation and archiving of gender related transition (Raun, 2015), Dutch-based Trans studies scholar Eliza Steinbock’s writing on archival activations in trans cultural production and the potential of trans heritage as well as t4t archival adoration (Steinbock, 2019, 2022a, 2022b), and feminist scholar of archival studies Marika Cifor’s engagement with the accidental corporeal remnants of trans life in the archive as offering counternarratives of trans subjectivity (Cifor, 2015, 2017).⁴

Trans archives are not records of an inanimate past, they are of the present and future as

they allow us to see and imagine trans life. As trans people, encountering ourselves in the physical as well as ephemeral archives can be heartbreaking because the traces of trans life we find are often limited and constructed through the lens of a medical or juridical system. But it can also be heartwarming as, through the archival records, we can come to know ourselves as historical subjects; know that someone like us existed (Steinbock, 2022b), making us feel “less alone” (Malatino, 2020, p. 54). Going into the archive and finding trans people is not about assigning an identity, but about recognizing a “transiness” of something through the lens of our own trans embodiment.⁵ It is without the need for a label – by which what we are finding in the archive is not an identity, but a doing or a practice of transness.

Trans and gender non-conforming people continuously struggle for the fundamental right to simply exist, and thus have a distinct investment in issues of archival representation and visibility (Hayward, 2017). Several trans archival initiatives have seen the light in recent years: from *The Digital Transgender Archive* that seeks to increase the accessibility of transgender history through a large online database to *The Museum of Transgender Hirstory & Art*, a conceptual art project and ephemeral pop-up archive of many forms by artist Chris E. Vargas (*Digital Transgender Archive*, 2024; *MOTHA*, 2024). Both initiatives, alongside others, make counter-archival efforts to create archives that challenge or disrupt traditional archival systems, to reclaim agency over how trans communities and experiences can be remembered, represented, and shared.⁶

Working with the notion of the trans archive centers questions around what is documented and saved for whom and asks for critical consideration of the acts of entering, looking for, and finding. Within the archive, who can be included, wants to be found, and on what terms (Drager, 2022)? What enters the archive as a proof of life, makes stories and lives possible – as such, trans archival work is an act of trans worldmaking, with a potential for forming counter-narratives for trans subjectivity.

A methodology of t4t archiving

To archive something is simultaneously a reach towards the past and the future; towards a past you want to keep traces of and a future towards which you are preserving something to be seen by others. In this article, I align the works of Kris Grey, Emmett Ramstad, and Marie Ahlberg Andersen with the concept of the archive to examine the artworks as documentation of medically assisted transition, devoted to documenting transition through artistic means. I employ a t4t methodology as a way of foregrounding the potentiality in the relation between the artworks’ gestures of capturing their embodied transition and the trans person that encounters them.

T4t means, most basically, trans-for-trans. The term appeared in early 2000s Craigslist personals, working to both “sequester trans folks from the categories of “m” and “w” and enable some kind of us to find one another for hookups” (Awkward-Rich and Malatino, 2022, p. 2). Today, t4t is still related to trans intimacy but also to separatist social forms and practices of mutual care. As Steinbock puts it: “T4t above all else, counters the overwhelming trope of the wretched, lonely trans person, depressed and suffering” (Steinbock, 2022b, p. 18). I employ t4t in relation to a separatist legacy, but also as a question of addressing and solidarity by which the for takes the form of a for you – a desire of “being ‘for’ and on the side of transness and trans-for-trans encounters, and also a desiring for transiness” (Steinbock, 2022b, p. 12); expressed, in this text, through the methodology of writing about and curating a t4t archive. I am aware of the risks of minimizing the differences surrounding trans life within the rubric of t4t, especially when it comes to racialization and access to gender-affirming care (Awkward-Rich and Malatino, 2022b). As such, I do not engage with t4t as an uncritical hope or call for an idealized or harmonized trans community of sameness, but employ t4t as a reading method, to acknowledge its momentary potential for elaborating trans-for-trans subjectivities and lifeworlds (Malatino, 2022).

Aside from the artworks being records of transition in and of themselves, I, in this article, gather them under the rubric of a t4t transition archive as a methodological proposal through which I am interested in examining the artworks potentiality as t4t gestures; from (someone's) trans becoming to (someone's) trans becoming.⁷ I engage with them collectively as a temporary t4t archive manifested in between an ephemeral archive of feeling and the graspable archival object, and the ways they trouble and proclaim what trans embodied becoming might (also) be. In doing so, I contribute to the emerging conversation on t4t methodologies as practices of t4t solidarity that emerges from and seeks contribute to our ongoing collective struggles for trans liberation (Friborg, 2023).

Engaging with a methodology of t4t archiving, and curating the artworks within the rubric of t4t, requires, I believe, a situated accountability, and as such, I begin my analysis with making visible how I came to affectively connect with the artworks through personal experience as a trans person – situating my trans embodied gaze. From this starting point, I examine how the works of Ramstad, Grey, and Andersen can be understood as artistic transition counter-archives and offerings of t4t encounters – for other trans people to be able to recognize themselves and their embodied becoming through them. The t4t potential, I find in the artworks, is fundamentally connected to my own trans experience – what I recognize in the works is shaped by the encounter with me and has shaped and shape my transness in return.

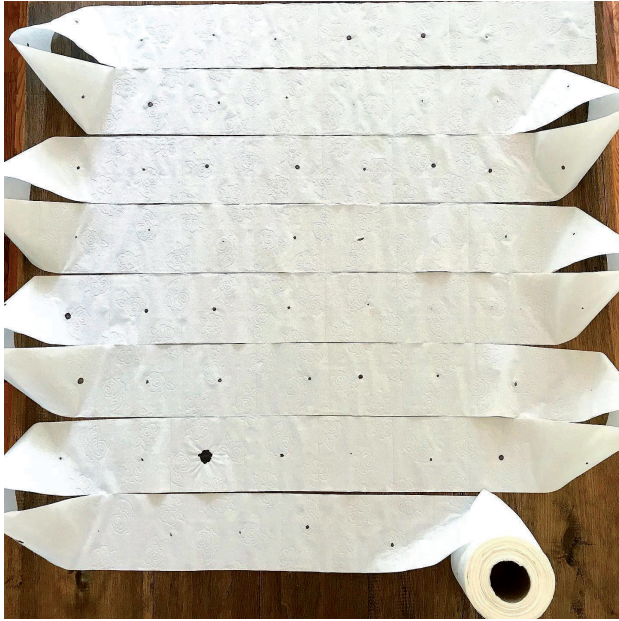
This article is created as a “multi-genre text” (Lykke, 2022) which means the autoethnographic and analytical texts co-exist in the writing and thinking of the article, and in the formation of its t4t archive (Ellis et al., 2011). The personal and analytical reflections are intertwined; one does not exist without the other and vice versa. I further align this situated and autoethnographic approach with feminist and trans studies scholar Ruth Pearce's methodology for the marginalized, in an attempt to honor the ways I, as a trans scholar, am related and relate to my research material; indebted to and immersed within the communities and lives

they represent (Pearce, 2020). Using autoethnographic writing as a starting point for my analysis is a way to make explicit the ways I, as a trans scholar, am differently and corporeally entangled with the trans artworks I write about – and the experiences, affects, and stakes at play in this t4t entanglement..

Oxidized blood as traces of slow transition

I first encounter Kris Grey's work while studying in New York in 2015. Drawn to the way they renegotiate their transness through corporeal exposure, I write about their performance Homage in the first article I publish. I meet them in 2016, when I still have no words for my own transness. Years later, in the late fall of 2020, I am in fertility treatment and take hormone shots daily, when I come across their work No title. The repetition and labor of making corporeal change resonates with my transness as it is, at this time, entangled, not with testosterone, but with FSH. After several tries of insemination and no luck, the doctors recommend I take follicle stimulating hormone, FSH, to increase chances of getting pregnant. During the first round of hormones, my partner and I do small rituals before administering the shots: candles, music, sage. Other shots are taken on the go: in my grandmother's kitchen or in a friend's bathroom. I get pregnant. In my office, I put up a picture of Kris Grey's blood drops. It anchors the ongoing labor, but also incomprehensibility, of my transness and trans pregnancy. I do not, though, start writing about Grey's work until 2022.

Kris Grey is a US-American artist of varying media. Educated within ceramics, Grey uses the impact of the sculptural in much of their work – both performance and object based. The work *No title* was exhibited as a part of Grey's first solo exhibition *Conduit* in 2019. When exhibited, the work consisted of two photographs. The first image features an entire roll of toilet paper – the image is taken from above. The roll of toilet paper is partially unfurled on a dark background. The continuous length of paper is zig zagged back and



forth – each square reveals darkened brown dots of varying size. The second image is a close-up of a blood drop on a single sheet of toilet paper. The bright red color of the blood is in stark contrast to the white floral background.

Grey's work *No Title* consists of over 200 blood drops collected every week when they administered their testosterone shot. The small dots on the white background vary in size and placement. Most are placed towards the center of the sheet, some fall to the side, and some are barely visible. A single drop is significantly larger than the others and as an effect of the darkening of the blood, it has slightly curled the paper around it. Aside from the number of blood drops, the darker color of some drops tells a story of time passing. The blood is not recently collected but has darkened over time as an effect of the oxidation of hemoglobin, which happens when blood exits the body, causing bloodstains to morph from bright red to dark brown. The bodily material, the blood, has slowly changed in the encounter with the surrounding world. In the weekly administering of the shot, as testosterone enters Grey's body, a drop of blood leaves the body – both body and drop slowly changing.

In *No title*, testosterone plays an important role. It is the injection of the hormone that creates the bloodstains and as such, the administering of the shot is the structuring factor of the

No title, Kris Grey, New York, 2019.

Photo credit: Kris Grey.

work – the trace of this act is all that is seen. I want to think with Grey's work alongside Tobias Raun's and film studies scholar Laura Horak's work on the archive of trans YouTube vlogs as records of hormonal transition. In his analysis of trans vlogs as archives, Tobias Raun finds that testosterone functions as the structuring principle and the transformative technology – exemplified by the standard introduction from the vloggers: "I am x days on T..." and the vloggers' focus on showing corporeal change – e.g. voice change (Raun, 2015). The temporality of the videos as well as transition narratives presented in them, are structured according to what Horak deems "hormone time" (Horak, 2014, p. 573). It is through the investment in hormone time that the trans body becomes legible as trans and as such, as records of transition, the vlogs risk (re)producing norms of transition, teaching viewers what transition is supposed to look like. *No title* offers different views of what hormonal transition 'looks like'. Grey's images do not show the promised proof of corporeal change associated with taking testosterone, instead, they stay in the temporality of seemingly no change, where



the proof of hormonal transition is instead found in a trace of the repeated acts of administering testosterone.

Grey's work of documenting their weekly hormone injections refuses to show proof of the accumulated corporeal change in transition. The temporality in the transition narrative of *No Title* is processual, slow, and repetitive. Trans embodiment in Grey's work is still imbedded in a relation to hormone technology, but not focused on the result, positioning hormonal transition at odds with chrononormative expectations of trans becoming's progressivist temporality. Their work makes explicit the repeating actions of hormonal transition – the weekly injections of testosterone required to maintain transitioning. *No title* is documentation of transition related corporeal change without a body. At the same time, the work does not fall into being complete abstraction without the presence of bodily materiality. Through the blood drops, the transitioning body is present, but instead of the full body, it is within the trace. Inviting us to consider the unspectacular, quotidian, and continued moments of hormonal transitioning. The work insists on staying with the daily and slow becoming-trans; the quotidian nature of the toilet paper roll they imprinted on for 200 days, makes their continued transition-related labor tangible. Hormonal transition and trans embodiment are, in Grey's work, not processes that begin or end – they are ongoing.

At the time I first wrote about Kris Grey's *No title*, my body had never been in contact with testosterone, but I still encountered my transness through it. As trans or gender non-confirming people, our becoming is work; an ongoing labor I recognize as tangible in the oxidized blood drops in Grey's documentation of their ongoing becoming. *No title* allows me to feel and recognize the ongoing labor of my trans becoming, in my first encounter with *No title*, most viscerally in my trans pregnancy, but, continuously, as I have

been with their work, also in the very subtle, quotidian labor of my ongoing being and becoming transness.

Dead corporeal matter that (still) matters

The image of Emmet Ramstad's carefully saved nipple scabs comes to me as I am changing your bandages in the bathroom of our summerhouse. I am bend over awkwardly so you can see your new chest in the mirror, while I carefully remove the old gaze seeped in blood and pus and gently put new gaze over your nipples. It's been a week since your surgery and we are inspecting the wellbeing of your nipples daily. At the pre-surgery consultation, the surgeon told us about the risk of losing a nipple. In detaching and re-attaching the nipples during surgery, there is a risk that they will not take to the body and as such will die and wither away. Over the next weeks, scabs form over your nipples. When they finally fall off, the softest pink skin appears underneath. Both nipples survive. In my office months later, after your chest is healed completely, I return to Ramstad's work to write about it.

Visual artist Emmett Ramstad's work *The good ones* features two circular metal containers with a glass lid. In the containers are bodily remains: Nipple graft scabs on gaze. Around the scabs are marks from stitches and traces of blood.



The good ones by Emmett Ramstad, 2006.
Photo credit: Emmett Ramstad.

The two circular containers are placed on a brown velvet pillow on which simple embroidery make the shape of two hands holding the containers.

The nipple scabs belong to a temporality of post-transition – remnants of gender-affirming top surgery. I am drawn closer to the tactility of the scabs, their texture and color mimicked in the brown velvet fabric of the pillow. Dead skin slowly separated from the nipples after surgery. What does it mean for Ramstad to save and exhibit their nipple scabs from gender-affirming surgery, and how are they records of transitioning?

What is present in *The good ones* is not the post-surgery body itself, but the remains from the bodily event – the surgery – the scabs, the gaze, the traces of stitches. In these materials, I find the record of the surgery, and as documentation of gender-affirming surgery, they shed light on the complex temporality and affective labor of this event. Imbedded within the scabs are both the abrupt and elongated processes of surgery – cutting and stitching but also sloughing, healing, and saving – pointing not simply towards an embodied future, nor towards a past, but, I believe, encompassing and honoring a more complex temporality and affectivity of surgical transitioning. The affective labor of gender-affirming surgery can be recognized in the soft, homey pillow with hands gently holding the scabs from the nipples once worried about, cared for, and later saved – honoring the affective interwovenness of the body (part) that was and the trans embodied present. Ramstad's work refuses the coherence of the binary transition narrative where movement, physical as well as emotional, only travels forward – towards a 'fixed' binary trans body – leaving 'another body' behind. Through keeping and honoring the scabs as a remain from their pre-surgical body and a trace from the event of the surgery, their post-transition body is temporally and affectively folded between an embodied past, present, and future.

Where Kris Grey's transition documentation challenged showing bodily results of transition to shed light on the slowness and repetitive labor of hormonal transition, Ramstad shows remains from surgical transition to give object to the event

of the surgery and make graspable the complex temporality and affectivity of gender-affirming surgery.

In *The good ones*, the hands on the pillow are literally holding, carefully guarding the corporeal remains from gender-affirming surgery. Scabs, dead corporeal material, which should be disposed of, are instead kept and safeguarded in a gesture saying: "these are worth saving".

In discovering an accidental hair in the archive, belonging to trans woman, sex worker, and activist, Victoria Schneider, Marika Cifor describes the hair as "detritus matter that matters" (Cifor, 2015, p. 646). This dead corporeal matter accidentally making it into the archive, Cifor explains, enables a "counternarrative of bodies in archives that challenges the notion that the body can be seen only in its necessary absence" (Cifor, 2015, p. 646). The archive, according to Cifor, stands in strong relation to the dead, but through finding and engaging with the corporeal material, both dead and alive, the unlively bodies of the archive can become lively (Cifor, 2017). The detritus matter enlivens the bodies of the archive and poses questions of what materialities are absent in the archive and what forms of (trans) life it might exclude.

Traditionally, the documentation and archiving of gender-affirming surgery takes place through doctor's notes, medical journals, and medical archives. But surgery, as a bodily event, is in *The good ones* documented and archived through the bodily materiality of the scabs. Placing the nipple scabs, the remnants of trans corporeal matter, in the archive as proof of trans life becomes a testament to the scabs as matter that still matters; a counter-archival gesture which enlivens the post-surgery trans body on its own terms.

As the image of Ramstad's nipple scabs comes to me during moments of my partner's top surgery aftercare, it anchors the temporal and affective complexity of gender-affirming surgery: the simultaneous fear, excitement, grieving, waiting, doubting, and hoping. As I am immersed within t4t labor of after-surgery care, Ramstad's saving, honoring, and sharing of their nipple scabs, as proof of trans becoming, becomes for me a t4t archival care work; offering for others to encounter and



honor the temporal and affective complexities of trans becoming through them. In the relation between Ramstad's work and my t4t care labor, I recognize the collectivity and communality within trans becoming: How my, and I believe many other trans people's, becoming, and even survival, is fundamentally and importantly supported, shaped, and made possible by t4t encounters and t4t carework.⁸

Printing incoherence & sharing the embodied trans archive

Marie and I first talk about their dick clit prints in the rain outside of a café in Copenhagen, where we run into each other. Marie and I have known each other for some years through common friends, and we are a part of the same trans non-binary parent group. I first see their prints at the conference. Marie is nervous about presenting them. I am excited to see them.

My Dick Clit has many forms.

Marie Ahlberg Andersen, 2022. Photo credit: Affective Activism.

At the Nordic Trans Studies conference in Tampere, Finland, Marie Ahlberg Andersen presents nine prints of the series *My Dick Clit has many forms*, placed in three small frames in the common area of the conference. The prints are numbered in a way that makes it clear that there has been lots more made. It feels intimate to look at them. And comforting. The homemade nature of them. The various degree of successfully capturing the body. Curiously documenting a change. The multiple prints of the artist's own dick clit are aesthetic manifestations of an urge to capture or document, even see, a corporeal change. Collected in private of a body part – supposedly intimate – and yet of so much interest in the classification and governance of trans bodies. Because of the printing technique, the prints are not easily recognized as trans genitalia. In their obliqueness, they appear as a body part of 'many forms' – as the title states. One that shifts from every angle – every print a bit different than the last. Captured by the watercolor on paper and at the same refusing certain capture.

Marie just texted me. They are happy that I want to work with their prints. I was feeling timid asking if I could. They want to send me pictures in better resolution than the ones I took at the conference. In the collection Marie sends me, there are 6 prints. They were selected out of 186 prints, captured over the course of two days.



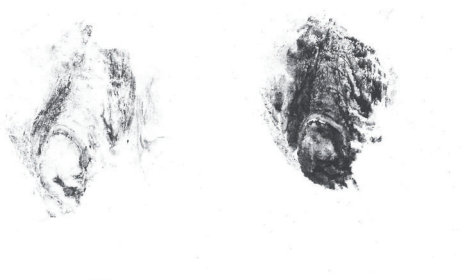
My Dick Clit has many forms, Marie Ahlberg Andersen, 2022.

Photo: Marie Ahlberg Andersen.

When looking at the six prints below individually, it can be hard to immediately recognize what they are. Though all the prints are in black watercolor on white paper, they vary in depth and color tone. Some are darker than others because of the amount of pressure that was put on the paper as it was pressed against the skin. Individually, the prints are volatile in their representation – but collectively they form the figure of a trans genitalia: the circle appears to me as the head of a small penis captured in profile.

I ask Marie about the process of making the prints. They tell me that the prints were made with watercolor face paint applied with a brush. To capture their dick clit, they first tried to use a pillow to provide the pressure on the paper towards the crotch – a method of pussy prints they had heard about from participants at a pussy printing workshop at the Danish separatist, feminist Femø-camp. But they realized that it flattened the print and only allowed for a frontal perspective – which was fine for vulva printing but not for this. Instead, they had to capture the profile to get the nuances of their small penis. With little luck, they created a roller from a pickle jar with the paper taped on and pressed from the side. “I tried the same, but with a lint roller, but ended up using my hand because it turned out to be important to get a fairly precise and firm pressure, and the hand was simply the best” (Andersen, 2023 - my translation).

The prints linger of the handmade process of capture. The result of applying different levels of pressure in the printmaking – struggling to get it right. Of the two prints below, one is light and soft as a result of a gentle and careful engagement with the body, but also opaque, whereby the



dick clit as a visual object remains partly outside of our reach. The second print, on the other hand, has been made with more pressure and therefore has more detail. Here the circular tip appears more clearly: its roundedness, the foreskin's texture and even hair follicles.

The technique used by Andersen to make prints of their genitalia is a monoprint – a single impression of an image made from a reprintable block. In monoprinting, one block should make one and the same image repeatedly, but, as Andersen describes, it proves much harder to capture their dick clit. And even when they succeed, the prints, as seen above, are both oblique and so different they might as well have been from different bodies. The monoprint, which is supposed to secure coherent capturability, shows up in Andersen's work as difficult to capture and incoherent.

Andersen describes how their technique of capture needed to be adjusted to their specific body, and when best achieved it was their own hand which captured the print. The amount of pressure in the process of capturing has made certain prints more available for recognition. The more pressure, the more visible and available the object becomes to the onlooker. The prints are an unapologetic representation of the trans crotch, and, at the same time, the handmade method of capture disturbs the representational logic and demands on the trans crotch to 'truthtell' about the trans body. The capture and legibility of trans genitalia as the alleged ultimate signifier of sex determination is troubled in *My Dick Clit has many forms*. As Andersen literally takes the capturing of their body into their own hands, the opaqueness of the monoprints points simultaneously to the illegibility and uncapturability of trans experience as well as the multiplicity and even incoherence of trans embodiment.

Andersen's prints, I believe, are aligned with the strategies of trans opacity as a resistance towards the representability of trans life.⁹ The dick clit prints problematize and challenge the dynamics of representing the trans crotch through Andersen's very technique of capture. The printmaking as a technique captures its object with an

unpredictable level of opacity and incoherence, resisting being knowable through the visual, and centers instead the uncapturability of trans becoming.

Trans becoming is, in Andersen's dick clit prints, entangled with an exploration and curiosity of getting to know one's becoming body. Significantly, the 186 efforts in capturing their dick clit are done over the course of two days and as such, the goal is not to document continuous growth, but instead to capture a corporeal moment. But the opaqueness of their genital mono-prints trouble the 'true' capture of the trans body. The inconsistency and opacity of the prints point towards an uncapturable representability of the becoming trans body through the visual and visible record. Effective in its technique and expression, especially as it goes so close to the physicality of the trans body, *My Dick Clit has many forms* also points to the incoherence and multiplicity of trans embodiment through the gesture of their opaque corporeal documentation.

In *My Dick Clit has many forms*, Andersen borrows strategies of the analogue printmaking and a collectivity of the 'kussetryk' (pussy prints) as a separatist tradition of documenting and sharing the body. I am interested in following the collectivity as a separatist gesture within Andersen's work, to think about encountering them through my own transness and their relation to a collective construction of trans embodiment.

Encountering others' transness can play an important role in forming one's own trans embodiment. Trans studies scholar Amira Lundy-Harris refers to this as the 'collective construction' of transness (a term she borrows from SJ Langer) and highlights the ways in which trans people make themselves through the encounter with other trans people and trans experiences (Lundy-Harris, 2022). Seeing the dick clit prints as t4t work, centers the collective creation, as opposed to self-making, in trans becoming. The circulation of the prints between Andersen's handmade capture of their changing trans body to my own trans body, creates a relation between our bodies that can shape my own transness. Reading Andersen's work through the notion of a t4t archive,

highlights the documentation and sharing of trans embodied becoming as an offering for others' trans becoming.

t4t archiving

Engaging with the blood stains, nipple scabs, and crotch prints, in the works of Ramstad, Grey, and Andersen, as documentation of a medically assisted transition is to center them as proof. It is, though, as I have shown, not proof of a 'finished', coherent, linearly progressing transitioned body. Instead, their ephemeral transition archives make a different kind of story possible: one of slow processes, affective labor, heterogenous temporalities, and uncapturable incoherence of trans embodied becoming. As I have shown in this article, through capturing and sharing their corporeal traces as proof of trans becoming, Grey, Ramstad, and Andersen artistically reclaim trans embodied capture from the medical, judicial, and legal system through the collection of blood, exhibition of corporeal matter, and imprint of bodies. They trouble the violent demands on trans people to show proof of themselves within a cis-normative understanding of gendered embodiment to access vital care and protection, and disturb the very notion of proof through abstraction, ephemerality, and uncapturability – allowing for trans becoming to appear in all its multiplicity, uncapturability, or incoherence.

In this article, through the rubric of the t4t archive, the works of Grey, Ramstad, and Andersen form a counter-archive through their collecting, saving, and capturing of corporeal traces, remnants, or imprints of their transitioning bodies. As counter-archival objects, each of the artworks question and trouble hegemonic medically assisted transition narratives, resisting the embodied coherence and legibility, the health care system and medical archives require of trans people. They offer transition documentation which disturbs the conceptions of medical transition as aligned with chrononormative trans embodiment. Through the documentation of their transition, Grey, Ramstad, and Andersen give materiality, tangibility, and



Prints of Grey's, Andersen's, and Ramstad's artworks, 2024. Image by the author.

temporality to experiences of trans becoming that are often intangible, volatile, and incoherent. They make artistic, counter-archival offerings which record knowledges and proof of transition in other places than the medical journal and enlivens the becoming trans body on its own terms. Through their counter-archival strategies and the formation of a t4t archive, Grey, Ramstad, and Andersen, reclaim proof as a vital tool for trans becoming and t4t togetherness.

Reading the works of Grey, Ramstad, and Andersen as t4t archives, highlights the potential of encountering them as a trans person. Printed images of the artworks have been hanging, side-by-side, in my office, as I have been writing this article. As a temporary t4t archive, they have supported, and continue to support, how I come to recognize the processes and labor of my own trans becoming. In the capturing and sharing of

their embodied becoming, they offer a t4t archival moment that, despite our transness being manifested in different ways, enables me to encounter, recognize, and shape my own transness through their work.

Gathering the artworks in a t4t archive counters the singularity and loneliness of trans embodiment, emphasizing the potential of forming collective counter-narratives of trans becoming. A t4t perspective does not erase the differences between transition processes or experiences – medical, social, or neither – but allows for the possibility of letting the artistic documentation of the multiplicity of trans embodied processes become a site for t4t encounters. A t4t offering – documenting, sharing, encountering, and becoming with and through each other – that in small steps gets us, as trans people, closer to who and how we want to become.

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Notes

- ¹ The artist’s own words.
- ² ‘Becoming trans’ signifies a continuous process and disturbs hegemonic narratives of transition which privileges linear progression and permanence in transition (Deleuze, 2005). I prefer this term because it encompasses the incoherent and more subtle becoming within trans experience.
- ³ I employ *trans* as involving claims of gendered personhood related to corporeality and embodiment. Inclusive of everyone who understand themselves in relation to trans as a descriptor of selfhood or lived experience (Malatino, 2022).
- ⁴ These are just a few of the trans studies scholars who have contributed to trans archival studies in recent years. Others include Emmett Drager, Jules Gill-Peterson, Elspeth Brown, Harrison Apple, and more.
- ⁵ “Transiness” is the word Susan Stryker uses for the recognition, in historical or archival material, of what she calls the “transiness” of something. A knowing of something trans, read through your own trans embodiment (U of T Digital Humanities Network, 2020).
- ⁶ For example, “Transgender Hirstory in 99 Objects: Legends & Mythologies”, One Archives.
- ⁷ See also (Madsen, 2024).
- ⁸ Collective trans (after)care has been beautifully written about by Hill Malatino in *Trans Care* (2020).
- ⁹ I understand trans opacity as an alternative strategy to the fight for increased visibility, as the right to remain partially unreadable or incomprehensible; drawing on Édouard Glissant’s understanding of opacity and read through Halberstam (Halberstam, 2011, 2018). I also draw on Jules Gill-Peterson’s engagement with strategies of opacity as a disturbance of medical and social systems which seek to make trans identities visible and legible (Gill-Peterson, 2018).

“Queerness is unstoppable”: How video game publications frame LGBTQ topics

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Abstract

During the 2010s, video game content and subsets of the gaming community have been diverging in polarized directions regarding LGBTQ topics in video game culture. On the basis of these discourses, this study utilizes framing and discourse analysis to examine how video game publications frame LGBTQ topics in gaming. Analyzing 269 articles published between 2002 and 2020, it finds that 57,2% of articles utilize framing characterized by egalitarian equality, compared to 0,7% that use traditionalist morality framing, while 36,1% use neutral framing. A majority of articles likewise deploy politically loaded keywords in a sincere manner rather than a veiled manner, in which these words function as stand-ins for conservative views. Further, the study points to conservative discourses like GamerGate affecting the output of articles between 2014 and 2015 and charts the potential construction of a journalistic paradigm in which journalists do not utilize slurs. This paradigm and high levels of egalitarian and neutral framing differ from previous findings regarding framing in game journalism.

KEYWORDS: framing, video game journalism, GamerGate, video game representation, LGBTQ representation

Introduction

Throughout the previous decade, the discourse surrounding diversity in video games has diverged in two polarized directions. The games industry has been developing in an egalitarian direction regarding LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) representation. This is perhaps best emblemized by the Sony conference at the 2018 Electronic Entertainment Expo. Sony began the conference with footage from their 2020 game, *The Last of Us Part II*, in which the main character, Ellie, kisses another woman (PlayStation, 2018). This was the first time two women had been shown kissing at E3, signaling increased inclusion of LGBTQ characters within video games. Only a few years prior, video game culture, including journalism and social media, was affected by the movement GamerGate (GG). GG gained traction in the late summer of 2014, when independent game developer Zoe Quinn was accused of “trading sex for positive game reviews” (Chess & Shaw, 2015, p. 210). The harassment campaign against Quinn developed into a sustained online movement that adopted ideas from right-wing philosophies in order to oppose increased diversity within video game content, culture, and the industry (Mortensen, 2018, pp. 788–791).

GG was one of several harassment campaigns that targeted women within the games industry, and proponents of GG spread misinformation about games studies and its purpose, stalked and harassed female game scholars (Chess & Shaw, 2015, p. 210; Mortensen, 2018, pp. 788–789), journalists, women, and minorities by doxing¹ them and sending them death threats (Perreault & Vos, 2018, p. 554). The movement claimed that video game journalism was collaborating too closely with the games industry to promote a progressive “social justice” agenda (Perreault & Vos, 2018, p. 554). As video game scholars Adrienne Shaw and Shira Chess express in their article about the controversy:

[GG] is a poignant example of the sexism, heterosexism, and patriarchal undercurrents that seem to serve as a constant guidepost

for the video game industry. (Chess & Shaw, 2015, p. 208)

A tension exists between video game production progressing in an egalitarian direction and a conservative subset of video game players. In the context of this tension, this article examines how and to what degree game publications reflect right-wing discourses within the video game community, as well as the inclusion of LGBTQ persons and characters within video production. This study is interdisciplinary, situated primarily within the field of media studies and utilizing media sociological methods, such as the content analytical method of coding, as well as the significant communications theory of framing through a queer and feminist lens. This article maps the developments of LGBTQ framing over time, illuminating the attitudes journalists have and have had within video game journalism, and how and to what degree they reflect the polarized spheres of video game content and the culture surrounding it. This allows comparative analysis of several video game news publications as well as thorough analysis of queer discourse within this subgenre of journalism. Numerous studies have examined attitudes towards LGBTQ subjects in game culture and communities from feminist and queer theoretical perspectives (for example: Gray, 2014, 2018; Ruberg, 2020; Shaw, 2017), but writing on queerness within video game production, content, and cultures remains a budding field that this study contributes to.

First, this article will review literature on the history of video game publications and their contributions to gaming culture, the theory behind framing, and how other researchers have used framing analysis to analyze LGBTQ topics in journalistic media publications. Next, the methods section details the key words used to locate and collect articles on LGBTQ topics, the magazines and publications chosen for analysis and the logic behind these selections, and details the method of coding and the manual created for the study, which labels and describes the articles included in the study (Bryman, 2016b, p. 293; Punch, 2014a, p. 173). The findings section will then detail the quantitative results of the coding of articles, such

as chronological framing developments, followed by a qualitative analysis of articles that most saliently represent different framing categories. Finally, the discussion section will reflect on the implications of these findings, and the conclusion will reiterate these and suggest further research that may be carried out based on these results.

Literature review

This section will first detail the depictions of male and female gamers and characters within video game magazines historically, which can put into perspective the importance of the framing of LGBTQ topics within such publications. It will then elucidate the mechanics of framing and framing analysis, and finally detail how other researchers have used these techniques, and how this article draws inspiration from these in designing this study.

Gendered marginalization in game magazines

Several studies have been carried out on the inclusion of men and women in video game magazines as well as the differences in how male and female characters are depicted. Media and culture scientist Howard Fisher and media and cultural theorist Robin Bootes found that women and non-white people received little page space within game magazines in the mid- to late 1990s and early 2000s (Bootes, 2024, p. 219; Fisher, 2015, pp. 551–52). Female characters were fetishized and portrayed as sexualized pin-ups, while real women were depicted as interlopers into gaming culture that should be “bullied” (Bootes, 2024, p. 224; Fisher, 2015, pp. 551–52). Fisher argues that these depictions align with the theory of *hegemonic masculinity*, excluding women from representation “in favor of multiple portrayals of men performing those same actions” (Fisher, 2015, p. 555).

Fisher, social psychologists Alicia Summers and Monica Miller, and cultural theorist Graeme Kirkpatrick also argue that the culture cultivated by game magazines helped ingrain the idea that video games are made for and enjoyed by men; games were not conceived as being a male space

but developed into one. Fisher argues that the 1982-84 Atari Age magazine depicted men and women more equally, while modern magazines are “far more” aimed at men than women (Fisher, 2015, pp. 551–552). Kirkpatrick argues that English game magazines published between 1981 and 1985 were concerned with including female participants and, “present[s] a milieu that was reflective on gender issues”, while magazines published after 1986 became increasingly gender exclusive and reinforced stereotypically masculine values, which coded video games as a male activity (Kirkpatrick, 2017, p. 453).

These studies argue that depictions of men and women within game publications help shape both the views of readers and the make-up of the gaming community. Kirkpatrick argues that the magazines are “crucibles for the production of gaming discourse” and active participants in shaping gaming culture with their representation of games and players (Kirkpatrick, 2017, pp. 455-457); social psychologists Summers and Miller argue that the sexist shift in how female characters are depicted may impact real attitudes and have tangible consequences (Summers & Miller, 2014, p. 1037); and Fisher asserts that media shapes people’s perceptions of the world around them “both by actively encouraging specific behaviors [...] but also in the ways that the media portray people or things” (Fisher, 2015, p. 557). These arguments emphasize the importance of researching how minoritized groups are depicted within video game publications because the framing of LGBTQ topics, characters, and persons may affect the attitudes of readers towards these groups. This study is a part of this research on the framing of minoritized groups in video game publications, addressing a lack of research regarding LGBTQ topics within these magazines.

Framing

Media and communications scholar Robert Entman describes how framing explains the power a communicating text can exert on someone’s consciousness (Entman, 1993, pp. 51–52). Framing involves making information within a text more salient to make that information more noticeable

and memorable to the reader (Entman, 1993, p. 53). Drawing on sociologist William A. Gamson's research on framing from 1992, Entman describes an approach to analyzing frames and their functions. Entman describes four key functions of framing: defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting remedies. Defining problems means determining what causal agents are doing, alongside the costs and benefits of their actions. Diagnosing causes establishes the sources creating the problem, and as the writer or journalist makes a moral judgment, they evaluate the causal agents and their effects. Suggesting remedies involves offering and justifying treatments for said causes and problems and predicting the remedies' effects (Entman, 1993, p. 52.).

Furthermore, Entman describes the locations of frames in the communication process: the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture. The communicator makes conscious or unconscious decisions regarding their communications, guided by their own belief systems, while the text itself is what contains the actual frames. These can be detected by examining the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that reinforce facts or judgments. However, the frames that guide the receiver's thinking may or may not reflect the framing intended by the communicator. Finally, the culture is the stock of commonly used sets of frames that are employed in the thinking and discourse of people within a social group (Entman, 1993, pp. 52-53). It should be noted that, as Entman uses these terms, framing denotes the act of utilizing these strategies to make certain information meaningful to a reader, while the frame itself is what contains these key functions and keywords (Entman, 1993, p. 52). As such, Entman's examination of framing details how framing strategies affect the opinions of the receivers of messages.

LGBTQ framing categories

To gather examples of and inspiration for how to construct relevant framing categories, I examined articles that likewise investigate the framing of

LGBTQ topics in journalistic media, drawing insights from studies that closely resembled this study in methodology and research topic.

Political scientist Tyler Johnson examines how articles from the Associated Press regarding LGBTQ marriage affected the opinions of readers (Johnson, 2012, p. 1053) opposition to same-sex marriage and civil unions has primarily been explained in individual, cross-sectional fashion using demographic and political characteristics as well as other policy attitudes. Such efforts have yet to explain movement in aggregate opinion on this policy debate over time. One factor driving such movement might be evolving information dynamics related to how the media cover same-sex marriage and civil unions. I examine how media framing capturing discussions of equality and morality shapes how the public feels concerning same-sex marriage and civil unions from 2004 to 2011, explaining how media content capturing core values plays a significant role in driving levels of opposition. I find strong evidence that equality framing drives opposition to same-sex marriage and civil unions downward, as does the extent to which equality framing surpasses morality framing in the competition for space on the media's agenda. Related Articles Lewis, Gregory B., and Charles W. Gossett. 2008. "Changing Public Opinion on Same-Sex Marriage: The Case of California." *Politics & Policy* 36 (1, and applies two master frames to his examination of the articles: *the equality frame*, measuring "the core value of egalitarianism", and *the morality frame*, "measuring the core value of moral traditionalism" (Johnson, 2012, p. 1063). Johnson found that when equality framing increased, opposition to LGBTQ marriage would decrease, and every word and phrase characterized by equality framing would decrease opposition by a little over one half of a percent (Johnson, 2012, p. 1069). These findings indicate that the equality and morality frames are of great import to LGBTQ-oriented framing, and they corroborate with Fisher, Summers and Miller, and Kirkpatrick's arguments regarding the impacts of representation.

Examining how Russian news media frames the LGBTQ movement (Semykina, 2018, p. 2) namely Saint Petersburg LGBT prides, in Russia. Framing

theory, which views the media as an arena in which groups of interest promote their frames, or interpretations of the discussed issue, is used. Frames juxtapose elements of the text in such a way as to provide the audience with a scheme to perceive the message. Social movements are viewed as a group of interest that introduces new frames in the public deliberation. Two types of frames can be distinguished, namely collective action frames and status quo frames. In this study, usage of two collective action frames were examined (equality frame and victim frame, sociologist Kseniia S. Semykina describes the equality frame as arguing in favor of LGBTQ people being equally respected by the law and morality framing as using religious or moral arguments to discredit the LGBTQ community. Among others, she also identifies *the victim frame*, which identifies LGBTQ persons as victims of an unjust status quo (Semykina, 2018, pp. 6-7).

Communications researchers Marie Hardin and Erin Whiteside identify several frames in a feminist context that are also relevant in an LGBTQ context. Their *demonization frame*, which frames feminism as deviant (Hardin & Whiteside, 2010, pp. 320–321), resonates with the morality frame, and they also identify a *victimization frame* that frames feminists as weak and vulnerable. Further, they identify *the goals frame*, in which goals such as civil rights receive attention, and *the agency frame*, which frames feminists as strong and capable (Hardin & Whiteside, 2010, p 321).

Many of these frames are relevant to this study, with the morality and equality frames standing out as most essential. I will describe the frames I selected for analysis and coding in section 3.3.

Method

To analyze the contents of numerous articles, I utilized content analysis to characterize and systematize disparate articles across a number of years, sources, and authors (Bryman, 2016b, p. 284).

I used coding to systematize my data by way of a coding manual and a coding schedule. The manual defines codes by applying labels to articles, describing and grouping their characteristics

on a schedule (Bryman, 2016b, p. 293; Punch, 2014a, p. 173). This indexation allows one to identify patterns throughout articles (Bryman, 2016b, pp. 293–4; Punch, 2014a, p. 173). I will elaborate on the categories and labels in the coding manual for this study in section 3.3 and analyze article patterns and chronological developments in section 4.1. The articles that most saliently represent identified frames will be analyzed for their usage of these frames and how they are made meaningful through the text, drawing on the practice of discourse analysis, focusing attention on “the way language is used, what it is used for and the social context in which it is used” – a discourse itself referring to the framework or perspective within which language and ideas are formulated (Punch, 2014a, p. 191).

Prior to these analyses, I will elaborate on which articles were collected, which publications they were collected from, and which labels and categories the coding manual contains.

Game publications for analysis

To determine which publications should be included in this study, I utilized a chart created by market research company Electronic Entertainment Design and Research (“EEDAR”, n.d.). The chart maps the 20 most ‘influential’ video game magazines, ranked by 3500 North American respondents in 2015. Several magazines have ceased publication since 2015, but the top three most influential outlets, GameSpot, Game Informer, and IGN, were still in circulation when articles were collected. These were established between 1991 and 1996 (Game Informer, n.d.; GameSpot Staff, 2019; IGN, n.d.), and their years in circulation and positions on the chart make them crucial cases for analysis. It should be noted that the Game Informer magazine, website, and digital archive were closed in 2024. The articles gathered prior to closing remain in this study’s population and samples, though they are no longer accessible to journalists, scholars, or the general public. I additionally chose to examine PC Gamer, established in 1993 and one of the older publications still in circulation (PC Gamer, 2016), alongside Kotaku, Polygon, and Gameranx. Part of Polygon’s editorial focus regards

“who is making and playing games, not just the games themselves” (Stark, 2012); Kotaku aims to be inclusive for gamers of any sexuality and gender (Totilo, 2013); and Gameranx is described as a platform that hosts diverse perspectives and “diverse groups of people” (Gameranx, n.d.).

IGN reaches “more than 200 million monthly users around the world” (IGN Press Room, 2020). I contacted the remaining publications to obtain reader statistics but received no responses. Thus, these seven outlets have access to a global monthly readership of at least 200 million.

Search terms and sampling

To collect relevant articles for analysis, I composed a list of keywords; if an article contained a keyword, it was collected as part of the population of articles. I compiled relevant LGBTQ terms by scrutinizing *The A-Z of Gender and Sexuality* by writer and LGBTQ community organizer Morgan Holleb from 2019, which details LGBTQ terminology, slurs, historical terms, and more (Holleb, 2019, pp. 10–11). Some keywords had alternatives that were also used to collect articles; for example, searching using the keyword ‘LGBTQ’ also required searching for ‘LGBT+’, ‘LGBTQIA’, ‘LGBTQIAP’ et cetera. What follows are examples of keywords:

- Terms for sexuality and the LGBTQ community:
 - LGBTQ, queer, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, heterosexual, sexuality, pride parade, homophobia.
- Terms for sex and gender:
 - Intersex, transgender, non-binary, gender-queer, cisgender.
- Slurs:
 - Faggot, tranny, hermaphrodite, dyke (Holleb, 2019, pp. 19–293).

Searching for slurs identifies texts in which journalists deploy these words and ones where journalists mention or discuss them. I hypothesize that journalists tend to discuss slurs rather than actively use them, as using slurs would break their journalistic paradigm. Paradigms consist of the unwritten norms that members of a field must follow in order to maintain authority and be

a respected member of the journalistic community (Perreault & Vos, 2018, p. 555). Using offensive language would likely break the paradigm and render an article illegitimate.

I also included the term ‘social justice warrior’ (SJW) based on arguments made by game scholars Adrienne Massanari and Shira Chess. Within certain far-right communities, including white ethnonationalists, islamophobes, and misogynists, the term is used as a pejorative that describes individuals who are “overly” invested in politics and “policing” the behavior of others (Massanari & Chess, 2018, pp. 525–26). Supporters of GamerGate often use the term to describe their “opposition” (Massanari & Chess, 2018, p. 527). In keeping with this reasoning, I included similarly politically loaded “key concepts in politics, privilege, and oppression, which intersect with queer politics” (Holleb, 2019, p. 11):

- Representation, diversity, oppression, equality, progressive, identity politics.

The inclusion of terms whose meanings can be egalitarian or moralistic depending on context made evident the need to code these keywords and the context in which they are used. I opted for the categories of sincere and veiled meaning, which depend on the context surrounding, for example, the word SJW. An article coded as using this word sincerely may involve a writer enthusiastically identifying with the term as an activist, while an article coded as using it in a veiled manner may lament the presence of SJWs within the gaming community. The term veiled was selected as, rather than writers explicitly expressing conservative views (Massanari & Chess, 2018, pp. 525–26), they were observed to instead use politically loaded terms as stand-ins.

To collect articles in practice, I utilized the magazine websites’ search functions rather than Google. Google algorithmically personalizes and contextualizes result rankings in complex ways that cannot be opted out of (Graham, 2023a, p. 9). While the search functions embedded within magazine websites are likely based on Google’s algorithm, they restrict result indexing to the current

search within the chosen publication, rather than potentially hiding relevant results due to personalization. Ranking describes how search results are sorted so that users are presented with “useful” and “relevant” results first (Graham, 2023b, p. 131). This method was only troubled when searching IGN’s website, as its indexation did not differentiate between exact keywords and similar alternatives; searching using the keyword ‘gay’ would also index all results containing the word ‘gray’ and sometimes rank ‘gray’ higher than the exact term. For IGN in particular, relevant articles may have been missed.

Articles that discuss diversity, but do not concern LGBTQ topics, could still hold relevance as they may intersect with LGBTQ politics (Holleb, 2019, p. 11) and include sincere or veiled applications of loaded keywords. For example, an article regarding depictions of cis men and women in video games may mention feminism and inclusion of

women, while another article discusses diversity, a politically loaded keyword, in games or the gaming community without specifying minoritized groups. The former article would not be collected, as it explicitly does not concern LGBTQ topics, while the latter would be collected, as discussion of loaded keywords may include LGBTQ people and topics. A step-by-step example of how to select an article for the population of this study looks as follows:

1. Open a publication website.
2. Click the search icon and type in a keyword.
3. Select an indexed article.
4. Verify: Does the article concern LGBTQ characters, persons, and/or topics or use politically loaded keywords that may include LGBTQ topics?
 - a. If it fulfils any of these criteria: The article is added to the population of articles.
 - b. If it does not: The article is not added.

Year / Outlet	Game-Spot	Game Informer	IGN	Kotaku	PC Gamer	Polygon	Game-ranx	Total per year	Per year aggregate
2020	2	0	2	7	2	2	0	15	807
2019	5	6	14	39	29	26	2	121	792
2018	4	6	13	39	19	23	0	104	671
2017	2	6	1	27	13	15	3	67	567
2016	8	1	2	19	5	17	6	58	500
2015	10	3	10	16	4	15	12	70	442
2014	20	4	13	29	9	50	20	145	372
2013	5	1	4	24	1	25	16	76	227
2012	4	1	8	33	0	5	15	66	151
2011	0	1	2	16	1	0	1	21	85
2010	2	2	2	13	1	0	1	21	64
2009	2	0	2	21	0	0	0	25	43
2008	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	6	18
2007	4	0	2	0	0	0	0	6	12
2006	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	3	6
2005	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
2004	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
2003	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2
2002	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total	70	31	80	288	84	178	76	807	
	(8,7%)	(3,8%)	(9,9%)	(35,7%)	(10,4%)	(22,1%)	(9,4%)		

Figure 1 – Quantitative sampling frame data

Sampling

Probability sampling involves a random selection process that gives each unit in a population an equal chance to be selected in the sample, ensuring representativeness of the population (Punch, 2014b, p. 244). My sample of articles is a stratified probability sample, dividing the population by publication before making a random selection (Punch, 2014b, p. 244).

Population articles were collected between the 3rd and the 13th of March 2020, and it consists of 807 articles, the most recent of which is from March 2nd 2020 and the oldest of which is from March 28th 2002. In order to lower the amount of sampled articles for analysis, I took a systematic sample – a type of random sampling (Bryman, 2016a, p. 178). I selected 1 of every 3 units in the sampling frame, resulting in a final sample consisting of 269 units. Figure 1 illustrates the full

sampling frame and the distribution of articles between game publications.

Coding

What follows is an explanation of the coding manual's instructions. This manual is synergized from research discussed in the literature review and methodology described in this section. Figure 2 displays the manual.

- *Article type* refers to the type of article in question.
- *LGBTQ identity discussed* refers to which LGBTQ identity is discussed within the article. These identities consist of keywords and categories described in section 3.2. The N/A label signifies articles that do not concern a specific LGBTQ identity.
- *Does the article concern video game culture, content or industry?* describes whether the

<p>Article type</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Original interview 2. Opinion piece 3. Review/press material 4. Feature 5. News reporting 6. Video <p>LGBT identity discussed</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Umbrella terms 2. Gay 3. Lesbian 4. Bisexual 5. Pansexual 6. Asexual 7. Transgender 8. Non-binary 9. Intersex 10. Several identities 11. N/A <p>Does the article concern video game culture, content or industry?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Culture 2. Content 3. Industry 4. Several 5. N/A 	<p>Article framing</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Traditionalist morality 2. Egalitarian equality 3. Neutral 4. Unclear 5. N/A <p>Topic frames</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. N/A 2. Demonization and victimization 3. Agency 4. Goals 5. Representation 6. Sex <p>Are slurs used?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No 3. Mentioned/discussed 4. N/A <p>Are loaded terms used?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes – sincere 2. Yes – veiled 3. No 4. Mentioned/discussed 5. N/A
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Figure 2 – Coding manual

article concerns gaming culture, such as cosplays and social media commentary; content, such as LGBTQ characters in games; and industry, such as workplace rights.

- *Article framing* refers to the way in which the journalist frames their writing on LGBTQ topics. This is the most essential category in the manual. The master frames *traditionalist morality* and *egalitarian equality* are synergized from Johnson, Semykina, and Hardin and Whiteside’s studies: egalitarian equality frames LGBTQ issues by using egalitarian arguments and arguing in favor of equity, while traditionalist morality uses traditionalist or moral arguments to discredit the LGBTQ movement and frame it as deviant. I also included *neutral framing*, describing journalistic framing that does not involve arguing for or against LGBTQ subjects, and *unclear framing*, which refers to articles that employ both morality and equality framing without taking a defined stance, or articles in which it is not evident whether the journalist utilizes equality or morality framing.

- *Topic frames* is separate from how journalists frame LGBTQ topics. Topic frames detail the framing characteristic of different article topics, as they were observed to be characterized by consistent sets of frames distinct from the ways in which journalists frame their views. Recording these frames allows the coded data to more closely reflect article nuances.
 - The *demonization and victimization frame* is synergized from Semykina’s victim frame and Hardin and Whiteside’s victimization and demonization frames. It describes LGBTQ people as vulnerable victims of a status quo that frames them as deviant. I combined these frames as the demonization and victimization frames share similarities, and as I observed that victimization appeared due to demonization with such frequency that coding the frames separately ceased to be meaningful. *Agency frames* LGBTQ people as strong and capable; *goals* describes civil rights goals, such as workplace rights and equality; *representation* is a

Figure 3.1 - Articles published per year stratified by magazine

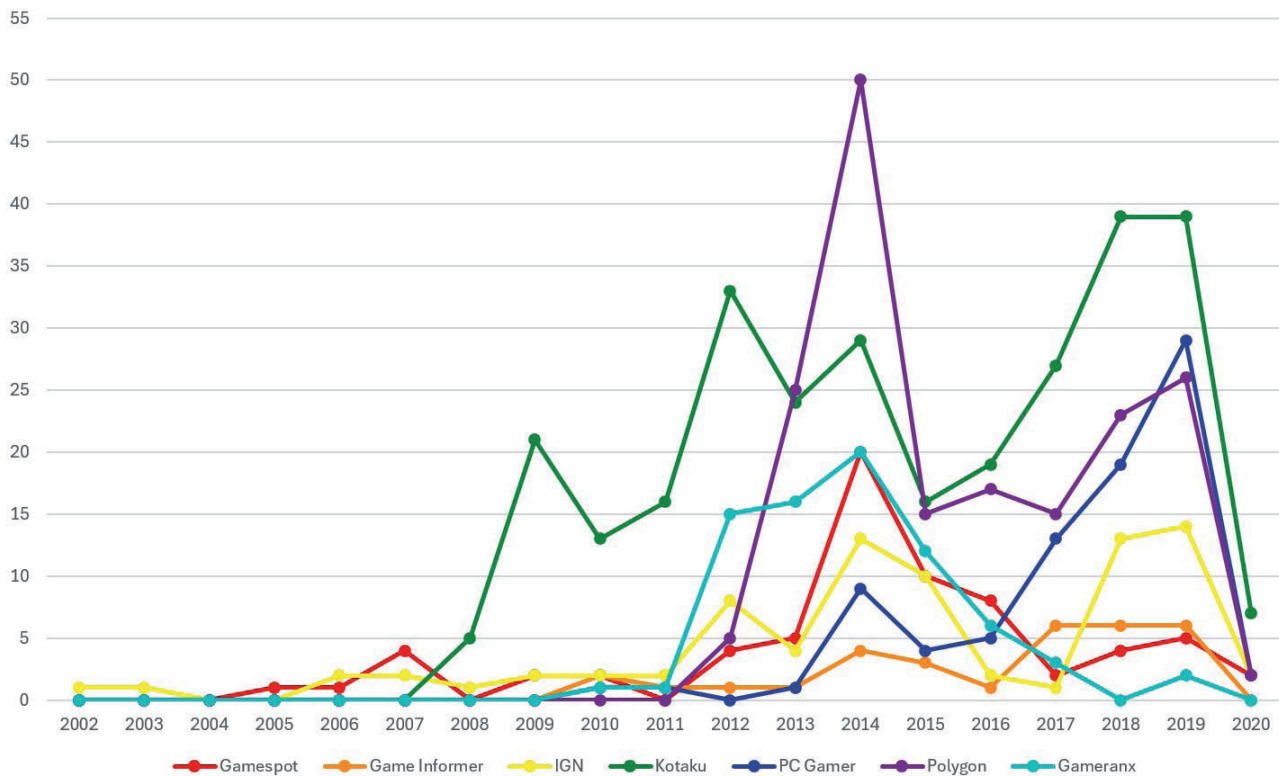


Figure 3.2 - Articles published per year in total



form of goal in and of itself, but it appeared with high enough frequency on its own that the agency and representation frames ought to be separated; the *sex frame* turned out to be a necessary inclusion, as certain articles discuss sex within video games using keywords that are not elucidated by other framing categories.

- *Are slurs used?* describes the journalist’s usage or discussion of slurs.
- *Are loaded terms used?* describes whether journalists use politically loaded keywords and whether these are deployed in a sincere or veiled manner.

Findings

This section consists of first a quantitative analysis of the data gathered in the coding schedule. This covers chronological framing developments and distributions of framing categories, hypothesizes on what may inform increases or decreases in articles published on LGBTQ topics, and charts

the possible construction of a journalistic paradigm within game journalism. Second, this section contains a qualitative framing analysis of the nine articles that most saliently represent the categories and labels of the coding manual, allowing characterization of these codes and framing categories.

Quantitative analysis

Figure 3.1 charts the number of published articles regarding LGBTQ subjects and diversity through 18 years, from 2002 to 2020, stratified by publication. Figure 3.2 displays the data in total.

Figure 3.2 shows significant increases in articles in 2009 and 2012 with the highest number of articles published in 2014. The peak in articles in 2014 is followed by a universal decrease – figure 3.1 shows that no magazines published more or maintained the same level of articles published. The GamerGate movement reached its zenith during August 2014 and January 2015, in which the majority of press responses were published (Perreault & Vos, 2018, p. 558). GG targeted female journalists, among others, with “physical, digital, and symbolic

threats of violence” so intense that game developer Zoe Quinn, originally the catalyst of the GG movement, had to flee her home (Gray, Buyukozturk, & Hill, 2017, pp. 1-2). Such threats against female figures in the gaming community and female journalists posit the reduction in LGBTQ-related articles from 2014 to 2015 as potentially significant.

Journalist Becky Gardiner examined the gendered prevalence of hostile comments posted in response to articles in the English newspaper The Guardian, finding that female and Black, Asian, and minority ethnic journalists were more likely to receive abusive comments on their articles (Gardiner, 2018, pp. 603–604). Receiving abusive comments affected how journalists approached writing articles: “[A] quarter had subdued or changed angles in stories, and 20% had refused assignments as a result of abuse” (Gardiner, 2018, p. 601). Considering that GG flourished during 2014 and early 2015 and that receiving harassment affects how and what journalists write, it is possible that GG influenced the decrease in articles on LGBTQ topics published in video game magazines. It would require further research, such as qualitative interviews with writing staff, to confirm this possibility.

Figure 4 illustrates that only a single journalist utilized offensive terms in an article in 2019. This may indicate the construction of a journalistic paradigm regarding LGBTQ topics within game journalism; the standard has changed in such a manner that offensive terms are rarely if ever used. Figure 5 illustrates that most journalists utilize politically loaded terms in a sincere, egalitarian manner. While veiled language is more common than using slurs, it is consistently surpassed by articles that do not use loaded terms and journalists that do so sincerely. Unlike how game magazines published after 1986 reinforced masculine values (Kirkpatrick, 2017, p. 453), game publications have since 2009 instead discussed slurs and sincerely utilized loaded terms when framing LGBTQ topics – a significant difference and a significant finding.

Figure 6 illustrates that 57,2% of journalists utilize equality framing in their articles on LGBTQ subjects, 36,1% use neutral framing, and 0,7% use morality framing. Major differences between magazines are characterized not by conflicting egalitarian equality and traditionalist morality framing, reflecting the tension between modern video game content and conservative communities such as GG, but rather equality and neutral

Figure 4 - Usage of slurs per year

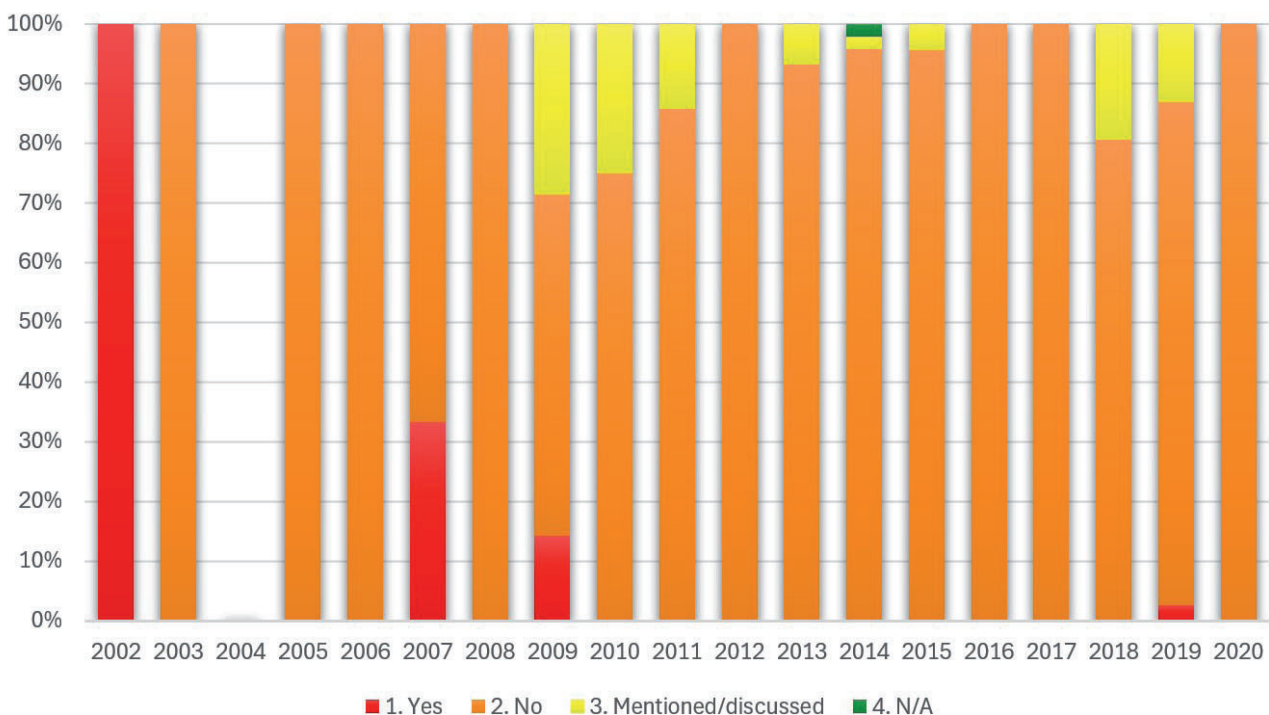
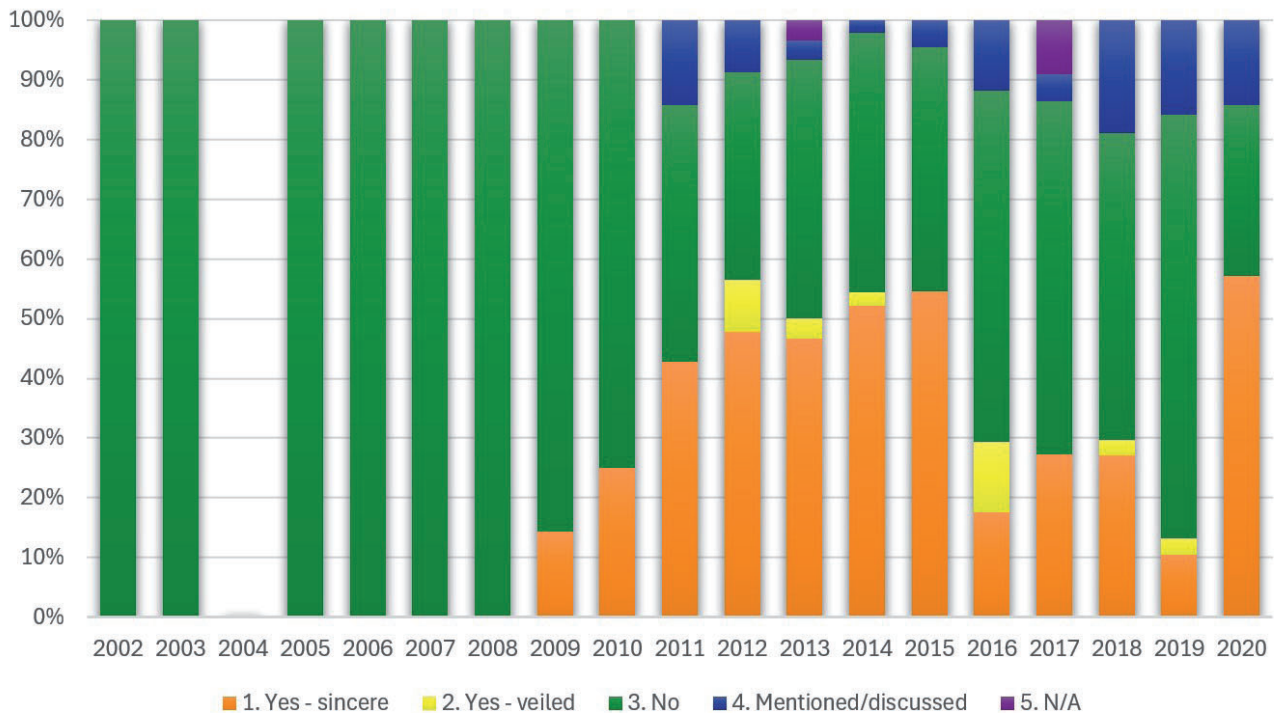


Figure 5 - Usage of loaded terms per year



framing. The greatest variations between publications likewise involve equality and neutral framing, Kotaku’s output being characterized by equality framing while Gamespot’s articles are characterized by neutral framing, for example. Morality framing is consistently minimal, illustrated by figure 7. As found by Johnson and argued by Kirkpatrick, Summers and Miller, and Fisher, egalitarian framing may influence readers’ mindsets in an egalitarian direction, marking this data as another noteworthy finding.

Framing analysis

I will analyze nine articles and their utilization of key functions of framing and the locations of frames within the texts, organized around the coding categories and labels described in the coding manual. These articles make salient the characteristics of these categories and labels. Figure 8 displays the distribution of each topic frame, contextualizing what types of framing and which keywords are most significant. When analyzing topic frames, I will focus less on the key functions of framing and more so on the keywords that characterize each.

Egalitarian equality

To analyze egalitarian equality framing, I selected Samantha Allen’s 2014 Polygon opinion piece “Nintendo’s ‘whimsical’ simulation erases an entire population of people, and that’s intolerable”. Allen defines problems by quoting a statement made by the game company Nintendo regarding criticism the company received for the lack of inclusion of LGBTQ relationships in its simulation game *Tomodachi Life* (2013). The company’s statement asserts that it did not intend to provide social commentary with the game and that it represents

Figure 6 - Article framing

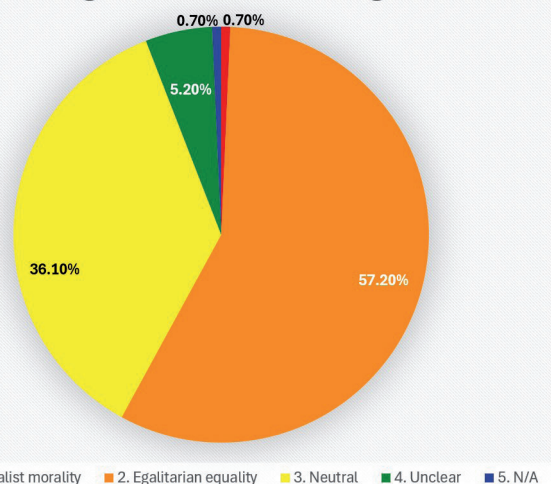
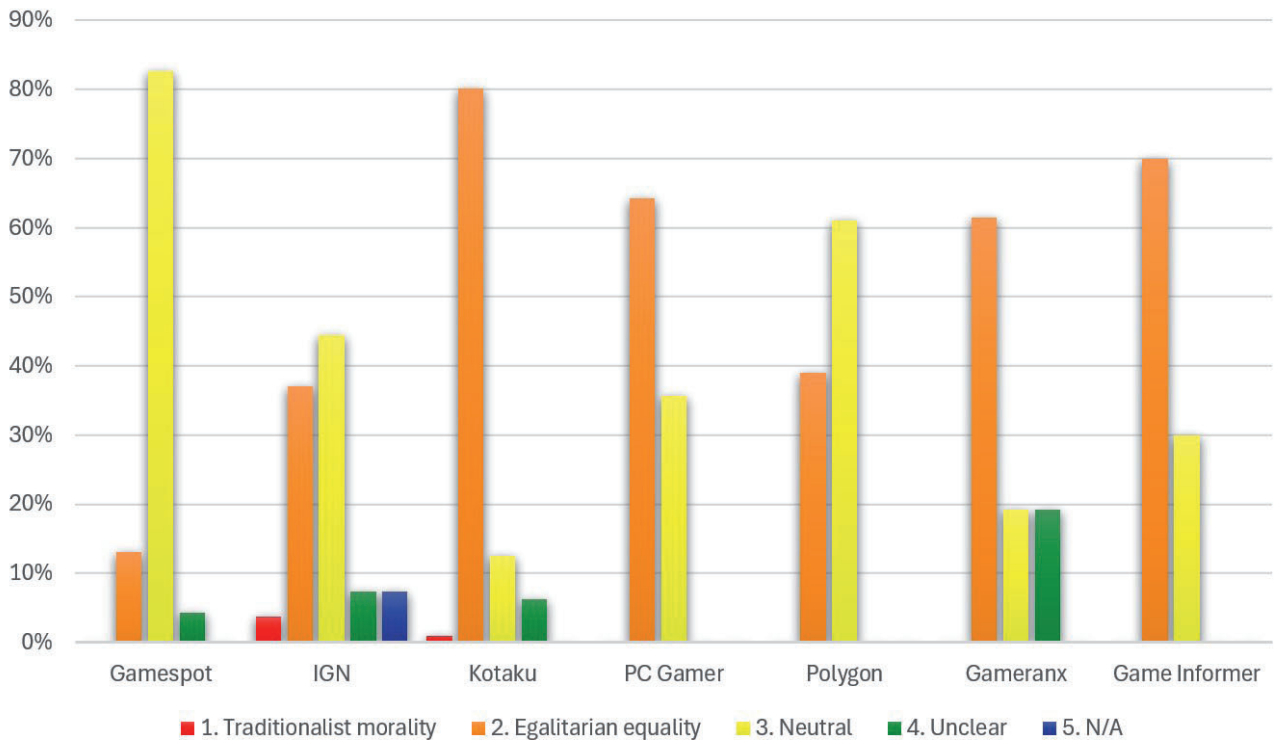


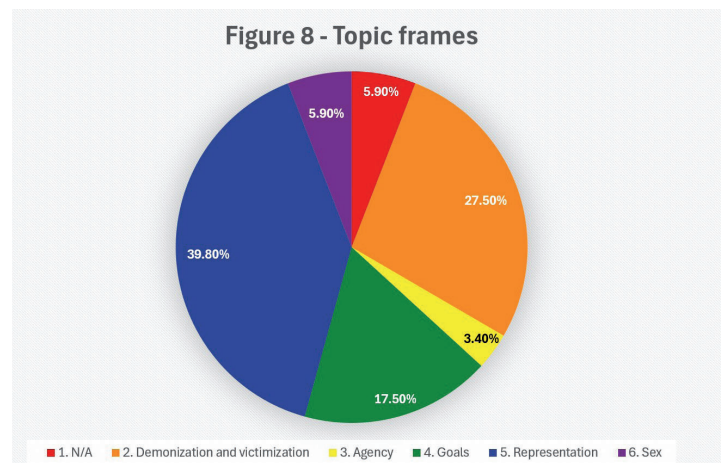
Figure 7 - Article framing stratified by magazine



a “playful alternate world” (Allen, 2014). Allen utilizes sentences that reinforce her judgments: “Nintendo has chosen to remain on the wrong side of history”, “behind all the corporate jargon [...] lies hatred, pure and simple” (Allen, 2014). She diagnoses causes by stating: “The beating, bigoted heart of Nintendo’s statement is this: Nintendo does not care about its lesbian, gay and bisexual audience” (Allen, 2014). Making moral judgments and evaluating causal agents, Allen states that same-sex relationships are a cultural reality, not social commentary, and reinforces her argument by including statistical and scientific sources of information, such as the Pew Research Center and social theorists Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner. She frames the “erasure” of same-sex marriages as “offensive and scary” and Nintendo’s words and actions as portraying these relationships as abnormal, deviant, and “other” (Allen, 2014). She suggests a remedy with the article’s last sentence, expressing that Nintendo should live up to the company’s reputation for innovation and choose differently (Allen, 2014).

Allen utilizes equality framing by arguing for the inclusion and equal representation of LGBTQ people. Several sets of keywords can be identified in her writing. First, she uses a set of keywords to frame Nintendo as being conservative: exclusionary, hatred, bigoted, normative, regressive, cowardly, offensive. Secondly, she frames the LGBTQ experience as being difficult partly due to conservatism like Nintendo’s: dread, scary, abnormal, deviant, painful. This contrasts the keywords she uses to frame heterosexual identities: self-evident, invisible,

Figure 8 - Topic frames



privileged. Lastly, she employs a set of keywords to describe LGBTQ communities and LGBTQ love: “queer people can be themselves”, fantasies, joy (Allen, 2014). This set of keywords has a small presence in the article compared to the difficult LGBTQ experience and conservatism, but it becomes noticeable due to this contrast it provides.

In summary, Allen’s article characterizes egalitarian equality as framing traditionalist attitudes using conscious framing and active criticism while making salient the challenges LGBTQ persons face and the bonds and communities they form. The framework that Allen utilizes may also draw on social research, queer theory, and gender studies to reinforce its argument.

Traditionalist morality

To examine traditionalist morality framing, I selected Brian Ashcraft’s 2009 Kotaku news article “NieR’s Hermaphrodite Character”. The article is short and uses few key framing functions. Ashcraft defines problems by reporting that Square Enix’ game *Nier* (2010) features an intersex character. Ashcraft utilizes stereotyped images in his framing of intersex people and his usage of the slur ‘hermaphrodite’ (Holleb, 2019, p. 144). Ashcraft refers to the intersex character, Kaine, as a “two-for-one” and satirizes the character’s pronouns:

Her, his, its Kaine’s attitude and manner of speech are manly – but she/he/it emphasizes her female qualities through her racy fashion style. (Ashcraft, 2009)

Using a slur and satirizing the character’s gender expression is an example of morality framing, discrediting an LGBTQ identity and framing intersex characters as being deviant by way of satire. Articles such as Ashcraft’s are emblematic of traditionalist morality framing, utilizing outdated terms and slurs in the discussion of LGBTQ topics as well as a satirical and flippant tone regarding LGBTQ identities.

Sincere and veiled usage of loaded terms

To examine the differences between sincere and veiled usage of loaded terms, I am analyzing two

articles that illustrate the different usages. Carolyn Petit’s 2013 GameSpot opinion piece “Heroes Who Look Like Us: A Call for Diversity in Games” utilizes loaded terms in a sincere manner. Petit defines the problem as being that game designer Cliff Bleszinski “asserts his own positive impact”, which Petit finds unjustified, as Bleszinski has included too few female characters in his games (Petit, 2013). She diagnoses the causes as being that women and other minorities are underrepresented in games and makes the judgment that it “doesn’t have to be this way”, and that “baby steps” that slowly diversify video games do not remedy the problem quickly enough (Petit, 2013). Her remedial suggestion is that the industry ought to add more diversity immediately, despite the hostility displayed by “straight white males” (Petit, 2013).

Petit frames diversity and progressiveness in a positive manner, often quoting industry professionals: “greater diversity in games is smart business”, “Diversity benefits creativity”, “greater diversity in games would be good for everyone”, “It’s time for the heroes games give us to become more diverse” (Petit, 2013). She frames the experiences of women and minorities in game culture and as game characters as being difficult: vitriol, marginalized, victim, underrepresented. Additionally, she frames those who oppose the inclusion of women and minorities in games in a negative manner: hostile, trolls, “comfortably accustomed to the status quo”, “You don’t coddle cancer” (Petit, 2013). Framing those who oppose diversity as ‘cancer’ positions them as something destructive that needs to be removed or cured.

Sincere usage of politically loaded terms frames diversity and inclusion as positives that benefit the game industry and community while criticizing ‘straight white males’ and gamers that oppose diversity. This positions sincere usage of loaded terms in opposition to the ideologies that inform movements like GG and in favor of the inclusion of LGBTQ topics and characters in games. Sincere framing also appears aware of the egalitarian and moralistic discourses within game production and culture and characterizes egalitarian developments positively while criticizing moralistic attitudes as being ‘cancerous’.

To examine veiled usage of loaded terms, I selected the opinion piece “Opinion: The Problem with Political Correctness in Video Games” by Marc Nix, published in IGN in 2012. Nix defines the problem as being that political correctness is “ruining” the creativity of the game industry. He makes the moral judgment that “[b]y refusing to address this problem, we are stripping gaming of its ability to be ingenious” (Nix, 2012). He suggests the remedy that games need to be “challenging” and that game creators and game communities should “throw off the shackles of political correctness” (Nix, 2012). Such sentences are illustrative of Nix’ negative usage of loaded terms; he frames political correctness as a restriction that constrains creativity and ‘ruins’ games: “Should we succumb to the plight of political correctness and let it ruin the creativity of our industry like it’s corrupted so many other artistic avenues?”, “We’ve already let political correctness like this destroy gaming projects” (Nix, 2012). This frames “political correctness” and inclusion as corrupting influences that destroy projects – this framing is characterized by morality framing, using moral arguments to discredit progressive beliefs. Nix uses historical sources of information to reinforce his argument, quoting founding father Benjamin Franklin and author George Orwell. Franklin, in particular, has strong patriotic connotations for Americans.

Nix uses a distinct set of keywords that frame diversity and inclusion as destructive: strangled, corrupted, “thought police”, obliterate, censored. Another set of keywords is one that frames those who speak out against political correctness as being brave: “stand up”, “push the envelope”, “protect our inherent freedoms of speech” (Nix, 2012), refusing, dare. This stands in contrast to Allen and Petit’s keywords and arguments, which frame opposition to diversity as conservative and cancerous. Nix’s opinion piece makes salient the importance of registering politically loaded keywords; veiled usage of loaded keywords does not utilize homo- or transphobic slurs, instead expressing opposition against diversity in general, which may include LGBTQ topics, and framing this as supporting creative expression.

Demonization and Victimization

The opinion piece “Why I Don’t Feel Welcome at Kotaku” by Mattie Brice in Kotaku from 2011 is an example of a topic characterized by demonization and victimization framing. Brice defines the problem of having nowhere to escape to as a transgender woman within video game culture and diagnoses the cause as not being seen as a “gamer” due to her identity (Brice, 2011). She makes the moral judgment that these factors have caused her to turn away from Kotaku in favor of other communities. She offers a remedy with the sentence: “I wish Kotaku would tell me ‘We don’t want you to go away’” (Brice, 2011). This is representative of the demonization and victimization frame, as Brice experiences hostility, exclusion, and victimization due to her gender identity. She utilizes keywords that frame the LGBTQ experience as being challenging: bullied, escape, monster, homophobic, martyr, and frames “straight white males” as negative influences: “typical gamers”, “homophobic adolescent dudes” (Brice, 2011), toxic. According to Brice, the LGBTQ experience becomes difficult due to a community consisting of “typical gamers”, making salient the difficulties associated with being an LGBTQ person and writer, the identified keywords closely reflecting the frame’s name: hostility, exclusion, and victimization. However, she also presents LGBTQ communities as positive alternatives to this difficulty: “empowered to be themselves”, “each one of us mattered” (Brice, 2011).

Agency

“My Shepard is Asexual, and That’s Okay” by Kris Ligman in Gameranx from 2012 illustrates the agency topic frame. Ligman defines the problem as being that sex is considered “the ultimate stage of a [virtual] relationship”, which causes her discomfort (Ligman, 2012). She diagnoses her asexuality as being the cause of her discomfort, as she attempted to “convince myself I felt otherwise” (Ligman, 2012). She makes the moral judgment that experiencing media as an asexual person is confusing and frustrating, suggesting the remedy of including relationships in games that do not mimic sexual relationships. Agency framing is

evident in the way in which Ligman frames herself as a capable asexual person who “took stock of what I was doing and who I was intending to play as” (Ligman, 2012). She describes her development as changing from believing that there was “something wrong about *me*” to a confident attitude: “[the characters] have *stopped caring* about conforming to expectations”, “treating sex as an achievement could go hang itself”, “I don’t need to keep pretending” (Ligman, 2012).

Framing herself this way, Ligman employs a set of keywords that expresses her agency and the comfort of experiencing a relationship that she could relate to. The agency frame is characterized by LGBTQ people characterizing themselves as strong and capable and their experiences as liberating despite confusion and discomfort.

Goals

News article “EA scores top marks for LGBTQ equality in the workplace” by Megan Farokhmanesh from 2014 in Polygon exemplifies the goals frame. Farokhmanesh defines the problem as being the fact that the games company Electronic Arts (EA) was “named one of the best companies to work for in regards to LGBTQ equality by the Human Rights Campaign” (Farokhmanesh, 2014), and diagnoses the cause as being EA’s inclusion of LGBTQ characters and participating in LGBTQ events.

The lack of moral judgments and suggesting remedies is emblematic of articles that use neutral framing; the journalist refrains from asserting opinions on the reported subject. Neutral framing does not utilize egalitarian or traditionalist framing, nor does it use loaded terms in a sincere or veiled manner. Frame locations are few, instead relying on the receiver and the frames that guide their thinking rather than influencing them. Nevertheless, the article does report on equal rights goals, as a game publisher received acclaim for its “commitment to the LGBTQ community” (Farokhmanesh, 2014).

Representation

“Sexuality and gender in science fiction games” by Jody Macgregor from 2018 in PC Gamer

illustrates the representation frame. Macgregor defines the problem that depictions of sexuality and gender in science fiction games have changed radically over the decades. He diagnoses the cause as sci-fi being a form of speculative fiction that examines the present and makes the moral judgment that showing a range of sexualities within games is “a positive trend” that helps players understand LGBTQ people and friends (Macgregor, 2018). He suggests the remedy that stories about the future “could stand to be a bit ahead of their time” (Macgregor, 2018). The LGBTQ experience is again framed as difficult: “feeling at odds with your own body”, “feeling broken”, “queer outcasts”, abject, horror, taboo (Macgregor, 2018). He also utilizes keywords that frame LGBTQ communities and representation as positive: “readers accept it”, “queerness is unstoppable”, “understand your trans friends better”, “people can reach ‘resolution, conclusion, understanding, empathy’”, “it’s OK to be you” (Macgregor, 2018).

Using game developers and sci-fi authors to strengthen his argument, Macgregor frames LGBTQ representation as something that allows LGBTQ people to find a community within games and as allowing non-LGBTQ people to better understand other sexualities and genders. The representation frame is characterized by the discussion of how inclusion may affect players; Macgregor argues that understanding is fueled by diversity, which affects those who are exposed to it, framing this in an explicitly egalitarian manner with statements such as “queerness is unstoppable”.

Sex

“This was the decade that sex in games became personal” by Emily Marlow from 2019 in PC Gamer is an example of the sex frame. Marlow defines the problem as being that romance and sex options in games are awkward. She diagnoses the causes as sex in games being poorly constructed and lacking in variation and makes the judgment that “the best sex in games in the last decade didn’t actually happen” (Marlow, 2019), meaning that desire and longing were more important to the experience than physical sex acts. She suggests the remedy that sex in games should not be

an inevitable result of romantic relationships (Marlow, 2019).

Articles that utilize the sex topic frame employ a distinct set of keywords: foreplay, soft-core, screwing, sexy, limp, shag, titillating, orgasm, thrusts, “bump and grind”, “hook-ups”, “dick pics”, chemistry, desire, lust (Marlow, 2019). These keywords are rarely present in other topic frames and do not function as the focus of other articles as they do in articles that employ the sex topic frame. Marlow additionally frames LGBTQ game creators as valuable sources of the kind of sex in games that Marlow suggests as a remedy, framing LGBTQ creators as positive influences:

Some of the best sex in games of the last ten years came from [LGBTQ] developers such as Nina Freeman, Anna Anthropy and Robert Yang. Each told all-too-familiar stories of messy love[...] [...] Here, sex is personal, heartfelt, and delicious. (Marlow, 2019)

The sex frame is not only characterized by its unique keywords, but by reflections on sexuality and gender and how they intersect with sex-related storytelling. Why the sex frame is not identified by prior studies, but appears frequently enough to necessitate coding when game publications frame LGBTQ topics, is a question that could be elucidated upon by perhaps a comparative analysis of how minoritized groups are framed within game magazines.

Discussion

While GamerGate employs arguments characterized by right-wing philosophies to oppose diversity and inclusion within video game content, video game journalism utilizes egalitarian and neutral framing regarding LGBTQ topics. To summarize the results of the framing analysis of articles representative of coding manual categories, I found several distinct sets of keywords:

- Keywords that describe the LGBTQ experience as being difficult and characterized by hardship.
- LGBTQ communities making a positive impact on LGBTQ people, and LGBTQ representation within games allowing LGBTQ people to connect with the medium and non-LGBTQ people to understand the LGBTQ experience.
 - This set of keywords can concern both the LGBTQ spectrum and diversity in general.
- Those who oppose LGBTQ inclusion as being conservative and a negative influence.
- Keywords that concern (LGBTQ) sex and sexual content.

These sets of keywords are generally utilized in articles that employ egalitarian equality framing. In contrast, articles that use traditionalist morality framing employ different sets of keywords:

- Keywords that describe loaded terms such as inclusion and diversity as being destructive and inhibiting creativity.
- Those who oppose inclusion as being brave and standing up for freedom of expression.
- The usage of slurs and outdated terms.

These differing sets of keywords characterize two distinct cultures of frames: one stock of commonly used sets of frames describes the egalitarian attitude and discourse of journalists employing equality framing, while the other culture describes framing utilized by journalists that deploy morality framing.

57,2% of journalists employ equality framing, 36,1% use neutral framing, and 0,7% use morality framing. As explored in section 4.1, this means that more than half of journalists frame LGBTQ topics in a manner characterized by a conscious usage of framing that criticizes traditionalism and treats LGBTQ topics with consideration, informed by social research. While traditionalist morality framing uses outdated terms and can be characterized as flippant in tone, morality framing is not what contrasts equality framing within game publications; rather, it is neutral framing which does not draw from either stock of cultures in its

framing of LGBTQ topics. These articles instead rely on the frames that guide receivers' thinking, the effects of which require further study, such as interviewing journalists on the matter and reception analyses of the comments section and debates surrounding such articles.

Sincere usage of loaded terms more often contrasts veiled usage, and veiled language is more common than traditionalist morality framing. As stated by Massanari and Chess, far-right communities veil their conservative views by using loaded terms (Massanari & Chess, 2018, pp. 525–26), and the contrast between sincere and veiled usage of these terms more closely reflects the tension between GamerGate and the game industry. However, sincere usage, like egalitarian framing, is consistently far more common than veiled usage. Whether one examines the usage of politically loaded terms or equality and morality framing, game publications consistently frame LGBTQ topics primarily in an egalitarian, sincere manner, though some publications utilize a higher rate of neutral framing. Across all types of framing utilized by journalists, the topics of inclusion and diversity as well as demonization and victimization receive a great deal of attention within game magazines. The representation topic is present in 39,8% of articles, demonization and victimization in 27,5%. As a result, 67,3% of articles surround topics characterized by an awareness of the difficulties associated with being an LGBTQ person and a focus on who is included in games and their community and how.

This stands in contrast to previous research regarding depictions of women and non-white people and characters within game magazines; game journalism since 2002 appears conscious of inclusion and diversity and deploys egalitarian or neutral framing, rather than reinforcing hegemonic gender roles (Fisher, 2015, p. 555). The differences between framing of LGBTQ topics compared to depictions of women and non-white people and characters are likely the result of a journalistic paradigm surrounding LGBTQ topics being established between 2009 and 2020, when the number of articles on LGBTQ topics increased severalfold, in which using offensive language and morality

framing would render an article illegitimate. The print publications studied by Kirkpatrick established paradigms between 1982 and 1985 that subsequently shifted towards masculine hegemony, affecting the surrounding gaming culture after 1986. It is possible that the hegemonic paradigms of the late 80s and 90s and the political and cultural environments in which they were produced are the cause of this difference, but while LGBTQ content has been a part of video gaming since at least 1988 (Henley, 2023) or 1989 (Zomorodi, 2023), reporting on LGBTQ topics in digital publications was rare and infrequent until around 2009. Print articles from the 80s and 90s are likely also scarce. This hypothesis can only be confirmed by studying older print editions of the publications included in this study, which is not within its scope. Additional research on LGBTQ topics within game publications is undoubtedly needed.

Conclusion

This study sought to understand how and if the tension between the increased diversity within the content produced by the video game industry and the opposing, right-wing attitudes regarding this content is reflected within video game publications. As more games and their creators broach LGBTQ subjects and themes, and as these games and their creators are met with harassment and aggression from movements such as GamerGate, game journalism does not reflect this opposition and division. Rather, 57,2% of articles on LGBTQ topics in game publications utilize equality framing, while morality framing makes up 0,7% of framing. Game publications have constructed a journalistic paradigm that is characterized by egalitarian or neutral framing of LGBTQ topics in which slurs are no longer used, which has persisted despite the effects GG may have had on article output in 2015. Consequently, the framing utilized by video game publications regarding LGBTQ subjects contrasts GG discourses that opposes diversity in video games. This can possibly influence readers towards an egalitarian mindset, as Tyler Johnson found and Graeme Kirkpatrick, Alicia

Summers and Monica Miller, and Howard Fisher argued.

The total amount of articles published on LGBTQ subjects in game publications decreased from 145 in 2014 to 70 in 2015. Considering that GG flourished during 2014 and early 2015 and that, as Becky Gardiner found, receiving abusive comments and harassment affects how and what journalists write, it is possible that GG influenced the decrease in LGBTQ-related articles published in video game news outlets. It may be valuable to research GG's effects on journalists via interviews and examining articles written on GG during this period. To this end, it may also be beneficial to research reader responses to LGBTQ-related articles, analyzing framing within comment sections or interviewing readers.

To conclude, this study expands the knowledge within media and communications research through a queer and feminist lens of how minoritized groups are framed and depicted within video game magazines, revealing significant historical contrasts between the framing of female and non-white people and characters and LGBTQ topics. It charts differences between game community and culture as compared to journalism and elucidates how game journalism generally engages in egalitarian discourse, in contrast to conservative communities like GamerGate – a valuable addition to the field of humanist game studies that expands the understanding of video game journalism as well as how it compares to its surrounding community and industry.



Image sources: IGN Entertainment, Gameranx, Game Informer, Gamespot, Kotaku, PC Gamer

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Notes

- ¹ ‘Doxing’ being a form of harassment that involves publishing identifying information about a person online with malicious intent.

Hvor vover hun!

Vrede og autisme i mediedækningen af Greta Thunberg

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Artiklen er baseret på analyser, som indgår i ph.d.-afhandlingen Hvor vover de? En queer kritisk-retorisk undersøgelse af, hvordan vrede bevæger det sociale.

Abstract

How Dare She – Anger and Autism in the Danish Media Coverage of Greta Thunberg.

Analyzing the Danish media reception of Greta Thunberg's speech at the UN's climate action summit in 2019, this article illustrates how anger sticks to Thunberg and the youth climate movement, as well as how 'their' anger is problematized and pathologized. The anger ascribed to Thunberg is framed as a symptom of her autism spectrum diagnosis; as a 'mental problem' rather than a reaction to a political problem. Further, 'her' anger is portrayed as contagious, posing a risk to the health of other children, and 'her' anger becomes the source of 'our' concern. The article illustrates this by drawing attention to the emergence of the figure of 'the impossible child': an angry figure who is denied the positive affective status of the Child even though her childishness is constantly emphasized. She is not the innocent Child who must be protected but a problematic child whose dysregulated, pathological anger must be regulated to protect other children from her.

KEYWORDS: affect, anger, neurodiversity, activism, children

"How dare you?" hvæsedde den dengang 16-årige klimaaktivist Greta Thunberg ad verdens ledere i sin berømte tale ved FN's Climate Action Summit i 2019 (NPR Staff, 2019). Talen har siden fået kultstatus: Citater fra talen og billeder af Thunbergs ansigt blev cirkuleret som memes, trykt på t-shirts og samlet i musik (se f.eks. Horn, 2019; *How Dare You*, s.d.). Thunbergs tale blev dog også mødt med massiv modstand, og talens retoriske spørgsmål gav genlyd i kritikken af hende: Hvor vover *hun* at skælde ud på de voksne? I denne artikel analyserer jeg den retoriske cirkulation af Thunbergs tale til FN i danske medier med fokus på, hvordan følelser som vrede og bekymring på forskellig vis *klæber* til Thunberg og den unge klimabevægelse (Ahmed, 2004).

Som kulturel figur er 'barnet' kropsliggørelsen af uskyld og forbundet med positive følelser som kærlighed, lykke, omsorg og håb for fremtiden (Dyer, 2019; Edelman, 2004), og flere peger på, at unge kvindelige aktivister er gået fra at være usynliggjorte i mainstream medier til at blive hyldet som håbefulde og harmløse heltefigurer (Locke, 2023; Ryalls & Mazzarella, 2021; Taft, 2020). Greta Thunberg er ofte blevet fremhævet som et eksempel på denne tendens. Studier peger på at den unge svenske klimaaktivist, sammenlignet med andre unge kvindelige aktivister såsom ugandiske Vanessa Nakate og pakistanske Malala Yousafzai, er privilegeret i kraft af sin nationalitet og hvidhed (Locke, 2023; Taft, 2020), og flere fremhæver, at repræsentationen og receptionen af børn og teenagere må forstås som formet i krydsfelterne mellem køn, alder, race, seksualitet og nationalitet (Buhre, 2023; Dyer, 2019). Ligesom disse studier er jeg i denne artikel optaget af, hvordan den uskyld og uskadelighed, som gør barnefiguren populær og giver den unge aktivist sin appel i offentlighedens øjne, ikke er lige tilgængelig for alle børn og unge. I forlængelse af studier, som påpeger vigtigheden af at inkludere handicap som en intersektionel identitetskategori i analyser af repræsentationer af børn og unge (Hill, 2017; Stienstra, 2015), er fokus i denne artikel på, hvordan kulturelle repræsentationer af barnet også må forstås som formet i intersektionerne mellem neurodivergens, køn og alder, samt hvordan følelser deltager i denne formgivning.

Igennem en analyse af medieomtalen af Thunbergs tale illustrerer jeg, hvordan Thunberg bliver fremstillet som drevet af en ukontrolleret vrede, og hvordan 'hendes' vrede bliver problematiseret og patologiseret. Analysen tager form i forlængelse af studier, der illustrerer, hvordan vrede kommer til at karakterisere nogle kroppe mere end andre, samt hvordan kvinder og minoriteters vrede historisk er blevet problematiseret og patologiseret (se f.eks. Tomlinson, 2010; Campbell, 1994; Ahmed, 2009). Med udgangspunkt i M. Remi Yergeaus (2018) teoretisering af autisme som et 'diskursivt script' som den diagnostiseredes handlinger og krop fortolkes gennem, illustrerer jeg, hvordan kritikken af Thunbergs vrede tager form i krydsfeltet mellem køn, alder og neurodivergens: Jeg illustrerer, hvordan Thunbergs vrede bliver fremstillet som barnlig uregerlighed, 'hysteri' og et *symptom* på hendes autisme-spektrum-diagnose, snarere end en *reaktion* på et politisk problem (utilstrækkelig klimahandling). Jeg argumenterer desuden for, at 'hendes' patologiske vrede bliver fremstillet som smitsom og som en trussel mod andre børn og unges mentale helbred, hvorved 'hendes' vrede bliver objekt for 'vores' (læserens/journalistens/debattørens) bekymring. Endelig argumenterer jeg for, at kritikken af Thunberg tegner konturerne af en figur, jeg foreslår at kalde 'det umulige barn'. Det umulige barn er umuligt i den forstand, at hun bliver fremstillet som uregerlig og uopdragen, og i den forstand at hun på én gang er barn og ikke-Barn: Hendes barnlighed betones konstant, samtidig med at hun mister Barnets affektive status som *glædesobjekt* (Ahmed, 2010). Det umulige barn er ikke et barn, der skal beskyttes, men et barn hvis patologiske vrede skal reguleres for at beskytte andre børn (mod hende).

Den retoriske cirkulation af Thunbergs tale

I sensommeren 2018 indledte den dengang 15-årige Greta Thunberg en ugentlig "skolstrejk för klimatet" foran det svenske parlament, Riksdagen. Året efter i 2019 var den, nu 16-årige, aktivist inviteret til at tale ved FN's Climate Action Summit

i New York. Her anklagede hun verdens ledere for at have stjålet hendes barndom og hendes fremtidsdrømme ved at prioritere økonomisk vækst i stedet for at føre den nødvendige politik for at reducere klima- og miljøkrisens katastrofale konsekvenser. I denne artikel er det dog ikke talen, men den medieomtale den affødte, som er genstand for analyse.

I de danske medier delte Thunbergs tale vandene: Mens dele af mediedækningen gengav og analyserede Thunbergs tale (Bavnhøj, 2019; Burcharth, 2019), affødte talen også store mængder kritik (se f.eks. Grimm, 2019; Libak, 2019; Møller, 2019; Selsing, 2019). Andre igen forsvarede Thunberg og kritiserede dem, der kritiserede hende (J. Andersen, 2019; Petersen, 2019; Sørensen, 2019). Et centralt omdrejningspunkt i mediedækningen såvel som debatten var talens følelseladede fremførelse (se f.eks. Mortensen, 2019; Ritzau, 2019; Wentoft, 2019). I det følgende vil jeg fokusere på, hvilke følelser der træder frem i medieomtalen, samt hvordan de på forskellig vis forbindes til Thunberg.

Det tekstkorpus, der ligger til grund for analysen, afspejler omtalen af Thunbergs tale på tværs af medier og genrer i den efterfølgende måned. Artiklerne er tilgået fra medieovervågningsplatformen Infomedia, og er samlet på baggrund af en systematisk søgning: Jeg har søgt på 'Greta Thunberg' i alle tilgængelige medier i perioden fra d. 23.09.2019 (dato for talen) til og med d. 23.10.2019 (i alt 930 artikler). Analysen spænder således over journalistiske genrer som reportager og nyhedsartikler til debatindlæg og læserbreve, og jeg sidestiller disse tekster på tværs af genre og medie, og på trods af at de er forfattet af skribenter med vidt forskellige baggrunde. En sidestilling, som giver mening i forhold til undersøgelsens formål, da jeg ikke er interesseret i at undersøge teksternes effekt, men i at illustrere et retorisk fænomen.

Jeg analyserer den *retoriske økologi* (Edbauer, 2005), herunder de netværk af offentlige følelser, som Thunbergs tale er en del af, med henblik på at vise, hvilke følelser der klæber til Thunberg, og hvordan der etableres forbindelser mellem f.eks. vrede og neurodivergens. I modsætning til

triangulære kommunikationsmodeller, som studerer tekster som del af afgrænsede og veldefinerede kommunikationssituationer (ofte afgrænset af 'afsender', 'modtager', 'tekst'), tilbyder teorien om retoriske økologier en forståelse af retorik som en vedvarende cirkulationsproces, der udvikler sig organisk. Med udgangspunkt i dette behandler jeg heller ikke medieteksterne i deres helhed, men har i stedet konstrueret en analysetekst af fragmenter fra mediedækningen og -debatten. Det giver yderligere mening at gøre, hvis vi forstår følelser – ikke som noget der tager sit udspring i en individuel krop, men som noget der cirkulerer og orienterer, former og afgrænser (kollektive) kroppe (Ahmed, 2004).

Vrede klæber

Når jeg i det følgende undersøger, hvordan følelser som vrede forbindes til nogle kroppe mere end andre og derigennem former og orienterer (kollektive) kroppe, er det en forlængelse af den bevægelse inden for dele af human- og samfundsvidenskaberne, som bliver kaldt 'den affektive vending' (Clough & Halley, 2007). Som det også tidligere er understreget i nærværende tidsskrift, er 'den affektive vending' dog alt andet end én simultan teoretisk, metodisk eller politisk bevægelse; 'den affektive vending' kan bedre forstås som en mangfoldighed af kritiske positioner (Koivunen, 2015, 20). Selvom 'den affektive vending' ofte bliver regnet for en reaktion på 'den sproglige vending': En vending væk, eller en vending tilbage til kroppen og tingenes materialitet¹, er det langt fra al nyere forskning i følelse og affekt, der vender poststrukturalistisk tankegods ryggen. Denne artikel skriver sig ind i den gren af affektstudier som:

[I]nsistere[r] på at indskrive følelser og affekter i det politiske og det sociale ved bl.a. at undersøge, hvordan affekter bevæger sig mellem kroppe, og derfor ikke bør betragtes som individuelt afgrænsede og inderlige, men derimod 'rørelser', som kan have potentielt mobiliserende effekter. (Christiansen et al., 2013, s. 4)

I stedet for at anskue affekt som autonom kropslig intensitet (Edbauer, 2004; Massumi, 1995) bliver det her relevant at studere, hvordan nogle følelser bliver forbundet med nogle objekter, nogle kroppe (Ahmed, 2014; Hemmings, 2005).

Sara Ahmed (2014a) teoretiserer følelser som *performative*; som på én gang kropslige og sociale størrelser, og Ahmed skelner derfor ikke mellem affekt (forstået som autonom kropslig intensitet) og følelse (forstået som fortolkning). Dette indebærer ikke en afvisning af, at der eksisterer nervebaner og hjernestrukturer, som umiddelbart og ubevidst registrerer affektive påvirkninger, der kan opleves som subtile stemninger eller atmosfærer. I stedet dækker det over en antagelse om, at også denne påvirkning, disse stemninger og atmosfærer, må forstås som kulturelt formet og fortolket. Måske var affekt altid allerede følelse, hvorfor sondringen mellem følelse og affekt viser sig slet ikke at være nogen sondring, kan man foreslå, som et ekko af Judith Butlers berømte spørgsmål om eksistensen af et meningsfuldt skel mellem et biologisk og et socialt køn: "Måske var det altid allerede socialt køn, hvilket har den konsekvens, at sondringen mellem biologisk køn og socialt køn viser sig slet ikke at være nogen sondring" (Butler, 2011, s. 46). Ahmeds teoretisering af følelser er da også inspireret af Butlers (2011) performativitetstænkning og deres dekonstruktion af den dikotomiske opdeling mellem krop og sprog, biologi og kultur. På samme måde som Butler opløser opdelingen af biologisk og socialt køn, kan følelser forstås som på én gang kropsliggjorte og sprogliggjorte fænomener. I forlængelse heraf, og inspireret af Ann Cvetkovic (2012), vil jeg i det følgende primært bruge ordet *følelse*, da dette ord konnoterer både kropslighed og fortolkning/refleksion: Mens følesansen har forbindelse til det autonome nervesystem og registrerer varme og kulde, smerte og nydelse, dækker følelser også over kulturelt bearbejdede og bevidstgjorte fænomener såsom kærlighed og jalousi. En performativ forståelse af følelser er således et opgør med essentialistiske såvel som radikalt konstruktivistiske forståelser af følelser og reducerer hverken følelser til indre tilstande eller konstruerede fantasier.

Vi har tendens til at tænke og tale om følelser som noget, der bor i enten subjekter eller objekter i form af en egenskab eller et karakteristikum og bevæger sig indefra-og-ud eller udefra-og-ind: Vi taler om, at vi 'har' en følelse, eller at noget eller nogen 'giver' os en følelse. En performativ forståelse af følelser gør op med denne tendens til at beskrive følelser som egenskab eller ejendom; som noget subjekter eller objekter er eller har. Lige så lidt som køn er noget, man har eller er hos Butler, lige så lidt er følelser hos Ahmed noget, der udspringer fra subjekter eller objekter. I stedet studerer Ahmed (2004), hvordan følelser bevæger sig imellem og danner forbindelser til subjekter og objekter: "the way emotions involve subjects and objects, but without residing positively within them" (s. 119).

I stedet for at bevæge sig indefra-og-ud eller udefra-og-ind bevæger følelser sig ifølge Ahmed (2004) sidelæns: "through 'sticky associations' between signs, figures, and objects," og baglæns: "'what sticks' is also bound up with the 'absent presence' of historicity" (s. 120). Det er som en effekt af disse bevægelser, at følelser bliver forbundet med, eller *klæber* til, nogle kroppe. Dette illustrerer Ahmed (2014a) med et eksempel, hvor et barn møder en bjørn og reagerer med frygt:

The fear is not in the child, let alone in the bear, but is a matter of how child and bear come into contact. This contact is shaped by past histories of contact, unavailable in the present, which allow the bear to be apprehended as fearsome. (s. 7)

Når man vil undersøge, hvordan nogle kroppe bliver opfattet som farlige (i eksemplet), eller som vrede og som kilde til bekymring (i denne artikel), kræver det således blik for, hvordan følelser og kroppe på én gang er medieret og er formet af historier.

Intersektionelle feministiske studier har vist, hvordan nogle kroppe historisk er blevet og til stadighed bliver set som bærere af 'dårlige følelser', herunder hvordan vrede bliver set som kendetegnende eksempelvis kønnede, racialiserede og tykke kroppe (og i særdeleshed kroppe, der befinder

sig i intersektionerne mellem disse kategorier) (Ahmed, 2009; Tomlinson, 2010; Eriksen 2018). I forlængelse heraf undersøger jeg i det følgende *relationen mellem vrede neurodivergens, alder og køn*. Jeg illustrerer, hvordan kritikken af Thunberg hæfter sig ved hendes diagnose, hendes unge alder og hendes køn, samt hvordan vrede hæfter til hende gennem disse identitetsmarkører: Thunberg portrætteres som styret af en ukontrolleret og dysreguleret vrede, der tilskrives hendes autismespektrum-diagnose såvel som hendes unge alder, eller kønnes som 'hysteri' i forlængelse af en historisk tendens til at problematisere og patologisere kvinders følelser.

I affekt

"Knækkede filmen?" (Dyrby, 2019) sådan spørger en leder i B.T., som fortsætter:

Spørgsmålet trænger sig på efter miljøaktivisten Greta Thunbergs tale til FNs topmøde i NewYork [sic]. Talen var følelsesladet og anklagende fem minutter lang. Flere gange var Greta på 16 år ved at bryde ud i gråd, og gennem hele talen havde hun svært ved at styre sin stemme og sin mimik. Hun virkede rasende, ude af kontrol og ubehageligt direkte. (Dyrby, 2019)

Fremstillingen af Thunberg som ude af kontrol og 'i sine følelsers vold' går igen i medieomtalen af Thunbergs tale: "Er Greta gået over gevind?" lyder overskriften på en artikel fra Jyllands-Posten (M. B. Broberg, 2019). Thunberg bliver beskrevet som "på slap line" (Danielsen, 2019), og det "kammer over" for hende, når hun "sidder og flæber," udtaler videnskabsjournalist Lone Frank (Møller, 2019). Formuleringen, at Thunberg "kammer over", går igen flere steder: "Men den lille, stakkels pige kammer fuldstændig over" (Lemcke, 2019).

Thunberg fremstilles som 'stakkels', 'lille' og 'skrøbelig', og flere skribenter spekulerer, om der er nogen, der udnytter hendes angiveligt ustabile mentale tilstand: "Jeg ved ikke, hvem der helt nøjagtig står bag lille Greta fra Sverige, men hun

virker nærmest som en, der er på grænsen til at få et nervesammenbrud" (Lemcke, 2019). Hun er ikke selv i kontrol; der må være nogle andre, der styrer hende, lyder logikken. Andre foreslår, at det er hendes følelser, der har magten over hende:

Det nytter ikke at forsøge at forklare Greta, at den vækst og de penge, som beslutningstagere er så fikseret på, er årsagen til, at børnedødelighed, børnearbejde og analfabetisme aldrig har været mindre end i dag på globalt plan. Globaliseringen har simpelthen hjulpet hved en milliard mennesker ud af fattigdom. Men det nytter ikke at sige det: For derfor kan Greta jo godt føle, at den også har stjålet hendes barndom. (Libak, 2019)

Thunberg fremstilles som udenfor fornuftens rækkevidde, og der tegner sig et billede af en krop 'i affekt': en intens og ukontrollabel emotionel tilstand, der kan føre til voldsomme, uoverlagte handlinger.

Undersøger man, hvordan disse følelser, som angiveligt styrer Thunberg, navngives og beskrives, træder især én følelse frem: Vrede klæber til Thunberg på den måde, at følelsen beskrives som *kendetegnende* Thunberg og hendes retorik. Thunberg karakteriseres som "vred" (se f.eks. Flodin, 2019; Mortensen, 2019; Dalgas, 2019) og hendes tale kaldes for et "vredesudbrud" (Damborg, 2019). Karakteristisk for citatet, som indledte denne analyse, er også, at Thunberg ofte beskrives som *rasende* (Ritzau, 2019; Wentoft, 2019; Wisendorff, 2019). "Den 16-årige pige var rasende. Hun var meget tæt på at begynde at græde, mens hun nærmest råbte ind i mikrofonen," hedder det andetsteds (Schouby, 2019).

Mens vrede typisk refererer til en "stærk sindsbevægelse som følge af krænkelse, forurettelse, ondskab el.lign." (Vrede, n.d.), er den gængse definition af raseri en "voldsom vrede og ophidselse" (Raseri, n.d.). Forskellen mellem (den kulturelle opfattelse af) vrede og raseri kan altså for det første ses som en gradsforskel, hvor raseri er en form for ophedet og ophidset vrede. Filosof og idéhistoriker Lars-Henrik Schmidt (2006) foreslår, at forskellen mellem raseri og vrede består i, at

vrede er et "sociale", mens raseri er et "eksistentiale"; "en sjæleform, en sindsstemning, hvor den indre scene agerer, hvorfor den er ganske vanskelig at bekæmpe og ordne i det ydre" (s. 15–16). Vreden er, ifølge Schmidt, væsensforskellig fra raseriet, idet vrede retter sig mod noget konkret, mens raseriet er mere diffust. Når Schmidt taler om vreden som et *sociale* skal det altså forstås som, at kun mennesker med en social selvbevidsthed kan være vrede (dyr kan f.eks. ikke være vrede). Raseriet, derimod, overskrider det sociale: Det afspejler sig også i sproget, hvor det er normalt at tale om f.eks. 'stormens rasen'. Når Thunberg fremstilles ikke bare som vred, men som rasende, antyder det for det første en følelsesintensitet, som bidrager til billedet af hendes følelser som ude af proportioner: 'kammeret over' og 'gået over gevind'. For det andet fremstilles hun som ufornuftig og ude af kontrol. Hendes argumenter bliver ikke gengivet som argumenter, men reduceret til ukontrollerede følelsesudbrud.

Sygeliggørelse: vrede som symptom

Når Thunberg, som i et af eksemplerne ovenfor, beskrives som "på grænsen til at få et nervesammenbrud" (Lemcke, 2019) medvirker det ikke kun til at fremstille hende som 'i affekt', det antyder også, at hun er mentalt ustabil. Flere aviser refererer ligeledes, hvordan hun på sociale medier kaldes "rablende gal", "dum i hovedet" og "hysterisk" (Krasnik, 2019; Schouby, 2019), og B.T. bringer et interview med en Facebook-bruger, som står bag kommentaren: "Det eneste, der er kollapsedet, er din hjerne, Greta. Du burde lukkes inde på en lukket afdeling, hvor du hører hjemme" (J. E. Andersen, 2019). Brugeren udtaler: "Jeg synes, hun overdriver. Og efter min holdning er det rent hysteri med hende" (J. E. Andersen, 2019). Senere i interviewet lyder det: "Hun virker, som om hun er syg", og da journalisten spørger, hvordan hun virker syg, bliver det tydeligt, at det er Thunbergs retorik, som, ifølge Facebook-brugeren, får hende til at virke syg: "På den måde hun udtrykker sig" (J. E. Andersen, 2019). Hun har: "teet sig som en sindssyg" (Harder, 2019), hedder det andetsteds.

Kritikken hæfter sig ved hendes diagnoser, når den bemærker at hun "tidligere har lidt af depressioner og spiseforstyrrelse, og at hendes nuværende diagnoser er Aspergers syndrom og OCD" (Dagø, 2019). I et indlæg med overskriften "Et mentalt problem" lyder det: "Det svenske fænomen, klima-krigeren Greta Thunberg, lider af aspergers" (Bømler, 2019). I tråd med kulturelle narrativer, der rammesætter autisme som et sprogligt handicap (Duffy & Dorner, 2011; Yergeau, 2018) kædes diagnosen ligeledes sammen med hendes måde at udtrykke sig på: "Det er en alvorlig sygdom med en udviklingsforstyrrelse, der betyder, at man har svært ved at være sammen med andre og har vanskeligheder med bl.a. at deltage i almindelig samtale" (Bømler, 2019).

M. Remi Yergeau (2018) argumenterer for, at neurodivergens, og mere specifikt autisme, fungerer som et *diskursivt script*: En linse, som den autistiske persons handlinger og krop fortolkes igennem. Denne fortolkning er formet af medicinske definitioner såvel som kulturelle forestillinger om, hvad der kendetegner autisme: "[O]ur bodyminds [are] made determinable and knowable through the criteria of neurodevelopmental disability" (s. 2). Autismen defineres ofte i modsætning til sprog, empati og intentionelitet, ligesom autisme forbindes med ufrivillighed og manglende kontrol over sin krop og sine handlinger (Duffy & Dorner, 2011; Yergeau, 2018). Som beskrevet i forrige afsnit klæber vrede til Thunberg på den måde at hendes tale ses som et 'vredesudbrud', og i ovenstående citater bliver det tydeligt, hvordan 'hendes' vrede fortolkes gennem hendes diagnose på den måde, at vreden fremstilles som et *symptom* på hendes autismspektrum-diagnose; som "et mentalt problem" (Bømler, 2019), snarere end som en *reaktion* på et problem, den planetære krise, som Thunberg adresserer i sin tale. Det er hendes diagnoser, der 'handler gennem hende', og hendes sproglige handlinger reduceres til ufrivillige mekanismer. Det beskrives for eksempel også, hvordan hun har "trækninger i ansigtet" og at hun lider af OCD (en diagnose, der ligesom autisme forbindes med tvangspræget adfærd og tænkning) (Dagø, 2019).

Det er en populær opfattelse, at netop evnen til at kommunikere med symboler, er det, der adskiller mennesker fra dyr, og Yergeau (2018) bemærker, hvordan det at definere autisme i modsætning til sproglighed og intentionalitet er en dehumaniserende proces, der fremstiller mennesker med autisme-spektrum-diagnoser som mindre-end-menneskelige (s. 10). Når Thunbergs retorik reduceres til ukontrollable følelsesudbrud, ufrivillige symptomer og dyriske lyde, reduceres hun til en krop, der måske klager og jamrer, men ikke *taler*. Dehumaniseringen får eftertryk, når hun fremstilles – ikke som et menneske, men som et monster:

Sikke en forestilling, hele verdens klimadaring leverede, da hun flæbende og nærmest helt skæv i ansigtet spyede ild mod hele verdens magthavere for bare passivt at se på jordens undergang. Det var en Hollywood-film værdigt. (...) Hun nominerede sig helt sikkert til en statuette i kategorien fantasyfilm, som bedste hovedrolle. (Lemcke, 2019)

Ligesom kritikken af Thunberg kan læses som en monstergørelse af den 'syge' krop, kan den også læses som en forlængelse af en historisk sygeliggørelse af kvindelig vrede. Kategorien kvinde er blevet formet langs med kategorier som 'syg' og 'handicappet', ligesom termen 'kvinde' er forbundet med mangel og utilstrækkelighed (Dolmage & Lewiecki-Wilson, 2010, s. 23). Kvinders vrede er historisk blevet problematiseret og patologiseret som 'hysteri' (F. H. Broberg, 2024; Micale, 2019; Smith-Rosenberg, 1972), og 'hysteri' klæber da også til Thunberg (de Mylius, 2019; Grimstrup, 2019; Guld, 2019; Rasmussen, 2019; Selsing, 2019), ligesom den unge klimabevægelse, hun repræsenterer, bliver kaldt "den klimahysteriske bevægelse" (Nielsen, 2019) og et udtryk for "massehysteri" (Hvilshøj, 2019). Når den unge klimabevægelse beskrives som hysterisk, kan det læses som en feminisering af bevægelsen: Den kollektive krop, der udgør bevægelsen, tager form som en hysterisk kvindekrop med alt, hvad det indebærer.

Smitsom vrede

Når den unge klimabevægelse kaldes for 'massehysteri', antyder det også, at bevægelsen repræsenterer en smitsom sygdom: Betegnelsen massehysteri bliver brugt til at beskrive et fænomen, hvor en gruppe mennesker, som er i kontakt med hinanden, udvikler samme symptomer, og fænomenet bliver populært opfattet som bevis for "at psykisk lidelse kan smitte" (Hysteri, 2017). Sygeliggørelsen af Thunberg smitter da også af på dem, der støtter hende, og på den bevægelse, hun har bag sig: "Greta Thunberg er galskab. Ikke så meget hende selv, men at nogen lytter til hende" (Selsing, 2019). I et indlæg i Berlingskes videnskabssektion med titlen "Thunbergs vrede kan have negative konsekvenser for hendes unge fans" anklages hun eksplicit for at gøre andre unge syge: "Når klimaforbæmpere som Greta Thunberg taler dunder om klimaforandringerne, kan det skabe vrede, frygt og afmagt hos unge. I sidste ende kan det føre til angst og depressioner, hvis ikke man gør noget, advarer eksperter" (Mortensen, 2019). Thunbergs vrede – ikke klimakrisen – fremstilles som kilde til unges klimaangst:

JA, selvfølgelig skal vi tage klimaproblematikken alvorligt, og når det så er sagt, så har Grete [sic] Thunbergs næsten øjeblikkelige kultstatus både blandt børn, unge og voksne verden over skabt en ny diagnose, nemlig klimaangst hos især børn og unge. (Bømler, 2019)

Denne påståede smitte-effekt beskrives som farlig:

Thunbergs panikanfald er ikke længere bare en privatsag. Hun har smittet mange med dem [...] Må man kritisere en pige med et handicap, der betyder, at hun lider under en indskrænket virkelighedsopfattelse. Det er man netop nødt til. For Greta-hysteriet har nu nået et niveau, som man må kalde truende. (Billingsøe & Heeger, 2019)

Bekymring klæber her til Thunbergs 'vrede retorik' på den måde, at 'hendes' vrede bliver kilde til 'vores' (læserens, journalistens, debattørens) bekymring. Ikke i den forstand at hun er genstand for bekymring: Det er ikke Thunberg, der skal beskyttes eller passes på. I stedet bliver hun objekt for bekymring på den måde, at hun bliver fremstillet som en trussel mod andre børn og unge.

I ovenstående analyse har jeg vist, hvordan Thunberg fremstilles som styret af en dysreguleret og sygelig vrede: Hendes vrede fremstilles som et ufrivilligt og ukontrollerbart symptom på hendes autismespektrum-diagnose (snarere end som en reaktion på et politisk problem) og som en smitsom trussel mod andre børn og unges mentale helbred. Som beskrevet ovenfor kan dette læses som en forlængelse af en historisk tendens til at sygeliggøre kvinder og minoriteters vrede. I det følgende vil jeg uddybe, hvordan kritikken af Thunberg tager form i intersektionerne mellem køn, alder og neurodivergens, og hvordan der her tegner sig konturerne af en figur, jeg foreslår at kalde 'det umulige barn'.

En god pige er ikke en vred pige

Kritikken af Thunberg hæfter sig, ud over hendes diagnose og køn, ved hendes alder, og ofte kædes de tre ting sammen, som når hun kaldes en "16-årig autist med infantil hestehale" (Selsing, 2019); et ordspil på 'infantil autisme', som samtidig kommenterer på hendes alder og traditionelt feminint kodede frisure. Thunberg kaldes "en oprørt lille pige" (Libak, 2019), og hun kaldes ved fornavn ofte kombineret med en aldersmarkør: "16-årige Greta" (Dyrby, 2019) eller "lille Greta" (Lemcke, 2019). Hun beskrives som én af mange: "skrigende klima- og miljøtøser" (Dagø, 2019), og som et ord, der bruges (ofte nedsættende eller patroniserende) om unge kvinder, fungerer 'tøser' på én gang som en køns- og aldersmarkør. Samme indlæg hæfter sig også ved hendes diagnose og munder ud i en henstilling om, at Thunberg og den unge klimabevægelse bør passe deres skole i stedet for at protestere:

[S]krigende klima- og miljøtøser (...) burde passe deres skolegang og blive klogere samt komme med noget mere konstruktivt, end at de nu vil købe genbrugstøj i stedet for som tidligere dyrt mærkevarer. (Dagø, 2019)

Når den unge klimaaktivist fremstilles som et barn, der pjækker fra skole, reduceres hendes politiske handlinger og hendes vrede til uopdragenhed og utilpassethed. Hun fremstilles som én, der skal rettes ind. Hun skal passe sin skole og lade de voksne 'passe deres arbejde': "Vær en god pige, og hold kæft og lad dem passe deres arbejde" (Ryde, 2019). 'En god pige' bliver her synonymt med at være stille; 'en god pige' er med andre ord ikke en vred pige.

Dette bliver også tydeligt, når Thunberg kaldes "skinger" (se f.eks. de Mylius, 2019; Rasmussen, 2019). På samme måde som 'hysterisk' er 'skinger' et ord, der klæber til vrede kvinder. Retoriker Joshua Gunn (2010) bemærker, hvordan børn tidligt lærer at skelne mellem maskuline og feminine stemmer, og hvordan der er en tendens til at forbinde det, der afkodes som mandestemmer, med fornuft, mens 'kvindestemmer' forbindes med følelser. Gunn bemærker også, hvordan et 'aggressivt tonefald' er mindre tilladt for kvindestemmer, og konkluderer: "[W]e don't simply think in discriminatory ways, we hear in sex" (s. 25). Ligesom der eksisterer kønnede forventninger til opførsel og påklædning, har feministiske retorikere vist, hvordan kønnede normer også manifesterer sig i forventninger om at kvinder performer *feminin stil*, hvilket blandt andet indebærer at argumentere indirekte og anekdotisk (K. K. Campbell, 1998; Reid-Brinkley, 2012). At være 'skinger' er med andre ord at tage plads og lave larm i et samfund, der foreskriver, at kvinder og piger skal gøre sig små, fysisk såvel som retorisk (Ahmed, 2017; K. K. Campbell, 1998).

Der er også en tendens til, at Thunbergs alder kædes sammen med beskrivelser af hendes følelsesladede fremtoning gennem sidestilling: "Flere gange var Greta på 16 år ved at bryde ud i gråd" (Dyrby, 2019). Hendes alder kommer således til at konnotere følelser og står i modsætning

til fornuft, hvilket ekspliciteres, når hun kaldes 'naiv': "Problemet er, at debatten om klima bliver useriøs, når den får lov at blive anført af naive skolebørn" (Harder, 2019). De 'følelsesladede børn' bør ikke blande sig i klimadebatten, men overgive ordet til 'fornuftige voksne'. Voksen-barn-hierarkiet, der hævdes i kritikken af Thunberg, markerer sig således også som et hierarki mellem fornuft og følelse. De voksne repræsenterer fornuft, mens teenageren Thunberg repræsenterer følelser: "Vi må ikke basere den her diskussion på en 16-årigs følelser, men derimod insistere på noget fakta" (A.-S. G. Møller & Fahrendorff, 2019).

Tilsammen bliver hendes køn, alder og diagnose grund til ikke at tage hende alvorligt: "Hun er grundlæggende blot et barn med seriøse udfordringer" (Gram, 2019), eller andetsteds: "[L]ad være med at lytte til den lille svenske skolepige Greta Thunberg" (Pedersen, 2019). Kritikken koncentrerer sig således i krydsfeltet mellem hendes alder, køn og neurodivergens, og her tegner der sig konturerne af en figur, jeg vil kalde 'det umulige barn'.

Det umulige barn: en vred figur

'Barnet' er en figur, der er overklistret med positive følelser som kærlighed, lykke, omsorg og håb for fremtiden (Dyer, 2019; Edelman, 2004). Som kulturel figur er Barnet kropsliggørelsen af uskyld. Det er dog ikke alle børn, der bliver opfattet som uskyldige og som nogle, der skal beskyttes (se f.eks. Buhre 2023; Dyer 2019; Taft 2020). Dette er særligt tydeligt, når palæstinensiske børn i danske medier bliver fremstillet som "menneskelige skjold" (Heeger, 2024) og "levende bomber" (Bjerggaard, 2024); en forlængelse af krigens materiel og dermed legitime krigsmål og *ikke-sorgbare liv* (Butler, 2016). Eller når danske børn i al-Hawl- og al-Roj-lejrene i det nordøstlige Syrien, hvor medlemmer af militante islamistiske grupper holdes fanget, ikke bliver set som børn, der skal beskyttes, men en potentiel fremtidig terrortrussel (Myong & Bissenbakker, 2024). Som eksemplerne antyder, gælder Barnets affektive særstatus i en dominerende (dansk/vestlig) kulturel kontekst

ikke (nogle) racialiserede børn. I en analyse af børnefigurer i den unge klimabevægelse peger Frida Buhre (2023) på, hvordan dette også gælder unge aktivister: "Childhood figurations (...) are unevenly distributed, circulated, and the adultist affective response is different or absent depending on the child's race, gender, age, and nationality" (s. 260). Buhre argumenterer for at drenge og nonbinære børn samt racialiserede børn ikke nyder den samme affektive status som hvide piger (s. 269). Flere har ligesom Buhre bemærket, at mediernes fokus på Thunberg som stemmen for den unge klimabevægelse må forstås i relation til hendes hvidhed: Jessica K. Taft (2020) påpeger ligeledes, at der findes mange andre unge kvindelige aktivister, hvis identiteter og politiske visioner er mere udfordrende eller sværere at fordøje for den dominerende offentlighed:

Much as anti-blackness has marked Black girls more as social problems than social solutions, it also makes it far more difficult for Black girls to be read as harmless. Black girls' rebelliousness, resistance, and anger are perceived as a threat to the social order and are not so readily digestible due to the logics of white supremacy. (s. 11)

Mens Taft bemærker, hvordan unge sorte kvindelige aktivister bliver usynliggjort i US-amerikanske medier, påpeger Jill Locke (2023), hvordan nogle kroppe, såvel som nogle politiske emner, er svære at fordøje i en skandinavisk kontekst: "Both Thunberg's identity as a white girl and the issue of climate justice, a cause that the majority in Swedish Parliament putatively support, would no doubt be received differently from, for example, a Muslim girl striking about immigration policy" (s. 120).

Kritikken af Thunberg kan ikke sidestilles med den måde, hvorpå nogle racialiserede børn, som beskrevet ovenfor, bliver usynliggjort, dehumaniseret og behandlet som ikke-sorgbare liv. På trods af at Thunberg er privilegeret af sin hvidhed, klæber 'negative' følelser som vrede, raseri og bekymring til hende, og Thunberg bliver, som illustreret i analysen, fremstillet som en trussel mod andre børn, snarere end barnet, der skal beskyttes.

Modsat Barnet, som bliver genstand for håb og kærlighed, bliver Thunberg i dele af medieomtalen kilde til 'dårlige' følelser: 'Hendes' vrede bliver kilde til 'vores' bekymring. Ikke på den måde, at hun skal beskyttes, men på den måde, at hun udgør en trussel for andre børn, og dermed skal reguleres og disciplineres. Selv når kritikken af Thunberg består af anklager om, at hun bliver udnyttet af FN eller af sine forældre, er den ikke formuleret som et opråb om at skåne angiveligt sårbare børn som Thunberg, men som en opfordring til at afvise hende og den bevægelse, hun repræsenterer (se f.eks. Nielsen, 2019; Pedersen, 2019).

I medieomtalen af Thunberg tegner der sig konturerne af en figur, som vi kan kalde 'det umulige barn'. 'Det umulige barn' er umuligt i den forstand, at hun er uregerlig, uopdragen, og i den forstand at hun på én gang er barn og ikke-Barn: Hendes barnlighed betones konstant, samtidig med at hun mister Barnets affektive særstatus. Det umulige barn er ikke et barn, der skal beskyttes, men et barn der skal reguleres – hvis patologiske og smitsomme vrede skal reguleres – for at beskytte andre børn mod hende. Det umulige barn er en uomager: En der opfører sig i strid med normerne for god aldersbetinget og kønnet opførsel. "Hun skal passe sin skole og ikke skælde ud på de voksne" ("Går Greta Thunberg for Vidt?," 2019). Figuren har slægtskab med Ahmeds (2014b) *willful child*: En ulydig barnefigur, der følger sin egen vilje, i stedet for villigt at adlyde de voksne. 'Det umulige barn' er, ligesom Ahmeds 'willful child', en figur, der ikke adlyder, og som må rettes ind; som, i dette tilfælde, skal passe sin skole i stedet for at skælde ud på de voksne. Begge må de disciplineres, sættes på plads, for at bevare den sociale orden. Som illustreret i ovenstående analyse beskrives Thunberg dog ikke som et viljestærkt barn, men bliver snarere kendetegnet ved ufrivillighed. Den vrede, der klæber til det umulige barn, beskrives, som illustreret ovenfor som "et mentalt problem" (Bømler, 2019). 'Hendes' vrede bliver fremstillet som et smitsomt symptom på autisme og OCD, diagnoser der begge bliver karakteriseret ved ufrivillighed. 'Problemet' med det umulige barn er således ikke hendes egenrådighed og vilje, men derimod hendes ufrivillighed.

Konklusion

I denne artikel har jeg analyseret medieomtalen af Thunbergs tale til FN's Climate Action Summit i 2019 med fokus på, hvilke følelser der træder frem, og hvordan de forbindes til Thunberg. Jeg har vist, hvordan Thunberg fremstilles som i affekt: Som i sine følelsers vold og uden for fornuftens rækkevidde. Jeg har illustreret, hvordan især vrede og raseri klæber til Thunberg, og hvordan 'hendes' vrede bliver fremstillet som et *symptom* på autisme og OCD, diagnoser der begge bliver karakteriseret ved ufrivillighed, snarere end som en *reaktion* på den klima- og miljøkrise som hun adresserer i sin tale; som et mentalt problem snarere end en reaktion på et politisk problem. Thunbergs vrede fremstilles som en smitsom trussel mod andre unge, og 'hendes' vrede bliver gjort til genstand for 'vores' (debattøren, journalisten, læserens) bekymring. Analysen illustrerer, at reguleringen af vrede ikke kun må forstås i krydsfeltet mellem kategorierne køn/ seksualitet/race, men som minimum også i relation til alder og neurodivergens.

I de senere år er unge kvindelige aktivister gået fra at være overvejende usynlige i mainstream medier til at blive hyldet som håbefulde og harmløse heltefigurer (Locke, 2023; Ryalls & Mazzarella, 2021; Taft, 2020). Som flere studier af unge kvindelige aktivister påpeger (Buhre, 2023; Locke, 2023; Taft, 2020), og som denne artikels analyse illustrerer, er den uskyld og uskadelighed, som gør barnefiguren populær, og giver den unge aktivist sin appel i offentlighedens øjne, dog ikke lige tilgængelig for alle børn og unge. Det har ikke været mit ærinde at begræde, at Thunberg ikke ubetinget indtager rollen som den unge kvindelige helt, der skal redde os fra klimakrisen. Som Jill Locke (2023) har illustreret, er denne figur inspirerende, men demobiliserende: Når den unge kvindelige helt fremstår som en figur, der skal redde os, skygger det for samtaler om, hvordan vi selv er en del af problemet og dermed løsningen, ligesom fascinationen af enkelte unge 'heltinder' (girl heroes) repræsenterer en problematisk tendens til at individualisere kollektivt aktivistisk arbejde. I stedet har fokus været på, hvordan kulturelle repræsentationer af barnet må forstås som formet

i intersektionerne mellem neurodivergens, såvel som køn, race, nationalitet og alder. Dette har jeg illustreret ved at pege på fremkomsten af en figur, jeg har kaldt 'det umulige barn'. Det umulige barn er umuligt i den dobbelte betydning, at hun er uregerlig og utænkkelig; hun på én gang er barn og ikke-Barn. Hendes barnlighed betones konstant, samtidig med at hun mister Barnets affektive særstatus som kulturelt glædesobjekt. I stedet er hun en bærer af 'dårlige følelser': Hun er vred, eller decideret rasende, hvilket er i strid med 'god' kønnet og aldersbetinget opførsel, og fordi 'hendes' patologiske vrede er smitsom, bliver hun kilde til 'vores' bekymring. Det umulige barn er ikke et barn, der skal beskyttes, men et barn der må reguleres – hvis vrede må reguleres – for at beskytte andre børn mod hende.

Det er ved at klæbe til nogle kroppe mere end andre og gøre dem til objekt for 'vores' følelser, at følelser orienterer følelser kroppe og fællesskaber (Ahmed, 2004). Ovenstående analyse af medieomtalen af Thunberg illustrerer, hvordan 'hendes problematiske og patologiske vrede' giver anledning til at vende sig væk fra hende. Flere argumenter desuden for, at Thunbergs vrede skader den unge klimabevægelse såvel som klimasagen. I et indlæg med titlen: "Hysterisk miljø-skideballe virker ikke", lyder det f.eks., at Thunberg har "gjort det let at tage afstand fra hendes skingre retorik

og dermed fra selve sagen" (Rasmussen, 2019). Dette afspejler en tendens, hvor det tilbageslag, som ofte møder 'vrede' aktivister, leder flere til den konklusion, at aktivister og sociale bevægelser bør afholde sig fra at udtrykke – eller sågar føle vrede (se f.eks. Nussbaum 2019; Zagacki and Boleyn-Fitzgerald 2006). Dette synspunkt giver også genlyd inden for neurodiversitetsbevægelsen (Loftis, 2018). Mit ærinde i denne artikel har dog ikke været at illustrere, at vrede er en uhenigtsmæssig følelse for aktivister og sociale bevægelser. Mens dén konklusion beror på en instrumentel forståelse af følelser, har jeg i denne artikel anlagt et performativt perspektiv på følelser. I stedet for at forstå vrede som noget, aktivister strategisk kan bruge eller lade være med at bruge, giver dette anledning til at analysere, hvordan følelser som vrede klæber til kroppe – nogle mere end andre. At vrede klæber til kroppe, skal dog ikke forstås deterministisk: Selvom det ikke er muligt at undslippe eller undvige klæbrige følelser, er det muligt at forhandle deres betydning (Hemmings, 2015, s. 150), og det, at vrede klæber til nogle kroppe mere end andre, er ikke nødvendigvis en grund til at forsøge at undgå vrede: "Not to speak anger because it is pointless is not the answer. After all, even if we use softer language, we are already sore points. We might as well do things with those points" (Ahmed 2009, 51).

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Noter

- ¹ Denne fremstilling er desuden blevet kritiseret for at negligere et kropsligt fokus på tværs af kulturstudiers historie, samt for at slette vigtige feministiske og postkoloniale bidrag (se f.eks. Hemmings 2015; Liljeström and Paasonen 2010). Interessen for subjektivitet, krop og affekt har længe været en central del af feministisk tænkning, og den affektive vending kan forstås som en forlængelse af poststrukturalistisk feministisk tænkning, ligesom følelser og krop historisk har været en integreret del af feministisk praksis.

‘A place for everyone who gets it’: Instacartooning as Feminist Activism

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Abstract

This article discusses the political potential of sharing comics and cartoons on Instagram when that practice lies in the intersection of autobiographical art, feminist activism, and for-profit influencer work. Through a case study of cartoonist Mary Catherine Starr, aka @momlife_comics, and the 2022 viral campaign against her work known as ‘Peachgate,’ the article discusses whether Starr’s work participates in a juxtapolitical intimate public or whether it holds the potential to incite more radical transformation of the gender dynamics it criticizes. Investigating Starr’s visual style and aesthetic strategies, as well as the platformed visibility labor she engages in, the article argues that Peachgate can be seen as an indication of the potential for this work to transform from an intimate public to an affective public, although only if allowed to circulate beyond the intentions and preferred interpretations offered by Starr.

KEYWORDS: activism, comics, influencer, Instagram, intimate publics

This article discusses an emergent and contested form of feminist activism: the intersection of instacartooning and 'momfluencing,' exemplified by the Instagram profile @momlife_comics. The profile is the main creative outlet for US cartoonist Mary Catherine Starr, who uses comics and cartoons to raise awareness about the gendered inequality of cisheterosexual marriage. Starr's comics went viral in the summer of 2022 when a number of Twitter¹ users shared her posts with denigrating commentary. Termed 'Peachgate' for the iconography of her most vilified comic, the virality greatly increased Starr's follower count but also subjected her to hate comments and anonymous threats. As a result, Starr modified her content, moving some more personal stories behind a paywall and doubling down on her insistence of being a necessary voice that anti-feminist critics would rather see silenced. Thus, along with the creative, activist labor of producing comics, Starr's engagement in the affective labor of platformed community management increased in intensity, making her a notable example of an increasingly common form of digital feminist consciousness-raising.

In this article, I use the case of Mary Catherine Starr's evolving online presence to investigate the affordances of Instagram activism in comics form. I hypothesize that Starr came under public scrutiny not merely because she details the struggles and frustrations of being a mother and the female partner in a cis-het marriage, but because she does so in the form of comics and cartoons.² The affordances of the form chosen by Starr—not just the cartoon but the *instacartoon*—compounds visual 'momfluencer' content typical on Instagram with the memetic viral potential of the cartoon distributed on social media. By analyzing Starr's visual style and the development of her content since gaining a large following, I discuss the aesthetic and political potential of Starr's work. Starr has been accused of indulging in 'domestic heteropessimism' (Brouillette, 2023), suggesting that she participates in the seemingly apolitical 'complaint genre' of feminized intimate publics (Berlant, 2008). I will argue that looking more closely at Starr's aesthetic strategies and the circulation of her comics on and beyond the Instagram platform

complicates the assumption that complaint cannot lead to systemic critique and political action. Although commercial in nature, Starr's work has been used in ways that counteract her attempts to control its meaning, thus inviting us to reconsider the activist potential of instacartooning.

Instacartooning and Peachgate

Mary Catherine Starr is a white woman in a heterosexual marriage, mother of two young children, and a resident of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, the traditional and ancestral land of the Wampanoag people. A former yoga instructor, Starr began sharing comics and cartoons on Instagram in 2021 about her experiences as a mother and wife. The experiences depicted by Starr are largely those of white middle-class US American cis women, although Starr addresses her work to 'women' and/or 'default parents' and 'primary caregivers' more broadly. Initially gaining a modest following, Starr first rose to wider prominence in January of 2022, when the *Huffington Post* shared her "Illustrated Guide to the Double Standards of Parenting" (Borresen, 2022). The comic was framed as a canny insight into gender inequality and resulted in a number of online articles and features, which Starr archived on her Instagram profile. This widespread attention resulted in Starr's follower count increasing dramatically, and on July 14, 2022, Starr shared a grateful and optimistic recap of the first full year of running @momlife_comics, having amassed a following of 215,000 people.

Two weeks later, on July 29, 2022, comics creator Rachel Jane Andelman posted several of Starr's comics on Twitter, noting that "I for one promise to never make comics about how much I hate my spouse, should I ever possess one" (2022a). Several scathing Twitter posts followed as other users picked up on the trend, sharing Starr's comics with captions such as "Women will create an Instagram account to complain about their relationship, gain 200k followers that are equally dissatisfied with their life choices and use it to trauma dump before going to couples therapy" (@ChulthuRisen, 2022). This led, in very brief, to

comments ranging from contemptuous to threatening, on Twitter and on Starr's Instagram, as well as via Direct Messages and email (Stokel-Walker, 2022). The influx of attention also included new followers who were sympathetic to Starr's work but the majority of the attention, as Starr describes it, was negative and overtly hateful. The controversy came to be termed 'Peachgate,' for the iconography of the post which received the most negative attention, and the criticism was largely directed towards Starr's perceived inability to either 'fix her marriage' or divorce her 'useless' husband.

The 'Peach' comic, as it became known, is a two-panel juxtaposition of Starr's avatar and that of her husband, posted to Instagram on July 23, 2021 (Starr, 2021b). A single panel border bisects the square frame, meaning that the entire comic fits into a single image on Instagram. This memetic style makes it easy to read at a glance and thus heightens the shareable nature of the comic, unlike Starr's longer comic strips. The image is easy to visually decode; the two characters are posed identically, in similarly casual outfits, rendered in simple line work with block colors. The thought balloons highlight the contrast between Starr and her husband: upon finding a ripe peach in their kitchen, Starr chooses to save it for her children rather than eating it herself, whereas her husband decides to use it in a smoothie for himself. Their difference in behavior and attitude is thus heightened, visually underscored by reducing them to their generic and binary gendered difference. Above the image, a caption reads "One of the [many] differences between me & my husband," and at the bottom of the image, smaller captions with arrows mark the characters as 'me' and 'him' (Starr, 2021a). In the caption, Starr refers to herself as an "unintentional martyr" (2021b), asking her followers whether they also fall into this trap.

The 'Peach' comic thus encapsulates the tone, themes, and mode of address favored by Starr and shared by many other digital creators with profiles similar to Starr's. Although Starr's notoriety and explicit activist agenda make her notable for the purposes of this article, she should not be taken as an exception to a norm but rather as one of many artists situated at the intersection of

creative work and digital celebrity. As demonstrated by Emily Hund, the 2010s witnessed a transformation of online female-oriented community from the early-2000s blogosphere to platformed social media, resulting in the rise of the 'influencer' (2023). The self-promotional and commercialized practices of influencers, Hund argues, have come to shape social media presences even for people who do not work or identify as such—a trend described by Sophie Bishop as 'influencer creep' (2023). This is the context in which we have witnessed online communities surrounding motherhood transform from 'mommy bloggers' (Morrison, 2011; Taylor, 2016; Yonker, 2012) to 'momfluencers' (Jorge et al., 2022; Lewis, 2023) on platforms such as Instagram. Sharing personal experiences and reaching out to a community of strangers is now a practice shaped by the affordances of these platforms.

The practice of 'instacartooning,' I argue, is one such practice: an artistic, often autobiographical, endeavor affected by influencer creep. I adapt the term from Camilla Holm Soelseth's concept of the 'instapoet'; designating a poet whose primary publication platform is Instagram and whose work consists in (large) part of posting, community-building, and self-promotion: "when they take on the platform-specific tasks of a social media creator, which is more than just producing content" (2022, p. 97). This is a sliding scale, as Soelseth argues, meaning that poets can undertake varying degrees of platformed labor (2022, p. 98). Thus, while anyone who posts comics and cartoons to Instagram could be designated an 'instacartoonist,' the term most accurately describes cartoonists who adapt their comics and cartoons to suit the affordances of Instagram and whose presence on the platform also includes building a community around their work, in part through sharing details about themselves, their lives, and their work. Instagram is ideally suited for comics and cartoons that are short, usually single-panel or consisting of a few panels that fit into a square slide, enabling readers to take them in at a glance. They are often simply rendered, graphically eye-catching, and easy to read on a small screen. Many of the

most successful instacartoonists draw on their own lived experience and make their lives part of their public persona, cultivating community as well as an artistic practice. For those instacartoonists who attempt to make a living from their digital comics, platformed labor is as much part of their work as the work of creating comics and cartoons. Thus, while their comics are interesting aesthetic and cultural artifacts in themselves, designating them 'instacartoons' can more accurately capture their political valence.

Instacartooning is a wildly heterogenous category, as diverse as its practitioners. A significant subset of instacartoonists, however, are mothers whose cartoons detail their lives as caregivers and artists. Their work takes place at the intersection of instacartooning and momfluencing, drawing on the aesthetic and social practices of both. As this hybrid form gains visibility and cultural impact, it prompts questions of political potential. The aesthetic and artistic experiments in the comics form and platformed art happen in conversation with the self-promotional ethos of influencing. Posting comics to Instagram does not guarantee an income, so artists wishing to sustain a living from their practice need to find alternative ways of making money. One such way, which presents itself to those artists whose following reaches a certain size, is to lean into the platformed work of influencing, selling merchandise and accepting corporate sponsorship. When artists such as Starr choose to brand and sell their content, which also claims an activist force, the lines between authentic sharing, activist community-building, and commodification inevitably blur. It is within this context that Starr rose to notoriety.

What went under-discussed in Peachgate and Starr's subsequent community moderation work, was the affordances of *drawing* feminist critiques of patriarchal motherhood culture. In the original Twitter thread, Andelman highlights cartoonists Anna Denise Floor and Cassandra Berger, both of whom share comics about parenting and motherhood on Instagram. Andelman's preference for Floor and Berger has to do, by her own account, with aesthetics and successful use of the comics form: "After making fun of those other comics, I

started to wonder if there were mom comics I'd appreciate, or if the whole genre wasn't for me. After some searching on Insta, I really like these ones by Anna Denise Floor. They've got strong punchlines and the art is quite appealing!" (Andelman, 2022c), she states, sharing examples of Floor's work, and following up with Berger's: "I love these Cassandra Berger comics, the art style is so so striking" (Andelman, 2022d). Commenting on Starr's work, Andelman shares a comic and its caption side by side, noting that "Her comics would be 5000% more interesting if she just incorporated the caption into the body of the comic. Maybe make it multi-paneled. But that would undercut the seething tone" (2022b). The concrete suggestions—to create multi-panel comics and to incorporate the message of the caption in the comic itself—are strategies that Starr frequently employs, since many of her posts are multi-slide posts containing all or mostly text, overtly stating her aims. Andelman infers that Starr chooses the more obviously 'memeable' style to convey a less nuanced message, not wanting to "undercut the seething tone." Andelman's initial critique of the messaging and strategy of the comics was picked up by the media and in Starr's responses, whereas the aesthetic and formal judgement did not make their way into the reporting on Peachgate or Starr's response. There is an argument to be made—and, indeed, Starr seems to make it—that the critique has to do with the messages and Starr's gender, rather than with her merits as a visual communicator. I contend, however, that the visual style and aesthetic choices made by Starr propelled her to the heightened visibility from which she both profits and is made vulnerable to critique.

Semiotic openness

Starr's visual style is established by the first post to the @momlife_comics profile from July 14, 2021 (Starr, 2021a). Starr had been sharing comics and illustrations on her personal Instagram profile before this time but created a separate account to, in her own words, "keep creating these illustrations and see where I can take this new passion"

(2021a). This wording is reminiscent of the language of 'side hustles' and 'passion jobs' that are pervasive within feminized blogging practices and influencer culture (Duffy, 2016, 2017). Thus, from the start, readers are invited to see Starr's comics as a personal, passion-driven project that straddles the line between amateur sharing and a professional art practice.

The image shared in the initial post is an anonymized portrait of Starr and her two children. It is drawn in her signature style of blocky digital line art with flat colors, in a generally pastel color scheme with no shading and minimal detail. None of the characters depicted have facial features, and the faces are instead left as blank surfaces. This has remained an instantly recognizable element of Starr's work; a semiotic openness at the heart of her comics. Although the characters are often meant to represent Starr and her family, or specific followers, they are anonymized and explicitly invite a more generalized reading of the situations and dynamics Starr depicts. The identificatory potential of the highly abstracted face is central to comics studies, taking up an idea from Scott McCloud (see e.g. Flowers, 2020; Hatfield, 2005, 2022; Sinervo and Freedman, 2022). Following the idea that the lowest degree of realism invites the highest degree of identification, Starr's decision to leave the faces entirely blank allows a broad range of people to see themselves in her characters.³ Thus, even though the initial post was framed as a self-portrait, the character it depicts became the generic cis woman who appears throughout the comics. Initially colored as a white woman with light brown hair, this stock character is often re-colored by Starr to feature different skin tones and hair colors, with slightly different styling, although always recognizable as the 'generic woman.' Her counterpart, the generic 'husband,' is similarly featureless, although usually depicted with facial hair. Notably, his first appearance on the profile is in the 'Peach' comic that would eventually go viral.

Starr stresses, in the image itself as well as in the accompanying text caption of the original post, that this is a story specifically about her and her spouse. Any generalized commentary is thus

an implied subtext, resulting from the faceless representation, the labelling of the husband as 'him' rather than his actual name, and the rhetorical tone of 'is it just me and my marriage?' in the paratextual caption. As the comic began to circulate, however, the subtextual implications increasingly dominate the meaning of the comic. Starr herself has reshared the comic many times, before and after it was virally circulated, capitalizing on the memetic capacity of the image. Launching the hashtag "#eatthedamnpeach" as a rallying cry for women to prioritize their own satisfaction over that of their families, Starr produced merchandise with the slogan and images of a peach, even having it tattooed and offering the tattoo stencil for use by her followers. Starr thus herself enabled the comic to travel from its specific, anchored meaning of "this is a situation which happened to me and my husband" to a more general experience of self-abnegating wives and mothers.

The circular, atemporal repetition of the post, as it is reshared and reactivated periodically by Starr and her followers, demonstrates that Starr's work is at its most effective when it is repeated. Notably, Starr's children are referenced but not visually present in the Peach comic. Thus, it can be shared at any time, regardless of the time that has elapsed from the initial posting, since there is no trace of its origin in the image itself. I argue that Starr increasingly uses this strategy, telling stories about her marriage which are unanchored from their specific time and place—even if they take place at, say, Christmas, it is a generic, repeatable 'holiday season'—enabling her to share them time and again with little to no changes or updates. This cyclical repetition is characteristic of momfluencer instacartooning more broadly, drawing on the affordances of the platform and the experiences of feminized work, brought together in comics form (see Fabricius, 2024). In Charles Hatfield's parlance, comics is an "art of tensions" (2005), drawing its semiotic force from the multiple, interacting modes of address created by combining words and images, single images and sequences, and—I argue—context-dependent meanings and meanings derived from resharing a comic in a new context.

For Starr, I speculate, the strategy will prove profitable in the long-term, since reposting old comics gets Starr closer to a form of passive income, lessening the rate at which she has to produce new content. She is not hindered, either, by her children growing up, leaving her without content about raising young children. While issues related to mothering and young children still appear in Starr's work, the focus of most of her posts is arguably "wife life" rather than the "momlife" of her Instagram handle.

Julianne Adams argues that internet meme culture, particularly in feminized genres, "results in a de-personalization of content that allows readers to interpret content contingent on their subjectivity" (2022, p. 1722). While the examples considered by Adams are distributed by creators whose online personas are more highly fictionalized or anonymized, I argue that the same potential is present in work such as Starr's. The memetic qualities of the content and how it is platformed invite readers to see their own experiences and frustrations in the 'de-personalized' depictions. This repeated and repeatable memetic quality to Starr's work is also, however, a main source of criticism. If Starr is to sustain the repetition of comics about her frustrations with her marriage, she must necessarily remain in an unsatisfactory state. Starr attempts to 'have it both ways' in the personal appeal and ethos of her posts. She capitalizes on the 'relatability' of sharing personal, lived experiences, as stated in her post addressing Peachgate:

For the majority of the time I have had this account [...] I have been speaking to a very specific audience of millennial or millennial-adjacent mothers. In this context, my body of work has been taken as a whole and I have felt confident that the majority of you, my audience, understands where I'm coming from. Many of us have had similar experiences when it come to the challenging aspects of motherhood and household equality. (Starr, 2022a)

After the controversy, however, Starr increasingly felt the need to disclaim that her posts were fictionalized accounts, in captions such as "Most of you know this but in case you don't: this comic isn't about my husband. It's about being the preferred/default parent [...]" (2022b). She also began illustrating stories from followers, the first posted on November 14, 2022, with the disclaimer "This is not a personal comic; a follower sent me this story. I receive lots of messages like this one but this is the first time I've illustrated someone else's conversation with her husband. I took some creative liberties with the last slide" (Starr, 2022c). This disclaimer, similar to when Starr draws on her own experiences, places the story somewhere between the authentically personal and the generically relatable, taking creative liberty while remaining rooted in 'real life.' Starr's style of drawing backs up this balance, visually gesturing towards the general through the faceless, anonymous characters that are given some specificity through the design and coloring, as well as their specific story.

The 'shareability' of Starr's instacartoons works both for and against her intentions of finding community through sharing personal experiences. Starr can harness the potential virality to some extent by encouraging engagement with her work, as well as through her aesthetic choices. Her more text-heavy posts, with handwriting on pastel-toned backgrounds, mimic an increasingly popular aesthetic associated with social justice activism on Instagram known colloquially as the 'Canva text slide' (Hund, 2023, pp. 140–41; Nguyen, 2020). Gesturing towards social activism through aesthetics and towards a generalizable message through her anonymized characters, Starr transforms her personal frustrations into a broadly shared, and sharable, representation of motherhood and 'women's work.' These qualities, which make Starr's work appealing to a broad audience, also expose her to audiences which do not feel seen or represented by her point of view. Although often accompanied by lengthy captions, Starr's posts can be taken out of context and shared as-is, leading them to be easily found by readers who are not necessarily sympathetic to

Starr or her messaging. Even with the original context, readers are not guaranteed to be swayed by Starr's politics, humor, or visual choices.

The choice to communicate through comics and cartoons is key to the diverse responses to Starr's work. Unlike photography, which claims a much higher degree of verisimilitude, Starr's illustrated real-life scenarios are clearly artistic interpretations. While Starr still enters an autobiographical contract with her audience, the terms differ from those of momfluencers who use photography and video. Although these forms are also framed and manipulated to tell a particular story and audiences are increasingly aware of this (Hund, 2023, p. 169), I argue that Starr's drawing style communicates that she is synthesizing and stylizing events to make a point. Her use of first-person singular pronouns and references to details from her own life retains an illusion of facticity, but the comics form makes evident that this is an artistic interpretation. For some audiences, this means expanded space for imagining themselves in Starr's shoes, sharing her experience and finding community in that recognition. These readers interpret Starr's work as commentary on a generalizable struggle, rooted in personal experience.

For others, Starr's combination of the personal and the generalized invites responses aimed at the systemic and the private, all at once. During Peachgate, Starr was taken to task both for the perceived failure of her own marriage and for the inability of heterosexually partnered cis women to take responsibility for their own happiness and refuse compliance with normative divisions of gendered labor. Starr's illustrated frustrations about motherhood, housework, and emotional labor were thus interpreted not as a space for solidarity with but as a symptom of regressive gender politics. While Starr herself attempts to remain rooted in personal experience and gesture towards a 'universal' experience of 'womanhood,' some readers see her as failing at both. The semiotic openness of Starr's visual style invites a range of responses, many of which fall outside the preferred reading offered by Starr.

Visibility work

Peachgate brought an overwhelming amount of visibility and attention to Starr and her work, most of it initially negative, and the viral attention caused her to double down on the platformed labor that undergirds her creative practice. She openly discussed the instacartooning work of managing comments and personal messages, of choosing what to share and what to keep private, and the need for explanatory disclaimers on her posts. The feminized labor represented by Starr in her posts was increasingly accompanied by the platformed labor of community management. Her posts, especially those in direct response to Peachgate, began including variations of the phrase "for those who get it," as she carefully delineated who her content was for (2022a). Although Starr mentions protecting her husband and how he was perceived by readers (2022a), she also centers herself, her creative decisions, and how she, as a woman speaking publicly, was perceived and sanctioned.

Studies of platformed visibility demonstrate that algorithmically structured platforms reproduce, even heighten, existing inequality and structures of power (Duffy, Poell, and Nieborg, 2019; Muldoon and Raekstad, 2022; Nieborg and Poell, 2018). The overlap between platformed labor and algorithmically driven social media, in particular, is an area in which visibility is highly contingent on gender (Bishop, 2018; Duffy, 2016; Duffy and Hund, 2019; Duffy and Meisner, 2022; Duffy and Pruchniewska, 2017). Since Instagram influencers tend to be women, and since platformed labor depends on gaining visibility (Cotter, 2019; Duffy and Hund, 2019; Duffy and Meisner, 2022), instacartooning and similar practices must be investigated within a framework attuned to the specificities of becoming-visible as a woman in these digital public spheres. As Duffy and Pruchniewska observe, "The much-vaunted imperative to 'put oneself out there' is fraught with risk for female entrepreneurs in digital spaces. Acts of compulsory visibility open content producers up to more insidious forms of public scrutiny, including hate speech, trolling, and other acts of online misogyny" (2017, p. 855).

Feminist critics have long been concerned with the terms of visibility for women and others who do not fit the norms of white masculinity. Liz Conor, tracing these issues to the early twentieth century and the emergence of spectacularized images of women in visual media, argues that “images of women are always producing meanings of women’s visibility” (2004, p. xv). According to Conor, the changing presence of women in the visual cultures of early twentieth century modernity marked a paradigm shift in women’s ability to choose, if within limits, the terms of their visibility. Appearing in a mediated public sphere became an arena within which women could enact agency, all the while that they were still policed along gendered, as well as classed and racialized, lines. This has remained the case throughout the changing media landscape of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Choosing the terms of one’s appearance and appearing in the public sphere is a fraught negotiation of gender and power, undergirded by strict norms of presentability. It is no great stretch to argue that this is increasingly the case in our moment of pervasive self-representation on social and other digital media.

Like the anxieties surrounding feminine visibility, concerns regarding the semiotic openness of images and the need to anchor preferred meanings through texts stem from the changing media landscapes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Brian Maidment demonstrates that satirical and comic images published in the Victorian period were accompanied by text that explained, and often simplified, their meaning. The explanatory texts were “an inhibiting force on their original graphic statements, making them something less, although perhaps something safer, than they were once were” (Maidment, 2016, p. 64). According to Maidment, this attempt to ‘tame’ the potential disruption of a politically controversial image which “remained dangerously open to alternative, and possibly transgressive, readings,” was often successful, as the semiotic openness “could be neutralized by the intervention of the explicatory text” (2016, p. 64). Starr’s attempts to ‘anchor’ the meaning of her images can similarly be understood as attempts to undercut the

potential disruption that the cartoons and comics might cause. While Starr included such caveats and explanations in her posts before Peachgate, they become more explicit and deliberate after the influx of attention.

This does not mean, however, that all readers will follow Starr’s suggested interpretation. Attempts to reduce the semiotic openness of an image cannot be entirely successful without altering the image itself. Readers can ignore or go against the preferred interpretation of a caption. While this can often lead to the kinds of responses Starr attempts to avoid—readers misinterpreting her work—it also facilitates more nuance in what Starr is able to communicate and how. Because she communicates in hybrid visual/verbal forms, Starr gives her readers the option of interpreting her work in a variety of ways. The explanatory captions should thus not be read only as attempts to ‘lock down’ a preferred interpretation but *also* as a way of allowing more nuanced, complicated, or even controversial messages without alienating parts of her audience.

Thus, when discussing the “visibility game” (Cotter, 2019) of Instagram, we should attend not only to the “threat of invisibility” (Cotter, 2019) but also to the threats inherent in visibility itself and how they are negotiated. Visibility is desirable because it can lead to popularity, community, and an income, but it is also a state of heightened scrutiny, the effects of which are unequally distributed along gendered, classed, and racialized lines. Starr’s virality granted her the much-desired exposure but with significant personal cost, if her public statements are to be believed. Her subsequent choices to carefully frame her public posts and paywall some of her content should be understood, I argue, as effects partially of her gender and the other power structures with which it intersects. Starr did not need to disappear entirely from the public eye but instead attempts to guide and control how her work is received.

Starr’s efforts in community management and the affective labor of managing her own responses, as well as modelling appropriate responses to her followers and encourage them to form community in line with her values, is central

to mitigating the ambivalent visibility her posts invite. The feminized work of managing emotional responses and building community thus seems inextricably linked to the creative and entrepreneurial labor necessary to building a platformed audience. As demonstrated by Julie A. Wilson and Emily Chivers Yochim, this type of 'mamapreneurial' digital labor, while holding the promise of, in Brooke Erin Duffy's terms, "getting paid to do what you love" (2017), works entirely within the boundaries of the patriarchal capitalist system that necessitated women making a living from their kitchen counters while their children nap (Wilson and Yochim, 2015, pp. 677–78). Although the circumstances differ—as a whole, the women studied by Wilson and Yochim are not creative workers but rather engaged in multilevel marketing schemes and other similarly exploitative 'side hustles'—and class privilege provides an important distinction, we should be mindful of this caveat. While this kind of work serves some women, it is far from a radical overthrow of oppressive, gendered labor conditions.

Marxist critic Sophie Lewis, in a commentary on momfluencers, notes the simultaneous matriophobic critiques of an industry built by women doing unpaid work in their homes and the misogyny of "the multibillion-dollar industry in question, where wifely financial dependency is positively aestheticized" (2023, n.p.). This view keeps in tension the pieceworker-esque working conditions of most momfluencers and the highly lucrative industry they have built. Starr's work exists on this spectrum, and thus its political valence cannot easily be pinned down. In the case of Starr, it seems clear that doing the work of creating comics and Instagram posts and fostering online community brings Starr personal fulfilment, along with the worries associated with microcelebrity. Her followers also express sentiments of feeling seen, aided, and empowered by Starr's work. Starr's critics, on the other hand, doubt that Starr's work has the potential to actually dismantle the structures being criticized. The popularity and notoriety Starr's work should prompt us to ask whom these comics and cartoons serve. The effects of Starr's posts are anything but monolithic, due to Starr's

visual style and the capacious space for interpretation it affords.

Radical complaint?

Peachgate and the ongoing critique of Starr demonstrates that not all readers were convinced by Starr's version of the narrative. While the influx of negative attention was initially the result of Starr's work circulating beyond its intended audience, the virality was also due to Starr's audience having already grown beyond a small in-group. This tension, which I have argued is shaped by ambivalent feminized visibility, troubles Starr's claim that her work is activist and consciousness-raising. Aimée Morrison argues that 'personal mommy blogging' holds radical potential beyond the notion of an intimate public so long as it remains networked at a small scale and is characterized by reciprocity (2011, p. 37). While this may have been the case at the early stages of Starr's career on Instagram, by the time of Peachgate, and certainly in its wake, the size of her following had moved her from 'networked' to 'broadcast' status, in Morrison's parlance. The asymmetry of this relationship thus diminished the radical potential that Morrison locates in the "direct reciprocity of attention and affect" of personal blogging (2011, p. 51).⁴ Peachgate also took place in a digital landscape shaped by 'virality 2.0,' wherein media producers and platforms alike seek out viral sharing beyond an expected audience (Payne, 2013). While the affordances of the instacartoon include the memetic potential to reach a wide and diverse audience, the algorithmic logics of the platform make it near-impossible for creators such as Starr to only speak to "those who get it." Peachgate was, read in this vein, an example of context collapse (Marwick and boyd, 2011). Starr's strategies of managing the affordances and microcelebrity specific to Instagram, speaking to her imagined audience (Marwick and boyd, 2011, p. 116), did not translate onto another platform as her images, divorced from their captions, did.

As mentioned, Starr attempted to insulate herself from criticism by scaling back on personal

anecdotes, writing disclaimers, and illustrating stories shared with her by her followers, gesturing towards broader, systemic issues. She dismissed backlash in the vein of “get a divorce” or “just do things differently” as personalized solutions to a systemic problem. This disavowal of individual solutions, however, was rarely backed up by suggestions for actual systemic change beyond the nebulous “raising awareness” and “building solidarity.” Thus, Starr seemingly sits between an individualized and a systemic approach to solving gendered inequality in the home, insisting that sharing her personal stories will matter to strangers but refraining from suggesting or enacting radical changes to married life.

This lack of systemic critique was one of the tenets of Peachgate and echoes into the academic reception of Starr’s comics. Sarah Brouillette characterizes Starr’s work as ‘domestic heteropessimism’ (2023), a mode of feeling that recognizes the gendered inequalities inherent in the heterosexual nuclear family unit but cannot imagine life beyond that structure. Starr may criticize the gender dynamics of her marriage and domestic arrangement but her attachment to being married and a primary caregiver is never questioned. Thus, Brouillette argues, while Starr recognizes and calls out a structural problem beyond her own situation, “gratitude and attachment are presented as the ultimate antidotes to her bad feelings about what work within the home requires of her” (2023, n.p.). Brouillette sees Starr’s work as proof of the ideological force of the family under late capitalism, which has duped Starr and her followers. Starr’s comics are imagined by Brouillette to be a mere cash grab: “as we know, the comics are designed ultimately to elicit online engagement, grow a monetizable following, and sell products” (2023, n.p.). While I do not disagree with this assessment of Starr’s presumable aims, it does belie Starr’s frequently stated desire to provide community and solidarity, in addition to being a source of exposure and income for her. In Brouillette’s reading, neither Starr nor her followers are imagined to be reaching beyond the patriarchal systems they rile against. The pessimism turns fatalistic, foreclosing any chance of change and

instead “offering the consolation of complaint” (Brouillette, 2023, n.p.).

The “consolation of complaint” echoes the notion of the ‘female complaint’ described by Lauren Berlant in their extensive study of popular feminized fiction. Complaint genres, according to Berlant, “foreground a view of power that blames flawed men and bad ideologies for women’s intimate suffering, all the while maintaining some fidelity to the world of distinction and desire that produced such disappointment in the first place” (2008, p. 2). The logic of complaint encourages women to remain allegiant to the structures of oppression which they identify as the source of their suffering. Starr has repeatedly stated her lack of interest in divorcing her husband or otherwise radically changing the tenets of her situation. The affective stance she offers her readers is one of frustration at circumstances which, while at times seem unbearable, are imagined to be better than the alternative. This dynamic is what leads Brouillette to characterize Starr’s work as domestic heteropessimism.

Complaint genres, Berlant argues, ultimately lead to intimate publics: affective communities which sustain the lives of those who participate but refrain from manifesting political transformation (2008, p. 19). To Berlant, the intimate public of ‘women’s culture’ is entangled with capitalism and circulation: “the cohabitation of critique, conventionality, and the commodity produces more movement within a space than toward being or wanting to be beyond it” (2008, p. 12). Although critique is present—as indeed we see in Starr’s work—its circular logic fails to gain an outward trajectory, instead remaining within the ideological confines of the framework it claims to criticize: “The circularity of the feminine project will not escape you, therefore: it is a perfect form, a sphere infused with activities of ongoing circuits of attachment that can at the same time look like and feel like a zero” (Berlant, 2008, p. 20). As demonstrated by Fabricius & Hogg, the form of circularity is built into the structure and lived experiences of feminized labor and its representation in art, including instacartoons (2023, p. 13; see also Fabricius, 2024). Starr’s work draws on circularity at multiple

levels, from the directly pictorial to the repetitive rhythms of reposting old comics and creating variations of the same basic structures and ideas.

In Berlant’s view, the experience of recognition, of seeing oneself addressed by an intimate public, is created by the circulation of cultural artefacts, such as Starr’s comics. In a platformed context such as Instagram, the notion of “a world of strangers [...] emotionally literate in each other’s experience of power, intimacy, desire, and discontent” (Berlant, 2008, p. 5), and that this community existed prior to being marketed to, seems entirely suited to the affordances of the communities created by influencers such as Starr. Indeed, as argued by Dobson, Carah, and Robards, “feminist critique of the immaterial, emotional, and affective labour of social reproduction” that shapes digital intimate publics allows us to see “how the intimate labour of care and of producing and maintaining shared feelings, affects, and intimate and social relations becomes *more* productive under conditions of digital capitalism” (2018, p. 16), evoking an idea similar to Kylie Jarret’s notion of the digital worker as an evolution of the housewife (2016). Further, Dobson et al. argue, “In being made productive, practices of digital intimacy lose important aspects of their *publicness*. The labour of intimacy sustains the business model of social media platforms” (2018, p. 16), leading to commodification of the affects and care that creators invest in their platformed work (2018, p. 17). While Brouillette locates the failings of Starr’s activism in the content and ideology of her work, Dobson et al. would point to the platform as the limit to the political potential. Ultimately, they conclude, digital intimate publics are “not public enough” (Dobson, Carah, and Robards, 2018, p. 21), as the affective labor that could raise consciousness and affect lasting change is subsumed by corporate interest and made to feed an algorithm.

The circular, recursive logic of the intimate public is also part of why Berlant claims intimate publics as *juxtapolitical*, that is, not quite politically effective: while intimate publics generate meaningful connection, sense of community, and affective potential, they are ineffective in the realm of systemic political change. Intimate publics create,

as well as respond to, a shared feeling, “flourish[ing] by circulating as an already felt need” (2008, p. 5), and that feeling is sustained, rather than transformed, in the circulation and consumption of it. Taking part in the intimate public of female complaint culture, such as Starr’s following, offers a sense of belonging and a way of keeping on in a hostile system. It does not, however, provide the impetus for undoing or overthrowing said system.⁵ Buying merchandise with the “Eat the damn peach” slogan is posited by Starr as a way of standing up for oneself and claiming a place—and, of course, supporting her ‘woman-owned small business’ in the process. Capitalism is posited as, at once, the source of and solution to the societal ills—in this case, patriarchal marriage and the double shift burden placed on mothers—its products attempt to describe.

This analysis, however, does not account for Peachgate. I hesitate in characterizing Starr unequivocally in the terms suggested by Brouillette and Berlant because of her status as a single individual claiming to share her own lived experience. While Starr is an entrepreneur and runs her Instagram account as a business, I find it difficult to equate her in simple terms with a large corporate entity or as simply expressive of ‘market forces.’ Certainly, she is complicit in such systems, as evidenced by the fact that her Instagram is a business, and she has taken steps to ensure its continued profitability. This does not, however, predetermine how her work will be taken up by readers. In this case, we should consider Zizi Papacharissi’s concept of *affective publics*: social movements, effecting lasting political change, which originated on social media. Affective publics are defined as “networked publics that are sustained by online media but also by modalities of affective intensity” (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 118). Papacharissi notes that digital platforms are not content, they are structures (2014, p. 121), and thus the effects and affects of the structure of feeling depend less on the platform and more on what each person/activist puts on that platform for others to engage with. Starr cannot control the public that forms around the circulation of her work, whether their affective responses to it reproduce the intimacy of shared

complaint or take a more activist, transformative direction. Starr did not initiate an affective public, but her comics were circulated by a range of people who came to constitute, at least for a moment, such a public.

One could argue that the community mobilized by Starr can never become an affective public at the scale described by Papacharissi, because it is too controlled by one person with a vested interest in turning a profit, in addition to facilitating a public. Intimacy crowds out mobilizing, in this reading. I contend, however, that although Starr's followers have not yet mobilized beyond their screens, and perhaps never will, the momentum was and is present in the affects being circulated through and around Starr's comics. As Starr moves her work in two distinct directions—a smaller community requiring paid access and a broader inclusion of stories beyond her own in her free content—it remains to be seen whether her consciousness-raising brings about lasting change in the lives of the people who follow her. Starr's work invites readers—particularly women living similar lives—to recognize themselves in the images and stories. What they do with that sense of recognition, whether it prompts reassurance or a lingering sense that one does not want this life if nothing will ever change, cannot be predicted in advance. The tensions inherent in the comics form and the strategic semiotic openness of Starr's aesthetic create a mirror for hundreds of thousands of people to gaze at. What they see upon looking is neither given nor static.

Certainly, what Peachgate demonstrated was that people did take her comics and used them as tools for denouncing domestic heteropessimism. Notably, this mainly took place on Twitter, the platform singled out by Papacharissi as the dominant vehicle for affective publics. Despite her efforts, Starr could not control how people used her comics, and although she attempted to do so within the confines of the Instagram community she leads, her work was shared and used elsewhere in ways she had not predicted nor endorsed. I do not wish to overstate the impact of Peachgate, which seemed mainly to contribute increased profitability, as well as increased anxiety

over cyberbullying, for Starr. Perhaps the people sharing Starr's work to widespread ridicule were not caught up in domestic heteropessimism to begin with. Nevertheless, Peachgate did demonstrate that the semiotic openness of Starr's comics worked beyond her intentions, allowing people to use it in ways *not* characteristic of an intimate public.

Conclusion

Similarly to how Berlant treats female complaint novels and film, my aim with this article has been to open a space of curiosity about a form of comics that are, at once, wildly successful and deeply off-putting, depending on the recipient. Most people presumably land somewhere between those two positions. The 'problem' with Starr's comics may well be what they were, if crudely, criticized for on Twitter: that they create an intimate public stagnated in its own oppression, with no systemic change in sight and no one to benefit but Starr herself (and the advertisers and shareholders of Instagram). This view, however, somewhat flattens the impact the comics have on Starr's followers and critics alike, who circulate and repurpose her comics in a variety of ways. Because Starr's comics are semiotically capacious enough, despite their seemingly monolithic aesthetic messaging, to warrant multiple interpretations and uses, they retain virtual meanings beyond face value. Indeed, because there are no actual faces, the affective ambiguity serves purposes beyond reifying the conditions that are so frustrating to their creator. Although sometimes cruel in tone, the initial Twitter posts mocking Starr's work were decidedly not roped into Starr's (assumed) politics, although aiding in their circulation.

While I agree with Brouillette's description of Starr's work as engaging in domestic heteropessimism, I am less satisfied with the suggestion that Starr is simply reproducing the conditions of her own oppression and conditioning others to do the same. Brouillette concedes that "One can identify with aspects of heteropessimism and still be engaged in looking toward the revolutionary horizon,

of course" (2023, n.p.). The next sentence, however, begins with the word "Yet," lamenting that "so many of its expressions do the opposite" (Brouillette, 2023, n.p.). Criticizing the politics of influential creators is a worthwhile endeavor but should not uncritically assume that their audiences will give over wholesale to those politics. The kinds of creative expression, shaped by activist sensibilities if not examples of actual activism, that are shared by Starr and her peers present so new a phenomenon that we have only begun to map its effects. On the one hand, Starr seems to be exploiting the private financial gain made possible by her following. Her creation of the subscriber-only feed, remaining on the Instagram platform, and her prioritization of 'wifelife' over 'momlife' in many of her posts suggests a longer-term strategy for remaining in the conditions that cause her distress but also create an income. Domestic

heteropessimism, indeed—and cruelly optimistic, following Berlant's parlance.

On the other hand, however, we do not yet know what Starr or her many followers will do with the community and consciousness-raising done within it. If the abolition of heterosexual marriage is not the only route to systemic change in gender relations, incremental change may yet come from having one's domestic oppression literally drawn out in bright appealing colors, inviting reflection and extending community. Perhaps some of the people advocating for Starr's divorce in the comments will themselves leave marriages or at least set out a set of demands. As the dynamics of social media continue to develop and work by artists like Starr continues to be shared, we should remain attentive to the publics and critiques that arise from their circulation, within and beyond the intent of the instacartoonist.

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Notes

- ¹ While this platform has since been rebranded as 'X,' I refer to it as Twitter throughout, since this was the name at the time of the controversy and the term used throughout the sources I draw on.
- ² For the purposes of this article, I do not dwell on the distinctions between comics (understood as an artform also known as 'sequential art') and cartoons (which can, in this context, be understood as 'single-panel comics'). Starr, as well as many of her 'mom Insta-cartoonist' colleagues, share a mixture of cartoons and comics, and thus my characterization of their work is similarly agnostic regarding the finer distinctions.
- ³ Following Flowers, I note that this identification is always shaped by norms of whiteness, cisgender, and other 'default' identities, most of which Starr herself embodies. Not everyone is able to see themselves represented by Starr, even if she has significantly expanded the representational space of her avatar.
- ⁴ It is worth noting that Morrison is writing on the cusp of the transformation of blogging into increasingly platformed influencer work (see Hund, 2023), and that later work on 'mommy bloggers' is less optimistic about their radical potential in a post-Recession platformed economy (see e.g. Taylor, 2016).
- ⁵ Berlant's subsequent work posited the notion of 'cruel optimism' as the ultimate outcome of the intimate publics that form around popular culture, in particular.

Luderen, akademikeren og manifestet: En retorisk analyse af genreeksperimenter og talepositioner i to nyere danske manifeste

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Hun forsker i manifestet som proces.*

Abstract

The Slut, the Academic and the Manifesto. A rhetorical analysis of genre experiments and speaking-positions in two newer Danish manifestos. This article investigates how feminist personas in Denmark are experimenting with the manifesto genre today, to renegotiate speaking positions within the public debate on gender and equality. Since the first wave of feminism, the manifesto genre has been used as an activist tool by feminists in the West. However, the genre, being traditionally both masculine and masculinist, is causing resistance when adapted by feminist agendas. Through a close textual analysis and a rhetorical genre analysis of two current feminist manifestos, *LUDERMANIFESTET* from 2017 and "Writing Victimhood" from 2021, I thus investigate the challenges and opportunities of such feminist adaptations of the manifesto genre. The analysis focusses on experiments with genre through embeddings and combinations, the act of reclaiming, and the possibility for feminist speaking-positions to be created as a result. The aim is to investigate how these genre experiments affect what can be said, *how* this can be said, and ultimately *who* gets to speak.

KEYWORDS: Manifestos, genre experiments, feminist speaking-positions, reclaiming, rhetorical genre analysis

... for the manifesto-writer who must create feminist speaking-positions, the production of a manifesto is no mere "sketch" job: it is a palimpsest's task, a decoding and recoding of inherited discourse, a creation of ironic and transitory political subjecthood. (Lyon, 1991, p. 121)

Sådan skriver Janet Lyon i sin artikel "Transforming Manifestoes: A Second-Wave Problematic" (1991). Jeg er, som Lyon, interesseret i at undersøge, hvad der sker, når feministiske aktivister forsøger at genforhandle talepositioner i den offentlige debat ved hjælp af den traditionelt maskulinistiske manifestgenre (pp. 101-2). Netop dette spørgsmål udfolder jeg i denne artikel nogle svar på gennem en tekstnær retorisk genanalyse af to feministiske manifeste i en nutidig, dansk kontekst.

Artiklen præsenterer først det fjerdebølgefeministiske influencemanifest *LUDERMANIFESTET* (Klæstrup et al., 2017) af det tidligere kollektiv #GirlSquad. #GirlSquad satte med *LUDERMANIFESTET* ord og billede på fjerdebølgefeminisme i Danmark, og argumenterede med deres tilhørende 'nudes' blandt andet for kvinders ret til at se ud som de vil, og for ejerskab over offentliggørelse og deling af seksualiserede selvportrætter.

Dernæst præsenteres det aktivistiske forskningsmanifest "Writing Victimhood. A methodological manifesto for researching digital sexual assault" (2021) af Signe Uldbjerg. Uldbjergs manifest kan forstås som et indlæg i debatten om kvinders ret til at eje deres egen fortælling, når de offergøres i sager om digitale sexkrænkelser. Men manifestet positionerer sig også tydeligt i en anden debat, nemlig den om aktivistisk forskning, og denne forsknings integritet som forskning.

Fælles for manifesterne er, at de manifesterer et erklæret feministisk projekt, som vil udvide kvinders muligheder for at have en position at tale fra, der er defineret af dem selv og ikke af det omkringliggende samfunds kønsnormer og fordomme. Derudover er de to manifeste valgt ud fra kriterierne om at være skrevet fra et personligt udgangspunkt af personer med en mere eller mindre offentlig persona eller figur (jf. Ahmed, 2020), i #GirlSquads tilfælde 'influenceren' og i Uldbjergs

tilfælde 'akademikeren'. Afsenderne definerer sig i begge manifesterne som feminister, og i begge tilfælde er omdrejningspunktet for den feministiske kamp en form for 'reclaiming' eller generobring af en stigmatiseret figur; i *LUDERMANIFESTET* 'luderen' og i "Writing Victimhood" 'offeret'. Begge manifeste er også optagede af mekanismerne omkring udskamning af kvinden, og i særdeleshed kvindekroppen, i både traditionelle og sociale medier. Endelig eksperimenterer manifesterne med genreindlejring og genrekombinationer (Auken, 2021), hvilket både opdaterer manifestgenren og tilpasser den til forfatterens egne formål (Junker, 2023, p. 196). Derfor har artiklen fokus på, netop hvad disse genreeksperimenter og genreindlejring gør ved muligheden for at skabe feministiske talepositioner, når man som feministisk aktivist deltager og indskrives sig i den ellers traditionelt maskulinistiske manifestgenre i Danmark i dag (jf. Lyon, 1991, pp. 102, 121). Artiklen giver således et nutidigt, dansk indblik i manifestgenrens udvikling, fra et retorisk og genreteoretisk perspektiv, og stiller skarpt på både de udfordringer og de muligheder, som genren med dens maskulinistiske historik skaber for særligt feministiske stemmer.

For at kunne give en analyse af de to feministiske manifeste, deres genreeksperimenter og genforhandling af talepositioner, er det imidlertid nødvendigt at give et rids af manifestgenren i den vestlige tradition samt af retorisk genreteori. Herefter følger selve analyserne, der leder op til en diskussion og afsluttende vurdering af både mulighederne og begrænsningerne som de feministiske aktivister står overfor, når de vælger at genreeksperimentere med manifestet i en dansk, samtidig kontekst.

Manifestgenrens maskulinistiske bagage

På trods af manifestets fortrinsvis maskuline og betydeligt maskulinistiske historie (Lyon, 1991, p. 102) har feminister i Vesten anvendt genren som megafon for deres aktivistiske projekter siden feminismens første bølge (Lund, 2023; Lyon, 1991). Således udforsker Janet Lyons kanoniske tekst

Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern (1999) gennem et dobbelt greb manifestet i moderniteten og modernitetens ideer i manifestet, med et særligt fokus på andenbølgefeministiske manifeste (1960-1980'erne) og den kamp, de manifestere for at skabe deres egne, nye positioner at tale fra. Den kamp udspiller sig ikke kun politisk men også internt i manifesterne selv. For manifestet er ikke kun "[the genre of] universal liberation" men også en genre, der qua sin form har nogle indlejrede kønnede forestillinger om, *hvordan* man agerer revolutionært, som bunder i modernismens idé om det universelle subjekt (pp. 2, 4). Manifestgenren indeholder altså en indbygget selvmodsigelse eller dobbelthed: På trods af at det at skrive et manifest er en diskursiv protest mod det etablerede, så kan selve handlingen også være med til at reproducere en diskurs, som bygger på partiarkalske eller maskulinistiske ideologier, for eksempel ideen om det universelle subjekt. Men for Lyon kritiserer manifestet samtidig rammerne for sin egen tilblivelse ved aggressivt at sætte spørgsmålstegn ved, hvad der overhovedet gælder som 'universelt', og hvem der har lov at definere det. Denne dobbelthed bliver en slags motor for genren, hvor hvert nyt manifest både bygger på genrehistorikken og prøver at bryde med den gennem nye, eksperimenterende manifeste (se Fahs, 2020).

Ser man til manifestforskningen generelt, er der da også en iagttagelse af, at genren er både bred og mangfoldig, og at grænsen til andre genrer er flydende og omskiftelig, hvilket kan gøre det svært at definere *hvad* et manifest faktisk er (Ariel, 2021; Yanoshevsky, 2009). Mary Ann Caws går i sin antologi *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (2001) så vidt som til at sige, at "[t]he manifesto can always be redefined; it makes its own definition each time" (p. xxviii). Netop derfor kan manifestet være et interessant valg, hvis man vil eksperimentere med genreindlejring og -kombinationer: Genrens historik inviterer simpelthen til transformation og nytænkning (Fahs, 2019).

På trods af genrens konstante udvikling og plasticitet, er der dog flere betragtninger af manifestet, som går igen på tværs af både fagfelter og tid, og som er værd at skitsere her for at give et billede af, hvilke forventninger man trods alt kan

have til genren. Jeg vil for overblikkets skyld sammentrage betragtningerne til fire aspekter: Manifestet som *performativt*, *normkritisk* og *-brydende*, *konstitutivt* og *narrativt*.

For det første kan vi forstå manifestet som *performativt*: Både som *tekst*, gennem det Galia Yanoshevsky (2009) kalder "a programmatic discourse of power" (p. 264), der vil forandre virkeligheden og sit publikum med ord; og som en del af en erkendelses- og skriveproces eller en aktivistisk *praksis* (se Fahs, 2019). Yanoshevsky opsummerer det performative aspekt således: "Whether concerning the literary or the political kind, the force and the theatricality of the manifesto are singled out by all researchers. Manifestos are violent acts, spectacular acts, a way to sound your voice" (2009, p. 266). Det performative element kan desuden kobles til spørgsmålet om identitet: Carsten Junker (2023) ser fx manifestet som et "identity-based instrument of social documentation" (p. 189) og pointerer, hvordan life-writing-genrerne – dagbogen, essayet og andre former for tekster, der tager udgangspunkt i det personlige, selvoplevede og subjektive – udvider mulighederne for at skabe nye (feministiske?) talepositioner.

For det andet kan vi forstå manifestet som *normkritisk* og *-brydende* i sit indhold og som følge deraf også i sin udtryksform. Således karakteriserer Martin Puchner (2005) manifestet som "[...] a genre that must usurp an authority it does not yet possess, a genre that is more insecure and therefore more aggressive in its attempts to turn words into actions and demands into reality" (p. 12). Den magt som manifestets afsendere ikke nødvendigvis har i virkeligheden, forsøger de altså at skrive frem gennem en aggressiv stil, som ofte er i strid med, hvad man anser for 'gode (skrifts)normer'. Sara Ahmed beskriver i sit *Killjoy Manifest* (2018), hvordan manifestet netop "skaber en appel ved ikke at være appellerende" (p. 11). Ironi, dobbeltydigheder, dobbeltmoral eller direkte selvmodsigelser er derfor også ofte at finde i manifeste (Fahs, 2020), og i feministiske manifeste vender denne ironi og normkritik sig særligt mod de patriarkalske strukturer.

For det tredje kan vi forstå manifestet som *konstitutivt*, idet det forsøger at "skabe og forme

et publikums sociale virkelighed” gennem tekstens direkte anrøbelser og underliggende ideologi (Madsen, 2023, p. 379). Det henvender sig til et dobbelt publikum, som det interPELLERER gennem det, Lyon kalder ”rigid hierarchical binaries” (1999, p. 3), en forsimpning og reduktion af kompleksiteten af de forskellige fronter i den debat, manifestet indskriver sig i. Følelser og affektive beskrivelser, frem for logiske argumenter, bruges ofte til at skabe en forbindelse til de forskellige publikummer, både dem som manifestet appellerer til (jf. Ahmed, 2018, pp. 11–12), og dem det agiterer imod (Fahs, 2020). Dette udtrykkes gennem en fremskrevet følelse af påtrængende nødvendighed, der også manifesterer sig gennem manifestets besættelse af ’det nye’ (Fahs, 2019, p. 34).

Endelig kan vi forstå manifestet som *narrativt* frem for logisk argumenterende. Manifestet skriver sit verdenssyn frem, som om det er en objektiv sandhed, også selvom det ofte snarere er en personlig holdning eller politisk ideologi. Junker (2023) observerer, hvordan flere af de nyere manifeste forsøger at sætte dagsordenen med udgangspunkt i personlige fortællinger og følelser, og kobler det til autoritet og autenticitet: “[T]he ’authority of experience’ (...) can work its magic; the personal is political, and the private becomes a matter of public concern” (p. 201). Det oplevede får i manifesterne dermed højeste autoritet som sandhed, hvilket ifølge Junker giver manifesternes forfattere en ”assumed authentic personality” (p. 201). Ahmed (2018) formulerer det i sit *Killjoy Manifest* som, at “[e]t liv kan være et manifest” (p. 21). Andre narrative træk, som værdisættelse og præsentation af en konflikt med tilhørende løsning (Iversen, 2013), er ofte medvirkende til at strukturere manifestet, og får det til at fremstå som en slags brændende platform, der indsætter det i en ”history of struggle” (Lyon, 1999, p. 4).

Det er også denne ”history of struggle”, man trækker på, når man benævner noget ’manifest’: Ifølge Nanna Ariel (2021) kan man nemlig forstå manifestet som ”a sort of magic word, charged with historical connotations” (p. 126). Denne form for ’manifestbesværgelse’ ændrer den måde, vi forstår både tekst og afsender på: “[U]sing the title ’manifesto’ is not descriptive or constative but

rather performative – it acts within discourse to immediately change the perception of the phenomenon it refers to” (p. 133). Ariel skelner mellem at bruge betegnelsen ’manifest’ som et superlativ og som en kritik, når man vil fremhæve en tekst som enten særligt kraftfuld eller alt for åbenlys (pp. 129, 131). Men hun skriver også, at ”the very labelling as a manifesto *makes the text into one*” (p. 129, min kursivering) – uanset om teksten ellers har genretræk fra manifestet eller ej. At benævne noget ’manifest’, hvad end det er i omtale eller som en del af en konkret titel, ændrer altså vores måde at forstå ’teksten’ (i bredeste forstand) på, fordi vi tilskriver den kvaliteter fra manifestet, og forstår den i kontekst af manifestgenrens historie. Ifølge Lyon (1999) bliver det at skrive et manifest dermed at deltage symbolsk i en historisk kamp, og at knytte sin stemme til ”the countless voices of previous revolutionary conflicts” (p. 4). Med andre ord: At skrive et manifest kan forstås som at deltage i en genre og udføre en bestemt genrehandling.

Genre som social handling, indlejring og eksperiment

At forstå genre som en handling er der en stærk tradition for i det retoriske fagfelt (se Auken, 2020). Vi kan i særdeleshed takke Carolyn Miller og hendes artikel ”Genre as Social Action” (1984) for at rykke fokus fra genre som rent formelle og stilistiske kriterier til spørgsmålet om genre som en social handling. Her beskriver hun genre som: ”a rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigence; it motivates by connecting the private with the public, the singular with the recurrent” (Miller, 1984, p. 163). Denne genreforståelse binder godt an til manifestteoretikernes ideer om manifestet som både en handlingsorienteret og performativ genre, og en genre, som er tæt forbundet til både vores offentlige sfærer og historiske kampe mod overmagten. Samtidig er der et fokus på private intentioner som respons eller reaktion på sociale ”exigences”, dvs. socialt vedtagne objektiverede behov (p. 157). At forstå genre som social handling giver dermed mulighed for at undersøge både de private intentioner hos

dem, som skriver manifestet, og de sociale behov, som forfatteren mener at adressere med sit manifest.

I min analyse af de to manifeste vil jeg, foruden de fire manifesttræk og forståelsen af genre som social handling, benytte mig af Sune Aukens (2021) begreber om *genreindlejring* og *genrekombination* samt min egen betegnelse *genreksperiment*. Disse begreber giver mulighed for at undersøge, hvordan nye genrekombinationer og -indlejringer kan redefinere manifestet, tilpasse det til forfatterens private intentioner, og, i denne artikels tilfælde, modarbejde genreens iboende maskulinistiske baggage.

Når Auken taler om genreindlejring, taler han generelt om genrehierarkier i alle typer af tekster, og fokuserer på forholdet mellem 'ramme' og 'indrammet', hvor simple genrer kan optræde inden for rammerne af andre, dermed mere komplekse genrer (2021, p. 164). Han deler således genre ind i to niveauer, som han kalder for indlejrende ("embedding") og indlejrede ("embedded") (p. 163). Han skelner mellem flere forskellige typer af genreindlejringer, hvoraf *rekontekstualisering* og *kontekstualisering* er relevante for denne undersøgelse. Som regel fungerer disse indlejringer 'automatisk', det vil sige, de er forventelige, hvis vi forstår genre som typificerede responser på genkomne situationer (Miller, 1984). I denne artikels tilfælde bruger jeg dog Aukens begreber til at undersøge de mere uventede og udfordrende genreindlejringer, eller -eksperimenter, som kan være sværere at få analytisk hold om. Aukens begreber bliver her behjælpelige til at bryde manifesterne ned i mindre (genre)dele, og til at forstå hvordan genretræk og elementer fra én genre kan påvirke og påvirkes i kontekst af en eller flere andre genrer.

Ved *rekontekstualisering* forstår Auken det at en genre, når den indlejres i en anden genre, transformeres af dens nye kontekst. Samtidig påvirker den indlejrede genre også selv denne nye kontekst ved at befinde sig inden for rammerne af den (Auken, 2021, p. 166). I relation til Millers (1984) genreteori skal det forstås sådan, at den indlejrede genre bidrager til den indlejrende genres sociale handling (Auken, 2021, p. 169). Et eksempel fra denne artikel er Signe Uldbjergs (2021)

manifest, som er indlejret i en akademisk artikel. Her gør manifestets tilstedeværelse både artiklen til et aktivistisk projekt, samtidig med at manifestet får vægt og ethos fra den akademiske artikel, som det er indlejret i.

Ved *kontekstualisering* får den indlejrende genres kontekst en afgørende betydning for forståelsen af den indlejrede genre (Auken, 2021, p. 167). Her bliver den indlejrede genre til en social handling i sin egen ret, og den indlejrende genre bliver dens styrkemarkør og i nogle tilfælde endda det, der muliggør den indlejrede genres "social force" (p. 169). Et eksempel fra artiklen her er, hvordan #Girlsquads seks "statements" (Klæstrup et al., 2017, p. 7) og krav om forandring får deres vægt og betydning i kraft af, at de optræder i et manifest, fordi de dermed kobles til en bestemt måde at fremsætte krav på, som vi forstår anderledes, end hvis de fx stod på en valgplakat.

I *genrekombinationer* optræder genreerne på lige fod med hinanden i et mere eller mindre tydeligt blandingsforhold, og ikke som indlejringer. Her kan en genre fx låne en anden genres form, uden at den dermed er indlejret (Auken, 2021, p. 174). Uldbjergs (2021) genreindlejrende artikel har fx 'manifest' i sin titel, hvilket som tidligere nævnt ifølge Ariel (2021) kan gøre den akademiske artikel selv til et manifest. Uldbjerg kombinerer altså genre 'akademisk artikel' med genre 'manifest', og skaber en ny kombineret genre, en manifestartikel eller et artikelmanifest, hvor de to genres egenskaber og træk begge er til stede samtidigt. Uldbjergs tekst er altså særligt kompleks, da den består af en genrekombination, som er kontekst for (mindst) én rekontekstualiserende genreindlejring (et 'manifest' i 'manifestartiklen'). Dette udfolder jeg yderligere i analysen nedenfor. Først må jeg definere, hvad jeg mener med betegnelsen *genreksperiment*.

Med *genreksperiment* vil jeg understrege, at mit analytiske fokus er på det uforudsigelige og ukonventionelle – det eksperimenterende – ved de genrekombinationer og -indlejringer, som er genstand for min analyse. Det handler dermed ikke kun om, at genrene kombineres, eller hvor komplekse indlejringerne er, men også om *hvordan* disse kombinationer og denne kompleksitet

forekommer i de to manifeste. Fordi det ligger så centralt i manifestgenren at beskæftige sig med at skabe "newness and freshness" (Fahs, 2019, p. 34), er manifestet også nødt til at være innovativt og eksperimenterende i både form og genrehandling. Genreksperimenter bliver, særligt for feministiske manifeste, også en mulighed for at forsøge at bryde med den maskulinistiske bagage, som genren trækkes med. Derfor har jeg valgt at fokusere på netop denne egenskab ved manifesterne i min analyse. 'Eksperiment' skal altså forstås som en kreativ udfoldelsesvej, en aktivt udøvende nysgerrighed hos forfatterne, der tester nye, usædvanlige og uselvfølgelige genremuligheder at handle igennem.

Nudes som visuel reclaiming og manifestation

Med *LUDERMANIFESTET* (Klæstrup et al., 2017) forsøger det feministiske aktivistkollektiv #GirlSquad at reclaime 'luderen' som en frigjort, feminin position at tale fra som kvinde i den offentlige debat. Og særligt ét iøjnefaldende greb er centralt i deres aktivistiske projekt, nemlig #GirlSquads 'nudes':

Vores nudes er en udtryksform, en kunstform, og så er de vores ret. Vi poster nudes og afklædte billeder som en del af vores feministiske kamp for at vise, at man godt kan være nøgen og en seksuel kvinde og stadig have holdninger og uddannelse. Vi poster nudes som en del af et feministisk æstetisk kunstunivers for at vise skønheden ved den feminine krop. Vi poster nudes som body empowerment for at vise, at vi elsker vores former, også selvom vi ikke lever op til et klassisk og naturligt skønhedsideal. Og nogle gange poster vi bare et nude, fordi vi har lyst [...] Det handler om at nedbryde idéen om, hvad en rigtig kvinde er og give kvinder muligheden for selv at definere deres liv. (Klæstrup et al., 2017, pp. 225, 232)

Uddraget præsenterer manifestets hovedargument i form af en tretrinsraket, hvor udtryksform, kunstform og rettigheder kobles sammen med en genforhandling af, hvad det vil sige at være "en rigtig kvinde". Argumentet understøttes rent stilistisk af gentagelserne af ordet *nudes* og anaforen "Vi poster nudes...", som skaber en insisterende rytme og en opbygning af momentum, hvilket etablerer en affektiv forbindelse til læseren. Dermed skabes pathosappellen til læseren ikke kun visuelt med de intentionelt provokerende nudes, men også tekstuel gennem den retoriske stil. Ifølge #GirlSquad er den visuelle tilstedeværelse af deres offentlige personaer på sociale medier altså en frigørelses- og ligestillingskamp, og deres manifest er en fysisk og symbolsk manifestation af denne kamp, med de tre afklædte hovedpersoner i centrum. For at undersøge om *LUDERMANIFESTET* både i form og handling bakker denne erklærede dagsorden op, vil jeg i det følgende undersøge de genreksperimenter og -handling, som manifestet manifesterer.

LUDERMANIFESTET er hele vejen igennem spækket med genreindlejring. Det gælder både layout og opsætning, som er en kuriøs blanding af genkendelige manifestelementer som versaler, udråbstegn og pointer i punktform, og elementer, man kender fra helt andre genrer, både magasin-guides (p. 134-5), lifehacks (p. 208-9), lovparagraffer (p. 220) og særligt de føromtalt nudes. Disse nudes findes gennem hele manifestet, på omslaget, men også på digitale platforme. Dermed kan billederne fra et genreperspektiv forstås som rekontekstualiserede indlejring af (Instagram)selfies, i nogle tilfælde endda med tilhørende kommentarspor (se p. 49), og som i kraft af deres æstetik og indhold (traditionelt 'smukke', hvide, slanke, næsten-nøgne kvinder) igen kan ses som en indlejret genre af nudes eller *soft porn* på Instagram. Indlejringerne har en meget tydelig, feminin æstetik, som står i kontrast til genrens ellers traditionelt mere maskuline udtryk (fx en 'magtfuld' stil i form af versaler, udråbstegn, et særligt tekstligt fokus med få billeder). Derudover sætter #GirlSquads nudes meget tydeligt ansigt (og krop) på afsenderne af manifestet. Dette medfører en personalisering af teksten (jf. Junker, 2023), som dermed både bliver

et visuelt belæg for manifestets argumenter, men også en visualisering af hvordan man ser ud, når man taler som 'luderen', og dermed hvem der kan indtage denne taleposition.

Når de rekontekstualiserede nudes optræder inden for rammerne af manifestet, sammen med mere traditionelle manifestelementer som fx #GirlsSquads førmtalte seks statements, skaber de også en ny måde at fremsætte krav på: "#3 KRÆV DIN ORGASME!" (Klæstrup et al., 2017, pp. 136-7) står der eksempelvis med versaler og ud-råbstegn på et dobbeltopslag. Kravet om orgasme efterfølges af endnu et dobbeltopslag med et billede af "Nikitas 22-års fødselsdag" (pp. 138-9). Her poserer de tre kvinder iført leopardpletet lingeri og forskellige nuancer af rød læbestift foran et spejl i noget, der kunne ligne et luksuriøst prøverum, mens de viser både kavalergang og baller. Deres blikke betragter enten hinanden eller beskueren, men fordi det er en spejl-selfie indikeres det, at de også ser på sig selv. Den seksuelle tone understreges dermed både eksplicit i den tekstuelle henvendelse til læseren på den foregående side ('du skal kræve din orgasme!'), men også visuelt gennem billedet, der kobler kvindernes performativt seksualiserede kroppe med kravet om orgasme. Selve billedet ligner ikke noget man forventer at finde i et manifest. Samtidig kan kropssproget i billedet alligevel siges at afspejle manifestets sociale handling: Det meget opstillede billede skaber en tydelig bevidsthed om manifestets egen performativitet, og blikkene – Nikita, der ser på Katja, der ser gennem kameraet, der peger ud mod beskueren og Louise, der ser direkte på læseren – viser en tydelig bevidsthed om, at der er et blik, og at dette blik kan bruges både konstituerende og afkrævende: #GirlsSquad ser både på sig selv, på læseren, og de 'ser' sig selv blive set af læseren. Gennem deres bydende blikke forsøger de at omvende blikkets hierarki, altså hvem der er objekt for hvor hvis blik. I kapitlet "#5 DICK PICS, HÆVNPORNO OG NUDES. DER ER FORSKEL. SÅ ENKELT ER DET!" (pp. 210-11) italesættes dette dobbeltvendte blik af "KATJA",¹ der står bag de fleste af bogens billeder. Hun forklarer, at hendes billeder henter inspiration fra ortodokse ikoner, hvor

[...] den hellige karakter kigger på os, og ikke omvendt [...] det er tilskueren, som bliver betragtet. Den afbillede på ikonet er et stærkt tilstedeværende subjekt. Det er den måde jeg tænker, når jeg laver majoriteten af mine billeder. Det er ikke mig, som er på billedet for at blive betragtet af tilskueren. Det er mig, som har valgt at se på min tilskuer. (pp. 241, 244)

De mange billeder i bogen har forskellige motiver men samme æstetik og komposition. Følger vi "KATJA"s logik, bliver billederne en måde gentagende og abrupt at afbryde tekstlæsningen for visuelt og affektivt at demonstrere manifestets krav: At 'luderen' er et subjekt i sin egen ret, der vil lære os noget – og vi har bare at lytte, møde hendes blik og tage hende seriøst.

Fortællestilen i manifestet bærer også præg af genreksperimenter. #GirlsSquad bruger forholdsvist meget spaltepads på deres personlige fortællinger for at give indtryk af, hvem de hver især er. Således indeholder forordet en reel biografi over hvert af de tre medlemmer, hvor de kommer ind på både deres CV og opvækst. Her er det "KATJA":

Jeg blev født i Moskva, hovedstaden i det tidligere Sovjetunionen, da landet var på randen af sammenbrud. Jeg har set det forfald og den desperation, som rammer mennesker, når det, de tror på, falder fra hinanden. De mange somre i vores sommerhus, hvor min familie overlevede ved at stjæle kartofler og majs fra landbrug og samle svampe i skoven, lærte mig, at ægte lykke ikke er materiel. (p. 15)

Den pathosfyldte fortællende stil i "KATJA"s biografi, der med beskrivelser som "på randen af sammenbrud", "desperation", "forfald" og fremhævelsen af, hvordan familien må stjæle for at overleve, skaber et narrativeret og dramatisk billede af hendes opvækst og baggrund. De narrative træk i begge tekster skaber en art personlig fortælling eller promovring, der, som Junker forklarer (2023), bliver belæg for, at det kvinderne har oplevet, er

sådan verden er (p. 201). Oplevetheden (Iversen, 2013, p. 80) i manifestet fungerer ikke kun som belæg for manifestets sandheder men medvirker som narrativt træk også til, at vi som læsere kan generfare #GirlSquads oplevelser og erfaringer – det være sig erfaringer, de rent faktisk har gjort sig, eller ting de måtte opdigte, men ikke desto mindre fremsætte som sandheder.

Ved at indlejre deres nudes, portrætter og personlige fortællinger i manifestet, indskriver #GirlSquad sig således som specifikke person(a) er i manifestets historiske kamp mod (patriarkalsk) undertrykkelse (Lyon, 1999, p. 4) og søger derigennem at legitimere, at deres kamp er en retfærdighedens kamp. Samtidig bliver de nøje koreograferede, afslørende billeder en måde at provokere læseren på, både i kraft af deres æstetik og indhold, og i kraft af, at vi simpelthen ikke forventer at finde nudes i et manifest. Denne kombination af akademisk, aktivistisk og 'dullet' (Klæstrup et al., 2017, p. 19) præger stilen manifestet igennem som et forsøg på at genforhandle, hvordan man kan tale om feminisme og ligestilling i den offentlige debat i 2017. Manifestets opmærksomhedskrævende genreksperimenter fungerer således som en megafon for de tre kvinder til udbredelse af deres personlige stemmer der, ifølge *LUDERMANIFESTET*, samlet allerede havde en platform på over 500.000 følgere inden udgivelsen (p. 214).

#GirlSquad forsøger altså gennem genreksperimenter med manifestet at reclaime luderen som en stærk og feministisk taleposition i den offentlige debat. Deres genreksperimenter tilføjer særligt nye visuelle elementer til manifestet. Elementer, som giver manifestet og dets krav en særlig form og æstetik. Når man ser på manifestet som helhed, og på den visuelle stil og æstetik i særdeleshed, er der dog flere spørgsmål, der melder sig: 1) Er der egentlig andre end #GirlSquad, der kan tale fra den generobrede luders position? Hvis ikke, 2) hvor feministisk er den så? Dernæst 3) om det er manifestgenrens maskulinistiske historik, der skaber rammerne for #GirlSquads handlemuligheder, og om denne genre da overhovedet er et godt valg, hvis man vil tale som en stærk, feministisk stemme i den offentlige debat? Det sidste spørgsmål leder mig videre til den næste

analysegenstand, der også eksperimenterer med manifestgenren men med et noget anderledes resultat. Den næste analyse giver, sammenholdt med læsningen af *LUDERMANIFESTET*, mulighed for at svare på spørgsmålene, hvilke jeg vender tilbage til i diskussionen.

Manifestet som aktivistisk positioneringsmetode

Signe Ulbjerg er en aktivistisk forsker, som gennem det akademiske manifest "Writing Victimhood. A methodological manifesto for researching digital sexual assault" (2021) præsenterer en metodologi til at samarbejde med ofre for digitale sexkrænkelser (i artiklen kaldet DSA, "digital sexual assault"). Målet for Ulbjerg er, at ofre for digitale sexkrænkelser udvikler redskaber til at skrive deres egne offerfortællinger og skabe deres egne stemmer, fordi der ellers kun er to mulige talepositioner til rådighed for dem: positionen som "reckless, naïve teenager", hvor ens status af offer ikke anerkendes, eller positionen som "inherently damaged by the assault", frataget al handlekraft til at skabe sig selv en bedre fremtid (pp. 27-28). Gennem dette arbejde vil Ulbjerg samtidigt reclaimere offerbegrebet: "I wish to insist on victimhood as a position of authority, one that gives you a special insight when addressing sexual assault personally and politically" (p. 29). Hun placerer sig selv i dobbeltrollen som både forsker og aktivist, og motiverer sit ståsted og projekt med begrundelsen:

As an activist, I have met a large number of women who are living with the consequences of sexual assault, and I live with such experiences myself. I know how frustrating and painful it can be to find yourself stuck in a position where you have to choose between giving up your claim to victimhood and accepting the stigma of the 'ruined' victim. (p. 28)

Personlig erfaring og motivation er altså, som i *LUDERMANIFESTET*, også et grundlag i Ulbjergs metodemanifest. En anden lighed mellem de to

manifeste er deres aktive og bevidste brug af genrekombinationer og -indlejninger. Således skriver Uldbjerg allerede i artiklens abstract: "I aim to combine activism and research" (p. 27), og lig #GirlsSquad får Uldbjerg også strukturen til sin artikel fra manifestgenren, der følger seks principper for aktivistisk forskning:

*Activist research must be participatory.
Activist research must engage in problem-solving. Activist research must be collective.
Activist research pose dual commitments.
Activist research aims for representation through care. Activist research provides hope.
These statements structure the following reflections on methodology and ethics. (p. 30)*

Anaforen "Activist research" skaber ikke bare artiklens struktur, men bliver også gennem sin rytmiske gentagelse en cementering af, at det er *aktivistisk* forskning, som beskrives og bedrives. Samtidig skaber anaforen som tidligere nævnt en affektiv forbindelse til læseren, der potentielt både kognitivt og kropsligt engageres i metodemanifestes indhold gennem gentagelsens rytme og momentumopbygning. Det momentum der opbygges, understreger desuden stilistisk følelsen af nødvendighed og kravet om forandring *nu*, hvilket også er centrale træk ved manifestet.

Som tidligere nævnt, kan det at titulere en tekst 'manifest' gøre, at den også forstås som sådant (Ariel, 2021, p. 129). Og som tidligere nævnt, sker dette allerede i titlen på Uldbjergs artikel "Writing Victimhood. A methodological *manifesto* for researching digital sexual assault" (min kursivering). Dette skaber en interessant genrekombination: Når Uldbjerg kombinerer 'metodologi' og 'manifest' forekommer det ikke kun i titlen, men i teksten som helhed, hvilket bevirker, at artiklen bliver et 'metodemanifest', en hybrid mellem akademisk artikel og manifest. Som Ariel (2021) formulerer det, opfører Uldbjerg en art "[l]anguage games with 'Manifesto'" (p. 125), og indskrives sig på denne måde ikke blot symbolsk i en historisk kamp mod den dominerende magt men også i den mere specifikke akademiske historie, hvori

"scholars also tend to play with 'manifesto' in relation to scholarly work, and gain from its effect as a transformative magic word" (p. 134).

Ud over at anvende genrebetegnelsen 'manifest' i titlen og ud over de seks principper som strukturerer artiklens indhold, er der, som nævnt, også konkret indlejret et mere genretypisk manifest, et "manifesto for writing victimhood" (Uldbjerg, 2017, p. 36), som afslutning på artiklen. Værd at bemærke er det, at Uldbjerg i artiklen selv italesætter, hvordan det at indlejre et manifest i den akademiske artikel påvirker, hvordan både artiklen og hendes arbejde kan ses som et led i en større aktivistisk kamp: "The final session concludes by addressing the hope for change as basis for the above considerations and by proposing a 'manifesto for writing victimhood' placing the research project in the context of a collaborative activist struggle" (p. 29). Manifestet, det konkrete og formmæssigt genkendelige manifest, indlejres i det større akademiske metodemanifest, så læseren ikke kan være i tvivl om, at her er en akademiker som handler, og som handler efter noget, der er større end hende selv. I det indlejrede manifest defineres akademiske mål som "**I AIM TO DEVELOP PROGRESSIVE METHODOLOGIES**" side om side med aktivistiske "**I VALUE, BELIEVE IN AND WORK TOWARDS CHANGE**" (p. 37). De markante erklæringskraft kommer til udtryk gennem både stil og typografi, korte sætninger i fede versaler. Endnu engang bruges den rytmiske gentagelse som stilistisk værktøj til at skabe en forbindelse til læseren, men modsat mange manifeste, som opstiller et 'os' over for et 'jer', anvender Uldbjerg pronomenet 'jeg' og kommer ikke eksplicit ind på, hvem manifestet taler imod. I stedet fokuserer hun på de omstændigheder, hun prøver at ændre: "**I FIGHT FOR A WORLD WHERE VICTIMS ARE LISTENED TO AND DO NOT HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN DIGNITY AND JUSTICE**" (p. 37). Hun behøver ikke være særligt konkret i det indlejrede manifest, fordi manifestet fungerer som en afsluttende opsummering på de vigtigste pointer i manifestartiklen. Her er altså tale om en rekontekstualisering: Artiklen bliver som indlejrende genre et belæg for det indlejrede manifest, da den akademiske artikel indeholder metodebeskrivelser, der

viser, hvordan Uldbjerg vil arbejde med ofre for seksuelle krænkelser (den faktiske handling) og en række afsnit, som teoretisk underbygger, hvordan denne måde at tænke og arbejde på defineres som aktivistisk fra et forskningsperspektiv (jf. Uldbjergs førnævnte principper).

Uldbjergs manifest-i-artiklen rekontekstualiserer således den akademiske artikel og vice versa, så teksterne gensidigt påvirkes af hinandens genrer: Den akademiske genre skaber saglig troværdighed, fordi der argumenteres for påstande med belæg og hjemmel i allerede eksisterende forskning. Men i kraft af stilen og formen på det indlejrede manifest, de seks principper, der strukturerer artiklen samt Uldbjergs personlige baggrund som feministisk aktivist (p. 28), får artiklen en passioneret og presserende tone. Samtidig insisterer Uldbjerg teksten igennem på at være empatisk, åben og lyttende, hvilket hun forbinder til andre forskere, der arbejder aktivistisk eller kreativt: "Feminist care ethics has been framed as a practice of listening to and encouraging unheard voices, a moral theory of respectfully meeting the needs of others, an ethical practice of negotiating and criticising power structures" (p. 35). I det afsluttende manifest er dette også hendes første erklæring: "I WILL LISTEN TO VICTIMS" (p. 37). Kombinationen af de akademiske formuleringer og referencer med den passionerede og presserende manifeststil til slut bliver en ny form for akademisk og aktivistisk stemme, som rummer både teori, empati og aggressiv passion.

Uldbjergs metodemanifest viser dermed en anden måde at genreeksperimentere med manifestet på, med vægt på empati, åbenhed og handlekraft, modsat #GirlsSquads mere afkrævende stil. Spørgsmålet bliver her, om det er ofre for digitale sexkrænkelser, der kan skabe deres egne talepositioner, eller om det er aktivist-akademikeren, der gennem eksperimenter med manifestgenren får udvidet sin. Dette, samt spørgsmålet om mulighederne og begrænsningerne ved at handle feministisk gennem manifestgenren mere generelt, vil jeg undersøge gennem den følgende diskussion, hvor jeg sammenholder de to manifeste.

Så... Hvem kan *egentlig* tale?

Sammenligner man de to manifesteksperimenter, er der både en del ligheder og nogle forskelle, der er værd at komme nærmere ind på for at forstå mulighederne og begrænsningerne ved at skabe feministiske talepositioner gennem manifestgenren. Begge manifesterne er fokuserede på at genforhandle eksisterende talepositioner, man som kvinde kan have til rådighed i kontekst af at være enten 'luder' eller 'offer': #Girlsquad vil kunne tale som både "akademikeren og dullen" (Klæstrup et al, 2017, p. 19), og Uldbjerg (2021) vil med sin forskning udvide talepositionerne for ofre for digitale sexkrænkelser, så de kan fortælle "alternative and empowering stories of victimhood" (p. 27). Begge manifeste aktiverer deres personlige fortælling som et redskab til at genforhandle og udvide disse talepositioner, og begge har "reclaiming" af et stigmatiserende begreb, 'luder' og 'offer', som en central del af deres projekt. Derudover positionerer de sig som personaer, der både tilhører den akademiske og den aktivistiske arena, dog på hver sin måde. Hvor #Girlsquad bruger en del tid og energi på at fortælle om både deres personlige og professionelle baggrund, som fx uddragene af de tidligere nævnte 'CV'er' (nudes inklusive), bygger Uldbjerg snarere sin aktivistiske og akademiske persona op gennem supporterende teori og eksterne henvisninger. Dette giver indtrykket af to ret forskellige 'figurer' (jf. Ahmed, 2020), der taler i manifesterne: Uldbjerg som 'akademikeren' og de tre kvinder i #Girlsquad som 'influenceren'. Disse forestillinger og forståelser af personaerne bag manifesterne hænger sammen med de respektive manifesters form og genreblandinger: Uldbjergs manifest er en akademisk metodisk artikel, mens #Girlsquads manifest kombinerer instagramslag, damebladsæstetik, kække faktabokse og soft porn-elementer. Det er dermed to meget forskellige eksempler på genreeksperimenter med manifestet, som begge på usædvanlig vis gennem reclaiming, genforhandling og positionering søger at forme og påvirke muligheden for feministiske talepositioner i den offentlige debat.

Begge manifeste formår da også at skabe stærke, opmærksomhedskrævende manifeste

og positioner at tale fra: #GirlSquads 'luder' fremstilles (også visuelt) som et stærkt kvindebillede: De sexede selvportrætter i kombination med flere forskellige fagligheder, personlige anekdoter og inputs fra alt fra lovparagraffer til memes blander sig i en hybrid af et iøjnefaldende manifest. Dette iøjnefaldende manifest er med til at skabe opmærksomhed omkring deres feministiske mærkesag: at kvinder skal tage magten over deres udseende og krop tilbage og vende det patriarkalske blik til deres egen fordel.

Uldbjerg formår at kombinere den akademiske artikel med manifestet, så hun kan sige noget nyt på en ny måde, fordi der bliver rum til passion og empati i en akademisk genre, der traditionelt er forbeholdt objektivitet, armslængdeprincipper og afvejede sætninger. Hun indskrives sig således i en bevægelse, der arbejder for at forbinde akademien og aktivisme ved at gøre personlige erfaringer og politiske agendaer tydelige, relevante og acceptable i en forskningskontekst.

Men, som jeg spurgte til tidligere: Hvem kan egentlig indtage de genforhandlede talepositioner, ud over afsenderne selv? Og, på et mere generelt plan: Er det overhovedet muligt at skabe feministiske talepositioner gennem manifestgenren, der historisk har været, og til tider stadig er, en maskulinistisk genre? Både Uldbjerg og #GirlSquad italesætter vigtigheden i at give nogen, der normalt ikke høres, en position at tale fra. I Uldbjergs tilfælde er det de fremtalte ofre for digitale sexkrænkelser; i #GirlSquads' er det både kvinder generelt, og minoriserede kvinder specifikt, som det kommer til udtryk i deres sidste statementkapitel "6 VI HAR IKKE LIGESTILLING FØR ALLE ER LIGE STILLEDE!" (Klæstrup et al., 2017, p. 258). I begge manifeste bliver disse kvinder tildelt en position at tale fra, men det er medieret tale gennem 'akademikeren' og 'influenceren', gennem *LUDERMANIFESTET* og "Writing Victimhood".

I *LUDERMANIFESTET*s (2017) sidste statementkapitel får tre minoriserede kvinder ordet i kontekst af kapitlets tema 'intersektionalitet' (p. 258). #GirlSquad skriver rammesættende, hvordan det i den feministiske kamp er vigtigt at være intersektionel og blive bevidst om sine egne privilegier (p. 255), og giver i den forbindelse taletid

til tre kvinder med levede erfaringer med racisme, transfobi og islamofobi. Til eksempel:

Mary Consolata Namagambe er debattør, antiracistisk feministisk aktivist og afrodansker. Som afrodansker har Mary ikke det privilegium at blive set og hørt i de sammenhænge, hvor vi som hvide feminister i #GirlSquad bliver hørt[...] Det at vi som hvide feminister kun behøver at snakke om sexismen, men ikke behøver at forholde os til racismen, er et privilegium, som Mary misunder os meget. (p. 280)

På trods af at Namagambe her altså 'får ordet', så bliver hendes budskab bragt i tredjeperson ("Mary" og "hun"), mens #GirlSquad stadig figurerer som det eneste "vi" i teksten. Når hhv. Saline Simon og Khaterah Parwani får ordet, er deres fortællinger også i tredjeperson (pp. 276–8, 284–7). De får altså ret bogstaveligt ikke deres egen position at tale fra, men kun medieret tale, genfortalt af #GirlSquad, der således både bestemmer vinklingen og farver udsigelseerne. Modsat får Emma Holten (en hvid cis-kvinde) (pp. 275–6) og de tre (hvide, cis-) kvinder fra #GirlSquad alle lov at fortælle deres historier i førsteperson eller gennem citeringer, hvilket giver indtrykket af en mere direkte, umedieret og personlig tale.

Et andet eksempel er "LOUISE"s redegørelse for, hvorfor hun ikke begår kulturel appropriation med sin twerkpraksis. Hun forklarer i manifestet, hvorfor hendes praksis med twerking er kulturel "appreciation" og ikke kulturel "appropriation", bl.a. fordi hun formidler twerkingens historie til sine elever, når hun underviser (pp. 282-3). Afslutningsvis konkluderer hun: "Derfor mener jeg også, at jeg adskiller mig fra begrebet cultural appropriation" (p. 283) og henviser i en note til en guide fra *Huffington Post* om, hvordan man undgår kulturel appropriation (p. 297). Men det er "LOUISE"s eget syn på sig selv, man som læser får adgang til i manifestet og skal tage for gode varer. "LOUISE" fortæller, at hun formilder historien om twerk til sine elever, men undlader at videreformidle denne historie til manifestets læsere. Som læser har man dermed ikke mulighed for at vurdere, om man er

enig i "LOUISE"s selv vurdering, og det forbliver dermed udelukkende en påstand, at hun 'appreciater' og ikke 'appropriater'. Kombineret med udsigelsespositionerne for alle ikke-hvide, ikke-cis medvirkende i manifestet giver dette desværre et tydeligt billede af, at det igen er hvide cis-kvinder, der taler på vegne af minoriserede kvinder, og endda kommer til at udnytte de minoriseredes fortællinger til at understøtte deres egne ideer, verdenssyn og samvittighed. Luderen's taleposition, som #GirlSquad etablerer gennem deres manifest, er altså ikke nær så rummelig, som de påstår, den er – og dermed heller ikke nær så feministisk, hvis man skal tage deres egne ord om ikke at have ligestilling, før alle er lige stillede, for gode varer. Dette understøttes i manifestet igennem af de mange visualiseringer af luder-figuren, der kun performes af de tre medlemmer i #GirlSquad og ikke af andre kroppe med fx andre hudfarver, størrelser eller kropskapabiliteter.

Uldbjergs (2021) eksempel er mere komplekst. Umiddelbart kan det se ud som om hun, på trods af sine gode intentioner, ender med primært at markere og skabe sin egen taleposition. Til eksempel starter hendes "Manifesto for writing victimhood" med sætningen "**I WILL LISTEN TO VICTIMS**", efterfulgt af tretten erklæringer, der starter med "I" (p. 37). Læser man efter i det indlejrende metodemanifest, bliver billedet dog mere nuanceret: Uldbjerg reflekterer løbende over sin egen rolle i projektet, og hvordan hun har en anden agenda end hendes projektdeltagere (som hun desuden kalder "co-researchers" (p. 34)):

From a feminist perspective, this [billedet af kvinden som følelsesmæssigt afhængig af manden] needs to change. However, I also have to consider if it is responsible to make Karen a scapegoat for this political agenda; after all, she contributed to the project wanting to shed light on DSA experiences, and defending girl culture is my agenda – not hers. (p. 33)

Hun er altså opmærksom på, at hun kan risikere at udnytte ofrenes historier til sit eget formål, og dermed at de talepositioner, ofrene er ved at opbygge

gennem deres egne fortællinger, risikerer at overskygges af hendes egen aktivistiske, akademiske agenda. Dette problematiseres tydeligt og i 'dialog' med en projektdeltager, der får lov at udtale sig 'direkte' gennem et citat om, hvordan der er forskel på at skrive sin egen fortælling og at bidrage til en nyhedsartikel: "I don't think your experiences are actually really being heard. It is more like they [journalisterne] just want some sort of quote that they can use in an article'. There is an irony to using a quote like that here – in an article" (p. 35). Uldbjerg viser her, at hun er klar over ironien, og tager den også alvorligt i sin videre refleksion, hvor hun problematiserer, at kontekstualiseringen af ofrenes historier i hendes akademiske artikel påvirker, hvordan de forstås og fortolkes (p. 35). Hendes refleksioner kontekstualiseres gennem andre teoretikers forskning og co-researchernes inputs, hvilket giver indtrykket af et mere nuanceret manifest, hvor man både kan se projektet som en måde at cirkulere ideerne om handlekraftige ofre og som en genforhandling af talepositionen for den aktivistiske akademiker.

Konklusion

Jeg har med denne artikel præsenteret to eksempler på, hvad der sker, når feministiske aktivister forsøger at genforhandle feministiske talepositioner ved hjælp af manifestgenren i Danmark i dag. Min analyse har vist, at manifestet er en interessant genre at handle igennem, særligt hvis man fremstår som en allerede (aner)kendt persona, der kan kombinere eksisterende (genre)kapital fra ens eget felt med manifestgenrens performative og passionerede stil, og dermed skabe nye, eksperimenterende manifeste. Når dette gøres på utraditionelle og usædvanlige måder, hvilket er tilfældet med både *LUDERMANIFESTET* og "Writing Victimhood", kan det endda medvirke til både at redefinere og opdatere manifestgenren fra en traditionelt maskulin og maskulinistisk form mod en mere rummelig og feministisk form. Der er dog forskel på, hvordan genren redefineres, og dermed også på, om den faktisk skaber eller genforhandler reelle feministiske talepositioner.

LUDERMANIFESTET formår primært at redefinere genrens *form*: Genreindlejringerne er alsidige, ekspressive og #GirlSquads nudes giver et ekstra lag af affektiv appel, som sikrer opmærksomhed, omtale og dermed også en form for talletid. 'Luderen' som taleposition er ved nærmere gennemlæsning desværre en smallere position at tale fra, end hvad projektet søger at gøre den til, fordi det i sidste ende kun er #GirlSquads medlemmer, eller dem, som ligner dem, der rent faktisk kan indtage den. Dermed formår *LUDERMANIFESTET* ikke helt at vriste sig fri af det maskulinistiske ved manifestgenren, da deres version af ligestilling ender med at ekskludere andre minoriserede stemmer – hvilket går imod deres egen erklærede agenda.

"Writing Victimhood" formår til gengæld gennem sine genreksperimenter at skabe en synergi mellem den maskulinistiske manifestgenre og feministisk forskning, som er både rummelig og reflekteret og samtidig passioneret og ekspresiv. Refleksionerne over DSA-ofrenes og de andre aktivistiske forskeres roller i manifestet er nuancerede, og stemmerne og repræsentationerne af

dem så umedierede, som det nu engang kan lade sig gøre i et personligt manifest. I stedet for skarpt at definere talepositionen for 'offeret', arbejder Uldbjerg gennem manifestet og sin forskning for, at denne taleposition skal blive bredere og kunne rumme mere mangfoldighed, og lader det dermed være op til hvert enkelt 'offer', hvordan de vil udfylde pladsen.

At eksperimenterne med manifestgenren som feministisk aktivist i dag, viser sig altså som både krævende, som Lyon påpegede allerede i 1991 (p. 121), og som risikabelt arbejde. Risikabelt, fordi genreksperimenterne mod intentionen kan resultere i en cementering og reproduktion af det, man forsøger at kæmpe imod. Krævende, fordi man må tage genrens historik og dens faldgruber og dobbeltheder alvorligt. Går man til opgaven som mere end "[a] mere 'sketch' job" (Lyon, 1991, p. 121) giver eksperimenter med lige præcis manifestgenren dog mulighed for at skabe en kraftfuld genforhandling af ikke bare *hvad* man kan sige, og *hvordan* man kan sige det, men også *hvem* der kan tale og dermed handle.

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Noter

- ¹ Jeg har valgt at opretholde et principielt skel mellem de virkelige personer bag *LUDERMANIFESTET*, og de personaer eller figurer, de fremstiller sig som gennem manifestet. Når jeg henviser til "LOUISE", "KATJA" eller "NIKITA" gør jeg det altså sådan, som de betegner sig selv gennem manifestet.

Gatekeeping Science – How Methodological Critiques Police Feminist Research.

By Jan Thorhauge Frederiksen and Simone Mejding Poulsen

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Abstract

In this analytical essay, we examine critical receptions of our recently published study on gendered inequality.

Our study received numerous extremely critical comments about the biological properties of gender, assumptions about the political stance, and the scientific integrity of the authors, and most importantly of whether the paper was even scientific. We identify two types of criticism: dismissive and scientific criticisms, and discuss the latter using Skov (2022). On closer inspection, our paper does in fact adhere to the criteria put forward by Skov.

We therefore argue that as this paper was exposed to the very same criticism most feminist research is exposed to, such critiques should not be understood as methodological critiques, but instead a misogynistic policing of science and scientific practice. The critiques mentioned above are not about ensuring scientific quality, nor about methodological standards, but rather about gatekeeping science, and preventing scientific studies that expose privilege and make claims aligning with feminist positions, from obtaining legitimacy. We draw here on the theory of misogyny as the policing of gender roles, as proposed by feminist philosopher Kate Manne.

KEYWORDS: gender research, inequality, positivism, antifeminism, misogyny

[W]hen it comes to your professional peers, I can almost guarantee that many of them will not entertain the idea that you are engaged in a different intellectual enterprise with different epistemological underpinnings. They will simply assume that you are doing what they are doing, only badly. (Luker, 2010, p. 40)

Introduction

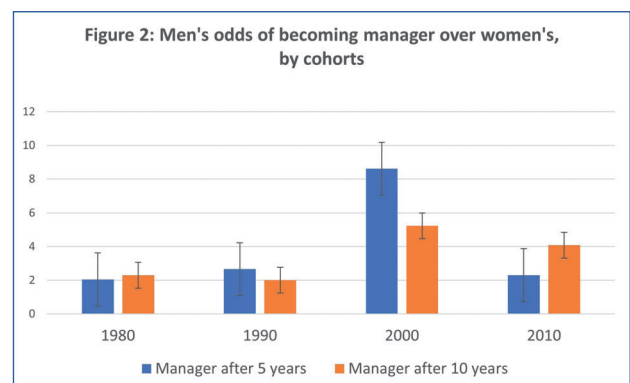
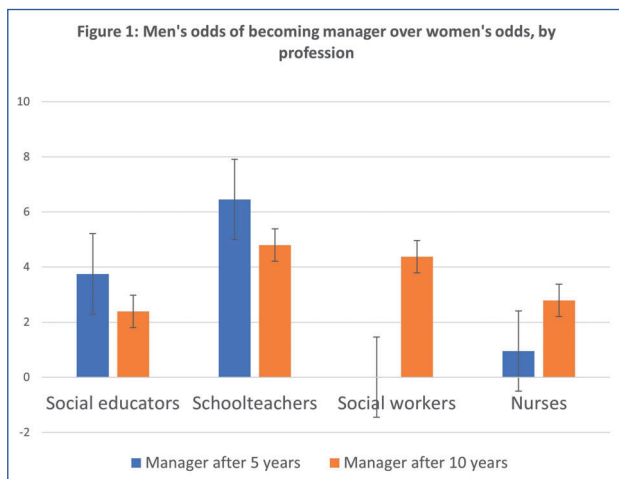
Feminist research often comes under attack for not adhering to scientific standards. In recent years, both individual Danish researchers, and entire methodologies (e.g. autoethnography) have come under such attack. In 2021, after a discussion on research into gender and migration, and their methods, a majority of the Danish parliament voted to impress upon Danish universities the need to ensure that political positions were not “disguised as research” (Forslag til vedtagelse V137, forespørgsel F49, 2021). One might then be tempted to assume that if only one did research in more traditional and quantitative ways, one might avoid such attacks. This, unfortunately, is not the case. In this analytical essay, we will exemplify this with a paper we published recently. We argue that these attacks are less concerned with methodology than they make out. Firstly we briefly present the paper, and then present an overview of the responses that this paper was met with in print and social media. We then examine the underlying scientific criteria, and discuss both whether these

are universal, and whether they apply to our study. Finally, we propose that this criticism is best understood as a pretense, and the intent is an antifeminist one, namely the delegitimization of feminist research.

A study in gender inequality

In 2021, we published an analysis of gendered inequality in access to manager positions within Danish welfare professions (Frederiksen & Poulsen, 2021). This study used data from four decades and followed welfare professionals career trajectories post-graduation. The data was extracted from Statistics Denmark, and besides data on employment, we used data on the professionals’ gender, social class origins, and citizenship¹. Through logistical regression, we estimated the odds-ratios of different social groups becoming managers after five and ten years, respectively². Our findings were relatively unsurprising and in line with similar research, confirming the persistence of gender inequality. We show the main findings in the figures below.

Figure 1 shows the odds-ratio of men versus women of obtaining a position as manager for each profession³. This plot should be interpreted for e.g. schoolteachers: men have 6.5 times better odds than women of becoming managers five years after graduation, and 4.8 times better odds after 10 years. Essentially, figure 1 demonstrates that men have significantly better odds of becoming managers, for all four professions, and only in the case of nurses, five years after graduation, do we see equality (an odds-ratio of 0.95). This equality disappears when we examine nurses after ten



years, where men have 2.8 times better odds of becoming a manager.

Figure 2 shows changes in odds-ratios over time. The plot should be interpreted the same way as figure 1, so in the case of the welfare professionals who completed training in 2010, men have 2.3 times better odds than women of becoming managers after 5 years, and after ten years, men's advantage increases to 4 times better than women's. Figure 2 thus demonstrates that men's advantage has remained stable from 1980 until today, with a massive increase in 2000.

In summary, our study showed that men in welfare professions are significantly more likely to obtain management positions than women educated at the same time, which is evidence of gender inequality in access to management positions. In the following, we will look at some criticism of the study, and its scientific merits.

Dismissive and scientific criticism

Our paper got a quite harsh reception, on social and print media, emails sent to the authors, etc. We collected more than a hundred critical comments and found them to fall into these categories:

Dismissive criticisms:

- a. "women and men prioritize differently"
- b. "women are naturally disinclined to become managers"
- c. "women are emotionally unsuited for leadership"
- d. "women are not victims of inequality, since [examples of women in power]"
- e. "this is not a real issue, you should focus on [other issue]"

Scientific criticisms:

- f. "managers are selected by merit, not gender, because in other professions women prevail"
- g. "if you didn't talk to hiring committees, you can't know whether gender played a role, and have no evidence of inequality"
- h. "since it is feminism, it isn't scientific"
- i. "this is wokeness, and not scientific"

We note that there are two different criticisms here. Points a, b, c, and d claim that differences between men and women do not express inequality, but merely preferences or natural differences. These claims have all been dismissed by research, and much of that research is discussed in our study (Corsun & Costen, 2001; Green & Cassell, 2008; Guillaume & Pochic, 2009; Kagan, 2021; Schoen & Rost, 2021). Point e claims that this inequality issue is unimportant compared to e.g. men's suicide rates, discrimination of persons below-average height, and issues women in the Global South are faced with. This is known as "what-aboutism" and is an attempt to derail the discussion rather than an actual argument (see, e.g. (Curtis, 2022) for a discussion of what-aboutism).

These five points of criticism we term dismissive criticism because they dismiss inequality, rather than question the evidence of it.

But the latter four points deserve a more substantial discussion, since they attack the scientific status of our paper, either by claiming we are wrong (f), that we employ an incorrect methodology (g), or voice suspicions about our political stance (h,j). These points state that we, either through negligence or malicious intent, have not delivered sufficient evidence to support our claim. They are voiced in a manner which seems to state that inequality would certainly be problematic, but fortunately, no such inequality is documented here. We will term this scientific criticism.

The dismissive criticism is not interested in debating gender inequality, but rather in silencing troubling and unwelcome claims, perhaps most evident in points d and e. The scientific criticism, at the very least, feigns an interest in the debate but then abandons it, lamenting the scientific inadequacy of our study. Several commenters in this vein underscored their research experience or affiliation with universities, invoking scientific authority. We do think that this scientific criticism is worth engaging with, albeit in an analytical way. We will first examine a more extensive criticism of this kind, and whether it really does apply to our study. We then present a feminist analysis arguing that this criticism in fact serves a completely different purpose, no different from dismissive criticism.

Canonical social science and positivism

Sociologist Kristin Luker has proposed the term *canonical social science* to describe the assumptions embedded in the dominant professional culture of social science. These assumptions describe scientific practice, and what procedures ensure that analyses and findings produced are valid, and consequently, also what procedures do not. Luker argues that canonical social science is nowhere near as universal as it is taken to be, but warns her reader that practitioners of canonical social science will not be aware of this, with the quote prefacing this essay. The four points of scientific criticism above are an example of this; that is, they are a case of the hypostatization of the specific criteria of scientificity that canonical social science subscribes to.

These four points of criticisms described above did not lend themselves to an analysis of their criteria, of what makes good science. But in the extensive Danish debate of gender research mentioned earlier, pundits have written extensively on this. One such pundit who was cited by Danish Right-wing politicians in relation to this debate was epidemiologist Torsten Skov (Ringgaard, 2023). Skov has also, online and on his personal website (begrund.dk), participated in attacks on feminist research on numerous occasions. Skov did not participate in the criticism of our paper, but his position aligns with the scientific criticism above and exemplifies the position in much more detail. In "Pseudo-science – 20 essays in defense of science" (Skov, 2022), he is very much in line with the scientific criticism above, as will be seen. All references in the following refer to Skov (2022).

In the preface Skov states plainly: "[...] great parts of [...] feminist science does not satisfy the most basic requirements of science[...]" (p.9). Specifically, Skov underscores the following issues with feminist science:

- it uses statistics wrongly (p. 9, 23)
- theoretical concepts are ill-defined and used unexplained, without explicit operationalizations (p.9, 115ff.)

- there is no evidence of the claims made (p.17, 49ff.)
- it makes invalid arguments (p.67ff.)
- it (repeatedly) draws on claims that have no scientific basis (p.49ff., 55ff.)
- it does not operate from scientific rationality (p.23), even claiming that there can be no common rationality (p.26)
- it proposes alternative (sic) epistemologies and ontologies (p.24)
- it is subjectivist, ideologic, and activist (p.95ff., 127ff.)

This list is incomplete but sums up the main points of Skov's position⁴. Invert these criteria, we arrive at Skov's implicit criteria, for what constitutes science:

- science uses quantitative methods correctly
- science uses clearly operationalized, well-defined concepts
- science provides evidence for its claims
- science makes logically coherent arguments
- science only draws on other science satisfying these criteria
- science operates rationally
- science has only one correct epistemology and ontology
- science is objective, neutral and does not meddle in politics

These criteria are all associated with positivism: claiming that science is a matter of disinterested examination of an outer world adhering to deterministic or stochastic laws. Science must strive to produce objective and logically coherent descriptions of the world, through theoretically informed and testable hypotheses. In short, the argument Skov makes is that science equals positivism, *sine qua non*.

In the rest of this essay, we will demonstrate the shortcomings of this position, and suggest that it is in fact motivated by another, less savory intent. First, positivism is not a universal position, but rather has obtained a privileged position for historical and political reasons. Secondly, our study does not, in fact, fall victim to scientific criticisms

proposed by Skov. We argue that this shows that both scientific criticism and dismissive criticism are attempts at policing science misogynistically.

Positivism is not universal

Sociologist George Steinmetz has examined why “U.S. sociology still [operates] according to a basically positivist framework” (Steinmetz, 2005, p. 276). Steinmetz answer by examining how the position of *methodological positivism* came to prevail in American sociology post-World War 2. Steinmetz extrapolates this position from writings, and practices of leading American sociologists and journals. It is a cluster of empiricist ontological assumptions, positivist epistemological precepts, and scientific naturalism (Steinmetz, 2005, p. 281). *Empiricist ontology* denies that phenomena can be caused by underlying structures or mechanisms that elude human experience, implying that whatever exists does so independently of human observers (Carnap, 1950). This connects well with *positivist epistemology* in the understanding of Carl Hempel, wherein scientific explanation must refer a particular case to a general *covering law* (Murphey, 1986). Finally, methodological positivism also entails subscribing to *scientific naturalism*, claiming that “the social world can be studied in the same general manner as the natural world” (Steinmetz, 2005, p. 283). This has two implications: First, methodological positivist science overlooks concept dependency, i.e. that “social practices and structures are inextricably bound up with peoples interpretations of the world” (Steinmetz, 2005, p. 283). An epistemology that does not take account of concept dependency assumes that things and ideas are completely different – a problematic position when applied to subjects of research who are themselves aware of being researched. Secondly, the scientific naturalist position also implies a dichotomy between facts and values. Both dichotomies are problematic if one is to study gender inequality – is it possible to study inequality without those who are affected by this inequality having an opinion about it? Can inequality be merely factual or is the value

of gender equality intrinsically embedded in that object of research?

Comparing methodological positivism to Skov’s position, and the scientific criticism above, both clearly subscribe to the methodological positivism position. Demands for objectivity, neutrality, absence of political positions, and complete rationality follow from the dual dichotomies implied by scientific naturalism; that concepts should be well-defined also makes sense if concepts are independent of both researchers and informants; that epistemology and ontology can only be respectively positivist and empiricist also leads to the demand for objective evidence, logical arguments drawing only on similarly logical and evidential research, and, of course, also to the position that other epistemological or ontological positions must be wrong. And finally, the demand that statistics be used correctly reiterates the point that methods are technical procedures, their correct application derivable from the epistemology and ontology of methodological positivism. Similarly, the scientific criticisms of our study are derived from the dichotomies of facts and values, and the denial of underlying structures. When there are no underlying structures, only conscious, discrimination can cause inequality. It follows from these arguments that methodological positivism is in complete opposition to any form of social constructivism and poststructuralism.

These positivist positions are not explicit in most sociological education – rather these positions are implicitly embedded in how methods and in particular statistics are being taught, as a matter of technical procedures (Steinmetz, 2005, p. 280). This helps us understand the claim that feminist research is not science – after all, if one understands there to be only one way of conducting scientific research, then any deviation from those procedures surely must be an error – or, paraphrasing Luker, bad science by a bad scientist. However, in most of the history of epistemological discussion, numerous other positions have appeared, and indeed the constructivist and poststructural positions, excluded by methodological positivism, are in fact very much on the rise in much of social science and humanities.

Steinmetz's analysis demonstrates why methodological positivism has come to occupy a privileged position, from which it may dismiss other epistemological positions, and he argues that this position of privilege stems from the social-epochal development in society at large. Leading journals and debates in sociology in the 1920s and 1930s harbored much more diverse epistemology and methodology. Referencing Merton, Foucault and Haraway, Steinmetz argues that the explanation for the dominance of positivism can be found in post-World War 2 capitalism, industrialism, and Fordism in the US (Steinmetz, 2005, p. 287). In other words, the dominant position of methodological positivism has not come about through its scientific qualities, but through its congruency with the political and economic developments in the US, and the global position of the US after World War 2. The assumption of universality of methodological positivism stems from this position of dominance, and not from researcher consensus about the qualities of methodological positivism. The arguments that non-positivist positions are scientifically inadequate originate (as is the case with Skov) from natural sciences, where the dichotomies between facts and values, and between things and ideas, as embedded in methodological positivism, are often considered less problematic.

An inverse strawman

Having made the case that Skov and scientific criticism erroneously assumes the universality of methodologic positivism, we now return to our study. Our study does in fact satisfy the scientific criteria presented by Skov. We use well-established statistical techniques, commonly used to determine inequality. Our concepts are clearly operationalized and draw on validated international schemes of operationalization of class and occupation. We also provide explicit quantitative evidence of our results, we argue from this evidence and from the research we address in the paper, and, while we subscribe to a constructivist epistemological position, this does not affect

the statistical analysis. We do suggest that our findings should have political consequences, but this is not part of the actual study. In short, Skov's position is not at all incompatible with our study. This leaves us with the question of why our study was ever targeted by scientific criticism. We can imagine two possibilities: The (unfortunately likely) possibility that our critics did not bother to read the paper, or that they did in fact read the paper, but made the criticism, ignoring that it did not apply. Either way, the criticism does not enter into a serious debate with how we conducted the study, how the data were analyzed, etc. That is perhaps the crux of this criticism: It appears to make a nuanced methodological call, taking exception not with the question, nor findings of our study, but rather with the intricacies of our procedures. But on closer inspection this turns out not to be the case; rather, the scientific criticism appears to be no different than dismissive criticism: It is an attempt at dismissing our findings, only now superficially draped in the vernacular of methodology.

This is an inversion of the disingenuous strawman-argumentation, wherein one knowingly misrepresents the proposition made by one's opponent. This fallacy serves to either make the impression that said proposition is much more radical, than what is actually the case, or to present the proposition in a form that is easier to defeat in argumentation. In our case, it is not our proposition, but the criticism of it, which is being presented in a disingenuous form. The criticism is presented as a form of red herring fallacy, or smokescreen, and hides the more nefarious strategy of delegitimizing our study, without doing so through explicitly antifeminist statements.

Gatekeeping science

We cannot conclusively show that scientific criticism does not differ substantially from the dismissive criticism. Yet it is puzzling that such criticism does not aim at substantial scientific debate – if they did, they would have learned that this criticism does not apply to our paper. Yet, as most of this criticism appears online, in public

fora, and in connection with our findings being disseminated through public media, it does seem reasonable to assume that the authors of the criticism want to influence the discussion, and possible consequences, drawn from our findings. We are then at somewhat of a loss to determine the genuine intent of the authors of the criticism. We suggest that the answer to this conundrum of not really examining the study, and at the same time publicly decrying it as unscientific is to understand the criticism as a misogynistic form of gatekeeping.

Feminist philosopher Kate Manne has suggested that we understand misogyny as “one strand among various similar systems of domination” that “serv[e] to uphold patriarchal order” (Manne, 2019, p. 19). More specifically, Manne argues that “[a] woman’s perceived resistance to or violation of the norms and expectations that govern [women’s] roles would naturally tend to provoke [misogynistic] reactions” (Manne, 2019, p. 49). Misogyny is the policing of patriarchal gender norms, and Manne proposes a definition of misogyny, from which one point is very salient:

Constitutively speaking, misogyny in a social environment comprises the social forces that [...]

- b. serve to police and enforce a patriarchal order, instantiated in relation to other intersecting systems of domination and disadvantage that apply to the relevant class of girls and women (e.g. various forms of racism, xenophobia, classism, ageism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, and so on.) (Manne, 2019, p. 63)

When our findings are faced with dismissive criticism, this is a way of attempting to silence a certain class of voices, perceived to represent women, and transgressing patriarchal norms. Manne identifies misogynistic norms as linked to the perception of women as demanding or *taking* something, rather than sticking to their role in patriarchy as *givers* (Manne, 2019, p. 279ff.). Kristin Luker arrives at a similar point in her analysis of abortion debate where pro-life positions serve to restrain women from straying too far from their perceived roles:

The [pro-choice position] can therefore be seen as an attack on a symbolic lynch-pin that held together a complicated set of assumptions about who women were, what their roles in life should be, what kinds of jobs they should take in the paid labor force, and how those jobs should be rewarded. “Equal pay for equal work” was already a revolutionary demand in this context, but until women could get equal work, even this demand was irrelevant. And women could not get equal work until they could challenge the assumption that their work activities were, or ought to be, or might be subordinated to family plans. (Luker, 1985, p. 134)

What Luker says about the liberation of women through the rights to abortion, and the pro-life responses, is comparable to the criticism of our study. Statements about the unequal opportunities for becoming a manager challenge the subordination of women’s work positions to their position in family. Thus, dismissive criticism emphasizes the choice not to apply for a position as manager as voluntarily and related to innate characteristics or values of women; this reinforces the congruency between not being a manager, and staying in one’s place, according to patriarchal norms.

There is then no real difference between scientific and dismissive criticism when it comes to the effect. But the scientific draping of the intent to dismiss and silence, serves to delegitimize not just our work, but the entire project of feminist research, of documenting the existence, nature and experience of gender inequality and challenging it. This is why it is unimportant whether the scientific criticism really applies to the study at hand – the scientific criticism is a synecdoche of the patriarchal stance towards feminist research *tour court*, and so it is irrelevant whether the criticism does apply *in casu*, because the issue is the general disallowance of research challenging patriarchy. This is also why this criticism is applied to feminist research regardless of methodology; the issue was never the differences between quantitative methods and autoethnography etc. In scientific criticism, transgressions against methodological

positivism substitute for transgressions against patriarchal norms, as the action requiring a misogynistic policing of norms.

Conclusions

We have shown that the scientific criticism of our paper erroneously assumes universal acceptance of methodological positivism. These criticisms turn out to be irrelevant and misapplied, and do not intend to debate the scientific merits of our study, but is a pretense to dismiss its findings. Such scientific criticism is an attempt at gatekeeping science, barring the feminist endeavor from recognition as science. Our statements purporting to be scientific, while challenging patriarchal norms,

thus elicits misogynistic responses trying to police and enforce those norms. Patriarchal norms are being tacitly upheld through such faux scientific criticism, and any attempts at methodologically accommodating such criticism will most likely be futile. This then raises the question of whether it then is worthwhile responding and taking such criticisms at face value? We will conclude by letting Luker answer that question, as she does in direct continuation from the quote that prefaces this essay:

You must always be prepared to defend your research method at the outset, and you will have to be much more thoughtful and better prepared than any of them will ever be. (Luker, 2010, p. 40)

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Notes

- ¹ We used data from Statistics Denmark and are thus limited by how data on gender, income, occupation, and ethnic origin are being registered in Denmark. This hampers the analysis in terms of gender and ethnicity, being limited to binary gender, and parental citizenship for ethnicity. We recognize that in using these categories, we are also reproducing them, and contributing to analytical erasure of other identities of ethnicity and gender.
- ² For further details, please consult the original study.
- ³ Odds-ratios for social workers cannot be calculated after 5 years, due to small numbers of managers.
- ⁴ One point, omitted from this list, is Skov's radical suggestion for screening criteria when vetting publications for pseudo-science, the first of which is whether the research rests on French post-structural philosophy (p.187).

Beskattet og ubeskyttet

Refleksioner over sexarbejde og sexarbejdervilkår

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"In the elite circles of the media, NGOs and top universities, repeating a phrase such as 'sex work is work' confers status of the speaker. It suggests an admirable open-mindedness, a rebellious attitude towards bourgeois sexual norms."

Sådan skriver den britiske journalist Louise Perry i sin debatbog *The Case against the Sexual Revolution* (2022, s. 146f), hvori hun gør op med den herskende seksualmoral, der ifølge hende dikteres af den moderne feminisme. Denne påstand om, at brugen af slagordet "sex work is work" skulle være en statusmarkør for eliten, satte en række tanker i gang hos mig angående den offentlige diskurs og lovgivning vedrørende sexarbejde og kalder på en række indvendinger. Derfor vil jeg i dette essay kaste et blik på parolen "sex work is work" og baggrunden for denne terminologi. Jeg vil reflektere over arbejdet i sexarbejde samt forholde mig til nogle af de politiske stemmer, som argumenterer for, at sexarbejde *ikke* er arbejde men udnyttelse og fornedrelse af kvinder, og derfor også kalder sexarbejde for *prostitution*. Derefter vil jeg optegne de nuværende arbejdsvilkår, som sexarbejdere er underlagt ud fra den danske lovgivning på området. Hertil vil jeg reflektere over, hvilke negative konsekvenser denne lovgivning og den dertilhørende sociale indstilling har på sexarbejde, samt hvorfor rettigheder er et bedre redskab end

kriminalisering, hvis det, man ønsker, er at sikre og forbedre sexarbejderen liv.

"Sex work is work"

Betegnelsen "sexarbejde" og slagordet "sex work is work" er ikke så ny endda. Disse blev gradvist udbredt i løbet af 1970'erne og 1980'erne, hvor amerikanske sexarbejdere begyndte at organisere sig og oprettede organisationer som f.eks. COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics), the PROS Network (Providers and Resources Offering services to Sex workers) og Maggie's (Bruckert et al., 2013, s. 57). En fælles målsætning for organisationerne var at bekæmpe stigmatisering, vold og chikane rettet mod sexarbejdere, samt skabe et sikkert rum, hvor sexarbejdere kunne samles for at dele viden og erfaringer. For at fremme denne dagsorden ændrede de deres fagterminologi og erstattede "prostituert" med "sexarbejder" (ibid). Dette skyldes, at betegnelsen "prostituert" ofte er forbundet med fordomme, såsom at prostituerede typisk er involveret i kriminalitet, er smittespredere for seksygdomme og ofte har psykiske lidelser (ibid., 71f; Hulusjö 2013, s. 96f). I mødet med sådanne fordomme og stigmatisering kan det være en udfordring at bevare ens selvværd intakt (Weitzer 2023, s. 26), så for at modvirke disse fordomme blev den mere positive betegnelse

"sexarbejde" indført. At betegne sexarbejde som arbejde bør derfor ikke opfattes som et forsøg på at cementere nogle individers status over andre, som Perry hævder. Derimod er det et sprogligt redskab til at nedbryde stigma.

Herhjemme i Danmark forenede en lille gruppe sexarbejdere sig i 2008 og oprettede Sexarbejdernes Interesse Organisation (SIO), hvis mærkesag fortsat er, at sexarbejde skal anerkendes som et legalt erhverv på linje med andre tertiære erhverv. Derfor arbejder SIO også ihærdigt for, at sexarbejdere skal involveres mere i debatter og beslutningsprocesser, der vedrører sexarbejde, hvilket kommer til udtryk i mottoet "Intet om os – uden os" (SIO, 2008). At se sexarbejdere som *fagfolk* er altså en grundtanke hos SIO, hvorfor organisationen også kæmper for, at samfundet anerkender sexarbejde som et individuelt og velfunderet valg, uanset hvilken bevæggrund den enkelte sexarbejder måtte have haft for træde ind i erhvervet. Nogle kan f.eks. være motiveret primært af lyst og nysgerrighed, mens andre vælger det udelukkende af økonomiske årsager. Endnu andre kan gå ind i faget af begge bevæggrunde (VIVE, 2021, s. 115ff).

Ikke sjældent kan man dog støde på et noget anderledes syn på sexarbejde. Nemlig når det bestrides, at sexarbejde er "rigtigt" arbejde, og at sexarbejdere har truffet et selvstændigt valg om at gå ind i branchen. Førnævnte Perry repræsenterer en sådan holdning. Hun fastslår kategorisk, "prostitution has never been a matter of personal choice or female empowerment" (Perry, 2022, s. 138. Min kursiv). Hun understøtter denne påstand med sin egen observation om, at den "prostituerede klasse" består af kvinder, der ikke har andre muligheder end at prostituere sig for at overleve (ibid., s. 139). Perrys afvisning af sexarbejders agens og oplevelse af *empowerment* negligerer den skjulte handlekraft bag ønsket om økonomisk forbedring samt det faktum, at mange sexarbejdere oplever styrket selvtilid gennem deres arbejde. Dette ses eksempelvis, når kunder giver anerkendelse, eller når sexarbejders økonomiske situation forbedres, hvilket øger deres selvbestemmelse og muligheder for at løfte sig selv og deres familier ud af fattigdom (Weitzer, 2023, s.

25f; VIVE, 2021, s. 119; 126; Hulusjö, 2013, a. 55f; Plambech, 2023, s. 5f).

En lignende argumentation blev anvendt i en dansk kontekst i 2019, da daværende social- og indenrigsminister Astrid Kragh nedlagde en tværministeriel arbejdsgruppe, som havde til hensigt at undersøge, hvordan sexarbejders arbejdsforhold kunne forbedres (Danielsen & Larsen, 2019). Kraghs og socialdemokratiets argument for at nedlægge arbejdsgruppen var, at man ikke ønskede at føre en socialpolitik med en devise om, at sexarbejde er arbejde (Kragh, 2019). Kragh mener nemlig, at vi bør betegne salg af seksuelle ydelser som ren og skær prostitution (i den betydning jeg har skitseret foroven), hvilket tydeligt indikerer hendes ønske om, at samfundet bør forstå denne praksis som udnyttelse af kvinder, der nødvendigvis sælger sex af nød og ikke af lyst. Ifølge Kragh, er den optimale politiske tilgang derfor også at implementere exitprogrammer frem for at forbedre sexarbejders rettigheder og sikkerhed, for hun mener, at det at kalde prostitution for arbejde er "en underlig forskønnelse af en brutal branche" (2019).

Hensigten bag betegnelsen "sexarbejde" og slagordet "sex work is work" har dog aldrig været at forskønne sexarbejde, selvom det ofte forstås sådan af fagets kritikere. Formålet med terminologien er derimod at udfordre førnævnte fordomme om sexarbejde og samfundets tendens til at forvise seksualiteten til den private sfære samt fremme refleksion over forholdet mellem sex og arbejde (Bruckert et al., 2013, s. 57). Mange, inklusiv jeg selv, bruger denne terminologi til at betone, at sexarbejdere har en professionel tilgang til deres arbejde, og at de fortjener den samme beskyttelse og sikkerhed som arbejdstagere i andre brancher. Terminologien er således knyttet til et politisk mål om at skifte fokus væk fra stigmatisering og kriminalisering af erhvervet til i stedet etablere en respektfuld anerkendelse af sexarbejders fag. Derudover bruges denne terminologi også til at betone, at sexarbejders integritet (og/eller mentale helbred) ikke *nødvendigvis* lider skade ved at sælge seksuelle ydelser. Nogle lider desværre overlast, og det må man naturligvis ikke bagatellisere. Dette vender jeg også tilbage til. Inden vi når dertil,

vil jeg dog først udfolde, hvori arbejdet i sexarbejde består. Jeg tror nemlig, at det er vigtigt at forstå, at sexarbejde ikke kan reduceres til en passiv, kropslig stillen-sig-til-rådighed overfor kunderne.

Sexarbejde fordrer evner inden for kommunikation og konfliktløsning, hvilket gør det sammenligneligt med andre job i servicesektoren. I sexarbejde er det nemlig også de interpersonelle færdigheder, der står i centrum, da de spiller en afgørende rolle i at opretholde positive interaktioner med kunderne (Bruckert et al., 2013, s. 61). Ligesom massører, frisører, SOSU'er, terapeuter, pædagoger, tjenere og lignende besidder eller udvikler sexarbejdere ofte gode evner til at være sociale og til at interagere med mange typer af mennesker. En væsentlig del af deres arbejde består i at kunne aflæse kunder og sætte sig ind i deres lyst og behov. Derudover tilegnes og udvikles evnen til at vurdere og handle i udfordrende eller risikable situationer, hvis der opstår konflikt med kunden (Hulusjö, 2013, s. 278ff; 292f). At kunne lede en interaktion, hvor man både skal etablere sin autoritet og opretholde en tillidsfuld og behagelig stemning med kunden, kræver dygtighed.

Derudover er der naturligvis også en ganske særlig kropslig dimension i sexarbejde, som skal kombineres med de interpersonelle evner. Dette forhold præciserer den amerikanske journalist og forfatter Melissa Gira Grant, idet hun opsummerer sexarbejde således: "Acting as if we share our customer's desires is the work of sex work" (Grant, 2014, s. 86). Her er det vigtigt at understrege, at selvom der er en vis grad af skuespil involveret i sexarbejde, betyder det ikke, at det er bedrag eller snyd. Essensen af sexarbejde er nemlig, at kunden køber en *performance* fra sexarbejderen, hvorfor det kræver en åbenhed over for forskellige former for lyst og en professionel anvendelse af denne åbenhed.

Dertil kommer også, at nogle kunder blot ønsker nærvær og samtale, hvor det at udvise sympati inden for en professionel ramme også er en kerneydelse for mange sexarbejdere. Dette aspekt ved sexarbejde fremhæver sociolog Anna Hulusjös i sin doktorafhandling *The multiplicities of prostitution experience. Narratives about power and resistance* (2013), hvor hun bl.a. interviewer

sexarbejderen Maria, som fortæller: "I think some of them [the customers] just feel lonely really. You buy a little company, intimacy" (Hulusjö, 2013, s. 241). Ligeledes beretter sexarbejderen Sonja, at "[some] are starved for touch and comments and praise for their bodies and all these things (...) They want what they don't have otherwise, and sometimes it's some special kind of sex but sometimes it's just to be seen and held" (ibid., s. 242). Den professionelle sympati kan manifestere sig ved at man lytter, giver fysisk kontakt, opmuntrer og giver komplimenter eller deler sine personlige perspektiver. Disse omsorgsfulde eller sågar terapeutiske aspekter ved sexarbejde og de positive oplevelser, der kan være forbundet ved at yde følelsesmæssig støtte, bliver desværre ofte overset i debatten om sexarbejde (se mere hos Weitzer, 2023, s. 23ff).

Sexarbejde adskiller sig naturligvis markant fra andre tertiære job, idet man skal forholde sig aktivt (og positivt) til andres seksuelle ønsker og involvere sin egen krop i disse. Jeg forstår derfor også sagtens, at mange kan føle, at netop denne kropslige og seksuelle dimension gør sexarbejde usammenligneligt med andre tertiære erhverv. Alligevel vil jeg nu fastholde, at disse karakteristika ved sexarbejde ikke forhindrer sexarbejde i at blive anerkendt som arbejde, for som Grant præcis formulerer det: "To insist that sex work is work is also to affirm there is a difference between sexualized form of labor and sexuality itself" (Grant, 2014, s. 91). Jeg finder denne sondring mellem seksualitet i sig selv og sexarbejde meget nyttig, for den tydeliggør, at der generelt hersker en kvalitativ forskel på den seksualitet, som sexarbejdere udlever i professionelle og private sammenhænge.

Sexarbejde-terminologien understøtter altså sexarbejderes erfaring af, at "arbejdssex" og "privatsex" tilhører hver sin sfære, hvilket udfordrer den stereotype opfattelse, at kunden køber sig adgang til sexarbejderens (private) seksualitet (se også Bruckert et al., 2013, s. 71). Denne opfattelse kender jeg også fra mig selv, for som de fleste andre er jeg også opdraget med fortællingen om, at prostituerede (for det hedder de jo i den fortælling) oftest er misbrugere, hjemløse eller på anden måde har slået sig på livet, og derfor er nødsaget til at sælge det eneste de ejer, nemlig dem selv og

deres seksualitet. Af den grund var tanken om, at nogen *frivilligt* ville ernære sig som sexarbejdere fremmed i mange år. Sidenhen har jeg dog gennem talrige samtaler og studier lært, at sexarbejde er meget mere komplekst. Ofte ligger der megen handlekraft og refleksion bag beslutningen om at gå ind i branchen, især når målet er at bryde ud af trange vilkår (her er der mange vidnesbyrd at hente hos Plambech (2023)). Det er især i tilfælde, hvor denne målsætning opnås, at sexarbejdere kan opleve en følelse af *empowerment* gennem deres arbejde. Men dette aspekt overses ofte, hvis man fastholder fortællingen om, at dem, der sælger sex, er ydmygede og sårede.

Ønsket om arbejderrettigheder og afkriminalisering

At betragte og behandle sexarbejde som et erhverv kan desuden hjælpe til bedre at skelne mellem overgreb og legitime arbejdsforhold i sexindustrien (Grant, 2014, s. 22; Bruckert et al., 2013, s. 13ff). Det kan nemlig være vanskeligt at identificere overgreb og grænseoverskridende adfærd, hvis hele sexarbejderens tilværelse opfattes som voldelig, hvilket det ofte gøres af de sædvanlige kritikere. Dette belyses også af antropolog Sine Plambech i hendes bog *Global Sex* (2023), hvor hun indsigtfuldt beskriver livssituationerne for en række thailandske og nigerianske kvinder, der kæmper for et bedre liv ved at sælge sex. Hun skriver f.eks. om den nigerianske kvinde Chika, som i 2011 rejste til Italien og arbejdede som sexarbejder, så hun kunne sende penge hjem og få sine børn i skole (Plambech, 2023, s. 84). Men en dag, hvor hun var på arbejde, blev hun voldtaget af fem mænd og herefter smidt på en mark, hvor hun blev fundet livløs af en hundelufter. Da hun fortalte politiet om voldtægtsmændene, samt at hun skyldte penge og altså befandt sig i en sårbar situation, håbede hun på at få hjælp af politiet og de sociale myndigheder. Men "hjælpen" viste sig at være en udvisning. Politiets konklusion var nemlig, at hun var kommet til Italien for at sælge sex imod sin vilje og altså var offer for trafficking – selvom dette ikke var hendes egen oplevelse (ibid.). Som en

lille trøst fik Chika lovning på en sum penge til at klare sig for, men pengene kom først et halvt år efter hjemkomsten, og i den tid havde Chika måtte gældsætte sig yderligere for at overleve (ibid.). Denne beretning tydeliggør, hvordan enkeltstående voldshandlinger ofte bliver brugt som belæg for påstanden om, at hele sexarbejderens arbejdsliv er præget af vold.

Plambech lærer også en anden nigeriansk kvinde at kende, Becky, som forgæves havde forsøgt at komme til Italien, også for at arbejde som sexarbejder. Da Plambech en dag spørger Becky om hendes holdning til advarslerne imod trafficking, der sendes ud på nigeriansk TV og hænger som plakattavler omkring i Benin City, siger Becky: "Der er ingen, der sætter os en pistol for panden og tvinger os til Europa. Så jeg tror ikke på trafficking, det er et ord, de hvide har opfundet. At rejse til Europa er en aftale mellem parterne: Kvinden, hendes familie og hendes madam. Vi forhandler os til en aftale, som alle parter accepterer" (ibid., s. 90).

Generelt bemærker jeg i disse beretninger, at kvinderne, der søger mod Europa for at arbejde som sexarbejdere, udviser en bemærkelsesværdig handlekraft, mod og målrettethed. Dette er et gennemgående tema i Plambechs bog, idet hun hele vejen igennem fokuserer på sexarbejdernes egne erfaringer, hvilket skaber et nuanceret portræt af deres liv og arbejde. Disse fortællinger udfordrer således den hidtil dominerende fortælling om sexarbejder (eller "prostitution", som det hedder i den fortælling), som typisk fremlægges af dem, der ønsker at bekæmpe branchen. Her er det en overdreven offerfortælling, og selvom intentionen bag denne vinkling er velmenende, så kan det desværre have negative konsekvenser, ligesom Chikas fortælling illustrerede. For selvom de europæiske, inklusiv de danske, myndigheder arbejder ud fra en ambition om at redde kvinder ud af et farligt, voldeligt liv i prostitution, så bidrager myndighederne paradoksalt nok til, at kvindernes situation forværres, når "løsningen" er at sende kvinderne tilbage til de dårlige kår, som de oprindeligt søgte at undslippe.

Kernen i problemet er, tror jeg, at man anser kampen for sexarbejderrettigheder som uforenelig med kampen mod seksuel vold, voldtægt og

misbrug. Men dette er en falsk modsætning, for sexarbejderrettigheder indebærer netop en kamp imod disse uretfærdigheder, hvor midlet er at sikre rettigheder og sikkerhed for dem, der arbejder i sexindustrien. Lad mig uddybe dette ved at optegne de generelle udfordringer og vilkår, der kendetegner sexarbejde i Danmark.

De udfordringer, som mange sexarbejdere står overfor, angår især økonomiske forhold, evt. decideret fattigdom og/eller hjemløshed. For migrantsexarbejdere kan der desuden være tale om manglende asyl og borgerrettigheder, herunder personlig retssikkerhed og lige ret til offentlige goder. Derudover er sexarbejdere, statsborgere eller ej, generelt ringe stillet hvad angår retssikkerhed som arbejdstagere, for selvom sexarbejde er lovligt i Danmark, er det ikke anerkendt som erhverv. Det betragtes derimod som et socialt problem og henhører derfor under socialstyrelsen og ikke erhvervsstyrelsen, selvom det at sælge sex er en måde at ernære sig på, hvorfor man naturligvis skal betale skat og moms. Der er altså et unikt misforhold mellem rettigheder og forpligtelser, idet sexarbejderen går glip af ret til fagforening, herunder ret til erstatning ved arbejdsskade, barselsorlov og dagpenge samt beskyttelse mod forskelsbehandling m.m.

Denne kombination af manglende rettigheder og en fastholdelse af sexarbejde som et socialt problem medfører en negativ tendens, hvor sexarbejdere sjældent anmelder vold eller voldtægt, hvis de udsættes herfor, for de bliver mødt af et system, som ser hele sexarbejderens tilværelse som præget af vold og desperation, og vil derfor hellere redde sexarbejderen fra sig selv og ud af denne livssituation end at hjælpe dem i den konkrete volds- eller overgrebssag. Denne tendens forstærkes yderligere af, at mange sexarbejdere risikerer udvisning (hvis man er migrant), eller bøder samt stigmatisering fra politiet og/eller de sociale myndigheder (se Sigurdsson, 2023). Med andre ord forsøger mange sexarbejdere derfor at undgå det "velmenende" systems søgelys, som, imod sexarbejdernes vilje, forsøger at skille sexarbejdernes fra deres levevej, da systemet ikke har fantasi til at forestille sig sexarbejdere som andet end nødstedte. Hvis man derimod gav

sexarbejdere almindelige arbejderrettigheder, ville det skabe grobund for et bedre samarbejde mellem sexarbejderne og myndighederne og dermed også forbedre mulighederne for at bekæmpe den udnyttelse, overgreb og vold, som nogle sexarbejdere desværre udsættes for (Huasheng & Vanya, 2022, s. 757, 783f).

Arbejderrettigheder til sexarbejdere er altså et vigtigt skadesreducerende initiativ, fordi det både hjælper dem, som vil ud af branchen og beskytter dem, som vil fortsætte. Desværre har man ikke iværksat dette initiativ, bl.a. fordi man fra politisk side nødtigt vil gøre arbejdsvilkårene så tålelige (eller ligefrem gode), at man ikke længere skulle finde incitament til at forlade branchen aldeles (Kragh, 2019). Ligeledes er man bekymret for, at rettighedsindrømmelser ville blive opfattet som en blåstempling af sexarbejde som sådan (Danielsen & Larsen, 2019), hvilket man naturligvis vil undgå, hvis man anser det som udnyttelse af kvinder. Man har derfor bevidst ladet stå til hvad angår sexarbejdernes arbejdsvilkår og håbet på, at status quo skulle være afskrækkende i sig selv. Dog har denne taktik ikke haft den ønskede effekt, da mange fortsat vælger at sælge sex, hvilket ikke er overraskende, da ringe retssikkerhed sjældent har trumfet nødvendigheden af ernære sig selv og sin familie.

Egentligt finder jeg det ret ejendommeligt, for ikke at sige ulogisk, at kravet til sexarbejdere om moms- og skattebetaling *ikke* betragtes som en formel anerkendelse af sexarbejde som et legitimt erhverv, mens tildelingen af rettigheder til sexarbejdere bliver anset som en sådan anerkendelse. At tildele sexarbejdere rettigheder er åbenbart en udfordring, fordi man fra politisk side helt grundlæggende ikke kan begribe, at fornuftige, raske mennesker vælger at sælge sex for at tjene til livets underhold. Men hvis det primære politiske mål nu alligevel er at give sexarbejdere gode forudsætninger for at indrette et andet eller bedre (arbejds)liv, så er rettigheder et godt sted at begynde.

Desuden spiller rettigheder også en vigtig rolle i at beskytte sexarbejdere mod re-traumatisering. Selvom jeg ikke deler den ensidige opfattelse, som modstandere af sexarbejde ofte fremsetter; at salg af seksuelle ydelser nødvendigvis

er traumatiserende, eftersom salg af seksuelle ydelser ifølge denne kritik er voldtægt (se Barfod 2009; Bruckert et al., 2013, s. 13f; Grant, 2014, s. 8), erkender jeg selvfølgelig, at risikoen for at pådrage sig et traume også er til stede i sexarbejde. Og *har* man oplevet et traumatiserende overgreb, forværres situationen kun yderligere, når man ikke tør gå til myndighederne for at anmelde det og få hjælp til at bearbejde traumet, fordi man risikerer stigmatisering, udvisning eller bøder, eller at kolleger eller samarbejdspartnere (f.eks. chauffører eller telefondamer) kommer i knibe.

For at forbedre sexarbejders vilkår er det derfor også afgørende, at der sker en afkriminalisering af sexarbejde parallelt med tildelingen af rettigheder. En lov, der kriminaliserer tredjeparten (som det ses i den danske rufferiparagraf (straffeloven §233)) eller kunden (som det ses i den svenske model) medfører nemlig at de ufarlige kunder og samarbejdspartnere bliver skræmt væk, mens de risikovillige og kriminelle forbliver (Vive, 2021, s. 181). På trods af disse konsekvenser, er der stadig mange, som foretrækker en kriminalisering af sexkøbere og tredjeparter. Ofte fremsætter fortalere for kriminalisering holdninger som denne, der er fremsat af Karin Dahl Hansen, chefredaktør på Kristeligt Dagblad: “[Det skal] ikke være tilladt at købe sig til det allermest intime rum hos et andet menneske. Sex er ikke en rettighed, som andre mennesker skal levere” (Hansen, 2023). Også argumentet om, at sexarbejde er et resultat af patriarkalske magtstrukturer, vægter højt hos andre modstandere af sexarbejde (Bruckert et al., 2013, s. 11ff; Hulusjö, 2013, s. 126; Weitzer, 2023, s. 27ff).

Som jeg forstår argumenterne for en kriminalisering af sexkøbere, så er den bagvedliggende bekymring, at en afkriminalisering vil føre til en normalisering af sexarbejde, hvilket potentielt

kunne undergrave opfattelsen af sex som en særlig intim handling. Men formålet med sexarbejderrettigheder er netop at præcisere hvad, der definerer sexarbejde som arbejde og samtidig nuancere forskellene mellem ”almindelig” sex, sexarbejde, seksuelle overgreb og voldtægt for at kunne reflektere over og formulere en stadig skarp seksualitet. Derfor må kampen for sexarbejderrettigheder heller ikke efterlade nogen i tvivl, om at sex i mange tilfælde er en særlig handling, som udføres af og mellem mennesker som holder af hinanden. Denne virkelighed udelukker imidlertid ikke den anden kendsgerning, at sex for nogle også kan være en ydelse, der generer indkomst. Disse to realiteter kan sagsens sameksistere.

På samme vis kan forskellige og modsatrettede oplevelser af sexarbejde også eksistere side om side. Man kan nemlig ikke indfange sexarbejderens hele erfaringshorisont, hvis man insisterer på at kategorisere dem som enten udnyttede eller *empowered* (Grant, 2014, s. 39; Hulusjö, 2013, s. 30f; 133; Weitzer, 2023, s. 6; 33ff), for ligesom så mange andre arbejdstagere i andre brancher, oplever sexarbejdere også en udvikling ift. arbejdsglæde, tanker om- og oplevelser med (valg af) arbejde. Kort sagt findes virkeligheden mellem yderpunkterne.

Derfor, og som en sidste bemærkning, bør det være et grundlæggende princip for politisk og feministisk tænkning, når det angår sexarbejde, at man forholder sig undersøgende overfor fænomenets kompleksitet og ikke mindst er varlig med at diktere, hvordan man bør og ikke bør bruge sin krop. For sexarbejde kan både være en måde at overkomme livets (økonomiske) udfordringer, såvel som en måde at udforske en ikke uvæsentlig del af livet – og sexarbejdernes rettighedskamp rummer begge.

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Game et professorat ...

Margretha Järvinen og Nanna Mik-Meyer:

Køn og Karriere i Akademia. Bag Facaden

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Af Stine Willum Adrian

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Er du forsker eller sidder du i universitetsledelsen, så er *Køn og Karriere i Akademia. Bag Facaden* pligtlæsning. Bogen kan læses både som en guide til, hvordan du 'gamer' dig til et professorat (hvis du er mand) eller som et opråb til politikere og universitetsledelser om at gentænke rammerne for dansk forskning.

Bogen undersøger, hvordan mange års universitetsreformer har påvirket den måde, forskning bedrives på i dag, og hvordan de nyere forskningspraksisser, der er opstået i kølvandet på universitetsreformen i 2003, har en stærk kønnet slagside. Bogen er lille og letlæst. Den er skrevet formidlende og sobert. Den baserer sig på et imponerende stort kvalitativt materiale bestående af 173 semistrukturerede interviews med forskere fra tre universiteter i Danmark. Forskerne, der interviewes, er alle fra samfundsvidenskabelige discipliner – sociologi, statskundskab og økonomi. Interviewene fordeler sig på 96 lektorer og 77 professorer, heraf er 101 mænd og 72 kvinder. Derudover har forfatterne anvendt offentligt tilgængelige

CV'ere på forskernes online universitetsprofiler til blandt andet at kortlægge forskernes publikationsnetværk. Selvom bogen er skrevet formidlende, er der gjort en del ud af at skabe metodisk transparens, så de preære og chokerende fund ikke forsvinder i metodekritik. Med andre ord, studiet er på alle måder bundsolidt.

Bogen er skrevet af de to professorer i sociologi, Margretha Järvinen (KU) og Nanna Mik-Meyer (CBS), der med bogen vælger at forske på deres egen og relaterede fagdiscipliner om hvordan ulighed blandt kønnene opstår. Det er et modigt valg. Selvom sociologien har en stærk videnssociologisk tradition, er det ikke normalt at kigge mod egen praksis, og slet ikke på hvordan uligheder produceres blandt kollegaer. Der har dog længe været et åbentlyst behov for forskning. Med reformer og indføring af det bibliometriske system, færre basismidler og flere strategiske forskningsmidler har forsknings- og publikationspraksisser transformeret sig, og hermed også hvad der forskes om. Hidtil har der ikke været forsket i, hvilke konsekvenser

sådanne omvæltninger har haft for karriereveje og forskningen i samfundsvidenskaberne.

Samtidig har Mik-Meyer og Järvinen været nysgerrige på, hvorfor ligestillingsdagsordenen, der i årevis er blevet diskuteret på universiteterne, endnu ikke har ført til markante ændringer på kønsfordelingen af fastansatte, særligt professorater. Her ligger Danmark i modsætning til de andre nordiske lande i den tunge ende i Europa. Internationalt er der en ret omfangsrig litteratur på køn i akademia. I Danmark har der ikke været det samme fokus på at afdække kønsbalancen blandt fastansatte på universiteterne som fx i Norge, hvor det Norske Forskningsråd i mange år har finansieret forskning gennem BALANSE-initiativet *Kjønnsbalanse i toppstillinger og forskningsledelse*¹. Samtidig har forskningen i Danmark fokuseret på sexismen og work-life-balance. Det vælger Mik-Meyer og Järvinen at gå udenom, skriver de. I stedet er deres nysgerrighed rettet mod hverdagspraksisser i forskningslivet. Her finder de interessante forklaringer på, hvorfor det er mændene, der løber med professoraterne, og hvordan de nye måder at forske på bidrager til at reproducere kønsulighed i akademia.

Studiet er designet som et genkendeligt solidt sociologisk, kvalitativt studie med Bourdieu og kapital-begrebet som analytisk blik, men er alligevel nyskabende, fordi studiet kobler køn og de sidste 20 års forandringer i forskningspraksisser. Det gør forfatterne gennem en række analytiske nedslag i bogens kapitler og ved at zoome ind på forskellige grupper af deres informanter. Først viser de, hvordan strategisk netværksdannelse er blevet nødvendigt med det øgede pres på publicering i internationale tidsskrifter. Her fokuserer de på de mandlige informanter. Aksel, en af informanterne, beskriver forandringen i bogens indledning, hvor han understreger, at netværk i dag er nødvendigt. Det handler ikke "bare" om at være en god forsker. "I dag er vi alle sammen både forskere og sælgere".

Selvom der også er forskel på, hvor gode mændene er til netværksdannelse, så er det dem, der er blandt de mest strategiske. Det beskrives blandt andet ved, at mændene i højere grad netværker med fagfællebedømmere og redaktører

af de internationale (amerikanske) tidsskrifter, for herved at få publikationer igennem i de gode tidsskrifter.

Et andet tema, der tages op er, hvordan forskerens placering i henholdsvis centrum eller periferi af ens fagdisciplin, er væsentlig. Det kan afgøre muligheder for finansiering, prestige og publicering i de tidsskrifter, der er udvalgt som særligt relevante inden for ens fagfelt. Her viser det sig, at de områder eller metoder, mange kvindelige forskere interesserer sig for (herunder familieforskning, kønsforskning, migrationsforskning og kvalitativ forskning), er defineret som perifære. Med en profil inden for de områder bliver det svært at opnå fast stilling og i sidste ende professorat.

Fordelingen af serviceopgaver fra undervisning til administrative opgaver udgør også et analytisk nedslag. Bogen viser, at det ofte er kvinder, der ender med at tage det akademiske "husarbejde". Gennem analysen får vi indsigt i, hvornår og hvilke serviceopgaver, der tæller på CV'et. Og vi lærer hvilke strategier, der kan bruges til at undgå husarbejde, for eksempel "strategisk inkompetence", så der bliver mere tid til forskning. En strategi der igen tilskrives mænd.

Endelig tager forfatterne også de kvindelige forskeres oplevelser i forbindelse med undervisning op. Her beskrives en autoritetskløft i undervisningen, der gør, at man som kvinde typisk skal arbejde hårdere for at opnå autoritet og anerkendelse hos de studerende.

I alle nedslag står køn centralt. Mik-Meyer og Järvinen bygger op til bogens mest interessante fund, nemlig at køn i akademia er tabu. Køn er svært at tale om, flere af de mandlige informanter bliver helt enkelt mundlamme, når forfatterne stiller de to enkle spørgsmål: 1) "Hvordan mener du, at den relativt lave andel kvindelige professorer kan forklares?" Og 2) "Har du været vidne til situationer, hvor mænd og kvinder blev behandlet forskelligt, for eksempel situationer hvor det ene køn blev favoriseret?"

Flere af de mandlige forskere understreger, at køn er en vigtig problematik. Nogle har ingen forklaringer på hvorfor, der er færre kvindelige professorer end mandlige, eller de peger på fortidens kønsforestillinger og praksisser. Andre taler uden

om spørgsmålene, og peger i stedet på de gange, de har bevidnet, at en kvinde er valgt til at blive professor for at sikre diversiteten.

Flemming (s. 90-91), en af de mandlige informanter, mener, at ledelsen på hans institut har fokus på problemet. De har ansat nogle kvindelige professorer, som ifølge ham har stort fokus på pligtarbejdet, og han forklarer, at "[d]et går ud over deres forskning, som så måske ikke ligger på samme niveau som deres mandlige kollegers." På en indirekte facon får Flemming beskrevet, at det ikke er prestigefyldt eller udtryk for at man er en dygtig forsker, når man tager ansvar for instituttets husarbejdsopgaver. Han understreger også, at han nok er lidt "tonedøv". Han er selv optaget af "avanceret teori og hardcore videnskabelig tænkning", hvilket han ikke rigtig har kunne sælge til potentielle kvindelige ph.d.-studerende. På den måde viser Flemming også, at den type forskningsinteresser, der optager ham og andre mænd, opleves som mere væsentlige end dem, hans kvindelige kollegaer fokuserer på.

På trods af tavshed og kønstabu får Järvinen og Mik-Meyer således de mandlige forskere til at fortælle om de praksisser og syn, de har på deres kvindelige kollegaer. Svar, der er med til at forklare, hvorfor kvinder ikke får professorater eller fastansættelser lige så let som mænd. Selv om forfatterne skriver, at analysens fokus ikke er sexismen, er det måske i virkeligheden det, de i dette kapitel får afdækket – ikke den seksuelt krænkende version, men hverdagssexismen. Det er godt gået. Det strategiske valg at fokusere på de mandlige forskere i nogle af kapitlerne giver blik for usynliggørelse og nedprioritering af kvindelige forskeres arbejde. Det er også de rigtige valg, når

bogens mission er at genstarte en debat om konsekvenserne af forskningsreformerne og af køn i akademien.

Som kvindelig forsker pirker det valg samtidig til min nysgerrighed. Hvad sagde ruppen af kvinder, der er blevet interviewet? Hvordan reagerer de, når de læser Järvinen og Mik-Meyers bog? Bliver de lige så forbandet som mig, mens de læser teksten? Ændrer deres syn på akademisk "husarbejde" og "netværk" sig? Og har nogle af de kvindelige forskere såvel som de mænd, der er mindre instrumentelle, andre og alternative bud på, hvordan man kan gøre akademien? De historier kunne også være inspirerende når forskningspolitik skal til debat. Har de andre kriterier for, hvad god forskning er? Er det overhovedet muligt at lancere sådanne alternative historier om forskning som bidrag til den forskningspolitiske diskussion om, hvad relevant og god forskning kunne være?

Bogen udgør et excellent, banebrydende og vigtigt bidrag til vores viden om kønsulighed i akademien. Der er ingen tvivl om, at bogen formår at skabe det nødvendige vidensgrundlag for en langt mere kvalificeret forskningspolitisk og kønspolitisk debat. Tak til forfatterne for det. Vi trænger til at få denne her debat bredt blandt kollegaer, i forskningsgrupperne og på institutter, men mest af alt i den forskningspolitiske elite. Så min opfordring med denne anmeldelse er, at vi sætter netværket igang og får bogen i hånden på alle involverede i forskningspolitik, forskningsfinansiering og universitetsledelse. Det vil kunne bidrage til en mere kvalificeret diskussion om, hvad forskningsexcellence betyder, og hvilke kriterier, vi skal fremover skal bruge, når vi udvælger fastansatte og professorer.

Noter

¹ Se mere: <https://www.forskningsradet.no/finansiering/hva/balanse/>

Rundt om museumsaktivisme

Det aktivistiske museum: praksisser, teorier og aktører

Redigeret af Louise Fabian og Julie Rokkjær Birch

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Det aktivistiske museum udforsker, hvordan museer med aktivisme som katalysator kan sætte retninger for samfundet i nutiden og i fremtiden gennem refleksioner og formidlinger af fortiden. Bogen, en velskrevet og original antologi, er redigeret af Louise Fabian, lektor i Idéhistorie på Aarhus Universitet og Julie Rokkjær Birch, tidl. direktør på KØN, nu Den Gamle By. Den består af tre sektioner med hver sit formål: 1) akademisk og praktisk indføring i temaet museumsaktivisme, 2) beretninger fra tidligere aktivister engageret i eller omkring KØN og 3) konkrete beskrivelser af museumsaktivisme på Museet KØN. Samlet set er bogen et engageret og flot stykke formidlingsarbejde fra VELUX forsknings- og formidlingsprojektet *Gender Blender*, som var forankret på Aarhus Universitet og Museet KØN.

I den danske offentlige debat har begrebet museumsaktivisme mest været fremme i forbindelse med temaer, som ofte forbindes med aktivisme, for eksempel kampen mod social uretfærdighed og undertrykkelse. For nylig har

museumsaktivisme været nævnt i debatten om, hvorvidt Danmark skal have et kolonihistorisk museum eller ej, og et konkret eksempel på museumsaktivisme kunne være Forsorgsmuseet på Sydfyns deltagelse i projektet *Velfærdshistorier fra kanten*. Forsorgsmuseet blev ikke blot omdrejningspunktet for formidlingen af en danmarkshistorie om misbrug og svigt. Museets arbejde spillede en rolle i den officielle undskyldning fra staten til Godhavndrengene. Senest er udstillingen *Anbragt* på Forsorgsmuseet blevet nomineret til en af den internationale museumsverdens største anerkendelser; en pris fra *Museum + Heritage*.

I den videnskabelige litteratur bliver det netop fremhævet, at museumsaktivisme er, når museer bruger deres position i samfundet til at skabe politisk forandring. Men samtidig behøver aktivisme ikke afhænge af, hvilke tematikker et museum arbejder med. Christina Holst definerer museumsaktivisme som "en praksis, hvor museerne bruger historie og deres magtfulde position i samfundet som etablerede videns- og kulturinstitutioner til at

bidrage til løsningen af samfundsmæssige problemer” (Holst, 2018, s. 5). Kasper Rathjen skriver om museumsaktivisme, at den ”[ikke] arbejder ud fra devisen om neutral refleksion og oplysning, men [derimod] giver svar – svar på problemstillinger, der traditionelt henføres til den politiske sfære” (Rathjen, 2020, s. 8).

Det aktivistiske museums hovedargument er netop også, at museumsarbejde allerede og altid er aktivistisk: ”Museer kan ikke længere blot uproblematisk ses som nationale dannelsesinstitutioner for forestillede homogene offentligheder” (s. 23). De er ”en del af skiftende videnskabelige, kulturelle og politiske agendaer” (s. 5), som Louise Fabian skriver i sit velstrukturerede oversigtskapitel om skiftende historiske agender, der har formet museers virke i forskellige perioder fra at være prestigegivende privatsamlinger til at blive nationalideologiske værktøjer for folkeoplysning og inkluderende rum for minoriserede og andetgjorte grupper og personer. Pointen bliver taget hjem flere gange i bogen, for eksempel af Julie Rokkjær Birch, som skriver at ”intet er neutralt – ikke engang museer. Museer burde virkelig være åbne om netop det, deres tro og mission i samfundet” (s. 43).

At afvise idealforestillingen om et neutralt udgangspunkt for forståelsen og formidlingen af historien vil næppe hverken overraske eller provokere de fleste læsere af *Kvinder, Køn og Forskning*. Alligevel er der noget at hente i *Det aktivistiske museum* for både forskere og studerende, praktikere og almindeligt interesserede. Værket samler nemlig vigtige idéer og erfaringer. Ikke bare fra Danmark, men også fra udlandet, for eksempel fra arbejdet med arbejderkultur i Canada og med pige-centreret museumsaktivisme i New Zealand. Samtidig bliver læseren præsenteret for, hvordan teoretiske overvejelser er blevet omsat til museal praksis. For eksempel hvordan affekt, performativitet og positionering har oplyst opbygningen af udstillingerne i FLUGT – Refugee Museum Denmark, Vardemuseerne.

Undervejs påpeger bogens forfattere, at museumsaktivisme også handler om at give adgang til forskellige og uenige stemmer og gæster. Lindsey McEwen opfordrer til ”opmærksomhed

på at engagere og værdsætte skjulte, marginale og mangfoldige stemmer” (s. 47). Cristina Lleras mener, at museet skal kunne tilbyde noget, som gæsterne kan bruge: ”Vi behøver ikke at tænke på klimakrisen og den sociale krise på samme måde, men vi er nødt til at tænke på dem på samme tid,” skriver hun for eksempel (s. 41).

Det aktivistiske museum behandler også museumsinstitutionens indre sammensathed; at ”museers historie er brolagt med vold, tyveri og konflikt [men også] med dannelsesdrømme, visioner og samarbejde” (s. 13). Samtidig bliver der argumenteret for, at ”pionerånden vil hjælpe med til, at de grænser, som traditionelle institutioner kan risikere at stødkne i, kan overskrides uden at troværdigheden går tabt” (s. 125). Bogen belyser også Museet KØNs eget, meget omdiskuterede, skifte fra ’kvindemuseum’ til ’kønsmuseum’ på en nysgerrig og nuanceret måde.

Som udgivelse er *Det aktivistiske museum* inspirerende, fordi den med sin opbygning rent faktisk også gør, som den selv argumenter for. På den måde bliver den til et eksempel på en feministisk praksis, som selv er den forandring, værket ønsker. Der er nemlig givet plads til stemmerne fra både store spillere i feltet – herunder redaktørerne selv og internationale forskere og museumsfolk – samt til de frivillige og i offentligheden ukendte aktører, som gennem tiden bragte aktivismen ind i Kvindemuseet i Aarhus. Det er et flot greb, at disse aktørberetninger får deres egen sektion. Til trods for, at sektionen fylder markant mindst ud af de tre, står den i publikationens struktur stadig lige med de to andre sektioner om teori og praksis.

Et andet eksempel på en, for antologier, normbrydende praksis er kapitlet med dialoger om resiliens mellem museumspraktikere i ind- og udland. Kapitlet er bygget op som en stafetsamtale, hvori pointer fra en samtale tages med i den næste. Kapitlets struktur understøtter dermed igen dets overordnede pointe om styrkelsen af forbindelsen og erfaringsudvekslingen, samtidig med at teksten kommer til at flyde let mellem meget forskellige museumsaktivistiske erfaringer og pointer. Vi hører en beretning fra det tidligere Jugoslavien, hvor kunstnere og aktivister selv, i krigens kølvand, tog sig af indsamlinger i kunst- og

kulturinstitutionernes fravær. Og der bliver sat spørgsmålstegn ved etablerede sandheder, for eksempel om bygninger, udstillinger og samlinger altid er aktiver eller om de (også) afholder museer fra virkelig at tjene publikum og være relevante.

Det aktivistiske museum udkom i november 2023 og i februar 2024 i en engelsksproget udgave. Der er altså tale om en relativ ny publikation, der naturligvis, som alle seriøse værker – især antologier, har været længe undervejs. Men den tydelige påvirkning af at stå midt i covid-19-pandemien, får nogle steder publikationen til allerede at virke forældet. Især kapitlet med de gode stafetsamtalens anslag, at "menneskeheden er midt i en kollektiv sorg, som verden aldrig har set magen til før" (s. 29), er så storladent, at det desværre fra

begyndelsen afsporer denne anmelders opfattelse af, om samtalerne betydninger er generelle eller kun knyttet til pandemien. Følelsen af, at covid-19-pandemien udgjorde et absolut vendepunkt, kan de fleste nok stadig genkalde sig. Alligevel er det nok ikke den aktualitet, som de fleste læsere på udgivelsestidspunktet vil pege imod. Lidt paradoksalt bliver samtalekapitlet indledt med sætningen, at "oprigtigt afgørende øjeblikke er sjældne," (s. 29) mens det forbliver uklart, hvad der egentlig menes med det. Var covid-19-pandemien sådan et øjeblik eller ikke? Under overfladen af den stærke forankring i den seneste pandemi, er *Det aktivistiske museum* dog heldigvis både relevant før, under og efter.

Litteratur

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Homesick or Sick of Home? Unhomeliness and Unhoming in Postmigrant Denmark

Anna Meera Gaonkar:

Feeling Sick of Home? A Cultural Study of Postmigrant Homesickness in Contemporary Denmark

University of Copenhagen, 2022, PhD Dissertation.

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With her dissertation, *Feeling Sick of Home? A Cultural Study of Postmigrant Homesickness in Contemporary Denmark* (2022), Anna Meera Gaonkar offers a timely and convincing study of what she calls “postmigrant homesickness” in postmillennial Denmark. She puts the spotlight on migrantised Danes who were born or grew up in Denmark but are affectively migrantised by socio-political discourse on migration and integration.

Gaonkar extends the notion of homesickness to cover both feeling sick *for* home and sick *of* home, as well as the inverted ‘anti-immigration’ equivalent of “grief-like reactions to the loss of ‘the good old days’ before so-called mass immigration” (p. 21). She convincingly argues that homesickness should not be posited simply as a “universal migrant malady” (p. 23). Rather, a cultural analysis of homesickness needs to engage with oppressive racialised dynamics.

Gaonkar elaborates the ways in which homesickness can be productively related to various notions and forms of migration and mobility, and how the concept of ‘home’ (or the lack thereof; or

indeed, the eviction from it) may serve as an interpretive prism through which we are able to perceive the different emotions and affective dimensions elicited by lived experiences of migration, as well as by reifying and racist discourses on migrants. She explains that cultural and political expressions of homesickness are best understood in relation to postmigrant society if they are read a) as affect; b) in relation to imagined national(ist) communities; and c) as embodied, and as a force that categorises, excludes, and evicts certain bodies and not others. ‘Affect’ here gestures towards the cultural politics of emotions as uncovered in the phenomenological work of Sara Ahmed, because Gaonkar is firmly invested in the politics of who gets to be a “homebody” – someone who, via their racialisation as white, is automatically considered to belong to the realm of the familiar within the Danish nation state.

The use of the term “postmigrant” disrupts the permanent problematisation of the figure of the migrant and the embodied effects of this problematisation, which Gaonkar defines as a

form of racialised migrancy, where visible otherness contributes to a continued experience of not being recognised simply as a citizen. These deliberations lead her to suggest an *inverted* dimension of homesickness: homesickness as feeling sick of home, as well as an *embodied* dimension of homesickness: homesickness as an effect of racialisation.

She sums up her approach thus: “Combining an affective-oriented and postmigrant perspective, I submit that postmigrant society is a highly intense site of affective circulation in which the imaginary of the national home is partly configured through the affective management of migration and migrants” (p. 28). The implications of this condition are unfolded in the analytical part of the thesis, where Gaonkar identifies three dimensions of homesickness in postmigrant Denmark.

The chapter on “Affective inheritances of migration” discusses two films: Anita Beikpour’s short film *Walk with Me* (2017) and the documentary *Far from Home* (2014) by Nitesh Anjaan. Both films centre on intergenerational dynamics between migrated grandparents and grandchildren, who have been born in Denmark. Gaonkar refers to the concepts of ‘postmemory’ and ‘countermemory’ to describe the inherited nature or the affective transferal of memories of migration. In contrast to the public obsession with generational conflict, the two films perform “imaginative memory work” as a form of “‘care work’ on behalf of their family bodies” (p. 86).

The chapter on “Feelings of unhomeliness” deals with non-white postmigrant voices, all of them Danish-born and Danish citizens, who are excluded from their Danish “home” by dominant white society, which at the same time accuses this same generation of failing to enter the Danish mainstream. This double bind leads to a particular relationship to home: a being sick not *for* a desired home, but a being sick *of* it and revolting against it. The postcolonial concept of ‘the unhomely’ leads Gaonkar to distinguish between ‘unhomeliness’ and ‘homelessness’. There is a specific generational unhomeliness, expressed in hostile statements like “go home”, or in the recurring question “where do you come from” in everyday encounters, that

continuously challenges whether racialised members of society can ever be truly Danish. These feelings are performatively explored as being caught between two lovers in Babak Vakili’s podcast *Generationen* (2021), in which he also contests the constant demand to prove one’s loyalty to the country. Malene Choi Jensen’s feature film *The Return* (2018) explores the global adoption industry, the question of kinship, and the failure of any memory of migration for Danes who have been adopted from South Korea as children and are now trying, with varying degrees of success, to explore this heritage in Seoul. Finally, Mikas Lang’s poetry collection *Melanin* (2021) creates Black kinship via intertextual references to Black culture.

The chapter “Affective evictions” discusses how Danish mainstream society in effect evicts – both discursively and in reality – non-Western populations from their Danish “home”. Gaonkar argues that such evictions are rooted in, and in part explained by, a common affect among majority white Danes, a sense and feeling of having lost the true, real, and good old homogenous Denmark. Simply stated, non-Western Danes are racialised, excluded, and evicted in a political and affective effort to reclaim and reconstruct a Denmark, in which white Danes can feel at home. Gaonkar analyses the Security Initiative and the Parallel Society Law as discussed in parliament. She demonstrates how in these discourses the figure of the “insecurity-creating immigrant boy” emerges. Here a nativist mode of homesickness, which is comparable to what Paul Gilroy describes as postcolonial melancholia in the British context, emerges as the longing for a national past and future with less migration from ‘outside Europe.’ Consequently, migrants and their children are, as Gaonkar compellingly terms it, “affectively evicted.” This is traced with reference to representations of the young male migrant and actual legislation on evictions from social housing. Returning to Vakili’s podcast, Gaonkar shows how he uses his art in this hostile climate “to insist on his right to express sickening feelings for home without being threatened with expulsion” (p. 151).

Finally, Gaonkar concludes that the notion of homesickness – and hence also of its derivatives,

for instance, home, unhomeliness, unhoming – offers a fundamental way of understanding how identities and collectives are categorised, grouped, managed, included, and excluded in contemporary Denmark.

Gaonkar's thesis is a lucid identification and examination of affective, emotional, cultural, and ideological mechanisms underlying processes of social, cultural, and political exclusion and segregation. Her conceptual and analytical framework enables her to demonstrate how families with a history of migration relate to "home"; and how ethnic and racial exclusions prevail in postmigrant societies, to the effect that non-white people are prevented from finding a "home" in their country of birth and citizenship.

The dissertation shows how the mechanisms of exclusion are both questioned and consolidated in aesthetic media, cultural discourse, and political policy. The thesis is remarkably coherent, as Gaonkar manages to connect seemingly

disparate experiences and phenomena – relationships within (post)migrant families; the unhoming (exclusion, segregation) of non-Western Danes; and the political establishment's deceptive and delusive rhetoric of Danish homogeneity and Danish values. Gaonkar successfully relates these three aspects precisely through her insisting focus on terms such as "home", "homesickness", and "unhomeliness" and the affects that cling to such terms.

Gaonkar offers an important analysis of the value of postmigrant perspectives, and how such perspectives may pave the way toward a society and culture in which the exclusionary and often racist walls that today surround Danish identity, the Danish home, are dismantled. Innovatively, she does not pathologise migrants' affective bearing but instead asks under what conditions some people are made to feel unhomey in their places of residence and how artistic practices can offer resistant and reparative responses to such feelings.

Strålende afhandling om sort racial isolation

Elizabeth Löwe Hunter

Black Racial Isolation: Understanding African Diaspora Subjectivity in Post-Racial Denmark

Ph.d.-afhandling, African American Studies and the Designated Emphasis in Women, Gender and Sexuality, Graduate Division of University of California, Berkeley, 2023

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I 2023 færdiggjorde Elizabeth Löwe Hunter sin ph.d.-afhandling *Black Racial Isolation: Understanding African Diaspora Subjectivity in Post-Racial Denmark* i afrikansk-amerikanske studier og kønsforskning ved UC Berkeley. Afhandlingens teoretisering og analyser af afrikansk diasporisk subjektivitet udgør et skelsættende bidrag til studier af sorthed i en dansk og nordisk kontekst, men også til kønsforskningen og andre fagfelter, som i disse år undersøger relationerne mellem kolonialisme og antisort racisme samt den specifikke udformning af hvid overmagt og dominans, som strukturerer de nordiske velfærdsstater. Overordnet undersøger afhandlingen, hvordan sorte danskere erfarer og bearbejder betingelserne for *belonging* i Danmark. Hunter forstår ikke *belonging* som selvidentifikation, men som "a potential state of being (in place and in relation) and antonym to the default experience of racialized 'others' in Denmark: alienation" (Hunter, 2023, s. 43). Der er dermed tale om et *belonging*-begreb, som vokser ud af en negation eller en mangel – fremmedgørelsen – og som samtidig længes efter dens omvendning (s. 43).

Et afropæisk feministisk standpunkt

Black Racial Isolation er en monografi, som består af en længere introduktion med teoretiske og metodologiske overvejelser, herefter følger tre analytiske kapitler og en konklusion. Afhandlingens tidsperiode strækker sig fra 1905 og frem til i dag, og den tager udgangspunkt i erfaringer fra den første generation af sorte danskere/afrikansk diasporiske danskere, som er vokset op i Danmark. Hunter arbejder med et arkiv, som dels består af tekstbaserede gengivelser af sort erfaring, dels et omfattende interviewmateriale. Hun har interviewet 34 personer, hvoraf mange er vokset op i familiekonstellationer med én hvid dansk forælder eller i helt hvide familier, hvor der har været få eller ingen muligheder for at finde støtte i multigenerationelle erfaringer med at vokse op som sort og dansk. Det generationelle er dermed ikke defineret af en bestemt tidsperiode, men at relationen mellem det sorte subjekt og hvidheden er defineret af nærhed. I lighed med bell hooks (1994) og Patricia Hill Collins (2000) forstår Hunter hverdagsteoretisering

som en feministisk praksis, som deltagerne tager del i ved at fortælle om og fortolke egne livsomstændigheder i interviewsituationen. Det at styre udenom en automatisk fokusering på traume og minoritetslidelse (Hunter, 2023, s. 19, se også Tuck, 2009) konstituerer et vigtigt etisk princip, og det udmønter sig eksempelvis som en prioritering af interviewspørgsmål, der stimulerer forestillingsevne, ønsker, drømme, fremtidsvisioner og forbundethed.

Afhandlingen er inspireret af dekoloniale, transnationale og afrofeministiske epistemologier. Med afsæt i disse, optegner Hunter et afropæisk perspektiv, der dels henter politisk og konceptuel styrke fra sort feminisme (forstået som et U.S.-amerikansk intellektuelt projekt), dels forpligter sig på at videreudvikle et sort standpunkt forankret i europæisk afrofeminisme (Hunter, 2023, s. 20). Forskere som Fatima El-Tayeb, Philomena Essed, Gloria Wekker, Grada Kilomba, May Ayim, Hazel Carby, Gail Lewis, Nana Osei-Kofi, Temi Odumosu, Ylva Habel, Lena Sawyer og Oda-Kange Midtvåge Diallo er således centrale inspirationer og samtalepartnere. Vigtigheden af positionaltet løber som en rød tråd gennem afhandlingen, og Hunter fastholder det epistemologiske standpunkt, at "*marginalized knowledges contribute scientific insights, in particular research on marginalized communities by its own members*" (Hunter, 2023, s. 24). *Black Racial Isolation* kan dermed også læses som en aktualisering af sort standpunktsfeminisme og som en intervention i et nordisk kønsforskningsfelt, hvor samtidigheden af sorte forskeres underrepræsentation og ekstraktion af sort teori konstituerer sin egen anti-sort dynamik.

Modlæsning som metodologi

Afhandlingens første kapitel genfortæller Victor Cornelins' liv baseret på hans arkiv af breve og dagbogsoptegnelser, og ikke mindst hans selvbiografi *Fra St. Croix til Nakskov* (1976 og 1977). Som Hunter anfører, er mange danske beskrivelser af Cornelins optaget af det ekstraordinære. Cornelins blev som 7-årig frarøvet et liv på St. Croix

og adskilt fra sin mor, for derefter at blive sejlet til Danmark sammen med den 5-årige Alberta Roberts for at blive udstillet i Tivoli i 1905. Alberta døde som 15-årig af tuberkulose, mens Victor blev i Danmark. Cornelins aftjente værnepligt, stiftede familie og fik et langt arbejdsliv som foredragsholder og skolelærer i Nakskov.

Hunter argumenterer for, at den kollektive danske erindringskultur omkring den koloniale vold, som formede Cornelins og Roberts' livsforløb, ofte ansamler sig i forfærdelse omkring udvalgte dele af deres historie, i særdeleshed udstillingsburet. Som et modtræk til spektakuleringen af sorthed (Hunter, 2023, s. 33) insisterer Hunter derfor på modlæsningen som metodologi. Dette indebærer en forståelse af Cornelins' erfaringer som ordinære og hans handlinger som menneskelige reaktioner på umenneskeliggørende betingelser. Dette greb drejer analysen væk fra et racialet register, hvor kritisk engagement med sort lidelse forudsætter gentagelse af undertvingelsens scene (Hunter, 2023, s. 42, se også Hartman, 2008). Med afsæt i Cornelins' livsomstændigheder og selvbiografiens udfoldning af hans erfaringer, udvikler Hunter sit hovedbegreb om *racial isolation*. Gennem forflytningen fra St. Croix til Danmark blev Cornelins både racialiseret som sort og dansk. Hans raciale 'andethed' blev på én og samme tid absorberet og reproduceret i/af en hvid dansk realitet.

Sammenholdt med Cornelins' traumatiserende oplevelser af omplantning – at skulle leve som en organisme i fremmed jord (Hunter, 2023, s. 42) – begrebsliggør Hunter disse processer som et antisort regime, der har den raciale isolation som sin magtform. Sort racial isolation er dermed et begreb, som teoretiserer, hvordan den første generation af sorte danskere i stor udstrækning har adskillelse fra sorte mennesker som et livsvilkår. Det betyder også, at for den første generation foregår udformninger af sort subjektivitet og bearbejdninger af antisorthed adskilt fra andre med samme erfaringer. Hunters analytiske genfortælling af Cornelins' historie viser, hvordan dette vilkår kan skabe en form for racial dissociation, kendetegnet af identifikation med en hvid norm, frem for den dobbelte bevidstheds udvikling af to

referencesystemer (Hunter, 2023, s. 61, se også Du Bois, 1903).

Spektakulariseringer af sorthed

I afhandlingens andet kapitel fokuserer Hunter især på de afrotyske børn og senere voksne, som i 1960'erne og 1970'erne blev forflyttet til Danmark, først gennem private adoptioner og senere gennem det transnationale adoptionssystem. Kapitlet udgør et vigtigt bidrag til kritisk adoptionsforskning, men hvor denne oftest indskriver afrotyske adopterede i en bredere diaspora af transnationalt adopterede, insisterer Hunter på at forstå afrotyske adopterede som en del af den afrikansk-danske diaspora. Afhandlingens analyse peger med rette på, at den danske adoptionslitteratur dels har forsømt at engagere sig mere specifikt med spørgsmålet om antisorthed, dels at den også er delagtig i spektakulariseringer af sorthed - for eksempel ved at gengivelser af de tidlige adoptioner fra Tyskland ofte artikuleres gennem et hvidt blik, hvis empati nærer sig ved det makabre og ekstraordinære.

Historien om hvide danske familiers adoptioner af afrotyske børn bliver oftest fortalt fra ikke-sorte og ikke-adopterede positioner, og selvom de to momenter ikke altid resulterer i genspejling af et hvidt blik, så tydeliggør Hunters analyse vigtigheden af positionalitet og repræsentation. For sorte adopterede (og adopterede mere generelt) er det ikke ligegyldigt, hvordan adoption fortælles frem, men det er heller ikke ligegyldigt fra hvilken position, der fortælles. At omstændighederne omkring de afrotyske adoptioner så ofte bliver genfortalt fra positioner uden levet erfaring som netop afrotysk adopteret repeterer en allerede eksisterende ulighed og frarøvelse af epistemisk autoritet.

Den gruppe af deltagerne, som er vokset op i Danmark i 1960'erne og 1970'erne, har mange erfaringer, der resonerer med Cornelins' oplevelser. Anne, som blev adopteret fra Tyskland i begyndelsen af 1960'erne, fortæller, at under sin opvækst i en hvid familie så eller mødte hun aldrig andre sorte mennesker. Hunters analyse viser, hvordan

den raciale isolations udsultning af spejlingsmuligheder producerer ambivalente bindinger til koloniseret sorthed (s. 88ff). Anne husker FDB's Cirkelpige som den eneste repræsentation af en smuk, sort kvinde, hun havde adgang til som barn, og som derfor fik stor betydning, også i hendes voksenliv. Hunters analyse peger på, hvordan deltagerne på denne måde har lært at relatere sig til et raciale billedsprog gennem identifikation med et hvidt blik (s. 91). Denne problematik kan ikke reduceres til fravær af såkaldt positive repræsentationer af sorthed. Som Hunter argumenterer for, bliver det sorte transraciale adopterede subjekt helt grundlæggende afskåret fra at familiarisere sig med sorthed gennem hverdagslige og kropsliggjorte omsorgsrelationer. På den måde tilegner subjektet sig ikke sorthed som en normalt tilstand, men som en undtagelse i hvidheden.

Den eneste – en kollektiv erfaring

I afhandlingens tredje kapitel analyseres deltagerne eleverfaringer i den danske folkeskole, fortrinsvis fra 1990'erne. Interviewmaterialet rummer mange historier om at være 'den eneste' sorte elev, og analysen viser, hvordan folkeskolen har udgjort en central arena for racial isolation og antisorthed. Dette er forbundet til en dobbeltekendelse. På samme tid som deltagerne under deres skolegang oplevede racialisering og andetgørelse af sorthed, erfarede de også, at de ikke passede ind i fortællingen om den nationale Anden: den muslimske migrant. Deltagerne oplevede med at blive gjort til genstand for antisort racisme af både hvide børn og ikke-sorte børn anskueliggør begrænsningerne ved såvel analytiske som politiske racismekritiske perspektiver, der forlader sig på en skellen mellem en hvid majoritet og et homogeniserende flimmer af brune minoriteter (s. 18). Det, som den første generation af sorte danskere har tilfælles, er netop den specifikke og kropsliggjorte erfaring af antisorthed (s. 116ff). Det kollektive ved denne erfaring består ikke alene i at blive gjort til antisorthedens objekt, men også at den raciale isolations indkapsling af denne undertrykkelse forstørre antisorthedens skadevirkninger (s. 108).

I kapitlets anden del analyseres deltageres ambivalens i forhold til eksisterende minoritetsdiskurser, som for eksempel centrerer spørgsmål om kollektiv smerte. For nogle af deltagerne fremstår det som offergørende, og de forstår i højere grad sig selv gennem figuren 'en almindelig sort dansk person'. Hunter begrebsliggør investeringerne i danskhed og almindelighed som et udtryk for disidentifikation med raciale minoritetsdiskurser (s. 127ff, se også Muñoz, 1999). Dette er ikke det samme som racial dissociation. Deltagerne er både bevidste om og investerede i egen sorthed, men de er forsigtige med at træde ind i en politisk sort position. Analysen viser, hvordan danskhed og almindelighed forstærker hinanden, og hvordan betoning af disse kan forstås som forhandlingsstrategier, der producerer (og måske legitimerer) belonging og sort subjektivitet inden for rammerne af den raciale isolations logikker.

Samtidig optræder der også andre momenter af belonging, som ikke artikuleres gennem danskheden. Deltagerne fortæller om oplevelser og øjeblikke af forbundethed med andre sorte mennesker i geografier, hvor den afrikanske diaspora med dens efterkommere har vokset sig større og har en længere historie (s. 137). Hunter hæfter sig ved, at for deltagerne eksisterer disse erfaringer samtidig med, at de tøver med at udforske mulighederne for forbundethed og belonging med sorte danskere. Dette rører ved et af de grundspørgsmål, som afhandlingen kredser om: Hvad skal der til for, at sort politisk bevidsthed kan slå rod og vokse sig stærkere i Danmark? Analyserne rejser et radikalt forandringskrav, som strækker sig forbi visioner om inklusion og ligestilling på hvidhedens præmisser. Som Hunter formulerer det: "Let us allow ourselves to imagine that we can 'belong to ourselves'" (s. 147, se også Noël, 2019).

Et eksistentielt kompromis

Black Racial Isolation er et skelsættende studie af flere grunde. Skrevet fra et afrofeministisk standpunkt bidrager afhandlingen med ny empirisk viden om, hvordan den første generation af sorte danskere, som er opvokset i overvejende hvide

omgivelser, producerer og forhandler sort subjektivitet. Samtidig udgør afhandlingens formulering af et selvstændigt teoretisk rammeværk, sort racial isolation, et fremragende bidrag til kritiske begrebsliggørelser af antisorthed og racialisering som sort i en dansk kontekst. Teoretiseringen supplerer eksisterende teoridannelser, som fokuserer på at diagnosticere segregering som en central magtform i den hvide overmagts undertrykkelse og kontrol af sorte befolkningsgrupper. Ifølge Hunter, eksemplificerer deltageres erfaringer med sort racial isolation 1) allestedsnærværelsen af racial hvidhed på et ideologisk plan, for eksempel dominansen af eurocentriske nationalistiske diskurser og udbredte forestillinger om Danmark som 'godgørende' kolonimagt, 2) at isolationen er en materiel realitet – såvel kropslig som psykologisk og 3) at hvidhedens normer bliver indlært i den intime sfære, det vil sige gennem omsorg, familieband, venskaber og senere i skolen (s. 139). Erfaringen af sort racial isolation, at være 'den eneste' sorte person – selv i omgivelser som ikke er eksplicit voldelige – kan, skriver Hunter, føles som et eksistentielt kompromis (s. 109). Det udfoldes kun delvist, hvordan denne tilstand af eksistentielt kompromis manifesterer sig i de transraciale slægtskabsrelationer, som forbinder deltagerne til en eller flere hvide forældre, familiemedlemmer og partnere, men dette peger sig ud som et fremtidigt forskningstema (s. 143).

Black Racial Isolation er et centralt studie for alle, der gerne vil blive teoretisk og empirisk klogere på det, Hunter andetsteds har kaldt "racialiseringens kolonialitet i Danmark" (2021). Samtidig er det først og fremmest en tekst skrevet til sorte danskere. Som en nedrivning af sort isolation og opbygning af sort forbundethed. Det stiller nogle krav til os, der læser med fra andre positioner. Der er fortællinger i *Black Racial Isolation*, som med tyngde minder mig om oplevelser fra mit eget liv som koreansk adopteret i Danmark. Og der er teoretiske og analytiske indsigter, som giver mig lyst til at revidere tekster, jeg har skrevet og gerne vil skrive. Jeg har været fristet af at lade både genkendelse og selvrevision drive min læsning. Men den impuls rummer også åbninger for appropriering

og kollaps af forskellighed, som taler ind i det euro-amerikanske universitets ekstraktion af sort vidensproduktion og fortrængning af antisorthedens specificitet. Denne overvejelse handler ikke om at isolere eller afskærme *Black Racial Isolation* fra et bredspektret engagement, men om at forsøge at møde afhandlingen på en måde, som både er investeret i at forstå dens kernespørgsmål om sort subjektivitet og antisorthed som eksistensbetingelse og at medtænke engagementets (raciale) politikker.

Tilbage står, at *Black Racial Isolation* udgør et strålende forskningsbidrag. Den er utrolig velskrevet og fortjener at blive læst omhyggeligt og langsomt. Jeg ville ønske, at teksten i sin helhed også kunne læses på dansk. Med afsæt i et imponerende teoretisk overblik fremskriver Hunter et væld af analytiske pointer, som på kritisk vis afnaturaliserer kolonialitetens præmisser for sort subjektivitet. Det er en praksis, som bygger en anden verden gennem at skabe nye betingelser for sort politisk bevidsthed i Danmark. Den kan varmt anbefales.

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