



# EVERYDAY ACTIVISM AND RESISTANCE BY MINORITY WOMEN IN DENMARK

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## ABSTRACT

STEREOTYPES OF MINORITY WOMEN, AND IN PARTICULAR MUSLIM WOMEN, ARE BEING USED TO PUSH CERTAIN GROUPS TO THE MARGINS OF DANISH SOCIETY, BOTH DISCURSIVELY AND GEOGRAPHICALLY. FOCUSING ON TWO CASE STUDIES WORKING IN THE SOCIAL PERIPHERY, ANDROMEDA, 8220 AND KVINDER I DIALOG, THIS ARTICLE ILLUMINATES HOW THE SAME STEREOTYPES ARE USED IN THE PRODUCTION OF COUNTERNARRATIVES THAT RESIST STIGMA AND DIVISIVE POLICIES. DESPITE THE MEDIA ATTENTION THAT THE NEW LAWS IN DENMARK SUCH AS "GHETTO" REFORMS AND MASKING BAN HAVE RECEIVED, LESS ATTENTION HAS BEEN PAID TO EXAMPLES OF RESISTANCE AND THE FIGHT FOR POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITY. BY FURTHER DEVELOPING AND EMPLOYING POSTCOLONIAL AND FEMINIST THEORY IN A DANISH CONTEXT, THIS ARTICLE ADDRESSES THIS GAP AND EMBARKS ON AN ANALYSIS OF MINORITY WOMEN'S CULTURAL ACTIVISM AGAINST HOMOGENIZATION.

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## Introduction

Minority women, and in particular Muslim women, are marginalized in Danish society through a gendered and racialized rhetoric and approach to policies. This stigmatization works through a homogenization of a very heterogeneous demographic and is used to exercise an approach to mainstream politics that seeks to keep minorities at the periphery or encourage them to adapt to supposedly Danish values and norms. Whilst the recent masking ban (brought into effect in August 2018) targets a specific group of women who wear a niqab or a burqa, it is symbolic of a wider criminalization of ethnic minorities in Denmark, such as the governmental ghetto list, which identifies what are deemed to be problematic and non-Danish residential areas. However, such discursive and geographical marginalization also establishes the possibility and indeed necessity for solidarity, social movements and cultural resistance. Through continued and aggravated marginalization, these individuals are pushed to the margins of society; consequently, the need to resist and create counternarratives is reinforced.

Examples of this type of resistance in Denmark are the two case studies that will be discussed in this article. First of all, the gallery and cultural platform *Andromeda, 8220*, which is situated in Gellerup, an area associated with the ghetto list. Secondly, the *Kvinder i Dialog* (Women in Dialogue), a political group who challenges the new law in Denmark that prohibits the wearing of niqab or burqa in public spaces. These case studies differ in many ways, but they share the common feature of being new initiatives that perform resistance by using and complicating the idea of minorities through the creative production of alternative narratives and perspectives. They also complement each other by highlighting varying yet overlapping aspects of the infrastructure of racism, be they through space or language. Through the quest for representation in the public sphere, they expose the varieties and nuances of marginalized subjects and give their position a voice.

We therefore argue that the opposition to the laws and policies in Denmark undertaken by minority women in these case studies demonstrates a fight for political agency through the strategic use of the limited identities imposed upon them. Much media attention, both national and international, has been given to the policies themselves.<sup>1</sup> However, we seek to diverge from this tendency and pay closer attention to the details of self-organised, self-representative practices. We have chosen to focus our analysis on the year 2018, both as a pragmatic choice to meet the challenges of writing on contemporary matters (much has changed since we began writing this paper), but primarily because we see 2018 as a year where a number of prior developments culminated.

In order to unpack these case studies, we apply an interdisciplinary methodology that utilizes both discursive and visual approaches, and which is grounded in an intersectional understanding of structural oppression. Relations of domination as well as social struggles and resistance are fuelled by intersecting dynamics and identities, and in the case of this article, we interrogate how gender might be used in and for the agenda of a simultaneously racist politics. Theoretically, we read the case studies through the context of the contemporary Danish climate and are inspired by Sara Farris and her work on what she defines as “femonationalism”, which highlights a convergence between right-wing nationalism, neoliberalism and feminism, and which invokes women’s rights in order to stigmatize immigrants (2017, p. 3). We also utilize the black feminist scholar bell hooks (1989), who perceives the margin to be a place with radical political potential. We employ this concept as a valuable analytical tool for understanding the dynamics of a racialized and gendered situation, even though the space and time of our analysis is obviously different to that of hooks. Similarly, we use the subaltern theory developed by Gayatri Chakravrti Spivak in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988[1993]) to better understand what can be called peripheral activism (activism from marginal spaces), and how this location needs to be understood as flexible and elusive (1993, p. 81).

We therefore seek to demonstrate that there is an analytical potential in activating the concepts of subalternity and marginality in a contemporary, Scandinavian context. We apply this theoretical framework to our case studies by investigating how *Andromeda, 8220* and *Kvinder i Dialog* produce counternarratives through their campaigns, protests and online presence. By doing so, we aim to contribute to knowledge about new forms of activism and social movements from the perspective of mediated cultural activism and practices of self-representation in Denmark. It is not in the scope of this article to discuss exactly how so-called ghettos come into existence and where the political responsibility lies for any socio-economic challenges that such areas might present. Similarly, we do not set out to discuss the actual lived conditions of Muslim women. Rather, we focus on how *ideas* of these intersecting issues in contemporary Denmark are manifested in examples of counternarratives.

As writers of this article, we wish to emphasize our own positionality as white, non-Muslim scholars who write from a very

different situation from those we explore in our analysis. Indeed, in the same article that we will later draw on in the analysis, hooks criticizes the work of white researchers about marginalised subjects that speaks “about us”, not “to us and with us”, and which portrays the margin as “a sign of deprivation, a wound, an unfulfilled longing” (1989, p. 36). Subsequently, our focus is not “pain”, but “creativity and power” (hooks, 1989). We therefore seek not to romanticize these experiences or practices, but rather to investigate an underexplored aspect of the current political climate in Denmark.

## Danish Context: The Ghetto List

The main theme of the 2018 New Year’s Speech by the former Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen was the so-called Danish ghettos, or what he defined as “holes in the map of Denmark” (Rasmussen, 2018). Referring to the concrete residential buildings, he dramatically declared that the state would: “Bryde betonen op. Rive bygninger ned. Spredde indbyggerne” (Break up the concrete. Tear down the buildings. Spread the inhabitants) (Rasmussen, 2018). By using the metaphor of holes in the map, he discursively implied that the so-called ghettos are not recognized as Danish areas, but rather as (dark) stains on the (white) fabric of Danish society. The speech must be understood as a direct extension of the former policies and initiatives connected to the ghetto list, which were introduced by the government in 2010. The list was part of a larger campaign to tackle what the government defines as *parallel societies*, which they deem exist separately albeit within Denmark. The New Year’s speech was the beginning of a policy escalation in the spring of 2018, where Løkke introduced a ghetto plan of new policies to tackle these areas.

There are the two types of residential areas on the aforementioned ghetto list: *udsat boligområder* (vulnerable residential areas) and *ghettoområder* (ghetto areas). To be in the former category, an area needs to meet a minimum of two out of four criteria that concern issues such as unemployment levels, education standards, taxable income and crime rates. To be in the latter category, an area must fulfil a very distinct fifth criteria:

Andelen af indvandrere og efterkommere fra ikke-vestlige lande overstiger 50 pct. (The proportion of immigrants and descendants from non-western countries exceeds 50 percent)  
(Ghettodefinition, Regeringen, 2017).

There are several noteworthy points in this definition. Primarily, the classification of a so-called ghetto is unashamedly based on the racial and ethnic identities of its inhabitants. According to Danmarks Statistik (Denmark’s Statistics), the non-Western countries are all countries in the world except EU member states, Andorra, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Norway, San Marino, Switzerland, The Vatican, Canada, USA, Australia and New Zealand (Danmarks Statistik). The main variation that separates a vulnerable residential area and a ghetto area is thus the residents’ lack of whiteness, which underscores the ideological construct of the West as superior. This list of countries swiftly erases histories of European colonization which have resulted in countries such as New Zealand and Australia being considered Western. The definition equates not being Western with being a problem and presents this position as objective knowledge. The concept of non-western covers an enormous group: the definition thus homogenizes a variety of differences into a simple category, whilst simultaneously creating a hierarchy between types of immigrants (it implies that white, Western immigrants are not an issue). Furthermore, the definition manifests a development in the category of non-Western by including a generational aspect, where descendants of non-Western immigrants are also included despite having been born in Denmark.

The language in the policy documents also exemplifies an erasure of the habitable nature of the so-called ghettos. Whilst the first area is called a vulnerable residential area (*boligområde*) the notion of residence is completely excluded from the second type, simply referred to as *areas*. This contrast implies that living is not done in the ghettos or that they are not worth living in, a description that subtly strengthens the government’s agenda of breaking apart these multi-ethnic localities.

The new ghetto plan of policies from spring 2018 also introduced the term “hård” (severe) ghetto, which defines areas that have been on the list for four years in a row (Regeringen, 2018, p. 13). In these areas, stigmatization is directly enforced through new practices, such as the demolition of residential areas; more control of who can live there; a strengthened policing and higher penalties; stronger combat of crime and increased security; and specific actions towards children, such as forced

day care attendance. The initiative thus involves a different treatment of people based on their address, which again is based on the inhabitants' race and ethnicity. It can thus be argued that these policies are essentially legalizing racism in Denmark. Indeed, in this official use of the term ghetto, there is no sensitivity towards the concept's history in, for example, the Nazi-regime in Germany.

## Danish Context: The Politics of the Veil

In the summer of 2018, the Dansk Folkeparti (Danish People's Party, from now on DF) launched a new campaign. Posters hanging on bus stops and billboards featured the faces of the head figures of the party, who were drawn as cartoons, speaking one-dimensional, supposedly unifying truths about their stance on Danish politics and values (Dansk Folkeparti, 2018). The poster featuring politician Martin Henriksen was the most specific, featuring the imperative demand: "Smid tørklædet og meld dig ind i Danmark" (Toss the scarf and join Denmark) (Dansk Folkeparti, 2018). The language used here is simultaneously vague and specific: the pervasiveness of the debate about women and Islamic veiling in Europe means that they can appeal to the viewer's knowledge and ability to make the link between implication and explicit subject without having to reference Islam, the burqa or the niqab. The ultimate irony of the poster is that it activates a broader right-wing position and language that has been used in other contexts such as France and Belgium: this is by no means just about Denmark. This rhetorical tactic, coupled with the distancing nature of cartoons, means that a stance can be made public without taking direct responsibility.

The discussion about Muslim women and the Islamic veil that the posters tap into has a long history in Western Europe. The simplified construction of the homogenous figure of the Muslim woman secures, as historian Joan W. Scott illustrates, the mythic vision of the nation and its internal cohesion (2007, pp. 10, 89). The veil has become a screen onto which images of strangeness and fantasies of danger are projected and is subsequently an emblem of "incompatible cultures" (Scott, 2007, pp. 5, 10). This stereotyped notion of Muslim women is also addressed by the gender scholar miriam cooke (2007) through the neologism "the Muslimwoman". The concept accentuates how the figure of "the Muslimwoman" has become an identity that deprives the women in question of both individuality and agency (cooke, 2007, p. 140).

Islamophobia can be interpreted as an example of femonationalist ideology when it is presented as liberating (Muslim) women from (Muslim) men (Farris, 2017, pp. 11, 25). The figure of "the Muslimwoman" was at the heart of the specific debate on the masking ban, which came into effect on 1 August 2018, and the mainstream discourse portrayed the law as necessary for women's liberation. For example, the purpose of the law was linked by politicians to the idea that the burqa and niqab "er symbolet på social kontrol, på at kvinder ikke har frie og lige muligheder" (the symbol of social control, of women not having free and equal opportunities) (Ingvorsen, 2018). As former prime minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen stated, it is "et symbol på kvindeundertrykkelse" (a symbol of women's oppression) ("Løkke: Burkaer er kvindeundertrykkende", 29.09.2017). As is evaluated in the work of Farris (2017), the construction of the poor and oppressed Muslim woman transforms racialized language into something morally acceptable (pp. 28, 55).

The masking ban debate was also frequently connected to the question of what kind of country Denmark should be. As the Social Democrat politician Nicolai Wammen answered: "et land, [...] hvor mænd og kvinder er ligeværdige eller vil vi være et land, hvor vi synes, det er fint med social kontrol" (a country where men and women are equal, or where we think it is OK with social control?) (Jeppesen, 2017). This rhetoric resonates with the same point as the DF poster, through its use of the construction of a mythic vision of a united nation through an othering of difference (Scott, 2007, p. 10). However, this type of positioning between feminism and conservatism, which Farris calls a "weird alliance" (Farris, 2017, p.11), is hollow: the notion of equality that is used is unspecific and it ignores the fact that dictating what women can or cannot wear exercises the same type of power that they attempt to criticize. Furthermore, Wammen's statement ignores the fact that, in 2018, Denmark did not even rank in the top ten global countries for gender equality in metrics such as the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2018).

The political campaigns and policies hitherto discussed thus work to, as Islamic scholar Oliver Roy notes, "[establish] Muslims as a single community" through "specific legislation that serves to objectify them" (2004, p. 15). Indeed, we suggest that the aims of the ghetto reforms and the masking ban can be understood to be operating on the same logic of uncovering and

revealing that which is perceived to be dangerous. For example, in her writings on disgust and othering, Sara Ahmed explores the affects of the wave of Islamophobia after 9/11. In her analysis of a specific reaction to the attacks, which stated that perpetrators must be “sought out, flushed from the holes in which they cower...”, she explains: “hidden in holes, the others threaten through being veiled or covered. The others who are the objects of our disgust must be penetrated and uncovered” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 97). A connection can thus be traced from the Løkke administration’s desire to close the holes in Denmark’s map and the lifting of the veil. Veiled women become a specific site onto which other anxieties about immigration and cultural change are transferred. In the following sections, we will explore two manifestations of activism that creatively refute these stereotypes.

## Case Study One: Andromeda, 8220

Andromeda, 8220 is a cultural platform, gallery and event space located in the heart of Gellerup, an area in the municipality of Aarhus. The number ‘8220’ refers to the area’s postcode. The fact that the postcode plays a part in the initiative’s public identity is highly significant. The postcode of the centre of Aarhus, otherwise known as ‘Aarhus C’, is 8000; the inclusion of the postcode of Gellerup in the name of the platform, situated to the west of Aarhus, thus becomes a marker of distinction from the city centre.

As previously outlined, areas such as Gellerup are deemed to be ghettos in the national discourse and policy on social housing. Gellerup is now also officially classed as a severe ghetto, the most extreme form of the parallel societies that the government deems to be actively positioning themselves against the status quo of Danish values. However, as critics of the ghetto rhetoric and reforms suggest, the issue is not so simple: “a question that [...] remains unanswered is, in the existing and future framework of strong levels of social control, who are then the ones producing this parallel society?” (Waco & Aaby, 2018). Indeed, in an article for the architectural magazine *The Funambulist*, the project’s figurehead Aysha Amin (2017) has stated that “though the word [ghetto] is supposedly a harmless classification, calling a neighbourhood like Gellerup a ghetto makes residents like myself worth less in the eyes of the state than those who live elsewhere.” Here, Amin uses her personal perspective to underline how the government’s “definition lacks any considerations of the social, spatial, and cultural values of the neighbourhood” (Biennale Architettura, 2018). As a result, Gellerup is experiencing fundamental changes to its geography and image as the local government seek to redevelop the area and make it more appealing to the middle classes.

The brandishing of an officially criminalized postal code therefore renders visible the cultural politics of urban planning, subverting the margin of the city into a space for creativity and pride. By challenging the associations of the area, Andromeda, 8220 seeks to tell a different story about Gellerup that resists the negative and homogenizing narrative of the media and of policies, and it does so from the position of the social, political, geographical and economic margin as a space of what bell hooks calls “radical openness” (1989, p. 19). Indeed, in her essay “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness”, hooks argues for an understanding of the margin as “more than a site of deprivation”; a place for “radical possibility” (hooks, 1989, p. 20). Through a retelling of her own “lived experience” of marginality as a black woman growing up in the south of the United States, hooks notes:

It was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of a counter hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives...It offers one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds (hooks, 1989, p. 20).

For hooks, the margin is a crucial location for the production of discourses and actions that challenge the oppressor (hooks, 1989, p. 19). By paying attention to how the initiative subverts negative stereotypes of the area and of women through social media and in-house events, we argue that the very marginalization of Gellerup on behalf of the government creates the possibility for resistance through a counternarrative.

Gellerup is an area that is defined by its concrete apartment block housing. These affordable examples of modernist architecture, relics of the utopian thinking of the 1960s and 70s, have now become what Waco and Aaby call “engines for social pathologies” (2018). The blocks that were originally built in order to provide comfortable, affordable and community-focused living for all “have now paradoxically been reduced drastically in the political discourse to epicenters for socio-economic issues

and frequent crimes” (Waco & Aaby, 2018). This is not just the case in Denmark but in a large number of similar modernist housing projects and cases of neighbourhood planning in Europe, such as Lichtenberg in Berlin and Scampia in Naples. Waco and Aaby claim that the media have been at the centre of this changing perception of Gellerup and the current stigma, as a “single televised episode on national TV from 1978 triggered the changing image by framing the housing project as a concrete slum” (2018).

Whilst the blocks have become a signifier of decay and threat in the media, Andromeda, 8220 seeks to resist this homogenizing view of Gellerup through the development of its own housing block iconography. Through a strong social media presence, the platform challenges negative representations with its own playful visual activism, which art historian T.J. Demos defines as “politically directed practices of visibility aimed at catalyzing social, political, and economic change” (2016, p. 3). The primary communication platform for Andromeda, 8220 is Facebook, and the cover graphic of the page is an initial example of what bell hooks calls a “politics of location”, which is essential to the “formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practice to identify the spaces where we begin the process of revision” (1989, p. 15). By activating and indeed animating the imagery of the oppressive political discourse, Andromeda rewrites the narrative of Gellerup from the perspective of a resident.



**Fig. 1**  
Screengrab of  
Andromeda’s  
Facebook  
cover photo.  
November  
2018.

In Fig. 1, the cover photo from Andromeda, 8220’s Facebook page, a housing block dances across the screen juxtaposed against a background of dense tropical foliage. This image functions on multiple levels. For one, the building’s movement undoes the apparent stasis of the area, suggesting vibrancy, life and humour. Furthermore, the tropical backdrop is a politically charged choice, implying the jungle and thus colonial notions of the other, or indeed a place of danger, unpredictability and darkness. The racial implications of the jungle subtly echo the ghetto policies that stigmatize non-Western residents. By playing into the iconography of otherness, and subsequently exposing how the image of Gellerup is constructed by external actors, Andromeda, 8220 is, as hooks notes, “unwilling to play the role of ‘exotic other’” (1989, p. 19), as the initiative is active and critical, rather than passive as the political mainstream perceive or expect. The project is unashamedly present and visible, its very visibility acting as a disturbance to the government’s agenda that seeks to make the buildings (and the communities that live there) disappear.

Andromeda, 8220 also creates solidarity across borders by comparing the situation in Gellerup to other countries. A social media campaign that started in 2018 shares images and media that feature other blocks from around the world every Sunday in a post called SØNDAGSBLOK (Sunday’s Block). In these posts, reference is made to La Courneuve’s Barre Robespierre in Paris, the Kleiburg block in The Netherlands and The Barbican in London, as well as urban housing in Hong Kong, China and Russia. By sharing music videos, images and screen grabs, Andromeda, 8220 “stays in” and “clings to” the margin (hooks, 1989, p. 20), establishing a virtual solidarity with people from around the world living in similar conditions of precarity under government control in (in some cases, social) housing that is no longer serving its purpose, either as affordable or democratic.



**Fig. 2**

Screengrab of Facebook post. Andromeda Facebook page. November 2018. Caption translation: Uhhmm winter time = t-shirt time! Now you can shop Gellerup for the whole family. Kåre Viemose made the picture. You can buy it for 250 kr. We offer good family discounts if you buy four or more!!! Come down and find out which block suits you best.

Indeed, a primary aim of the aforementioned ghetto plan of reforms is to demolish several of these buildings. Drawing attention to the demolitions and the displacement that they will cause, as well as trying to save the buildings, are causes that have become central to Andromeda, 8220's activism through the establishment of a visual aesthetic that embraces and commemorates the grey facades. For instance, in 2018 a series of t-shirts was launched by the platform featuring large photographs of the residential blocks. Taken by locals, these images counter the negative perceptions associated with the buildings that are perpetuated by the demolitions. They portray the housing blocks positively, showing soft light reflected in apartment windows at sunset and snowmen on the communal grass, exemplifying an act of documentation and preservation in an area that is rapidly changing (Fig. 2). The wearing of a t-shirt, an embodied act often associated with fandom and admiration, thus suggests feelings of appreciation and belonging, rather than criticism. The sign *Familiecenteret* (Family centre) in Fig. 2 draws attention to the fact that Gellerup is an area which many families call home.

Thus, by utilizing images of the block housing in campaigns, local initiatives and aesthetics, the Andromeda, 8220 project draws attention to how *representations* of the Gellerup area are mediated and employed in the mainstream narrative of the government, its policies and the media, just as much as by Andromeda, 8220. Reproducing and distributing the blocks in ways that are both critical and celebratory challenge the single, stable truth of the area as defunct that the ghetto policy attempts to convey, albeit devoid of the personal stories and experiences of those that live there.

In addition to its online activities, Andromeda, 8220 is first and foremost a physical gallery and event space. Situating a cultural space in Gellerup resists the pull of the cultural and political centre of the city, encouraging people from the local area and the city centre to move out into the urban periphery through a series of debates, workshops, readings and film screenings. It is in these events that we see a particular solidarity with minority women and where Andromeda, 8220 emerges as a feminist space not only committed to discussing and disrupting the social, economic and political changes in Gellerup as a whole, but also the particular forms of oppression experienced by minority women. Making a safe public space for women in Gellerup is particularly poignant when the micropolitics of the locality are also considered, such as the recent removal of women-only swimming sessions at the Gellerup pool.

When less and less emancipatory space is being made for minority women both physically and ideologically, Andromeda,



8220 establishes a platform for other stories to be told and heard. For example, zine-making is a primary facet of Andromeda's activities. As a creative practice, zine-making is historically connected to resistance movements and subcultures. Zines are a form of "non-commercial, non-professional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves" (Duncombe, 1997, p. 6). They are a tangible, material means of expressing ideas and they employ a DIY ethics and aesthetics that discard the need for endorsement by the traditional gatekeepers of publishing, allowing for a variety of voices and stories. As Kimberley Creasap (2014) notes, "whether an individual or collective effort, making zines is a collaborative process" (p. 156). In 2018, Andromeda, 8220 collaborated with the Somali cultural organization Gobad to make a zine called "Decolonize your Tastebuds". By facilitating the making of a zine not only about but also with local Somali women, Andromeda, 8220 enacts an affirmation that the dominant narrative denies these women in terms of representation. By using a printed format that has always been associated with counter cultures, underground movements and political struggles, the zine form is used in order to insist that minority women in the Gellerup community are political and organized subjects.

By engaging in practices of cultural activism and collaborative artistic encounters, Andromeda, 8220 thus challenges not only the aforementioned policies but also the notion of a homogenous Danish culture. For instance, in November 2018 the gallery hosted an event called "Storytelling, Womanhood and Veiling" at which both writers were present. We argue that such an event has twofold significance. First of all, by hosting an event that features poetry reading, storytelling and music, the depth and complexity of minority women's lived experiences is voiced and communicated to other people in the margins, as well as those who move out to the margin in solidarity. Gathering to hear women speak resists the ways in which the nuances of individuals are reduced by the dominant narratives, simplifying the relationship between gender and faith. Secondly, Andromeda, 8220's programming exemplifies a resistance to what Camilla Møhring Reestorff and Carsten Stage identify as the politics of government initiatives such as the Danish Cultural Canon (published 2006). As they argue, this project attempted to "achieve cultural reterritorialisation by intertwining 'cultural identity', linked to a specific construction of 'local traditions', with the territorial borders of the nation" (2011, p. 226). However, "the object [of] 'Danish culture' is impossible, and what is at stake in the Cultural Canon is thus precisely a representation of impossibility, namely culture understood as a national unit untouched by the pluralistic influences of the processes of Danish society" (Reestorff & Stage, 2011, p. 228). The list, which featured examples of literature, visual arts and architecture amongst other genres "disregards the diversity of cultural positions existing within Danish society and subordinates these positions to a national culture which is made valid for all Danish inhabitants" (Reestorff & Stage, 2011, p. 227).

When the government's use of culture is understood as part of a mainstream ideology, Andromeda, 8220's identity as an arts and culture platform for and by minorities becomes increasingly significant. We read this platform as a kind of everyday activism through its creation of space for a plurality of voices and perspectives, challenging not only the representation of the ghettos but also of what culture is and where it is produced.

## Case Study Two: Kvinder i Dialog

The group Kvinder i Dialog (Women in Dialogue) state on their webpage: "It's time to talk with us – not about us" (Kvinder i Dialog, 2018a). Reminiscent of the words of hooks that were discussed at the beginning of this article, these words also signal the recognition of the continued objectification of Muslim women and demonstrate how this understanding is actively being used as a political tool. As the debate about a potential ban on Islamic face covering unfolded during the years 2017/2018, the group Kvinder i Dialog was founded through a growing connectivity and solidarity. They pushed their way into the public debate from which they were systematically excluded, both opposing the law in question and the framework they were presented in. In this section, we will analyze the ways in which their online activism through videos and archival practices, their face-to-face activities on the street and through open houses, and their use of dialogue work to undermine and invert the stereotypes used to represent them.

In the debate on the masking ban in Denmark, the figure of "the Muslimwoman" (cooke, 2007) was at the heart of the discussion, while the women themselves were rarely listened to. This complexity is illustrated through the postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak and her concept of the subaltern. In her famous essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988[1993]), Spivak

develops the idea of the subaltern to refer to a situation of muteness, of being on the side of a relationship of dominance that is rarely seen or heard (1993, p. 75). According to Antonio Gramsci, who first used the term 'subaltern' in his *Prison Notebooks*, the term refers to the non-hegemonic group (1971, p. xiv). Spivak uses this term to describe the paradox of speaking but still not being heard due to positionality (1993, pp. 80, 87). This theory encourages an understanding of what is at stake for the *Kvinder i Dialog*: they are trying to make their perspectives heard, and they articulate their persistent discursive marginalization through their activities, writings and by rejecting the erasure of their diversity.



**Fig. 3**

Screen grab from *Kvinder i Dialog*. (I love potatoes and brown sauce. I mean, seriously right. And with red cabbage! It is the best). Retrieved from <http://kvinderialog.dk/videoer.html>, November 2018.

The group consists of women both with and without a niqab, and their aim is to engage in dialogue and educate the public. Spivak underlines the difficulty of rewriting conditions by creating such a space: the "oppressor's language" is the only one available, which leads to representations being determined by the governing ideology (Spivak, 1993, pp. 73, 78). For instance, in one video (Fig. 3), members of *Kvinder i Dialog* transmit a clear image of being Danish, using identity markers to illustrate their familiarity with Danish culture. In this example, familiarity is signified by the classic Danish meal of potatoes, brown sauce and red cabbage (*Kvinder i dialog*, 2018b). As Reestorff and Stage note, this could be understood as an example of Muslims needing "to show how he or she manages his or her 'Muslimness'" (2011, p. 224):

...the identification "Muslim" is met with a demand for self-declaration which would never be asked for in relation to say Christians or Buddhists. Muslims are expected to prove their loyalty to national culture and the nation state, creating a problematic link between political/cultural hegemony and social legitimacy (Reestorff & Stage, 2011, p. 224).

However, we also suggest that by speaking through the niqab about stereotypical Danish food, the women draw attention to how their niqab is a material garment that does not automatically make them incongruous with Danish tastes. Pairing conservative Islamic dress with traditional Danish food unravels assumptions, demonstrating that all cultures have their traditions and that they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. This merger of cultures is a way of resisting the homogenization they are exposed to and demonstrates how presumably stable categories are negotiable and permeable. This exemplifies the notion of *bicultural identities* (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013), which try to address the ambiguous position of immigrants, ethnic minorities, mixed-ethnic individuals and other heterogeneous groups. Danish food culture has commonly been used to actively *other* Muslims, especially through the elevation of pork as a traditional Danish food. *Kvinder i Dialog's* resistance demonstrates the arbitrary lines of one's culture, and how these cultural and discursive borders are used in racialized marginalization.

The online activism of the *Kvinder i Dialog* website also works as an archive, creating a source of knowledge to counter limiting representations. Both postcolonial and feminist theory have demonstrated how the archive has been a masculine and

white space of power and exclusion. The Subaltern Studies collective and figures such as Dipesh Chakrabarty have pointed to the fact that often peasants do not leave their own documents, and thus do not speak into the archival format (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 21).<sup>2</sup> The historical archives are produced by dominant groups, becoming institutions that reproduce knowledge hierarchies. There is a similar tendency in feminist theory and activism, as Kate Eichorn points to in her book *The Archival Turn in Feminism* (2013). As Eichorn notes, “the archive is not necessarily either a destination or an impenetrable barrier to be breached, but rather a site and practice integral to knowledge making, cultural production, and activism” (2013, p. 7). For example, on their webpage, Kvinder i Dialog upload pictures, videos and small texts from events they have participated in and organized. Through this archival practice, they negotiate the conflicting accounts of their everyday lives, protect their stories and perspectives, and prepare for the protest’s revival by future generations when there is a need for “creative activism to counter oppression” (Ashton, 2017, pp. 129, 134).



**Fig. 4 & 5**

*Images of Kvinder i Dialog activities.*

Retrieved from <http://kvinderialog.dk/voresarbejde.html>, November 2018.

Examples of face-to-face encounters detailed in their online archive consist of talks and workshops (at open houses, organizations and schools), and activities in public spaces, such as distributing flyers in the street (Fig. 4 & 5). Through these activities they underscore the need for people from different social groups to talk to each other in order to establish ways of living together. The dialogical aspect of their activism becomes clear when Kvinder i Dialog states: “We believe that the path to understanding and mutual respect can best be achieved by speaking with each other. We insist on communication regardless of disagreements” (Kvinder i Dialog, 2018a). Thus, the group creates a clear link to the concept of Danish values, which can be exemplified through the previously mentioned New Year’s speech by the PM Lars Løkke Rasmussen, where he highlighted “tolerance”, “respect” and “trust” as particular Danish values (Rasmussen, 2018). Kvinder i Dialog activate these concepts as part of their mission and thereby transmit the message of not only wanting to be but already being a part of Denmark.

Untangling and exposing the paradoxes inflicted upon them by the ban are key to the actions of Kvinder i Dialog. Indeed, it can also be argued that the active use of dialogue established a direct association to the formation of the Danish democracy after World War II. The Danish historian Hal Koch (1901-1963), who was a central figure in this period, repeatedly noted that dialogue was the central part of a modern democracy: “Det er Samtalen (Dialogen) og den gensidige Forstaaelse og Respekt, som er Demokratiets Væsen” (It is the Conversation (the Dialogue) and the mutual Understanding and Respect, which is the essence of democracy) (Koch, 2003, p. 66). Kvinder i Dialog’s emphasis on equality through conversation throws into sharp relief not only the hypocrisy of the Prime Minister’s statement, but also the way in which it is the appearance, rather than the ideas or opinions, of women who are Muslim that is the centre of public controversy and debate. In practice, they draw attention to the fact that, for them, the niqab is not a gag, and consequently that the veil is not necessarily the reason for them not being heard.

A further example of their activities is how they, in the summer of 2018, visited the National Museum of Denmark (Fig. 6 & 7). By standing in a space that signifies traditional Danish history and culture, a monolithic understanding of freedom permeates the image. We suggest that just by being there and posing in the pristine room, they manifest a disruption to what it means to be a part of Denmark. This disruption, connected to the aforementioned use of Danish food culture, demonstrates the hybridity and potential fusion of cultures. Fig. 7 shows a group member next to a poster of the exhibition Meet the Danes, also emphasizing the fact that these women identify as Danish. Next to the pictures from the visit they wrote of how wonderful the day had been and that this was “én af de ting vi kommer til at savne mest når forbuddet træder i kraft” (“one of the things we will miss the

most when the ban comes into effect" ) (Kvinder i Dialog, 2018c). These images underline the inherent irony of the veil ban: the government demands that minorities partake in society, and yet the ban on the niqab will likely keep many women at home.

Indeed, cooke remarks on how "the Muslimwoman" is in fact a powerful global identity connected to new information technologies (cooke, 2007, p. 153). New media facilitates fresh allegiances and produces a radical connectivity. This is not to imply that the internet has a purely emancipatory potential, as there are very strong Islamophobic and anti-feminist movements online. However, the use of online space by Kvinder i Dialog, like Andromeda, 8220, demonstrates how new communication platforms enable the building of a broader unity across groups and geographical locations. Kvinder i Dialog simultaneously utilize and resist the classical objectification of the "Muslimwoman" and use this imposed identity of weakness as a weapon.



**Fig. 6 & 7**

Kvinder i Dialog  
visiting the  
National Museum.  
Retrieved from  
<http://kvinde-ridialog.dk/voresarbejde.html>,  
November 2018.

Finally, in 2018 there were two major, self-organized demonstrations in the big cities of Denmark, one on 1 August when the masking ban came into effect, and one on 10 August in resistance to the first fine that was handed out. The demonstration on the 1 August verified a new-found solidarity between the few women who wear niqab in Denmark and over 3000 people in different types of masks who walked with them. There is a clear enactment of embodied and politicized presence in these demonstrations. Whilst the dominant narrative only gives them reductive discursive and visual representation, these women, by putting their bodies in the streets, reclaim space and assert their demand for human rights. The successful demonstrations illustrate that their activism was partly working. They do not entirely adjust the political centre but create new paths to action by inviting people to the margin in order to walk towards the centre together.



**Fig. 8**

Image from the  
demonstration  
in Copenhagen.  
Retrieved from  
<http://kvinde-ridialog.dk/voresarbejde.html>, November  
2018.

## Conclusion

To conclude, in contemporary Denmark, minority women are activating their marginality rhetorically, visually and spatially. The two cases demonstrate how the margin can be a radical space for cultural and political resistance, even though these spaces can be extremely difficult to occupy. The very presence of *Andromeda, 8220* and *Kvinder i Dialog* enacts a rethinking of the mainstream understanding of who, what and where is politically relevant, highlighting that the conventional notion of the political citizen is still male, and the fact that this male citizen is also perceived to be white and European (Beard, 2017, p. 4). Postcolonial and feminist theoretical interrogations challenge this understanding of the engaged citizen and expose the fact that many groups are still placed in the subaltern shadow. In Dipesh Chakrabarty's words, "the imaginary boundaries of the category 'political' [is effectively stretched] far beyond the territories assigned to it in European political thought" (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 16). The widening of the gap between the centre and margin is evidenced by policies such as the ghetto list and the masking ban, which position supposedly threatening areas and identities at a remove. However, as the centre seeks to exercise greater control, the extremity of the measures engenders an intensified resistance and building of bridges between positions. The new spaces, initiatives and actions that we have analysed produce lived alternatives to the hegemonic discourses, demonstrating that the margin has a transformative potential far beyond that of the centre.

We understand these examples of everyday activism as connected to an ongoing reaction to a neocolonial and neoliberal rhetoric that coerces feminist ideas and women's rights. To return to Spivak, she notes that "imperialism's image as the establisher of the good society is marked by the espousal of the woman as *object* of protection from her own kind" (1993, p. 94). Our overview of the situation in Denmark in 2018 and the case studies imply the discursive use of a victim's and saviour's dynamic as a means of persuasion, and therefore re-enact the colonial impulse of "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak, 1993, p. 92). Indeed, Farris also demonstrates how the construction of the Muslim woman as the victim simultaneously helps to construct and reinforce the image of the dangerous Muslim man, thus evidencing the relational function of gender and other structural categories. Furthermore, it can be suggested that the uniform construction of the 'third-world woman', famously framed in Chandra Talpade Mohanty's essay "Under Western Eyes" (1984), is now refigured as "the Muslimwoman" in certain contexts, which illustrates how minority women are continuously positioned between patriarchy and imperialism (Farris, 2017).

These contemporary manifestations of neocolonialism within which we position the resistances of *Andromeda, 8220* and *Kvinder i Dialog* are not taking place in a colonized country, but as part of changes to the occupants of colonized areas in Denmark, such as the ghettos, and as inhabitants of colonized identities. The ghetto policies, the masking ban and the Dansk Folkeparti poster are thus representative of a neoimperialist gaze, as well as neoliberal policies working through Islamophobia and a fear of others. As our case studies have demonstrated, acts of resistance to these discursive regulations are not a matter of deep structural changes but rather a pushing of boundaries to create spaces for new conversations. *Andromeda, 8220* and *Kvinder i Dialog* call on the majority to step out into the periphery, to understand their positions and consider their potential for affirmative politics.

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## Endnotes

- 1 For example, an article from the New York Times detailed the policies and people's views in July 2018:  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/01/world/europe/denmark-immigrant-ghettos.html>.
- 2 Also referred to as the Subaltern Studies Group (SSG), it is a group of South Asian scholars interested in the postcolonial and post-imperial societies, which started in 1979-80.