Black Racial Isolation:

Understanding African Diaspora Subjectivity in Post-Racial Denmark

By

Elizabeth Löwe Hunter

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Abstract

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This is an Afrofeminist Cultural Studies analysis of blackness and belonging in Denmark. The study is situated within African Diaspora Studies, specifically the theoretical branches in and of Europe. Simultaneously constructed as marginal to hegemonic Europeanness and dominant conceptions of blackness, I seek to carve out space for Afropean and European Black perspectives. With attention to genealogical distinctions between European-based Afrofeminisms and Black Feminisms of the USA, this dissertation is a contribution to a grounded theory of blackness in a larger European context. Specifically, this is a step towards writing the much-undertheorized conditions of the African diasporas in the Nordics into the archives (McEachrane 2016).

The study centers first-person narratives. I focus on first-generation African diaspora Danish people, i.e., those with experiences of being raised and socialized in Denmark while Black as the first in a family. Situation myself as a researcher within this very life experience, I examine how others have navigated that experience before the era of the Internet and with a scarcity of racial mirroring. But particularly, I examine the condition of being racialized as Black in an alleged post-racial European context, dominated by a 'raceless' discourse of Denmark and its 'other' (El-Tayeb 2011; Boulila 2019). And more precisely within a regional discourse of Nordic Exceptionalism (Habel 2011). Positioned as apparently a paradox within an exclusive nationalist narrative, Afropean existence becomes unspeakable and Black Danish people constructed as always already foreigners, having just arrived. Part of the Black Danish experience, as across the Nordic region, is thus characterized by a lack of language to name one's reality (Adeniji 2016; Diallo 2022). And importantly, a language to understand and resist racism, and to develop a political consciousness (Essed 1991; Kelekay 2019). I analyze how these circumstances affect Black Danish people's subjectivity.

The study's first chapter builds on a reading of Crucian-Danish Victor Cornelins' autobiography *From St. Croix to Nakskov* from 1976. This is supplemented by material from the

Nakskov Local History Archives in Denmark. Here, I offer feminist analyses centered in African diasporic care and consideration of historical representations of blackness in Denmark as well as archival silences. Reading Cornelins as an early theorist of blackness in Denmark, the contours of a primary formative condition emerge: racial isolation.

The second and third chapters are based on original data from semi-structured interviews during a seven-month stay in Copenhagen in 2020-2021. The second chapter sketches out the scattered collective of a post-WWII generation of so-called 'brown babies.' Being of Black American and white German parentage, thousands of individuals were deemed 'better off' outside of Germany due to their blackness and 'mixedness.' At the beginning of a post-racial discourse in Europe and a de-colonization moment globally, a generation of 'brown' children were adopted into the intimate sphere of the post-racial Danish nation-state. An obscured, misrepresented part of Danish history, this chapter seeks to humanize people of this generation and identify their agency in constructing themselves as whole.

The final chapter gives context to the current moment and growing up Black in Denmark. Imagined as outside of the Danish nation, yet also outside of dominant immigration discourse, analyzing the particularity of racialization as Black proves highly pertinent. The taxing reality of experiencing racism in a post-racialist culture become clear, especially the fact of being the only one in many social contexts. Yet this chapter also illuminates people's ambivalence, disidentification, and dissociation from concepts of collective blackness or minoritarian solidarity. There is a complex relationship between assuming one's own racialized social position as Black and understanding oneself as Danish.

Black racial isolation runs through the three chapters as a common condition for African diasporic Danish people who have come of age in Denmark between 1905 and 2021. I therefore offer *Black racial isolation* as a core concept to better understand how Danish Black people make sense of themselves and their relationship to African diasporas and Black (political) collectivity. This notion also illuminates ways racialization and racism functions in dominant Danish culture through a visual economy, racial spectacularization, and fetishization of Black pain.

As a Black experience the Danish version is an articulation of racialization within a Westernized context historically shaped through binaries of Black/white. What sets this apart from other theorizations of blackness in the 'West', is that it is significantly experienced alone, rather than in community. My findings suggest that such isolation can results in internalization of binaries and a splitting of the self. In conclusion, I meditate on conditions for creating connection – with self and others – as a path toward sustainable, humanizing futures for Danish African diasporic blackness and belonging. As such, this dissertation contributes original, grounded theory of blackness, race, and racialization in Europe with deep appreciation for Afrofeminist, Black and decolonial feminist genealogies from which this study could grow.

For my father

and my brother

and all our past little selves

CONTENTS

Geographical Overview of Denmark

Figure 1: Satellite image of Denmark and places mentioned in this dissertation (NASA, public domain).

1. Nakskov
2. Copenhagen
3. Southern Jutland
4. Odense
5. Kolding
6. Northern Jutland
7. North of Copenhagen
8. Northern Zealand
9. West of Copenhagen

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PREFACE: BELONGING AND BUDDING CONSCIOUSNESS

The inception of this project began in 2015. I was living in Paris, and this is where my racial awakening and since politicization began. Before I explain what I mean by this, I will share the story of what happened. On the weekend of February 14-15, I went to *Le Carreau du Temple* in the fashionable *Marais,* the, by then, internationally, and otherwise gentrified *3ème arrondissement* of Paris, France. The event *AfricaParis* was held in the huge hall of the *Carreau* for four days. It was a chic marketplace-gone-concept store filled with vendors of hair and beauty supplies, art, design, food and much more. The entertainment program included roundtable discussions, fashion shows, hair shows, dance workshops, cooking classes, sports and dance performances, concerts and theater. For example, I went to a theater performance called *Afropéennes* by Eva Doumbia. The writer, director and actress was a special guest helping to conceptualize just that notion: *Afropeanness*. This was a transformative moment for me. Looking back, this was the day I 'became' Black.

Adventures in Afropea 1 is the name of Zap Mama's album from 1993. Founded by Belgian-Congolese Marie Daulne, the album was a successful re-release of their first album *Zap Mama* from 1991, this time by David Byrne on the US American record label Luaka Bop. To the best of my knowledge, the term Afropean originates here. From Marie Daulne's intentional artistic work where she integrated vocal traditions from the places of her own lineages and others from across Africa and its diasporas. Her music illustrates what we might understand by 'Afropean': a polyphony in which each voice, while unique and distinct, is an inseparable part of a whole. The notion and framework has been taken up again recently, as shown above by Eva Doumbia and also by Johny Pitts' (2019) *Afropean: Notes from Black Europe* and Leonora Miano's (2020) *Afropea: Utopie post-occidentale et post-raciste,* to name a few. Here, I do not delve into how the notion is conceptualized by each of them. I amplify it for its production of an experiential integrity of parts often constructed as mutually exclusive. I amplify it out of appreciation for a formulation for this concept and for offering imaginative expansion.

The transformation of internal wholeness seeped into my body first. Being in the beautiful space, surrounded by people who looked like kin put my nervous system at ease. Eyes meeting mine somehow made me feel as if I was not only welcome but expected. The strange familiarity of their greetings and the sense that, if or when we would have conversation, we would likely *tutoyer* one another; addressing each other with the familial *tu* rather than the formal *vous.* For me, it was an experience of being seen, not simply looked at. It was a reversal of what I was used to experiencing: being the 'only one', hyper awareness of sticking out in a default white crowd as an Afro-descendant. It was the *absence* of being surveilled when entering a fancy event at a fancy address. It was the *absence* of default alienation because, here, all products catered to my kind of skin, complexion, hair, body, and shape. It was the absence of the question 'where are you from?' This peace, ease and *feeling good* was unknown to me. This, I pondered, must be what belonging feels like.

I locate the beginning of my present work here. In the budding expansion of my being. The new sensation and experience of belonging – despite being in a foreign country – was facilitated by the curation of an Afropean space delivering what was news to me: A reflection of my own existence. An experienced normalcy of being a European-born Black African descendant, a first-person plural extended to me. Feeling belonging changed my entire perception of the world. Suddenly, it became clear to me how whiteness had shaped every aspect of my being growing up

in Denmark. How alienation was my default, since I was always other, and most often alone (Spivak 1985). “Pass me the skin-colored crayon/make-up foundation/band aid/‘nude’ pantyhose or dancewear” implicitly meant a light pinkish beige, never products matching my skin tone. A minority in a sea of white, not just because we were few like me, but because other realities were all together unspoken, unrepresented. Accommodating our bodies, materially, was unthought of. I clearly remember my American cousins sending care packages including pink lotion, double beaded hair bands, and the colorful plastic hair clips with all the little figures that were hot if you were a kid in the 1990’s.

From the soft embrace of belonging one weekend, my realization of the systemic nature of alienation as my birth gift transformed into grief and anger. Grief that I had lived nearly 30 years, not feeling right in my own skin. Literally. Especially thinking back at my childhood and the body dysmorphia I experienced. Of course, I could have never articulated that then. Scrubbing hard on my skin to get the brownness – myself – off. Hitting my thighs and butt in the hope they would get flatter, like the skinny white girls I was surrounded by. Trying to wear a clothespin on my nose, to make it slim and pointy. These were all ways of self-harming. And the hair! Hating how my ponytail would not hang down the neck and swing while I walked, like the blonds, but only seemed to grow out and up. Or having to mostly wear braids when I was little because my hair was something to be ‘handled’ rather than *cared* for and nurtured. And until I got old enough to ‘handle’ it myself, braids made it easier. Ngozi Onwurah, the Black British filmmaker, agonizingly depicted this type of trauma in her short film Coffee Colored Children (1988). Together with her brother Simon Onwurah, they portray children's innocence and deeply embodied, internalized contempt of self. We see their attempts at erasing the unwanted, the brown skin, the blackness. I did not find this precious mirror until a few years ago, through my research. This was about 30 years after I was the one in the bathtub trying to whiten myself. When I did find the film my heart broke open. I wept, and I still do, for the little ones we were, conditioned to feel like that.

In Paris, as I realized that *I* was not wrong or ugly, but simply Black in a white place, I felt anger for having to come to this realization myself, so late. Why had I not learned this? The representation of racial whiteness as universal and ‘normal’ was wrong, not me. And what made me truly angry was the lies. The public consensus that, in Denmark, ‘we don’t see race’ and therefore, naturally, there is no racism. So, the racism that was part of everyday experiences had no name. Gaslighting is the default for the brave who dares to break the silence (Habel 2008). Adults would sound like: “I’m sure they meant no harm; they are just jealous/ignorant/do not know any better” or “Everybody gets teased sometimes just like (white) redheads/with glasses/braces.” In short “what you just told me you experienced cannot possibly be your experience, you must be mistaking” was the message. Therefore, many of us internalized it and tried to make sense of it alone. This default reality of multiple levels of white racial ignorance, antiblackness, and lack of African diaspora community is what I will come to theorize as Black Racial Isolation.

The realization of the possibility of belonging was transformative because I experienced an ‘otherwise’ and an ‘elsewhere.’ Ephemeral, sure, but still. Coming to know of other possibilities for *being* made me long for an otherwise. I would aim for that for as much as possible moving forward. Coming into consciousness about the structural character of my alienation is what I understand as politicization. As such, political consciousness can create liberation from personalized guilt and shame, when we come to understand our own conditions in a larger historical and collective context (Collins 2000). Inspired by Audre Lorde, I used my anger creatively and channeled it into my work of generating clarity and language (Lorde 1993b). I knew I had to write. For myself, I had to articulate my experience and the connections that had become

clear between my pain and power structures in the world. This helped remove problematization from me to society. I needed to write into existence myself as Afropean and what I saw in the world from my specific vantage point. As an offering to myself, creating that expression of reality which could have supported me to read. And if it would resonate with a few others like me, that would be beautiful.

In the present work, I demonstrate why above-mentioned frictions between self-perception and alienation cannot be answered outside of an engagement with critical race theories in a decolonial frame. Specifically, the importance of analyses of blackness and antiblackness in a European context. This is because the nationalist exclusions experienced by native Danes like myself get erased in the current discourse on xenophobia at large: the immigration and integration debate (El-Tayeb 2003). The notion at play – 'integration' – simply is not what is at stake for us. We might relate to other places on the globe through our parents, but personally, we were always insiders in Denmark. No migration took place. As I will show, the transgression of our existence lies elsewhere.

Part of why *AfricaParis* resonated so deeply with me was because it evoked subjects of the city *and* of the African diasporas. My claim to Denmark was never an emotional attachment to national culture, but simply a statement of the reality of my life. I was always acutely aware of my ejection from the national imagination. But where exactly would they send me if I were to 'go back to where I came from?' On the contrary, a sense of home would be my years spent in Nørrebro, Copenhagen. This is where my father lived, and where I moved to as a young adult, before moving to Paris. The look and feel in the 1990's and 2000's were familial. Not because everyone looked like us, our family, but because there was not one dominating norm. As the most ethno-racially diverse place in Denmark there were many different differences, making variation normal. Likewise, *AfricaParis* reflected experiences of local possibilities of cultural mergings that I recognized in the context of rooting in a cityscape. Indeed, a subconscious reason that I moved to Paris was to be able to blend in more. Thus, *AfricaParis* made space for expressions that are a reality for so many – being a citizen of a European city, identifying with a zip code before a country. The term Afropean captures something similar: the merging of cultural and contextual formative influences and expressions. No hyphen to separate-but-bridge the supposedly incompatible 'essence' of each. For instance, after having lived in Paris for some years at that point, it mattered less that I was Danish than the shared experience of being European by socialization *and* an African descendant, thus Black by racialization. Something about the local and the regional could somehow hold African diasporic self-identified belongingness – Afropeanness – better than the national. This is, of course, as told by *us,* despite dominating discourses constructing European nationhood as mutually exclusive to blackness and Africanness.

Introduction

Conceptualizing First-Generation African Diaspora Danish Citizens

This dissertation is a study on the conditions of belonging for Danish people of African Diasporas. The notion of *belonging* has been a driving force from the very beginning. Who gets to belong where and when? What are the prerequisites, both the spoken and unspoken, and who defines them? In the way I conceptualize belonging, it is both a social and a spatial experience. Belonging as a central term comes out of my own lived experience, and since over a decade of studying how some of us are perceived as strangers in the very place(s) we know as home (Ahmed 2000; El-Tayeb 2011). I do not romanticize belonging, rather I am interested in what it would take to simply experience peace; to *not* be alienated in the place where one exists. To just *be*. In this particular context, for this particular group I will define further below.

Diaspora is another notion that grounds these queries. Focusing on diverse members of African Diasporas in Denmark, *I specifically ask how the conditions for belonging are experienced by those visually perceived and racialized as Black?* Diaspora refers to dispersal of peoples, it therefore inherently has a spatial component too. Discrepancies occur between *experiences* of belonging somewhere and the dominant *politics* of belonging, part of what I refer to as the conditions (Yuval-Davis 2006). While I do not engage either *belonging* or *diaspora* as units of analysis, they serve to frame what I understand as the *stakes* and the *cause* for our circumstance and potential longing.

Breaking down the question above, I examine:

1) How can the conditions for first generation African diasporic Danish people be defined?

2) What does living through ongoing alienation mean for peoples' sense of self?

3) Which strategies do African diasporic Danish people use to navigate their blackness in a post-racial context?

I am seeking to better understand how structures and relations of domination affect Danish people of African descent, racialized as Black, while not having a common language to articulate precisely that. I look at how racism is expressed across three different generations, and how people conceptualize it with few words. And I listen to how it feels to understand that you are perceived as 'different' while 'seeing' difference is a cultural taboo. I center first generation experiences of being Danish and racialized as Black. I define 'first generation' as the first in a family lineage who, as Black *and* Danish, have had to navigate that positionality in the absence of multigenerational prior experiences and knowledge to lean on. Often neither at home nor in a 'community' elsewhere. I had a thesis that a considerable part of first-generation Danish people of African descent are children of one white Danish and one Black African or African diasporic parent. My data confirmed. This experience represents a particular vantage point to understand Danish hegemonic

culture and its inherent ideological paradoxes. Born into not only the national culture but also intimate relationships through family, the expectation of national belonging is as natural as any other Dane's. Yet, when cultural nativeness is not enough, racial whiteness emerges as not only a norm but the very premise for legibility as Danish within the dominant national constructions of belonging. While including diverse versions of first-gen life experiences, the analysis I offer is grounded in the situated knowledge from this specific vantage point of being born into multiple layers of whiteness as a formative condition of a Black life experience in Denmark. This vantage point can be simultaneously multicultural, multilingual, interracial, and transracial. Depending on the degrees of connections and rupture with one's African or Black diasporic roots. But I want to emphasize an existential sense of being 'in-between' as a generational experience of navigating between several cultures and/or racialized experiences of 'otherness,' typical for many kids of African or Black immigrants (Soumahoro 2020). It is not about the construct of racial 'mixedness;' rather it is but about being racialized as a 'foreigner' *while* being a national and being expected to represent and know our parents' cultural frame of reference in *their* way, while having been socialized and molded into another national culture as well (or uniquely, for those with white European parents only). In a Nordic context with newer populations of descendants of immigrants, generational experience can differ quite significantly and is therefore an important part of people's positionality (Sawyer 2008).

In my conceptualization, generation thus has a non-linear, non-temporal meaning. Therefore, I study the conditions of socialization from 1905 to the present and call all of the subjects first generation Black or African diaspora Danish people. It is a relational concept vis à vis the parents and their belongingness on one hand and the (new) diasporic 'host land' on the other, the place the first-generation knows as home (Butler 2001). In short, a first-generation Black Danish subject neither shares their experiences with their potential African parents because they experience blackness in Denmark as people who have migrated, nor with their potential white parents who experience Danish socialization as white. Embodying racial blackness and socialized as culturally Danish (not necessarily exclusively) is therefore its own, new experience. Besides this fact of circumstance, it is also a conscious choice of mine to situate this population group as first-generation Black Danes and not 'second generation immigrants.' Migration is a practical experience, not an innate cultural trait or identity status that can logically be inherited by offspring. The term second generation immigrant (and third, fourth etc) thus hints moreso towards exclusionary racialization of citizens rather than their actual foreignness, which I expand on below.

In this sense, first generation experiences, across different types of family constellations, are therefore constantly reemerging and lived anew. That is, as long as African and Black people relocate to Denmark, new people are born from parents with whom they do not share their particular positionality and situatedness as *African diasporic Black Danish*. However, it is my intention that, as we produce knowledge on *our* first-gen experiences, we have something to pass on to the next ones. Hopefully they will experience less isolation and less representational deprivation, if they can see just parts of themselves reflected in the stories, we are making available today. This, I hope, will give them a different point of departure in constructing themselves as Danish people of African diasporas, as worthy humans who belong in their own right.

'Where are you from?': Delineating the Racial Geographic

What does it mean to be racialized and 'othered' when the notion of race is denied? How can we theorize these lives? A racialized conceptualization of (geographical and national) belonging often

materializes on a mundane level. To be posed the question 'where are you from?' is a common experience for people racialized as non-white across European nations (Opitz, Oguntoye, and Schultz 1992; El-Tayeb 2003; 2011; Kilomba 2010; Habel 2011; Adeniji 2016; Carby 2019). It is a question that accentuates the naturalized whiteness of 'here' and of belonging 'here' in a European nation. It is also a speech act which, at once, reproduces the idea of the national space as all white and constructs the non-white person as an immigrant, a tourist, or otherwise a *stranger* to the territory (Ahmed 2000). To ask, 'where are you from?' implies a conviction that an elsewhere for this person to belong is a fact, and the asking serves as a clarification of exactly where the non-white person is from. It is seemingly not about *if* the person is from somewhere else than the place where the question is asked.

This question is useful in illuminating at least two crucial aspects of the construction of Denmark as white: First, 'where are you from?' reveals that a nation and its citizens are in fact not colorblind, despite official state ideologies such as social democracy and egalitarianism in their raceless version. The commonsense defensive argument against using the term 'race' is that if you see or even say 'race', you are racist (El-Tayeb 2011; Habel 2011; Essed and Hoving 2014; Wekker 2016; R. Diallo 2019). But the question emphasizes the significance and affirms the capability of visual distinctions. Thus, on a quotidian level people *do* racist differentiation even without racial vocabularies or intentions when they question non-white people's origin. Consider who in a diverse friend group is systematically and repeatedly asked this and who are not.

Secondly, the way whiteness and nationality relate as reciprocal signifiers, this question collapses all non-white nationals *and* all non-white immigrants into one category of non-belonging. The discursive construction of racialized nationhood creates a dichotomous idea of citizens as white and people marked as non-white as foreigners, erasing the positions in between: non-white citizens (and white immigrants, for that matter) (Gilroy 1993; El-Tayeb 2011).

Hazel Carby (2019) takes this topic up in a chapter dedicated to that very question: "Where are you from" in *Imperial Intimacies.* Through a biographical narrative, she tells the story of each of her parents' as well as her own upbringing as a so-called mixed race, brown-skinned child born and raised in England in the 1950's. Her mother was white Welsh, her father Black Jamaican. The systemic way the question operates across Western Europe shows similarities and a common investment in the idea of whiteness and its use in constructing an 'other' against the national 'self' (Spivak 1985). Therefore, Carby writes, her child self was constructed as being 'out of place', and her answer to the question about her origin – being born in England – was perceived as a paradox: "She was being asked to provide a reason for her being which she did not have. It was sobering to realize that 'where' and 'from' did not reference geography, but the fiction of race in British national heritage" (p. 12). However culturally fluent and in proximity to white nationals, often biological mothers, Swedish Anna Adeniji (2016) emphasizes that "[…] it is still the color of my skin that draws a line between me and 'ethnic Swedes.' It is your physical appearance that forces you to answer the question in perpetuity […]" (p. 151). These and other testimonies exemplify the entanglement of race and place which 'sends' the person racialized as 'other' away from *here* – the nation. What I want to underscore here is the way racist commentary works to alienate nationals, despite, for example, Danish public discourse as a self-proclaimed tolerant and race-free nation. A narrative that echoes throughout the European metropoles (El-Tayeb 2011; McEachrane 2016; Wekker 2016; R. Diallo 2019). I evoke the term metropole to situate Europe and European nations within theorizations of the afterlife of slavery (Hartman 1997). Within the Black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993) and Modernity at large, Europe represents the colonial centers of administration and profit, rather than the geographies of human extraction, plantation slavery, and production. By no means

does this suggest that we in the metropoles are not also living in the wake of racial capitalist modalities, yet with different expressions than in the former colonies (Sharpe 2016).

Racialization in Denmark, and in other Western European nations has considerable consequences, despite the ways it functions via avoidance of explicitly racial terms. One effect is the hyper-visibilization of the 'other' and the articulation of difference through an assemblage of spatial and racial imaginaries. 'Difference' becomes self-evident as difference-from-whiteness, which is left unmarked, unnamed. Here, 'racelessness' reveals a disengagement with the racialization of the cultural status quo (Goldberg 2006). By that I mean, the national 'firstness' – a heterosexual, male, white, Christian, Western norm – which is at once an invisibilized omnipresence, presumably neutral, while also rendered superior. The construction of the nation and the imagined citizen subject as white is a defining characteristic, but it is silenced (Lentin 2008).

The European Imaginary: Inventing the West and the Rest

It can be productive to evoke understandings of Europe broadly to trace crucial similarities in racializing logics across, rather within nations. One aspect is the fact that Western European countries today have historically been interrelated and developed culturally and materially as such. Large, shared patterns, for example, are Christianity, European Enlightenment, colonialism and the invention of capitalism. These represent structures of thought and ways of engaging with the world that have been created through exchanges among European countries internally and through similar relationships to the non-European external world, namely dominance.

Identifying larger political patterns is therefore useful, if not necessary, in the work towards theorizations of racisms in a specific place like Denmark, where there is not necessarily a solid language or scholarly foundation to build on. National expressions of racism can thus be read as local articulations of larger political and regional structures of power. This fruitfully interrupts the insular and exceptionalist dominating perspective of nation states.

Another aspect, centering those subjugated to said power structures, is the inherent globalized nature of conceptualizing a European self and thus its outsider (Hall 1991). In theorizing constructions of racial blackness specifically, it becomes unviable to maintain clear lines between the inside and outside of the construct of Europe, as well as between nations and national histories. Fatima El-Tayeb has said "You cannot tell national stories about blackness" (personal communication, 2022). Constructions of blackness as well as nation states are per definition transnational and relational productions. The meaning-making happens at the created boundaries. Following streams of thought across borders and boundaries of language within Europe can illustrate the shared practical conditions and cultural conditionings of Afropeans. The African diasporas' subjectivity and life circumstances are shaped by discursive and legal frameworks oscillating between co-constitutive specific nationalisms and shared Eurocentrism.

The definition of power I refer to throughout is conceptualized by Michel Foucault (1982) not as something a person or entity (such as an institution) can hold, rather "[t]he term 'power' designates relationships between partners" (p. 786). And moreover, power is understood as productive and agentive: "The exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners individual or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others" (p. 788). Foucault emphasizes the relationality of it in that "[p]ower exists only when it is put into action…" (p. 788). In this definition, then, power necessitates a constant reiteration in order to be effective. Here it is pertinent to stress that power does not equate with violence although it can and does often include

it. Rather, power can be conceptualized as "a battle for truth," a tension Foucault coined through the term *power/knowledge* (Foucault and Gordon 1980, 132). He writes: "'Truth' is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements. 'Truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A 'régime' of truth" (p. 133). It is the centrality of 'truth' to the exercise of power that makes *discourse* (Foucault 1971) another central notion that I use throughout this dissertation. Also building on Foucault, Stuart Hall (2011a) defines discourse as "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e. a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge on a topic. When statements about a topic are made within a particular discourse, the discourse makes it possible to construct the topic in a certain way. It also limits other ways in which the topic can be constructed" (p. 201).

With these definitions in mind, I suggest distinguishing different aspects: Europe (as territory), European (as belonging to the territory) and Europeanness (as characteristically European), all concepts with meanings that are changeable over time and according to historical context. Despite their relative fluidity and constructedness, Stuart Hall (1991) has argued that the concept of Europe matters because of the effects it produces. One of its effects being the entangled concepts of geography and belonging. The historical constructions of difference between people and the attachment of geographical meaning to those distinctions constructs a logic of 'placing' differently racialized people in different locations. This means that when racialized distinction is made in relation to Europeanness or European nationhood, the spatialized, whitened logic of belonging translates race into place and thus makes place a proxy for race. This results in 'innocent' curiosity about (assumed) origins of the non-white 'other', and an obscuring of the hierarchy inherent in the historical-geographical construct of 'the West and the Rest' (Hall 2011a). When I refer to the 'West' it is therefore a reference to an *idea* of a global hierarchy constructed through European colonialism and capitalism (Fanon 1961; Quijano 2000; Glissant 1989; Alexander 2005; Hall 2011a). The notion of the 'West' constructs Europe especially as a center of reference, and at the top of a human evolutionary hierarchy. Similarly to the notion of Europe, it matters because of the effects of its operationalization. For instance, instead of racial markers.

The following unpacks the exclusionary character of dominating constructions of Europeanness, premised on an omission of Europe's globalized history, namely European Modernity. I then discuss some of the mechanisms that produce 'European others' (El-Tayeb 2011) within variations of 'politically raceless' and 'post-racial' national discourses (Goldberg 2006; Boulila 2019) and the significance of the post-WWII era for the 'disappearance' of race. I unfold what it can sound like when spatialization is operationalized in lieu of explicit reference to 'race.' Specifically, I exemplify this through the nationalist discourse in Denmark over time identifying how Danish people racialized as Black become constructed as 'out of place' (Carby 2019). Here, inclusion and exclusion, belonging and alienation, draw on both a local and global sense of place explicitly. This spatialization of race/racialization of space functions, inherently, although it is taboo, through physicality and the gaze (Ahmed 2000).

Colonial Amnesia, Racial Denial, and Exceptionalism

In the introductory sentence to *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy (1993) approaches questions of Europeanness head-on: "Striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness" (p. 1). And he goes on to articulate

the perceived problem: "[…W]here racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist discourses orchestrate political relationships so that these identities appear to be mutually exclusive, occupying the space between them or trying to demonstrate their continuity has been viewed as a provocation and even oppositional act of political insubordination" (p. 1). In presenting this conflict, he illustrates how the boundaries of European identity are drawn from above to exclude blackness. And how its conceptual binary constructs a certain *in-betweenness* where those of us who are situated as both European and Black exist. Gilroy shows how the Black diasporas in the Americas – the Caribbean, North- Central, and South America – have been historically premised on the Transatlantic Slave Trade, a fundamentally European enterprise. He illustrates the circulation of African diasporic cultures and thus both African descendants and our cultures are present in the former metropoles as well as in the Americas. The centuries old presence of postcolonial subjects in England, in the case of Gilroy's focus, challenges Eurocentric ideas of Europe as a white space and who is European, by centering Black intellectual thought and cultural production. While the physical presence of African diasporic subjects in the West might be a matter of fact, a close relationship between constructions of Europeanness and Modernity produces a temporal discourse of exclusivity. Such discourse defers the Black subject not only to other places, but to other times as well. They become continuously reproduced as 'new' to the metropolitan European geography. But blackness as such is intrinsically part of Modernity, not outside of it (Gilroy 1993).

The contours of Europeanness and who gets to be recognized as European has been explicitly addressed by racial minorities in European countries, particularly second and third generations. They are born, raised, and socialized into these nations, differently than those parents or grandparents who might have migrated and had to adapt in a new place. Native minorities are thus conditioned to develop a double consciousness to some extent, learning both their own experiences and the dominant cultural norms by heart (Du Bois 1903; Gilroy 1993). The vantage point of nationals with minority racial backgrounds opens possibilities to examine the various principles of citizenship in Europe. Being European *and* something else, by positioning rather than essence, situates them in the in-between and overlapping experiences of belonging. These perspectives are specifically relevant in relation to national ideologies where resistance to difference generally and racial difference specifically converge, such as the Danish links between equality and sameness (Habel 2008; Jensen and Loftsdóttir 2022). Myths of equality and the irrelevance of attending to racism as a structure of power exist across European 'nation narrations' (Bhabha 1990).

Fatima El-Tayeb (2011) identifies some primary mechanisms of exclusion that produce minority racialized European citizens and groups as 'other.' This is a pattern across European countries in which racialized constructions of national and European self-representations are seemingly unable to incorporate population diversity. The construct is tied to how the writing of History and collective memory has constructed Europe, El-Tayeb argues, citing Stuart Hall's notion of an "'internalist' narrative of European identity, that is a narrative in which Europe appears as a largely homogenous entity, entirely self-sufficient, its development uninfluenced by outside forces or contact with other parts of the world" (Hall 1991; El-Tayeb 2011, xvii). The *externalization* of racialized populations is crucial to understand as an especially European expression of colorblind racism. It constructs the racialized minorities not solely as less than citizens, but as entirely unbelonging to the territory. And it does so through markers articulated as foreignness and immigration, which then allows for a discourse that avoids mentioning the taboo which is race and racism. The debates on immigration – which become the shorthand for non-

European, *non-white* immigration – is therefore the locus for heated debates on national belonging. And within these debates questions of integration, if not assimilation, serve as a discursive point of fixation. However, in practice being culturally integrated is not sufficient, which is apparent when the reproduction of these discourses recast national racialized minorities as foreigners generation after generation (El-Tayeb 2003; 2011; Salem and Thompson 2016; Michel 2018). This logic of externalization, in turn, reduces social inequalities to questions of failed integration, the responsibility for which falls largely on the assumed immigrants. These debates are important to understand on the backdrop of the colorblind ideology and the scarce research on the significance of racialization and racial differentiation within Europe, rather than national or ethnic difference, which both presume an origin outside of Europe.

The inability to more accurately research and work towards an understanding of the social inequality and injustice faced by racially minoritized Europeans is prevented by the denial of racism that European scholars point towards in different ways (El-Tayeb 2011; Wekker 2016; Michel 2018; R. Diallo 2019; dos Santos Pinto et al. 2022). This collective mindset is also captured succinctly by David Theo Goldberg's (2006) theorization of Europe and his notion of *political racelessness*: "It's not so much a matter of operating non-racially, of 'seeing a colourblind future'; it's a matter of repressing the very claim of racial conception at all." (p. 353). A difference between a discourse wherein racism is dismissed as irrelevant through referrals to the past and the racelessness of Europe is the perception that not only is it not relevant, but it is also inherently un-European and thus conceptually outside of thinkable discourse and language whatsoever (Lentin 2008). Europe is allegedly exceptional. And the pushback on this, equally identified by European critical scholars, comes in the form of accusations against mobilizing around the term race to protest racism.

El-Tayeb explains how a commonsense belief functions to delegitimize the identification of racist structures through the logic that "…you are racist if you 'see' race and therefore you cannot be racist if you are 'colorblind'" (El-Tayeb 2011, xxix). Rokhaya Diallo (2019), writing from the French context, exemplifies the provocation the mere utterance of the word race or a specific racialized position, here blackness, causes the majoritized French general population. She mentions how the notion of 'Black excellence' in France provoked counter reactions in an article she wrote on the French 2018 World Cup. The victory was represented by a team of majority African or African descendant French soccer players. Writing about 'Black excellence' in this regard was called racist. To prove their point, opponents suggested she would be unhappy should they 'reverse' it and begin to speak about 'white excellence' (R. Diallo 2019). These dynamics and pushback – almost identical across Europe – illustrate at least two important aspects of European political racelessness and the notion of difference: First, that naming difference, here racialized difference, is worse than the racism the utterance often utilized to name. Secondly, difference appears to be conceived of as non-hierarchical. As Diallo points out, suggesting a reversal of Black excellence into white excellence reveals "a real incomprehension of systems of domination" (2019, 73). This point is crucial. When the taboo of heterogeneous national populations is addressed, an additional mechanism of misrecognition is construing differences as relative, rather than hierarchical. This ties back to ahistorical national self-perceptions. This is essentially why being able to research racism and identify it beyond the migration/integration discourses matters. Critical research in racialization and racism is about identifying systems of domination within democratic societies that, despite ideals of freedom and equality, ostracize parts of its population.

When ‘Race’ Disappeared from the European Vocabulary

It is important to locate the raceless European discourse within its historical context. The rejection of ‘race’ in Europe is directly connected to the era following World War II and the Jewish Holocaust in which the United Nations were established, and UNESCO published its statements on race (Goldberg 2006; El-Tayeb 2011; Boulila 2019). This moment represents a unification of Western Europe and the (European) memory of the Holocaust is narrated as a crucial breaking point in European history. The racialization of European Jews represents a moral crisis contrary to the self-perceived reasonable and benevolent Enlightenment thought. El-Tayeb (2011) writes that “[t]he challenge and moral obligation that the postwar West thus faced was to recover and modify the Enlightenment project in a way that would reestablish it as the basis of an international regime of universal human rights” (p. 8). Through this framework ‘race’ was now deemed inappropriate as the Holocaust became “the defining event, the mark par excellence, of race and racially inscribed histories” (Goldberg 2006, 336). A premise for this retelling of European history is an erasure of four centuries of colonialism. This narrative involves two interrelated grips.

On one hand, the disappearance of European colonialism relies on temporal constructs that allows for a ‘forgetting’ of such a distant past, at the same time as any occasional memory deems it redundant and backward gazing to discuss colonialism as relevant in the European present, for example in relation to claims for reparation for African chattel slavery (Nonbo Andersen 2017; Boulila 2019). Writing European history, then, with 1945 as its contemporary genesis makes Holocaust “the referent point for race” (Goldberg 2006, 336). Following Aimé Césaire (2000), this was shocking to Europeans because it took place in Europe – not because of the scope of the violence and humiliation in itself: The type of genocide the German Nazi regime was responsible for, and that many European nations were complicit in effectuating, was not original, Césaire recalls. Rather, the Holocaust as a crime against humanity was acknowledged as such because, he argues, Adolf Hitler “applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India, and the blacks of Africa” (Césaire 2000, 3). Here, Césaire is not concerned with the individual but rather with Hitler as a personification of ideologies already inhabiting “the very distinguished, very humanistic, very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century” (p. 3). The spatial proximity, compared to distant overseas colonies, constructed the Holocaust as both *here,* within the territory, and *now* situated in a European sense of presentness (Césaire 2000; Goldberg 2006).

On the other hand is the dynamic character of racialization and the fluidity of markers of (de)humanization. Whereas the integrability of Ashkenazi Jews into Europeannes, and since historical *whitening,* in Houria Bouteldja’s (2016) words, must be understood as conditional and not absolute, it illuminates the centrality this particular genocide has in the European narration of History. Reading across the work of James Baldwin (1998; 2010) Bouteldja (2016) and Santiago Slabodsky (2014) Sophia Sobko (2022) argues that the exceptionalization of the Jewish Holocaust is a “weaponization of Jewish whiteness” (Sobko 2022, 4). European self-representation emphasizes its own role as protector, but tokenizing Jewish suffering, she argues, leads to the result that: “connections between antisemitism, modernity, and European colonialism are obscured, when these could otherwise foster decolonial alliances” (2022, 6). This tokenization is also what Houria Bouteldja (2019), theorizing France, has called *philosemitism:* the state’s desire to “integrate the Jews into the national project,” an integration premised on the maintained exclusion of others. This type of integration benefits the state, not the group it claims to protect. As such, a decolonial, and therefore antiracist, framing can illuminate ways in which the European hegemonic ‘production of history’ (Trouillot 2015) erases the past by fixating the Holocaust as an event, rather

than an articulation of structures of domination that Europeans had exercised for centuries (Césaire 2000; Goldberg 2006; Kauanui 2016).

In the same vein, a selective empathy and outrage is useful in the production of a European present and future: this representation is also premised on an erasure of other marginalized groups and veritable genocides, including the Roma, sexual minorities, Black people, people with various abilities, and people of oppositional political orientations residing in Europe during World War II (Goldberg 2006; Carmona 2018). The racialization of Jews as 'other' and the subsequent moral conflict in the European project as 'civilized' thus lead to the elision of 'race' as a concept. Stefanie C. Boulila's (2019) crucial work offers a pan-European, intersectional analysis of race in 'post-racial Europe' in which she, like others, defines the characteristics of this alleged post-raciality. In the UNESCO 1950 statement on race, the notion is in clear reference to eugenics, seeking to prove the fallacy of the category and derived concepts such as 'Aryan' or the supposed dangers of 'racial mixing'. This definition "reduces race to a biological category that needs to be resisted against," Boulila writes, which is practiced through an *antiracialist discourse* (2019, 19).

Merely avoiding a word through antiracialism does not equate to disappearing the issue it names: "Instead racial denial has led to the paradoxical situation whereby no framework or language has been available to analyse or contest the power of race nor theorise its relationship to racism" (p. 18). Ethnicity and culture have thus been common euphemisms for race in European antiracist discourse via the UNESCO framework, she writes. And the term race has been rendered taboo by its reduction to a) biological racism/eugenics and b) individual, psychocentric flaws: "The idea of racists as 'crazy' (and with that abnormal) mediates the idea of an antiracist norm and majority versus a psychologised racist minority" (p. 20). These aspects are fundamental to understand the push-back from politicians, scientists, and the general European public (whites as well as many whitened racial minorities) and represents an internalized 'truth telling' in which the European (or national subject, the Dane for example) per definition is *good* and innocent (Habel 2011; Essed and Hoving 2014; Wekker 2016). Reproduced by ahistoric and psychocentric definitions of 'race' the cultural status quo makes antiracist work that engages critical analysis of race and racialization illegitimate, even accused of *producing* racism, similarly to dynamics in everyday speech on an interpersonal level (El-Tayeb 2011; Boulila 2019).

With Boulila, by way of Goldberg (2009), it is therefore necessary to understand and distinguish between *antiracialism* – a 'top-down' discourse of denial and externalization of racism as described above – and *antiracism*: "Antiracism is [...] characterised by a political agenda that aims to combat the epistemic and material conditions and structures that reproduce and naturalise race and with that refuses complicity in the denial of race as a viable political category" (Boulila 2019, 20). It is the ahistorical relationship to colonialism and delinking of racism and nationalism from coloniality that allows for a perception of a post-racial Europe. Forward looking (progressive) and concerned with humanism, this discourse operationalizes a construction of World War II to position Europe on a universally good mission, notably through the erasure of 'race.' The blind angles of its Eurocentrism however, obscures for Europe itself that, as Alana Lentin (2004) puts it: "Humanism, like universalism is [...] necessarily double-edged because in order for a vision of humanity to be produced, a definition must first be constructed of what humanity is *not"* (70). European humanism depends on dehumanization. The post-World War II repent thus says less about racism being abolished from Europe than the elasticity of European white supremacy for strategic incorporation, what Haritaworn et. al. have called 'murderous inclusions' (2013). That is, the flexibility of 'the line of the human' and the shifting markers that assign inferiority/superiority (Ramon Grosfoguel 2016). Whether conceptualizing this double-edged character of European

Humanism as a paradox or precisely as by design, it is reasonable when Césaire (2000) calls it pseudo-humanism, seeing that it is not in fact concerned with the life of all of humans but is "narrow and fragmentary, incomplete and biased and, all things considered, sordidly racist" (p. 3). This humanism and its individual rights framework, a reformulation of previous versions of Modernity, became the unifying European discourse after World War II.

These larger narratives of Europe, of nationhood, and of the West are connected in ways that give hierarchical notions of humanness power through different articulations. Dominating discourse on European antiracism as well as implicit racism can and do operate through other words than 'race' yet producing racist effects: dehumanization. Always as an unfinished project and as a spectrum rather than a binary. The fluidity of the line of the human (across various systems of oppression) are useful in that the recruitment of new identities into the realm of the human can give the impression that oppression is over, while simply moving and reaffirming the line. The boundary work is what gives power and meaning to the conceptualization of the human, not any substantive characteristics. It is therefore in identifying and tracing the systems of oppression and their productivity that racialization can be identified as weaved into the fabric of European thought, politics, and everyday culture. The exercise of power does not depend on the application of fixed terms or mobilization of presumably fixed 'identity' categories to function. What becomes apparent when paying attention to what racism *does,* despite the avoidance of using the term race, is in fact a highly racialized imagination of Europe. For example, the internalist narrative of European identity and the post-racialist discourse result in an interpretation of discrimination that confounds racism and xenophobia. Foreigner and 'racialized as other' come to mean the same.

As such European racializing systems construct a dichotomy of geographies through colonialist, racializing ideas. A *here* and a *there*. Generally, ethnocentric dynamics, although seemingly occupied with identifying the 'other,' are simultaneously preoccupied with self-identification and delimiting the 'us.' So too is Eurocentrism, specifically, concerned with demarcating its boundaries of Europeanness with one result being obscuring differences and variation both within the 'us', but in particular among 'them.' Categorizing all non-Europeans as one, becomes so generalizing it almost loses any meaning in an empirical sense. This construct echoes Stuart Hall's discussion of the construction of 'The West and the Rest' in which he argues that the West is a concept: A historical concept, rather than a geographical one (Hall 2011a, 77). This is reiterated by Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2015) who emphasized "the West was created" (p. 74), and by Edouard Glissant (1989) who pertinently reminds us that "[t]he West is not in the West. It is a project, not a place" (p. 3). By denaturalizing a political geographic we can keep in mind a curiosity about what this project might produce and who benefits. In this light, the close relationship between concepts of Europeanness and Westernness make for a reasonable juxtaposition through their significant overlaps. It becomes possible to observe the ways a vast, generalized 'other' – the global majority – is constructed as negation through Euro-Western-centricity, and thus without substance of its own. What then becomes the crucial identifier, discursively, is simply the distinction and what they are *not*. Practically, however, the construction of otherness is relational and always in relationship both to the 'firstness' of the West and to dehumanization of the historical and contextual extreme other, the non-integrable, which gives leverage to the relative ascendance of the not-quite-human toward proximity of humanness (Weheliye 2014). Analytically, it is crucial to disrupt the premises given by the Euro-Western discourse, a dichotomy, and to tease out power differentials across the oppressed – the operationalization of which reproduces the hierarchy under the guise of neoliberal 'diversity and

inclusion' ideals and post-oppression myths, like post-racial Europe (Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2013; Boulila 2019).

Nordic Exceptionalism

Exceptionalism becomes a crucial part of constructing national, raceless narratives, for example the dominant image of Denmark through emphasizing the benevolent welfare state and silencing the colonial past (and neocolonial, militaristic present) (Jensen and Loftsdóttir 2022; Trouillot 2015; Wekker 2016). *Nordic Exceptionalism* is a regionally specific version referring to the Scandinavian countries' (a)historical self-representation (however, Swiss exceptionalism has similarities (dos Santos Pinto et al. 2022)). Somewhat on the margin of Europe, countries such as Sweden and Denmark, who have also dominated internally in the Nordic region, have established narratives in which their colonial histories become 'benign' if remembered at all, particularly participation in the Transatlantic Slave Trade (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012; Sawyer and Habel 2014; McEachrane 2016; Jensen 2018). Referring to their participation, which was shorter lived, did not trade *directly* in humans, or was lesser in scope *relative to bigger European countries*, exceptionalism is mobilized to situate the Nordics as outside of a common European history that constructed the Black 'other' with and through the development of Modern capitalism. Nordic Exceptionalism has also been claimed through discourses of (supposedly already obtained) gender equality and sexual inclusivity, akin to what Jasbir Puar (2007) has coined *homonationalism* (Hvenegård-Lassen and Maurer 2012; Nebeling Petersen and Myong 2015).[1] In this way, the lived experiences of systemic *racial* discrimination challenge national self-perceptions of actual equal societies on the basis of formal citizenship. The lived life of racially minoritized nationals illuminate the hypocrisy of exceptionalism working through 'colorblind' or 'raceblind' discourses (El-Tayeb 2003; Lentin 2008; El-Tayeb 2011; Salem and Thompson 2016; Boulila 2019).

The political and institutionalized frame for Nordic Exceptionalism is the Nordic welfare state. Characterized by a large public sector and a relatively high tax liability the state provides universal social securities and rights such as retirement benefits, paid parental and sick leave, unemployment benefits, health care, primary schooling and higher education including universal stipends. In the post WWII era Denmark saw economic growth and the integration of women into the workforce which meant more collective wealth through taxes. The 1960's was also when the public or 'social' housing sector grew, making good and affordable housing available to regular workers through associations, thus not for profit and centering the lessee's rights. Known as the Nordic Model, the Nordic welfare states have thus been constructed as unified, taking similar political stances in the wake of WWII and during the Cold War, and 'modeling' to the world domestic 'progressive' politics through social democracy and a generous institutionalized redistribution (Kelekay 2022). However, a neoliberal tendency to cut down the very social securities that Denmark has been known for as a Nordic welfare state, can be read critically in connection to an increasing immigrant population since the 1970's. The institutionalization of discrimination based on 'non-Western' ethnicity, such as the Danish 'Ghetto Law,' therefore illuminates the state, even a *welfare* state, as founded on racialized principles of citizenry. State sanctioned racial discrimination, Jasmine Kelekay (2022) argues, specifically with regards to policing, is therefore not a sign of "the failures of the welfare state, but because the welfare state

[1] In fact, 'diversity and inclusion' policies in Denmark often refers exclusively to 'gender' or (cis) women as the only minorities imaginable (Skadegård Thorsen 2020).

relies on a racial welfare order wherein the well-being of some depends on the subjugation of others" (p. xxiii). The post-racialist terminology might be 'ethnicized', yet the material effects are racializing.

Nordic Exceptionalism thus implies context specific articulations of *Nordic Whiteness* (Lundström and Teitelbaum 2017). Ylva Habel (2008; 2011; 2018) has contributed especially pertinent theorizations of 'Whiteness Swedish Style', white fragility, and white defensiveness as related to Nordic Exceptionalism generally. Since 'race' as such is considered an irrelevant sociological category in the Nordic context, it follows that the topic of racial whiteness too, is rendered taboo. A conception of *post-racial whiteness* is thus expressed ideologically when white Swedes, in this case, make a claim to a "non-relational whiteness, ie. they do not want to put it in perspective to anything having to do with the globally valid white privileges" (Habel 2008, 7). On the interpersonal level, Habel (2008) has identified three generalizable white subject positions; the innocent, the relativist, and the consciously doubter (p. 7). While these positions express distinct rationales when it comes to discussing racial whiteness, "[c]ommon for them is that they try to disidentify with the privileges that whiteness carries with them, either by escaping the subject, refusing to understand what we are talking about, or various attempts to renegotiations of the meaning of whiteness" (p. 7-8). Ahistorical and outside of power relations, as I will illustrate later, race is often conceptualized quite literally as 'color' in the Nordics, thus reduced to a surface layer, rather than a constructed social *position* within a structure of dominance. "'I don't *feel White* – I am more…pink'" (Habel 2008, 8) is thus not an unusual way for the Nordic majority of disidentifying with their own *racialization as white*. This expresses white people's rejection of both collective embodiment and social positioning and their relatedness in a societal reality structured through the supremacy of whiteness; an expression of the coloniality of race in the Nordics (Quijano 2000; McEachrane 2018; Eika et al. 2019; Hunter 2021). The historical amnesia embedded in Nordic disavowal of racial whiteness becomes even more apparent (and paradoxical) when recalling that one of the most prominent European eugenics scientists in the 18th century was in fact the Swede Carl von Linné (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012).

Metropolitan Denmark is a very small island country with its 16,580 square miles and about 5.9 million people as of 2023, which is an increase, and just slightly over half a million inhabitants in its capital Copenhagen. Compared to bigger European countries and empires, that, despite similar historical amnesia, have had to somehow deal with centuries of colonial subjects in their metropolitan geographies, Denmark and the Nordic countries have had a real opportunity to write a raceless national History, both past and present. With the historical influx primarily of colonial goods and profits, but not colonial subjects, the absence of a critical mass of peoples who could have challenged Nordic Exceptionalism earlier is characteristic for the region (Habel 2011; McEachrane 2016). Sweden, however, has had a considerable African diasporic population, particularly from across the Horn of Africa, for longer than Denmark due to different immigration policies from the 1980's and onward[2] (Kelekay 2022). In comparison, Swedish Black and African mobilization and political consciousness is more developed than the Danish, while Black scholarship is generally extremely scarce across the Nordic context. So, while the framework of a

[2] Extending welfare state ideals of equal citizen rights to immigrants, Swedish immigration policies have been characterized by good faith relative to the Danish, and by institutionalized multiculturalism by public support of mother tongue instruction and funding for cultural associations for minorities, for example (Skodo 2018). In contrast, besides a small window of liberal immigration policies in the early 1980's, Danish immigration policies have been gradually tightened regardless of the political representation in government and characterized by high demands for immigrants and refugees to gain rights and residency (Myong and Andersen 2015; Farbøl et al. 2019). But without comparison, Sweden has generally accepted a higher number of immigrants and had the highest number of refugees per capita globally in 2015 (Skodo 2018).

post-racial Europe that El-Tayeb and Boulila offer, for example, is absolutely indispensable for my work, I would add that it is worth considering if the Danish national narrative is in fact almost *pre*-racial, rather than post-racial, in its flavor of denial. As if 'race' has yet to be proven a relevant term.

Racism without 'Race': How 'Difference' has been Theorized in Denmark

In many places across Europe the summer of 2020 was extraordinarily marked by the global COVID-19 pandemic and demonstrations following former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin's murder George Floyd in May. In Denmark, large demonstrations were held in solidarity with the Movement for Black Life across the US. This also sparked conversations around racism, institutionalized racism, and antiblackness in Denmark in the public debate. At a first glance, debates around racism surfaced in the Danish public and political debate, however, the dominating discourse maintained a relationship to racism precisely as debatable. For instance, national newspaper *Politiken* and public service broadcasting channel TV2 published a survey (with 1174 participants) on the question of whether racism is a widespread problem in Denmark and conclude that it is not, leaving the issue a matter of personal opinion (Bostrup 2020; Færch 2020). But even the Danish Institute for Human Rights in a 2017 report on "Afro-Danes' experiences of discrimination" leaves the recorded experiences of racism as open questions for the (white) researchers to determine as real or not (Stenum 2017). That is, whether the discrimination 'really' was racism. This public attitude was further reinforced when a Danish-Tanzanian black man was murdered by two white, Danish men. The assumption of an 'antiracist norm and majority', in Boulila's words produces racism as always already unlikely and something to be proven. It was a disillusioning time to be a researcher of race when everyone, particularly the millennial generation I am part of, all of a sudden became self-proclaimed spokesperson for 'people of color'. Slow, deep study was per definition in opposition to the twitter- and instagram format of the heated moment. Volume, confidence, and opinion spoke louder than grounded, informed analysis. Additionally, the entire momentum was mediated through the white gaze and an economy of minority pain on display. That is, finally the marginalized were 'offered platforms' by mainstream media, or in Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang's words, I observed that: "The subaltern can speak, but is only invited to speak her/our pain" (2014, 224). Some community and critical public conversation was indeed built (at least online). The future will show how much was simply momentum, click-bait solidarity from mainstream media, and to which extent this was a real moment of learning and change among the majoritized. Because it is hard to speak about or change anything regarding racism, when the public consensus insists, they do not 'see race.'

It is not that there is not a discourse in Denmark about 'us' and 'them,' rather it is because the current discourse does not account for those who are neither experiencing categorization as 'us' (Danish) or 'them' (immigrant), the in-between experience. Here, it can be useful to ground an understanding of the sound of racial silence in what *is* articulated instead. Lene Myong (2011) describes racial silence as the way 'race' and 'racism' is rarely uttered in Denmark. "This silence," she writes, "functions as constitutive of the perceived notion of Danishness as raised above the question of race" (p. 272). Meanwhile, a dominating discourse is coloring ethno-national divides through terminology such as 'ghetto,' 'parallel society,' 'non-Western/Western,' and 'immigrants and descendants' (A. M. von Freiesleben 2016; Frandsen and Hansen 2020; Hassani 2020; 2021). Insight into the dominating discourse surrounding the 'ghetto law' or 'ghetto package' – lately edited to 'parallel society package' – gives a good understanding of constructions of difference in

contemporary Denmark and its underlying racializing logics, dominated by islamophobic overtones. It presents a current vocabulary of the sayable and in turn the unsayable and overlooked marginalized experiences.

When I spend an extensive amount of space explaining a dominating discourse that does not name the population group I am focusing on, it is precisely to make it clear how a raceless discourse invisibilizes some racial minorities while hyper-visibilizing others. I have therefore illustrated the usefulness of a European, specifically Western European, framework rather than a narrower focus on simply Denmark, or Scandinavia alone. By understanding the context within which a sense of Europeanness is reproduced, and reproduced as Western, ties it to European Modernity's fundamental coloniality (Césaire 2000; Quijano 2000). The reiteration of Europeanness and Westernness, in this view, are then placed in their context of ideological projects of defining the human or simply Man (Wynter 2003). As I have shown, essentially two categories are perceivable in the imaginary raceless national scheme in Denmark: Danish or foreigner, where Danish is premised on being racialized as white: "Europeans possessing the (visual) markers of Otherness thus are eternal newcomers, forever suspended in time, forever 'just arriving,' defined by a static foreignness overriding both individual experience and historical facts" (El-Tayeb 2011, xxv). The perceivability of the 'foreigner' category is possible in part due to distinguishing between national citizenship and significantly through the discursive construction of foreigner-*as*-Muslim. In a post-racial neo-secular European world order, as Hanane Karimi argues, assumed religious and cultural 'difference' are thus legitimate political fix-points, whereas national citizens' embodied racial difference from white peoplehood remains unspeakable, taboo (personal communication 2023, see also Karimi 2023).

Brought up within these dominating epistemologies of exclusionary nationalism and Europeanness, yet not being an immigrant or 'foreigner' makes for a condition of multiple aspects of alienation. There is the alienation of being made 'other' all together and then there is the alienation of one's situation existing outside of the common vocabulary for 'us' and 'them' – as "indefinable non-white" as Ylva Habel writes (2008, 2). With few concepts to name this, how do Danish people of the African diasporas make sense of themselves and their lives as Danes, yet systematically alienated? Danes and Scandinavians of color generally share this particular condition of search for language with other Europeans of color. However, the UK is different in that a) there is a Black British history and civil rights movement to draw on, b) there is a *language* and historical Black discourse, both in the sense of terminology and practically sharing English with the U.S. and c) it is possible (legal) to collect racial data in the census. This creates entirely different and relatively advantageous predispositions for developing Black political consciousness and African diasporic collectivity and even policies. Theories of Black experiences from places with an already established language like the British, and the U.S. American especially, can add an additional layer of alienation, since fundamental parts of the continental Afro-European experiences are invisibilized and simply unthought of within Anglophone theorizations (Wekker 2009; Emejulu and Sobande 2019). I therefore center European theories grounded in similar discursive and societal conditions of racelessness as in Denmark, in contexts where developing a language all together is part of the stakes for (potential) politicization.

The frameworks through which nationhood, belonging and difference are discussed in Denmark are currently expanding alongside the a small, but crucial presence of critical scholars with racial minority positionalities (and a few allies) (Myong 2009; 2011; 2014; Khawaja 2014a; Elg 2016; Skadegård 2017; Muasya, Birisawa, and Berisha 2018; O.-K. Diallo 2019; Lagerman 2019; Skadegård Thorsen 2019; 2020; Hassani 2021; Cramer, Elg, and Jørgensen 2021; Diallo and

Miskow Friborg 2021). This scholarship, in particular, is challenging the dominant discourse and creating debate, within and outside of academia. Characteristic for much racially minoritized scholarship is that it suggests *structural* analysis, a significant part of it emphasizes *race* and *racialization* as analytics, and it ideally focuses on relations of *power*. However, there are clearly different political imaginations and desires behind the small but diverse group of critical scholars, likely reflecting different positionalities and access to power internally. It is pertinent to recall that Denmark is small (less than 6 million people) and the academic world even smaller, and that political discourse, public representations and academic discourse are closely related. Indeed, the media are often the very objects of academic study (Suárez-Krabbe 2012; Rødje and Thorsen 2019; Danbolt 2017). Additionally, the relationships of power that racially minoritized scholars examine, also pertain to the research environment itself, such as opportunities for funding, mentorship, and publications. This all shapes (and limits) the field. Most significantly is the fact that, like in other Nordic and European countries, no formal training in critical race studies is possible to date. No departments or programs exist as an intellectual and pedagogical frame. Therefore, Black women in particular, and marginalized people doing norm critical research on Denmark at a Danish institution often experience isolation, epistemic violence and (premature) burn-out. Oda-Kange M. Diallo's (2019) study on Black women across academic fields, paints the picture as such:

> "Essentially, being a Black woman in Danish academia requires the ability to walk an incredibly thin line, balancing institutional, yet well-hidden racism, sexism and Islamophobia, while also fulfilling one's own ambitions. It is a multi-layered marginality, which does not leave much room for personal movement. Yet Black women show up every day, and keep distorting these white, male spaces with their presence, and their work. It seems as though standing at the margins makes you able to see the absurdities of white, male-dominated academia very clearly" (p. 227).

In existing research on constructions of difference in Denmark, 'Islam' and 'Muslims' have been primary categories emphasized in the field of immigration studies and often confined to debates on integration. I emphasize that these are categorizations (from outside and above) and often have little or nothing to do with people who are Muslim nor are they grounded in expertise of the vast worlds of Islam. Such scholarship especially emerged in the wake of what was known as the cartoon crisis when Danish illustrators depicted the prophet Muhammad in two national newspapers in 2005 in stereotyping and caricaturing ways. A body of literature examined the heightened tension in the public discourse as it was expressed in the daily news media and by politicians, in a time where the far right-wing political party of Denmark consistently gained power. This type of literature included Danish academic publications with titles such as *The Question of Immigration* (Olwig and Pærregaard 2011); *Islam in Denmark: The challenge of diversity* (J. S. Nielsen 2012); *The Annoying Difference* (Hervik 2011). These publications analyze xenophobic discourses and representations in Danish media, politics, and everyday attitudes, as they pertain to the 'issue' of Muslims, immigrants, and 'non-Westerners'. I do not engage such scholarship; it simply serves as an illustration of dominant conceptualizations of differences that matter. While notions such as neoracism, cultural racism, xenophobia, and islamophobia were evoked in the above publications to describe the right-leaning commonsense discourse circulating in Denmark, the conclusions largely enabled the issue of racism to be perceived as acts by individuals or isolated events and always already related to 'immigrants.'

Postcolonial, decolonial, and scholarship engaging Nordic whiteness has taken a more critical approach to questions of ethno-racial inequalities in Denmark and Scandinavia. The relationship between racial whiteness, Danish colonialism, and post-colonial representations brings to the fore (typically) the discursive continuities of power relations, and articulations of the construct of Danishness as whiteness, whiteness as Danishness (Lundström and Teitelbaum 2017; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012; Andreassen 2014; Jensen 2018; Hervik 2019). The complex aspects of Danish innocence and exceptionalism co-existing with colonial nostalgia have been examined, however sometimes leaving the white Danish researcher positionalities unacknowledged (Lindqvist 2014; Jensen 2015). While critical Nordic whiteness studies are indispensable for the field as such, naturalized white researcher positionalities risks reproducing representations of colonial (genocidal, epistemic) symbolic violence. For example, describing Greenland as part of the Danish commonwealth matter of factually, or reproducing the racialized Danish/foreigner dichotomy as well as using 'immigrant' and 'Muslim' as both interchangeable and as placeholders for racial difference from unnamed default whiteness (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012).

Decolonial scholarship grounded in structural analysis of racism and racialization has precisely addressed the risk of maintaining a discourse of white innocence as the academic status quo (Suárez-Krabbe 2012; Danbolt 2017; Skadegård and Jensen 2018; Danbolt and Myong 2019; Rødje and Thorsen 2019). Significantly for this dissertation is considerations of the kind of pushback related research has met. Mathias Danbolt and Lene Myong (2019) sketch out the political climate regarding the topic of (anti-racist) research on racism as it was expressed between 2012-2016:

> "The debate was marked by a widespread recognition of the existence of racism as a marginal, contained, controllable, and intentional phenomena, and of anti-racist research and knowledge production as a destructible, oppressive force that has gone too far. According to this framework, what needs to be kept on a tight rein is no longer racism as such but anti-racist researchers with their epistemological framework that wrongly demonizes the Danes by calling them racist." (p. 57).

The above quote illustrates a split in what can be called a debate about racism in Denmark: a) Research on racism and xenophobia in Denmark through a variety of approaches, as I have reviewed so far, and b) meta-discourses on racism in Denmark, that is, academic and public contestations of anti-racist research *discourse* itself, *not* original empirical research that disproves the claims of racism in Denmark. As such, the latter is actually not part of the (empirical) research field but opposes the theoretical and methodological premises on which anti-racist research is founded. This debate climate thus echoes the dominating discourse in Danish society, beginning its inquiry from a Nordic exceptionalist ideological standpoint with titles such as Bech and Necef's (2012) *Are Danes Racist? The Problems of Immigration Research* [*Er danskerne racister? Indvandrerforskningens problemer*] (Qvotrup Jensen 2015; Danbolt and Myong 2019). This is an ongoing, if not intensifying reality. Marginalized voices are questioned as legitimate, professional knowledge producers at all, attacked publicly from the highest ranks, and the Danish white Christian straight male worldview is upheld as objective and allegedly representing the one universal Truth. Anyone else's perspective – specifically women, queer, and Muslim people – is called subjective and personal opinions (I. Hassani 2023).

It is worth noting that while the immigration-approach and the post-colonial approach are dominated by white Danish scholars, the structural approaches to racism and analyses of power

have the highest representation of researchers with Danish minoritized positionalities, however few they are in numbers. It emphasizes that researcher positionality matters. For example, a crucial distinction of this scholarship is that it introduces the non-white Danish citizen as a research subject *as well as* knowledge producer. These perspectives complicate dominant articulations of normative Danishness and of imagined Danish geopolitical and colonial innocence.

With this dissertation I work to contribute to such scholarship and, as previously mentioned, I emphasize a need for even more specific and situated knowledge: beyond identifying colonial, hegemonic Danish whiteness or the 'majority,' the particularities of racializations as Inuit, as Muslim, and as Black, for example, have not received adequate attention through structural analysis of racialization. Rather, scholars whose work looks at such collective experiences, are at best placed under the rubric of 'immigration/integration scholar', regardless of their work examining Danish national subjects, at worst, routinely disregarded as legitimate researchers.

RESEARCH DESIGN

I am examining the ways first generation African diasporic Danish people make sense of themselves, and their relationship to Danishness and belonging in Denmark. Therefore, I focus on first person voices of people who have lived this experience broadly. Here, I briefly repeat my research questions:

1) How can the conditions for first-generation African diasporic Danish people be defined?
2) What does living through ongoing alienation mean for peoples' sense of self?
3) Which strategies do African diasporic Danish people use to navigate their blackness in a post-racial context?

To approach these questions, I built a multi-methods research design which reflects the interdisciplinary character of this work. These methods include content analysis, semi directive and non-directive individual interviews, and small focus group interviews. I have had to invent my methodology, just like the theoretical framework is composed from across disciplines, representing diverse approaches to identifying and analyzing structures of power.

Methodological and Epistemological Reflections

In this study I am centering the voices of Danish people of African descent. I focus on first-person narratives through one main autobiography, one secondary autobiographical publication, and interviews I have personally conducted with 34 individuals. I spent a total of seven months in Denmark from December 2020 to July 2021, the beginning primarily spent with textual archives, and the last part focused on interviews. Thus, it was in the middle of the global Covid-19 pandemic

and a locked down Denmark, while online and traditional media were in a momentum of 'racial reckoning' after the murder of George Floyd.

As I have argued, I identify a gap in the current academic research whose historical non-engagement with 'race' as a unit of analysis misses accounts of Danish people whose primary reason for systemic exclusion from national belonging is a question of race and racialization. In this research I place racialized minoritization and racism, as an empirical point of departure, rather than a finding. I focus specifically on Afro Descendants, racialized as Black. While I first thought I was going to research racialization generally, the more I studied over the years, it became clear that that antiblackness and the Black figure is specific to Modernity and thus to a European context, ideologically, historically, economically and so on. The last few years, a discourse of 'minority' has also become more and more prominent among racially minoritized Danes generally, perhaps non-Black minorities specifically. Yet, there is a tendency to erase particularities through constructions of a generalizable brown blur of minorities. But more importantly, appropriation of specifically Black experiences and Black theoretical terminology of resistance is incorporated into a 'minority' terminology without acknowledgement of its genealogy. In my observation, this is in part due to Danish people's unreflected adoption of U.S. American terminology such as People of Color (POC) and Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) for example. This is both decontextualized and deeply ahistorical. While the population group of African descendants racialized as Black is already very diverse in Denmark, I chose this demarcation to focus analytically on *antiblackness,* rather than *racism* generally. Racialization as Black is not a random matter of difference from whiteness, but a specific social, political and economic positioning structured historically through dominance, yet with various contextual expressions. Antiblackness does not care about actual ethnic origins or filiation. It is thus capacious in its operationalization in the Danish context casting quite differently marked bodies as Black. Just like there is a great diversity of social groups who are invested and complicit in antiblack oppression.

My epistemological grounding and research approach is Afrofeminist. It builds on a fundamental feminist claim that knowledge and knowledge production is always situated, never objective or neutral (Haraway 1988; Hill Collins 2000). Moreover, my approach is specifically informed by Decolonial, Transnational, and Black feminisms and Indigenous and Afrofeminist epistemologies that account for how situatedness is not merely relative positions, but positions within relationships of power (Lorde 1993c; Alexander 2005; Yuval-Davis 1997; Lugones 2010; Alexander and Mohanty 2013; Hill Collins 2000; Lugones 2016; L. T. Smith, Tuck, and Yang 2019). Who is constructed as a knowledge producer and who is constructed merely as an informant is related to dominating structures of power, and Patricia Hill Collins, and others, argue that there is significant knowledge to gain from the marginalized 'outsider' perspectives (Collins 1986; Hooks 1989; Kilomba 2010; O.-K. Diallo 2019).

In Denmark, as an articulation of Western European paradigms, such positions of power especially pertain to whiteness, Christianity, individuality, maleness, and being a researcher within an institution such as a university or an NGO. It is therefore a methodological choice of mine to value knowledge production in various formats, both with regard to primary and secondary sources. I consider both the reading and the interviews I engaged as primary data as equally expressions of theory arguing that oral stories hold knowledge, something that has been devalued in academia (Banks-Wallace 2002). Additionally, I include some non-academic writing, podcasts, and personal communication because I learn through these sources too and from the people who produce them. This approach to knowledge and knowledge production is part of my Black Feminist Citational Praxis. Through my citational politics I tend to a centering of not only ideas

from the margin, but also citations of the actual thinkers, speakers, and authors to the best of my knowledge. Theoreticians, from the African diaspora, Indigenous peoples, and other colonized people – women and queer folk in particular – continue to be systematically excluded from academic 'canons', syllabi and core readings. Relegated to being 'ethnic studies', such scholarship is routinely considered relevant only in the study of their respective subgroups rather than society as a whole. All the while, radical ideas by the marginalized get co-opted and appropriated by mainstream scholars *without* proper citation, thus erasing theories' genealogy and failing to acknowledge Black, Indigenous and colonized people's intellectual contributions (Bilge 2014; C. A. Smith 2017; B. Williams 2022).

In the dominating anti-racist discourse in Denmark, there is often a focus on the minoritized subject, rather than the *structure* that minoritizes (Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz 2005). In this work, I focus on the structures of power as they affect the people I speak with. Furthermore, there is a focus on a) experiences of 'minority-pain' (Tuck 2009; Lang 2020), and if racism is mentioned at all, there is typically a fixation on b) whether or not racism was the cause of discrimination and pain (Hervik 2011; Stenum 2017). In this research I refuse such approaches. Learning notions from Native Studies scholarship and research methodologies, here Eve Tuck, K. Wayne Yang and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, I insist on relating to the people I engage with as people first and foremost, and refuse 'pain based' and 'damage-centered research' (Tuck 2009; Tuck and Yang 2014; Smith 2012). This includes diverging from methods and discourses that ask the minoritized to prove the 'realness' of racism in Denmark, and to exhibit pain in order to 'deserve' reparations or simply acknowledgment (Tuck and Yang 2014).

What I have been intentional about instead, is centering an ethics of care and familiarity (Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett 2003; Alexander 2005; Hill Collins 2000). Planning the themes of my semi-structured interviews, I centered elements of what Eve Tuck (2009) calls a *desire-based* research framework: I asked questions about feeling good, imagination, wishes and dreams for the future, and experiences of connection. This was an example of mobilizing and sharing my positionality: I asked questions that were informed by my lived experiences and positionality which I shared with the participants, enabling and a sense that *you know if you know* (Hill Collins 2000). Creating the conversational point of departure of a shared knowing, rather than a need to prove or explain lived experience, resulted in a level of openness, trust and familiarity that I found exceptional. I experienced truly moving, fun, and heartwarming conversations in the conversational space, whether it was in person or via video call. And I received a lot of feedback from people who enjoyed it too.

This approach included me choosing to work intentionally to "humanize the researcher," myself, as Tuck describes, through my insistence on humanizing the interviewees (rather than exotifying or tokenizing) (Tuck and Yang 2014, 238). While the research was about producing and exemplifying knowledge from the 'outside' (Hill Collins 1986), I approached it as best I could through a relationship of reciprocity rather than a relationship of information extraction (Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett 2003; Tuck and Yang 2014; Chase 2020). This required a practice of my researcher role as grounded in *my* humanness, and a commitment to (continuous) deconstructing disciplinary splits of mind/body and intellect/emotion (hooks 1994).

I understand this dissertation as a work of collecting stories and putting them in the same place (Chase 2020). I consider all of you who have contributed, all of us, really, experts of our own lives. Following my intuition and embodied knowledge about what *I* have lived, *you* have lived too, I created and asked questions to get to know your version of such stories. It is in putting iterations of the same stories together that a pattern emerges. I therefore think of *constellations of*

collectivity. There are different ways to make connections between the individual stories, but they are definitely connected. In future iterations of my work, I therefore dream of creating more concrete togetherness. I want to share what I experienced, all the stories I heard and listened to. That big picture of *us*. Remember, I spoke with 34 people, but most people had an experience of just speaking with one, me. A few people experienced the live resonance of group conversation. Although I was only able to include a fraction of the amazing conversations, I hope this work will give some insight into the beautiful constellations of African diasporic Danish life. Even in the individual interviews, I believe that that in itself was a crucial point of connection where we generated ways of knowing and naming ourselves. I know it was for me.

Afrofeminisms and Matters of Afropean Knowledge Production

As mentioned, this work is grounded in transnational feminist theorizations broadly. The specific interventions of feminisms that are marginalized within what has been defined as 'the gender struggle,' for example, is an attention to the dynamics of domination *within* and *across* groups with less power (Davis 1983; Alexander and Mohanty 2013). This goes for notions of a so-called 'Black struggle,' or a category as 'Black women,' or simply 'women' or 'Black' as well. The struggle over power to define seems particularly tense when theorizing from a time and context where language *is* part of the fight for self-recognition both as subjects and collectives (Hooks 1989). And when, as in many Northern European countries, American culture and language (including Black American) has been dominating TV, radio, and cinema for decades, American Blackness and language has become an (if not the only) accessible model for being Black in the West, for better or worse. But without attention to the historical and contextual specificity of *U.S. American* mediated blackness(es), using other people's context specific experiences, language and strategies as our own is a major disservice, if not entirely unviable analytical project. Thus, it is an ambivalent relationship to the U.S. and U.S. blackness that exists among the African diasporas in a place like Denmark generally, particularly the 1980's generation, seeing as the golden era of U.S. American Black sitcoms and hip hop of the 1990's and early 2000's precisely provided some kind of reflection of affirmation when there was none locally. However, as I am writing, the '80's generation has begun to use its voice, and it is clear to me that the U.S. American hegemony regarding race theories and 'Blackness discourse' also derails the conversations and theorizations needed locally. The scholarly American (Black) hegemony is as present as the cultural. What is at stake, therefore, is not solely translation of languages, technically, but the translational tasks embedded in navigating expressions of different historically and contextually specific experiences and thus theories. As matters of blackness are per definition transnational matters, it is indispensable that they be approached through analytics capacious enough to embrace them as such. This is not always the case, and the U.S. is too often simultaneously centered and constructed as universal/superior regarding all things Black. U.S.-centrism functions *within* Black and Diaspora Studies like other structures of power that are typically critiqued in American Black Studies, its effects being epistemic marginalization and invalidation of the vast African diasporic knowledges and articulations of Black experiences.

It is therefore instructive when Afrofeminists in and/or of Europe have articulated a distinction between Black Feminism and Afrofeminism (Mwasi 2018; Emejulu and Sobande 2019; Noël 2021). Black Feminisms as U.S. American intellectual (and poetic and relational and care) projects continue to be invaluable resources to European grounded Afrofeminisms. *And,* while there are certain similarities due to the generalizable conditions of being Black(ened) subjects in

the white, hetero cis-male, capitalist 'West,' Black Feminisms remain specific to the larger U.S. American context. A core concept from Black feminisms is the analytic attention to 'interlocking' structures of power, as the Combahee River Collective articulated it in 1979 (hooks 1981; Davis 1983; Crenshaw 1989; Lorde 1993c; Jordan 2002; Hill Collins 2000; Nash 2019; Combahee River Collective 2021). This includes analytical attention to simultaneous mechanisms of oppression *and* of privilege – as Margo Okazawa-Rey (2022) has put it: "Nobody is off the hook if you look at things intersectionally." I often like to make use of Patricia Bell-Scott, Gloria T. Hull and Barbara Smith's (1982) apt title *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, but some of us are Brave* to make this theoretical point come across. I have then typically modified it to the position I work to theorize in two versions: 'All the Danes are White, all the non-Whites are foreigners, but some of us are Brave' *and* 'All the Europeans are White, all the Blacks are American, but some of us are Brave.' These phrases efficiently demonstrate the invisibilized in-between position I occupy and theorize. Yet, the fact that I cannot express all of it at once through such framing is a point in itself.

The metaphor and (now) mainstreamed terminology of *intersectionality*, as Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989; 1991) theorized race-and-gender in the U.S. context of Law risks simplification of relations of power into a few (two) categories or axes that 'intersect.' It is particularly the importation of this version of the concept in Europe that seems unviable to analyze the local contexts where different legal categories are operationalized, not to mention how 'race' has been omitted from the framework (Bilge 2014). More importantly, it is also the popularization of 'intersectionality' as solely pertaining to gender, race, sexuality and perhaps class that dilutes its radical potential. The Black Feminists and other minority racialized, immigrant, and Indigenous women theorizing from the U.S. in the 1970's and 1980's had (and still have) a transnational outlook contextualizing the imperial, colonial, militaristic and geographical realities they referred to as well (Anzaldúa and Moraga 1981; Alexander and Mohanty 2013; Angela Y. Davis and Frank Barat 2016). Such complexity is needed and often mobilized in Afrofeminisms. Power inequalities constructed from geopolitical, multi-lingual, multi-racial, and transnational diversity *simultaneously* are at the forefront of how 'difference' is articulated in Europe. It is from these realities racialized positionalities are formed in the former metropoles, yet simultaneously entangled with 'old' racial (plantation) schemes foundational to the Modern/Colonial, such as the binaries Black/white and heteronormativity.

European Afrofeminisms are thus tasked with producing grounded theory while systematically being epistemologically marginalized simultaneously by Euro-white-centrism *and* Black U.S.-centrism (Essed 1991; Wekker 2009; El-Tayeb 2011; Bacchetta, El-Tayeb, and Haritaworn 2018; Bacchetta et al. 2018). And it is not surprising, however, that many Afrofeminists have chosen to spend significant time or relocate entirely to the U.S., where, despite U.S. centrism, it is possible to study and theorize racialization *formally* (Bacchetta et al. 2018). It is possible to simply *speak* the word race. The lack of institutionalization of Black Studies or any types of 'ethnic studies' is a huge practical challenge to the formation of intellectual Afrofeminist fellowship within European countries and across them. We simply cannot easily find each other. Spread across fairly random academic fields and with key words such as 'Black' or 'race' often absent from our biographies, it is difficult to identify each other, even when we try. Add to that European language differences and the fact that a large part of us have left Europe (or at least our own country), not to mention our names that might sound either so 'African' or so 'European' that it is hard to identify each other as fellow Afropean *both-and* scholars. For me personally, it has therefore not been until I was affiliated with African American Studies in the U.S. that I met other Afropean scholars and got to know Afro-European and Afrofeminist literature. It was through that space where certain

words were possible. So, while an African American Studies department made space for the mere idea of blackness, the rest of the diasporas and Afropean scholarship were largely omitted from the curriculum. Epistemological marginalization, if not near erasure, thus characterized my studies once again, now from a hegemonic Black center. Reading *our* theories, Afro European texts, were therefore extracurricular and largely self-guided, only supported by peers or by occasional mentor figures I would reach out to. What saved me, I think, was the strong Black Feminist anchoring and leadership at this time in my department. Being mostly freed from also fighting patriarchy and being trained in Black Feminist research methods has been invaluable for my intellectual growth.

The institutional marginalization Diallo (2019) theorized earlier, among Black women in Danish academia, can therefore be juxtaposed to the isolation of being a European (or probably any non-American) Black scholar in a U.S. American Black Studies doctoral program. Having to figure out what might constitute Afropean, specifically Afrofeminist, core readings was something I had to figure out alone, just like theorizing my work's empirical context was something I did without advice from anyone knowledgeable of that context. Explaining, justifying, and defending my perspectives has therefore been defining for this experience, similar to Black Europeans in white European institutions. So, while the contours of something called European Black Feminism and Afrofeminism may be work in progress, the delineation of what Black European or Afropean Studies is *not* is clear to me. A sense of gaslighting is reproduced when, highly funded, Americans (Black or otherwise) research their 'other', the exotic Black and Afro-Europeans. This is not Afropean Studies. Nor is it when Americans (Black or otherwise) research American Blacks in Europe. This is not Afropean Studies. And it is also not when Black Americans live abroad in Europe and theorize *their* experience *in* Europe as 'the Black European Experience.' It is even hard to call research *by* Afropeans Afropean Studies when they use a U.S.-centric template to identify a so-called 'Black Europe' (Hine, Keaton, and Small 2009).

Our work is slow work. It requires translation and interpretation, flight tickets, multiple language skills, sometimes luck and always funding so we can tell our own stories and theorize our own realities. In this regard I want to acknowledge the paradox of theorizing Danish racializing modalities *in English.* As a matter of fact, I believe deeply in having a literal language for our local experiences in our local languages. For reasons already explained above, I too, had to move myself away from Europe in order to theorize it. And this is only a beginning.

The French Afrofeminist collective Mwasi articulates some of the definitions of their project as "afrofeminism as a political practice and not an identity" and as work "against our invisibilization as political subjects" (2018, 20). This is helpful in a European context where many African descendants might not call themselves 'Black', and where African diasporic diversity is too vast to easily identify as a unity. But across differences, many might still be sympathetic to a certain political *project* and cultivate a feminist *practice*. And for those African descendants in Denmark who *do* find resonance in claiming Black subjectivity as a *political* subjectivity (not an identity), we might more explicitly contribute to the work of speaking ourselves into existence, creating language and archives, sharing our experiences, building ourselves and each other up in various ways. And by this, by *making* space and *taking* up space, we might challenge a status quo that pushes us to their margins. So, I reiterate the courage and bravery it requires to speak up and I am forever grateful to those who have done so before me whose labor (and love) from the complex in-betweens that I have found early enough to strengthen and affirm my own: Philomena Essed, May Ayim and Katharina Oguntoye, Gloria Wekker, Françoise Vergès, Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe, Houria Bouteldja, Hazel Carby, Grada Kilomba, Lene Myong, Maboula Soumahoro, Rokhaya Diallo and especially those who I have also been fortunate enough to be

directly supported by or in community with – Fatima El-Tayeb, Nana Osei-Kofi, Ylva Habel, Lena Sawyer, Gail Lewis, and Temi Odumosu.

I consider everyday theorizing a key feminist practice, as suggested by hooks and Collins, for example (hooks 1994; Hill Collins 2000). We need concepts to understand our worlds. And theorizing together is particularly important. But I am also aware that the notion of 'theory' sounds foreign or elitist to some, and I notice a compartmentalization and separation between 'intellectual' work and 'activism' or 'the real world' in certain public conversations in Denmark at the moment. bell hooks (1994) speaks to such a split as "further promoting the false dichotomy between theory and practice" (p. 65). I believe that everybody I interviewed for this project theorized: they shared how they connect and assign meaning to circumstances in their lives and identified patterns. As such, they produced theories of blackness in Denmark with their own (Danish) words. This is what theory can mean; simply interpretation of lived experiences and their patterns. It is a particularly feminist practice from the margins to deconstruct dichotomies between theory and experience and situating such fragmenting epistemologies within European knowledge projects as the Enlightenment and its colonialist implications (hooks 1994; Oyěwùmí 1997; Lugones 2007; 2010; 2016; Alexander and Mohanty 2013; Alexander 2005; Hill Collins 2000). A dynamic hooks observed as a Black feminist in the 90's United States resonates in the current work towards language to understand our condition in Denmark. Particularly in the age of social media and the economy of fast, diluted knowledge and self-made digital social justice 'influencers': "There is a link between the silencing we experience, the censoring, the anti-intellectualism in predominantly black settings that are supposedly supportive (like all-black woman space), and the silencing that takes place in institutions wherein black women and women of color are told that we cannot be fully heard or listened to because our work is not theoretical enough" (hooks 1994, 68). Being Black European women *academics* can position us in yet another in-between due to constructed dichotomies of knowledge and who can be a knowing subject both within the institutions we move in and in the communities, we belong with.

Intellectual work can be written although it does not have to be. Writing however is an amazing technology through which we can share ideas across time and place, now, instantaneously. Those of us who are literate should never take for granted what this skill can give access to. And we might recall there was a reason our ancestors were not allowed to read and write, and literally had a mask put on to prevent speech (Kilomba 2010). But they were also forced to speak the master's tongue yet developed their own languages enabling some autonomy of communication and interrelation. Words are powerful. The written word no less.

Writing, for oneself or others, can be a way to break our silences, our own and those that oppress us. Audre Lorde (1993a) understood the high stakes of speaking up as a multiply marginalized person. It can feel dangerous, but we can learn to do it anyway, she said: "For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us" (Lorde 1993a, 44). We might as well say it scared, she encouraged, because "[y]our silence will not protect you" (p. 40).

Similarly, bell hooks (1994) wrote about "Theorizing as a Liberatory Practice." She shared how, for her, she was hurting and searching for belonging: "Living in childhood without a sense of home, I found a place of sanctuary in 'theorizing,' in making sense out of what was happening. I found a place where I could imagine possible futures, a place where life could be lived differently" (p. 61). "Fundamentally," she continues, "I learned from this experience that theory could be a healing place" (p. 61). That is, creating and understanding of the conditions that were

hurting her and putting them into words. And speaking to my point above, about the artificial separation between intellectual and other types of labor, she wrote: "When our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice" (p. 61). As such, Black Feminist and Afrofeminist Theory is consciously grounded not just in the national, or local socio-political context, but in *positionality* as mentioned earlier (Hill Collins 2000). By this, we might understand, not just our societal positionality, but also our emotional and sensous experiences. It is in theorizing from this vulnerability of being a whole human, in not trying to sound like what white European men have defined as theory for centuries, that specific Afrofeminist and Black Feminist knowledge can be fruitfully cultivated.

Positionality therefore matters and *marginalized* knowledges contribute scientific insights, in particular research *on* marginalized communities *by* its own members. Theorization from the margins (of Modernity/coloniality broadly (Quijano 2000)) include analytical attention to: self-definition and self-valuation (Collins 1986; Ellerbe-Dück and Wekker 2015); interlocking oppressions (Combahee River Collective 2021; Collins 1986); deconstruction of taken for granted social categories (hooks 1994; Oyěwùmí 1997; Lugones 2016); ethics of care and epistemic harm reduction (Tuck 2009; Tuck and Yang 2014; Hill Collins 2000; Chase 2020); and simply, identification and definitions of our problems in coherence with our lived reality through a critique of power (Fanon 1961; Césaire 2000). Rather than a pathologization of 'the minorities,' analyses from the margin can develop 'subjectless critique' (Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz 2005). Moreover, theorizing consciously from the margin, bell hooks (1989) reminds us, holds a potential for *radical openness*. Therefore, it continues to resonate deeply with me when Barbara Christian wrote "I can only speak for myself. But what I write and how I write is done in order to save my own life. And I mean that literally. For me literature is a way of knowing that I am not hallucinating, that whatever I feel/know *is*. It is an affirmation that sensuality is intelligence, that sensual language is language that makes sense" (Christian 1988, 61). In affirming our own experiences and actively bringing all those aspects into our work towards more language and more clarity, holds a radical and productive intellectual potential. And it requires a lot of unlearning for some of us who have been formally trained within the academy to *not feel* – having learned that only (male, white) cognition is knowledge.

Lastly, a note on translation: As I had the conversations or interviews in Danish, I have translated the excerpts I use for the purpose of this dissertation. I have done this to the best of my ability in order to preserve the meaning-making processes in Danish language, specifically between Danish people of African descent. Since the interviews were informal and amicable, there was a kind of intimacy that became possible in my interaction with the participants. Much of this emerged precisely because we talked about omnipresent topics of their (our) lives, which, at the same time, most people almost never said out loud and some had never spoken with anyone about being Black in Denmark before. The material is therefore emotionally rich. Some of the ways people expressed themselves to me was through a taken for granted notion that we shared the same knowledge. Therefore, they sometimes left out words, or did not finish sentences, assuming that I got it. Which I did. One such linguistic act in the Danish language is through the word *jo. Jo* is used as an 'emphatic affirmation,' that is, it is added to sentences typically after a verb to emphasize the self-evident character of what is being said. Example of use in questions and answers: "Why did she interview people about blackness in Denmark?" "She is *jo* Danish!" This will indicate not just an answer, but that this *clearly* is obvious, and should be known. In this way my interlocutors let me into their worlds of meaning-making by engaging me as if we *already shared* an

understanding of what they are speaking about. This will be left un-translated as I believe it has no equivalent in English and is an important indicator of the connection and relationship we are actively creating through the dialogical praxis of the conversation.

My Positionality: Sharing from Where I Speak

The nature of a 'realization' or discovery of my own blackness was my reality due to a deeply ingrained denial of race and racism in the omnipresent, yet unarticulated Danish status quo. My mother, who I grew up with, is a white Danish woman. I think I had the kind of experience of kids of divorced parents with a father who was around, but not in my house, minus the separation trauma because I do not remember when we did all live together. Being a traveler and artist, he was sometimes gone for long periods, but besides that, he was someone I could call and ask for help with English homework etc. Available, although on his terms. This is a nuance I gained through this project. Because while I had had a narrative that I had completely missed out on my father while he was alive, I can now see that he was very present compared to many others I spoke with. He was a part of my life, my school plays, my dance performances, holidays, birthdays, and weekends spent together doing regular, familial uneventful things.

Having an African American, pro-Black, anticolonial and critically reflecting father did not immediately transfer a Black (political) consciousness to me (or my siblings). And not only because I did not live with him. In fact, as a child I felt quite confused and alienated too, by his naming of my blackness in positive affirmations: "Black Is Beautiful", "You are a Queen, Elizabeth," "Don't ever let anybody tell you there is something you cannot do in life!" I knew what *he* was – American (as a child, that equated with being Black – that was my norm). He would speak English; I would answer in Danish. Naturally. But *I* was just Danish, right? And that exemplifies part of the issue: The available concepts for my relationship to home was either Danish or foreigner. And since I was born and raised in Denmark, mothered and grand mothered by white Danish matriarchs, that made me pretty Danish, didn't it? That was all I had ever known. So, when our dad passed before any of us were adults, my siblings and I lost a lot of our rooting and scarce access to learning ourselves and our blackness in (live, earthly) relationship with him. Our circumstances became even whiter.

I have navigated my life in Denmark with the non-material resources my parents gave me – intellectual and spiritual openness – and the material resources the state provided: free (and compensated) higher education, healthcare, social safety nets, and affordable housing. The European union also allowed me to go to Paris for education, internship, and work and spend a total of five years there, without having to apply for residency or work permits. Likewise, when I applied for graduate school in the U.S., I could do this as a citizen and was thus eligible for fellowships 'foreign' students would not be. So, while money did not come from home, I was given citizenship with access to some resources that I acknowledge many will not have access to for free. For example, my parents chose an alternative private school for us which was affordable because it was greatly subsidized, but also nowhere near as elitist as in the U.S. for example. In turn, as in Danish society generally, Christianity undergirded the curriculum, without ever calling it that explicitly. I have thus been socialized as culturally Protestant, while not being religious.

As of now, I am by far the most educated in my family, on both sides. Apparently, my father had a bachelor degree. I only found out as I applied for graduate school myself, 12 years after his passing. So, I did not identify with higher education at all and found it transgressive to apply and felt like an imposter for many years. I never thought of us as an intellectual household, but maybe

we were, informally. I have clear memories of both of them loving to read and having huge bookshelves. While my mother and that side of the family was not working or working class with upward mobility throughout my life, the whiteness surely made it more bearable to have very little money in my early years. And while my father was Black, his Americannes could mitigate the foreigner experience once his accent and nationality was revealed. I can see how the creativity and resourcefulness enabled both of my parents (and my sisters' mother) to do a lot with the little money they had, and to make capable and resilient humans out of us. Their consciousness is a sort of wealth, although it is not monetary.

I grew up in the greater Copenhagen area, in Gentofte, but not in the rich way, I have to say, as it connotes wealth. But they have public housing there too. So that is where we lived, for half of my life and then rented elsewhere in my late teens. As a young adult I moved to Nørrebro, Copenhagen, which is also where my father lived. Having lived in different countries, it is interesting to position myself physically, having experienced being read slightly differently across contexts. I can say this: in a European context, I am read as unambiguously of African descent *and* unambiguously as someone with a white parent. In Paris and in the San Francisco Bay Area, when I am not assumed to be 'just Black,' American for *not* being mixed, I am read as Ethiopian/Habesha. I have kinky hair compared to those categorized as 'mixed' in California and people I saw in my childhood, but I have 'soft' hair according to my Black cousins in Georgia. It is dark brown, but the ends can turn red'ish in the sun. I can grow an actual afro, coily and upwards. I currently wear it super short. In the winter my skin is a pale oakwood tone, in the Californian summer it has a medium cherry wood color, and with age (and sun) I get more beauty marks on my cheekbones, just like my father and our people. In Europe, I was of average height and size, which means thin in California, and close enough to normative, gendered beauty standards to have felt attractive 'for a black woman.' And yet, like many others like me, I was absolutely ignored in my youth, as Black was *not* beautiful, not even within the category of feminine or slightly interesting. As an adult, across contexts I have been assumed to be a lesbian when I really wanted to be straight, and I have been straight passing when I really wanted to be read as queer. Among my different entangled embodied markers, I am relatively protected or vulnerable according to context. Everyday though, I am a woman, and I am Black.

Our family carries several forms of trauma and loss that (I have come to find out) are common within a variety of immigration and diaspora family stories. And yet, we have the relative stability of the multigenerational presence on the Danish side. Similar complexities often exist in first generation multicultural families, and I expected somewhat vulnerable conversation simply from interview questions on family. In fact, it turned out to be quite the norm to have lost one or two African diasporic parents prematurely. As I will show, this is a loss on multiple, entangled levels for first-generation African descendants in otherwise white environments.

Lastly, where I am located as I write is in Huichin, unceded Lisjan Territory in what is known as Oakland, California, USA. As one of several Ohlone nations, the Lisjan people are Chochenyo speaking (The Sogorea Te Land Trust n.d.). The Lisjan are not federally recognized as a tribe which means they have no rights to land, resources, or protections. Work towards *rematriation* of the land is therefore organized by *Sogorea Te' Land Trust – Led by Urban Indigenous Women.* One way we settlers are invited to support directly is by donating and by 'giving Shuumi', paying a land tax to the Confederal Villages of Lisjan. I am in the process of learning, from Sogorea Te' and others, my role and responsibility as a Danish/African American guest on this land.

On my Black side of the family, my own people are 'from' Savannah, Georgia. It is thus only in a nation state logic that me being in the U.S. partly as a way to better understand my roots makes sense at all. California and Georgia could hardly be further apart. As descendants of imported, enslaved Africans my lineage did not choose to be there. There is therefore a complex relationship between the fact that they were displaced to literally, forcibly, cultivate land (L. T. Smith, Tuck, and Yang 2019, xii) Indigenous people are dispossessed of. Thus, inserted involuntarily into the ongoing project of Native displacement, dispossession and genocide. Our ethnic and geographical origins on the African continent, however, are obscured or erased yet notions of 'return' easily become invented nostalgia, if not imperialist or neocolonial. The place of the Black American in the U.S. (descendants of the enslaved in this country specifically), formerly constructed as property/capital, is therefore complex. Situated between their own historical dispossession of native African lands and epistemologies, and those of peoples Indigenous to these lands, continuously occupied by the United States, makes belonging difficult to conceptualize. (L. T. Smith, Tuck, and Yang 2019; Byrd 2019; Harris 2019). While antiblackness is inherent to U.S. settler colonialism, the Black subject has been constructed as "criminal, landless, and forgone" – both indispensable and killable (L. T. Smith, Tuck, and Yang 2019, xii). This is an ambivalent relation to land and place.

As a Black *European* my presence here is complex. Assuming my (formal) Europeanness, I cannot claim this place, meanwhile my country of birth does not claim me because of my blackness (regardless of whether I own it or not). This is an experience of diaspora, doubly displaced; simplified, first from unknown African places to the Southeastern coast of North America, and then from there to Denmark, the northern edge of Europe. My sense of Black belonging is marked by placelessness. This seems to be a premise to accept, and a collective experience. I do my best to balance potential harm I inflict through what my positionality means in some places and the harm inflicted on me because of my positionality in other places.

Delineating the Interlocutors

Black diaspora kids, descendants of enslaved 'new world' Black subjects like me are a minority of Danish African descendants according to my group of interviewees (1 of 34). And according to the census, being American and thus 'Western' *and* Black is something the national statistics would not be able to show. Similarly, Caribbeans and South American Black people would disappear into their respective national categorization. Rather, the majority Danish-born diaspora kids from the 1970-1990's have direct parental links to a diversity of African regions, nations, and ethnic groups. This diversity also represents a variation of reasons for migrating, from political exile of anti-colonial freedom fighters to economic or educational pursuits and, lastly, partnering with a Danish person. As mentioned, the 1990's represent a significant shift vis à vis African and Black diaspora presence in Denmark. This shift was produced through a conjunction of demographic changes in Denmark, notably collective diasporas of people seeking asylum, mainly from Somalia, on one hand, and the increasing availability of Black, westernized self-representation through African American pop-culture (sitcoms, commercialized hip hop music, movies etc) on the other. Affirming images would since expand through the democratization of Internet-access, the development of social media, and the circulation of self-expressions it enabled. Visual self-representation and politicized connections were two crucial elements in new possibilities of forging collective consciousness(es) across contexts globally. I therefore heard a shared understanding from the people born in the 60's, 70's, 80's and (even) early 90's that the next

generation, so-called gen Z, will have completely different experiences. Coming of age with access to mass circulation of diverse and affirmative voices and images sets the future adult generations apart. I am interested in what people did before this availability. Recognizing that there is still a long way to go, this is why I delineated the target group in terms of year of birth. As such I organized the online sign-up survey according to years, making people identify within 5-year intervals.

This research comes out of my personal experiences of missing and searching for mirroring, reflections, role models and simply language to articulate and understand my own life circumstances. The experience of not feeling at home *at home*, as bell hooks (1989) mentioned, but on a societal level. And so too, I began researching and theorizing. I am therefore interested in other experiences like mine. This is what I call the first generation: you do not fully share your position with either of your parents, who might be Danish, but white, and the other might also be Black, but from a different context. With no intergenerational knowledge about the *Danish African diasporic* conditions to pass down, you have to invent it yourself and learn as you go from your experiences. I specifically speak with Danish *citizens*[3]. This is in acknowledgement of a material reality deeply shaped by the access, rights and protections that depend on formal citizenship in the European border regime. It is also to delineate a target group which is as Danish as can be in all cultural and practical ways, excluding the 'integration issues' argument for experiences of exclusion. As such, I position myself as an insider to the group I research, while being cognizant of internal differences and positions of power. Of the few people I have personal relationships with, none of them are included in the dissertation. Additionally, everyone is anonymous while African origins and Danish places are left true for the sake of context, although I have regionalized very small towns.

I spoke with 34 people. I had one group interview of two who were friends, one of four siblings, one of three, where two were acquaintances (to me as well) and the third was a new encounter. The rest were individual interviews. There was another pair of siblings in the entire group, but I interviewed them separately. This gave me just a glimpse into the completely different worlds that can exist in the same family, and almost opposing relationships to racism, blackness and belonging. I hosted most people in the two different locations where I stayed in Nørrebro and Nordvest, and some on zoom as well. This was an option both to be able to speak with people who were located elsewhere than Copenhagen, since I was not able to travel. And it was also an option with regards to the pandemic for people's comfort and as a plan B when a few people had been exposed to Covid-19. I also interviewed a few people in their homes, but always offered to host. I would make tea and have little snacks or fruit and water available, and we would sit at a table or the couch available. Before recording I would ask if they needed anything and if they were ready for me to press record. If we had not organically started talking, my first question would often be 'how are you feeling?'

What stood out to me when I published my call for participants was the interest. At that point, I still lived in the belief that I was more or less the only one – just like everybody else, as I will show. So, when within the first 3 days I had 57 people sign up I was amazed. The following week 14 more signed up, and for the remaining couple months I was open for participants 22 more signed up. 93 total! I didn't even know we were that many.

Within this group, another pattern quickly became clear: Where were the men? Out of 93, 14 identified as 'he,' one as 'they/she', the rest as 'she,' except a few who did not answer the

[3] Other Scandinavian national citizens are included here, since there is an agreement extending Danish national rights and duties to them. See the Danish Constitution on citizenship and naturalization.

question or wrote 'no preference.' The latter, I think, testifies to me using politically correct language about pronouns out of context. Having been in feminist academic circles for six years, in the very queer Bay Area of all places, I have definitely been in a cultural bubble that is not representative of how most people speak. In communicating with people, it was my mistake to assume that folks who are not in queer activist and/or academic spaces understand what I was asking and why it mattered. In Any case, it ended up being 15 identifying as men, of which 7 were already used to speaking in public. I know because I recognized their names and some of them were already acquaintances of mine. This suggests they were already confident on the topic, and I suppose they had some trust in me, already being in some of the same networks. It means that there were only 8 men out of 93 people who took a chance to participate in conversation about these topics without being engaged with it already. This was partly why I kept registration open for so long, to personally recruit more men. But they were largely unresponsive or flaking. It was an interesting observation compared with the women and femme who were majority complete strangers to me and also not public speakers, generally. Of the ones I ended up speaking with, only three worked quite explicitly with race and racism as activists/scholars, one worked indirectly with race through Gender Studies, and one had previously worked with blackness related topics. I also personally reached out to a few women whose perspectives were not yet presented – they were generally very responsive and ended up participating, only one did not return my invitation email after initially having signed up.

I ended up interviewing 27 women and 7 men, of which 4 women had experience thinking and talking critically (and publicly) about race and 3 of the men did too. Of the 7 men, 4 were heterosexual, all were cis-men and 3 were queer and out. I would sometimes bring this representational gender discrepancy up in interviews. As one of the men said, he could not tell me why more men did not sign up, because he was there, right!? He *was* also one of the experienced speakers. Some of the women reflected that there were some gender specific experiences of racism that might be extra hard to talk about for men, and they observed Black men struggle particularly in their personal lives. I had the same observation just from life. The way Black and non-white men, especially those racialized as 'Arab' (regardless of actual origin), experience racial violence in Europe is systematic and explicit through physical policing in public space (Holmberg and Kyvsgaard 2003; Kelekay 2019; 2022; Younis 2022). The way white supremacist patriarchy targets and affects Black and non-white men thus entails both corporal public violence and humiliation *and* robs them of safely expressing their experiences, in the same way women seemingly feel comfortable doing. This is complex because racially minoritized men, who are themselves invested in patriarchal masculinity, may still uphold an expected hardness and emotionlessness in order to be validated as 'real men' (hooks 2004). From an afrofeminist perspective, I could understand the absence, sharing racial trauma with Black Danish brothers, although via differently gendered manifestations. Had I chosen to analyze Danish hip hop, for example, there would have been an overrepresentation of male voices. But in this project, I wanted to explore relational dialogic storytelling. And by definition, dialogue takes two.

As I took a 'desire based' research approach and refused seeking out 'minority pain' (Tuck 2009; Tuck and Yang 2014) I was never going to ask about violent episodes or encounters with the police, for example. But how would people have known? As I explain in chapter three, 'racism' thus far has largely been presented as racial minorities exposing their own pain in Danish public discourse. So, while a few people did have experiences with the police and incarceration, this was something that would only come up if they chose to speak about it. And most did not. It goes for everybody that it can be a very difficult topic to talk about racialized experiences of belonging and

alienation because violence is implicit in it. As one female interlocutor aptly put it: "To come here is to say 'yes, I stand out, *I know it!*'"[4] Participating in a research project about African diaspora experiences of belonging is therefore an act of assuming your blackness on some level, it is an act of 'showing our true colors' in all of the implied meanings of the expression (Opitz, Oguntoye, and Schultz 1992). It is important to emphasize that I acknowledge this and the courage it took. So, when I later on write about the mechanisms of partly self-denial that some people express, it is from an understanding that they have already taken a position within a spectrum of African diasporic Black subjectivity. Otherwise, they would not have shown up to speak with me at all.

In that vein, an underrepresented group were transnational adoptees of the 1980'-90's generations. I interviewed one person whom I actively recruited and two from the older generations, one from the post-war German generation, one from a Central African country, both born in the 1960's. I reflect on the recruitment of the older generation in the introduction to chapter two. Among adoptees and non-adoptees alike, an understanding emerged across the interviews that this was an experience apart, that it was common to meet Black people who were adopted and did not want to recognize their own blackness whatsoever. I had no way of examining this further, given the minimal participation of Black/African adoptees. But I can simply observe that this group, just like men generally, did not resonate with my call for participants.

As mentioned, I was primarily interested in generational representation. Basically, studying what it meant to be Black Danish before the Internet and a certain availability of representation. I therefore began to reach out to people with an official invitation for participation according to a diverse age representation, within the targeted generations. I would ask a few follow-up questions when I experienced that there were different definitions of 'born/raised' in Denmark, being first-generation, and so on. I am aware these definitions are not static and that many people do not have a linear diaspora experience of being either native or immigrant. Some have moved back and forth, others are '1.5 generations', having immigrated as children etc. But this also helped me narrow down what I am interested in researching. That said, I did allow for some flexibility of the 'born/raised' definition in order to test out my own thesis that it mattered and that the native experience is distinct from im/migrant experiences, and that the first-generation is different from the few second-gen experiences. Interestingly a few people who are second generation Black Danes identify with the first-generation experience. As we can see from chapter two, this is likely related to the fact that the parent generation from the 1960's did not themselves assume a Black subjectivity – thus their children still had to navigate 'Black danishness' almost from scratch like those with immigrant parents. One person I interviewed turned out to be, in my definition, second generation. A few others, kids of the German-born generation did not make the cut.

The ethnic and racial makeup of the group was therefore random. As such, I interviewed 11 people of two African parents ('dark skinned,' 'mono-racial' Black), some of whom migrated as children and two of which were adopted, thus grew up with exclusively white parents. The other eight with an African mother (and a deceased father or a father living abroad, and two with a stepfather/mother's new partner), and one with both African parents (until they passed). One grew up in a constellation that has been called 'farming' in the UK (Ifekwunigwe 1999): being partly fostered by a white 'grandparent' couple while the parents studied and then later moving back with the parents. People were generally middle class; all had a bit of professional or higher education. Some experienced social upward mobility vis à vis their parents/mother, across white Danish and immigrated African parents.

[4] "At komme hér, det er at sige: ja, jeg skiller mig ud, *I know it!*"

I interviewed 23 people with one white and one Black biological parent ('mixed-race' Black). Of the 23, one was adopted, one grew up in a foster family, both all white homes. Eight grew up with a white single mother, one with a Black single mother, and 12 grew up with two parents (until one passed away). Of the 12 mixed-race people with two parents three people have/had an African mother, two of these people were siblings. The rest have African fathers (one Caribbean) and white mothers. In a patriarchal context, I take note of the overrepresentation of single mothers (18/34) compared to zero single fathers and of the overrepresentation of white mothers in interracial and transracial families and across single and multi-parent households (21/34). The role as primary parent or parent all together, is systematically taken up by mothers. This is noteworthy if considering the connection between gender, race and nation and how women are constructed as bearers of culture, thus tasked with passing on knowledge (Yuval-Davis 1997).

This is not a (Critical) Mixed Race Studies research project. While I use the expression 'mixed-race' Black to denote how certain people are positioned in a racial scheme, this should *not* be understood as referring to their biological make-up or 'mixedness.' I understand foregrounding 'mixedness' as a (colonialist) construct, heavily founded in eugenics and fantasies of racial purity and hierarchy on one hand (Sexton 2008). And on the other hand, as a U.S. American invented field of study, it is fixated on individual self-identification and premised on historical, racial amnesia and romanticization (Mahtani 2014). Importantly, Mixed Race Studies has to a large degree been pushed by white U.S. American mothers of Black children who felt uncomfortable with their children's blackness and Black identity (Alynia Phillips 2017).

What *is* relevant in this context, is to distinguish those Black people who are *racialized* and *presumed* to have a parent who is *racialized as white* and another who is *racialized as Black*. That is, so-called mono-racial African and/or Black parents in this particular time in Denmark. Given that such *racialization as 'mixed-race' Black* is often overlapping with the lived reality of being primarily or significantly socialized by white caregivers, the so-called mixed-race Black body in Denmark becomes legible as likely having an exclusively or significantly internalized white Danish cultural frame of reference. And/or *also lacking* a cultural frame of reference contextualizing their Africanness/blackness. This potential lack and internalization of white cultural references, however, is not exclusive to the so-called mixed-race Black people or Black adoptees. Assimilationist African households may create a cultural disconnection and lack as well, often in attempts to aid their children's integration. But assuming a 'Danish', de-racialized subject position was a significant common denominator overlapping with the overrepresentation of white mothers raising Black children among my interlocutors. In co-formation (Bacchetta 2015a) with *colorism* – the valuation of lighter skin tones and 'whiter' phenotypic traits – *racialization as mixed-race Black* in Denmark has connotations of *already culturally Danish,* pre-assimilated and 'less foreign' than mono-racial Black and non-white subjects, yet they are always still 'other.'

It is thus *transraciality* – Black children in white families especially – which I identify as a formative condition of Danish Black experiences. Not the color of their skin. Specifically, it is the relationship of racial whiteness and blackness in the intimate sphere, under white supremacy, that is characteristically *Danish* Black (although by no means exclusively). The Black/white relationship represents a historically constructed racial dichotomy that is functioning and affecting people deeply. Because the social world and the discursive reality in Denmark are dominantly white as well, I was interested in the generational experiences across racial family constellations. Due to this, African diasporic Danish people with African or Black parents exclusively would still engage overwhelmingly in transracial relationships with white Danes (teachers, doctors, sports coaches) in their quotidian lives. The diversity across the first-generation experiences would then

allow somewhat of a qualitative comparison between different parent and family constellations and exposure to whiteness on different levels. Therefore, people of one Black African and one non-Black minoritized parent are not part of this study. I do *not* subscribe to racial 'mixedness' as a meaningful category or a political subject position in itself. It is the effects of politically extreme power positions within family constellations that adds a layer of proximity to whiteness, for some, for better or worse. Black motherhood, as I will show, did not serve as a magical fix that made belonging and subjectivity easy for those Black Danish people read as mono-racial African Black. But as a minimum they had that normalized mirroring, they *knew* they were Black, whereas white parents systematically ignore and silence race altogether, in misunderstood (and impossible) efforts to tone down their children's 'difference' (Kilomba 2010; Myong 2011). On the contrary, being told "I don't even see you as Black," is a seemingly compulsory white European colorblind comment uttered inside and outside of families (Opitz, Oguntoye, and Schultz 1992; Habel 2008; Adeniji 2010; Kilomba 2010; Lawton 2021; Gay 2021). Apparently, this is supposed to make the Black person feel included and loved! This is inherently antiblack and bound to affect the psyche of the person who is Black *and also* other things. But never *not* Black.

I use the term 'mixed-race', for one because this is the language people used themselves (in English), and secondly because I have clarified how I defined what this term refers to in this context. I recognize their racialized experience as always *Black,* which is why I used 'mixed-race Black.' To emphasize, the racial terms I use are meant to be understood as how people are *racialized in Denmark*, not how they *self-identify*. They are analytical categorizations, derived from how racialization is produced relationally in people's lived experiences.

Because I expected that self-identification would not be an efficient way to go about analyzing experiences of blackness among Danish people, I articulated my call referring to the diasporic experiences, not to assumed categories. Since Denmark was under lockdown, I had already planned to circulate my call online exclusively on Facebook and Instagram. I had also prepared a format that was good to email, for example as I invited people formally. I posted them and tagged a bunch of people, to get exposure through their respective networks and I also encouraged people and a few online communities to share widely. Below are the calls used on Instagram:

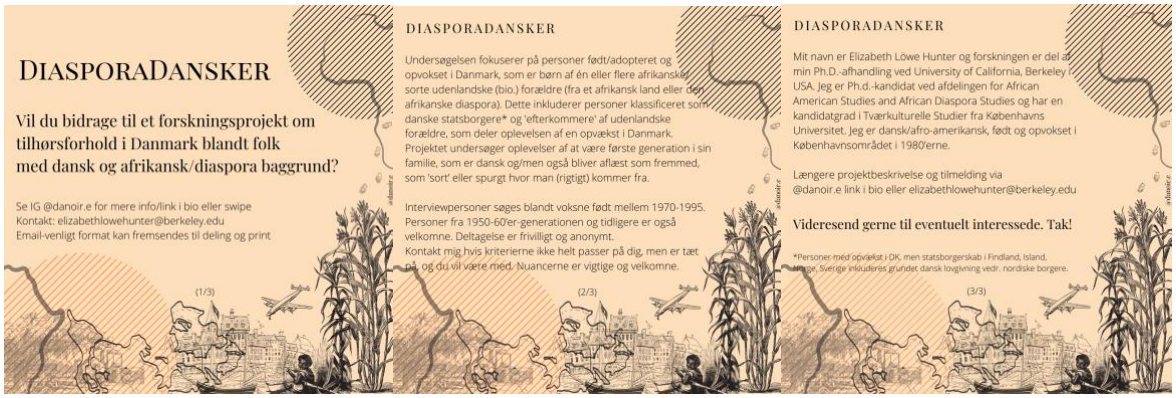

Figure 2. An Instagram post, graphically designed by me, containing a collage of illustrations referring to geography, migration, diaspora, a Black child, sugar plantations, and Denmark.[5]

[5] Title: "DIASPORA DANE". Picture 1: "Do you want to contribute to a research project about belonging in Denmark among people of Danish and African/diaspora background? [Contact information]." Picture 2: "The research focuses on persons

Chapter overview

The first chapter gives some context to the Danish colonial relationship to Black subjugation via plantation slavery in the Caribbean. I also show how this part of history is remembered and dis/connected to racial blackness in Denmark today. Through creative maneuvers of selective remembering and historical amnesia, the collective Danish memory simultaneously cling to past colonized possessions through a nostalgic 'tropical attachment,' while official apologies let alone reparations are dismissed.

The core of the chapter is built on reading Victor Cornelins' autobiography from 1976, *From St. Croix to Nakskov,* supplemented by a public archive of his life, in Nakskov Local History Archives. That is the small town where Cornelins lived the majority of his life. I consulted the archive online (due to Covid-19) and was able to go in person for three days in 2022. I offer a counter reading of his life events to break with a one-sided public 'remembering' of his life which I argue represents a spectacularization of blackness. A key feature in Danish colonial constructs of the racial other is the *white gaze* and exteriorization of 'race.' I analyze the effects of the gaze in Cornelins' early memories, choosing an ethics of care centering the child.

Theorizing the Danish context, Cornelins illuminates how constructions of subjectivity are structured through various modalities of racialization as Black. His life experiences in Denmark emphasize the reality and effects of *racial isolation*. His experience of becoming Danish *and* Black is characterized by absorption into white danishness as a foreign *transplant*, in his words. This therefore distinguishes *Black racial isolation* as formative for a type of Black experience from *segregation* as another type of Black experience: While blackness in the West is generally characterized by the omnipresence of white ideology and white people, Cornelins was separated *from* not *together with* other Black people. He therefore did not so much develop a 'double consciousness' as he developed a *racial dissociation*, being socialized into identifying with whiteness without any Black racial mirroring.

The second chapter centers Black Danish experiences among those who were born in Germany in the Second World War or postwar period and adopted to Denmark, illegally. While scattered and isolated, this group makes up the contours of a collective Black Danish experience. However, this generation and their collective story remains largely invisibilized as part of Danish history. Meanwhile, the shady beginnings of transnational adoption in Denmark would be the building block for the industry moving forward. The history of adoption in Denmark from domestic to international and transracial adoptions is characterized by the former centering children in need while the latter centers adults with needs.

Focusing on experiences of racialization, I listened to one main interlocutor as she narrated her memories of growing up as a mixed-race Black woman, from the 1960's adoptee generation in Denmark. Her voice is supplemented by the written word of another person from that generation,

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born/raised in Denmark who are the children of one or more African/Black foreign (biological) parents (from an African country or the African Diaspora). This includes people classified as Danish citizens and 'descendants' of foreign parents, who share the experience of an upbringing in Denmark. The project examines experiences of being the first generation in your family, who is Danish and/but is also perceived as alien, as 'Black' or asked where you are (really) from. Interviewees wanted among adults born between 1970-1995. Persons from the 1950-60's generation and earlier are welcome too. Participation is voluntary and anonymous. Contact me if the criteria do not fit you exactly but are close. The nuances are important and welcomed." Picture 3: "My name is Elizabeth Löwe Hunter and the research is part of my Ph.D. dissertation at the University of California, Berkeley in the USA. I am a PhD-candidate in the Department of African American and African Diaspora Studies and hold a master's degree in Cross-Cultural Studies from the University of Copenhagen. I am Danish/African American, born and raised in the Copenhagen area in the 1980's. Extensive project description and registration via [contact information]. Please forward to potentially interested people. Thank you! *People with Danish upbringing but citizenship in Finland, Iceland, Norway, or Sweden included due to Danish law re. Nordic citizens."

as well as a few other interlocutors whose experiences of a Black sense of self are parallel. Black Racial Isolation reoccurs as a significant theme as does a lack of representation and a need for racial mirroring. I explore how a minimum of representation of blackness becomes an indispensable building block to construct a positive relationship to racial blackness and people's own racial identity. In hindsight, this is an ambivalent pleasure, since the scarce representations available at the time were constructed through the white, colonialist gaze.

The dominating discourse on adoption is situated within the political and historical moment: the European post-war era and the budding *post-racial* era via the establishment of the UN and UNESCO. This moment spiked decolonization and independence movements globally, and, since the European development aid industrial complex and neocolonial relationships to former colonies. As such, as Germany essentially wanted to deport children, a Danish individual took it upon her to 'rescue' the 'brown babies' from former Nazi-Germany. Within a saviorist discourse it is implied that the rescued owes gratitude to the rescuer. Meanwhile, the *affective labor* the adoptee involuntarily does, by meeting a high demand for children among childless Danish adults, is silenced. The unequal relationship is continuously rearticulated as the person's blackness, simultaneously becomes a signifier for the adoption, racial and spatial transgression, and for how grateful they should be to be in Denmark. I emphasize the coloniality of transracial adoption by drawing a parallel to the last colonial subjects of the Danish empire, the Indigenous Greenlandic Inuit. Like this, I illustrate how white saviorism and constructions of orphans were tools in a Danish Post-Modern civilizing mission and domestication of the racial and colonial 'other.'

Finally, chapter three sketches out two parts centering the generations born in the 1980's and 1990's: First, the Danish public school as a site for alienation where both cultural and institutionalized social categorizations are played out. Secondly, constructions of Danish African subjectivity as exceptional, through which Black group belonging is contested, denied, and negotiated. The chapter is based entirely on interviews.

Through recounting everyday experiences from primary school years, secondary socialization regarding one's 'otherness' becomes apparent. This includes the circumstance that everyone experienced *being the only one*. Being constructed as 'other' and specifically as 'Black other' *and* navigating this alone, thus echoed the experience of Black Racial Isolation from the previous chapters. For more than a century, this condition has changed very little for Black Danish people. The specificity of being first generation *Danish* Black is highlighted in contrast to Black or African immigrated parents and their limited ability to relate to and support their *Danish* Black children's experiences of racism and yearning to belong.

Within the context of the Danish public school there was a double realization common in the 1990's: While my interlocutors were racialized as Black and 'other,' they simultaneously fell outside of the normative category for conceptualizing the national 'other': a non-Black-Muslim-immigrant figure. This theme is somewhat specific to the millennial generation broadly (and likely those after), due to the fact that there was not an established 'immigration discourse' per se prior to the 1960's. The immigration discourse and a budding 'minority discourse,' as articulated from within, are therefore examples of common-sense ways of articulating 'the other' as *foreigner* in opposition to 'regular Danes' (as white). Being neither white nor immigrants, the millennial Black Danes experience a lack of language to articulate their experiences – they are minorities, "but not in the right way."

In part two I identify articulations of *disidentification* with racial minority discourses. One aspect is the refusal of pain-centered minority discourse *as* showcasing struggle. Another aspect, however, is a resistance, hesitance, or ambivalence regarding taking a stand *as* Black (or however

they call themselves). This is done by the construction of the *Ordinary Narrative* through which some people construct themselves as outside of Black/racial minority experiences arguing that they are 'completely ordinary': implicitly, their (non-suffering) blackness is not reflected in public discourses; ergo they must not be (authentically) Black. Through a variation of language individuality is established by upholding dichotomies between their various identities, reconstructing them as mutually exclusive. I show examples of this common tendency of constructing one's self as *either-or* and contrast it to expressions of those navigating complexity through *both-and.* Analyzing people's *understanding* of *everyday racism* becomes a crucial building block in their (de)construction of themselves as Black subjects.

The ambivalence of identification and disidentification emerges clearly in discussing place specific racialization. Traveling to contexts with a significant and historically grounded Black presence was repeated as spaces where *feeling belonging*, however ephemeral, was possible. They therefore expressed seemingly contradictory logics for why connecting with Black people in one place felt wonderful and freeing, and why in other places (at home in Denmark) the suggestion of Black collectivity was perceived as limiting and robbing them of their individuality.

The various themes emerging throughout the chapters express how the personal and intimate spheres, the social and public spheres, and the epistemological and imaginary spheres are dominated by white/Eurocentrism and by an absence of mirroring and reflection of Afro-descendant and Afropean voices, images, and mere presence. I argue that it is the accumulation of racial isolation across those different yet connected socio-cultural spheres, and the consistency throughout roughly a century, that illuminates a defining collective conditioning of first generation Danish African diaspora people and their subjectivity: Black racial isolation.

Chapter 1. Danish Colonial Subjectivity in the Metropole: Victor Cornelins 1898-1985

The Danish West Indies: Empire without Dominion[6]

As *Rigsarkivet,* The Danish National Archives, has begun to digitize written historical records that have been difficult to access, they are now online in great numbers. It is a work in progress. Significantly, this renders colonial archives publicly available, many of which are in English or translated into English and thus more easily accessible to citizens of the former Danish colonies, namely the United States Virgin Islands (USVI). On *Rigsarkivet's* website dedicated to the former Danish West Indies, Danish colonization in the islands is organized and presented under different headings. As such, on the topic of Slavery, one heading reads: "Danish decision to abolish transatlantic slave trade in 1792."[7] The subhead quickly goes to the subject matter with numbers and dates: "From the 1650s onward, Denmark participated in the transatlantic slave trade. A total of approximately 120,000 enslaved Africans were transported from Africa to the West Indies on ships flying the flag of Denmark. On the other hand, Denmark was the first slave-trading nation that prohibited the barbaric traffic." Despite the topic being Slavery, this page actually does not provide an explanation of plantation slavery but focuses on the tail end of it under Danish command. The last part is of particular interest. 'On the other hand' suggests a fact to follow that somehow balances out the former, namely the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. But particularly, the emphasis on allegedly being 'the first' is noteworthy. If the general Danish public knows little to nothing about Danish colonization in the Caribbean, this is likely what they know: Variations of stories about Danish colonization and plantation slavery somehow being more benign than other European enslaving empires. This idea of 'mild slavery' is simply an oxymoron. But as we see, on a front webpage of the National Archives, this narrative is central to Danish national representation of History and production of collective memory (Trouillot 2015).

Kingdoms such as Spain, France, England, and Holland had already begun their overseas occupations when Denmark-Norway entered the 'scramble for colonies' in 1659 (N. A. T. Hall 1992). Establishing the trading forts Christiansborg and Frederiksborg in former Lower Guinea, present day Ghana, Denmark-Norway stepped into the business of trading in African human beings in 1659, sending them to the Caribbean. The Indigenous peoples already living on the Caribbean islands likely included the Ciboney, Kalinago or Carib, and Taino Arawaks who were among the first peoples subjected to armed European intrusion in the region when Christopher Columbus' second expedition reached Salt Bay in St Croix in 1493 (Dookhan 1994). A too small native population by the beginning of the Danish occupation became the colonialist reason to import other populations. Among those, Neville Hall refers to a missionary's note who believed to identify the following West African ethnic groups in the Danish West Indies between 1767 and 1769: "Fulani, Mandingoes, Amina, Akims, Popos, Ibos and Yorubas [...]" (1992, 71). Later on, Hall's archives mention "cargoes of Congo" and he argues for a great ethnic diversity, given that the "geographical spread of their points of departure embraced the entire area of Upper Guinea to Angola, between the Senegal and Cuanza Rivers" (p. 72). Perceived as property to the Danish and

[6] I respectfully borrow this title from Neville A. T. Hall (1985;1992). Partly because he said it best and to honor and amplify his extensive historical oeuvre on *Slave Societies in the Danish West Indies* (1992).
[7] https://www.virgin-islands-history.org/en/history/slavery/danish-decision-to-abolish-transatlantic-slave-trade-in-1792/

other European colonizers, people were packed as cargo and shipped in mass to the colonized Caribbean Islands and all along the American continents. Between the first and the last *documented* ship (from 1501 to 1875), an estimated total of 10 million enslaved Africans were shipped to the New World of which approximately 8.5 million survived the middle passage.[8] Additional illegal shippings continued after the trade in Africans was prohibited. Surviving the transport did not equal surviving plantation slavery. Because of the institutionalization of violence and the brutality of plantation slave labor across plantation societies the enslaved population could not reproduce itself; death rates were higher than birth rates (1992, 3; James 1989). This fact incentivized planters to keep importing new Africans for enslavement. And significantly, at the turn of the 19th century, when discussions of abolition of the trade in people circulated among European kingdoms and colonizers, the transatlantic trade took an aggressive spike in order to secure a supply of enslaved people. Such went the business logic.

It can there therefore be read as tragically ironic that public Danish self-perception, then as well as now, is steeped in "moral self-congratulation at being the first European nation to abolish the transatlantic slave trade" when, according to the archives, the year 1792 also marks a veritable augmentation of harm in quantitative measures during the following decade (1992, 35). In qualitative measures, despite the provision of abolition of the trade within in a ten-year 'grace period' (grace for the European planters and their businesses), there was no amelioration of the *code noir* – it was simply not a priority and "the sacred right to property" could not be violated in consideration of enslaved peoples living condition (p. 68). This connects to another point regarding the History of Denmark. The emphasis on 'the first' leads attention away from three related historical facts: First, the decision in 1792 is different from the official actualization in 1802. As mentioned above, the decision changed nothing for people enslaved in the Danish West Indies – it increased the numbers by an intensification of slave trade. Secondly, the 1792 decision concerned the abolition of the *transatlantic* trade. The institution of slavery and the handling of enslaved people as property locally was alive and well until 1848. And lastly, but crucially, this telling of Danish History is premised on a selective historical memory: claiming that Denmark was 'the first' regarding abolition of either institutionalized slavery or the transatlantic trade or both requires omitting the history of Saint Domingue and the long fight for Haitian Independence. In fact, movements on the other plantation islands, in particular the former French West Indies or Antilles, were indeed influential on Danish colonial politics and caused quite some anxiety among the white population (N. A. T. Hall 1992). The Haitian Revolution began in 1791; the Haitian Constitution from 1801 declared that "slavery was forever abolished," not just the trade; and on January 1st 1804 the Haitian Declaration of Independence was proclaimed, marking the official end to the long revolution (James 1989, 263).

Chronologically then, one year before Denmark effectuated abolition of the transatlantic *trade* in enslaved Africans, Haiti had abolished *slavery* all together. From the famous year 1792 it would take 56 more years before the institution of slavery was formally abolished in the Danish West Indies and Black people juridically transitioned from property to persons. Beyond anxieties, the anticipation of British abolition was also a motivating factor in Danish plans to end the trade due to a high dependency of the British West Indies. Abolition of slavery in The Danish West Indies 1848, on the contrary, was forced through a slave uprising between July 2nd-3rd leaving no other choice for the colonial administration (N. A. T. Hall 1992).

[8] https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database#tables

The Danish National Archives' emphasis on selected aspects of Danish History thus partake in a common erasure in which "[t]he Haitian Revolution [...] entered history with the peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable even as it happened," it is simply left a story untold, written out of European *History* (Trouillot 2015, 73). The effect of this particular erasure produces and reproduces selective memory and collective historical amnesia in the West (Trouillot 2015; Habel 2015; Wekker 2016).

Exceptionalism aside, something else was indeed distinct about the three Danish colonies in the Caribbean. When Denmark colonized St Thomas the Danish West India Guinea Company was also established in 1671. It was not until 1717 that St John was occupied and in 1733 Denmark bought St Croix from France. Unlike the other European possessions, the Danish were minimally occupied by Danes. While the majority of European settlers in St John and St Thomas were Dutch, St Croix had an English majority. This compromised an otherwise key element of imperialism, namely cultural and linguistic imperialism. While the Danish flag and law were a structuring presence, Hall aptly describes the Danish West Indian endeavor as an "Empire without Dominion" (N. A. T. Hall 1985; 1992). In essence, he argues, St Croix was English and St John and St Thomas were Dutch, their commercial and cultural hegemony considered. The latter became increasingly diverse, however not more Danish, over time due to its status as neutral in European wars. European merchants as well as 'freedmen' from the wider colonized Caribbean found it advantageous for business as well as civic reasons (N. A. T. Hall 1992). In these histories lie some crucial reasons for the different relationship between the Danish metropole and its Caribbean colonies, historically, compared to the French, Dutch, and British counterparts. It is not solely the fact that Denmark sold its possessions 'earlier' to the U.S. in 1917, creating temporal distance, but also this cultural and linguistic heterogeneity. That has made it less obvious for colonial subjects of this part of the Danish empire to seek toward the metropole in mass. For one, they did not speak the same language and the low investment on behalf of Danish civic society in the Danish West Indies made it so that no cultural, even less national, imagined community was formed in any significant way tying metropolitan Denmark and the West Indies to one another (N. A. T. Hall 1992; Anderson 2005). This is also one of the main reasons "the average Dane has never had to confront the physical, human result of Denmark's colonial enterprise on home soil" (Lindqvist 2014, 54). And this then, is arguably one of the reasons the resistance to colonial history as relevant is so persistent in Danish public opinion. This resistance is articulated along with dismissals of the pertinence of making connections between ideologies that have structured oppression historically and the present, specifically racism (Vergès 2006; McEachrane 2016; Wekker 2016).

That the former Danish West Indies were dominated by foreigners in the day to day offers interesting perspectives in relation to productions of Danish collective memory. Especially a certain 'colonial nostalgia' and a romanticized attachment to a 'lost paradise' through tourism and popular representations of the U.S. Virgin Islands as, at once, stopped in time, yet still available for white Danes to make a claim to today (Lindqvist 2014; Nonbo Andersen 2017). Reference to 'our shared past' has been common rhetoric – although always without neither apologies nor a concept of reparations (Nonbo Andersen 2017). The Danish Prime Minister's speech in the USVI on Transfer Day 2017 underscored this, on the day marking the centennial of Denmark selling the islands (Statsministeriet 2017). In fact, Black Virgin Islanders, the descendants of those enslaved under the Danish crown, are sifted out of the discursive production of the present representations of the USVI and their relationship to Denmark today. Instead, Danish West Indian 'heritage' is cultivated through a fetishization of *white Danes,* who, through personal archives or DNA-tests, 'discover' a distant Black ancestry or among the colonizing white class. Danish public service

broadcasting's channel DR2's *Slavernes Slægt* (The Kin of Slaves) from 2005 was a prime example as well as the accompanying book by the same name (Larsen 2008). As an example, from *Slavernes Slægt* and beyond, is the continuous public attention to the white descendants of Victor Cornelins. Such focus cultivates this fascination of a link between Denmark and an 'exotic' past, but always without 'the exotic,' that is, the racialized 'other'. To be clear, this is none of their fault. I am arguing that they become pieces in a nationalist game of 'tropical attachment' in which Danish cultural production will center an *idea* of what those colonies might have been like but omitting the colonized and their immediate descendants. This leaves the majoritized Danish narratives of wonder, curiosity, and naive outrage – a testimony to the centering of whitened memory, a critique which is not new (Olwig 2003; Lindqvist 2014; Andreassen 2015; Odumosu 2019; Belle 2020). It shows a deprioritization of voices of people positioned and embodied in such a way that the aftermath of colonization and slavery is never a 'discovery' but a lived quotidian experience – a Black experience. It is my hope that this introduction around the production of The History of Denmark and collective memory will give context to the present chapter. A chapter that centers a colonial subject who uses his voice and how, in turn, his narrative has been publicly and collectively remembered through discursive practices in Danish history, media, and cultural production.

Reading Against the Grain as Methodology

On August 3rd, 1898, Victor Waldemar Cornelius was born in, then, Danish West Indian Island St Croix. He was shipped to Denmark as a young boy and ended up living there for the rest of his life. This chapter offers a reading of Victor Cornelins' life as rendered accessible through his autobiography as the primary source, centering his own narrative voice. Victor Cornelins' autobiography is a unique archive that gives access to many firsthand experiences from a Black man in Denmark in the 20th century. His autobiography was published in 1976 and 1977 but has since gone out of print. It is difficult to access today, only available at the public libraries and, seemingly, the last antiquarian bookshops have sold their copies for the time being. It is published by an Inner Mission publication house and does reflect Cornelins' increasing Christian affiliations and personal religiosity, and thus, possibly his imagined readers. Supplementary sources are the public archives, many of which are his own words, for example speeches he wrote, letters or diary entries. I also read texts specifically about him or literature that include his life in broader stories of Danish West Indians in Denmark or Danish colonialism, such as *Human Exhibitions* by Rikke Andreassen (2015) and Birgitte Freiesleben's (1998) *Fra St. Croix til Tivoli.* The latter includes a full draft of Cornelins' autobiography in English, which was meant for publication for an Anglophone audience, Crucian perhaps, but it was never published beyond Freiesleben's inclusion. Photography and film also inform my general research about his life; however, I do not engage in visual analyses.

Most writing on Cornelins within the Danish context has centered on how unusual his life was. Cornelins was a public persona before the publication of his autobiography. He was well known in his local community in smalltown Nakskov, Denmark, through his teaching service and civic engagement for example through his musical talents. Because he was a Black man in early twentieth century Denmark, his life drew attention beyond his local community. Accounts of his life and accomplishments typically focused on the voyage from a tropical island to the metropole and the 'adventurous', extraordinary aspects of his life, going from a poor – Black – child to becoming a school principal. Newspaper column headings from the 1940's and 50's would

commonly read: *"Negeren, der blev overlærer"* [the Negro who became head teacher] or *"En Lærer fra Dansk-Vestindien"* [A teacher from [the] Danish West Indies].[9] Victor Cornelins also chose that narrative arc, of contrast and transition, as the frame of his autobiography: *Fra St. Croix til Nakskov: et livs eventyr,* 'From St. Croix to Nakskov: a life's adventure.' After the publication in 1976, certain news media would use language from the book, such as the tabloid magazine *Billedbladet's* three-part series on Cornelins, *"Jeg er nigger og dansker"* [I am [a] Nigger and [a] Dane], which is a direct quote from the book. The three parts were given the respective subheadings (in Danish) "My fantastic voyage", "I was exhibited in a cage", and "I never saw my mother again."[10]

In this chapter, I examine exceptionalizing representations of Victor Cornelins and how he chose to represent himself. I seek first and foremost to read his story through a lens that recognizes his human experiences, especially his experiences as a small child. This includes, and goes beyond, Victor Cornelins and his companion Alberta Viola Roberts being in a cage at a colonial exhibition in the amusement park Tivoli in 1905. This story is continuously retold with outrage; however, these retellings often reproduce some of the violence they intend to trouble. The colonialist premises of the entire project of the children's involuntary objectification is left unquestioned and rendered doable and thinkable. The reading I offer joins Emil Elg's (2021) approach in his article *"Omplantet"*, [Transplanted], a word Cornelins used to describe Alberta's and his shared experience. Here, Elg centers the children as children, considering their vulnerability and the trauma inherent to the situation. Like Elg, I challenge the spectacularization on various levels of the typical retelling of Cornelins' story. I do this by reading his experiences and emotions as essentially ordinary, human (child) experiences. Similarly to representations of Victor in the time of his life, the way he is remembered publicly in the present, is often also through exceptionalization of him and his experiences in Tivoli. In 2017, for example, when the Danish sale of the Virgin Islands was marked, Victor Cornelins and Alberta Roberts' were momentarily brought to the attention of the public sphere. In this regard, two main public service television broadcasting channels, DR and TV2, brought stories with the respective headings: DR's "Victor was kept encaged as tourist attraction" and TV2's "They called for two 'negro children' and exhibited them in a cage in Tivoli."[11] While they both unfold the story and relate it to the present, it is characteristic for representations of Cornelins that the historical parts are largely paraphrasing his autobiography, yet without citing it. As we see, too, only one of them alludes to a second person involved, Alberta, whereas the other one leaves her out entirely. However, DR's story is a video of Cornelins as an adult, telling this part of his story – perhaps reading from his book, seemingly on a live TV-show, likely in the 1970's after its publication. Here, he mentions Alberta, when he explains the 'we' he is referring to in relation to being put in a cage, the story he was apparently asked to tell. How must that have felt for him?

My reading aims to disturb accounts in which only the cage is made outrageous and Black pain is otherwise normalized or overlooked. Arguably, the entire separation of minors from their caretakers can also be understood as an assault, along with the racist trauma and neglect the children faced. Reading the pain of colonial Black-child subjects with care, I am interested in the very human reactions to inhuman circumstances.

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[9] Nakskov Archives: A1064/109 – 2000/22 and A1064/144

[10] Nakskov Archives, item: A1064/114;117;118

[11] https://www.dr.dk/historie/danmarkshistorien/video-victor-blev-holdt-i-bur-som-turistattraktion
https://nyheder.tv2.dk/samfund/2017-03-31-de-sendte-bud-efter-to-negerboern-og-udstillede-dem-i-bur-i-tivoli

There has been public attention to Cornelins during his lifetime as he did public lectures in church communities and associations as well as the time following the publication of his autobiography. The Nakskov Archive of Local History, in the town where he spent his adult life, holds a collection of countless newspaper articles, columns, and tabloid magazines carrying excerpts of his story and interviews from the late 1970's. Cornelins story also resurfaced momentarily, for example, in the previously mentioned 2005 documentary series The Kin of Slaves, where his own grandchildren were learning about him with wonder. But generally, his autobiography and Victor Cornelins himself have become mostly unknown to the general Danish public and with that, a part of Danish history that can be described as subjected to collective historical amnesia: An erasure and forgetting of the Danish colonial enterprises in West Africa and the Caribbean, notably Danish companies' trade in enslaved Africans and production of cane sugar. But Danish colonialism and slavery was, of course, the very historical and political context for Cornelins' movement from St. Croix to Denmark.

Remembering, Rewriting Black Humanness

Cornelins' presence as an adult Black Crucian man in Denmark was rare, but not unique. There were several Black persons in Denmark at that time, for example others who were brought to Denmark as children to receive teacher training and return to teach in St. Croix (B. Freiesleben and Cornelins 1998). But it is unique, however, that Cornelins wrote his life testimony in this way. Alberta Roberts and countless other Black, colonial subjects have remained just that: colonial subjects, often with names and stories unknown to researchers of the Danish colonial archives. Under these conditions, we can understand Cornelins as neither more or less important or unique than others. He was not the first and he was not the only or the last Crucian in Denmark. He simply left a clearer trace and, importantly, he took control over his own story, in a way that many others did not get access to do. This is a potential of his autobiography: it offers a rare voice and perspective from a member of a group who has been spoken about, portrayed and caricatured, forgotten and fully erased from Danish History. Some scholars and artists have begun the care work of remembering and literally finding the Black people in the archives. and some have specifically gone looking for Alberta Roberts whose absence is so stark in contrast to Cornelins' hyper mediated presence (Sampson 2017; Odumosu 2020; 2019; Belle 2021; Elg 2021). I read the life story Cornelins provides in his autobiography along with his letters and notebook entries. This adds information to fill in gaps or address questions that arise in the reading of his autobiography. However, it is still a patchwork and the bits and pieces provided through the available archives and his own voice are necessarily shaped by specific motivations and perspectives. His as well as my own.

Writing Victor Cornelins' life differently than the dominant public narratives raises questions about the past, how we know it and what there is to know about it (Hartman 2008). Historical narratives, Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2015) argues, are constructs – a certain way to recreate the past. Specifically, he calls attention to "an irreducible distinction and yet an equally irreducible overlap between what happened and that which is said to have happened" (p. 3). In Trouillot's terms, the 'one-sided historicity' with which Victor is remembered and represented upholds a certain imaginary both of him specifically and of racial blackness in Denmark across a historical period. At the same time, there is an inherent challenge in creating different narratives from the same archives. Seeking to tell a story about Victor the person and the human, rather than Victor the ('Negro') spectacle, requires more than access to different archives. When looking for

Black people in the context of the Transatlantic the archives themselves are violent, as Saidiya Hartman (2008) reflects. Descendants of the enslaved are documented by the same powers that are responsible for their ancestors' and their own submission (Hartman 2008). That is, they are documented *if* the white historians see them, and *how* they see them – as cargo, as numbers, as artifacts for exhibition etcetera. Even when an autobiography exists, as in the case of Victor Cornelins, the same passages are amplified in Danish public memory and re-presentation, but also in the *same ways*[12]. This practice reproduces the same silence. Hartman asks: "How does one revisit the scene of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence?" (p. 4). Victor actually makes his scenes of subjection available from his own, dignifying perspective and voice. This fact illustrates that the possibility for counter-narratives is not solely a question of the concrete availability of archives, but also a question of power (Hartman 2008; Derrida 2008; Trouillot 2015; Odumosu 2019). And in the case of Denmark power is sometimes expressed as alternative historical narratives being illegible, within the premises of the dominant History of Denmark. And Hartman does caution that "the *history* of black counter-historical projects is one of failure, precisely because these accounts have never been able to install themselves as history, but rather are insurgent, disruptive narratives that are marginalized and derailed before they ever gain footing" (2008, 13). Again, this hints towards the role power plays in construction of a historical past, beyond mere available facts, and the positions from which history is written, remembered and guarded.

In what follows I stitch together not a more complete or 'truer' story about Victor Cornelins, but rather I bring different stories forward. These stories, or interpretations, represent lesser told perspectives, namely from the perspective of a Black Studies scholar, a transnational afrofeminist scholar, an Afro-descendant Danish (and African American) woman for whom Cornelins' life experiences resonate deeply. His experiences also resonate with my interview data from 2021. These echoes across time express a point both Trouillot and Hartman make about the interconnectedness between past and present. The past is not separate from the present, from where we can write it anew and, simultaneously, access to parts of the past can shape how we write the present, even the future. Our present moment sheds light on Victor's past in particular ways and his present inform, what would be the future as he wrote. The experience of being out of place, having been *transplanted*, as Victor wrote (1976, 22) – that he became an organism in foreign soil – that experience has been repeated to me almost verbatim in my present. Always being different, but quickly adapting and growing new roots, despite it all. Victor shared parts of this with Alberta Roberts – how did it feel like when she died? Did he mourn? What human experiences did Victor have that were ordinary and banal, rather than adventurous and spectacular? What human experiences did he have specifically as a Black person being transplanted from a majority Black Caribbean society to a majority white Danish one? Was Victor already Black or did he become Black through his transplantation to Denmark? What did the becoming feel like to him? How did he know or find out?

An aspect of 'time travel' enables a reading of Victor's life that is informed by other possibilities of thinking through African Diaspora conditions than what was available to him. It enables me to ask questions like the above and to address them in ways that center Victor's dignity and humanness as a frame of understanding the discrepancy between different narrations of his story. Reading Victor as a first-gen Black Danish subject contextualized with voices of younger generations illustrates ways in which he did not simply write his personal autobiography; Victor

[12] From a random Internet search on Cornelins in Danish, notice how the exact same excerpts and omissions from pages 22-27 of his autobiography are reproduced across official Danish websites and individual blogs.

Cornelins was effectively theorizing blackness, coloniality, and racialized nationhood in twentieth century Denmark (and beyond).

The Spectacle of Blackness

As Victor was brought to Denmark at the age of 7 years old, he already had memories from and was shaped first in St Croix. However, at his young age, he also adapted quickly to Danish language and customs, eventually making them his own. As such, his life trajectory does not fit neatly into a dichotomous native/foreigner distinction. As with many social positions, his was one of both/and. Considering his actual life circumstances and socialization in Denmark among white Danes, it is reasonable to treat him as a cultural insider, not a foreigner, in Denmark while also always appreciating him as Crucian by origin. I will generally refer to Victor as Black, just like he called himself *sort,* although the connotation of 'black' in Danish, as we shall see, is more so as a visual descriptor. But I make this choice also because he, as a colonial subject and a product of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, occupied the analytical position and categorization as Black in the context of European Modernity. That is, a subject coerced into a condition in which access to his African ethnic, cultural and linguistic lineages were largely erased, or significantly transformed and creolized, through centuries of colonialism. This is a shared circumstance of what has been called the Black Atlantic and what shapes the subjectivities that emerge from being and becoming *Black* in the West (Gilroy 1993). The capitalization of the word Black thus refers to a socio-political position structured through relations of dominance, not simply a color (Hall 1980; Hartman and Wilderson 2003).

Reading his autobiography in the light of him as a cultural insider can illuminate ways in which he theorizes premises of belonging in the place he calls home. I conceptualize belonging as a potential state of being (in place and in relation) and antonym to the default experience of racialized 'others' in Denmark: alienation. I engage the notion of belonging, then, to identify circumstances – and dream up futures and spaces – where people are recognized as persons and can just *be*, without first and foremost being hailed *as Black-other.* In this usage belonging as a concept emerges out of a negation, or deficit, and articulates a longing for its reversal (Alexander 2005). Perhaps, reaching for what Aimé Césaire (2000) and Frantz Fanon (1961) have called *disalienation,* but beyond that until a true wellbeing. Ideally, experiencing belonging could stand alone, rather than being a counter notion, always already in relation to oppression. Or it could even be unnecessary to articulate at all. However, in the context of theorizing racialization and blackness specifically, the notion of belonging only becomes redundant for the racialized majority whose default state of racialization is rendered invisible due to being constructed as 'normal', natural, and unmarked. The notion of belonging, as I conceptualize it, is therefore grounded in analyses of social context and life circumstances structured through domination, rather than self-identification or 'feelings' of belonging (Hall 1980; Yuval-Davis 2006). Analyzing social context – across Black people's relationships to state and nationhood – can enable identification of modalities of power that renders possible, impossible, or constraints belonging: the politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006). A belonging that is complicated both by racialization as 'other', and, importantly, being racialized as 'other' *alone*. As the analysis will show, however, Victor had moments of frustration over his own blackness and being 'out of place' in an otherwise white milieu, while at later times making sense of his blackness precisely by drawing on his migration story and his 'being from elsewhere' as explaining that blackness (Carby 2019). Racial singularity, or aloneness, is a condition that defines the first African diasporas in Denmark. This sets them apart from diasporas

in other European countries, where postcolonial African or Caribbean migrants have come to the metropole as a *collective*, and over generations, thus being able to form communities (McEachrane 2016).

The following will provide some context to representations of racial blackness in Denmark during Victor Cornelins' lifetime and coming of age in Denmark. This can give an idea of the cultural and imaginary context he was 'transplanted into', the imaginaries projected onto him, and the possibilities he had for understanding himself and negotiating his sense of self. Then, I turn to Cornelins' own words as expressed in his autobiographies, letters, and speeches. In this part I examine some ways he negotiated his place in Denmark as a Black child and since as a Black man and public figure.

Metropolitan Constructions of Race in 20th Century Denmark

Victor Waldemar Cornelius was born in St Croix on August 3rd, 1898. His mother was asked to send him to Denmark. There were ambiguous motivations from the Danish side. Victor believed he was supposed to be trained as a teacher in Denmark, and eventually return to St. Croix to educate his fellow Crucians. This is the version of his migration story he tells. But prior to his education, a colonial exhibition in Copenhagen needed Black Crucians to represent what was constructed as the 'natives' of the Danish West Indies and requested that it be children (B. Freiesleben and Cornelins 1998). There is therefore a discrepancy in the how Cornelins write about why he was brought to Denmark and what the archives show: "The strategy of training local West Indians in Denmark and subsequently sending them back home to oversee teacher training in the West Indies was not developed and implemented until *after* Victor Cornelins was sent from the islands" (Andreassen 2015, 98). Victor himself was not given a choice just like his mother did not easily give him up. Rather, pressed by her precarity she was persuaded by an insisting business manager, Edward R. Ford, whose task it was to find children to bring back to Denmark for the exhibit (p. 98). A misreading of Victor's last name *Cornelius* resulted in the spelling *Cornelins*. I have not been able to find out whether he ever corrected it as a child, however he has been cited for accepting it as an adult, while also being aware of the error: "By now I have been called Cornelins for 50 years, so let us stick to that" (Lundrup 2010, 71).

At seven years old, Victor found himself involuntarily aboard a boat when he woke up one morning. Already far away from his mother, Sarah Eliza Allen, and home and surrounded by adult white men he did not know, only recognizing the man, Ford, who had visited his mother sometime prior (Cornelins 1976). He shared this experience with Alberta Roberts, a little Crucian girl who had also been separated from her mother to be sent to Denmark, at only four years old. Victor recalls fighting and wanting to get off the boat, but in vain. He recalls Alberta and him crying out for their mothers. He had not understood the gravity of the situation when she dressed him in Sunday clothes and sent him off on a horse carriage together with Alberta the day prior. He had noticed his mother's tears, but assumed he was just going to town and would be back in the evening. He had no idea that he would never see her again (Cornelins 1976).

Victor and Alberta's journey evokes that of their ancestors, although now in the direction from the West Indies towards the European point of the Triangular trade. Sharing the experience and surviving the naval journey as shipmates holds a particular meaning of African diasporic kinship. Across the Caribbean Creole languages words deriving from *shipmate* or *friend* in various European languages have turned into terms like *mati*, *zami* and a range of locally specific words, denoting a special kinship. Today, these notions are often theorized in the context of Black Queer

Studies (Lorde 1993c; Alexander 2005; Wekker 2006; Allen 2012). This is connected to the history of African peoples being packed in the hold of slave ships, divided according to the slavers' perception of sex. For that reason, the captives would make friendships among same-sex shipmates. These terms connote Black diasporic, particularly queer, kinship in most scholarship today. Yet *mati*, for example, is also inherently a term that names kinship conditioned by colonial violence including forced separation from first families and kin (Wekker 2006). Therefore, we may think of Alberta and Victor as situated in a *mati* relationship of sorts. The two became each other's shipmates in a literal sense and, since, shared moments of further hardship, but did also provide each other some comfort and joy (B. Freiesleben and Cornelins 1998). As Temi Odumosu remarks, Victor consistently wrote in the first-person plural about their time in Denmark up until Alberta's passing (personal communication, 2023). This testifies to their kinship and Victor's experience of their togetherness.

Figure 3. Photograph of Alberta Roberts and Victor Cornelins in Tivoli, Copenhagen 1905 mistakenly captioned "the Negro Children from St. Thomas." Alberta wears a white short sleeved dress and black boots, and short hair and Victor wears a dark suit consisting of shorts, matching jacket, sixpence hat and black boots, probably their Sunday best. The children are smiling, perhaps laughing and seemingly in motion on a gravel path. A (white) lady dressed in a long black skirt and jacket and hat, has an eye on them in the near background. The photograph is from Arkiv.dk and its caption reads (in English): "A photo album belonging to

the Danish Handicraft Association contains the only known photo of Victor and Alberta in Tivoli in 1905 (National Museum, Denmark)."

Crossing the Atlantic Ocean by boat from St. Croix to Denmark in 1905 would have taken a month's time. Victor himself did not describe a lot from the journey besides his sorrow and the decision to stay onboard due to the sharks that followed the ship. The time between this life-changing childhood experience and his age while writing the biography could explain lost memories, while memory loss is also a common trauma response. Whether Cornelins, the adult author, chose to leave out descriptions of the journey at sea or if it was inaccessible to him, is an open question. But it is unlikely that he did not have any reactions at all, and, later on, he does recount several traumatic experiences from the early period in Denmark. The central point is that during the journey and upon arrival in Copenhagen, Victor and Alberta now faced the challenges of adapting to a new place, climate, language, and demographic as newly *orphaned* children. That is, they were constructed as such when Danes decided to separate them from their mothers. At four and seven, respectively, they simultaneously experienced grief while having to quickly adjust to new surroundings alone. The lost comfort and emotional regulation of a parent such a situation called for was the very source of their grief.

At the turn of the twentieth century, there had been a great interest in exhibitions of 'exotic' peoples from around the world, in places colonized by European kingdoms. Adults and children were brought to Denmark and installed in 'villages' built in the zoological garden of Copenhagen. Here, behind fences separating them from the white Danish audience, they were made to perform themselves, or rather a Danish, male idea of their 'ethnic' behavior and customs (Andreassen 2015). Rikke Andreassen (2015) demonstrates how interlaced racial, gendered, and sexualized concepts of the exotic 'other' were shaped through these exhibitions as well as the representations of them, in publicities and reviews. Created as educational opportunities to showcase parts of the world to the Danish public, the exhibitions played a significant role in constructions of contemporary ideas around race and 'race science.' Along with the exhibitions in the Zoo, a few exhibitions took place in Tivoli, an amusement park and "an Orientalist pleasure garden built outside Copenhagen's ramparts in 1843," the present-day center of the city (Oxfeldt 2005, 56). These were colonial exhibitions showcasing the Danish possessions specifically: The Faroe Islands, Iceland, Greenland, and the Danish West Indies (Andreassen 2015). It was now decided by the famous author Emma Gad that Victor and Alberta were to be exhibited at the colonial exhibition in Tivoli 1905, and president of the exhibition, merchant Moses Melchior supported this quest, providing the contacts in St. Croix. Victor and Alberta were to replace an adult Crucian couple, specialized in basket weaving, who had declined their participation (Andreassen 2015, 95). The children thus became representatives for the Danish West Indies alongside two adults, Mr. Smith who showcased livestock and a 'negro hut,' and Henriette Jensen, a woman hired as a server in the restaurant (p. 95). The two children became the main attraction. In Cornelins' words, there might have been a practical aspect of his and Alberta's participation being so urgent and the replacement indispensable:

> "It was easy to transform white Copenhageners into Faroese, Icelanders and Greenlanders by simply dressing them in the respective folk costumes. It was more difficult for them to make believe that they were black native West Indians, for that, one would need a whole lot of carbon black and red lip balm. No, then it was easier to use us two genuine black children as the living

> decoration at the West Indian section, and that is what happened!"[13] (Cornelins 1976, 22)

As such, Victor and Alberta were not only inserted into a certain racial discursive context but were literally placed onto the stage of the colonial spectacle. From Cornelins' reflections, however, his internalization of the current discourse on representations of racial blackness, in the time of his writing, is apparent as well. His suggestions that an imitation of Black Crucians would have required 'a whole lot of carbon black and red lip balm' reflects the caricatural aesthetics of 'blackface' used in minstrel shows in the United States in the 19th century. However, the history of blackface dates back to medieval Europe (Thompson 2021). Blackface minstrelsy, which Cornelins' hints at, was created by white men covered in coal black theater makeup with red, oversized lips and wide opened eyes to perform a caricature of a Black person. Along with imagined mimicry of movement and speech, blackface reproduced Black racial stereotypes performed on stages and recirculated in newspaper illustrations, cartoons, and advertisements among other contexts. These stereotypes became an easily recognizable placeholder for a Black person and circulated in Europe too, including in Denmark. As a representation of African and African descendant Black people, blackface is inherently racist. Through an imagination of the previously enslaved Black 'other,' blackface upholds and gives expressions to Western concepts of racial hierarchies in which white European and white descendants are superior to Black Africans and Black descendants. Danish illustrators participated in the production of these images in the metropolitan Danish context. Not least in relation to the sale of the Danish West Indies. Cornelins shows that he understands that this would have been a common way to substitute Black Crucians within the mainstream Danish discourse, had it not been for his and Alberta's presence.

Implicit in his account is also a logic in which a racially white person could meaningfully dress up and convincingly perform as a native Inuk from Greenland. While the majority Faroese and Islandic populations would be racialized as similar enough to majority Danes to be 'performed' by them, the Inuit have not been racialized as white or Danish in Denmark. On the contrary, occupied by Denmark since 1721, the Greenlandic Inuit have been subjected in a variety of ways that can be characterized as colonialist coercion (Hermann 2021). The underlying dehumanization of the Inuit, which, for the Danish missionaries and the Kingdom, at the time, justified the treatment of them as subordinate, have since been reproduced in stereotypes and prejudices. These stereotypes function as what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) calls 'controlling images' and reproduce stereotypes as a form of truth about the Inuit. How they were racialized as 'other' was part of identifying them as different from and inferior to the white Danes. However, these stereotypes may not have been fetishized and circulated like *blackface*. The different representational practices of Inuit and Black people may also be an articulation of a racial hierarchy wherein blackness was one extreme which rendered make-up indispensable. Differently, other brown-skinned peoples could be performed by white people, apparently, to a satisfactory degree within this racial scheme. That said, as was the case with Victor and Alberta, in theaters and the budding film industry finding 'genuine' African descendants was preferred to fill roles as extras to perform African and Afro-Caribbean nativeness (Andreassen 2015). In fact, many Virgin Islanders in Denmark worked in capacities of performing blackness which archives of professions and photographs show (P. Nielsen 2016). Interestingly, no humans were exhibited for the Greenlandic section in the 1905

[13] "Det var let at forvandle hvide københavnere til færinger, islændinge og grønlændere ved blot at iklæde dem de respektive folkedragter. Vanskeligere var det at få dem til at illudere som sorte indfødte vestindere, hertil skulle der anvendes en hel del kønrøg og rød læbepomade. Nej, så var det lettere at bruge os to vaskeægte sorte børn som den levende staffage på den vestindiske afdeling, og det skete!"

exhibition, only artifacts. And apparently, Greenlandic Inuits were never exhibited in European human exhibitions, although Canadian Inuits were, but not in Denmark (Andreassen 2015, 17).

Returning to the Colony Exhibition in Tivoli, Cornelins speaks from his humanized self when he recalls and comments on Alberta and his treatment, constructed as objects of entertainment. Cornelins writes about his great interest in the Greenlandic section of the exhibition. As a seven-year-old from 'the tropics', as he writes, he had fun exploring the arctic scenery consisting of artificial icebergs and mounted local animals. He describes playing in the kayaks and sleds, artifacts meant to showcase Inuit craft and lifeways – without Inuit presence. Being a child, and a child that did not yet speak Danish, he did not understand that he had been installed in the West Indian section to stay there and represent a 'native.' As Cornelins writes, neither scolding nor smacks on the neck would make him understand the time slots where he needed to be present on his post. Therefore, other methods were deemed necessary:

> "They got a cage!!! Here, Alberta and I were placed and the influx to the West Indian section became bigger than previously, maybe because the rumors were that there were two human-eating children who were dangerous and could not wander around freely. A lot of children came as well who stuck their fingers inside to us, trying out if we would bite, and many adults brought chocolate and other treats to show their kindness. Alberta, who was very compliant, collected many a delicacy in the course of the day, but I, who was rendered quite desperate by this incarceration, rewarded any approach, be it kind or unkind, in the exact same way: -- a well-directed blob of spit ---!!"[14] (Cornelins 1976, 27).

Cornelins recounts the experiences of being used as a spectacle with a certain lightness by playing on the atrociousness of it all, which had become common sense in the politically correct 1970's, and the contrast in how the children reacted. Simultaneously he makes space for the conflict that is the negotiation of his own subjectivity as a Black child in a white European exhibit of the exoticized, and literally objectified, colonial 'other.' He understands the increasing public interest in him and Alberta, at the time, as likely having to do with existing stereotypes of 'the cannibal'. At the same time outrageous and 'dangerous', the prospect of viewing and perhaps even touching real live 'human-eating' children was exciting for a white Danish audience. Whereas adult Black exoticized 'others' were often also sexualized and hyper-sexualized in racial-gendered ways, Victor and Alberta were rendered spectacular in different ways. Their racialization as Black, and colonialist connotations of 'savage' or animalistic tropes, which the cage emphasized, were part of constructing Victor and Alberta as exhibited artifacts, or 'living decoration' as he articulated it previously.

Considering the particular show constructed by putting Victor and Alberta in a cage (be it an actual cage or a fenced area), it was different from just an 'ethnic' or 'tropical' spectacle. As mentioned, The Colony Exhibition in Tivoli was also represented by Madame Henriette Jensen and Mr. William Smith. As such, according to Nielsen (2016), part of the exhibition's purpose was meant to underscore the cohesion of the Danish Kingdom and shared culture among all imperial

[14] "Man anskaffede et bur!!! Her blev Alberta og jeg anbragt, og tilstrømningen til den vestindiske afdeling blev større end tidligere, måske fordi der gik rygter om, at vi var menneskeæderbørn, der var farlige og ikke måtte gå løse. Der kom da også mange børn, som stak fingrene ind til os for at prøve, om vi bed på, og mange voksne kom med chokolade og andet mundgodt for at vise deres venlighed. Alberta, der var meget medgørlig, indkasserede mangen en lækkerbid i dagens løb, men jeg, hvem denne indespærring gjorde ganske desperat, lønnede enhver tilnærmelse, den være sig venlig eller uvenlig, med nøjagtig samme konfekt: -- en velrettet spytklat ---!!"

subjects regardless of different histories, languages, and "how one look looks" (Nielsen 175). However, considering the actual English and Dutch cultural hegemony in the islands[15], such showcasing would have been more so a *performance* of empire and less of a reflection of Danish influence in the West Indies, nor actually shared national sentiment (N. A. T. Hall 1985; Olwig 2003). An illusion of cohesion would have been wishful, if not desperate, thinking from the metropole at the eleventh hour of a shrinking empire. Indeed, Elisabeth Oxfeldt (2005) argues that Danish (Nordic) Orientalism, and by extension exhibitions of the 'exotic', was an attempt to situate Denmark in proximity to central European nations, rather than on the European periphery, as a "modern, cosmopolitan nation" (p. 12). While this may be one aspect, Rikke Andreassen (2015), recalling Edward Said (1979), emphasizes that these exhibitions, too, were key investments in the construction of *racial whiteness* as Danish in contrast to the exhibited, racial and colonial 'others' (Andreassen 2015, 56–57).

In any case, the two Black children in a cage might have tickled the audience' curiosity as they were closer to expectations and images of 'authentic' others; nicely dressed, sure, but locked up, which could lead the colonial imagination in many directions. While kindness can be defined by empathy and consideration of others, the interactions between the white audience – adults and children alike – and Victor and Alberta were characterized by one sided curiosity and consumption of difference. And in relation to the following quote below, calling the spectators kind hints toward the adult Cornelins' awareness of the audience of his book. In this wording, he offers the benefit of the doubt to the people his presumed audience would identify with in his story. Because he makes it clear, too, that little Victor did not experience any of it as kind.

Common for the various representations of the Black colonial 'other', especially in the 'ethnic' exhibitions, was that it awakened simultaneous sentiments of repulsion and attraction in the white Danish audience (Andreassen 2012). This was often expressed in news coverage and reviews of the exhibitions. Victor's reaction to the colonialist-racist degradation to less than human was acting and responding as best he could – spitting as resistance. In retrospect he writes: "Surely, it was not very nice, but I did not have better means back then to assert my human dignity"[16] (Cornelins 1976, 27). Cornelins addresses the stakes directly – his humanity– and being put in a position where his agency was necessary to assert it, because it was being denied. What must have been the reasoning in the mind of the respective responsible curators? Somebody made the suggestion to lock two children in a cage, and others must have found the idea reasonable enough to endorse it, or by silent complicity. Yet, Cornelins' memories and later reflections question the arrangement and its justification. The experience was not more or less violent simply because Alberta and Victor had different reactions and strategies to cope. For example, Cornelins described Alberta as more 'compliant'. Recalling the overwhelming situation for a moment, both children navigated several high stressors all at the same time. At seven and four, they were adapting to many new impressions, the loss of their caregivers, and thus their new existence as unaccompanied minors. Additionally, they were being robbed of their freedom to roam around like children but were displayed for a large crowd of (pale) strangers. Loud and close to the cage, some sticking in their fingers and arms to touch them. Some of Cornelins' other descriptions suggest that such an audience would have likely been very excited and thus frightening for children. A chain of decisions were made on their behalf and they had no control over the countless intimidating

[15] As across the Caribbean a creolization of cultures was taking place in the Danish West Indies between the diverse African and African descendant cultures and the European ones. It is with regards to Denmark's formal occupation of the islands that its cultural presence was weak and dominated by the Dutch and English, of course within a larger creolized cultural reality (N.A.T. Hall 1992).

[16] "Det var jo ikke særlig pænt, men jeg havde dengang ikke bedre midler til at hævde min menneskeværdighed."

scenarios they would find themselves in, involuntarily, in service of Danish public education and entertainment. That each child would have different ways of coping inside the cage can be an expression of the variety of human adaptation and personality. It should also be taking into account their differences in age and ways they were gendered and approached differently. Victor spitting can be read as an apt reaction to dehumanization experienced by someone who knows that he is a person and knows that he is free. A reaction grounded in his integrity which calls out the colonialist-racist subjugation as strange, not him. Centering Victor's experience, the civilizing mission of colonization is on display as inherently hypocritical; through self-proclaimed superior moral and human advancement, the actions of the colonizers – here the Danes responsible for the Colony Exhibition – are truly uncivilized and brute, not the colonized (Césaire 2000).

The spectacular sight of Black people was not reserved for the exhibition space. In fact, Alberta and Victor's presence caused a lot of fuss in the scenery of quotidian Copenhagen life where a Black person was exceptional and likely a novelty for many. Cornelins reflects on this and compares his own experience of being used to seeing white people in St. Croix. Although they were not the numeric majority, the white people in St. Croix were used to seeing Black Crucians too and to "treat us like humans" (Cornelins 1976, 24). His reflection suggests that in this particular place and historical time, 1905's Copenhagen, the spectacle of blackness was not simply overt exoticization of racial difference. The Copenhageners' reactions to seeing him and Alberta were also telling of limited exposure to and circulation of imagery of the Danish colonies and their populations in the metropole. Throughout Danish West Indian colonial history, bourgeois families had brought enslaved African descendants to Denmark, often as personal servants, but it was mostly individuals, and they were eventually sent back to the West Indies (P. Nielsen 2016, 231). After the abolition of slavery in 1848 Afro-descendant West Indians would still come to Denmark, again, individually and typically with wealthy Danish families or as sailors, but relatively few settled in Denmark (P. Nielsen 2016). As such, there was never a so-called postcolonial population group of Afro-descendant citizens who were culturally assimilated, spoke Danish and were an integrated part of Copenhagen city life. Rather than a collective permanent presence, Black West Indians overwhelmingly came and went as individuals, tied to 'employers.' Besides West Indians, there would have been occasional Black people from colonies in Africa and the U.S. as well, all though not communities as such. Similarly, other exoticized people who had been exhibited in the Zoo would sometimes stay and build a life in Copenhagen, again individually (Andreassen 2015). At the turn of the 20th century (and long after) the sight of a Black person was rare enough to be highly noticeable in Denmark.

Having just arrived in Denmark from St. Croix Victor found the attention "highly bothersome, but also incomprehensible" (Cornelins 1976, 24). He describes the walk from their foster home to the exhibit in Tivoli, accompanied by a 14-15-year-old white girl:

> "When the young girl showed up at Rådhuspladsen [the Town Hall Square] with us two Black children it got crowded around us. All the road users forgot their original errands, pedestrians, cyclists, yes even the tram passengers swarmed around us to see the strange beings the young white girl had at her hands. One could not truly believe our realness, and several tried with the thumb on our cheeks, to see if the black color would rub off, others pulled our hair to find out if it was a wig or truly real negro hair. Before we got across Rådhuspladsen, the gathering was so strong, that we could hardly move

> further, before a huge police officer came to our aid and cleared the way for us down Vesterbro's Passage."[17] (p. 24)

The multiple conditions that made Alberta and Victor vulnerable – their young age, recent parental loss, and being unaccompanied in a foreign place – likely would have exacerbated the experience of being transformed from a child to a spectacular object. Some of the emotional responses that Cornelins later described indicates that this otherization was traumatic: "[But] here in Copenhagen we were almost considered to be some bizarre animals, who had surely escaped the Zoological Garden. This sentiment made us scared, so we were afraid to go into the streets and our anxiety transmitted to the young girl who led us" (p. 24)[18]. And later, after arrival within the gates of Tivoli: "This, to be an exhibition object for other people's amusement not only made me timid but also furious inside. Sometimes I would hide between cardboard boxes and scenery, but I was soon found and from time to time got a smack on the back of the head by one or another's flat hand to underscore that I *had to* stay at the 'arena'" (p. 26).[19]

Through these memories, Cornelins (1976) both articulated emotions – fear and anger – and his corresponding behavioral reaction to what he experienced: hiding. In that light, what sensations and emotions must it have evoked in him in the situations where he would have wanted to hide, but had nowhere to run? Contextualized as such, his response to spit at audiences was one of few available acts of refusal in the absence of hiding places. His outward reaction testifies to a relatively resilient child who, in the face of change and trauma, stood up for himself and asserted his human dignity, as he put it. Retreating inwards, trying to make himself smaller or invisible would have been reasonable solutions for a child in his situation as well.

Victor's sense of self and agency, however, is not proof that he was unmarked by the violent experiences described above. On several occasions in his autobiography, he writes about times where early memories from Copenhagen impacted him as an adult. While in military service in Denmark, it was custom to march through the town where the barracks were located. Being a Black soldier in the Danish military in the 1930's, Victor requested an exception, if for nothing else, he wrote, then due to "comical appearance" (p. 87). But more specifically, the reason was that his appearance – how he was racialized and stood out – once again caused overwhelming and anxiety provoking reactions in public space:

> " […] when people on our way discovered the Black soldier within the column, they stood still and looked and made others aware of the curious sight, indeed children and youth followed behind the marching column and shouted. I truly felt as if back in 1905 and the noisy events at Rådhuspladsen [the Town Hall Square] at the appearance of Alberta and me. Even though it made me cringe just like the emperor who paraded unclothed, like 'The Steadfast

[17] "Når den unge pige sammen med os to sorte børn viste sig på Rådhuspladsen, blev der trængsel om os. Alle trafikanterne glemte deres oprindelige ærinde, forgængere, cyklister, ja sågar sporvognspassagerer stimlede sammen om os for at se de mærkværdige skabninger, den unge hvide pige havde ved hånden. Man troede ikke rigtig på vores ægthed, og flere prøvede med tommelfingrene på vores kinder, om den sorte farve lod sig gnide af, andre ruskede i vores hårtotter for at finde ud af, om det var paryk eller virkelig ægte negerhår. Inden vi nåede over Rådhuspladsen, var sammenstimmelen så stærk, at vi næsten ikke kunne komme videre, før en af de kæmpemæssige politibetjente kom os til hjælp og banede os vej ned ad Vesterbros Passage."

[18] Men her i København blev vi nærmest anset for at være nogle løjerlige dyr, der nok var sluppet ud af en Zoologisk Have. Denne fornemmelse gjorde os skræmte, så vi var bange for at komme på gaden og blive set, og vores ængstelse forplantede sig til den unge pige der førte os.

[19] Dette at skulle være en udstillingsgenstand andre mennesker til moro gjorde mig ikke alene undselig men også rasende i mit indre. Jeg gemte mig undertiden mellem pakkasser og kulisser, men jeg blev snart fundet frem igen og fik nu og da et nakkedrag af en eller andens flade hånd for at understrege, at jeg *skulle* holde mig på "arenaen".

> Soldier' I continued with strict discipline until we turned into the barrack yard and a powerful slam of the gate let me know that the loud mob was shut out --- for now.
>
> The unusual attention that I caused made me request permission to dress in civilian clothes when I was not on duty." (p. 87)[20]

Here, Cornelins describes scenarios that, seemingly, had not changed in the couple decades since his arrival in Denmark until his young adulthood. The sight of him was still perceived as spectacular, causing chaos in public space. Similarly, his emotional response was still one of anxiety. His reference to the famous Danish author Hans Christian Andersen's folktale *The Emperor Has No Clothes* creates a comparison between his experience of exposure and literal nakedness. And by referring to his first shock and experiences with becoming an object of extreme curiosity, in the eyes of white Danes, he communicates that this type of objectification was not something he would get used to over time. Rather, the trauma was reproduced each time. While it was equally unpleasant as an adult, by then, he had more capabilities to try and mitigate the discomfort of the racial spectacularization he was subjected to. For one, he learned to suppress his emotions, until he was away from the public space. But also, he sought to negotiate his military service attendance, although without success. Thus, an alternative request he made, to dress in ordinary clothing instead of his uniform, was a way to avoid the extra visibility that followed with it. Not only were the parades and marching through town already a type of performance, but also, on this stage of the column, Victor was Black and the *only* Black soldier. Attention was therefore drawn to him in an exaggerated way that his day-to-day errands, without an orchestra and uniformed parade, would not cause to the same extent. And perhaps, too, the contradictory relationship between his racialization as Black and the uniform as a Danish national symbol were part of the extraordinariness. It is possible that he tried to avoid marching duty precisely by playing on the nationalist commonsense discourse that a Danish soldier was a white soldier, hence a Black soldier would naturally appear comical, as he wrote. Cornelins writes about other ways he tried to escape the 'stage' of the soldier duties, for example by faking illness to stay behind in his room, while the rest marched. Given Victor Cornelins' later life story as a teacher and public speaker, there is no reason to believe that he was introverted or dealt with social anxiety. Yet, the hyper exposure specifically *as Black* overwhelmed him to a degree that he still felt the need to hide, even as an adult.

On another occasion, Cornelins recalled situations where past trauma would resurface:

> "In my later life as a teacher for white children it was often my task to make field trips to zoological gardens but the children's eagerness to go to the monkey's cage as well as their apparent amusement over the jumping and hissing little animals in there did not sit well with me.

[20] "Nej, når folk på vor vej opdagede den sorte soldat inde i kolonnen, stod de stille og kikkede og gjorde andre opmærksomme på det kuriøse syn, ja børn og unge fulgte bag efter marchkolonnen og råbte op. Jeg følte mig i sandhed sat tilbage til 1905 og de larmende begivenheder på Rådhuspladsen ved Albertas og min tilsynekomst. Selv om det krøb i mig ligesom i kejseren, der i eventyret gik i procession i den bare skjorte, holdt jeg som "Den standhaftige Soldat" kæft, trit og retning, til vi svingede ind i kasernegården, og et kraftigt smæld af porten fortalte mig, at den larmende hob var lukket ude --- for denne gang.

Den ualmindelige opmærksomhed, som jeg vakte, iklædt soldatertøjet, fik mig til at ansøge om tilladelse til at gå civil, når jeg ikke var i tjeneste."

I remembered all too well when I was behind the bars myself!!!" (p. 27)[21]

Witnessing encaged living beings and their corporal signs of fear sparked Cornelins' own memories and activated a discomfort. And, as he wrote, the relationship between the frightened animals behind bars and the loud, excited 'white children' for whom the animals' suffering was entertainment. Unlike the example with the soldier parade, at the zoological garden Victor did not portray a situation where he was personally objectified. But as a teacher on a field trip he became witness to something that was close enough to his own experience of violation to make him relate and feel bothered.

If we recall for a moment how the cage has been remembered in white Danish public memory, it is most often extracted from Cornelins' larger life story, but simultaneously somehow used *as* his life story and represented as outrageous. This is an example of spectacularization of Black pain through a white gaze, which I will speak to in chapter two. Here, I bring it up briefly, as a contrast to how Cornelins utilizes this specific memory to make a different, quite opposite point. While the contemporary Danish retellings of this are rather fixated on the materiality of the cage and its delimited temporality, Cornelins is centering his visceral and emotional response to dehumanization by white Danes in public space. Whereas Victor and Alberta's material confinement was limited in time, the way he re-evokes the felt *experience* suggests that that was in fact *not* confined to the space/time of Tivoli's Colony Exhibition. Cornelins' awareness of the cage as a strong symbol can be read as a narrative grip in telling his story, or as Odumosu suggests, a chronotrope he employs to travel back in time (personal communication, 2023). In this way, he makes references to experiencing confinement later in life, not behind literal bars, but through circumstances in his cultural milieu. The cage then comes to symbolize ways his subjectivity, spirit and mind indeed were confined by the operating definitions of belonging and personhood throughout his life in Denmark.

Both of the above examples of ways childhood racial trauma echoed in adulthood illustrate the relational character of racialization. As Cornelins reflects himself, it is not the fact of particular racialization as Black or white, for instance, or racial difference per se that causes the white people's hysterical reactions. Frantz Fanon articulates this ontological premise in such a context: "For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (1952, 90). In accounts by people who are born into a majority Black population and then move to Europe, including Fanon, it is not uncommon that this transition is when they experience 'becoming' Black all together. Previously, they had simply been a *person*. The becoming emerges from the *hailing* as 'other.' In Fanon's famous words, this sounded like "Look! A Negro!" when he first went to France from Martinique, and we can imagine a Danish equivalent, accompanied with pointing fingers and unsubtle stares in Victor's case (p. 91-94).

Relationality and hailing thus illustrate the productive character of racialization. It is as much a question of *doing* race as it is about *being* or non-being (Fanon 1952). Producing racial difference (via hailing) is simultaneously the act that produces a racialized norm – here, that is racial whiteness as default. This is a historically and contextually specific categorization and part of the effect, in a European context like the Danish, is invisibilization and thus normalization of racial whiteness, constructing it as the human default. The violent reactions to the sight of Black

[21] "I mit senere liv som lærer for hvide børn var det ofte min opgave at gøre udflugter til zoologiske haver men børnenes iver efter at komme hen til abeburet såvel som deres åbenbare morskab over de springende og hvæsende smådyr derinde huede mig ikke.
Jeg huskede alt for tydeligt, da jeg selv sad bag tremmerne!!!"

persons therefore says less about their blackness than about the white population's ethnocentrism and limited exposure to anyone different from their own racial norm. Differently, the white people in St. Croix were used to being around people they perceived as Black and did not spectacularize them like white Danes in the metropole, in Cornelins' account. A racial norm and racialized hierarchy were still at work in the post-slavery, plantation society of St Croix, but white Crucians and white Danish planters were not astonished by the mere sight of Black people. The experience of being racialized as 'other' is multilayered in that the relations of power express racial and racist logics of categorization, but they are articulated differently across time and space. Here, the racial hierarchy, supremacy of whiteness and inferiority of blackness, the shock factor and novelty of racial difference played together. What Victor experienced in metropolitan Copenhagen vis à vis in St. Croix was racialization as Black in the context of a 20th century Denmark: any foreigner would have been a curious sight, and racial foreigners in particular.[22] The general public was racially unaware and racist hierarchies were attached to common knowledge on human diversity represented by the 'race science' of the time, eugenics (Andreassen 2015).

Despite the decades between Victor's childhood experiences in 1905 and his similar experiences as a young adult, time did not change how uncomfortable and frightening he experienced exoticization and having his humanity tested. Whereas Victor had no choice but to adapt to the social and racial surroundings, the racism he faced (continuously hailed as different and less than human) was not something he adapted to. The point here is that his experiences were not just dependent on his personal adjustment; they were always also a result of the dynamic between the white people in question and blackness. Here, it is relevant to recall the characteristics of the Danish colonial relationship with the three US Virgin Islands. While they had a Danish administration, the white Europeans who settled there, as planters, merchants, etcetera, were in large part from other European countries. The circulation of knowledge to and from the Danish West Indies may therefore have been spread in different directions, rather than an exchange between the Danish metropole and its colonies per se. This left metropolitan Danes relatively ignorant about Black West Indians and the colonies generally. In a context where racial blackness is continuously constructed as exceptional, the questioning of a Black person's realness – the thumb on the cheeks, the pull of the hair – is reproduced in perpetuity as well. The relationship between the Danish public, their common knowledge, and representations of blackness shapes the real-life encounters of Black Africans and African descendants. That means white Danish society's slow adaptation to the racial diversity could at any point throw Victor into complex embodied and emotional turbulence. This was Victor's 'cage'. Fanon describes a hyper-awareness of his body, his skin, blood rushing, losing his temper, trembling with rage, exploding. We might think of Fanon's words as an intellectual articulation of the appropriate fury behind child Victor's spitting. "The white gaze," Fanon writes, "the only valid one, is already dissecting me," effectively deconstructing his humanity over and over (Fanon 1952, 95).

Reading closely what connotations racialization as Black evokes in the Danish imaginary in the above examples, Victor refers to ways his 'realness' is being tested by the white audience several times. By verifying that the hair and skin (color) actually belongs to the person's body,

[22] The multiple layers contributing to the exceptionalism of the site of blackness is an overlap in signification between racialized 'otherness' (from unmarked racialization), foreignness (actually arriving from elsewhere) and cultural difference (norms and language different from Danish ones). While racialization was the primary marker of Victor's difference from the white Danes, it was a fact that he was also from elsewhere and raised in a different culture. The interesting thing to note is that the expectation of these elements being equal to one another did not change significantly, if at all, during his lifetime. Neither for him, as he integrated and assimilated culturally into Danishness as best he could, nor for afro-descendants born and raised in Denmark since. Cultural integration does not make up for racial difference in the Danish cultural (ethno-national) logic.

blackness is perceived as a layer, perhaps a costume, on top of an imagined more real (and white) body. Likewise, the afro hair must be a wig, or the nappy texture must be artificially made – implicitly, it must be a manipulation of 'normal' straight, blond hair. Exteriorizing racial blackness is a characteristic of northern European racist perception. The notion of Black personhood is not entertained or even imagined, but rather, there is a hyper focus on the *color* of the skin, which is perceived as an application, not as embodiment. The questioning of Black peoples' realness and fetishization of the skin itself is to this day a defining part of Danish racism and is not specific to the past. In the Danish racial imaginary, it is as if racial blackness or any non-white racialized categories are not integrated into a reality where racial variation exists. Rather, it stays exceptional, always held against the dominating norm of humanness: Danish notions of racial whiteness as default.

The types of spectacularization that Victor and Alberta experienced were not exclusively a product of their time. A common belief in Denmark about racism is that societies evolve in a linear way towards social equality and tolerance, so-called progress. Until recently, the political (white) left typically represented these progressive views. But depending on context, both place and demographically, the sight of a Black person can also be spectacular in Denmark in the 21st century. But more importantly, the deep-rooted nationalist racial imaginaries are reproduced over time through discourse and practices that at once invent and reinforce a 'truth.' This is, for instance, the normalization of Danishness as white, but also the construction of Humanity itself as default white (Wynter 2003; Weheliye 2014). Approaching the assumption of temporal progress differently: why *would* racism disappear or change automatically simply due to time? Unsettling claims to Danish innocence and progressiveness allows for a critical listening practice to contemporary testimonies of Black Danish life that echo many of the types of racialized 'othering' that Cornelins wrote about in his autobiography. To better understand the functioning of racializing dynamics, it is therefore necessary to engage with their basic mechanisms through which they function in this Northern European context of Denmark. Perpetual hailing, newness and spectacularization are central to these dynamics. These are a small fraction of a larger epistemological project rooted in Western Modernity. In the following, I make connections between the biological sense of eyesight, the gaze, and visual representation as these elements relate to the construction of race and racialization.

Seeing Race: Theorizing the White Gaze

In *The Invention of Women* sociologist Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí (1997) argues that Western social categorizations privilege the physical and visible, what she calls a bio-logic. She clarifies the specificity of such epistemology and emphasizes that social organization in human societies is created in a variety of ways globally. Privileging the sight, the gaze, and identifying visible characteristics is a Western construct and not a universal way of making sense of the world. In this intervention, her main argument is that the category of 'woman' does not exist in Yoruba culture and language – it is an invention. Considering Oyěwùmí's argument about the epistemological foundation of the Western gender construct, it can be relevant to think through constructions of 'race' in the same vein, especially when recognizing that they are always entangled and co-constructing each other. An overarching contribution of Oyěwùmí's critique is to better understand parameters and premises for constructions of difference. When the Western bio-logic is taken for granted as a way to grasp the world, it obscures ways in which a dominating idea of 'race' too is an invention that relies on privileging eyesight and 'seeing' race.

In my study, the focus is specifically on Western constructions of African blackness in the context of Western European colonialism in Africa, enslavement of Africans in the Caribbean and the Americas and what these relationships mean in Europe in the aftermath. In this context, racialization became one of several justifications for chattel slavery specifically, whereas slavery was not new to Europe (Robinson 2000). Other justifications had been referring to a Natural Law; to the biblical Curse of Ham; Christening and civilizing the 'heathens,' or those without soul; and lastly through reference to innate biological difference and inferiority (N. A. T. Hall 1985; Robinson 2000). What sets this racial scheme of difference apart from other peoples' ethnocentrisms is its emergence with, through, and for capitalism. The development of mercantilism into modern capitalism produced the Black, so to speak: "The features of the man, his hair, color and dentifrice, his 'subhuman' characteristics so widely pleaded, were only the later rationalizations to justify a simple economic fact: that the colonies needed labor and resorted to Negro labor because it was cheapest and best" (E. E. Williams 2021, 14). This racial modality is therefore inseparable from capitalism as a structure, what Cedric Robinson called *racial capitalism* (Robinson 2000).

Alexander Weheliye (2014) offers another framework which is useful to think through alongside the bio-logic and racial capitalism: *racializing assemblages*. He defines the notion of racializing assemblages as something that "represent, among other things, the visual modalities in which dehumanization is practiced and lived" (2014, 6). Articulating the connection between visual modalities and dehumanization clarifies that the Western bio-logical knowledge project is not solely about 'seeing' and constructing distinctions but producing "differentiation and hierarchization" simultaneously (p. 5). This, essentially, is the working of racialization (p. 5). The visual is one among several modalities through which racialization is operationalized, hence the assemblage. 'Seeing' race in the Western epistemology is therefore inherently linked to this hierarchy of "full humans, not quite-humans, and nonhumans" (p. 4). This is grounded in what Sylvia Wynter calls "the overrepresentation of Man as if it were the human" (Wynter 2003, 267). The idea that the European Enlightenment subject as white, male, and Christian equals 'normal humanness' in a relation of dominance to the colonized 'other.'

While there are many systems of differentiation operation at the same time, in complex interconnected ways, the primacy of the visual gets fixed alongside the crystallization of racist dogmas. This fixation means that 'seeing' is perceived as a method to uncover The Truth in the West. Accordingly, what can be seen is what *is* in the world, unlike feeling, emoting, relating etc. Race and racialization are more complex than simply skin color. Yet, the use of 'color', 'people of color,' or 'colored' as meaningful social differentiators in Western epistemologies across languages highlights the centrality of the gaze as a principal means to *know* something in the world. Oyěwùmí troubles this type of knowing as the default or most legitimate experience of and in the world. Through a Western epistemology, who humans 'are' is inextricably tied up with physical bodies and how they are attached value in a certain context regarding race, gender, sex, size, shape, and abilities. Theorizing the gaze is therefore central to understanding processes of racialization in a Western Modern context and to understanding the significance of racial representation and racial reflection. Analytically, we can identify the primacy given to sight in a racializing discourse – here, the Danish – while simultaneously holding space for physicality to be a "referent of the idea" of the difference and inferiority, not the difference itself (Wynter 2003, 266).

bell hooks argues that "...a fundamental task of black critical thinkers has been the struggle to break with the hegemonic modes of seeing, thinking, and being that block our capacity to see ourselves oppositionally, to imagine, describe, and invent ourselves in ways that are liberatory"

(hooks 2015, 2). Like Oyěwùmí, hooks connects the visual to structures of power and categorization. While Oyěwùmí gives an in-depth analysis of the extent of the Western bio-logic, hooks examines the possibilities for justice within a world that is heavily organized around visual culture broadly. hooks argues that Black people have the ability to shift their gaze and that how they see themselves is crucial to their perceived agency in the world. The idea of the gaze in a socio-cultural analysis is not so much about physical eyesight and seeing, but more so about the vision, about looking; a directed attention towards something and what becomes visible and invisible from a given position. Analytically, the gaze refers both to vision and discourse. Vision is central in a hyper visualized culture and discursive practices take place through visual communication. Therefore, hooks explains the relevance of studying the media as a site where social power relations are articulated: "There is a direct and abiding connection between the maintenance of white supremacist patriarchy in this society and the institutionalization via mass media of specific images, representations of race, of blackness that support and maintain the oppression, exploitation, and overall domination of all black people" (hooks 2015, 2). The circulation of certain images and the absence of others are powerful methods to invent and uphold a given narrative as Truth. At the same time, unshown imagery, in turn, can become not only absent versions of reality, but completely unthought of and unimaginable realities to the majority. Within a Western epistemology where vision is overemphasized as *the* way to know in the world, it is therefore crucial to pay attention to representations of the world through images. Within relations of power, as hooks discusses, dominating representations of the world by centering a certain gaze can be challenged when it becomes clear that the dominating gaze is not Truth, but rather a located, situated perspective. Learning to 'see' differently, from other locations – especially minoritized groups' own location – can challenge the hegemonic narratives that privilege one or few versions of reality. This impacts our understanding of self, others, and our place in the world and, importantly, enables agency and action. The relatively simple idea that no human produces objective and absolute knowledge, that all knowledge is indeed *situated* or *positioned* is a major scientific contribution from across feminisms (Haraway 1988; Hill Collins 2000).

The excerpts from Victor Cornelins' autobiography so far have exemplified how he was subjected to the white gaze which constructed him as strange and 'the other.' His adult voice makes space for the parts of him that felt alienated by being treated in a way that did not correspond to how he experienced himself. In Fanon's words, the ways he was *fixed* by the white gaze (1952, 95). This retrospection illustrates negotiations of Victor's sense of self in the past and the ways he was defined from the outside in a context where he was minoritized. However, later, he internalized the othering gaze. That is, he too learns to perceive racial whiteness as norm to the degree he identifies with it. By consequence, he also internalizes and begins to regard himself through the white gaze, alienating his own blackness. In this way, dealing with "two systems of reference," as Fanon would write, splits the Black consciousness, and develops what W.E.B. Du Bois called a *double consciousness* (Du Bois 1903; Fanon 1952, 90).

Self-perception, and perception generally, is shaped within relations of power and within discourse (Hall 1997). And discourse is produced and reproduced through representation, hence the importance of visual representation in regard to race (Hall 1997; hooks 2015). Media scholar Tess Skadegård Thorsen (2020) conducted the first comprehensive study on the Danish film industry focusing on representations of race in front of and behind the camera. This study is of particular interest here because of how, as bell hooks stated, popular culture articulates societal power relations. This study therefore offers a unique critical race analysis of the hegemonic Danish

racial imaginary and its reproduction in the entertainment industry. Two separate but related aspects of representation of racial minorities, following Skadegård Thorsen, are *under*representation and *mis*representation (2020, 137). Underrepresentation, or lack of representation, refers to the erasure of minority racialized individuals all together and is a quantitative observation. Misrepresentation refers to *how* racialized minorities are represented, qualitatively. In tracing connections between the gaze and racialization, both aspects of representation are relevant, however I will emphasize misrepresentation. The relationship between a scarcity of racially diverse representation and overwhelmingly misrepresentations to fill the gap, raises questions about what this means to the racial imaginaries of the racial minorities themselves as well as the majority. Is any representation better than nothing? That is, are colonialist, racist representations of Black Africans and Virgin Islanders an acceptable minimum compared to a visual landscape without any representations of blackness at all?

Patricia Hill Collins' (2014) notion *controlling images*, as well as hooks explanations above, illustrate ways visual representations of the Black racial 'other' exclusively through stereotypes both produce and maintain oppression of Black people by fixing racist images as Truth. What kinds of negotiations take place when only or overwhelmingly exposed to negative, racializing stereotypes of the group we are categorized as belonging to? The consciousness of Black Danish people might be heavily dominated by the white gaze, and thus appear singular and indeed 'white.' This caused by the historical absence of nurture and cultivation when isolated from a Black collective that could have provided shared consciousness, affirmation, and truly 'seeing' someone like Victor (Opitz, Oguntoye, and Schultz 1992; Kilomba 2010). Double consciousness, with its reference to two-ness might therefore not truly capture the development of consciousness of Black people in Denmark; a white society characterized by (individual) racial isolation, unlike Du Bois' theorization of (collective) racial segregation. For a consciousness to be double it presumes a Black consciousness existing in the first place, as one of two systems of reference (Du Bois 1903; Fanon 1952).

The national visual imagination of Black people at the turn of the 20th century in Denmark was mediated through a white Danish, European gaze and Euro-American cultural production, equally centering a white, racist imagination. While there were some Black people living in Denmark at the time, staged live appearances such as the colonial exhibitions were sites with a broader exposure. Alongside these racial 'performances', printed images also circulated, for example as advertisements for the colonial exhibitions or the newspapers' coverage of it. These limited representations constructed Black people as exotic (people). Perceptions of them as simply people too – with mundane lives and human, existential concerns – were erased through a combination of underrepresentation and misrepresentation. The language of staging can be helpful here to tease out ways in which people who are Black got 'cast', and still do, reduced to their 'racial' status or identity, while their personhood and humanity is unacknowledged[23]. These exotic controlling images were the versions of Black people most readily available to the Danish masses. Fewer people would have been exposed to, or actually personally know, Black people with regular Copenhagen lives, tending to work and quotidian tasks like most others, like Cornelins and other Virgin Islanders.

In European constructions of blackness specifically, connotations are often created between race and surface color, or race and food (chocolate, coffee etc.), but also dirtiness or soot (Cornelins

[23] As I am writing this in early 2023, more than 40 Danish actors have organized around a message to represent A Bigger Picture (Et Større Billede) in the Danish film industry, pointing out the lived experiences of Skadegård Thorsens's research and disproportionate under- and misrepresentation of racially minoritized Danish actors.

1976; Opitz, Oguntoye, and Schultz 1992; Wekker 2016; Wyver 2019; Gay 2021). As I will show, key features of these racial logics construct (minority) racialized appearance simply as external, rather than a full, embodied experience and position in this social world. While several expressions of racialization and racism co-exist and co-create each other, there is a way that Danish discourse draws on the surface-level racism, e.g. when people say "does it rub off?" "oh, you can tan too?" etcetera. But what happens to the consciousness of the Black Danish person, when they too internalize an idea that their racialization is simply a surface, separate from themselves? What forms of self-perception exists among Danish people of African descent who, factually, know that they have brown skin and a certain Afro-descendant lineage, but for whom that does not translate into *identifying with* blackness as a socio-racial position? Through the centrality of the gaze, tensions occur between constructs of what someone 'looks' like, 'sound' like, and their perceived 'being.'

Fancying Being White: Real Mirrors and Shocking Reflections

It is precisely because of the lived experience, the physical and emotional reactions to being hailed as 'other', that makes the questions of *being* interesting with regards to subjectivity. Because regardless of what you *feel* like you are, how you *self-identify*, or how willingly you assimilate, forget, or deny your otherness as a Black person in the West, you are "overdetermined from the outside" (Fanon 1952, 95). 'Identity' as self-identification becomes irrelevant in a social context in which embodied racialized blackness deviates from the norm and will be hailed as such. Sometimes, the outside does not even have to be another person. Cornelins writes:

> "Why was I, Africa's descendant, or SON OF THE BLACKS, as Richard Wright says, brought up to these Nordic beaches? Why did I have to continuously be perceived as a close relative to the ape, when all my work inside and outside of the school was so successful? Was I indeed in the wrong place? If I was not, then why had I gotten white man's training and formation, when I was essentially in others' eyes perceived as a wild man? Why was I black in the first place, when my life was lived among whites?"[24] (1976, 106)

This quote by Victor Cornelins comes out of an anecdote where he, as a teacher on recreation watch duty in the schoolyard, catches his own reflection in a basement mirror. He describes his sudden shock and reminder at the sight of his own blackness. "When I saw my black face among all the white, everything occurred to me utterly meaningless! [...] nobody in this school environment made me aware that I was black, but now I saw for myself with a clarity that shook me"[25] (p. 106). Dissociating with what he saw – himself – he enters these existential questions about blackness. His alienation is centered around two axes: Constructions of place and constructions of non- and not-quite-humanness.

[24] "Hvorfor var jeg, Afrikas ætling, eller SØN AF DE SORTE, som Richard Wright siger, blevet ført op på disse nordlige strande? Hvorfor skulle jeg vedblivende betragtes som nær slægtning til aben, når alt i mit arbejde i og udenfor skolen lykkedes så godt? Var jeg alligevel kommet på den gale hylde? Hvis jeg ikke var det, hvorfor havde jeg fået hvid mands oplæring og dannelse, når jeg dybest set i andres øjne blev anset for en vild mand? Hvorfor var jeg i det hele taget sort, når mit liv levedes blandt hvide?"
[25] "Da jeg så mit sorte ansigt mellem alle de hvide, forekom alting mig ganske meningsløst! Med undtagelse af ovennævnte isolerede episode var der ingen i dette skolemilieu, som gjorde mig opmærksom på, at jeg var sort, men nu så jeg det selv med en tydelighed, som rystede mig."

A sense of place is constructed through contrasting 'Africa' and the 'North,' as racialized geographies: the Nordic beaches equals being 'among whites.' As an African descendant, the place 'Africa' is constructed as his racial geography of origin: it makes him a son of the Blacks, which he emphasized. Following this rationalization of race and place he therefore asks if he is in 'the wrong place.' Constructions of differences as such are not necessarily and inherently producing hierarchy. But as a colonialist power relationship, racism produces differentiation and hierarchy simultaneously. Therefore, while seeing his own reflection prompted the questions, they go beyond the embodied and spatial aspects of his lived blackness. Notably, Cornelins makes connections between that which he is perceived to be – Black – and the dehumanizing connotations attached to blackness in the contemporary Danish discourse and imaginary: 'a relative to the ape'; 'a wild man.' He decries the fact that despite his professional success and training, he was still subjugated to racial stereotypes, as not-quite-human, which he did not identify with. He therefore doubted the point of his 'white' education when that did not change how he was inferiorized as Black.

This quote is dense with various aspects of experienced Black embodiment in a majority white Northern European context. A part that stands out here is the impression that he had forgotten or pushed to the back of his consciousness that he was Black. Nobody made him aware, he writes, and so he was shocked. While Cornelins generally expressed a clear recognition about his own blackness as a factual matter, he also understands it in opposition to his professional achievements and 'white' training. As if Cornelins the professional and Cornelins the Black man were two separate fragments and as if excellence would have canceled out the constructions of him as non-human or not-quite-human. But it did not. His last question speaks volumes to his context and why he might have been surprised at all at the sight of himself in the glass: he was Black, surrounded by white people. Coming of age in a context where representation of Black people was scarce and skewed through a colonialist, racist gaze, almost no mirroring existed to affirm his own existence. He mentions no relationships or access to other Black people in his adult life who could have affirmed humanized, relatable Black experiences in Denmark. Therefore, he is struck by a sense of meaninglessness.

Interestingly, in the English version of his biography manuscript, he wrote this part differently. It includes a significant extra sentence. To his imagined anglophone audience, Cornelins puts the incidence in the schoolyard like this:

> "At one time it happened that I looked into the basement windows that mirrored life in the yard. There I saw my own black face among all the white ones.
>
> Suddenly I felt as if everything had lost its meaning. Was I a misfit? Or what? At school no one mentioned that I was black; all my colleagues treated me as they treated each others. *I had fancied that I was just as white as they* [my emphasis, ELH]. But how I saw with my own eyes distinctly and revealingly: I was black! "Sons of the Blacks" as Richard Wright, our famous author, called us. I was a son of the blacks from Africa, washed ashore on the northern coast" (B. Freiesleben and Cornelins 1998, 200).

The English unpublished manuscript is an adaptation rather than a translation of the Danish one. Most likely imagined as Crucians and other Virgin Islanders in the U.S., it seems Cornelins considered the reader's different context and frame of reference. While there are a few changes between the Danish and English telling of the story in this quote, apart from the order, the sentence

I have emphasized stands out: "I had fancied that I was just as white as they." This sentence is at work producing meaning on several levels.

First, the blunt statement in itself is letting the reader know that a Black man thought he was white, to a degree that he was shocked at his own 'revealing' reflection. This might be one of the clearest statements of the stakes of Danish Black subjectivity that I have come across: He thought he was white! This direct articulation of his sense of self is central to the arguments of this dissertation. His shock is actually not surprising in my analysis, rather it affirms a key point: It is common that black- and brown skinned African descendant Danes identify with whiteness and racially white people when raised in dominantly white environments. As Victor's experience demonstrates, herein lies the conflict when he is confronted with his Black body.

Secondly, the emphasized sentence is important in the context of translation. By adding this explicitly, unlike in the Danish biography manuscript, he guides the anglophone reader to get on the same page as him. Likely aware that this very statement might be completely surprising if not paradoxical to other Black people, he spells out how he felt and identified: as belonging in the world he was socialized into. Why would he not? we might as well ask. While, at other times, he demonstrates awareness of his black body as a fact, this experience shows that he did not experience blackness as something he *was.* And therefore, it is the *sight* of himself in the mirroring glass, as well as external, racist connotations, that would remind him and trouble the way he identified, the way he *felt* different from how he *looked.*

Cornelins expressed an experience of racial dissociation here, which is in large part shaped by the conditions of racial isolation in a racially white milieu which he was socialized in. Importantly, it is not solely the empirical population or absence of visible Black people that matters, but also the ideological landscape around it. "In the white world", Fanon writes, "the man of color encounters difficulties in elaborating his body schema. The image of one's body is solely negating. It's an image in the third person" (1952, 90). The ideological landscape of both underrepresentation (scarcity, absence, silence) and misrepresentation (stereotypes, inferiorization) alienates the Black person – from those representations and hence from themselves (Fanon 1952; Skadegård Thorsen 2020). This can evoke a deep sense of *nonbeing*, as Fanon articulates it, or existential *meaninglessness*, in Cornelins' words (Fanon 1952; Kilomba 2010).

Victor's story exemplifies that it is possible to know, factually, that one is black- or brown skinned and at the same time dissociate from the sight of oneself, if it does not correspond to one's internal experience of self. Considering such separation between physical African descendant blackness and an identification with that lived experience, a political Black identity seems even more unlikely. Additionally, in the Danish conditions, disintegrating his *self* and his blackness could have served several purposes as a social survival strategy, whether consciously or not, in order to try to belong (Eng and Han 2019). Most likely, Victor navigated Denmark as best he could; he simply did not have a range of alternative strategies to choose from.

'Transplants' in a Racial Geographic

In the exclusionary racial schema Cornelins expresses, unbelonging is articulated as placelessness. Both in terms of geographic location when Cornelins questions why he was "washed ashore on the northern coast" and as racialized social relationships when he situates himself and his life "among all the white ones." In this way, he reproduces a link between metropolitan Denmark and racial whiteness as commonsense. As he knows this to be the norm, he then recognizes his own body as out of place when remembering that it is black (Carby 2019). It is worth emphasizing that

racial whiteness is not solely an ideological norm, but at his time also the reality of his social relations. He and Alberta Roberts were split into different foster homes some years after their arrival in Denmark. They had little contact since and then Alberta passed away at 15 years old (Cornelins 1976). Victor therefore did not have the companion he had arrived with. The first period in Denmark and the experiences of becoming an 'other' had been a shared experience, Victor and Alberta being each other's life witnesses in a crucial time of their lives. Victor lost his *mati,* his special friend, his kin by circumstance. Later, the specific experiences of being a Black Crucian in Denmark was something he went through alone. A life lived "among the white ones," therefore needs to be taken quite literally to mean among only white Danes with only occasional 'others,' as certain pictures and letters can testify to. But he had no community of people or close relationships with anybody in similar circumstances and similar racialized realities as himself. "Alberta and I were children of nature," he writes, "uprooted and transplanted, and the progress of adjusting to the new environment proved painful. […] Alberta and I became sightseeing objects." (Freiesleben and Cornelins 1998, 155).

This type of upbringing, that can be characterized as a 'transplantation' [*omplantning*], as Cornelins suggested, characterizes a lot of first-generation Black Danes and our upbringing as I will demonstrate in other chapters. Victor, however, does not fit neatly into one category or another, in relation to his blackness and his Danishness. While he lived the majority of his life in Denmark and, importantly, most of his formative years, he also did factually 'come from' St. Croix. At least, his origin is constructed as such through the modern racial geographics in which the Black Crucian in the New World is made 'native.' Simultaneously, in such a construct, Africa is erased from the relationship with the Black subject and the Indigenous American is erased from the relationship with the lands of the Caribbean and Americas. Here, we might consider how overlapping constructions are operationalized in different contexts to do different kinds of work: While evoking St. Croix as origin proves useful in the classroom, Cornelins is also aware that the inherent Africanity of Black Crucians, and 'Africa' as his meta origin, is the 'signifier' of non-humanness (Hall 1997). This illuminates a racial geographic imaginary and representational practice particular to the Black subject in the New World, who is always eventually 'sent' all the way to 'Africa' regardless of 400 years of ancestral separation. That this is an ideological construct of signification is easily exemplified by juxtaposing this racial geographical logic with white (and other) settlers in occupied territories (Hall 1997). Majoritized whites in the U.S.A., Canada, Australia, and Argentina, for instance, are rarely asked to account for their European origins centuries ago ('where are you *really* from?'). Self-constructed as prototypical citizens they can and do evoke their colonizing ancestors' ethnicities only if they choose to. In the Modern/Colonial world system, then, whiteness is not perceived as 'out of place,' despite their relatively recent settler occupation and shared timeline with the African Diaspora they forced to those places (Quijano 2000; Carby 2019).

However alienating Victor experienced racism in Denmark, the fact of his arrival story – his 'crossing' (Alexander 2005) – provided him with a logical and straightforward explanation to assumptions of his foreignness. For example, he writes about how he would begin teaching new classes by providing a presentation of his background story and a world map, locating the Caribbean: "I showed the children my island of birth, St. Croix, and told them a little bit from my childhood there, about the sharks, and the fateful long voyage to Denmark and its purpose. It was

my intention to motivate my immediate presence for the children, and it was successful"[26] (1976, 82). In his English manuscript he writes a little more straight forward: "I wanted them to understand why I was here with them…" (Freiesleben and Cornelins 1998, 190). This kind of presentation was a way to bridge gaps of comprehension caused by his Black presence in white Denmark and thereby the disturbance of the racialized geographic order. Here, it is not so much about whether he remembered St. Croix or identified as a Crucian that mattered. Rather, the event of his arrival served as a strategy to answer an unavoidable question: Where are you from? And more precisely, as he explains, why he was "there with them" *and* Black, I would add.

On one hand, this represents a crucial distinction between racialized experiences of Danish-born and immigrated African descendants' circumstances, even if the majority of the immigrant's life has been in Denmark. Having a concrete answer when hailed as racial other, provides an existential difference and possibilities for negotiating one's presence than for those who cannot refer to a 'crossing'. As a schoolteacher in the 1930's, and when writing his autobiography in the 1970's, Cornelins understands the nuances of Danish racism very well. Entering his classroom on the first day, he wrote about the pupils: "Their curiosity needled me" (p. 190). This curiosity is not solely about his blackness or racial difference per se. The nationalist overtones of the racist discourse he navigates is one that works to transform racial 'others' into 'strangers', that is, as external to Denmark. Sara Ahmed writes: "The recognisability of strangers is determinate in the social demarcation of spaces of belonging [...]" (2000, 22). Victor knows that an explanation is needed for him being 'out of place' in order to quench the curiosity (Carby 2019). And he delivers. This solves the racial geographic puzzle of his presence in Denmark, within the racialized discourse that constructs Denmark, and by extension Danes as white and naturally belonging per definition. At least temporarily, among the group of children who learned his origin story.

On the other hand, Victor's subjectivity was shaped by his life in Denmark, as we read previously. The social aspect of placelessness he experienced therefore had much in common with that of Danish-born Black and African descendant people. He experienced that he belonged in Denmark, a circumstantial attachment by nature of growing up there. But when racial otherness equals stranger, or foreigner, in the Danish racial imaginary the Black person is always automatically connected to and assumed to belong 'elsewhere' geographically. This illuminated the essentialization of racial geographic imaginaries. Victor's consciousness is therefore also shaped by experiences of in-betweenness when his blackness is constructed as incompatible with Denmark.

Victor came of age in a colonial era rather than a so-called postcolonial era, and later a beginning neo-colonial reality. Overtly racist language was not considered politically incorrect among the majority Danes. Racialized difference was perceived as matter of fact, assumed to be objective descriptors. This discourse then enabled Victor to call himself *sort* (black in Danish, not politicized), a word which became almost unspeakable for certain people of the younger generations, after World War II and the new politically correct post-racial discourse (Boulila 2019). An interplay between a colonialist discourse and the fact of Victor's crossing or transplantation made the fact of his blackness concrete. He called himself *black* (a racialized, physical/visual description, not capitalized B) because that was how he was perceived and learned to perceive himself. The placelessness, however, was still a real, felt experience because there was no *place* for blackness, neither in terms of space nor in social relationships for him. He depended on being

[26] "Jeg viste børnene min fødeø, St. Croix, og fortalte dem lidt fra min barndom, om hajerne, om den skæbnesvangre lange sørejse til Danmark og formålet med den. Det var min hensigt at motivere min umiddelbare tilstedeværelse over for børnene, og det lykkedes."

an exception. His narrative does not convincingly suggest that he called himself *Black* (capitalized B) by assuming a socio-political and collective position. But this remains an open question precisely because of the non-existence of Black Danish communities and collective consciousness: there simply was not a political discourse in which *sort* [black] in Danish language had been shaped into a political signification and capitalized like *Black* in English, rooted in the U.S. American history.

"The Dane under my Black Skin": Negotiating the Both-And

Later in his life, in a situation of financial and family hardship, Victor is drawn to become active in a Christian community. This new and strong affiliation shows up in his narrative in how he begins to make sense of his life and belonging, now through the lens of certain Christian ideas. His earlier crisis of dissociation, triggered by his own reflection, expressed a sense of being neither here nor there, in terms of belonging. Middle-aged Victor negotiated his place differently. He began to express an ontological sense of self and his purpose through racial *integration* (Ifekwunigwe 1999):

> "But I am not either – or, but both – and! I am both nigger and Dane! I am *proud* to be both! And I thank God, because by being both I can be part of bridging between white and colored. I am convinced that it was in this deed of life, God wanted to use me, when at the time as a 7-year-old I was taken out of my West Indian milieu and brought to Denmark.
>
> Whatever positive and good is obtained through this deed of life – God has the honor!!"[27] (Cornelins 1976, 132)

By the first reading of this passage, admittedly most of my attention was drawn to the fact of Cornelins calling himself *that* word: Nigger. In Danish, *neger* would be the equivalent of negro, whereas *nigger,* in Danish, is more offensive. Today, you would rarely hear *nigger* in Danish, whereas *neger* is contested but still used by some people, especially older generations insisting that that is simply *the* word for Africans and descendants (Opitz, Oguntoye, and Schultz 1992; Kilomba 2010). Considering the generational and contextual gap between Cornelins' writing and the time of me reading it, it still gave me a visceral reaction. And an emotional one too. Of shock, of disgust, perhaps even pity. Why would he call himself that? And of the two words, why *this* one? Was it perhaps a bit of a provocation or exaggeration to make a point come across? (The Danish press at the time definitely took advantage of it, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter.) His reflection follows a few pages where he describes several overtly racist incidents he experienced in public. In the last one this exact word is used by people by the sight of him, in passing. Cornelins narrates a person's uttering: "'I thought he was a nigger, and then he is…' (the fireworks of an oath permitted) '… a Dane!'" (Freiesleben and Cornelins 1998, 208). His reflection

[27] "Men jeg er ikke enten – eller, men både – og! Jeg er både nigger og dansker! Jeg er glad for, at jeg er begge dele! Jeg er *stolt* af, at jeg er begge dele! Og jeg takker Gud, fordi jeg ved at være begge dele kan være med til at bygge bro mellem hvid og farvet. Jeg er overbevist om at det var i denne livsgerning, Gud ville bruge mig, da jeg i sin tid som 7-årig blev taget ud af mit vestindiske milieu og ført til Danmark.

Hvad der end i denne livsgerning er opnået af positivt og godt --- Gud har æren!!"

on his dual identity in response to this particular memory of being insulted, may be part of the reason for his choice of this word.

That aside, in this part Cornelins comes to a different conclusion than the previous dissociation: a combination. As mentioned earlier, the commonsense is that Danish = white and therefore, logically, non-white, particularly Black = non-Danish. It is therefore two different categories, a national and a racial categorization, that are compared and opposed, rendered meaningful through their implicit connotations. The passerby's racist comment then adds nuance through their specific insult. Logically, calling Victor the n-word must follow that he is racially black. However, while they still construct a dichotomy between that and danishness, it is noteworthy that they conclude that they "*thought* he was a nigger, and then he *is* […] a Dane!" when Victor spoke Danish, demonstratively loud, for them to hear it. His impeccable Danish language becomes a negotiating possibility, although only after he is first and foremost racialized and hailed as Black.

Besides reiterating the construction of the Danishness vs. blackness dichotomy, this sentence is also another example of the Danish racialist logic centering the gaze and the notion of race as 'color.' Here, color pertains to the surface, the skin, merely a layer, whereas something else is assumed to exist 'under' the black skin, something more real. The Dane, his core, is inside, he suggests, simply covered by his black skin, which is not also on the inside or part of his being. We are to understand that it is only related to what he *looks like.* He writes: "I could not blame the young man for failing to see a Dane under my black skin" (B. Freiesleben and Cornelins 1998, 208; Cornelins 1976, 132). But this separation of what one *looks like* and what one truly *is* leaves a gap of understanding when Victor's personhood, including his danishness, is also systematically questioned and denied. If the brown skin allegedly holds no other meaning than a random variation of pigment and melanin, why, then, is national belonging questioned? Danishness and personhood can be pursued on the premise of ignoring or 'not seeing' skin-color or other racializing markers. And by adequate performance of Danishness, according to context. This then necessitates a dichotomy between national belonging and blackness in the Danish context, often a denial of the empirical reality of the latter.

With Grada Kilomba's (2010) theorization of *skin politics,* we might summarize these different examples of negotiating black belonging in white Denmark as 'mechanisms of negation' (p. 86). What she articulates as "a sudden inability to *see* 'race'" is what allows positive associations with the subject otherwise racialized as Black (p. 86-87). In a social reality structured by a racial phobia (antiblackness), as Kilomba writes, as long as the Black individual is not experienced as a threat in the environment the white social world constructs the Black person as not-Black (e.g. Cornelins colleagues not making him aware that he is Black). "This allows positive feelings [for the Black person] to remain intact while repugnant and aggressive feelings towards Blackness are projected onto the outside" (p. 87). Internalized, this was expressed by Victor 'fancying to be white' and negating blackness through (Black) excellence, his professional success. Conditioned both by racial isolation and antiblackness, splitting and negation became the premise upon which he could construct a humanized subject position for himself. These strategies are what I characterize as specific to *Black racial isolation*.

Victor had different options to negotiate his 'place' compared to his subjectivity (and humanity) because he had a concrete answer – St. Croix. Staging himself as a 'transplant' became a racial/spatial answer to the white surroundings' question of origin, a euphemism for questions about blackness. This became a means for him to exteriorize the continuous 'othering' he experienced, making it about a place rather than his body, his skin, indeed his very being.

The last strategy to negotiate belonging demonstrated a shift from his own negating either-or thinking to a both-and. Still conceptualized as separate categories, here, Cornelins' cognitive move consists in claiming that he is 'both' Black and Danish. It is not a merging but an additive identity, embracing what is considered as separate parts – and taking pride in being 'both.' His understanding of the two parts of his identity as principally incompatible is further underlined when he shares his newfound purpose and potential: positioned as someone who can 'bridge' the gap between 'white and colored.' This articulation expresses blackness and whiteness-danishness as something that can be connected yet are essentially different. The excerpt can be read as Cornelins showing enthusiasm and joy over a reconciliation and embrace of what is constructed as distinct parts of himself, from the outside. Therefore, it reads as an important acknowledgement and turning point in relation to his previous dissociation and racialized crisis of belonging. Through a lens in which identity is considered fluid it is also quite possible that, even with this later acknowledgement of his own 'doubleness' – being both-and rather than either-or – the sense of self could oscillate between racial-national dissociation and embrace according to context and other events influencing his life (Hall 2011b; Eng and Han 2019).

Victor Cornelins and (other) Black Discourses

As a Black Crucian in Denmark, Victor Cornelins' circumstances and possibilities for developing a sense of self had been shaped considerably by the *absence* of representation that could have mirrored his identity. And by the omnipresence of whiteness. That is, the conditioning of whiteness in all social and societal relationships: the interpersonal, the public, and the dominant ideology and constructions of knowledge in Denmark. While he experienced a great deal of racial isolation – as expressed through his trauma of racism and racial dissociation – the contours of a consciousness *as Black* that he did develop, seems to have emerged through the scarce reflections he managed to find.

As the quote from the mirror episode shows, Cornelins was interested in African American literature, and he quotes Richard Wright's novel *Native Son* from 1940. Being aware of antiblackness in the U.S. was part of what informed his decision to stay in Denmark after St. Croix was sold off to the U.S. in 1917 along with the rest of the Danish West Indies and their populations. But Cornelins was also interest in the 'negro question' and historical context of enslavement of Africans globally, and prior to U.S. American racial slavery and American history. This becomes apparent through his countless public lectures around the country in various contexts, but often churches. These activities are documented through archived programs, written summaries, and letters of appreciation from organizers and audiences as well as some of the speeches. Additionally, archived letters show that Cornelins was connecting with other Black people in Denmark, who were not Danish. How did exchanges with Black people from the U.S. position or reposition Victor Cornelins as part of a Black diaspora? How might relating to other Black people in the West enable different identifications than relating almost exclusively to white Danes?

As an example, Cornelins received a letter from a person by the name Marion Leslie Levine in 1948. Mr. Levine thanks him for a letter he received while incarcerated in Denmark. Levine recounts that everyone told him about Cornelins as soon as he arrived at Nyborg Prison, where Cornelins had previously visited, likely in his capacity as public speaker. The letter is written in English – in pencil with an apologetic note about the pen not working. Mr. Levine writes of his surprise about the conditions there; that he is treated "the same as the rest of the prisoners," which could suggest that he is American and used to expecting violence in the context of a prison. It is

implicit that he is himself 'colored' which is the racial term he uses to describe both Cornelins and other visitors he had in a different Danish prison before. But most tellingly of his own racial identity, he shared with Cornelins: "I have come to adjust myself to the all white surroundings." This suggests that, for Mr. Levine, racial isolation was a novelty. The letter is cordial and expresses excitement for the prospect of meeting in person with a fellow 'colored' man, one who is spoken about in positive terms as 'cultured' by the prison warden: "I was indeed surprise[d]," Levine continues, "to [hear] a white person speak in those terms of a colored person. And that you were a teacher."[28]

This exchange of experiences and viewpoints with another Black man from a different context situates Cornelins, both within a larger Black diaspora in white Western nations and also within Denmark. In relation to this U.S. American fellow Black person Victor Cornelins' life is rather dignified. From the foreigner's view, if a Black inmate is treated with mutual respect and camaraderie on the inside, including access to education, what would a free Black man experience in Danish society? And here, Levine hears of a Black man who is both a teacher, seemingly an honorable profession to him, and an esteemed public figure among the general public, the white Danes. The astonishment of these conditions is part of what identifies the norm and expectation of racial power dynamics in Levine's previous experience. In comparison, the variation of racism in Cornelins' life can be characterized as psychologically violent, affecting his subjectivity, whereas Levine's suggests a normalization of material, corporal violence. For example, why he requested a single person cell at his arrival to the prison. Victor narrates countless experiences of racist encounters from across his life, but he does not share whether he ever feared for his physical safety, or his life in a similar way. This is an archival silence rather than proof that it did never happen to him.

Cornelins' socio-economic position and upward mobility is not purely an expression of a 'milder' racism in Denmark in the late 1940's compared to the racial segregation of the U.S. as some myths would have it. After all, he did live in the time of two European World Wars including racialized genocides. But too, Denmark and the U.S. were structured so differently at that time, that comparison would serve very little purpose. In fact, it is precisely the leverage of Cornelins' social status (including maleness) that facilitates a mitigation of antiblackness by being perceived as 'cultured.' We can recall that the 'solution' to do something with him and Alberta after the colonial exhibition in 1905 became schooling and teacher training. Therefore, Cornelins' access to education, jobs, and promotion was institutionalized and supported by the state and other actors. Cornelins' experiences, then, are in no way representative of what other contemporary Black people may have lived through in Denmark, whether from the U.S., the then Danish West Indies, or African colonies. This context may not have been known to Mr. Levine. Notably, Cornelins' presence in Denmark was supposed to benefit the Danish colonization, therefore he met relative benevolence and flexibility in encounters with Danish institutions and authorities. This means that Victor Cornelins' version of being 'not either-or, but both and', Danish and Black was in many ways specific to the particular conditions that brought him to Denmark in the first place. And at the same time as he was specifically a Danish *colonial subject*, some of his deep existential queries and traumas, expressed in his earlier adulthood, are defining features of lived experiences of Black subjectivity more generally in Denmark (Ramón Grosfoguel 2003). Cornelins' Black life – his expressions of Black subjectivity – then, demands space for nuance and contradictions in the analysis of his racialized reality. It is simultaneously true that he experienced relative dignity vis à

[28] Nakskov Archives. Item A1064/28: *"1948 K Brev fra Marion Leslie Levine, fange i Nyborg med kommentarer til Cornelins besøg dér."* [1948 K Letter from Marion Leslie Levine, prisoner in Nyborg with comments to Cornelins' visit there]

vis his Black American diasporic peers *and,* regardless of his professional success and social upward mobility, he was never afforded an escape from antiblack racism in Denmark. Because, while becoming increasingly famous and well-liked, he was never *not* Black as well. Antiblack racial trauma and material privileges show up as complexly interwoven in this type of racial landscape.

It is also worth noting that Cornelins' previous celebrity was premised on the role he played in public; essentially, he was cast as Black. Both his autobiography as well as his career as public lecturer were centered around his Black otherness, his West Indian origin, and his interest in the 'negro problem' historically and globally.[29] As such, while Cornelins' had some agency and critical engagement with issues of white racism and blackness, he was still moving within the limited frame of his racialization in public. That said, his career as a teacher, and since school principal, corresponded to his professional competencies, not first and foremost him being a Black man. Here, he was not just positively tokenized or negated as not-Black, on the contrary. Here too, he met racial prejudices and pushback from parents and employers alike throughout his career while being well-liked by others. In his leisurely activities he took on the mediator role, as a way to make sense of his Black presence in Denmark: a transgression, placed in a white context to bridge the racial divides by the grace of God. As such, he played on his blackness and mobilized it as part of his life purpose. Countless articles about Cornelins in the Danish press and advertisements for his talks and lectures affirm this staging of him across his professions; Black first, person and professional after. Examples of this are column titles like "The Negro who became Head Teacher in Nakskov"[30] [*Negeren, som blev overlærer i Nakskov*] and other titles including this and the other n-word, his origin, or the fact that he performed with 'Negro Spirituals' from the U.S.

A Danish Contract of Belonging

Cornelins' occasional entry to belonging within Danish spaces relied on centering his Black spectacularity, constructing himself as an acceptable exception from the rule. That is, although marginalized, complying with the dominating discourse in exchange for inclusion (Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2013). The blackness he integrates into his identity is, on the one hand, historically aware and relatively critical. For example, when he engages with the dehumanization of Black Africans, particularly by Europeans and in European colonial projects. On the other hand, his view on African and African descendant people is colonialist. His internalization of the dominating discourse is expressed when he reproduces a European Christian and evolutionist stance, claiming that African peoples' so-called 'encounter' with Christianity was the silver lining of the Transatlantic Slave Trade[31]. Such a stance could be popularized (and shared in public speeches) because it did not substantially challenge the status quo. Rather, he enveloped his critiques of colonialism in well-known justifications, characteristic of the larger European Enlightenment era: discovery narratives and civilizationist arguments such as 'giving' culture and Christianity to the 'uncultured', the 'savages'. Internalizing this epistemology is not surprising considering that Cornelins was socialized and educated in Denmark, learning the Danish commonsense like everybody else. While it was not startling it was paradoxical in so far as the

[29] Nakskov Archives. Item A1064/28: "1948 K Brev fra Marion Leslie Levine, fange i Nyborg med kommentarer til Cornelins besøg dér."
[30] Nakskov Archives. Item A1064/144: "u.å. U Avisudklip med privat notat vedr. tale i Nakskov Rotaryklub."
[31] Nakskov Archives. Item A1064/91: [no date, likely 1954] "u.å. A Engelsk artikel om race (se 85-89)." [no date A English article on race (see 85-89)].

colonialist-racist lens he learned also framed himself as inferior to white Danish and European people – those who he learned to identify with. By consequence, he also perceived other Black people as inferior to whites.

As one of very few Black Danish people with a public facing voice in Denmark at the time, Cornelins' stance was not challenged by other Black people and other expressions of Black consciousness. Within Denmark, his consciousness developed largely in a vacuum vis à vis Black people, and mostly played up against the "stark white background", as Zora Neale Hurston would put it, which was his social world (Cornelins 1976; Hurston 1979, 154). Unlike Hurston in 1928's *segregated* U.S.A, Cornelins was *isolated*: He was played up against whiteness as default.

Two letters from 'colored', African American men to Victor Cornelins both represent one side of a correspondence that leaves space for speculation about the other side – what Cornelins' might have written to them, and how he perceived their relationship. In some ways the letter from the in Mr. Levine and an anonymous, upset writer comment on the same parts of Cornelins: his acceptance and success among white Danes. The former expresses surprise that Victor is respected and liked among white people, that he is 'cultured' and works as a teacher. The tone is positive, if not impressed. The latter formulates these same aspects by calling Victor an 'Uncle Tom'[32] and a 'white folk's nigger.' He adds: "You think you are so important because you have a job as a school master, which is not very much."[33] They both specifically point out his job as a teacher, though in contrasting ways.

Reading through the anger of the last letter and drawing out the arguments, they produce a certain meaning from the point of view of a Black American. Perhaps somebody interested in Black liberation at best, or at least solidarity. Sent in August 1957 from Boston, Massachusetts, USA, the writer is situated in the context of the Civil Rights Movement, the fight against the legal discrimination of Black Americans through racial segregation in the US. Whether actively engaged in the movement or not, questions of racial equality – particularly the advancements of Black people in a majority white society – could hardly have escaped this writer's awareness. Namely, some of the most mediated events of the Civil Rights Movement had already taken place and got national attention in the U.S. For example, the lynching and murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till in 1955 in Mississippi and the Montgomery bus boycott that same year. Within that political moment, evoking an Uncle Tom about a Black man with success in a white society suggests that he is playing along with the people in power, rather than using his position to challenge a system that oppresses Black people. In the letter, Cornelins is called out for his complicity in degrading Black (American) visitors, but also reminded that he is no better himself – "Victor, you are also a negro and a black one at that" – and that he has not escaped his blackness neither through his profession, nor through his proximity to whiteness:

> "Even though you did marry a white woman, it does not make your children white, they are kinky, nappy headed Negroes and they look like Negroes and if they have children, the children will also be colored and look like colored, so Cornelieus [error in original], when you make slight of or belittle or try to

[32] Within that political moment, evoking an Uncle Tom about a Black man with success in a white society suggests that he is playing along with the people in power, being complicit in the system that oppresses Black people. Non-American Black people may not have had that contextual Black literacy. For example, a Crucian relative of Cornelins owned a restaurant in Aalborg in the far North of Jutland by the name of *Onkel Toms Cafe,* Uncle Tom's Cafe.

[33] Nakskov Archives. Item A1064/93: "1957 K Anonymt trusselbrev." [1957 K Anonymous threat letter].

> down other colored people you are only belittling yourself and your own Negro children."

In 1957, a decade before the Loving vs. Virginia court case, interracial marriage and miscegenation was still illegal in the U.S., and desegregation of schools had barely begun. Nevertheless, marrying 'light' could be a move towards upward social status, or a way to preserve a lineage of so-called lighter skinned Black people. In both cases, this would also be associated with survival. Thus, the writer approaches Cornelins and his family through a colorist discourse as he knows it from his own context. Here, Cornelins marriage to a white person is read as an attempt to move away from blackness and toward whiteness. The underlying message is therefore that Cornelins' success is not as a Black and free person, but rather a result of his willingness to assimilate into whiteness and white Danish ideologies as best he can, publicly and privately: by being a 'white folk's nigger' and avoiding standing up for himself or other Black people.

Meanwhile, in the Danish context, even if Cornelins would have wanted a Black spouse, that would have been close to impossible simply because of the demographic. Additionally, had he been oriented toward other Black people in Denmark, most of them would likely have arrived in Denmark as adults, thus being culturally different from Cornelins and opening questions around *which* blacknesses might have been relatable at all. So, while his choice of spouse was most likely a result of who he was concretely surrounded by, more so than an explicit elitist strategy, the material consequences would be the same: the closer proximity to whiteness in all ways, the easier life would have become in Denmark. And eventually, just two generations of marrying white it would require a certain eye and historical knowledge to identify any African diasporic lineage in his descendants. For Cornelins, and arguably for many Black Danish people of the first generations, this was simply how things went; the social environments were default white and by extension potential family would be white and future generations 'whitened' -racially, politically, and culturally (Bouteldja 2016).

Nevertheless, whether Cornelins' merging into whiteness was a conscious choice or simply what was possible within the circumstances of his life, the type of consciousness he developed later in life was one in which his social ascendance as a Black man was premised on internalizing Eurocentrism. The way he retells the arch of his life in his autobiography, is one in which he first reflects critically on the dehumanization he experienced as a child (of nature), submitted to white people's racism in Denmark. He describes the emotional reactions from childhood and young adulthood with precision – rage, fear, the need to assert his humanity – and the aftereffects in young adulthood when he relived extreme exposure and unwanted attention: Racial trauma (Kilomba 2010). He then went on to explore his interest in African and African American people's oppression, both historically and in his time. His increasing devotion to Christian faith communities offered him a frame of interpreting himself and his Black existence in Denmark. While he carries a "secret pain in my mind" about colonization of Africa, he also expresses an understanding of Christian missions as beneficial to 'Africans' (Cornelins 1976, 106). His previous critical reflections of his own experiences as a colonial child subject – loss, objectification, confinement, ongoing racism – do not go as far as to connect to the missionaries. He does not connect the pains of his own life as produced through colonial power relations, similar to those of the missionaries which he praises as an adult.

Black consciousness is vast and because Cornelins is Black (and knows that he is), whatever consciousness he has is the consciousness of a Black person. However, his is not a political Black consciousness, valuing and centering Black people and their lives on their own terms. But the paradox in the consciousness he expresses is that even if he could get by in Denmark

having absorbed a Eurocentric, colonialist norm, his social status depended on people knowing him. The story Cornelins recounted earlier, illuminated this fact: "I thought he was a nigger, and then he is… [...]… a Dane!" Whatever status and social capital Cornelins may have held, including his affiliation with his white wife and lighter, brown-skinned children, none of this marked his body as his blackness did. To a random person, outside of his quotidian context and semi celebrity, Victor Cornelins was first and foremost read as a Black man. His relative freedoms depended on the cultural context and continuously asserting his social status. For this reason, the angry letter writer's analysis holds some truth: when and if Cornelins would belittle other Black people, in fact he was belittling himself too because he was always primarily a Black man until anything else was added.

Having been assimilated as a child, Cornelins had to invent himself from scratch as Danish *and* Black because he did not experience himself as an immigrant. This is a story of difference in isolation that would be shared with generations to come. *From St Croix to Nakskov* is relevant reading today because it foregrounds lived experiences of racialized differentiation of someone who is culturally fluent as an insider to the national and local context. Specifically, Cornelins articulates the acute awareness of being racialized as Black and its particular, historically constructed connotations of non-humanness. Such experiences cannot be adequately identified through a prism focused on immigration and integration, because that is not what was at stake at the time Cornelins wrote his book. And of course, these are experiences that also cannot be identified through any scientific analytic that shies away from theorizing race and racialization explicitly. The relationship between embodied blackness and the white gaze is at the center of his life. Therefore, we might rightfully read Victor Cornelins as one of the first theoreticians of blackness in and of Denmark.

While race always intersects with notions of culture, ethnicity, religion, and nationality, the latter are not adequate placeholders to analyze the mechanisms of differentiation that systematically conditioned Cornelins' life and, as an effect, his consciousness. And precisely because consciousness and subjectivity can be co-opted into the dominant discourse a racialized minority *position* needs to be distinguished from racial *identity*, in the sense of self-identification. As shown, dissociation can be a subconscious strategy to survive racial isolation, and it can also be an effect of it. I have described this particular conditioning by omnipresence of Eurocentric whiteness and experiencing antiblackness alone as *Black racial isolation*. To analyze these connections, the present chapter was therefore framed through a decolonial theoretical lens, emphasizing relations of power and considering hierarchical constructions of (male) blackness and class that constrained and enabled Victor Cornelins. Regardless of whether he identified *as* Black or not, I was able to identify his Black condition.

Chapter 2. Importing Racial Difference in Post-Racial Times: The 1960's 'Brown Baby' Diaspora

Identifying a Dispersed yet Collective Experience of Danish Blackness

As I was doing my research in the winter of 2020 and 2021, digital archives became very important. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic I was able to continue as planned and had relocated to Copenhagen from Oakland at the end of 2020 to prepare for the empirical part of my research. Living with one of my sisters that winter, I remember sitting at her living room table next to a big window and looking at the gray winter sky in Sydhavn. I was still in the process of having my IRB approved – the procedure U.S. universities require researchers to go through, to make sure we protect the 'human research subjects.' This was a lengthy process of having my interview questions reviewed in detail and getting feedback on individual words and resubmitting a few times.[34] Therefore, I made use of that waiting time to research Victor Cornelins, diving into the extensive digital archives provided by Nakskov Local History Archive. Victor Cornelins was a Crucian-Danish man, who lived in Denmark from 1905-1985. His autobiography is a unique theorization of blackness and colonial subjectivity in Denmark, and there is extensive documentation on his life in the Nakskov Archives (see chapter 1). It was one of the documents I found there that led to a discovery for me both personally and as a researcher (see figure 1 below).

On January 12th, 1962, Victor Cornelins participated in a radio show on the topic 'Do we have race prejudice in Denmark?' on *Danmarks Radio,* the Danish Broadcasting Corporation. The one and only TV and radio broadcasting at the time, financed by the state and the listeners. The invitation to the show was sent in December 1961 and as I read it 60 later, I was struck by the fact that this very question was still posed in Denmark. Seemingly a question with no conclusion in the public collective consciousness. This time, it was the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd that motivated Danish media to entertain the question of 'possible' racism in Denmark once again. As Cornelins had become a public figure, often speaking on 'Africa' or 'the race issue,' I could understand why he was invited to share his perspective. And, of course, he was Black. However, I did not know the other guests: Monika and Tytte Botfeldt as well as Henrik Colberg. I hardly found information about Colberg. Instead, what appeared to be a silenced chapter of Danish History emerged as I looked up the Botfeldts.

During the decade after the Second World War ended in Europe, a diaspora of Black mixed-race children was created through transnational adoption. These were German-born children of local white, and often poor, women and Black U.S. American G.I.s. While some stayed in Germany, others were adopted, the biggest receiving countries being the U.S. and Denmark (Fehrenbach 2009). An estimate of 2000-3000 children were adopted in Denmark. This was the beginning of transnational adoption in the history of Denmark. And the main actor responsible for these initially illicit transnational adoptions from Germany to Denmark was Tytte Botfeldt. Monika Botfeldt was one of her adopted children.

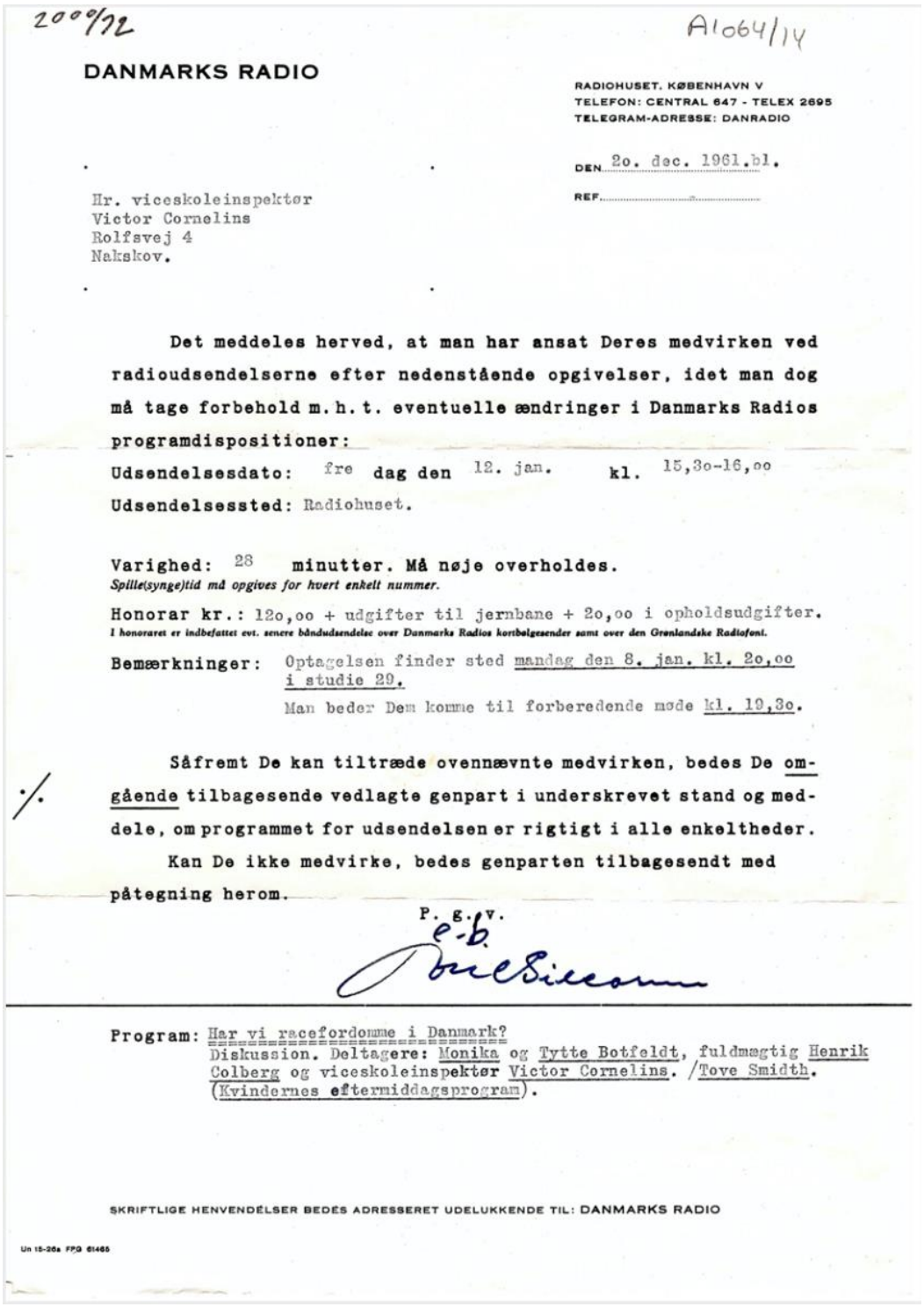
I wanted to include this chapter of Danish history, although my research plan and methodology was not set up for it. For example, I had not planned to reach out to a target group in their 60's, especially not during a global pandemic and state sanctioned lock-down in Denmark.

[34] This was inherently double work for me since the internal review board (IRB) process was in English after which I had to translate individual and group interview guides into Danish as well as translating different consent contracts, for groups, individuals, and for media release respectively.

Gathering information about this group, getting in touch with them, and educating myself on the historical context therefore needed to be somewhat improvised. Posting about my 'discovery' on Instagram turned out to be helpful. I heard from someone who said, "I am one of those children," and I also learned that some of my peers were children of German-born Black Danish citizens whose adoptions were organized by Botfeldt. One of them lent me the autobiography *Sporløst* [Traceless] by Norbert Andersen, a rare publicly available personal story told by a member of that generation (Andersen 2020). And I learned about other Black people subjected to adoption from other geo-political contexts, for example Black mixed-race people born 'out of wedlock' in the U.K., to West African male students and white British women, and of Danish missionaries adopting people from African countries they were stationed in. All of these stories took place within the decade after World War Two. I knew of none of this. The German-born generation is of particular interest here because it represents a *group experience,* despite most people having grown up separately from each other and not necessarily aware of the collectivity of their history.

Once I learned more about the existence of what to me represented an 'adult' generation of Black Danish people, more questions arose: Where were they? What were they doing? Had any of them been public figures? And, although it felt like a stretch, could any of them have done some kind of political or anti-racist work in Denmark? Meaning, was there a collective consciousness among any of them? The scarce representation of Black mixed-race or Black African residents and citizens among this generation was overwhelmingly in the entertainment industry, mainly music. And most seemed to take a rather colorblind stance, being absorbed into the political mainstream at the moment. This all makes sense given the time and context; I do not blame them. However, if there *were* anti-racist, collective *afro-descendant* political consciousness among a generation that my generation could have looked up to, it has been kept from us. Or, perhaps, those who truly 'got it' left Denmark, as they would have been way more intellectually marginalized than I care to imagine. Having met a few people of this age who indeed left, I wonder where the rest potentially is. Regardless, this missing archive is what makes the current antiracist movement appear as a 'first'. The development of a critical discourse from national insiders, contesting Danish racism publicly and collectively. Not immigration or refugee status; not alleged cultural difference; not alleged language barriers; not alleged non-integrable Muslimness. Just a critical consciousness from the position of being Black Danish people in a white and self-proclaimed colorblind Denmark (Elg 2016; Ehlers 2016; O.-K. Diallo 2019; Lang 2019; Marronage and DCN 2020). Mere visual (under)representation, and stereotypical at that (like the singers and rappers from the 80's and on), did not provide a foundation for the following generations to build a political movement on.

This German-born generation of mixed-race Black adoptees is worth entire research studies. Such work is out of my scope and expertise. This chapter is based on one main interview with someone adopted from Germany. I also use excerpts from the self-published autobiography by Norbert Andersen (2020) from that generation. And lastly, I add perspectives from a few interviews with others who grew up mixed-race Black, however *not* adopted, whose experiences overlap through the discourses they were all met with in society.



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DANMARKS RADIO

RADIOHUSET. KØBENHAVN V
TELEFON: CENTRAL 647 - TELEX 2695
TELEGRAM-ADRESSE: DANRADIO

DEN 2o. dec. 1961.bl.

REF.

Hr. viceskoleinspektør
Victor Cornelins
Rolfsvej 4
Nakskov.

Det meddeles herved, at man har ansat Deres medvirken ved radioudsendelserne efter nedenstående opgivelser, idet man dog må tage forbehold m.h.t. eventuelle ændringer i Danmarks Radios programdispositioner:

Udsendelsesdato: fre dag den 12. jan. kl. 15,3o-16,oo

Udsendelsessted: Radiohuset.

Varighed: 28 minutter. Må nøje overholdes.
Spille(synge)tid må opgives for hvert enkelt nummer.

Honorar kr.: 12o,oo + udgifter til jernbane + 2o,oo i opholdsudgifter.
I honoraret er indbefattet evt. senere båndudsendelse over Danmarks Radios kortbølgesender samt over den Grønlandske Radiofoni.

Bemærkninger: Optagelsen finder sted mandag den 8. jan. kl. 2o,oo i studie 29.
Man beder Dem komme til forberedende møde kl. 19,3o.

/.

Såfremt De kan tiltræde ovennævnte medvirken, bedes De omgående tilbagesende vedlagte genpart i underskrevet stand og meddele, om programmet for udsendelsen er rigtigt i alle enkeltheder.

Kan De ikke medvirke, bedes genparten tilbagesendt med påtegning herom.

P. g. v.
e-b.

Program: Har vi racefordomme i Danmark?
Diskussion. Deltagere: Monika og Tytte Botfeldt, fuldmægtig Henrik Colberg og viceskoleinspektør Victor Cornelins. /Tove Smidth.
(Kvindernes eftermiddagsprogram).

SKRIFTLIGE HENVENDELSER BEDES ADRESSERET UDELUKKENDE TIL: DANMARKS RADIO

Un 15-26a FPG 61465

Figure 4. Contract letter from *Danmarks Radio*, the Danish broadcasting Corporation, dated December 20th, 1961, detailing Victor Cornelins participation in a radio discussion titled: “Do we have race prejudice in Denmark?” It was part of “The Women's Afternoon Program” and was hosted by Tove Smidth, airing in January 1962. The letter was found in the Nakskov Archives, item A1064/14.

Contextualizing a Generation: Race, Geopolitics, and White Saviorism

What was the scope of this young mixed-race Black population? According to Heide Fehrenbach, 94,000 babies were born to parents of the military occupation in West Germany (2009, 31). Of that number about 3000 were born in 1950 who were described as "'*farbige Mislinge*' or 'colored mixed-bloods, distinguished from others by their black paternity" (p. 31). This would become nearly double that number in 1955, so approximately 6000 (p. 31) These numbers differ somewhat according to Yara-Colette Lemke Muniz de Faria (2003). She finds that "[b]etween 1945 and 1955, an estimated 67,770 children were born to soldiers of the occupying forces and German women in the Federal Republic of Germany. Of these children, 4,776 were the children of African American and Moroccan soldiers" (Muniz de Faria 2003, 344). In fact, Fatima El-Tayeb underlines, (French) Morrocans were categorized *as* Black, likely a racial categorization specific to the German historical context (El-Tayeb 2023, personal communication). Now, the estimates of mixed-race Black German children sent to Denmark up until the 1965's is 1500-2000, according to a research study conducted by the Danish Social Research Institute (*Socialforskningsinstituttet*) in 1977 that Linde et al. refer to (2016, 9). This rough number ends up being 2000-3000, and they also comment on the number of children sent to the U.S. being approximately 7000 (p. 10). These numbers do not add up. One reason for this, in the Danish case, is the unauthorized character of the adoptions where neither adoption nor adoptees were registered by any authorities. Germany being a neighboring country, Danish couples would simply get in their car and drive across the border and pick up a child, or alternatively, they would have the child put on a train, if they were old enough, and come get them at the central station in Copenhagen (Linde et al. 2016; Eriksen 2020). Concerning the total number of mixed-race Black children born in Germany, this was surrounded by much stigma and shame in the complex situation of women being in relationships with occupying soldiers, Black men at that, and having babies out of wedlock. Term *'Besatzungskinder*,' occupation children would be used widely, underscoring the entangled political and racial implications. However, its racializing overtones were apparent in that other Afro-Germans were called this too (El-Tayeb 2023, personal communication). These connotations were circulating in the recent aftermath of institutionalized Nazism where strict legislation on sex was in place to promote an Aryan state and empire, built on biological racism and miscegenation angst. However, Germany already had a mixed-race Black population and a history of anxiety around mixed-race Black Germans and racist legislation to govern it. Two significant historical eras where these population groups came into being were during the German colonization in several African regions from 1884-1914, as well as the generation of mixed-raced children being born after World War One, derogatively called the 'Rhinelandbastards' (El-Tayeb 1999).

With this new generation, there was a common understanding among German authorities and researchers that these children needed 'special care' compared to other post war refugee children: "...[T]he federal Interior Ministry ordered school and youth officials to investigate the character, abilities, and integration prospects of only Afro-German children, despite their comparatively minute numbers. Clearly, then, the overriding concern was not to facilitate social integration" (Fehrenbach 2009, 45). The anxiety about this integration justified ideas of their emigration by way of adoption or segregation, by placing them in special children's homes (Fehrenbach 2005).

While there is very limited documentation on these adoptions and of the people subjected to it in Denmark, there is considerably more to find in the German and U.S. American contexts and their interrelations. Unfortunately, there is not much that looks across several contexts including Denmark. It is reasonable to consider language differences being one of the practical

challenges to wider, transnational research on the people of this diaspora. But also, in the case of Denmark, documentation was complicated for the simple reason that transnational adoption in the 1950's was essentially individually organized human trafficking. For comparison, domestic adoption was a matter of the state, and thus institutionalized with formal procedures and documentation.

Shortly before beginning my empirical research, Danish Norbert Andersen, a German-born adoptee, wrote and published his short autobiography. Andersen gives some context to how the adoptions functioned, practically:

> "My Danish mother and Tytte Botfeldt were writing to each other a lot before my Danish foster parents decided to try with this foster child. Now I believe, and I know, that this was not a project my father approved of. He was *jo* the father of a biological son, but he usually got in line when Lis wanted something.
>
> My mother Lis and Tytte, I think, had the same political attitude and they held the opinion that they had to save these children of German women who had relationships with American soldiers. In my case, an Afro-American man and this situation was common in that area. There were lots of bases situated flat against the East German border. There would have been lots of love affairs going on since there *jo* would have been a deficit of German men – many had *jo* lost their lives in the war. But these little, dark children were not so well-seen in a Germany which probably was not quite over the Nazi past they had.
>
> Therefore, Tytte Botfeldt thought that these little dark children should be rescued out of there in time. That was *jo* a nice thought but as it was described in the book that came out of the three students from Roskilde, it did not turn out equally well for everyone who was 'rescued'." (Andersen 2020, 69)

In Andersen's recap of the historical context for his adoption, he writes about how he and many other children were brought to Denmark, initially to be in foster care, typically over the summer, and since adopted. Summer camps for less off children was a common practice, also internally in Denmark. Poor city kids would become 'vacation children' with families in the countryside and benefit from the fresh air and recreation broadly. How this practice turned into foster care which turned into self-planned adoptions must be placed in the Danish context of domestic adoption at the time.

In the 1950's the number of Danish children in need of caretakers was on a decline. At the same time, couples interested in adopting were on a rise. While it was positive that very few children were orphans, this revealed aspects of the practice of adoption beyond the best interest of children: the needs and desires of adults (Linde et al. 2016; Eriksen 2020). The number of waiting couples was disproportionate to the existence of children who needed homes and caretakers. This adult need speaks into larger ideologies around the Western nuclear family norm and compulsion to have children that I will not go into. But others have written about it in relation to transnational adoption (Myong and Andersen 2015). Tytte Botfeldt's idealism and desire to rescue these children became the answer to meet the high demand for children among Danish couples. To her, a win-win situation. Since the total number of German children who were now orphans was significantly

larger than the fraction of African American descent, it shows that the emphasis on 'little *dark* children,' in Andersens words, was ascribing additional urgency to the project of rescue. It was not just about any orphans. *Dark* is a common descriptor, used generically in Danish about any and all non-white people, which will show up during the interviews too. Here, it is a reference specifically to the awareness that being *dark* in Germany at this point in time might present added vulnerability. And rightfully so. However, from the German side as well as Botfeldt's idealism, racialization seemingly trumped the question of the childs' actual orphan status or precarity otherwise. Linde et al. describe Botfeldt as such: "She was an idealist and firmly believed that the mulatto[35] children no matter what would be better off in any Danish home than in their home country where Nazism's ideology on race purity still lingered" (Linde et al. 2016, 11). To believe that *any Danish home* would be better, even when adoptants would not have been approved to adopt a *Danish* (white) child, Botfeldt implicitly constructed 'the Danish home' as inherently innocent vis a vis post-war Germany, simply by being Danish (Linde et al. 2016). That is, a version of Danish exceptionalism. Interestingly, for her racialized saviorism to be coherent, she had to construct the children through a group identity, as they did in Germany (Fehrenbach 2005). But once in Denmark, though, any specific concerns with regards to their racial vulnerability seemingly evaporated, or in fact were dismissed: the racism Botfeldt's adoptive daughter experienced, for example, was "framed not as a consequence of a pervasive Danish racism (like the racism in Germany) but as an individual act of a boy who 'just wanted to say a hurtful thing'" (Nelson and Myong 2020, 108). Botfeldt even went so far as to claim that being a mixed-race Black child in Denmark may lead to "preferential treatment" (p. 108). But above all, her 'rescue' enterprise worked because there was a higher demand for children than currently needy children in Denmark *and* because Botfeldt wilfully risked the mixed-race Black children's wellbeing by facilitating adoptions outside of the regulations and oversights (Linde et al. 2016). This established a core difference between domestic adoptions and the emerging transnational adoption. Kasper Eriksen (2020) identifies this as two paradigms: domestic adoption was motivated by a concern for child welfare whereas the emerging transnational adoptions were rooted in adult's "Great Desire for Children", justified through ideological humanitarianism (Eriksen 2020). Because it was relatively easy for Danish couples to obtain permission to foster children, this method became a gateway into adopting children (who were already present) later on (Linde et al. 2016). The disregard of many of the children actually not being orphans also characterizes the adult-centered approach in Danish transnational adoption. Because, in fact, the large majority of German children (76%) lived with their mother or other relatives. This is to say that, despite the hyper attention to this group of children and their adoptions, the reality was not one of mass rejection and separation. For mothers who, for whatever reason in a post-war context, saw it necessary to have their child stay in an orphanage, only about 12%, according to Muniz de Faria, there could be love and a desire to stay connected (Muniz de Faria 2003, 344).

"We can do it ourselves!" Representation of Black (Adoptee) Pain

Anne was one of these children. As we met in July, her sun kissed skin was a golden cherry wood shade. Her long locks were tied back in a low, relaxed bun. Her hair was slightly salt and pepper in the front, black-brown in the middle, and lighter at the ends. This hair would lock naturally with its texture, although these locks were intentional. Her high cheekbones and soft, rounded facial

[35] I will not go into Linde et. al.'s use of the word 'mulatto' here. There will be a short engagement with it later in this chapter.

features visibly placed her within an African American lineage represented by some unknown Black American GI and a white German woman. Anne was born in Germany in 1963 and adopted by a white Danish couple seven months after her birth. She ended up growing up primarily with her mother and was close with her paternal grandmother before she and her mother started moving frequently. She tells me about something she learned about her own adoption in regard to the construction of orphans:

> "I know *jo* from my biological mother, who I have met in Germany, [that] she gave birth to me in that orphanage, and she actually came and visited me several times a week. I got some pictures – that is really the best! [She smiles widely] I have them in an album, they are set out so I look in them often – of her and me, since I was a baby, right… And you do *jo* not go and visit a child several times a week, by yourself and with your girlfriends and so on, and take pictures and stay and watch a child you want to give away. And then, she said, one day she came and I was gone."[36]

What Anne's story suggests is that her biological mother wanted her. While she may have been in need of what an orphanage could offer in the beginning, she was not consenting to giving her baby up for adoption. The precarity of some pregnant women was due to complex factors related to the specific war and postwar context entangled with the extra stigma of the sexual and racial transgression that their pregnancy came to symbolize. Muniz de Faria points out that the mothers' wishes for the children were ignored in German debates around the children's best interest. And affirming Anne's story: "Contrary to a common perception at the time, many mothers found the separation from their child difficult and heartbreaking" (Muniz de Faria 2003, 355). And many fathers' request to marry or stay near their girlfriends were denied and in fact intentionally blocked: "In Germany it was common practice among military officials to transfer Black soldiers to a different city or back to the United States when he applied to his superior officer for permission to marry or if it was known that he had fathered a child" (p. 345). This brings nuance to narratives that construct the Afro-German babies as almost naturally and primarily orphans, rather than somebody's children, whether it was one or two present parents or other relatives. The forceful splitting of families is a defining condition for the Transatlantic African Diaspora historically. In this particular context, it was caused by an interplay of U.S. American segregation, anti-blackness, and anti-miscegenation laws in the occupying army, and German anti-black racism and still lingering pursuits of white racial 'purity' (El-Tayeb 1999; Fehrenbach 2009). Anne continues: "And when I then read that book, I know *jo* what happened, and I find that shocking, but it is also nice to get to know. It is nice to get your history. Otherwise, you are *jo* just an erased page, you know nothing."[37] The book she, and Andersen above, is referring to is *Børneimporten – et mørkt kapitel i fortællingen om udenlandsk adoption,* [The Child Import – a dark chapter in the story of foreign adoption] (Linde et al. 2016). This book revealed not only that the transnational adoption industry began as illegal in Denmark, but also that in many cases the children were actually not given up for adoption by their mothers in Germany in the first place.

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[36] "Jeg ved jo fra min biologiske mor, som jeg har mødt i Tyskland, hun fødte mig på det der børnehjem og kom jo sådan set og besøgte mig flere gange om ugen. Jeg har fået billeder – det er da det bedste! [Hun smiler bredt] Jeg har dem i et album, de ligger fremme, så jeg kigger i dem tit – af hende og mig siden jeg var baby, ik'… Og man kommer jo ikke og besøger et barn flere gange om ugen, selv og med sine veninder og så noget og tager billeder og sidder der og kigger og så' noget, på et barn man vil give væk. Og så sagde hun, en dag kom hun og så var jeg væk."

[37] "Og så når jeg så læser den bog, så ved jeg jo godt hvad der er sket, det synes jeg er chokerende, men det er også ret rart at få at vide. Det er rart at få sin historie. Ellers er man jo bare et udvisket blad, man ved ingenting."

When researching the German-born generation today, as it relates to Denmark, one of the first and only titles appearing online will be *The Child Import.* It was written by three Danish journalists, Amalie Linde, Matilde Hørmand-Pallesen and Amalie Kønigsfeldt (2016) and is currently the most focused Danish work on this generation of Black children adopted from Germany to Denmark in the post-war era. The book is based on extensive archival research around Tytte Botfeldt's enterprise and includes personal stories based on interviews with some of the people subjected to Botfeldt's adoptions. Or, as the authors aptly call it, her child import. The archival material made available through the book is very illuminating. Yet, the representation of people, from being Black children and since as adults, reproduces a familiar European fetishization of blackness. This happens, among other things, through the authors' one-sided focus on the spectacular and the grotesque (Hartman 1997). Norbert Andersen shares that he responded to the authors' call for interviewees and shared his story with them: "The ladies [...] called me back, and they told me they were happy about the interview but that they did not know how much of it they could use. I would later find out how little they used and why" (Andersen 2020, 69). Andersen was since invited to the book launch and enjoyed meeting people who looked like him and with whom he shared a decisive part of personal history, a rare experience.

> "When I got home, I read the book and could definitely understand why my story was not in it. It had gone too well for me! Understood in the way that I had not had a traumatizing destiny as many in the book had had. I could read that my life had been without a lot of horrific experiences, that many went through. There had been incest, violence and even murder in the families the book deals with" (Andersen 2020, 70).

Norbert made a connection between his life which 'had gone too well,' that he 'had not had a traumatizing destiny' and 'horrible experiences' and the omission of his personal story from *The Child Import.* So what Linde et al. chose to be defining for the narrative, excluded Norbert's version of the German adoptee story. Reading his book made me wonder if this misrepresentation might have been part of his motivation to write up his own story later on, to create self-representation.

Linde et. al.'s prioritization of the macabre recalls the selective representations of Victor Cornelins and Alberta Roberts and the cage in Danish collective memory. This becomes not solely an issue of (mis)representation but the way it is part of discourse and reproduces it at the same time (Hall 1997). I have consciously chosen not to repeat the details here, but as Norbert indicated, *The Child Import* graphically describes incidents of abuse, violence, and murder of people (then children) in the adopted generation. The one-sidedness of the narrative they chose to present spectacularizes Black pain. That is, they put violence against Black children on display as what Saidiya Hartman has called 'scenes of subjection' giving the majoritized gaze an opportunity to consume and create an illusion of empathy with the victimized children (Hartman 1997). Empathy is an illusion because suffering is defined by what is legible to the authors as such; the extreme, pornographic emotional and physical abuse. Empathy – feeling outraged, shocked, sad – is premised on the authors' and their imagined readers' ability to put themselves in the victim's place and 'share' the pain (Hartman 1997, 18). In Hartman's theorization of scenes of subjection, she therefore pertinently poses the question: "Can the white witness of the spectacle of suffering affirm the materiality of black sentience only by feeling for himself?" (1997, 19). In other words, does the exhibition of Black suffering actually center white feelings? This question is an important one as it runs through the representations of blackness across the generations whose experiences I

study. And what is to gain by spectacularization *as* representation of blackness and other minority racialized experiences within the Danish context is the simplified portrayal of who are the 'bad guys' and what the bad treatment is. It is then easy for the average Danish reader to distance themselves from the *bad,* 'share' feelings of pain and suffering and through these feelings position themselves as *the good* and thus innocent (Hartman 1997; Tuck and Yang 2012). As such, spectacularization *as* representation of blackness produces a discourse of explicit victimization in which the culpable versus innocent (whites) are easily identified. The majoritized reader is thus free to delve into tears of empathy while avoiding critical engagement with the systems of knowing undergirding the violence in the first place, and how they might themselves be complicit in upholding and benefitting from those structures.

Importantly too, spectacularization as a narrative grip silences and invisibilizes the human (experiences) in the German adoptee collective story, including the horror in the mundane (Essed 1991; Kilomba 2010). That is to say, the interlaced specificity of being a child/a Black child/a separated Black child/adopted/in white Europe already potentially *is* a drama and a horror story. For the reader who relates to the *people* in the story – rather than the story about the people – feelings may arise, and visceral reactions may occur at very different places. Simply reading and watching pictures of someone who looks like you, if this has not been available or common, can be moving. Reading about separation of little children from kin is a drama. Reading about children alone on trains, waiting for strangers at a central station is a drama. Being denied speaking your first language and being given a name that is not yours is a drama. Being lied to about your own story, deep into your adult age, is a horror story. The omnipresent whiteness, yet equally present denial of its violence is a horror story. Navigating racism without adults, siblings, or peers and being gaslit is a horror story. Colorblind inclusionism is a horror story. The Danish status quo already is oppressive to Black subjects, so the spectacle of *corporal* violence must be for readers who need persuasion. Persuasion in order to acknowledge Black sentience and the pain in the ordinary, or the ordinariness of pain when Black-in-Denmark, across adoptee and non-adoptee stories.

When Anne and I spoke about the book she articulated her impression of its authors: "...Three white women, well-meaning, young white women, who so want to do well by these children who had it so bad, yeah…"[38] It was clear that Anne had already thought about this and how the authors reproduced racism despite their good intentions. "They use the word 'mulatto'!" Anne continued, outraged. She tells me about a recent podcast on the topic where one of the authors was invited and just like in the book, but now in 2021, was using that word completely matter of factly.[39] Anne's comments point to the racial unawareness mixed with pity that undergirds *The Child Import*. 'Mulatto' is literally *the* way Anne's cohort is referred to consistently by Linde et al., a word she finds alienating and denigrating. The terms mulatto/mulatta derive from the word mule, connoting 'crossbreeding' within a eugenic understanding of human 'races' as biological fact. Its genealogy is European colonization and enslavement of Africans, from the African context to the New World's plantation societies (Kilomba 2010). It thus is a term developed to categorize a group of perceived sub- or non-humans and remains colonialist and dehumanizing. In Denmark, due to a general racial ignorance, the term mulatto is used completely ahistorically, in public and academic discourse alike, effectively reproducing colonialist harm, specifically antiblackness (Linde et al. 2016; Skadegård and Jensen 2018).

[38] "Tre hvide kvinder, velmenende, unge hvide kvinder, der vil gøre det så godt for de her børn, der har haft det så slemt, ja…"
[39] Podcast *Genau* by Radio 4, episode "The black shame" [*Den sorte skam*], 6/22/2021. https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/genau/id1489589623

I happened to have listened to the podcast too. When we talked about who got to speak on it, and who did not, she reflected back on it: "I did think it was sort of a white angle on it… [...] I did wonder about that." Besides the already mentioned author Amalie Kønigsfeldt, one adoptee was invited to speak, Klaus-Dieter Drechsler, and a German 'undercover' journalist Günther Wallraff, whose alleged expertise on being Black came from him wearing blackface to expose human rights violations, and lastly, the host Thomas Schumann. Besides Drechsler's lived experience, none of them were experts in neither transnational adoption nor race and racism. Since the idea for the program was pitched by an adoptee from Germany, something Anne knew through her personal network, she commented that this had probably not been what the person had in mind when reaching out to the radio station. Their story was told by white people. "We can do it ourselves! We do not need another *white savior* to tell this [story]," she said, a comment that applies to the recent podcast as well as the book itself. The reduction of this collective story to a story of extremities is something Anne is convinced they sought out explicitly in the book "because it had to sell and 'oh no, how horrible it all was'." Here Anne speaks into the commodification of Black pain. This is a representational phenomenon that is well-known in U.S. American critical Black discourse, but unrelated to that Anne theorizes from her own immediate perception. Telling a collective story of a marginalized group does not need to rely on trauma only, especially not what the limited imagination of the 'white witness,' in Hartman's words, defines as trauma. "Extreme cases, right," Anne goes, "and then there are those completely ordinary ones like *me.* Who grow up, go to school, have kids, work, work, work until I retire in ten years, I mean… completely ordinary, just like every other woman in this country, I was about to say, you know… Those are not extreme stories, but just a story." Similarly, to what Norbert wrote, Anne's perspective teases out a connection between an interpretation of her story through the white gaze as reduced to extremities that merit pity and activates white empathy. The cost, however, is it sacrifices a holistic and, importantly, *humanizing* representation of the people at the center of the story. Clearly, it alienated some of them.

All this to say that publicly available documentation on the Black 1960's generation specifically is limited and scattered, to say the least, particularly in Denmark. There is a glaring lack of any race analysis which, despite good intentions, reproduces harm: it objectifies, alienates, and recirculates racism through its language and centering of white Danish commonsense (Fanon 1961; hooks 2015). There is a tension in the fact that, when and if Danish people of African descent, adoptees or others, begin searching to understand Danish history and Denmark's relation to Africans and blackness, they will encounter mostly knowledge produced from outsider perspectives. Thus, colonist, racist imaginaries and discourses are likely maintained and reproduced, when they are presented from standpoints that do not fundamentally challenge the epistemologies within Africans and African descendants are imagined as less than human in the first place (Hunter 2018). I will exemplify this paradox of representation further on.

Between Kinship and Culture: Politicizing the 'Brown' Child's Best Interest

Denmark is arguably no more racism free than other European countries. It is therefore interesting to understand the international debates and how Denmark ended up being a crucial receiving country for a diaspora of mixed-race Black children. Muniz de Faria's research traces the discursive shifts in Germany surrounding the children as well as an African American discourse in the U.S. and how they related to each other. Accordingly, the racialization of the Afro-German children as 'other' and foreign was seen as the primary 'issue' which their German socialization

and citizenship could not mitigate (Muniz de Faria 2003, 345–46). Two different arguments both resulted in the logic that the children should be separated from German society by either emigration (deportation) or segregation: their unlikely integrability into German society on the one hand, and on the other: "For their own protection, Afro- German children were seen to be best cared for 'among their own kind' – in Africa, South America, or the United States" (p. 344). While both arguments were deeply rooted in biological racism and assumptions of these children's cognitive inferiority, the second concern was awkwardly caring, what Muniz de Faria calls a "paradoxical and shifting dynamic" in the debate around the children (p. 345). A recognition of their vulnerability as racialized 'others,' which sparked the initiative of special children's homes domestically, just for the Afro- German children (Fehrenbach 2005). It should be noted that there was also an important debate based on the belief that German society would recover from Nazism and grow tolerant and inclusive, hence many also argued for the integration of the children into German society. And for those children who stayed, the German authorities paid a disproportionate attention to this relatively small population group as it was seen as presenting a 'special problem,' especially once they reached school age and entered into educational institutions in the early 1950's (Opitz, Oguntoye, and Schultz 1992; Fehrenbach 2009).

For the time being, the United States was seen as the most fitting receiving destination. Simultaneously, on that side of the Atlantic, the African American magazine *Ebony* had brought an article on German so-called 'war babies' in 1951 and Margareth Ethel Butler, an African American teacher's, quest to adopt two such children (Muniz de Faria 2003). What became known as The Butler Case was, according to Muniz de Faria, a significant point in the history of adoption of the Afro-German children, a topic that was picked up by the Black press in the U.S. and by the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). And since, Ms. Mabel Grammer, an African American journalist, organized the 'Brown Baby Plan.' Here too, a discourse of both fear of the discrimination the children would face in Germany and a sense of care arose in response to news about 'brown babies' in need. Different Black American news media encouraged African Americans to support by sending care packages, choosing to sponsor a child, and since by adopting children (Muniz de Faria 2003). Muniz de Faria identifies two main motivations that mobilized African Americans to help these children, different from general altruism. Reading through the media discourse at the time, she argues that African Americans were moved through a sense of kinship and connection based on race. Next, they also seemed to have been motivated by a sense of shame over 'irresponsible' G.I.s and attempts to right their wrongs by supporting their offspring. Lastly, and in that connection, there was also a fear that African Americans in general would be judged by Germans due to their perception of the Black G.I.s; a motivation to prove themselves as a larger African American community (Muniz de Faria 2003, 148–49).

There were several interesting discourses circulating in the Black Press, some that argued for the saving of the 'brown babies', bringing them to the U.S. into African American families, and others that praised the progressiveness of German efforts to integrate the children into the school system, seemingly proof of their recovering democracy (p. 353). But these kinds of juxtapositions testify to a lack of knowledge of the significant differences between German and U.S. society at the time and the unviability of comparisons of, for example, what 'integration' might imply in the respective contexts. Muniz de Faria reflects that "[b]ecause of the fact that African Americans continued to be denied rights in their own country, Germany's treatment of these children was regarded by African Americans not only as measure of its status as a democracy, it also functioned as a surface onto which their own hopes and wishes for a democratic and non-racist society were projected" (p. 353).

Back in Germany, however, the discourse shifted around 1955, by the suspension of the Statute of Occupation (Fehrenbach 2005). From believing in a better future for the Afro- German children in African American families, the 'Brown Baby Plan' and Mabel Grammer's private adoption program became heavily criticized by German officials. As it was unregulated by American child welfare authorities, it was seen as compromising the children's safety (Fehrenbach 2009; Muniz de Faria 2003, 357). In fact, adoptions to Denmark, which were already taking place simultaneously, began to outnumber those to the U.S. According to Fehrenbach: "Denmark was portrayed in terms of cultural similarity: it was like Germany, only better, since prospective Danish parents seemed 'more broad-minded about the children's origins'", that is, relative to both German and U.S. racism (Fehrenbach 2009, 48). In light of Tytte Botfeldt's equally illegal and devastatingly unregulated mass adoptions, the emerging discourse on Denmark is remarkable. Besides simply ignorance, there could be several reasons both for the shift and the seeming hypocrisy the German welfare system exhibited in discriminating between two rather similar initiatives. According to Muniz de Faria, Grammer herself experienced the critique as partly *because* the families she worked with were African Americans. As if – in this new turn of the German discourse – they were not good enough to be adoptive parents (Muniz de Faria 2003, 357). Indeed, some type of hierarchical value judgment was now established in which Denmark was constructed as superior to (Black) America. And surely, as Fehrenbach shows, when a German Protestant Youth Welfare Association visited Denmark in 1962 to oversee the wellbeing of some of the children, a rather rosy picture was painted of exclusively content children and adoptive parents (Fehrenbach 2005). This idealization both played on cultural fittedness in contrast to the segregationist U.S., but also, interestingly, developed a pathologizing discourse on African American motherhood specifically. This effectively replaced one racist stereotype for another; from an assumed naturally nurturing Black 'mammy' fantasy (a well-known, highly mediated trope in the U.S.) to an unsuitable mother and family type (an idea that circulated in the 1960's U.S. due to the Moynihan Report). It was articulated as a way to "delineate national-cultural difference and distinguish between a putatively more refined set of European gender practices and sensibilities and their baser (African) American counterpart," as per Fehrenbach's analysis (Fehrenbach 2005, 166).

In Denmark, on the other hand, Botfeldt's illegal adoptions were not only known to the domestic adoption authorities but became public knowledge after the national tabloid BT's headline in 1963 stating "Illegal Import of Children to Denmark" (Eriksen 2020). According to Linde et. al. (2016) the Danish Ministry of Justice held meetings with Botfeldt and warned her about breaking the law and she herself had applied for permission to conduct transnational adoptions but was denied. Yet, she continued anyway and faced no consequences. Aside from racist undertones, the German upholding of (white) Danish adoptants over African American ones therefore appears to be based on ideals and superficial oversight. But the shift in discourse also served a new interesting positioning that Germany took in reconstructing a new national identity, as Fehrenbach argues:

> "By claiming to act in the best interests of the child, the West German state cultivated its role as protector and used its experience in international adoptions to provide a critical comparative perspective on the social progress of American and German democracy. Within a decade and a half of Nazi defeat, West German officials could claim a moral victory when it came to race relations and declared the provisional period of postwar racial reeducation closed" (Fehrenbach 2009, 48).

For the same reason it was difficult to trace the exact numbers of adopted children, it is difficult to gather knowledge about this cohort of adults today. Due to the illegal nature on both sides of the Atlantic, it seems almost random which of the children in orphanages were sent to the U.S. and who were sent to Denmark. But the motivations behind the two women's actions and interest in these children had such different roots. A sense of racial kinship from Grammer and the African American adoptants sought to 'save' the children into a racial in-group community. And on the other end was the white humanitarianism of Botfeldt and the majority white Danish adoptants. Here, in a colorblind, yet racist, social world the Black-mixed children would be positioned as outsiders anew. It is hard not to ponder how the effects of these fundamentally different motivations and environments have affected these, now adult, people's destinies.

The Danish Adoption System: From Children in Need to Adults with Needs

From the private adoptions, often beginning in the frame of a summer camp and foster care, a group of Danish adoptants, including Tytte Botfeldt, started the association *Glemte Børn* [Forgotten Children] in 1964. In 1965 the association was authorized to facilitate transnational adoptions. According to Eriksen: "The association was only permitted to facilitate contact between Danish adoption seekers and foreign adoption authorities and institutions after one of the Danish adoption institutions had examined the Danish couple as well as the foreign child and approved both" (Eriksen 2020, 9). This would have been *Mødrehjælpen* [Mothers' Aid] and *Plejehjems-foreningerne* [The Nursing Home Associations], of which Mothers' Aid was responsible for (domestic) adoptions in Denmark. Notably, when asked by the Ministry of Justice, they were hesitant to assist mediating international adoptions since, for one, they did not have adequate resources and, secondly, they saw it as an entirely different business than their own: namely to take care of children in need, not adults with needs (Linde et al. 2016, 131). Due to internal conflicts, Forgotten Children split into two in 1969 and the new branch became *AC Børnehjælp* [Adoption Center Children's Aid]. It was authorized to facilitate adoptions that same year. Meanwhile, much of the organizational issues, as Linde et al. suggest, were in fact due to Tytte Botfeldt herself and disagreements persisted internally in Forgotten Children (later *DanAdopt*). This had lead Botfeldt to engage herself in the founding of a Danish chapter of *Terre des Hommes*, an international child aid organization founded in Switzerland, in 1967 and in 1971 they too became authorized to facilitate adoptions. To sum up: "With the institutionalization of Glemte Børn, Adoption Center and Terres des Hommes, attention quickly turned to overseas markets in East and Southeast Asia, in particular South Korea, where the implementation of adoption legislation in 1962 created a framework and juridical infrastructure for the expansion of adoption programs and an unprecedented number of transnational adoptions" (Myong and Andersen 2015, 70). This means that from the 1970's onwards the number of adoptions were more transparent. This is also when adoptions from Germany stopped which leaves the facts of that cohort of adoptees obscured.

It is simultaneously true that while now legalized, all three Danish official transnational adoption agencies originated from Tytte Botfeldt's private, unsupervised child import. It is relevant to ask to what extent the adoption agencies' ideologies and methods had significantly changed in order to gain authorizations. Clearly, the Danish Ministry of Justice also wanted to gain some control of activities that were taking place regardless of their warnings. Additionally, the Danish authorities' motivation to grant permission did not arise until external pressure from the Danish media and the International Social Service interfered (Linde et al. 2016). Up until then, the Ministry of Justice was aware of Botfeldt's activities, just like she was aware that they were illegal.

And indeed, the Danish transnational adoption industry continued to be revealed as problematic. Interestingly, both in 1976 and in 1985 an adoption council (existing since 1969) considered whether transnational adoptions should be handled by the state rather than private organizations, but concluded, for various reasons, that "the adoption mediation most appropriately would be handled by a few highly qualified and experienced private organizations, which were publicly authorized and subject to public oversight."[40] This report by what was then the Ministry for Children, Equality, Integration and Social Affairs emphasizes the 'highly qualified' organizations without further reference to what concretely made them qualified. Juxtaposed to a point Myong and Andersen make, this assumption reveals a considerable blind spot with regards to the conflict of interest permeating Danish transnational adoption: "A significant difference between transnational and domestic adoption in Denmark was the fact that these agencies were founded and managed by adopters. [...] Mødrehjælpen was never as closely managed by adopters as the agencies that came to facilitate transnational adoptions" (Myong and Andersen 2015, 70). In addition to this, it is noteworthy that these agencies were not licensed to conduct adoptions of other Nordic children (Norwegian, Swedish, Icelandic, Finnish), who apparently were considered worthy of the same care as Danish children in the authorized, domestic adoption system.

The three organizations continued conducting transnational adoptions in Denmark until the minister of Justice ordered *Terre des Hommes* to immediately stop adoptions after *DR TV,* the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, revealed a scandal in the adoption of Romanian children in 1999.[41] However, according to a note from the Board of Appeal, this was not new and found that: "[...] TdH [Terre des Hommes] systematically have not complied with the conditions laid down by the Danish authorities for the [adoption] mediation work."[42] The Danish transnational adoption industry, thereafter AC Children's Aid and DanAdopt, continued but through an interplay of adult adoptees speaking up publicly and by the help of investigative journalism, the remaining adoption agencies have been held accountable for scandals revolving mistreatment of adoptants and illegal adoptions, for instance. In 2015 the two adoption agencies fused into Danish International Adoption. Transnational adoption to Denmark peaked in the 70's with increasing adoptions from South Korea, India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh and continued through the 90's adding countries in Southeast and East Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, as well as China, Ethiopia, South Africa, and Haiti. Transnational adoption to Denmark decreased drastically after 2010.

Compulsory Gratitude as Affective Debt

The legality or illegality of Danish transnational adoptions is not what is at stake within a frame of decolonial and critical race analysis. The unregulated adoptions in Denmark, especially in the beginning, likely heightened the cases of abuse that could have been avoided by thoroughly verifying the adoptants. Yet, the problem is the transactional character, centering the Danish adults' needs, and the commodification of people turned orphans then adoptees, leading to the near erasure of their first parents and their lives before arrival with the final adoptive family (Eng 2010). These effects have been inherent in transnational adoption to Denmark, regardless of what the given legal status of the transaction was at a given time, regardless of whether control and oversight improved – in the eyes of the receiving state and adoptants. And, crucially, in the Danish context,

[40] Ministeriet for Børn, Ligestilling, Integration og Sociale Forhold (2014). "Helhedsanalyse af det danske adoptionssystem: De strukturelle rammer og tilsynet," 11.
[41] Danmarks Radio. https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/standser-adoptioner, visited 1/16/2023
[42] Folketinget. Social- og Ældreudvalget, Ankelstyrelsen (2021). "Notat om Terre des Hommes adoptionsformidling i 1970'erne."

transnational adoption has been synonymous with transracial adoptions. Racialization as 'other' is what makes the circumstance of adoption inescapable to have to name as explanation to clarify ones 'out of placeness' as someone with a non-white 'sign on the body' in a national space racialized as white; Denmark (Myong 2009; 2011; Carby 2019). And the specificity of a historical pattern of white Danish adoptants of Black and minority racialized foreign children emphasizes the power imbalance and coloniality of such race relations. And I have not even engaged the psychological and emotional effects of separation generally, in some cases multiple separations between birth until a final destination, and the intersection of that with racism and racial separation and isolation specific to Denmark.

Questions about the legality of adoption become even less viable with respect to African descendants and people racialized as Black. A Western European nation's law will not serve as an adequate measure for humane treatment of Black subjects, since most of the horrors of Western Modernity committed towards Black Africans historically have indeed *been the law* (Buck-Morss 2000; Césaire 2000). What is legalized and what – or who – is criminalized in the interrelation between white European subjects and nation states and Black subjects globally is therefore already tainted by the coloniality of notions such as 'nation', 'Europe', and 'the West' and Eurocentric conceptions of morality (Lewis 2020; Kelekay 2022). A Black Studies' lens can provide particularly useful analytics to contextualize the Black adopted subject in a transactional relationship with both state and adoptive parents. The constructed position as commodified person – in the name of self-evident benevolent white rescue – makes unspeakable the idea of the Black person's will, agency or consent (Hartman 1997). Contrarily, it is common that adoptees find themselves in an emotional 'debt,' owing their adoptive parents what David Eng calls 'affective labor' (Eng 2010; Myong and Andersen 2015). Anne told me: "I have always felt kind of caught in being a child who came to satisfy some parents, to satisfy my mother in her need, and to adapt myself." Being an 'easy' and content child became a role she learned to play, part of her affective labor, in order to live up to the mother's needs. She therefore also shut off parts of herself, keeping her range of emotions muted. A double edge sword in which she experienced that her grief and anger could not be expressed. Neither on a personal level, nor in reaction to a life navigating racism. Interestingly, another woman about a decade younger, shares something that resonates. Elora was a child in the 1970's and born in Zaire to a Zairan father and a white Danish mother. The mother raised her and her sibling in Denmark from Elora was a toddler.

> "I am actually curious about [...] if my generation has not had so much anger, but we have had grief. But I do not think we have had so much anger, because I do not think we have…It was *jo* not legitimate. I mean, nobody was there to tell us that it was wrong to be called those things, nobody told us… So what did you have to be mad about? Then I could be angry that my father was not there, but what? I mean, I could *jo* not be mad about what the outside world said, that was okay…"[43]

Elora speaks to how they learned to tolerate racism and carry it in alone. When she says, 'what did you have to be mad about?' or that racist remarks from the outside world 'was okay', she is

[43] "Jeg ved ikke, jeg er faktisk nysgerrig på [...] om min generation ikke har haft så meget vrede, vi har haft sorgen. Men jeg tror ikke vi har haft så meget vreden, for jeg tror egentlig ikke vi har – den har jo ikke været legal. Altså, der er jo ikke nogen der har sagt at, at det var forkert at blive kaldt det, der er ingen der har sagt, det var… Så hvad skulle du være vred over? Så kunne jeg være vred over, at min far ikke var der, men hvad. Altså, jeg kunne jo ikke være vred over det, som omverdenen sagde, det var ok… [...]"

paraphrasing messaging she has heard growing up. An upbringing without parents or a community to share the burden with and to develop a discourse, or at least a reaction to the denigration she and her sibling experienced. This is one of the premises of the first generation. Like I did in the beginning of this chapter, Elora, too, is referring to the void that was a non-existent adult/parent generation, finding that 'nobody was there'. All these mixed-Black children could do was to adapt to the Danish status quo in which racist commentary 'was okay'. Or rather, it was not even perceived as racist. But another aspect was striking, as she elaborated: "You had to be grateful. 'Think about if your mom had left you in Africa'," she says in a mocking voice. "That's something people have said to you?!" I asked. "Yeees!", she said, drawing out the vowels, affirming that *of course* this was something she had heard in her life, repeatedly. "So, you did not get permission [to be mad]," she says.

The point about gratitude runs through critical adoption discourse. Yet it is important to also acknowledge the discourse for its racialized, colonialist connotations in and of themselves. The demand for gratitude is not reserved for the transactionary character of transnational adoption alone, but specifically the transnational/tranraciality of it. Elora also had to 'be grateful'. Her blackness was thicker than the *jus sanguinis,* the birthright principle of parentage (of blood, literally) granting her nationality but not the option to pass for a 'real' Dane. She experienced anger as a non-possibility when subjected to racism coming of age in the 1970's and 80's. She notices it is much different for the younger generations today, the generation Z and onwards. Her own generation was told that: "You did not grow up in poor Africa, which was plundered by Europe, so you can't be mad. You did not grow up in the USA where there is racism, so you can't be mad about that, so what exactly do you want to be mad about?! You are *lucky*!" she told me, exemplifying the sound of 'white innocent' pushback and Danish exceptionalism if she articulated any experiences of racism (Wekker 2016; Sawyer and Habel 2014). The discourse can also be heard from majority Danes when critical voices speak up today. Anyone assumed to be a foreigner is told to 'go home where they came from' if they have something to 'complain' about. That is a kind of conditioned tolerance where the 'other' needs to perform gratitude, or else! A kind of structural adaptation to the white motherland is required, a larger scale of the adaptation Anne talked about in the interpersonal relationship with her (adoptive) mother. The affective labor of the minority racialized demonstrates how not only the transnational adopted subject is in a contractual relationship with Denmark. Therefore, Anne's duty to be grateful is not demanded of her because she was adopted from *Germany*; it is her duty to be grateful to Denmark because she is *Black*.

Elora had contextualized the inception of what she calls *her* generation as emerging out of a geo-political moment across Africa, in the aftermath of recent independence movements from European colonization. She taught me something I did not know: "Uhm, their parents have *jo* been in Africa as '*u-landsfrivillige'* ['development country' volunteers][44]." Being sent off by *Danida*, Danes would volunteer in African countries as doctors, teachers or nurses. Danida is Denmark's developmental corporation, under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "Denmark's development

[44] The term *u-land,* "d-country" for *development country,* was common up until the 1990's. To be a volunteer in a so-called development country was institutionalized and promoted through humanitarian organizations as well as travel agencies. The term carries a commonsense meaning of progressiveness and benevolence and is encouraged to Danish children from childhood to adulthood. For example, the aid organization Danida in collaboration with the national Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR) have sponsored children's Christmas calendars – a paper calendar and an accompanying TV-show for the month of December – since the ealy 1960s. Donating the proceeds to chosen so-called development countries, they are simply called *Børnenes u-landskalender,* "The Childrens d-country calendar", to this day. Similarly, taking a gap year after high school and traveling to a destination in the Global South broadly, is a culturally valued activity, perhaps particularly on the political left, understood as a combined opportunity for edification [dannelse] and a way to help others in the world, see for example globalcontact.dk part of Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke, just one among many.

policy aims to combat [...] poverty through promotion of human rights and economic growth."[45] Through a refashioned humanitarianism, articulated by the framework of 'human rights' in a United Nations era, eurocentrism and European interference in the newly established African nations was now justified as 'aid.' Thus, the newfound moral superiority post WWII remarketed Europe as protector of world peace by erasing 'race' and saving 'Brown Babies' simultaneously. This 1960's conjunction created Anne's generation. Closely related, a generation of Black Danish people born around the 1970's, were results of the 'development aid' industry and its neocolonialist white savior complex. The geopolitical and discursive stories are intrinsically linked in that the post-war era was a catalyst for African independence. The connected Danish imaginaries when Anne and Elora came of age constructed racialized geographics in which the racial other, who was externalized per definition, would have the 'honor' of being saved by Denmark. Therefore, existing in its national space, on the mercy of the benevolent Danes (volunteers/adoptants/the state), the least they could do was to be grateful (Essed and Hoving 2014). In these imaginaries, ecchoing colonial Christian missionaries, the Danish goodwill was essentially these 'poor' Black people's reason for being. In return, they were expected to repress all other (human) experiences and emotions beyond gratitude and love (Myong and Bissenbakker 2021). That is, a contractual self-negation, fragmentation, and self-alienation (Fanon 1952; Kilomba 2010).

REPRESENTATIONS OF RACE IN 1960'S DENMARK:

"My First and only Mirroring": Ambivalent Attachments to Colonized Blackness

Understanding the racial landscape when the 1960's-70's generation grew up, is an important part of understanding what conditions shaped them subconsciously, and which options they concretely had for more or less conscious self-making. One of my main theories is that the absence of reflections of ourselves matters in how we come to create a sense of self. It was therefore one of the questions I consistently asked everybody, and in a very direct way. When it fitted naturally into the flow of the conversation, I would pose the question, here in my interview with Anne: "What have you had in terms of mirroring in your life?", I asked her. "Nothing!" she replied promptly. After a brief hesitation she continues: "Yes, I have had *one* reflection and that is that *Cirkelkaffe-pige*," I verbally affirmed and was not at all surprised to hear the 'Circle Coffee Girl' mentioned in this way. "I lived in Kolding and there was [...] a factory and on a huge gable in the middle of town – I also lived kind of downtown – on there she was. Uh, and I *do have* that poster and no matter what…that was my first and best friend, my first and only mirroring… until I…"[46] Anne took a little break here. This leaves room for a bit of contextualization.

Cirkelkaffe is an old Danish coffee brand, which went by that name since 1938, and is now sold by the supermarket cooperation *Coop*. Since the illustrator Aage Sikker Hanssen's drawing of an African girl as the logo for the brand in 1955, the image, colloquially referred to simply as *cirkelpigen,* 'the circle girl', has become an icon. The way Anne tells me that she owns a poster of

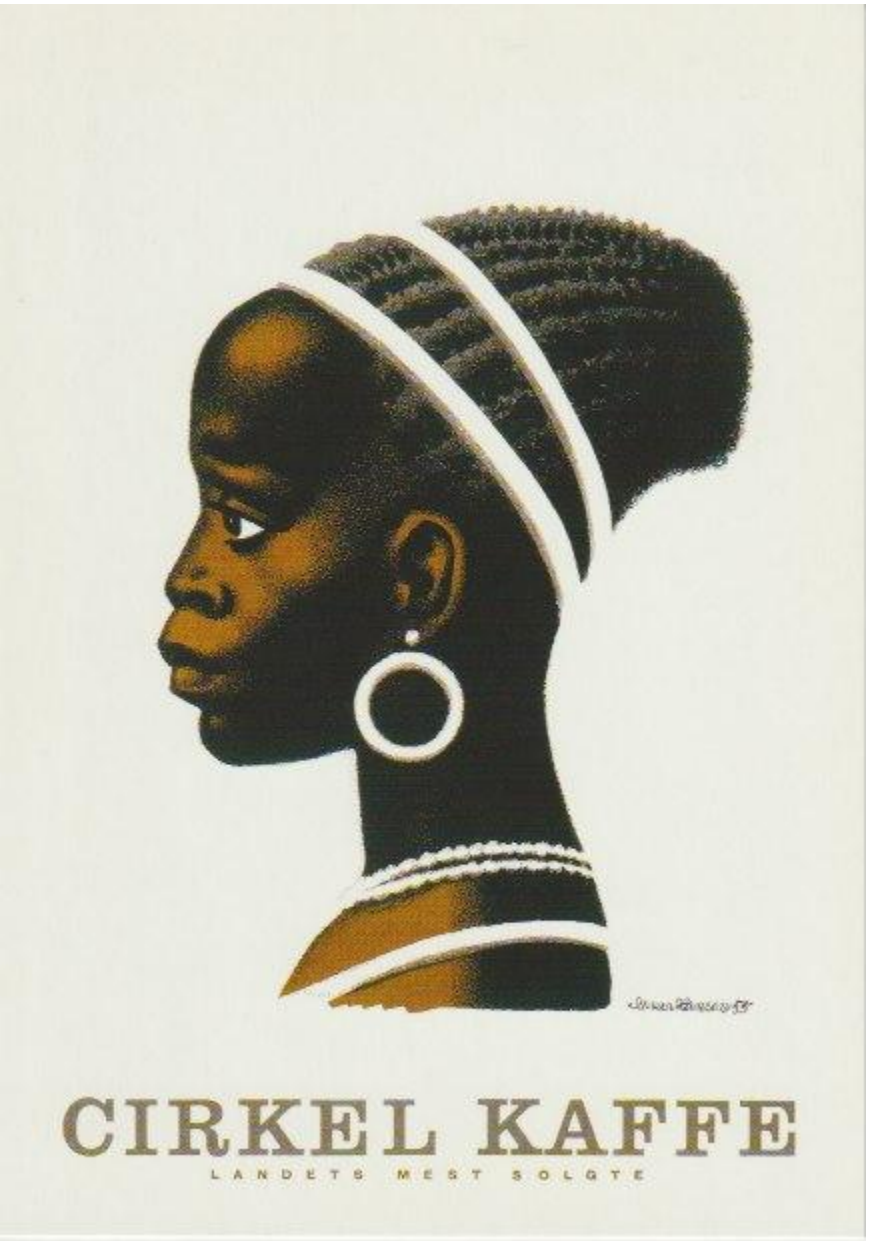
[45] (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.)

[46] "Ingenting!" [svarer prompte]. "Jo, jeg har haft én spejling og det er den der cirkelkaffepige [jeg siger mmm bekræftende]. Jeg boede i Kolding og der var [...] en fabrik og på en kæmpe gavl midt i byen – jeg boede også sådan i midtbyen – der var hun på. Øh, og jeg *har* den plakat og uanset hvad, så… det var min første og bedste ven, min første og eneste spejling… indtil jeg… [hun tænker]."

cirkelpigen 'no matter what…' or 'despite…' [*"uanset hvad"*] hints at her awareness of it as a type of representation which has received criticism over the past few decades. Critical understandings of this type of representation especially emerged as the image of the circle girl no longer appeared only on the packets of coffee, old commercial murals, or posters but had been mass produced as merchandise during the early 2000's. A perspective from someone 20 years younger than Anne, is startling in its resemblance to hers. This is Claire reflecting on the questions of mirroring growing up, even in a different decade: "[But] back then in the 80's there were *jo* nothing, I mean really, [no] representation. So, so, so there wasn't uhm…" Claire went on to tell me about an Ethiopian neighbor with kids her age, but did not really count that as mirroring due to the cultural foreignness she experienced. "So, I have thought about that thing with… the coffee girl," she said and laughed, to which I responded "yes, you mean Circle Coffee?" "Yes," she answered and explained: "...which is *jo* really a symbol of oppression and all kinds of things… She, she was my only mirroring... Uhm, and it is kind of funny, I have had her – also as an adult – I have had her on the wall and on bags and stuff because when I was little, to me she was a beautiful Black woman and the only one I saw anywhere, you know." She pauses for a moment, pensively. "Yeah… so, so I also have – I mean with everything that I know today – still some difficulty letting go of her… and she is still in a few places," Claire says and laughs, "because to me, she is that beautiful Black woman, right. And then, of course, one can talk about, uhm, how bad it is that the only mirroring I had was an oppressed, working, black woman… But that is not what *I* see when I look at her…But that is *it*, actually."

Figure 5. Scan of a "Circle Coffee" postcard I bought in a poster shop in Copenhagen in 2021. The profile of a Black African woman is illustrated in colored drawing. Depicted with dark brown skin and black shadows, white earrings, headbands, and necklaces accentuate her blackness. Illustrated with a slightly cone shaped cornrow hair style, she looks serious, gazing straight ahead of her. The Danish caption reads "Circle Coffee" and sub caption: "most sold in the country." The illustrator's signature is discreetly written next to the motive.

Both Anne and Claire mention the Circle Girl as their only representation of both blackness and black womanhood. Actually, they also mention other representations of Africanness or other non-white persons. But they both conclude that, in fact they did not truly count and that the Circle Girl was their *first, best,* and *only* genuine Black representation. A representation of *beautiful* blackness that they *enjoyed* and cultivated by having 'her' in their homes and 'her' image on objects in their everyday life, useful things too, not limited to art on a wall. Notice that the Circle Girl is personified as *she.* They speak about *her*, not just about a poster of her, for example. This is common, also among white Danes. The fact that this icon has had such a significance for Afro-descendant Danes across generations, might say something about what a PR success this image was and still is. It has become such a part of mainstream Danish imagery that it appears as quite unspectacular to the average Dane. This is just what coffee looks like. It has become treasured as a national aesthetic, not a 'Black' one, certainly not a colonialist one. Of course, it would be quite meaningless in the Danish context to speak of anything 'Black,' in the racelessness that shaped the cultural status quo when Anne and Claire grew up. The Circle Girl as a completely normal representation is largely taken for granted by white and minority-racialized Danes alike. And in 2004 it won the prize for being a design 'classic' by the Danish Design Center. In a bigger perspective the Danish Circle



Coffee packaging is inscribed in a European culture of consumption in which entitlement to enjoying colonial products is normalized (Danbolt 2017; Habel 2018). The coloniality of Europe's dependency or even addiction to consuming coffee, cocoa, and cane sugar, for instance, is invisibilized: Not by hiding the colonized laborers, but by explicitly using the white European imagination of them as advertisement for the product, as smiling, content, exotic(ized) figures, at your service.

A refreshing outsiders' perspective was presented when art historian Temi Odumosu moved to Copenhagen to begin working on a project on Danish colonial archives from the U.S. Virgin Islands (former Danish West Indies) in 2015. Her work would come to present important contributions and insights into Danish national/imperial memory and forgetting, as shown in chapter one (Odumosu 2019; 2020). For this purpose, however, I would like to share an excerpt from a blog post she wrote in the beginning of her settling into the city, rather than an academic piece. Here, she expressed her very immediate reactions as a Black British woman with a certain racial literacy (besides scholarly training) that exposes the non-existent racial-historical literacy in Denmark at large. Odumosu wrote about continually meeting racial-colonialist imagery in public space of Copenhagen, like the Circle Girl:

> "During these encounters I would always experience a moment of alarm, which was sometimes expressed by gasps, head shaking, or quiet vocal outbursts like 'Really?' and 'I can't believe this!' Yes, the difficulty adjusting to this new environment influenced some of my reactions. But they were also a response to the primacy of these images; their inherent readability as racial icons and thus as psychic residue of unfinished imperial sagas" (Odumosu 2016).

'Unfinished imperial sagas!' The interesting thing is that, when my interlocutors and I grew up (and to this day), supermarkets would literally have isles and shelves labeled 'colonial goods' and it would still not be related to Danish imperialism or concrete *colonies* in the collective Danish consciousness (Danbolt 2017). As Claire said, 'that is not what *I* see when I look at her…' As Danish subjects, African-descendant Danes internalize the discourse they grow up in like everybody else. This is despite the friction it might sometimes cause internally, but they thus learn to relate to racial imagery through the white Danish gaze. The conflict Claire expresses, and that Anne hesitantly hints to without finishing her sentence, is a friction of having adored an image, and perhaps clinged to it, and then developing a critical racial awareness that contextualizes the beloved and rare image within colonialism. There is a kind of loss embedded in this shift in consciousness. But as people who grew up in Denmark, with white Danish mothers and without a Black father as referent, their previous racial illiteracy is to be expected. There were no challenging discourses available in their homes, in public or in the larger narratives of Denmark they were taught. It *would* be hard to 'let go' of the Circle Girl, as Claire self-reflects. Because what is left if we find out that the scarce sources of any kind of remotely familiar (Black) reflection is indeed also part of what Mathias Danbolt calls 'racialized affective consumption'? (2017). Ambivalently holding on to the Circle Girl can be seen as a selective gaze and willful ignorance or forgetting to keep participating in (majoritized) Danish racialized affective consumption of racialized imagery. An effective consumption that is premised on a particular Danish innocence that Danbolt frames as 'retro racism.' In this frame racism is "always already retrograde, politically as well as historically, in a Danish context" (2017, 106). As such, many products – from the isle of colonial goods and beyond – continue to carry racialized and racist imagery, not least those targeted at

children, from candies to amusement park rides (Rødje and Thorsen 2019). Danbolt synthesizes this practice as such: "I suggest that the insistent framing of the consumption of racialized things in a language of happiness, desire and nostalgia also contributes to a racialization of the Danes as an imagined community of consumers who are always already 'beyond' and 'above' questions of race and colonialism" (Danbolt 2017, 110). As such, name changes of sweets with racist names specifically referring to Danish colonial subjects, Black and Inuit, have been met with feelings of being robbed of something from white Danes who are not racist, the logic goes, they just claim the right to use racist-colonial language (Dørup 2020). This reflects what Philomena Essed and Isabel Hoving (2014) have called 'smug ignorance', the refusal to know (better) and what Essed (2013) has coined 'entitlement racism,' an interpretation of 'freedom of speech' as "the right to *offend and to humiliate*" (p. 62).

Returning to the consumption of colonialist imagery, African descendants actually need a recognition of the racialized reality they live in, to feel seen. While they arguably have an affective relationship to the Circle Girl, it is not merely a consumerist colonialist affection. Their joy over the existence of just one more 'like them' in an upbringing where they have been the only ones, is a joy that matters to their existence and to their sense of self. Even if they had had a critical consciousness while growing up, I wonder if they could have afforded to reject the Circle Girl, the same way Odumosu's racial awareness allowed her to shake her head in disbelief and alarm (Odumosu 2016). I will raise the same question as I did in relation to Victor Cornelins: Is any representation better than nothing at all? Finding the Circle Girl beautiful shows the complex attachment to her in relation to their own blackness and Africanness and the lack of visual representation that could offer mirroring. At the same time, available representation of any kind of blackness or Africanness has been mediated through the white gaze for Victor as well as for Anne and for Claire. These are largely colonialist representations; racial stereotypes or romanticization of enslaved Africans. A mute(d) illustration, the Circle Girl could represent whatever African descendant Danes wanted her to, more relatable blackness than actual Ethiopian neighbors, for example, whose foreignness obscured the longed-for mirroring.

I therefore recall the centrality of the gaze and visual representation in imagining who we are and who we can become (hooks 2015). Most of Danish representations of blackness from Victor's upbringing, in the beginning of the 1900's, to Claire's, in the 1980's be it visual or verbal were white, colonialist consumptions of the 'other' (hooks 2015; Danbolt 2017). Internalizing this type of gaze thus produces an ambiguous relationship of attachment to imagery that Afro-descendants might know, now, is actually dehumanizing. Yet, it was all they had to ground themselves in an isolated bubble of belonging between themselves and her, the Circle Girl. It is worth considering that what is at play, what *feels good* about a figure like the Circle Girl, as Amandine Gay aptly points out, is that she presents a *positive* association to blackness. As Gay (2022) argues, for people who have grown up Black in a white society, specifically transnational adoptees, your blackness becomes associated with discrimination, which teaches you blackness equals a problem, something negative. Unlike people who grow up with family members who are Black, the Black child in a transracial white family does not have access to a normalization/humanization of blackness. It does not even have to be particularly positive associations, but simply learning and internalizing the *normalcy* of blackness through familiarity with caretakers and siblings. But creating a relationship to blackness as simply unarticulated being, rather than hyper articulated 'being other', which white societies construct. As Amandine (2022) says, somebody needs to pass on the positive – from humanizing, to ordinary, to beautiful –

associations to the Black child who lives in a white society *and* in a white family. In other words, a cultural context is needed in order to locate and *root* the given child's Black heritage *somewhere*.

Exposure to humanizing Black representation could challenge the ways blackness is being constructed as lacking or a void always already in relationship to whiteness and Europeanness, through the dominant discourse. Kilomba (2010) defines what this means specifically: "Only positive images, and I mean 'positive' not 'idealized' images, of Blackness created by Blacks themselves, in literature and visual culture, can dismantle this alienation, when one can finally identify positively with oneself and develop and positive self-image" (p. 91). Without that, the differently transplanted Afro-descendant children in 1970's, 80's and 90's Denmark grasped and held onto the scarce quasi mirrorings available, much like how plants may adapt and survive in new soil, but they might not be nourished properly to grow healthily and flourish.

Other 'Others': Colonial Synchronicities of Violent Intimacy

Back in the conversation with Anne, she had paused after sharing her relationship to the Circle Girl. She explained how that was the only available representation, at least one that made her feel good like that. When she continued sketching out the racial landscape of her upbringing, she did this imitating the dominant racial discourse of her childhood. Where I left off with our conversation above, was when she was thinking back on the Black representation, paused, and then continued her train of thought remembering other minority racialized people in her daily life at the time: "In my grade there was 'Greenlander-Gitte' and 'Negro-Anne', right!? That was me. And then Greenlander-Gitte disappeared, right." This crude way of saying it is wrapped in bittersweet sarcasm. Implicitly, and obviously to Anne and me, this is what these two minoritized kids were called by the white majority kids in school. In Danish, *grønlænder-Gitte* and *neger-Anne.* In the Danish context, then as well as now, the way *'grønlænder'* was used here, it was operationalized as a pejorative term. To the non-Danish speaker, it might simply sound like a nationality, but in Danish, this term is loaded with meaning in such a context, often connected to other words, or in name-calling as above. It carries connotations of racial stereotyping specific to the Greenlandic Inuit[47] in Denmark.

This short anecdote illuminates an interesting overlap in segments of Danish history that are both invisibilized but also separated from each other. There is a synchronicity in these stories of differently positioned groups of children that were intended to be absorbed into Denmark and Danishness, through distinct but related ideologies: the Black German-born children who were 'saved' from post-Nazi Germany and the Inuit children who were to be 'civilized', specifically *Danified* (Hermann 2021). In 1951, 22 children were brought to Denmark from Kalaallit Nunaat, (Greenland) by Danish officials, under the guise of a great educational opportunity (Bryld 1998). A significant difference between these two stories was that, while the first transnational adoptions were privately and illegally organized, the so-called 'experiment' with Inuit children was a federal undertaking. The Danish government and the aid organizations Red Cross and Save the Children along with civil servants all played their part. It was so official the Danish queen came to see about

[47] Here, I follow Juno Berthelsen's definitions of terminology: "The term *Greenlandic Inuit* will be used to describe and refer to the people in Greenland who are not only born and raised in Greenland, but who descend from the Inuit population in Greenland that the Danish settlers colonized from 1721 and onwards. *Greenlanders* is understood as a term for the whole of the Greenlandic population who are born and raised in Greenland regardless of ethnicity. An analytical distinction is therefore made between a *Greenlander* (a concept related to citizenship) and an *Indigenous Greenlander* or *Greenlandic Inuk* (concept related to lineage, culture and ethnicity)" (Berthelsen 2020).

the children. The separation of Inuit children from their parents for the purpose of alleged civilization echoes a particular type of coercion that diverse Indigenous[48] peoples have experienced across histories of Western/European colonizations (L. T. Smith, Tuck, and Yang 2019; Chase 2020; Hermann 2021). In the Danish case, while this explicit experiment was momentary, the coloniality of it was not. First of all, the individuals subjected to the experiment are marked for life[49] (Otzen 2015; Hermann 2021; Murray 2022; Alluna 2023). But secondly, this was just a formalization of what was practiced way beyond it. "Towards the end of the 1970's approximately 9000 Greenlandic school children were sent on [...] a stay in Denmark, from where they had scarce letter correspondence with their parents" (Hermann 2021, 135). This included both foster care and adoptions into white Danish families.

Officially, the first Danish settlements in Kalaallit Nunaat, or Greenland, are dated to 1721 with the arrival of missionary Hans Egede. (In the Danish public debate, *whether* Greenland was a colony is still contested (Baeré 2018)). In 1953 – at a historic time of global decolonization – Greenland was included into the Danish commonwealth and became a Danish county. In *The Empire's Children: When Denmark misled the UN and Greenland to keep its last colony,* Anne Kirstine Hermann (2021) argues that that decision between Greenland's independence or becoming a Danish territory, might not have been handled in accordance with the rules. This is relevant in the light of Denmark arguably having an extractive relationship to Greenlandic natural resources and would indeed profit from continued settlement (Berthelsen 2020). Additionally, as a shrunken empire it would show the rest of the world that Denmark still had their last colony (Hermann 2021). In 1979 Greenland attained home rule, which largely divided governance between Greenland's government and the Danish state, for domestic and foreign issues respectively. Officially, then, as of today Greenland is *not* a politically or economically independent country just like its population is Danish citizens.

This colonial power relation frames the perception and treatment of the Inuit by the Danish state, in Greenland as well as in Denmark. Anne's mentioning of Gitte in the context of whether she had any mirroring, helps paint a picture of how rare it was to see any kind of racialized 'other' at the time. And it meant something to her to know of somebody else. The fact that Anne still remembers this suggests that it made an impression on her. But then Gitte 'disappeared,' she said. I take note of this choice of word in the context of the Danish state's treatment of Inuit children and girls in particular. I wonder, did something happen to her beyond the quotidian violence of colonialism? Or was she simply sent back to be an 'exemplary' *danified* Inuk, utilized in the Danish modernization of Greenland? In any case, many of the circumstances surrounding the adoptions of Anne's generation had similarities with the cases of Greenland Inuit children and youth. Significantly was a lack of informed consent from parents (even less children) and irregulated and individually motivated actions by well-intentioned Danish doctors or teachers, for example (Hermann 2021). But also, a construction of children as orphans where there were none as a way

[48] The term Indigenous can become a simplification and generalization of vastly different people's experiences of colonization. In a similar vein, even 'Greenlandic Inuit' can be seen as a generalization given the diversity (Berthelsen 2020), while it also serves to make distinctions from other Inuit across the Arctic. When I use it here, it is to describe a people's relationship to and with land (Kalaallit Nunaat, Greenland) as well as their relationship with the people and kingdom/nation state (ethnic Danes and Denmark) settling on that land, and their extractive relationship to that land. Analytically, the categorization Indigenous is important precisely to denote the colonial relationship to the Danish state vis à vis post 1960 immigrants, refugees, adoptees, and to distinguish between other Danish citizens who experience racial minoritization. And lastly, it allows to distinguish modes of racialization, eg. invisibilization and silencing, that is typical for this group, but not for others in the Danish nationalist everyday discourse. All while centering the implications of racialization (being constructed as different-and-inferior) here as dispossession of land.

[49] See also Helene Thiesen in (Otzen 2015), Naja Lyberth in (Murray 2022) and Aaju Peter in (Alluna 2023).

to justify pulling children out of their families and into the Danish integrationist, civilizing project. While some orphans existed (as in the German case), other children were categorized as 'motherless' or 'fatherless,' but many of them did have relatives. In the Danish colonial logic, it then made sense to expose already grieving children to another loss and separation trauma by sending them from Greenland to Denmark. This testifies to a Danish upholding of a Eurocentric, heteronormative nuclear family as standard and 'good' for children, rendering other kinships and family forms illegible and thus illegitimate. Hermann writes: "The children have since spoken about homesickness and loss [*savn*] and about tensions between themselves and their foster families as well as the language shock and the identity confusion they experienced by being sent to Denmark and then home again" (Hermann 2021, 135). If they were allowed to see their relatives at their return, many could no longer speak together.

The 1950's and 60's presented decades of budding European humanitarianism in the wake of WWII and the foundation of the United Nations and the concept of human rights. Domestically the Danish welfare state was booming and internationally the Nordic countries were established as a moral authority, allegedly worthy of global aspiration (Kelekay 2022). Connected ideals around child welfare and Danish saviorism would produce cohorts of Danish citizens who were racialized minorities in Denmark *before* the era of mass immigration: the post-war subjects and the colonial subjects. These two groups were and are distinct in many significant ways, in terms of who they would have been had they not been uprooted. But since they were, they have come to share one crucial condition in relation to Denmark and their involuntary integration and assimilation into Danishness: they were absorbed – adopted – into the *intimate* sphere of Denmark. Directly into white Danish homes and families (at times together), not just into the nation state (i.e., through schooling, the job market etc.). This is an important distinction in contrast to immigrant subjects later on, and something that comes to effect the discourse around them versus around other 'foreigners' in the nation. As my interlocutor Jacob pointedly argued: "It is the ultimate integration… it was *jo* also why they [*man*] took Greenlander-children [derogatory] and sent them to Denmark in the 1950's, right, to live in Danish families, right, you know… It shapes you *jo* in a different way, right, I mean… And your identity it suddenly becomes totally independent of your race."[50] The malleability of younger children is precisely what made the erasure of their lifeworlds particularly violent and efficient. Jacob, a mixed-race Black man born in the 1980's, was brought up in a white Danish foster family. His reflections too, come from the position of a similar integration, splitting a sense of self from his own embodiment. Except for the learned naming of Inuit children, he is making pertinent connections between his experience and Danish colonial subjectivity.

Since it is illegal to collect and analyze racial demographic data, minority racialized adoptees and Inuit born in Denmark are all Danish citizens and therefore disappear in the statistics. Notably definitions of who is 'Greenlandic' varies across public reports and perhaps according to the purpose (SFI and Baviskar 2015; VIVE et al. 2022). This means that the effects of their specific conditions – from personal stories, over collective adoption and colonial circumstances, and insertion into white families – have not been possible to study systematically on a large scale, even if the willingness had been there. Producing this knowledge would be highly pertinent to better understand the complex causes for a seeming overrepresentation of precarity present in both these adopted generations of adults including mental vulnerability, substance abuse, premature death,

[50] "Det er den ultimative integration… det var jo også derfor man tog grønlænderbørn og sendte dem til Danmark i 1950'erne, ik, for at bo i danske familier, ik, du ved… Det former dig jo på en anden måde ik, altså... Og din identitet, den bliver lige pludselig totalt uafhængig af din race..."

suicide and death by murder (Linde et al. 2016; Hermann 2021; Gay 2021). Just like insights into what characterizes the lives of the survivors would be invaluable, and about those who thrive and what healing can look like. At present, estimates therefore rely on journalistic research like *The Child Import* (Linde et al. 2016) and *The Empire's Children* (Hermann 2021), and reports with fluctuating definitions, while Statistics Denmark currently has no means of identifying colonial and ethno-racially specific patterns of life and death among Danish citizens.

Among New 'Others': Following the Sense of Connection

Denmark is not and has not been a completely homogenous and white society as some myths about this tiny Nordic country claim. Europeans who have immigrated throughout history – e.g., from Germany, Holland, Russia, and the rest of Scandinavia – would become absorbed into the Danish population through assimilation, over generations, but importantly, changing modes of racialization. Historically, they have been able to more easily become Danish. This is in part through the reduction of intra-European difference and the construction of shared whiteness in contrast to Black and 'Oriental' 'others,' as mentioned in chapter 1. The coloniality of race in the 1960's Denmark, emphasizing the gaze in constructing and delineating racial difference, did not afford that same racial absorption into the Danish social landscape to a brown-skinned African descendant young person. When Anne shares her experiences of almost never seeing anyone else who looked like her, or generally other minority racialized people, this is a testament to the particular time where there would be very few brown-skinned people in the social landscape. If we remember Victor Cornelins and other Crucians who came to Denmark as students, sailors or maids, there would likely be some of their descendants around in the 1960's, although many chose to leave Denmark too. Cornelins himself had three children, for example. There would also have been other more random immigrants here and there, who came for studies or work, not immediately connected to Danish colonialism. All this to say that, at this point, while there would be an Afro-diasporic (and other visible minority) presence, there were not as such established *communities*. It was a scarce and scattered presence. And a presence that would often visually 'whiten' over a few generations, and thus disappear. This contributed to the experience that 'there was no one' or that it was truly an exception to meet someone who looked like you.

This brings us back to Anne's story, after the bit about the Black Circle Girl and the Inuit classmate: "...And then I think the first time I met another dark person was when we moved to Southern Jutland when my mother worked on a residential school [*efterskole*] for about a month, there was a Moroccan man there who also worked there… where we sort of *connectede* and my mother was also kind of, kind of, you know…?!" As I am listening to her tell the story, and from reading her non-verbal gestures, I do know what she is alluding to here. She goes on to explicate: "But there was nothing sexual in it, nothing! I think she [the mother] thought in *that* way; she did not at all think in the other way, right. So that was him." This tale contextualizes the beginning of the guest worker era, and marks an important shift, where laborers from places like Morocco, Turkey and Pakistan were invited to fill in for a shortage in the Danish labor force. As they settled in and their families joined sometime after, the Danish demographic would diversify visually in new ways. Up until the 1980's these groups would be identified as workers; *gæstearbjeder* [guest worker] or *fremmedarbejder* [foreign worker] being common descriptors (yet they would later become racist terms), as well as their respective nationalities (Yilmaz 2016). It was later, after significant shifts in the political discourse that, as Ferruh Yilmaz argues, 'the workers became Muslim' (2016).

Anne experienced a joy in connecting with a 'dark' adult, who she might have felt seen by in a different way than most white adults had been capable of. The Moroccan man and Anne *'connectede*,' as she says, 'danifying' the English word. Her mother, however, seemed to have sexualized the man and her daughter's connection with him, 'she thought in *that* way,' Anne reflects. 'She did not at all think in the other way, right,' suggesting that it did not cross her mother's mind that it might simply feel good for her brown-skinned child to connect with an adult she could see some of herself in. And who could see her. In the mother's worry, as Anne remembers it, a certain orientalist discourse might have shaped her imagination around this man, (hyper) sexualizing him through his racialization (Said 1979; Oxfeldt 2005). This is something that would become part of the xenophobic discourse later on, specifically for the figure of the 'immigrant man' as assumed rapist. This is Anne's story, and she shared her joy. But imagine for a moment what it would be like for a 'dark' Moroccan person to arrive in Denmark in late 1960's or 70's and then find work in rural Sønderjylland, of all places! It would be quite surprising and likely joyful to meet a little one who might look a bit like people back home.

Anne finishes up her short list of mirror memories: "And then there was one other in [small town in Northern Zealand], when I went to school there, we did not know each other…" The fact that she does not specify how this 'one other' is racialized, implicitly suggests that it was another one like her. The hyper awareness of another person who looked somewhat like her, too, is telling of the scarcity and scattered nature of Afro-descendants. This kind of awareness of 'one other', even if you do not know each other, is typical also for the following generations, particularly in more rural or suburban places like that town, in the northernmost part of the capital region. She goes on, and a smile spreads across her face: "Uh, and then [it was] not until I moved to Copenhagen in '86," she says, and laughs, "and then I have children with my first real mirroring, right, and who becomes my introduction into that…the Black milieu." That is, she met a mixed-race man of white Danish and African American descent, in whom she saw herself and he saw her too. And the network he had, family and friends, opened new possibilities of connection, importantly for her, creating her own family and having offspring who looked similar to her, in all their diversity.[51]

Anne's exposure to racialized 'others' during her upbringing is an excellent picture of what Denmark looked like in the post-war decades. Her recollection also tells stories about place and time and the individual, momentary character of mirroring when it did happen. Even the fiction of mirroring, because the only African descendant woman she encountered was indeed a commercialized image, literally an advertisement. Despite it all, Anne seems to have had a strong sense of self in that she let herself feel and enjoy that which resonated. Her 'first and best friend', the Circle Girl, her 'first and only mirroring,' and later in her young adult years, meeting and creating a family with her 'first real mirroring:' a new kind of first because he was a real person, not an illustration. Anne has let herself be guided towards that which, and those who, affirmed her. For Anne, the problem of her story of adoption is the racist aspect. This underscores the degree to which adoption in Denmark almost automatically refers to *international* or *transnational* adoption and that this equals *transracial adoptions* – implicitly, by white Danish adoptants. It is in this reality and discourse where the minority racialized embodiment becomes a constant signifier of

[51] The significance of birthing children who look like you, as a mixed-race Black adoptee, is beyond my imagination. While my theoretical focus is on racial mirroring in society or the lack thereof, it is also my privilege relative to Black Danish adoptees to choose this focus. Admittedly, I have taken for granted actually *resembling* my family members, on both sides of my parentage. Thus, my personal reproductive choices have had lower stakes in this regard. My siblings were my immediate mirrors. I recognize that when I write about 'seeing oneself' in somebody else it might mean something vastly different for adoptees than non-adoptees. Having biological children can be radical. This is one of my limitations from my positionality.

the adoptee status, it is not the adoption in itself. The adoption becomes the 'explanation' for this specific experience of being constructed as out of place. However, the racializing assemblage that constructs the mixed-Black and Black transnational adoptee subject in the white European intimate sphere is unique. While this positionality has significant overlaps with other Black and adopted minorities, its specificities merit that it be researched as such. Yet, the conditioning in Black racial isolation, again, appears as a defining characteristic for this generation and iteration of Black Danes. I let Anne have the last word:

> "...[M]ore than the fact of being adopted it is rather about being different – to be brown in Denmark and not have anyone to reflect yourself in. That is actually the essence, I think. I can bear to have grown up with another woman than the one who gave birth to me, but I have not had anyone to reflect myself in and have not been accommodated in that, so that is actually what is of importance, I think… [...] [I] think that if I had had somebody to mirror myself in, next to me, then I could have been a little more whole, or have had something that I have missed, right. That would have been valuable, in any case, I could have used that…"[52]

[52] …[M]ere end det at være adopteret, så er det mere det at være anderledes – at være brun i Danmark og ikke have nogen at spejle sig i. Det er egentlig essensen, synes jeg. Jeg kan godt bære at være vokset op med en anden kvinde end den kvinde der har født mig, men jeg har ikke haft nogen at spejle mig i og er ikke blevet mødt i det, så det er egentlig det der er det vigtige synes jeg… [...] [J]eg tænker, at hvis jeg havde haft nogen at spejle mig i, ved siden af, så havde jeg kunne være bare lidt mere hel eller haft noget som jeg har savnet, ik. Det havde været værdifuldt i hvert fald, det kunne jeg godt havde brugt…"

Chapter 3. All the Danes are White, all the 'Browns' are Immigrants, but some of Us Are Brave[53]

This chapter illuminates various experiences of in-betweenness and complicated belonging across space and place. The primary school arose as a theme from consistently being discussed by more or less every single person I spoke with. Each time unprompted. It makes good sense; besides kindergarten, primary school represents significant experiences of secondary socialization. For example, a lot of first-time realizations of social categories happen there as they would operate in relationships across the classroom community. From the testimonies below, a few interrelated subthemes occur: One is the expressions of dominant Danish everyday discourses on 'us' and 'them.' The entangled and overlapping uses of 'ethnicity', 'nationality', 'culture' that people have navigated growing up give a good insight into post-racial Danish terminology of 'difference' as it relates to national belonging.

Another subtheme is how they navigate their position in the social network. As I speak with people who are either born in Denmark or raised there since they were under five years old, the hegemony of an 'immigration and integration' discourse is unrelatable to them. They all know that they are not 'the immigrant other.' Here, a lack of both an affirmative racial terminology and collective consciousness becomes apparent. There is no simple and clear legitimate way to express their social (racial) position. Not without 'race'. In our dialogue, they develop language to name both what they are not: immigrants, and what they are experiencing: embodied blackness.

A third and overarching theme, as in previous chapters, is being isolated with these experiences. Everybody I spoke to has been, or are still in some contexts, 'the only one.' They have therefore had to figure out how to navigate the racialized and discursive language largely on their own. Coping mechanisms include narratives that make the lived reality bearable and a sense of self coherent, however, these narratives do not always match their actual lived experiences. Dissociation and splitting appear as subconscious survival strategies. Across the various modalities of exclusion experienced by Danish African descendants, I identify *Black racial isolation* as a key concept for the ideological, societal, and interpersonal conditions shaping African diasporic subjectivity.

As in the previous chapters, the emphatic adverb *jo* is used throughout the interviews conducted in Danish, and I leave the word untranslated. It is used in sentences emphasizing the (assumed) common knowledge or even obviousness of a statement. In this context it functions by binding us together and creating a sense of group knowledge.

PART I: THE DANISH 'FOLK SCHOOL' AS SITE OF EVERYDAY RACISM

A highly institutionalized welfare society, childcare and schooling take up a considerable amount of most children's lives. Memories from kindergarten or primary school therefore are places of secondary socialization that, for smaller children, often represent more of their awake hours than

[53] As mentioned in the introduction, this is a play with the title *All the Women are White, All the Black are Men, But Some of Us are Brave* (Bell-Scott, Hull, and Smith 1982).

what they spend at home with their caretakers. It is therefore appropriate to invoke the theoretical notion *everyday racism* coined by Philomena Essed (1984; 1991). The role of public school in Denmark carries a particular connotation in relation to nationhood and the state. Formally established and systematized in 1814, *folkeskolen* [the People's School], connotes the ideal of the Danish public school as a general education, or rather edification, of the Danish people or *folk.* This task became the legal and financial responsibility of the state, and the goals were to educate Christian citizens, loyal to the King before the present-day constitutional monarchy.[54] Today, public primary education is mandatory through ninth grade and free for all. The core values around edification [*dannelse*] are still central to how the purpose of *folkeskolen* is understood; fundamentally as a main site of forming well-rounded national Danish identities. The purpose of the people's school, in the law reads: "The People's School shall prepare the pupils for participation, co-responsibility, rights and duties in a society with liberty and people's government [*folkestyre*]. The school's function shall therefore be characterized by freedom of spirit [*åndsfrihed*] and democracy."[55] Despite its claim to both secularism and 'freedom of spirit', Protestant Christianity undergirds the many traditions and holidays throughout the school year which are largely taken for granted as being cultural rather than religious (Khawaja 2014b). The Danish public school, then, is not merely built as a site of learning but ideally a site of fostering national belonging and social cohesion across the population. Therefore, it is a contested terrain for 'integration' of so-called *to-sprogede* [bilingual] children. In the context of integration discourse, *bilingual* is a negatively loaded and racializing term in Danish (Gilliam and Gulløv 2017). Children who have immigrated to Denmark or are children of parents who have, have often been categorized as immigrants themselves. However, only certain immigrant backgrounds and family constellations are counted in the census categorizations generating incessant enumeration of 'generations' of immigrants (who have never immigrated). These are people classified as *non-Western*, and the more recent MENAP and Turkey-category[56].

It is in this context that Black Danish's people's experiences of *folkeskolen* are framed. In a space that is imagined as tying the youngest members of a nation together in all their diversity and, at the same time, it is a specific context where certain types of diversity are amplified and labeled: *immigrants* and those who need to be *integrated*. Here, limitations of the 'immigration and integration' framework show up in several ways.

First and foremost, this conceptualization of difference constructs homogenizing generalizations of all (non-Western) immigrants, lumping them into one group. This includes what is arguably a mis-categorization of children who are born and raised in Denmark yet labeled as 'descendants of immigrants' tying them to a connotation of *arrival*. This is the effect of nationality granted according to *ius sanguinis,* that is by descent or, literally, blood: you have to have descended from the Danish *folk* to be part of it, is the rationale. Thus, a child born to Danish citizens abroad will be entitled to Danish nationality as a birthright until their 22nd year, whereas a child born and raised in Denmark by two parents with other citizenship than Danish or Nordic[57] citizenship will not automatically get Danish citizenship; they have to apply for it. For comparison, a handful of European countries follow *ius soli,* which grants nationality to an individual born in the national territory, irrespective of their parent's nationality (or 'blood'). The Danish

[54] Nationalmuseet. https://natmus.dk/historisk-viden/danmark/nationalstaten-1849-1915/faedreland-og-folkeliv/almueskolen/
[55] Bekendtgørelse af lov om folkeskolen, Ch 1, paragraph 1, stk 3. https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2020/1396
[56] As in English the abbreviation stands for Middle Easter, North Africa and Pakistan with the addition of Turkey. This grouping is meant to capture majority Muslim regions and nations.
[57] Including Nordic citizenship, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian, and Swedish.

naturalization laws thus create an administrative obstacle and a discrepancy between a group of people's upbringings in Denmark and their possibility of full citizenship there.

Next, these labels create invisibilization and homogenization of other immigrant groups. That is, through the discursive hyper focus on non-Western immigrants, the term 'immigrant' is used as synonymous with the non-Western which, in turn, has come to be a proxy for Muslimness and Muslims (Hassani 2020). In 2021 14% of the population was immigrants and descendants, of which 58% were so-called non-Western[58]. That is about 8% of the entire Danish population. Considering the political and media hyper representation of 'immigrants,' it can be surprising to learn that this demographic is actually so small. The other 42% of the immigrated population, 'Western' immigrants, who make up about 6 % of the Danish demographic, get no particular media or political attention whatsoever. This suggests that neither immigration itself nor foreign nationality as such is understood as inherently problematic. Rather, while some nationalities are imagined as 'foreign', others are imagined as 'familiar', or at least familiar *enough* to be compatible with dominating ideas of Denmark and Danishness. This further suggests that the construction of 'non-Western' is a placeholder for whatever is imagined as inherently problematic. We can observe this imagination applied when descendants of immigrants, that is, people born and raised in Denmark, only are constructed as somehow outside of the Danish national community when their parents are categorized as non-Western. The outsider status is constructed as if it is an innate characteristic and 'naturally' passed on through generations.

Lastly, but importantly, this discourse invisibilizes the specific challenges experienced by children who face racial discrimination but who might *not* be categorized as 'second generation immigrants' or *to-sprogede,* (bilingual) officially (Andreassen and Ahmed-Andresen 2014). Without explicitly racial terms, the construction of the West and the non-West is a racializing discourse (Hassani 2020; 2021). It is distinct from the 'Where Are You From' everyday discourse, yet the two overlap at times. This affects a variety of people with Danish citizenship and brown skin. Because of the way nationality and racialization gets confused across official as well as everyday Danish discourse, a large group of Danish citizens do not statistically get registered as ethno-racial minorities. Therefore, their data does not count in quantitative overviews of the population to show health, wealth, and general quality of life. In practice, however, Black and African descendants and other non-white Danish children *do* get treated as and assumed to be 'other' throughout their lives. As an example, one of my interlocutors, Naomi, told me about how her Black child was offered 'special help' with Danish language at a primary school. As she said, her daughter was perfectly bright and, needless to say, Danish is her first language. On the contrary, Naomi's white friend who recently moved to Denmark from Iceland had a son who was struggling in school due to his language barrier as a recent immigrant. He was white, though, and was therefore assumed to be capable, even when he was not. Or rather, he was assumed to be and speak Danish. The educators' assumptions of Naomi's daughter's foreignness or 'bilingualism' relied solely on her blackness (Kristjánsdottir and Timm 2007).

While systematic low expectations of children with actual immigrant backgrounds is worth problematizing in itself, racialized underestimation by teachers causes a particular alienation and confusion for kids like the above. It happens when people who are Danish experience themselves as Danish are categorized as 'foreigners,' and expected to perform below average. This is Nathalie:

> "I have *jo* never seen myself, really, as different – only what I got from others.
> So, of course, when you go to school, you are bullied because of your skin

[58] Danmarks Statistik (Statistics Denmark) (2022).

> color and the teachers scold… I mean, you are sort of looked at differently. In primary school it was kind of something else; in high school suddenly I became one of the immigrant girls and got bad grades with the other immigrant girls, or [girls] with a different ethnic background, right, where you were like…Uhm, okay? I mean…"[59]

In a country with master narratives that rejects racism as a social reality as well as a term, the public school presents a scene where racialized categorizations play out in concrete ways, such as the ways children are divided, even who are admitted or rejected. It demonstrates that, despite a claim to racelessness, visual racialization is a primary mode of differentiation among educators as well as pupils, expressed in a variety of ways. Danish minority racialized pupils' actual cultural groundedness and fluency is systematically ignored and erased. With this in mind, in which ways did school as a place of socialization shape people's sense of self? How did they understand their place in school?

That the Danish public school, or people's school, is a crucial site to research ethnic diversity in Denmark, is well known (Vertelyte and Staunæs 2021). In fact, an overwhelming amount of research on so-called ethnic discrimination has happened within scholarship on the Danish education system (Khawaja 2001; Kristjánsdottir and Timm 2007; Staunæs 2008; Gilliam 2009; Khawaja 2014a; Gilliam and Gulløv 2017; Horst 2017; Matthiesen 2017; Skadegård 2017; Gilliam 2018; Lagermann 2018). Some of the scholarship's most important contributions to research on race and racialization generally are identifications of notions of Danishness as white as a discursive norm (Andreassen and Ahmed-Andresen 2014; Skadegård and Jensen 2018; Khawaja 2022b). It has also offered valuable articulations of racial discrimination as structural and systemic, rather than individual and interpersonal (Skadegård 2017). There are varied understandings of the term ethnicity and its relation to the notion of race; they are often used as interchangeable, although ethnicity dominates. However, ethnicity too becomes a placeholder for race in some literature. When I listened to my interlocutors situate themselves and their lineage, some would mention a nation, and some would also mention their ethnic group. Their lived experience of racial discrimination, however, is antiblackness. The majority Danish population has no literacy to tell apart ethnic groups from a given African region. Research would therefore be more precise if analytical terms were used specifically as they relate to racialization, self-identified ethnic affiliations and their entanglements.

In Danish research on racial discrimination more generally, there is a remarkable interchanging and lax use of terms: 'minority', 'ethnicity,' 'race,' and 'culture' as causing difference and 'Muslim,' 'bilingual,' 'immigrant,' 'descendant,' 'second generation immigrant,' and simply 'foreigners' as designations to subjects hailed as difference from the imagined Danish community: largely all non-white people (Khawaja 2001; Anderson 2005; Skadegård and Jensen 2018; Lagerman 2019; Vertelyte and Staunæs 2021). The still prevalent avoidance of engagement with actually *analyzing* race and racialization, even among critical scholars writing from within these positions of lived experience, generates new norms and analytical centers. For example, the dominating discourse of a national 'us' and foreign 'them' has deep connotations of a 'Muslim other.' In researching the construction of this prototypical 'other,' 'Muslimness' is often reproduced

[59] "Jeg har jo aldrig set mig selv, rigtigt, som anderledes – kun fra hvad jeg har fået fra andre. Så selvfølgelig, når man går i skole, så bliver man mobbet på grund af sin hudfarve og lærerne skælder… altså man bliver ligesom set på anderledes. I de små klasser var det lidt noget andet; i gymnasiet der var jeg *pludselig* en af indvandrerpigerne der fik lave karakterer med de andre indvandrerpiger, eller med anden etnisk baggrund i klassen, ik, hvor man sådan… øhm, okay? Altså…"

with assumptions of some unspecified but implicitly racial 'Middle Easterness' or 'Arabness' – implicitly non-Black Muslimness (Khawaja 2010; Hassani 2021). But how are these Muslims racialized exactly? Afterall, this is a huge global faith community. Unspecified definitions of terminology invisibilizes the vastness of racialized 'others' and the Muslims who are not also racialized as 'Arab,' specifically the coexistence of categorization as Muslim *and* Black (Diallo 2011). At the same time as there is a fixation on the 'Muslim', the use of 'minority' and 'majority' also lumps the diverse national, ethnic, racial, and religious minorities together, across origins, relation to the state, and generation (Khawaja 2001; Lagerman 2019). But most importantly, the minority/majority dichotomy creates an analytical center in the majority, in white Danishness as norm – regardless of intentions to avoid it. Inequality in Denmark is thus constructed and maintained as a binary between the so-called majority and everybody else. The specificities of modes of racialization that target some groups, but not others, are then left unidentified in this type of analysis. Including the unequal power relationships within and across racially marginalized groups, including who is legible as an authentic and proper minority subject. The realities of people racialized as Roma, Greenlandic Inuit, Black Afro-descendant, African in general and Somali in particular, get lost in generalizing terminologies such as 'minority.' Embodiment is central to critical analysis of race, but even more so is precision and historical contextualization (Myong 2009; O.-K. Diallo 2019). Scholarship on racism in the Nordics is continuously primarily situated in a literal borderland in which questions of actual cultural and/or linguistic difference and actual migration from 'elsewhere' are determinant for the conceptualization of racialization. As I will illustrate, an analysis of *antiblackness* is necessary to identify the racializing modalities at play in the lives of Black Afro-descendants in and *of* Denmark. Those who are almost too Danish for their own good.

Being the Only One

We begin by listening to Faith, a Black woman in her mid 30's. Raised in Denmark from age 2 by her Zambian mother with aunties and younger cousins around. Her father, who is Zambian too, did not come with them to Denmark. When her mother remarried to a white Danish man, Faith got a little brother. Faith is petite and has mahogany brown skin and black coily hair. She often wears it in long braids, twists, or straight weaves. Today she wears braids and a relaxed outfit. Having met her before in public, I noticed she is usually dressed fashionably and very much like a Copenhagener, a minimalist trendiness and sneaker friendly femininity.

Faith and I sat in her kitchen, in a great Nørrebro apartment. She is not from Copenhagen, though. And she has thoughts about conversations on racism in Copenhagen – in short, she thinks there is a tendency to dwell a bit too much on pain. She shared this in a public, online event that I had watched the recording of, so I asked her about it. After a bit of laughing and explaining why she had been so blunt that day, she goes on to share that whatever racism problems exist in Copenhagen, she does not let it bother her because they are nowhere near as bad as what she went through growing up in the countryside. So, before I pose my planned questions, she went ahead and set the frame for me:

> "I mean, I, I grew up in Sønderjylland [Southern Jutland] most of the time. And I have been the only Black for a very, very, very, very, *very,* very long time! And I have had…uhm, unbelievably many problems, both inwards and outwards by being the only one. I mean, when I think back to my public-school

> era, I am thinking *major* neglect!... I mean, neglect, neglect, neglect, neglect, neglect… I am thinking uh, I am thinking mornings crying because I did not feel like going to school; I am thinking, uh, god, how good that I left public school in 7th grade – and never came back again. Because…there was nobody who took me into consideration, there was nobody who, like… I mean, I don't think that it was me who was a problem, but there was just nobody who… at that time, at all, could handle…that I was different."[60]

Unprompted, Faith situates the realm of the public school as a place of alienation and pain as a Black person. And the only one. She understands the circumstance of being the only one as directly connected to the problems she has had 'both inwards and outwards.' From listening to her full story, this can be interpreted as the emotional and psychological effects as the inner experiences and social relationships as the external issues. Her first association with public school is neglect. Going to school was dreadful for her to the extent that she would sometimes cry before even being there, and she expresses relief that she left it in seventh grade 'and never came back again.'

Setting the scene of her childhood like this, she reflects both on the space of public school as such *and* the specific local context. Southern Jutland is predominantly rural and represents Denmark's leading agricultural counties. Its largest town, Sønderborg, had less than 30.000 inhabitants in the 1990's when Faith grew up in the region. She gives some more context for this: "Before we moved to Southern Jutland, we lived in Odense. At that time, Odense was diverse [*mangfoldigt*] compared to a little town [*lille flække*] in Southern Jutland, so in a way it was a shock for me to suddenly land in a place where I was called *neger* [negro] from I began till I left public school, I mean…" It becomes apparent how place matters for her sense of belonging. Odense is the fourth largest city in Denmark and, at the time, part of Funen County (the country has since been regrouped into regions rather than counties). Although similar in area size, and with a little over 12.000 'foreign citizens' in Funen County all together, it had twice as many as the total of Southern Jutland County in 1993, when Faith would have been about to start school.[61] Citizenship status, however, leaves questions open as to the racial makeup of these demographics. Within the entire population of foreign citizens in Denmark at the time, 9461 individuals were categorized under 'Africa', a category that is not defined further. It could therefore include (North and South) Africans who are not also typically perceived as Black in this context.

With the general tendency of foreigners settling in the capital area, and then in the bigger towns, it is not hard to believe that Faith would have been 'the only one' in most settings, in a small, rural place in the 1990's Denmark. And while the category of Africans was one of the smaller foreigner groups, just living in a place with a general racial diversity in Odense, did mean something to Faith. She blended in more. Therefore, both the lack of diversity, being the only Black child, and the blatant racism of the small-town inhabitants was shocking.

Faith experienced a huge weight of being the only child who was 'different' as well as having to cope with her emotions by herself:

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[60] "Altså jeg, jeg er vokset op i Sønderjylland det meste af tiden. Og jeg har været den eneste sorte i meget, meget, meget, meget, *meget*, meget lang tid! Og jeg har haft… øh, utroligt mange problemer, både indadtil og udadtil ved at være den eneste. Altså, når jeg tænker tilbage på min folkeskoletid, så tænker jeg *kæmpe* svigt!… Altså svigt, svigt, svigt, svigt, svigt… Jeg tænker øh, jeg tænker morgener hvor jeg har grædt fordi jeg ikke har haft lyst til at komme i skole; jeg tænker, øh, gud hvor var det godt at jeg forlod folkeskolen i 7. klasse – og aldrig kom tilbage igen. Fordi… der var ikke nogen der tog hensyn til mig eller, der var ikke nogen som så'n… Altså jeg vil ik' sige at det var mig der var et problem, men der var bare ingen der… på dét tidspunkt, overhovedet, kunne håndtere… at jeg var anderledes."

[61] Danmarks Statistik (1993).

> "There was no one who listened or understood why I was extremely angry and sad as a child and teenager; why I was not thriving, but I just feel like, it is probably you, at some point, become fundamentally tired [*'grundtræt'*] from always […] not knowing where your classmates stand… I mean, you become extremely insecure… I mean, like, when I think back, I have *jo* had an enormous amount of anxiety, because I could not rely on people at all, I mean…"[62]

While Faith does not go into detail with a lot of different examples, she has already made it clear that her classmates bullied her in specifically antiblack racist ways all throughout her primary school years. And the ones who she thought were her friends, well, they were complicit in different ways. This what Grada Kilomba (2010) calls *racial triangulation: "*the consensus of the *white* audience observing the performance" (p. 98). By participating, by staying silent, by not coming to her defense, they consented. Faith did not know where they stood – they could change in any moment from alleged friends to bystanders or worse.

The two aspects here, racist aggressions *and* lack of solidarity, resulted in what Faith calls a state of becoming fundamentally tired: *grundtræt*; tired in your foundation or core, tired as your default. The circumstances of being continuously discriminated against and attacked by others, and having to develop strategies to cope, is burdensome and a type of emotional stress (Polanco-Roman, Danies, and Anglin 2016; Khawaja 2022a; Hargons et al. 2022). Carrying this alone and not knowing if or when classmates will turn against you or silently let bullying happen, does sound anxiety inducing. While Faith's mother likely had her own struggles as a Zambian woman in Denmark, Faith felt that she dealt with racism herself. She does not remember them discussing it at home. Her mother has since passed away, but Faith mentioned conversations with her maternal aunt about racism in Denmark, where she lives as well. For her aunt, caring about racism is a privilege afforded Faith's generation. The adult, immigrated generation had other worries, such as building a life, taking care of their children, and going to work. Faith paraphrases her aunt saying that they did not have time to worry about the racists they were caring for working in the nursing homes. They had more pressing problems, she said.

From a different interview, another child of an African immigrant mother and a white Danish father, Amanda, adds a supplementing perspective: "They have *jo* grown up in a place where other people are Black, so they *jo* do not reflect on racism. It is *jo* not until you go to another country [...] where you are [a] minority that racism, the racism that whites commit, or everybody else commit, against Black [people], is relevant."[63] The experience of being a numerical majority has given these African mothers different priorities as immigrants but also an entirely different social orientation. Amanda's analysis echoes relational notions of becoming aware of racism or even *becoming Black* upon arrival in Europe*,* touched upon in chapter one (Fanon 1961; Cornelins 1976; Glissant 1997; Hall 1998). Besides concrete daily economic priorities, this is in part due to not having had to construct themselves up against "a stark white background" (Hurston 1979, 154), navigating racism as a default, but also, as Philomena Essed (1991a) points out, often due to a colonial education, be it British, French or other "unfinished imperial sagas" tainting socialization

[62] "Der var ikke nogen der lyttede til eller forstod hvorfor jeg var enormt vred og ked af det som barn og teenager; hvorfor jeg ikke trivedes, men hvor jeg bare har det sådan, det er jo nok fordi at man på et tidspunkt bliver grundtræt ved hele tiden [at ens,] at man ikke ved hvor man har ens klassekammerater henne… Altså man bliver enormt usikker… Altså så'n når jeg tænker tilbage, jeg har jo haft enormt meget angst, for jeg har ikke vidst hvor jeg har haft folk overhovedet, altså…"

[63] De er jo vokset op et sted hvor andre er sorte, så de forholder sig jo ikke til racisme. Det er jo først når man kommer til et land der er, hvor man er minoritet, at racismen, den racisme som hvide begår eller andre begår mod sorte er relevant. As a result, adults who could have understood Faith were not sensitive or attentive to the way racist bullying deeply affected her.

in their countries of origin (Odumosu 2016, n.a.). The African mothers appear less aware of racism and their Danish-African children's burden of navigating racial exclusion in a place *they* call home. Effectively, this left Faith alone with her racially and generationally specific experiences.

Faith uses the word *anxiety* as she thinks back at her child experiences with her adult perspective. This fundamental fatigue from endless attacks and neglect that shaped her childhood, made her lose faith in people. She explains how it was a turning point for her to begin at a residential school [*efterskole*] after 7th grade…

> "…and to be in a place, in an environment where I was just received as who I was. And it wasn't even like there were that many brown [people] – I think it was only me and one other – but I was not *met* in the same way [as in public school]. There was another spaciousness [*rummelighed*]. And it wasn't even like it was in Zealand, it was still in Jutland and…and it was like that in high school too…and I just think that I, after that, then uhm…then maybe I got the faith in people back."[64]

Again, location becomes part of the way Faith makes sense of her experiences. In this case, it becomes a surprise and an exception from the rule, that she could be received as who she was, *even in* Jutland. In this perception, Zealand, the island of the capital region, is understood as representing a more progressive, less racist culture, while Jutland is expected to be a racist place. This is a common perception of the center and periphery of Denmark. The usage of *rummelighed* which I have initially translated as spaciousness actually connotes tolerance or open mindedness in Danish. For certain residential schools (grades 8th through 10th) and the Danish 'folk high school' [*folkehøjskole*] for adults, the ideal of edification [*dannelse*] is emphasized. These types of schools are imagined as free(er) lifelong learning and creative spaces, including making *room* for social diversity, for example through international foci and exchange programs.

One of my other interlocutors, Rose, is in fact a teacher at a folk high school. Realizing how she is targeted simultaneously by racism *and* sexism, as a mixed-race Black woman, she sometimes speaks about this in the teachers' lounge: "[I]n a way I am hit doubly, I mean I am both a woman and then I am brown on top of that. And *that* is provocative to say when you are a (folk) high school teacher, because it is supposed to be this spacious [*rummelige*] environment and 'everybody can be here and everybody has the politically correct opinions' and so on. They are extremely provoked when I point out that I still think there are some things that are not entirely okay [...]."[65] With a bit of irony in her voice, Rose explained the righteous ideal of the folk high school and its commonsense reputation characterized by *rummelighed* – politically correct, tolerant and *not* racist or sexist. Yet, her merely naming the interlaced oppressions she is personally aware of, as a 'brown' woman, seems to mark the limit of the tolerable. In this way, the self-image of certain types of schools as representing a liberal and tolerant culture mirrors dominating narratives of Denmark as an enclosed, small, progressive environment. And similarly, as in the

[64] "…og være et sted i et miljø hvor jeg bare blev taget imod som den jeg var. Og det var ikke engang fordi at der var særligt mange brune – jeg tror kun der var mig og en anden – men jeg blev ikke mødt på samme måde. Der var en anden rummelighed. Og det var ikke engang fordi at det var på Sjælland, det var stadig i Jylland og…og sådan var det så også på gymnasiet… og så tror jeg bare at så, efter dét, så øhm… så har jeg måske fået troen tilbage på mennesker."

[65] "jeg er da på en eller anden måde dobbelt ramt, altså jeg er både kvinde og så er også jeg brun oveni. Og dét er provokerende at sige når man er højskolelærer, fordi at det skal være det der rummelige miljø og alle kan jo være her og alle har de politisk korrekte holdninger og sådan noget. De bliver vildt provokerede når jeg peger på jeg synes stadig der er nogle ting der ikke er helt ok [...]."

national public debate simply naming existing inequalities is treated as more provoking than the actual inequalities (Essed and Hoving 2014; Wekker 2016; Habel 2018).

Nevertheless, for Faith, the particular site of her residential school proved to be a saf*er* place with enough 'spaciousness' in comparison to her previous, default experience of Jutland. After several better social experiences, her expectation of neglect was slowly changed, and she started to believe that not all people are like that. Throughout, the way she makes sense of racism is rather localized and having to do with the people in certain spaces or areas. While Copenhagen is not free of oppression, she admits, for now, this is a much better place to be (Black).

Antiblack Bullying in the 1990's: "Nobody Knew Anything!"

A common experience besides being bullied due to your blackness by other children, is the teacher's participation and/or complete ignorance of how to take care of Black children in their classroom. It is a central part of experiencing neglect, when adults that you turn to as a child, do not protect you from racism. Faith shares a few scenarios from school and being Black in public space:

> "…the worst part was that thing with public school girlfriends who are like, you know, they didn't *jo* know what to say; the teachers didn't know what to say, nobody knew anything! And also just like regular uhm, what do you call it, adults who also commented, old ladies who had to come and touch me because 'aw, a little Black child,' and things like that… Nobody knew anything…"[66]

Part of the complexities here were that, to this day, racism is not understood *as* racism by majority white Danes, including schoolteachers. Several of my interlocutors had stories like this. Leylo, a daughter of two Somali parents and about a decade younger than Faith, grew up in a small rural town too. She shared how her siblings and her became the targets of recess harassment, for instance being attacked with snow in the winter. This is a physically violent and freezingly wet assault well known to anyone growing up in the Nordics. It was always *them*, she said, because they were *so* visible, "just *so* Black, everybody else was white:"

> "...And then I remember one time I went to one of my pedagogues, who was very kind and with whom I had a good relationship, and I said to him that 'they are calling me *neger* [negro] and they are saying these things to me'… And then he was just like, in all seriousness he tries to comfort me and then says: 'But, Leylo, you *are jo* [a] *neger*!'... Right?... [...] he tries to say to me that I have to *own* it in some way, but as a 9-year-old, I do not *jo* understand it, right. Because I do not have language for it, but what I am trying to say to him is 'the others are excluding me and making fun of me', right… And it is not this thing about this one specific word, but this thing about 'why do I have to be alienated', right…"[67]

[66] "… det værste har været det dér med folkeskoleveninderne som er sådan du ved, de vidste jo ikke hvad de skulle sige; lærerne vidst ikke hvad de skulle sige, der var ikke nogen der vidste noget som helst! Og også bare sådan almindelig øh, hvad kan man sige, voksne mennesker som også kom med kommentarer, gamle damer der skulle hen at røre ved mig, fordi 'uha sådan et lille sort barn', og så'noget… der var ikke nogen der vidste noget…"

[67] "…Og så kan jeg huske at jeg engang gik til en af mine pædagoger, som var rigtig sød og jeg havde et godt forhold til, og så sagde jeg så'n til ham at 'de kalder mig neger og de siger de her ting til mig… Og så var han bare så'n – helt seriøst prøver at

As children, people felt powerless, hearing the crude echo of what they had just shared was harmful to them; being called *neger.* The complete dismissal of their worry and sadness from the adults in charge, can aptly be described as neglect, as Faith did. Here, the Danish racial discourse in its 1990's version shows the teachers' unawareness of the specificity of racist bullying and what it was like being called *neger*, or any other slur, as a Black Danish child. What is particular, is how it is not just the insult that is dismissed, but the very word *neger as insult*. Saying 'but you *are jo* a *neger*' reduces the word to a neutral descriptor whereas it is utilized as a denigration (Opitz, Oguntoye, and Schultz 1992; Habel 2008; Kilomba 2010). This was Leylo's point above; the way the word is put to work and its effects: alienation and dehumanization. The teacher confuses the reality of Leylo's blackness with being called a negro, stating that is what she objectively *is.* This reduction is an articulation of Eurocentrism, the cultural racism which is the status quo, and centers white Danish definitions of social reality *as* reality (Essed 1991). What should be the point in the context of the Danish public school, is that a child is verbally assaulted and sad and comes to an adult for help. But experiencing these types of dismissals, the message to the children was that there is no problem here, that those who were calling them a *neger* was essentially right, and no harm was done. This illustrates the ahistorical and racially illiterate commonsense culture and discourse in Denmark and its everyday articulations: repetitions of the assumed tolerance and innocence of white Danes and Danish society (Essed 1991; Habel 2008; 2011; Essed and Hoving 2014; Wekker 2016). The result is neglect and escalation of racist harm.

Most of my interlocutors experienced these types of things alone, or, in some cases, would have a sibling or know a few others in the entire school who they *might* be able to speak with. Experiencing a lack of 'language for it', as Leylo shared, therefore illuminated the particular situation of first generation Black Danish youth, situated between unaware migrant parents and ignorant, harmful white Danish adults. Let us remember that for many, white ignorant adults are also their relatives, and often only (available) parents; then there is no refuge from racism. A search for language is a common theme across experiences of blackness in the Nordic region (Adeniji 2016; Diallo 2022) and Europe more broadly (Wekker 2009). I will return to languagelessness in the second part of this chapter. Being isolated on several levels, more often than not, Black Danish youth kept their experiences to themselves, and many did not even share with their families at home. As a consequence, many slowly internalized the sentiment that (undefined) racism only happened to them and that something must be wrong with them, personally (Habel 2008).

Everyday Racism in Racial Isolation

Faith's childhood paints a picture of circumstances that characterizes growing up Black in Denmark in the 1990's. Racial isolation has been the default for many Black Danish children and bullying or other forms of othering has been the rule, rather than the exception. The ways racism is experienced in racial isolation creates multiple layers of harm, different from racism experienced collectively. First, there is the fact of being constructed as different, and mistreated due to that difference, and not having anyone around who may go through something similar and understand. This can be experienced as gaslighting. In principle, solidarity and support is not dependent on sharing the exact same experiences as someone who is oppressed. But in practice, the white

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trøste mig og siger så'n: 'Jamen Leylo, du er jo en neger'!... Ik'... Ja, hvor han prøver at sige til mig at jeg skal own det på en eller anden måde, men som 9-årig så forstår jeg det jo ikke, ik'. Fordi jeg har ikke sprog for det, men det jeg prøver at sige til ham er 'de andre de holder mig ude' og gør grin med mig, ik'... Og det er ik specifikt det hér med det hér ene ord, men det her med, hvorfor skal jeg fremmedgøres, ik'..."

classmates did not defend Faith, they were all kids and 'nobody knew anything' about racism. This is a second aspect of racial isolation; the insecurity of not knowing if you can trust your – majority white – school friends to have your back; the racial triangulation, their silent consent. Faith connected this to anxiety. And a third characteristic of racial isolation is the neglect by the adults, and essentially the educational institutions. The lack of anti-racist awareness among teachers made them incompetent in identifying racism and possibly holding bullies – and themselves – accountable. It made them incapable of acknowledging, let alone comforting, the Black children. The stakes are higher than the racial triangulation of peers: on an interpersonal level, the adults are expected to protect the children, but do the opposite, which produces a sense of powerlessness. Importantly, it is an ongoing problem in Denmark and Danish educational institutions, and it does not by any means pertain solely to the past.

The typical racial isolation is specifically characterized by an encapsulation in racial whiteness. However, Faith explains that in another majority white context, the residential school, she felt significantly better, as there was more 'spaciousness' and she slowly started trusting people. Being the only one was still the reality, however. Even in settings that are not explicitly violent, 'being the only one' presents a kind of existential compromise that echoes across the stories of Black Danes across generations. But because being the only one has been the default for so many, a lot of people do not even imagine an alternative: shared experiences, togetherness, to be seen and understood – *not* being alienated. Most people I spoke with are as isolated today as they were in their childhood. For others it has changed organically, and they have some Black friends, while some have actively sought out friends, they could see themselves in.

For Faith, having friends who she related to *including* through shared racialized experiences happened in young adulthood. Before that, she had only one childhood friend, but they grew apart. "So, no, it is *jo* not until I moved to Copenhagen that I began to have Black friends who I chose *myself* and not just some of my mom's friends' kids who you have been forced to play with or something…"[68] While she appreciated making good friends who were white after the harsh primary school years – friends that she feels she can speak with about issues of racism – she is also cognizant of the limitations:

> "…But I am also 100% aware that they don't understand it, I mean, they just never understand it 100%. I can't say, like, 'oh, you know?'… they are like 'hmmm, maybe we saw that in a movie' or maybe I have told them before or something like that…[…] That said, I am also *extremely* happy that I have made friends who are Black or have another ethnicity [than Danish] because ultimately it is just much easier to be able to say 'you know what I mean?' and then they just say yes. And you almost don't need to say anything else. And there is *jo* a safety in that, I think."[69]

Throughout, Faith uses the words 'safe' and 'unsafe' in relation to her experiences in social spaces, namely the different schools. For example, how she "felt unsafe *right away*" visiting her hometown, where she had gone to primary school, after she had left for residential school. And

[68] "Så nej, så det er jo først da jeg flyttede til København at jeg begyndte at have sorte venner som jeg selv har valgt og ikke bare nogle af min mors venners børn, hvor man bare var blevet tvunget til at leget sammen eller sådan."

[69] "Men jeg er også 100% bevidst om at de forstår det ikke, altså de forstår det bare aldrig 100%... Jeg kan ikke sige sådan 'ej, kender i det'?... de er sådan hmm, måske har vi set det i en film eller måske har jeg fortalt det før eller et eller andet... Når det er sagt, så er jeg også enormt glad for at jeg så også har fået venner som er sorte eller har en anden etnicitet, fordi det er også i sidste ende meget nemmere at skulle sige 'kender du det?' og de kan bare sige ja. Og man behøver nærmest ikke at sige mere. Og der er jo også en tryghed i det, synes jeg."

soon enough that feeling was confirmed: "And I remember at some point, uh, someone from my class walks by me and then [says] 'what the hell are you doing here you Black pig!' And then I was like, did I go back home for *this*? I mean, I could have been home on the couch watching movies or something, just relaxing… and then I am back home, and this is one of the first things I am called. And the rest of the evening I did not feel safe [...]"[70]

The experience is both violent and self-affirming. Intuitively, Faith had already doubted whether to go out but gave her childhood town and schoolmates yet another chance – she showed them mercy, she said [*forbarmede sig over dem*]. The abusive relationship and unequal power dynamic is emphasized in the way Faith chose to stretch herself and extend the benefit of the doubt to a place and people from her childhood. She did this despite years of harm and her lived experiences telling her it was unsafe. She reflected on the cost of energy for her and how she could have been relaxing at home, instead of exposing herself to *this* – all too familiar antiblack, racist verbal assault.

Here, it can be useful to summarize Faith's story through the lens of Philomena Essed's (1984; 1991a) notion of *everyday racism* and Black women's *comprehension* of everyday racism. Essed defines everyday racism as a concept "...which connects structural forces of racism with routine situations in everyday life. It links ideological dimensions of racism with daily attitudes and interprets the reproduction of racism in terms of the experience of it in everyday life" (1991a, 2). She distinguishes between two main modes of racism knowledge acquisition, namely by direct or indirect information. Where the direct mode is via explicit teaching or communication about the issue of racism, the indirect mode is characterized as lived experiences of racist episodes as source of knowledge. Notably, Essed argues that lived experience alone does not necessarily lead to Black women's comprehension of racism *as* racism and the development of *explanatory theories.* Throughout, Faith was quite explicit in connecting her childhood trauma to the fact of being the only Black child. She constructed a knowledge about racism from repeated and continuous experiences of racist episodes, which is a characteristic of everyday racism (Essed 1991; Kilomba 2010). Racism surpasses time both through traumatic memories (or simply trauma) and in the accumulation of new, but similar, experiences.

In this way, Faith is well aware that what she has been exposed to *is* racist. However, she develops a logic of understanding her experiences as significantly tied to *place,* implicitly a dichotomous notion of Denmark's cultural center and margin; the (relatively) progressive city vis à vis the backwards rural areas. With Essed's theory, Faith seemingly develops an explanatory concept of knowledge taking a *cultural* approach to racism, similar to the women in the Netherlands that Essed studied: "The basic explanatory concept in their knowledge structures seems to be *attitude* or *ignorance* (about racism in the Netherlands). This confirms that their explanatory knowledge of racism draws substantially on the dominant view of racism as a problem of misinformation" (Essed 1991, 111). It is within this binary scheme that the positive experience of 'spacious' white Danes in the residential school in Jutland is represented as an exception from the rule: they were less ignorant, despite the rural location. Additionally, she hints toward a temporal gap of comprehension of racism as well: She willingly identifies racist trauma in her past but does not want to engage actively in speaking about racism (anymore) in her present. This was essentially what she had shared in the online event and what I asked her about as we began our

[70] "Og så kan jeg huske på et tidspunkt så øh, én fra min.. som jeg gik i klasse med, han går forbi mig og så sådan 'hvad fanden laver du hér, dit sorte svin!' Og så var jeg sådan er jeg taget hjem for det her? Altså, jeg kunne ligge hjemme og se film eller et eller andet andet, bare slappe af…og så er jeg hjemme og så er det noget af det første jeg bliver kaldt. Og resten af aftenen følte jeg mig ikke tryg [...]"

conversation. Compared to racism in her *past in the countryside*, racism in her *present in the city* was not that bad. Therefore, she argued that people ought not to dwell on pain and talk so much about racism, when it was not very bad here and now, *comparatively*.

It is therefore possible to draw significant parallels to the conclusion Essed found (almost 40 years prior) relating to the cognition of Black Surinamese women dealing with Dutch racism: "...Black women in the Netherlands define themselves as objects of racism but do not define themselves as part of the history of Black resistance. In other words, Black women in the Netherlands are debunking the myth of tolerance and have acquired elaborate descriptive knowledge about the processes of racism. However, their explanatory concepts are anchored in the dominant ideology of cultural pluralism" (Essed 1991, 117). The maintenance of the dominant ideology, emphasizing difference, but not power, can be seen in the way Faith identifies experiences of racism as events which might have been repeated over time – hence her knowledge of racism *as* racism – but which she nevertheless isolates in time and space. As such *events* where differentiation or discrimination 'happened' come to present an exception from a Danish socio-cultural norm which she reproduces as fundamentally not (that) racist. This is different from an understanding of racism through a *structural* approach which primarily Black U.S. American women had in Essed's study: "The underlying explanatory concepts of their knowledge structures are race conflict (segregation and aggression) and socioeconomic power (color hierarchy). In this structural approach racism is perceived as a primary form of oppression that operates through gender (polarization) and class (differentiation)" (1991, 111).

So, while Faith can be said to invest in the cultural approach to understanding racism, constructing racism as singular *events* rather than a continuous *group experience,* she does simultaneously emphasize a sense of *safety* that she experiences being amongst other Black people. Beyond the absence of explicit racial violence, being around other Black people also enables the mere experience of what you share being immediately accepted and normalized. It is a needed break from the default of constantly being the only one; the only one who *knows,* having to explain and even justify and defend your experiences. This is what Essed identifies as part of how racism functions as a conflict-maintaining dynamic, namely the constant struggles over definitions of social reality (1991, 185). There is a sense of safety when your daily and life experiences are being made ordinary and familiar, for once. When sharing the same definition of social reality with others, you can just *be*. Of course, it is also in friend groups with other people of African descent that the conversation can turn toward shared trauma. It is not rosy. But when Faith articulates that '…there is *jo* a safety in that', it emphasizes the importance of social relationships where your experiences are reflected back, for better or worse. Several voices speaking your experiences into existence can disturb beliefs that what you went through were random, singular events. Or even worse, that it was your fault or responsibility; that something was wrong with *you*, personally. Collectivity can help to illuminate the patterns of remarkably similar experiences and identify racism. Connection is therefore crucial to unravel narratives of perceived uniqueness and weave them into a larger picture of shared conditions and life experiences that shape the sense of self across the multifaceted African diasporas in Denmark. However, connection is only available on a micro level in Denmark.

In this case, Essed's comparative method is useful in showing the vastly different dispositions for knowledge acquisition of racism and blackness, including how or if one positions oneself as Black. Although Essed's examination in the Netherlands is of immigrated Black women, post-colonial subjects, and not of the first generation who were brought up as Black Europeans, their experiences are useful in reflecting the socio-cultural conditions shaping their comprehension

of racism. In fact, if we consider that this generation of women might correspond to Faith's mother and aunties' experiences (adult immigrants in the 1970's-80's), it is not surprising that Faith experienced having to deal with racism alone. They themselves were learning as they arrived. Arguing that "without general knowledge of racism, individuals cannot comprehend the meaning of racism in their lives," Essed demonstrates how such a general knowledge is available and has been historically passed down in the case of the U.S. Black women, but that the Black Surinamese in the Netherlands largely were without a framework to understand racism beyond their personal experiences (p. 77). Similarly, as a first generation Black Danish person (regardless of historical moment) Faith did not have access to *direct* knowledge about racism in the home (the primary space for learning in the U.S. women's case in Essed's study); she was surrounded by white people who reproduced racism and who were thus ignorant as to how to protect her from it; and she breathed the ideological air of Danish egalitarian innocence, a narrative of tolerance, progressiveness, multiculturalism and anti-racialism (not to be confused with antiracism). Being isolated Black, specifically from Black people with a structural understanding of racism, in her formative years, she had had to make her own sense of racism. Faith is far from naive or in denial, but her narrative of splitting space/time is an interesting strategy to produce a present/location in which she represents racism as not a notable problem. If not entirely self-deceptive, the narrative of 2021 Copenhagen as not-really-that-racist could imply her experience "...that pointing out discrimination is associated with powerlessness" (Essed 1991, 84). And Faith resists experiencing that again. Rather, minimizing or ignoring racism suggests a common Afro-Nordic tendency: "a strategically adopted blindness that is absolutely necessary for the social survival in our specific climate" (Habel 2008, 4).

'You were not a minority in the *right* way, of course': The Danish 'Us and Them' Discourse

As children of the late 80's and early 90's Isaac, Amanda and Mia share their first experiences of learning that they were 'different' from the other kids. Like Faith, they too identify school as a primary sight of othering and pain. Both Amanda and Mia shared that they were bullied in school in their initial introductions, and Isaac echoes that he too was always bullied *a lot,* he emphasized. Isaac is the son of two Ghanaian parents but grew up with his mother and stepfather who is Caribbean Black, and the siblings from that marriage. He came to Denmark when he was four years old. Isaac's skin is deep mahogany, and he wears his hair in an iconic hairstyle that shows off its tight, kinky texture and grows up tall, like only afros do. While Danish common knowledge does not have a sensitivity to West African ethnic groups, Isaac would most certainly always be read as 'African.' Amanda and Mia are both of white Danish and, respectively, Ghanaian and Ugandan parentage. Through hair texture, and how they choose to wear it, in Denmark, they are marked as African descendants. Amanda has a thick coily afro in a high bun. Her skin is the shade of light oak wood, yet her facial features would rarely make her pass as anything else than someone of mixed African parentage, in this context. Mia has a teeny weeny afro, gently covering her head like a soft woolly crown. With a sharp nose and narrow lips, her hair and skin, brown like cherry wood, still places her unambiguously as a mixed Black African descendant in Denmark. I clarify this, because it is common that people are read differently across places they travel to. Identities assigned to them through racialization in Denmark are therefore not static. Rather, the relationship between their appearance and their social categorization is quite fluid, and according to place and time, globally.

Despite looking different and being read differently because of colorism, all three of them articulate being categorized through African blackness in connection to bullying. Colorism or shadeism is attributing superiority to brown-skinned people according to their proximity to racial whiteness/lightness. It functions within ideologies of white supremacy and antiblackness, however not exclusively, and is often operationalized through a fine-tuned racial literacy with attention to a combination of skin complexion, hair texture, and (facial) features (de Santana Pinho 2009; Hordge-Freeman 2015). The racial 'grammar' for how a given person is read, as mentioned, is locally and historically specific.

In predominantly white societies, signs of embodied blackness are a heavy marker. The three resonated with each other and bounced off the similarities in each other's stories. Mia opens the round of setting the scene for what has shaped them as people. It is new for her to have this kind of conversation in community with other African descendants, in contrast to Amanda and Isaac. In her own words, she has not yet experienced the kind of mirroring the other two seem to have access to, and she wonders if it is because of spending so many years in a small town. She grew up a couple hours north of Copenhagen in a small town on the northern coast of Zealand. She has four siblings on her Ghanaian father's side, one who is Black Ghanaian, the others with two different white Danish mothers – they all look different.

To this day Mia is searching for connection and community around her Ghanaian heritage and experiences as a descendant in Denmark. While still in the phase of acquiring a language for this, her consciousness has always been marked by marginalization: "I have *jo* always been different. [I] went to a school where it was only my sister and me who were Africans. The rest would have been Danish or from the former Yugoslavia. So, I have always *known* that I was different. And that I did not look like the others. And [...] have been bullied for most of my life. Both with my hair… Uhm, that thing where – I don't know if you are familiar – 'can't I just touch?'", she goes, imitating people who have touched her body without her permission. Isaac and Amanda affirm knowingly. They are more than familiar with these rather banal, yet classic Black tales. However, Black hair stories (from white countries) are only banal if you have anybody to talk to about them. Mia continues repeating what white people have said to her: "'Oh, it feels like a sponge! Ha-ha, that's funny!'" The others affirm verbally again, and Mia verifies with a "Yeah?" perhaps savoring the experience of being heard and believed, then continues: "'You, you have dark skin [*du er mørk i huden*] so you are different', right? Always something where you are made aware that you are different. Through both primary school [and higher] education…yeah…"[71]

Mia's story is expressed through her lived experiences of racialized othering, particularly as an African descendant. She uses the word 'different' which implies that there was a norm she did not fit into, including among other minorities in that time and place. In fact, her sister was her closest and only mirror. She formulates her ascribed difference in terms of 'origin' and a notion of 'Africa', which emphasizes how the norm stays implicit and invisibilized even to her: Her upbringing in a majority white environment shaped her life according to her racialization as 'Black other' regardless of her so-called mixed-race parentage and biological makeup. Her embodied difference, lighter, brown-skinned African blackness, cancels out any chance of logically blending in with the white norm. It therefore makes sense that she describes her sister and herself through

[71] "Jeg har jo altid være anderledes. [Jeg har] gået i en skole hvor det kun var min søster og mig der var afrikanere. Resten har været danske eller fra det gamle Jugoslavien. Så jeg har også altid vidst at jeg var anderledes. Og at jeg ikke så ud som de andre. Og [...] er blevet mobbet det meste af mit liv. Både med mit hår… Øh, det dér med – det ved jeg ikke om i kender – 'ej, må jeg ikke lige røre? [Amanda og Isaac bekræfter selvfølgeligt, uden tøven] 'Ej, det føles som en svamp! Ha-ha, det er sjovt!' [De bekræfter igen] Ja?! Du [er], øh, du' mørk i huden, så du er, altså du er anderledes, ik?! Altid et eller andet hvor man bliver gjort opmærksom på at man er anderledes. Igen både, altså folkeskolen, uddannelse… Ja…"

what is made strange about them: Africanness. Without precise words for race and racialization, Mia's stories demonstrate that, as a child of Black African and white Danish parentage, you are placed on a spectrum of blackness. Relative to their Ghanaian-born sibling, Mia and her sister are in proximity to whiteness, but could never reach whiteness within the racializing modality in Denmark. She describes other minorities in narrower regional terms as being from the 'former Yugoslavia.' This is also a reminder of how the increasing racial diversity in Denmark in the 1990's was closely connected to ongoing geo-political crises and the arrival of people seeking refuge from war.

The discourse in play here echoes the dominant Danish racializing discourse that places racial otherness outside of Denmark, creating a spatial elsewhere that people are 'from.' Except, Mia is not 'from' Ghana in the same way that people are 'from' the former Yugoslavia; she lived in Denmark her entire life, but this is the language she has learned to make sense of her racialization. Primary school being one of the first scenes where 'othering' was played out.

The conversation flows smoothly, and Amanda picks up after Mia. She is the daughter of a white Danish father and a Black Ugandan mother and has one sibling from the same parents. After she introduces herself, she also immediately located school as a site where she learned about nuances of being different. This is her experience from her first public primary school, before she changed to another, private one:

> "About school, there was a period – because I was also bullied very much. I went to school both in [West of Copenhagen, *Vestegnen*], where it was very multicultural, there were like two Danish – but then I was a minority in the minority, as mentioned, so I have experiences being bullied by *other* minorities, because perhaps it is easier to hit someone who is less represented, right… Which, in retrospect, is totally crazy, because some of them were *jo* from North African, so we were kind of in the same…"[72]

Through her narrative Amanda expresses some additional common logics of social organization in Danish racial discourse. The first school she mentions was 'very multicultural' and she demonstrates that through the fact that there were only 'two Danish.' Notions of culture and nationality are mixed and compared, which makes sense within this logic to make a certain point: namely that there were only two *white* Danish kids. In this way 'culture' comes to denote the majority of the pupils racialized as other than white, while 'Danish' becomes the placeholder for racialization as white. This juxtaposition is so taken for granted that no clarification is needed at the table – we all know what this means. However, Amanda implicitly places herself among the 'multicultural' in this framing of the classroom, although she also speaks of herself as "Danish too, 100%." This suggests at least two things: First, that two essentially different entities, culture and nationality, are constructed as logically comparable and, secondly, that these different categories come to signify a third, namely *racial categorization* before anything else.

Amanda and many of her classmates, arguably, *were* Danish, both in terms of nationality and culture. But they were not *white*. But like other Western European countries, Denmark subscribes to anti-racialism, explicit racial markers are taboo. The connotation of the pupils' alleged foreignness is thus described in terms of *cultural* difference – they were multicultural

[72] "Apropos skolegang, der var en periode – fordi jeg er også blevet mobbet vildt meget. Jeg har gået i skole både i [Vestegnen], hvor det var meget multikulturelt, der var sådan to danske – men så var jeg en minoritet i minoriteten, som sagt, så jeg har jo oplevet at blive mobbet af andre minoriteter, fordi at det er måske lettere at slå på den der er mindre repræsenteret, ik'.. Hvilket, i retrospekt, er helt skørt, fordi nogle af dem var jo fra Nordafrika så vi var ligesom del af den samme…"

versus Danish, the logic goes. 'Danishness', technically a nationality, as placeholder for racial whiteness and 'culture' as placeholder for racial 'otherness' are central expressions of racializing logics within everyday Danish language and collective national discourse. Additionally, the logic of comparing different types of categories might help identify more taken for granted aspects of what 'Danish' is supposed to mean, in this discourse. Pointing out 'the other' is a basic principle of constructing the self (Hall 1991). Therefore, while 'Danish' is mobilized in this context as a racial descriptor for *whiteness*, it also holds connotations of Danish *culture* from which the 'multicultural' become distinguishable. This suggests that Danishness or Danish is operationalized in stories like this as a complex categorization; an 'assemblage' of an imagined *folk* or peoplehood, a cultural community, *and* racial whiteness (Weheliye 2014; Wallerstein 2005).

Further, situated within the group marked as 'other' through the cultural descriptor, those Amanda calls the minorities, she became further minoritized: "…then I was a minority in the minority." It is implicit here that the other minorities were not of Black African origin or descent. So, while sharing being constructed as minorities in relation to the white 'Danish' kids together with the other 'multicultural', non-white Danish kids, Amanda was a numeric *and* sociological minority among them. She was the only child of Black African descent, and that mattered. But she thinks that it is 'totally crazy', because she considers some of the other minoritized kids of North African descent, 'kind of the same' as her. Isaac picks up these topics and shares his experiences:

> "I was also bullied – extremely, because I always was the only…*sorte person, afrodansker* [black person, Afro-Dane]… Uhm, and I felt very alone, but did not have anyone to reflect myself in either. It was kind of a double feeling, that is, not to have any windows to look into and I did not have anyone to look up to either.[…] I changed schools too […] to a school in Amager [Copenhagen], which was kind of more international, uh multicultural, […] but I was also bullied there among the minorities, because you were *jo* not a minority in the *right* way, if that makes sense, […] and that was from North Africa and the Middle East etcetera. And there was also something like being more dark than others where people can bully you too, there, there is some hierarchy between children."[73]

Isaac expresses being the only one, similarly to Faith, earlier, and then changing schools to a more multicultural setting and context, comparable to Amanda's experience. He articulates the connections between Black racial isolation and feelings of loneliness and how he experienced it as a doubleness: having neither peers who reflected him, nor potential role models to look up to. Despite the new school being 'more international' he was bullied there too, 'because you were *jo* not a minority in the *right* way…' He speaks into an already established understanding and consensus of his point among us, emphasized by the word *jo.* Between us, it is obvious that no generic minority community exists.

Isaac uses 'multicultural' as well as 'international' as descriptors for the 'minorities' which he is part of, while he *also* situates himself as 'Afro-Dane', thus within the *national* community *as* a Black person. Here, by juxtaposing international with multicultural, the links between supposed

[73] "[Jeg] blev også mobbet – ekstremt meget, fordi jeg altid var den eneste… sorte person, afrodansker… Øh, og følte mig meget alene, men havde heller ikke nogen at spejle mig i. Det var sådan en dobbelt følelse, altså jeg havde ikke nogen vinduer at kigge ind i og jeg havde heller ikke nogen jeg kunne se op til. […] Jeg skiftede også skole [...] til en skole på Amager, som var sådan mere international, øh multikulturel, [...] men blev også mobbet dér iblandt minoriteter, fordi man jo ikke var minoritet på den rigtige måde, hvis det giver mening, […] og det var fra nordafrika og mellemøsten osv. Og der var også sådan noget med at være mere mørk end andre, hvor folk også kan mobbe én, der, der er et eller andet hierarki mellem børn.

nationality and its culture are made clearer. It then creates a somewhat more consistent discourse when speaking about an international classroom, where everybody has different nationalities (or likely parents' origins). The racial connotations, however, become apparent when, rather than self-describing as Ghanaian-Danish, for example, he uses *'sorte person, afrodansker'* to situate himself in the socio-racial context. First, in this sentence he uses Black [*sort*] and Afro as interchangeable, reciprocal referents. Additionally, his use of racial markers suggests that, just like in Amanda's understanding, the terms 'multicultural' and 'international' are in fact operationalized as *racial* markers against Danish culture/nationality or culture-nationality, connoting racial whiteness. 'Minorities', like in Amanda's experience, then means *racial* minorities specifically. Because regarding culture and nationality, the kids *are* Danish. And they 'are' other things too, which Isaac's hyphenated self-identifier aims to express.

Antiblackness as Common Denominator

Mia, Amanda, and Isaac all identify primary schooling as a central site of othering and of bullying. Particularly, they emphasized being bullied by other racial minorities who were not of Black African descent. Their expressions 'a minority in the minority' and not being 'a minority in the *right* way' articulate that, within the vast group of non-white youth, there was an understanding of a center and a periphery of the minority experience. A certain type of narrative dominated the representation of who 'the minorities' are, including what places they 'come from', how they are racialized and what cultures they are expected to be part of. And in this construction of 'the minority', Isaac, Mia, and Amanda's minoritization was constructed as outside of – and below – that prototype. Right away, then, they all articulate an understanding of their experiences as related to their African blackness and to experiencing antiblackness *alone.* For people of unambiguous African descent racism is not solely about being categorized as any given minority, but about being categorized as Black. White kids, therefore, were not the primary and only perpetrators of their bullying, but everyone non-Black.

Isaac and Amanda both name North Africans as part of the other minority kids. Amanda does so by remarking that it is 'crazy' to be bullied by someone who is 'kind of the same' as you. What I interpret as her surprise or sense of paradox, could be referring to the fact of shared racial minority experiences and an expectation of togetherness. Or, potentially, she could be hinting at the specificities of North Africans being *Africans* (or descendants) just like her. While neither Amanda nor Isaac specify it, they are likely referring to descendants of (non-Black identified) Moroccans or perhaps Algerians. As mentioned, North Africans are a population group with collective history in Denmark since the 1960's. Amanda and Isaac's childhood stories are testimonies of lived experiences of effectively being categorized as distinctive from and less than 'North Africans', who were among the other kids who took part in bullying Black children.

Whether they meant to indicate that they were bullied by other minorities or other Africans, and found a paradox in the lack of solidarity, Amanda pauses briefly, then goes on to offer the benefit of the doubt: Maybe the bullying was because everybody (racially minoritized) was dealing with something back then. And in some respects, she adds, she, herself, might even have been one of the *ressourcestærke børn* [resourceful children] in the school – despite her being subjected to bullying. To be a 'resourceful' child, the expression she uses in Danish, is a common term in the context of the so-called integration debate [*indvandrerdebatten*]. In this debate at large, connections between schooling and 'integration' are often central, and perceived 'immigrantness' is devalued and conceptualized as lacking, or in deficit (Matthiesen 2017; Gilliam and Gulløv

2017). The connotation of resourcefulness signifies class position which is linked to social and cultural capital, not just financial or material resources (Bourdieu 2021). In this way, Amanda shows awareness of the entanglements of her position: inferiorized as Black (in school) simultaneously with her reality of more privilege (at home) relative to some of the other kids with different minority backgrounds. Although growing up in a working-class family, door to door with classmates, having a white Danish parent, presents a form of *cultural capital* (Bourdieu 2021). She was born into inheriting certain cultural codes and having access to generational insider knowledge. In the bigger picture, whatever she experienced in school is mitigated by her upbringing in a household where one parent, her dad, was a national and cultural insider. In comparison to families where all caretakers might be navigating Danish language and society as adults who have immigrated, Amanda understands that she has had one foot ahead regarding navigating life in Denmark, beyond the site of primary school, and despite it.

Isaac expresses not being considered a minority in the right way – relative to people 'from' North African or the Middle East. His articulation emphasizes the discursive overlap in constructions of origins and parents' origins as interchangeable, in a similar manner to the use of 'international' and 'multicultural.' This is such a taken for granted logic that none of us around the table notice it, even if the classmates Isaac is talking about are most likely as Danish as all of us – born and/or raised in Denmark for most of their lives. And to his first point, about not being "a minority in the *right* way, if that makes sense," it *does* make a lot of sense. Because the implicit commonality between 'North Africans' and 'Middle Easterners' as generalized, imagined communities is an assumed 'Arabness,' a construction oozing Orientalist connotations (Said 1979; Anderson 2005; Yilmaz 2016). As mentioned, the representation of 'Arab' = Muslim = Immigrant is an overshadowing narrative in the 'immigrant debate' in Denmark. It constructs an immigrant subject in a particular and limited way, especially through the legal categorization 'non-Western' and imaginations of 'Muslimness' connected to that. However, imagining that notion of being an immigrant, or rather children of immigrants in the *right way*, one effect is seemingly that it creates a certain legibility and internal mirroring of experiences. It has the potential to be mobilized politically. But being a Black African did not fit into that image or the available discourses of 'immigrantness' in Denmark. And there were no other minority discourses readily available to capture such experience, such as a collective Black discourse.

The hegemony of the current discourse and its construct of the 'proper' minority subject can be seen as a simultaneous production of Danish immigration history and a representational praxis. In 2022 immigrants consisted of 11% of the Danish population, of which 57% were classified as non-Western: meaning only 6.27% of the entire population in Denmark. The Danish immigration debate is characterized by a representation disproportionate to their population size, effectively stigmatizing individuals and groups cast as 'immigrant-Muslim-Arab' through a disproportionate media representation (Hervik 2011; Olwig and Pærregaard 2011; J. S. Nielsen 2012; Hassani 2020; Skadegård Thorsen 2020). This hyper representation and intensified islamophobia must also be contextualized in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in the USA.

In the 1990's – my interviewees' frame of reference – African immigrants were a small immigrant group in a relatively small and scattered immigrant population overall. This has something to say in the lack of representation at the time, as well as an absence of large communities (eg. compared to European countries with significant postcolonial Black presences). What could tentatively be called a 'beige washing' of the construction of the Muslim subject is particularly interesting in relation to an equally stigmatized 'immigrant-and-descendant' group:

the Somali diasporas. Due to the civil war, many Somalis arrived in Denmark during the 1990's, some a little before. The categorization as 'Somali', too, has gotten disproportionate representation and highly negative connotations in the Danish 'immigration debate.' But why is this group not lumped into the already established (and overly generalizing) discourse and category of immigrants? We can observe that this group gets singled out discursively and articulated as 'Somalis,' in the Danish anti-racialist vocabulary, yet it is implicit that the category is always *also* within the 'immigrant-Muslim' construct of the 'foreigner.' In a Danish context, scholars have yet to research the specific social, material, and cultural conditions of people categorized as Somali through a critical race analysis, identifying the co-formations of antiblackness and islamophobia (Bacchetta 2015b; McEachrane 2016; Kelekay 2022). Arguably, this is a categorization that discursively is constructed as outside of dominant imaginaries of blackness and Muslimness, but empirically occupies both, which makes it a racializing assemblage truly on the margin of the margin in a Western context (Weheliye 2014).

Back in the discussion about blackness in the early 90's Isaac also named "something like being more dark than others" and that "there is some hierarchy between children." This speaks to the centrality of visibility in racialization discussed in chapter one. It mattered that he was of African descent *and* darker than the other brown-skinned children. The way he was categorized as Black is different from how Amanda and Mia were categorized as Black, appearing way lighter and whiter, being of interracial parentage. Had they not all been 'the only ones' and perhaps in the same classroom, it is quite possible that different dynamics would have positioned them together or divided them, according to context. Isaac recalls being in grade K [*børnehaveklassen*] and being the only Black child, but there was another mixed-race Black boy. Isaac was excited to make friends with him, imagining that they would relate to one another. But to his frustration, not only did the two little boys not become friends, but the mixed-race boy did not even show solidarity when it really mattered. In fact, Isaac explains, "[...] so, when I was called the n-word, nobody would set a boundary [*sige fra*], but also, the other one who was a bit lighter-skinned would sometimes call me that word to kind of show that 'I am elevated over you.'"[74] For years Isaac was "frustrated," he said. He reflects that "of course, it was pretty stupid to think that just because you have the same skin color you will be friends, but…"[75] He thought he would have found mirroring in that boy, but it did not happen, quite the opposite.

Being darker than the other kids generally in conjunction with being the only *African Black* shows nuances of Isaac's experience of blackness as a physical, visible racialization. When he refers to a spectrum of skin-complexion it highlights that it is possible to identify colorism as a hierarchy that functions *together with* constructions of 'Africanness' but is analytically distinct. In the example above, Isaac recognized the mixed-race boy as an African descendant and understood their partly shared positioning as a potential for, if not friendship, then at least solidarity. I did not interview that person. But whatever reasoning took place in the mixed boy's social and racial imaginary – whether he acknowledged his own blackness at all or not – the result was that he fully rejected and was complicit in assaulting Isaac with the n-word, just like the other kids did. Through his concept of racial categorization, he situated himself as different from and superior to Isaac, a Black, dark-skinned boy. I will return to what seems like racial dissociation of mixed-race Black Danes later.

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[74] "[...] så når jeg blev kaldt n-ordet, var der ikke nogen der sagde fra, men også den anden, som var lidt lysere i huden kunne finde på at kalde mig det ord, for ligesom at vise at 'jeg er hævet over dig.'"

[75] "og det var selvfølgeligt meget dumt at tænke at bare fordi man har sammen hudfarve, så kommer man til at være venner, men…"

It is worth noticing that, in this very story about colorism, Isaac uses the term *skin color* to describe that the two boys were both of African descent and/or some kind of brown-skinned, in short, meaning racialized (as Black). There is an irony in this commonsense use of 'skin color' as placeholder for race and racialization in Danish, when the whole point of the story was that they precisely did *not* have the same skin color. And more importantly, the contextual meaning-making of this construct of a 'color line' is what separated the two boys (Du Bois 1903). More on this follows below.

The social upholding of lightness/whiteness and denigration of darker skin tones exist within and across communities globally. Thus, it is also reproduced in their diasporas. This means that in this 'multicultural' classroom, where families are truly multicultural and not just racialized as foreigner, a variety of antiblack discourses likely circulate and co-exist with the Danish racial imaginaries. Histories of enslavement of Black African peoples, trans-regional trade, and exploitation predates European colonialism in Africa and the Transatlantic slavetrade to the Americas. This includes in the larger so-called 'Arab' world, where histories of dehumanization of Black Africans have various expressions today, one of the most mediated and recent being the CNN reportage from 2017 showing young African men being sold as objects in Libya (Hajji 2018). Other traces, specifically to Arabic speaking contexts, is the linguistic incorporation of antiblackness: the normalization of words for slave or servant being the everyday terms to refer to Black African people (Sadai 2021). Among the particular minority populations represented in these stories, and in Danish immigration history generally, it is therefore pertinent to pay attention to already existing antiblack discourses and racialized imaginaries in opposition to Black Africans and darker skinned people more generally.

Another important minoritized group in Denmark are transnational adoptees. As illustrated in the previous chapter, the 1950's and '60's mixed-race Black and some Greenlandic Inuit were adopted. From the 1970's Korean adoptees became a significant group. In the majority of cases, the term transnational equals trans*racial* adoption in Denmark, with minority racialized children incorporated into white Danish families. The most visible and organized group in Denmark is people who have been adopted from Korea. Lene Myong's research on this group was a groundbreaking engagement with a critical race analysis and qualitative study of the racializing dynamics in Denmark, focusing on meaning-making and racialized becoming (Myong 2009). While the study demonstrated entanglements of whiteness and Danishness, it also showed some internalized antiblackness among (non-Black) Korean adoptees. As with other non-Black minorities, or even mixed-race Black people as above, 'triangulation' can be a subconscious way to leverage their own position in a racialized hierarchy (Kim 1999). In a racialized field of power, striving for 'inclusion' is as much about exclusion and distance from that which a group is *not* – especially Black (Agathangelou, Bassichis, and Spira 2008; Sexton 2008; Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2013).

In the Danish context of multi-racial classrooms, we can identify antiblack sentiment and bullying as operating simultaneously through constructions of Black African inferiority *and* colorism as commonsense discourses and relations of power. Now, in this specific context it is crucial to pay attention to what Isaac, Mia, and Amanda can help identify, namely that colorism is not a power structure functioning simply through a random color scale from beige to dark brown. Within the first-generation Black Danish people born up until 1980's, lighter skinned complexion of a given racial minority will often also reflect their concrete proximity to whiteness, ei. a white biological parent. And, as per Amanda's self-reflections, in many cases this means an automated incorporation into Danishness. And it is possible to experience the privileges of inheriting certain

cultural capital and entitlements in relation to Denmark while *also* going through life being racialized as Black. It is therefore worthwhile to acknowledge the contextual, local grammar of colorism as actual signifiers of a person's relation to the nation and a particular position in the history of immigration at large. Studying constructions of blackness in Modernity historically, such hierarchies are not new (James 1989; Hordge-Freeman 2015; Ze Winters 2018). We might therefore read Isaac's sense of betrayal by the mixed-race boy not as a matter of skin color in and of itself. Rather, his experience was an articulation of how embodied markers of white parentage in a Danish context (mixed-race blackness) often equals a *whitened* consciousness resulting from a disconnection or total loss of any Black African sense of self or cultural grounding.

With regard to Isaac himself, on the other hand, him being 'darker' therefore also connotes (and reflects empirically) a proximity to 'Africa' in a broad sense. For Isaac, and a lot of people of his generation who look like him, the darker skinned Blackness does indeed tell a story of parents who would have had to *learn* and *adapt* to Danish society alongside their children. Of course, there are nuances to this across experiences of transracial adoption and different transracial family constellations. And as Faith and Amanda illustrated earlier, *African* parents do not necessarily have a *Black* consciousness to pass on. The point is that colorism in Denmark should not be reduced to the supremacy of white racial phenotypical standards alone, but always simultaneously examined through material circumstances such as intergenerational rootedness (and sometimes wealth) and citizenship status. These entanglements of the visible and the lived conditions are therefore inherent to how colorism functions in Denmark today. Taking these complex relationships into careful consideration is part of the challenge when attempting to draw the contours of something activists have (tentatively) called Afro Danes ("Afro Danish Collective" 2022; Hunter 2021)

To conclude this part, while Danish Afro-descendants are diverse in terms of origin, parents' immigration story, visible appearance and complexion, something does tie them together: their lived experiences of antiblackness. Not simply racism as random, generalizable 'brown' people in relation to the majority white Danes and everyday racism. Rather, what is part of their shared experiences is that, across a spectrum of blacknesses, they are being hailed *as Black Africans and descendants specifically* by white Danes *and* other, non-Black racial minorities as well. But, unlike racial minorities who fall within the dominating discourse, Danes of African descent experience being situated outside of the existing categories for minoritization. This exclusion operates discursively among minorities as well as in the dominating public discourse.

The primary school years, and the Danish public folk school, in particular, is a site where cultural common sense social categorizations are played out daily. And in turn, where these are learned, internalized, and negotiated. The institutionalization of national knowledge and the vision of molding young children into proper Danish citizens, operationalizes racialized notions of national belonging in no subtle way. The awkwardness of constructing the 'other' by seeing race, yet through an insistence on political racelessness, leaves brown-skinned, Danish African descendants in a conceptual in-between position: offered extra language classes in their first language; sudden bad grades when categorized as 'immigrant'; or compliments for being a 'pattern breaker,' while indeed repeating a social inheritance and pattern of well-educated parents. Systematically excluded from Danishness, being a racial minority, but not in the 'right way', means that acknowledgement and representation of Danish people of African descent's specific circumstance exist in a gray zone. These realities get lost between the limited official representations of racial minorities as 'immigrants' and 'descendants' and the constructions of who the proper minority subject is on one hand. And on the other hand, the experiences of exclusion by

racial minorities that are non-Black, effectively constructs Black Danish people collectively as a 'minority in the minority.'

PART II: STRATEGIZING IN BLACK RACIAL ISOLATION

"I am Completely Ordinary"

In the beginning of each interview, right after pressing 'record' on either the microphone or our video call, I first invited my interlocutors to tell me a bit about their motivation for responding to my research call. Pretty much verbatim, I always asked if they had any reservations or anything they hoped to talk about. Asking this question came out of my observation of a discourse on racism in anti-racist online spaces that was cultivating a kind of 'that time I experienced racism' testimonial tone, which I found less conducive. First, because it reduced racism to isolated happenings, rather than structures, and secondly, because it produced a limiting framing of racial minorities *as* their traumas, thus as victims rather than *people* who are exposed to something. I have also observed that a lot of people who reject victimization, still somehow buy the premise that acknowledging racism equals being a victim, they therefore reject discussions of racism all together saying they do not feel like victims. I still remember the first time that happened to me in Denmark, in conversation with someone who was a public figure and known to be an activist and artist, and I assumed we were on the same page. While sharing with him my research project and the problems of racism that I identified he dismissed me by saying it was self-victimizing. The transformation of critical conversations about racism in Denmark into a framing of victimhood is both produced by opponents of discussions on racial discrimination as well as alleged proponents.

My worry about this discourse showed to be well grounded. Within the first few minutes, as a response to my question about reservations and hope for the interview, some of my interlocutors showed how the 'victim' discourse was affecting them. Dagmar is one example. She was born in Zambia in the early 1980's to a white Danish mother and a Black Zambian father. Then she and her mother moved back to Denmark when she was a toddler, and she grew up in Northern Jutland. Dagmar's hair is in a relaxed high bun and from the stray hair sticking out here and there, I spot tight curls that would probably fall down along her face if loose. Her skin is brown like cherry wood and her features tell stories equally about her father's and mother's lineages, in my eyes. In a white European or Western context, she would most likely always be read as having Black African lineage.

Dagmar explains how she found my call for research participants reposted in a Facebook group related to 'Africa' and Africans in Denmark as she says:

> "…And then I saw it and then I saw the age group you were searching for and then I thought that it might be kind of important that I signed up, because it might be the case that there were not a lot from the early 80's. [She paused] And uh, and then I actually also had this feeling that maybe people…" [Interruption]" Then I also had a sense that maybe more people were motivated to sign up if they had been exposed to discrimination and something ugly. And then I felt that I had a need for there to also be this other voice here, so I

> thought that it was actually kind of my duty to, because I have not… because I am completely ordinary, and that I also came, [and] signed up for something like this. So, I do not have anything else [to say] other than that I think it is wonderful that you are writing about this topic, I think it is important, and then I thought that I was sufficiently ordinary [*tilpas almindelig*] that it would probably also be quite important that I took the time for it."[76]

Before looking closer at Dagmar's answer, I will include a complimentary type of answer and then analyze them together. Another woman, Binta said: "what can *I* contribute?" She was interested in my research, but she did not necessarily know how she fit in. As she introduced herself, she said she always called herself Danish, "very Danish" in fact, she said with a smile. She also told me that it never meant anything for her to be "dark." *Mørk,* dark in Danish, is one of the common adjectives for brown-skinned people, not specifically African descendants. I heard her state that "it never meant anything" to her as a way to simultaneously express that she recognized her physical, visible 'darkness', but that it was not significant or defining for her life. In Danish, this also has a bit of a connotation that being 'dark' never meant anything *bad.* This was how she contextualized it: "[And] it has never been something that took up a lot of space for me… that I was brown… it, it is not something that I ever thought about, uhm, I have never been bullied or anything like that."[77] Here, Binta is referring to understandings developed in her family sphere and social life, rather than mediated public debate. Still, the logic is the same: brownness never really meant anything because it did not cause her *victimization*. Interestingly, she goes on to tell me how one would "obviously" be called *neger* [negro] as a child if you had an argument with somebody, which she juxtaposes to being teased for wearing glasses. Such juxtaposition is a typical Danish deflection from acknowledging racism *as* racism. She continues, "but [...] it has not been something where I felt especially exposed because I was brown. Whereas my sister and my cousins had a completely different upbringing where it took up much more space."[78] Being 'brown' is a fact, but it is not an identity or characteristic of her life. In any case, as an introduction, this is her way to echo a narrative of being exempt from larger, public representations of racism, what it means, and who the subject of racism is. This was another way to frame her life story as one of 'an ordinary person', much like Dagmar. Implicitly, an ordinary Dane.

I do not hear these identifications as 'ordinary people' as a complete denial of their experiences of racialization per se. Rather, I hear them as an expression of the commonsense definitions of racism as 'discrimination and something ugly,' as Dagmar put it. In this definition, they understand racism as singular discriminatory acts and violence on individuals or groups, explained as motivated by hate or ignorance of another group. As in the case of Faith, this

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[76] [O]g så så jeg det, og så så jeg aldersgruppen som du ledte efter også tænkte jeg at det ku' godt være at det var lidt vigtigt at jeg meldte mig, fordi det ku' godt være at der ikke var så mange fra start 80'erne. [pause] Og øh, og så havde jeg faktisk også sådan en følelse af at det ku' godt være at folk…" [interruption] "Så havde jeg også en fornemmelse af, at måske var flere motiverede til at melde sig hvis de havde været udsat for noget diskrimination og noget grimt. Og det kunne jeg mærke, at det havde jeg brug for at der også var den anden stemme med, så jeg tænkte egentlig også lidt at det var min pligt at, fordi at jeg ikke… fordi jeg er fuldstændigt almindelig og at jeg også kom, meldte mig til sådan noget. Så jeg har ikke andet, end at jeg synes det er dejligt at du skriver om det emne, jeg synes det er vigtigt, og så tænkte jeg at jeg er tilpas almindelig til at det nok også var ret vigtigt at jeg tog mig tid til det."

[77] "Og det har aldrig været noget der har… fyldt hos mig, at jeg har været brun… det, det er ikke noget der har, jeg har tænkt så meget over, øh, jeg har aldrig været mobbet eller noget i den dur."

[78] "Men det har ikke været, altså, det har ikke været noget hvor jeg har følt at jeg var særligt udsat fordi jeg var brun. Hvor[imod] min søster og min fætter og kusine har en helt anden opvækst hvor det har fyldt meget mere."

illustrates their basic explanatory concepts as reproducing the ideological norm, understanding Denmark as not-racist as a rule and episodes of racism as exceptions (Essed 1991, 111).

Joy, another woman I spoke with, gives current examples of when 'racism happened' in Denmark, after the murder of George Floyd in the US and subsequent Black Lives Matter movements in Denmark. She lists: "The girl on the train, the man in Bornholm, the woman at the parking lot." While explicit hate crimes and murder as the ones she referenced, are good examples of 'something ugly', these are only one expression of racism. They are quite obvious incidents and the ones that happened to gain broader public attention. Still, *whether* the motives were truly racist is always put up for debate in the Danish public discourse. Within this commonsense understanding, racism is something that needs to be *proved*. The reason these cases even got any media attention in the first place, likely has much to do with the political moment in 2020, as Joy suggests. In that moment, despite it all, there was somewhat of a collective reckoning in Denmark, too, that certain conversations needed to be had. Therefore, the racist incidents themselves were not exceptional, but the media attention to them was.

The day-to-day understanding and usages of the term racism among part of my interlocutors is thus limited to signify explicit acts of physical violence and obvious discrimination such as using racist slurs or obvious racial discrimination, explicitly due to how one is racialized. Therefore, it makes sense to bracket themselves as ordinary people if they have different, perhaps less explicitly, violent experiences as African descendant Danish people. This is Dagmar reflecting:

> "I joined the Facebook group and I try to keep up a bit, but I just… Again, it is that self-evaluation – am I Black enough [*sort nok*] to have a place here? I mean. And I have not experienced racism in a way that I remember very well. And that is what is being talked about a lot [in the group]. So, that thing about, if I haven't struggled enough is it then okay for me to, like, be part of this community?"[79]

Here, we can hear how Dagmar's earlier statement of being 'ordinary' is not a racial dissociation. She acknowledges her own blackness, however, has doubts about her authentic belonging in an African-centered Facebook group, because her life was not hard enough. Being 'sufficiently ordinary' [*tilpas almindelig*] can then take on the meaning of ordinary-for-a-*Black*-person as well as self-identifying as an ordinary Dane or person. A lot of people I listened to would sometimes tell me how their experiences were 'not that bad' and very often *in the same breath* go on to list experiences of what *I* define as racism, analytically. But not only that, they knew that experiences of being racialized, hailed as different/inferior and singled out, *was* something that they experienced precisely due to their visible racialization, and they felt that it was deeply alienating. But they did not call that racism.

What this shows is a gap in shared language to identify and process such experiences. And I want to emphasize *shared* language here because, individually, many of the people I spoke with, have indeed pushed back on the racism they have faced, and even called it out as such. However, repeatedly, African descendants are being dismissed by white Danes when setting boundaries. In particular, using the words *racisme* or *racist* in Danish [racism, racist] often triggers forceful push

[79] "Jeg har meldt mig ind i Facebook-gruppen og prøver at følge lidt med, men jeg kan også bare… Det er igen den der selv-evaluering med: er jeg sort nok til at have min plads her? Altså... Og jeg har ik' oplevet racisme hvor jeg kan huske det ret godt. Og det er dét, der bliver snakket rigtig meget om. Så det der med, hvis jeg ikke har haft det hårdt nok er det så okay at jeg ligesom er med i det her fællesskab?

back and complete dismissal: "…If you can't handle it, you either have a bad sense of humor or else you are just always offended no matter what…" as Isabelle, another interlocutor, aptly described it.

The notion of someone who always is violated, *krænket* in Danish, has gained such power that new terms have been invented to name them. As such *krænkelsesparat* describes someone who is 'ready to be violated' or 'offended' whereas *krænkelseskultur* refers to the 'culture' of being (easily) violated, suggesting that people have become too sensitive (Habel 2011). This implies that reactions are per definition overreactions, and it misrecognizes the causes for taking offense as valid. Such language is used among opponents of 'identity politics' [*identitetspolitik*]. In the Danish context as in many others, 'identity politics' has become a somewhat mocking descriptor of those who challenge societal power inequalities such as patriarchy and sexism, colonialism, white supremacy, and homophobia. Such societal critiques have increased, in particular in connection to the #MeToo movement and #BlackLivesMatter which took off in Denmark in 2020. There are repercussions for standing up for yourself and naming racism and other systems of oppression that one is subjected to. So, while there is a need for a shared language, people in fact *do* have some language. But because they are routinely being intimidated and punished for using it, this effectively results in withdrawal and (self)silencing of many voices. This is Isabelle again: "I mean, I am probably the type who, if I hear something racist for example [...] I usually do not comment on it or speak back, besides if it is… no, I actually do not, because I think it is difficult to interfere in the debate when you stand alone because people are also very…also about that *krænkelseskultur."*[80] The discourse of *krækelseskultur* dismisses engagement with the notion of racism at all and as such shuts down dialogue, constructive arguments, or invitations to accountability. It is also closely connected to Philomena Essed's (2013) notion of *entitlement racism,* a confusion of free speech with the right to assault others. Dismissal like this can gaslight people with lifelong and ongoing experiences of racism. It contributes to dissociation and confusion around how to name one's experiences, or anxiety around naming them at all, because its logic equals saying *'racisme'* [racism] with being *krænkelsesparat* [easily offended]. And people do not experience themselves as such.

On the other hand, a certain anti-racist discourse took place in 2020 especially, in which minority racialized people came forward to tell their story and 'revealed' that they too had been 'exposed to racism.' Social media accounts, articles, and TV-segments suddenly appeared, amplifying stories about 'incidents' of racism. All this, seemingly, in good faith for the cause of showcasing that 'even in Denmark', despite its self-proclaimed progressiveness, there is racism (Pred 2000; Habel 2008; Essed and Hoving 2014). That is, in relation to the heightened attention to racism in the US, the typical scapegoat for where racism takes place, the confessions of widespread racism in allegedly innocent Denmark was treated as surprising news in the media and public debate. To a large degree, this discourse of coming forward constructed minority racialized people generally as first and foremost victims of racism. Such discourse, despite good intentions, can also alienate people as it limits them to be identified *by* their racial trauma, rather than it being part of a range of diverse life experiences. This is especially true as the Danish mediascape represents a scarce racial diversity characterized by both underrepresentation and misrepresentation (Skadegård Thorsen 2020). The effect was expressed by several interlocutors who were invested in their 'ordinariness' and 'being Danish' but said they were changed in the

[80] "Altså jeg er nok typen der, hvis jeg hører ting [der er] racistisk[e] for eksempel, altså jeg, jeg plejer ikke sådan at kommentere [på] det eller sige så meget igen, andet end hvis det er… nej, det gør jeg faktisk ikke, for jeg synes det er, det er svært at blande sig i debatten når man står selv, fordi folk er meget også med det der krænkelseskultur."

2020 moment of racial reckoning. They knew discussions on racism and blackness concerned them but felt unsure they had legitimate voices in the debates.

Here is an expression of how the 'ordinary narrative' gets woven together with insecurity about claiming a general racialized minority position. This is Rose:

> "[...] So, I used the time after the murder of George Floyd *listening*, really. I mean, and I still do. Also because I think, I believe [pause] I mean, I, yes of course I have been exposed to stupid comments and *hyggeracisme* [*'hygge'* racism] and whatnot, but I actually think I have been very, uhm, spared in a way, right? I mean, if I have been exposed to something, it has been that alienation, in a way, right. But that thing, being called something and so on… uuuhm… I mean, to get back in the line for jobs or, I mean, what I can think of right now, I mean, I have not experienced that… So when everything was going on [in 2020] I was really like 'okay, there is something big here in some way, which I in some way felt I ought to be part of, but that I did not feel I could be a part of because I did not understand it fully on my own body."[81]

Rose who shared these reflections with me demonstrates what I have mentioned previously, namely claiming *and* denying experiences of racism at the same time. Condensed, this is part of what she says: I have been exposed to stupid comments and *hyggeracisme*, *but* I have been very spared, *but* I have exposed to alienation, *but* I have not felt racism on my own body. For what I hear as contradictions to make sense, some racist experiences are bracketed as not-really-racism, while others – 'being called something' or overt discrimination on the job market – are categorized as racism. The notion of *hyggeracisme*, even if it literally contains the word racism, is part of what Rose dismisses as her personal experience of racism. The word is an oxymoron. While *hygge* is supposed to be a uniquely Danish term for coziness, racism is per definition unpleasant at best, lethal at worst and in all ways the opposite of something *hyggeligt. Hyggeracisme* is especially used to describe 'stupid comments,' implicitly about race, that the utterer would likely defend as humorous and innocent if confronted with it being racist.

Example of *hyggeracisme*: at my 17th birthday my (white) friends from our liberal, artsy, and progressive private school gifted me the childrens book Little Black Sambo from 1899, an explicitly racist-colonialist antique story gone kitsch. To accompany it, they had written a 'birthday' song containing lots of explicit references to (my) blackness, Africa, something that rhymes with 'barbarian', and the word 'Moor.' The latter, they had learned from the Nativity play that our school's (white) teachers would put on each Christmas. One of them would be in blackface as King Baltazar, allegedly a Black African from 'The Land of the Moors.' All of this, I was socialized to believe, was 'just for fun' and I had learned to laugh along through an ironic distance to being hailed as different – to my blackness – a common strategy for Danish racial minorities. Simultaneously, I knew for a fact that, if my African American father knew, he would have been extremely angry. Deep inside I knew something was off.

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[81] "Og jeg brugte altså tiden efter mordet på George Floyd på at *lytte* egentligt. Altså og gør det stadigvæk, øhm. Også fordi jeg synes, jeg tror [pause] altså, jeg, jo, selvfølgelig har jeg været udsat for dumme kommentarer og hyggeracisme og hvad ved jeg, men, men jeg tror faktisk jeg har været meget øh forskånet på en eller anden måde, ik?! Altså hvis jeg har været udsat for noget, så er det den fremmedgørelse, på en eller anden måde, ik. Men det der med at blive kaldt ting og så' noget…øøøh… altså, komme bag i køen til jobs eller altså, hvad jeg nu lige kunne komme i tanker om, altså det har jeg ikke oplevet, øh… Så da det hele rullede var jeg virkelig sådan, okay, der er noget stort her på en eller anden måde, som jeg på en eller anden måde følte jeg burde være en del af, men som jeg ikke helt følte jeg kunne være en del af, fordi jeg forstod det ik' på min egen krop til fulde."

According to Rose, racist comments, jokes, and alienation are not proper experiences of racism. And because those are her only personal experiences, she believes she has been 'very spared' from racism such as labor market discrimination, in her understanding. In this way, she reproduces a particular discourse that is based on a dichotomy: Proper racism versus not-really-racism. However, the not-really-racism must still be recognized by her as having to do with her racialization as Black. That is why she mentions those experiences in the first place and compares them to what she has *not* experienced. Ambiguously, she situates herself outside of the anti-racist debates because she concludes that she has been spared from racism, having only her experiences of not-really-racism, which do not count.

Remember Dagmar, who had insisted on her ordinariness in the beginning of the interview. She summed up points similar to Rose's but articulates more succinctly connections between certain understandings of blackness, racism, and collectivity and how they come to make sense in a particular way: "am I Black enough to have my place here? [...] If I have not struggled enough is it then okay that I, kind of, am part of this community?" Cutting straight to the chase, Dagmar names the stakes: her blackness. Within the discourse of victimization, can she claim her Black experiences if they do not sound like the dominant narrative? She ponders whether struggle is the premise for legitimate belonging. So, while she is actually interested in taking a position as an African descendant, at this point in our conversation and in her life, her less traumatic experiences and 'ordinary (for a Black person) narrative' falls outside of the dominant points of bonding in the group.

The examples above show a very common type of consciousness among Danish people of African descent. Specifically, the women we heard from grew up in transracial families and are so-called mixed-race. Most of them lived only with their white Danish mothers, and one with her white Danish father and Black African mother. They all grew up into Danish culture in ways that seemingly differed very little, if at all, from average majority Danish families across class. To them, their own Danishness is self-evident, but must be reiterated because it is not taken for granted in a majority white society in which they get racialized as 'other' and 'Black.'

Self-identifying as ordinary (or) Danish showed up in their stories as something that set the narrators apart from collective minority experiences and Black African (descendant) collectivity. Sometimes they disengaged from identifying as a minority or Black at all through claims to being 'very Danish.' Then they would explain their 'otherness' in factual terms relating to their African parents and their country, rather than an identity they personally held. Being ordinary also showed up when they actually wanted to be in community, and experienced it set them apart from what seemed to bind people together, namely pain and struggle. Thus, the ordinary narrative was operationalized both as a way to control their own narrative and avoid being boxed in a category they did not recognize. But it also became a point of doubt and insecurity in relation to categories they felt they had something to do with where they felt as racial imposters.

This type of self-perception can be seen as a specific European feature of African diasporic subjectivity as identified through their comprehension of racism shaped by a lack of shared knowledge and language. Essed found a similar pattern to be true among Black women in the Netherlands:

> "The women do not define themselves as Black or are ambivalent about defining themselves as members of a racially or ethnically dominated group. This is also evident in their use of language. Blacks are referred to as 'they,' and differentiated from the self ('I') as in 'I feel different [than other Blacks]. I don't know how they feel' [...]. Differentiating themselves from other Blacks

> does not mean that the women have not experienced racial discrimination in their lives. They could all recall specific events of unfair treatment or of discrimination, but they themselves did not categorize these experiences as racist events" (Essed 1991, 78).

There is therefore a close correlation between Black Danish people's comprehension of racism and their racial consciousness, a relationship that seems to mutually inform each aspect. Following Essed's theorization on *understanding* everyday racism, we might then recall that "...it can be assumed that the comprehension of racist events depends on the availability of general knowledge about racism and on the availability of notions of 'unfair' treatment or discrimination but also on the availability of representations of experience and structure of a certain 'maturity'" (Essed 1991, 76). As was the case with Faith, the comprehension of racism is largely developed in a vacuum for Rosa, Dagmar, and Binta who subscribe heavily to the ordinary narrative. Their stronger reluctance to identify with a minoritized collective, vis à vis Faith for example, might also reflect the added layer of Black racial isolation shaping them: their intimate envelopment in whiteness being raised by white others *only*. A factor inherently also representing an absence and disconnect from a blackness that Faith and others had access to via their parents.

While none of them have had access to a 'general knowledge of racism' to develop an *understanding* of racism (Essed 1991, 76–77), the mixed-Black children in white single parent households have been in a default position of racial alienation, additionally. This likely says something about their aversion to taking a position as Black, whereas this was not even a logical option for Faith or Isaac. Recalling Victor Cornelins' racial dissociation, I suggest that 'fancying being white,' has to do with the conditioning through an overrepresentation of whiteness/Eurocentrism intersecting with an absence of blackness in shaping people's subjectivity (Cornelins 1976; Essed 1991; Kilomba 2010; Eng and Han 2019). I underscore this, because this type of cognition could easily be oversimplified and explained with the mixed-race positionality in my specific examples here, by essentializing people's disposition for a certain consciousness. But such cognition also exists among minority racialized people who are not of part white biological parentage, but who are similarly enveloped in whiteness and deprived of access to a 'general knowledge of racism' (Essed 1991; Myong 2009).

In the following I look closer at the meaning-making process the Ordinary Narrative contributes through the notion of disidentification and suggest some characteristics of this particular to Danish Black subjectivity.

Disidentification and Individual Exceptionalism

The Ordinary Narrative can be theorized as *disidentification* with available representations of African descendant Danish narratives (Muñoz 1999). Understanding this type of disidentification as part of a personal introduction is crucial because it will show up in different forms throughout the conversation. As I stated previously, this does not suggest a disidentification with people's africanness or blackness – although that also occurs. Rather it demonstrates both a lack of vocabulary but probably more so a lack of representations of minority discourses generally, and African descendant discourses specifically, that are *relatable*. José Esteban Muñoz developed the term disidentification in relation to what he called *minority discourse,* performativity and the agency through which minoritarian subjectivity is formed (1999). Here, I will only draw on the aspect of intra-minority disidentification with minority discourse. This is because while Muñoz'

concept is elaborated around a political agenda of anti-assimilation, the acts of disidentification I will analyze below are conceptualized mostly within apolitical, internalized post-racial imaginaries – thus with a tendency to conform to the majority regardless of it being oppressive. Nevertheless, this one aspect of Muñoz theory is quite productive.

While minority discourse is representation by a given group, marginalized and minoritized in relation to the dominant norms, disidentification is performed by those who are minoritized too but resist the 'mainstream' minority discourse. In Muñoz' theorization this is often related to the latter being minorities across more structures of power than what mainstream minority discourse accounts for, e.g., queer of color versus white queer discourse. In the Danish case, however, disidentification does not necessarily relate to hierarchies in the same way – those who perform disidentification from mainstream Danish minority discourse are generally *not* more marginalized than those who subscribe to it. Quite the contrary. Their disidentification is more so expressed from a place of recognizing something shared, but not agreeing with or relating to the representation. This is an expression of ways a certain one-sidedness within Danish minority discourse has little to do with how most people see themselves. And in the absence of alternative discourses and terms, simply rejecting the dominant ones is one available way to take power back to name oneself. Unfortunately, 'unlabelling' or 'de-racializing' oneself can reinforce an experience of being unique and alone with *their* special Afro-descendant experiences. Rejecting the bit of shared language that exists without developing, or looking for or creating alternatives, maintains narratives of uniqueness through frames like 'I am completely ordinary', implicitly: *for an Afro-descendant*. Ironically, being alone and feeling unique because of one's brownness and africanness (however people name it), *is* a collective experience.

The ways Dagmar and Binta first told their narratives of ordinariness to me emphasized negations. They both let me know as one of the first things what kind of afro-descendant discourse they did *not* subscribe to. Their perspectives were different from those minority narratives they, seemingly, thought they were expected to tell: stories of victimhood. It would have been easy to hear this as dismissing experiences of racial discrimination all together and perhaps as moves toward colorblind attitudes. Binta shares how she has navigated her identity until she was in her mid-twenties. As mentioned earlier, she says several times how she always saw herself as *Danish!* (She emphasized the word each time). She went on to explain how she understands retrospectively that she *had* to be *'very* Danish': "[...] and preferably, nobody should be able to point a finger at anything connecting me to my Gambian roots." It becomes apparent that calling herself Danish was not simply a passive or colorblind way of identifying. Rather, investing in Danishness was directly, although subconsciously, linked to her deviating from the norms, both racially and as a working-class kid. Being 'very Danish' became a strategy to negotiate belonging within the cultural norm.

I suggest that overcompensating cultural Danishness can also be a type of disidentification from minority discourse when racial minorities do it. Cultivating what they call being ordinary or very Danish is therefore a specific minority praxis – obviously, white Danes would never have to do this. Overcompensation can look like perfecting and hyper performing Danish language, perfectionism in educational institutions, demonstrating familiarity with Danish cultural references such as music, food, and films. And, as in Binta's case, being in 'very Danish environments' and not letting 'darkness' take up a lot of space in her consciousness. Unlike many afro-descendants of her generation, she actually had access to mirroring, if she would have wanted to, through her sister and cousins who hung out in 'African environments.' But she chose to separate herself from

them in certain ways. I could ask what was at stake here? But again, I might as well ask why *should* she have wanted to be in those social settings?

In these examples, disidentification takes the shape of actively investing in something whereas divestment from something else becomes more implicit. Hyper investment in being ordinary, being Danish, and being an ordinary Dane can therefore sound like it ignores people's own Africanness, brownness and blackness. It has been an available way to navigate one's own alienation in racially white families and environments without role models or well established, affirming minority discourse. And namely, navigating being constructed as different in a society whose premise for equality is sameness. You try your best to blend in and treat your 'otherness' as random, taking a cultural approach to racism rather than a structural understanding (Essed 1991, 111). These circumstances are a characteristic, if not defining, part of Black Danish first-generation life and consciousness. However, when the experience is lived unconnected from others who share it, most people do not realize that they are in fact having a group experience.

A characteristic of how the 'ordinary' people navigate tensions between knowing, as a matter of fact, that they are Black/brown/dark, without assuming blackness as a social position of experience, is their insistence on individuality. Rejecting the minority discourse of victimization, is not solely about that specific discourse, as I have suggested. Rather, this disidentification also rejects the idea of afro-descendant or racial minority *collectivity* and their own (potential) relationship to it. This is a large part of what is at stake: Not just being misrepresented, and the invisibilization of *their* version of afro-descendant experiences, but to lose their individuality if they admit to belonging in such a collective. That would be a community *outside* of the majority and 'ordinary' (white) Danish one. Basically, a community based on the very experiences they have spent a lot of energy minimizing and ignoring. Identifying within a collective experience would require a significant reorientation of who they had previously thought themselves to be. Constructing themselves as exceptional seems to provide a sense of security about who they are – despite the ongoing glitches when the external world does not buy their premise and racialize them.

Feeling misrepresented or unrepresented as a Black Danish person born between 1960 and 1990, is part of this local and generational black subjectivity. That is to say, not only experiences of racism shapes Black Danish consciousness: Performing ordinariness, disidentification, dissociating from experiences of alienation, gaslighting oneself, and processing (acknowledged) racism alone are all part of a shared experience. These characteristics are something that conditions afro-descendant Danish people's subjectivity, their sense of self.

Navigating Overlaps and In-betweenness: Integrating the Self

How people go about positioning their Black/brown/dark self is what separates Black political subjectivities and what I (for the time being) call exceptionalist afro-descendant subjectivities. The lived experiences are shared, no matter whether people know it or not. But it can be affirming to acknowledge the collective experiences. Isabelle lives rurally in Funen and is quite isolated from other racial minorities and afro-descendants besides her mother and siblings in her social life. Besides, they do not talk about belonging, alienation or life experiences shaped by racism among them. She is interested in the public debate on racism, as previously mentioned, but feels insecure about participating as she "stands alone." She seems a bit timid and quiet, yet confident in who she is and what she believes in. But she is certainly not an activist. All this to say that enjoying a (virtual) space where people share many foundational life experiences does not need to be radical or explicitly political (while centering minorities is default political). Neither does it necessarily

take away from other positions that shape your life experiences. She told me she joined a group on Facebook…

> "[...] because it is kind of nice to feel that fellowship [*fællesskab*], or that you are somebody who have the same…I mean, are in the same place [*står det samme sted*] where you feel you belong in one place, but externally others can see someone who does not belong to that place. Because that is particular to be in, that you *jo* are, I mean I feel *jo* as Danish, I am *jo* born and raised here. I do not know Zambia and have not been there, but others can interpret you as something else or have an opinion of you on the basis of how you look that you can not recognize, yourself."[82]

Isabelle speaks about the online group, named Speak Out (*Tal ud*), in terms of a community of people who share a *position* of experiences. The group is explicitly titled in a way that can imply confessions of 'racist incidents' and that is part of what felt comforting to Isabelle to see that she shared with others. She does not disidentify or point out such discourse, like Dagmar, Rose and Binta did. Isabelle seems to separate who she knows she is and how others [majoritized Danes] racialize and perceive her: she distinguished between *feeling* belonging to one place versus being *seen* as not belonging. Her taken for granted belonging in place – Denmark – is connected to having always been there (born and raised). This connection as self-evident is emphasized through her repeated use of the word 'jo' – the frequently used emphatic affirmation. It highlights part of the construction of Danishness as, ideally, having to do with a claim to nativeness. Not simply legally as it regards citizenship, but as a cultural narrative we learn. Her nativeness is then nullified qua her blackness which is a signifier of Africanness, and this equals foreignness. When other people present this equation of her (un)belonging and conclude that she 'is something else' than Danish, she cannot recognize herself in that image of her from an external, majoritized gaze. As she aptly states, it is 'particular to be in', this always negotiable position, and that is what feels nice to share with others. Isabelle does not experience an existential conflict in how she 'feels' her internal sense of self and how she is 'seen' and 'interpreted': "It is not like I have anything against, I mean people are allowed to see me, *jo* of course, as who I am and the way I look, but it is when people have something negative [to say] in relation to it that it becomes a problem."[83] She defies a discursive dichotomy between racialization as Black and national belonging through a naturalized notion of her embodiment and sense of homeplace as perfectly compatible.

Isabelle expresses a notion of identity where the online community represents a group of people who "are in the same place [*står det samme sted*]." In other words, she understands racial minorization as positions in the white Danish society, formed by a shared *condition* (Césaire 2010). Isabelle does not identify *as* Black, "I mean I feel *jo* as Danish" *and* she does acknowledge her experiences shaped by racialization as Black. There is no relationship of opposition here, unlike the dominant Danish discourse. Her blackness poses no threat to her (Danish) subjectivity and this embrace lets her connect with others who are racially minoritized. Differently than Victor Cornelins, Isabelle does not 'fancy to be white', and unlike her generational peers above, she is not resisting or refusing community around what she identifies as a standpoint in society: blackness

[82] "Fordi det er meget rart at føle det der fællesskab, eller man er nogen der har samme, altså står det samme sted hvor man føler man hører til ét sted, men udadtil kan andre se en som en der ikke hører til det sted. Fordi det er specielt at stå i, at man er jo, altså jeg føler mig jo som dansker, jeg er jo født og opvokset her, jeg kender ikke til Zambia og har ikke været der, men andre kan godt tolke én som noget andet eller have en mening om en på baggrund af den måde man ser ud på, som man ikke selv kan genkende.
[83] Det er ikke fordi jeg har noget imod, altså folk må gerne se mig, jo selvfølgelig som den jeg er og sådan som jeg ser ud, men det er når folk de har noget negativt i forhold til det at det er et problem.

and racial minoritization. Emphasizing the practical shared conditions in this way echoes Aimé Césaire's theories of what may constitute global Black African and African diaspora collectivity: as condition(ing) rather than essence (Césaire 2010). In this vein, Isabelle is not depending on a shared personal, internal way of self-identification to enter into a minority community context. In fact, it sounds like her sense of self is not on the line at all when engaging in a space centered around shared experiences of racial minoritization. I highlight this because it is significantly different from the following example which is a common way of making sense of oneself among Black and other Danish racial minorities.

Splitting the Self

From a similarly socially isolated adult life, Rose's navigation of self and her racialization sounded more conflictual. Rose lives in a newer neighborhood in Copenhagen. She described it as a place where the only people who 'stick out' would be expats from the U.S, a term underscoring the affluent social class across both white and non-white people living there. She puts it into perspective and comments that it would probably look completely different if they lived just on the other side of the water, in a public housing neighborhood where foreigners are called immigrants rather than expats. Others I spoke with grew up there. Rose grew up in a similar public housing project, though, north of Copenhagen (this has an upper-class connotation, despite talking about public housing). She lived with her white Danish mother and white Danish older siblings and without knowing her Ghanaian father. In the 1980's and 90's and in that particular housing project, there were not a lot of people who looked like her. And today, in the wake of last year's (2020) debates, Rose realizes she has very little diversity in her social circle. In fact, she has no "brown girlfriends" and nobody to chat about race with over a cup of tea and develop a vocabulary. She reflects that this is probably why she takes a listening position rather than using her own voice.

However, when asking Rose about her potential interest in groups for people of African descent, she hesitated shortly before answering: "I mean, not immediately [*altså, umiddelbart ikke*]. I am not at all looking for it." She gave me an example of her hesitant attitude when she received a magazine from her labor union representing her academic field:

> "Then it had a cover with a network for academic women with, with, with brown skin…[laughes] I mean, that is not what it is called [we both laughed] it is called something much more fancy and smart… but where I just got this 'god, how exciting,' that is just what I am going to do [*det skal jeg da!*] and yet, when I read about it… hmmmm… then there is something about… I don't know, it is actually very difficult for me to put into words, but, but… I think it is that the brown[ness] becomes the *point* of reference [*omdrejningspunktet*]. And I want… I don't think I have a need for that, or like, I would actually like it if it were my profession that is the point of reference."

Rose thinks out loud and openly shares her shifting emotions and relationship to the idea of a network for women professionals who are all 'brown.' She struggles with the terminology itself and uses self-irony to get around the acknowledgement that her vocabulary is limited. Uttering racial words is awkward. At first glance, a network of female 'brown' colleagues looks like it is just right for her. Then, looking more into it, she decides it is not for her. Although the network is per definition a professional network, Rose argues that it becomes about brownness and that she (thinks) she does not need that. Apparently, centering experiences of 'brownness' *within* the

professional context, still somehow makes it *about* brownness and *not* about their profession. At least, this is how she frames it; as opposites rather than overlaps or intersections. But concretely, when Rose joins professional networks, she is always both 'brown' and an academic. Just like she is a woman and academic, which does not seem to challenge her sense of professionalism, in this context. To maintain her academic professional identity in this regard, she seemingly needs to split and discard her 'brownness.'

Rose acknowledges that there indeed is a need for such a network and that it surely is helpful for a lot of women – she just does not quite feel like it is for her. I asked why not? She repeats, in different words, arguing that her "...skin color becomes the focal point of something I think should be about my profession or my career." And then she goes on to share her understanding of the connotations of brownness. This logic sounds quite similar to her claims to Danishness earlier. It echoes her disidentification with minority racialized self-identification, or simply put, including herself in what could be called a 'brown' experience: "And maybe it would be different if I had a very experienced feeling of being disregarded, that I was not seen or recognized professionally, or something. But, uhm, I have just never felt that. And I don't know if it is totally naive, I mean, would I have come even further in my career if I hadn't been brown? That, I don't know, but I don't feel like it has held me back…ever… Uhm, yeah… Does that make sense?"

The way she makes sense of this, again, is that 'brown' equals overt discrimination and she says she has not experienced that – in the workplace, in this context. Therefore, she does not fit into the brown professional women's network, her reasoning goes. And therefore, she prefers to disregard brownness all together as far as it concerns building networks professionally and personally. The premise for the cohesion of her identity stands out in relation to the previous example of Isabelle. Isabelle navigates her complex identities as a both-and: she feels Danish *and is also* aware of 'how she looks' and claims her experiences of racism matter of factually. Those experiences are not her; they happen to her. So, it resonates with her to be in community with people who share that position and therefore similar experiences. She embraces her experiences as a Danish person racialized as Black and that 'particular place' she stands, in-between. Borrowing from Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe, I call this an "integrated sense of self" (Ifekwunigwe 1999, 171). For Isabelle, feeling Danish refers to her entire cultural and social conditioning whereas her Zambian roots become mostly a marker of her racial otherness. As she said, she does not know Zambia, she never went. Nevertheless, it is part of her and her multicultural upbringing and, notably, is marked on her body.

Rose's sense of self, on the other hand, as Danish is dependent on pushing away her brownness to maintain coherence in her way of identifying. She rejects even trying to see what racial minority groups might be about because she thinks it is not for her since, in her own words, she was very spared from racism. But besides, she does not want to be in social or professional settings where brownness is the focal point. To her, hypothetically standing in her brown/Black experience seems to mean that she apparently is not *also* still Danish or *also* still a professional. This suggests she has internalized a dominant discourse in which Danishness is an exclusive category. And because being Danish is allegedly incompatible with brownness, she disintegrates her self and opts out of being brown as best she can.

However, *Ghanaianness* is important to her and serves as the explanatory fact of her brownness and experiences of othering. Experiences which she *has* had, but not in a way that she believes she has anything in common with people in the online groups and professional networks. Still, she does not identify *as* Ghanaian, but as Danish. What Rose's way of constructing herself

shows is that her core identity as "a Dane, first and foremost" is dependent on reducing herself to only that. She leaves her experiences of brownness a footnote only to be spoken about in relation to Ghana or her Ghanaian father, when *she* chooses to.

She treats her experiences of racism as exemptions from the rule and minimizes their impact, maintaining her narrative of being ordinary and generally spared from racism. As such, racist experiences are disconnected from her embodiment. Yet, her embodiment is an everyday fact of her life. What would happen if she made the connection? According to the reductionism and dichotomy she subscribes to, perhaps claiming blackness would reduce her to only that and exclude Danishness? Effectively this would be a loss of her entire self, following her way of making sense of identity. On the other hand, in the wake of 2020, as she has shared, she *is* interested but takes a somewhat outside position to questions of race, blackness, and racism in Denmark, as a listener. Interestingly, she tells a story about a previous colleague who, to her, was even more dismissive: "Uhm, and she was adopted, though, so she did not know her biological parents… was adopted here in Denmark. And she was perhaps 10 years older than me, uh, and she did *not at all* acknowledge the Ghanaian background, I mean, she… I, I, I could almost feel, you know, I could almost feel how she was feeling because she felt just like I did when I was a teenager, some of that… 'I don't want that alienation so therefore I have to push this thing away.'"[84]

Through this anecdote – partly her projection onto another and partly a memory of a previous version of herself – Rose gives an answer to my question above about why she needs to disconnect from her brownness. It is an extremely apt analysis of the stakes. If being brown is the aspect of you that causes your alienation, you must reject it to experience belonging (in Denmark, as Danish). Rose has expressed this strategy across different contexts in her own life, the common denominator being that brownness gets in the way of how she wants to identify. The concept of multiple overlapping or hyphenated identities stays unfathomable; it is *either-or*. I wonder, though, would she become more alienated from the outside world if she joined those networks? Or would she become alienated from herself? Rose can engage with the notion of Ghana, but she will not engage with her personal condition of racialization as such. Again, this exemplifies the dominating racializing discourse in Denmark which operates through the construction of a geographical elsewhere through the question 'where are you from?' Thus, Rose engages with her notion of (her father's) origin, Ghana, but not with her own 'particular place', as Isabelle would have put it, her social position as a Danish woman of interracial parentage who is racialized as Black. A positionality conditioned by blackness *and* her other entangled identities, for example womanhood (Hill Collins 2000). Although no longer a teenager, as in her anecdote, Rose resisted my many questions about communities based on shared experiences with her Ordinary Narrative and claim to a (almost) racism-free upbringing. It sounded like she was indeed still pushing away 'this thing', her own brownness and only engaging with it on her own terms. And like Faith, an underlying premise for this narrative is an understanding of Denmark as default not-racist, thus reproducing the cultural status quo of Danish tolerance and innocence.

Rose's conditional engagement with herself as a racialized person is expressed in at least two ways. First, as I have mentioned, through the racial-geographical reference to her father and Ghana. This becomes a matter of factual solution to invasive questions about her 'real' belonging and origins, the inescapable 'where are you from?'. Sometimes she refuses giving this information,

[84] "Øh, og hun var så adopteret, så hun kendte ikke sine biologiske forældre, var adopteret her i Danmark. Og hun var måske 10 år ældre end mig, eh, og hun anerkendte *slet ikke* den ghanesiske baggrund, altså, hun… Jeg, jeg, jeg ku' næsten mærke, kender du det, jeg ku' næsten mærke hvordan hun havde det for hun havde det ligesom jeg havde det da jeg var teenager, noget af det der… 'jeg gider ikke den der fremmedgørelse, så derfor er jeg nødt til at skubbe det her væk.'"

which is one of few acts of refusal available to control her own story. But the point is, it is *also* a solution to the equation of her African descendant and brown appearance – a way to compartmentalize this aspect of her. The 'elsewhere', Ghana, becomes a convenient symbol for her to locate and put away her otherness when she wants to. Part of what makes Ghana useful for this purpose, is through a construction of biological kinship, and thus relationship to place, meaningful in a particular way. Constructing herself as different from the acquaintance who was adopted and who 'did *not at all* acknowledge the Ghanaian background' Rose indicates that because she could now locate her biological kin, this contributed to making her a bit more acknowledging than in her teens. And much more compared to the Ghanaian Danish adoptee. Eurocentric constructions of biological parents are reproduced as central and as a type of narrative glue that holds together Rose's racialized life story and sense of self (ironically, nuclear family relationship or the primacy of biological parents is not a norm in many West African cultures). This is despite her actual experience of, serendipitously, having 'found' and connected with her biological father for the first time as a young adult. But she grew up in a completely white Danish household including only white siblings – much like many transnational adoptees. Identifying her biological father as something meaningful thus also testifies to the power of stories; knowing her parent's (broken) love story and being able to ask her mother questions about her father provided an anchor for her own life story. Even if he was not part of her life until she found him, the story of him and the knowledge of his existence was.

The (narrative of her) biological father thus enables explanations to her personal existence and her racial otherness, on her terms. Yet, what she seems to avoid, is the fact that she is a brown-skinned Danish Ghanaian person in Denmark, therefore Black, all day every day of her life. But avoiding social contexts where the racial aspect of this fact is at the center can be a way to stay in control of her own narration of self. There might be unknown aspects of everyday experiences that Black Danish people share, that would come up if she joined a community. This would be out of her control.

For Danish people of African descent who navigate their blackness and experiences of racial 'othering' as random individual incidents, rather than patterns and systems, indeed a lot is at stake. Internalizing the Danish post-racial narratives about cultural belonging, it might be threatful to seriously consider that regardless of how well you know your own national culture, your racialization as 'other' will always compromise a friction free and taken for granted belonging in it. And in the absence of 'race' in the Danish public discourse, it also means that affirming and positive discourses and adequate representation have not been readily available for the 1980's kids, similar to prior generations (Kilomba 2010; Gay 2021; Diallo 2022). You can be white Danish or brown-skinned and an immigrant, but many are neither. This means that, if you were to stand firm and own your blackness, the thing that is used to alienate you, there would be nothing to lean on instead. Therefore, (attempts to) blending in has been a number one social survival strategy for a lot of people (Habel 2008). People learn to understand their 'difference' as the very obstacle to a sense of belonging, rather than problematizing the racist premises of that imagined homogenous nation. The challenge is thus approached by personally mitigating that difference through maneuvers of denial, a fragmentation of self (Fanon 1952; Opitz, Oguntoye, and Schultz 1992; Kilomba 2010).

Self-Reflection and Negotiation Through Dialogue

I had shared my personal experiences of suddenly discovering the soothing feeling of recognition, mirroring and being seen in Afro-diasporic communities. After a lifetime of normalized alienation and discursively being 'sent' away from where I was born to where the Danish imagination wanted me to 'really be from,' the emotional and visceral experience of a sense of belonging changed my life. Because Rose was holding on so tightly to her narrative of being ordinary, I was curious about her imagination. Particularly because there was a doubleness to what she was saying. At once, she repeatedly insisted she did not fit into Afro-descendant communities, while at the same time, she related to my desire to be free of default alienation having grown up Black in Denmark, and the positive (humanizing) emotions it could bring. Below I show a longer excerpt of our conversation, including my understanding of the stakes of seeking afro-descendant, Black community as a Danish person. This is especially interesting because it shows nuances of Rose's relationship to the idea of Black community and her own place in it. This conversation is an example of the *praxis* of the Afro-diasporic Danish community, specifically between those of us who share significant life circumstances that have shaped us.

The ways my position, as a researcher, is different from most people I spoke with, enabled a type of negotiation between understandings. Because I think, read, and write about this very topic for a living (and have done so in the frame of a Black Studies department in the U.S.), I have developed a vocabulary and analysis that you would hardly acquire in Denmark without being very proactive in seeking knowledge. And that would suggest you already had a critical racial consciousness making you search for a certain type of knowledge. In the interviews, I experienced that simply sharing my own journey and what had affected my shifting consciousness and sense of self opened something in people. And on a practical level, simply speaking was a way to offer a terminology to articulate experiences that they recognized. Things they already felt themselves but had not previously expressed. In fact, after months of interviews, my experience was that the more I leaned into the dialogical format of semi-structured interviews, the better the conversation. In this longer excerpt, Rose tells a moving tale of momentarily feeling belonging. A memory that clearly meant something to her in its own right, *and* she also uses my story to mirror hers in, finding similarities and differences by relating them to one another.

> "The experience I had in New York as a 29-year-old, I think… I mean, all those things when growing up and always being different and being alienated without feeling alien yourself… All those things about always being *neger-Rose* [negro-Rose] and *mulat-Rose* [mulatta-Rose] and then as a 23-year old travelling to Ghana and thinking that now I am travelling to that thing everybody says I belong to, and then going there and then *obroni* was shouted at me in the street, which *jo* is 'white' and then it was just like *what the fuck?!,* I mean! So, here they don't think I belong either, uhm… And then when I was on vacation in New York and was going to this like – which is *jo* a super touristy thing to do – this big, famous *gospel* church [...] And when I arrived, there was kind of like a queue for the congregation and those who belong and a queue for the tourists [...] and that queue for the tourists reached all the way along the building, so I was sort of discouraged when I went around that line there [...]. And then I actually just wanted to go back to the metro and then I pass the congregation line and I – I mean, it is not something I see, but they are, they are all Black [*sorte*], and then somebody, a woman who sort of stops

> me and asks where I am going and if I was on my way inside. And then I say that I really wanted to get in but that that line was simply too long… And then she says, a little *sista*-like [*sista-agtigt*], I mean, 'you just come with me'... And that is the first and only time ever where, exactly, I had precisely that [...] feeling you describe where [she took a deep breath] *here,* I just belong. *Here,* I just *am, here* I am pulled into the queue because – I am just one of those who belong here. [She sighs]. So, I understand your story 100%. For me, however, it was just rather brief, because it was *jo* only in that line and then the fact of getting into the church and sitting downstairs on the bench [she smiles saying this] while all the tourists sat upstairs, uhm… And then it was *jo* actually over, kind of. And I have never experienced that before or since."

Rose's tale begins with what is almost a rite of passage of first-generation diasporic subjects. She is deemed 'out of place' through continuous alienation, alienation that she does not recognize herself in, as a Danish person by life experience, not a foreigner (Carby 2019). The racial slurs which both connote *Black* [inferior] and *African* [foreigner, immigrant] discursively 'sends' her away from Denmark in a nationalist logic of racial-geographies and her alleged destination is 'Africa.' Because of her personal history and knowledge of her father's place of origin, she goes to Ghana, although not immediately to his region or village. Once in Ghana, in this (constructed) place where she had been 'situated' by the outside world her entire life, she is hailed anew. Now excluded as *obroni,* she has to recon with a different racializing context. Here, the color line cuts the social world differently: while she could never be white in Denmark, she is now hailed through a notion in which whiteness/foreignness/Europeanness/Westernness means more or less the same thing. Not dissimilar to the Danish racial geographic, it simply sends her in the opposite direction, back to Europe. For comparison, I heard similar stories from the mono-racial Black Danes I spoke with, and someone even mentioned that their (Black African) mother, after having spent most of her adult life in Denmark, now also experiences being outside and being called 'European' in her former home country. Without specialized knowledge of the context Rose went to, it is reasonable to suggest that, here too, the construction of the 'foreigner' is an assemblage of various factors such as class, culture, language (or lack of), mannerism and dress as well as embodied, visual racial categorization. That said, outside the Global North and its Modern racializing scheme, particularly in majority Black African contexts, what makes someone like Rose different from the norm at a first glance, among the other factors, *is* her racial whiteness and she could be pointed out for this alone. This is frustrating her. And it is precisely this realization – 'what the fuck?!' – that is very typical, a rite of passage, for various lived experiences of being a 'third culture kid'(Pollock and Van Reken 2001; Van Reken, Pollock, and Pollock 2010). Meaning those who are not neatly fitting into either of the places they have been socialized to think they might call home across inherited 'origins' and geographical places.

And it is here too, that expressions of 'new world' blackness shaped by Modernity, in Rose's story this is the U.S., can sometimes do something for westernized Black subjects, who do not have access to such expressions at home. When the church lady stopped Rose and invitingly said 'you just come with me,' she did a speech act which signified that she saw Rose and what she saw meant that she belonged. Because the lady did not know anything else about her, and she likely knew she was not local and picked up on Rose's accent when they spoke. But in *that* context, Rose's embodied *blackness* was the entire and only ticket she needed to be easily and naturally absorbed into a community of belonging. Not despite, but *because she was Black* in that time and place. This is specific for a place in which, for historical reasons, a Black collectivity has been

shaped and reshaped and can be quite expansive – here, Rose's mixed-race blackness *was* blackness. I heard iterations of this story of belonging from almost everyone, across mixed-race Black and mono-racial Black Danish people. Often belonging played out in locations where Black diasporic formation has existed and grown for centuries; in big U.S. cities, Black Brazilian locations, or parts of London were places that enabled a feeling of coming home. Rose was pulled into an embrace where she was *seen* rather than looked at: '*here,* I just belong. *Here,* I just *am…*' She took pause through a deep breath and, perhaps, relived the memories and sensations of simply *being*, the *break* from the default of alienation. This was a nourishing experience she did not even realize she needed. And then it was over. Ephemeral belonging turned into a memory.

In no uncertain terms, Rose expresses this as a heartening and good experience. Yet, she returns to her hesitancy about the possibility of making connections and exploring community building *in Denmark* and perhaps recreating that feeling of belonging: "And maybe…I don't know if, for example, I joined such a network [...] in their magazine, which by the way I never read, but I could just see a bunch of brown women on the front page," she says smilingly, "so I had to check out what it was. Uhm, and maybe I would get it there, I didn't even think… I mean…I rather think that precisely I…yeah…no…yeah, I don't know…no…" she said and giggled quietly, pensively.

The tension between experiencing the sweet, soft, and relieving embrace of belonging – even if ephemeral – yet, shying away from possibilities of connection and relatability is fascinating to me. Why turn away from something that feels good? Studying power, I understand that we in the larger Western context have learned to disconnect from a range of our personal and human desires, including who to relate with and who to love. We learn to suppress or not register our longings at all in order to comply with what bell hooks (2012) has called "imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (p. 4). It is part of the coloniality of power (Quijano 2000) within which we live, particularly as Black subjects in diaspora – fragmentation, from self, our people, and our places is inherent in our being Black in and partly of the West (Alexander 2005). Although I can understand why, I still pose the question to unsettle the naturalization of the ways we have learned to self-repress.

Taking this question seriously is my driving force and what intrigues me about Black Danish subjectivity. Because the people who invest heavily in 'being normal' and in their individuality are not racially dissociating. They have an awareness of themselves grounded in facts: brown skin; an African parent, some absent, some present, but a sense of an identifiable 'root' of their ancestry and explanation to their own propagation in white soil. While they have an awareness of their Africanness and racial blackness, most of them do not express a Black political consciousness. The insistence on their individuality keeps them from entertaining ideas around the fact that there might be connections to make between shared racialized embodiment, shared lived experiences, and thus shared understandings (Essed 1991; Opitz, Oguntoye, and Schultz 1992; Hill Collins 2000). Disidentifying with minority discourse generally, then also keeps them from stepping into a political Black position, specifically (Muñoz 1999). A position that does not need to be based solely on trauma bonding and victimization, although it has been hyper mediated as such. Ideally, assuming political blackness can be a holistic acknowledgement of the broad spectrum of African diasporic lives in Denmark and what connects us. This includes affirmations, pleasure, and joyfulness too. And simply space to breathe and to just *be*. 'There is *jo* a sense of safety in that,' as Faith put it. Assuming a Black political position would have less to do with self-identification – 'I am *very* Danish!' or 'I am not Black, I am Ugandan' – and more to do with recognition of collective circumstance – a group experience. There is therefore a complicated,

circular relationship between the lived reality of *Black racial isolation* as a characteristic of first generation Black Danish people and the prospect for change through collective movement. If Black racial isolation leads to racial exceptionalism, what will break the isolation so that the patterns of collectivity can emerge? Coming into a critical Black consciousness is a recognition that you are *not* unique, and that many defining experiences that have shaped your sense of self are, in fact, a collective experience. It is a recognition that you do not (have to) carry that weight alone. What *is* individual however, is to *allow* a change of self – personal transformation – to happen.

Conclusion: Remembering Our Wholeness

I had many formulations of my reasons to do this research project. One I have heard myself consistently stating was simply that I have to write us into existence. By us, I mean myself and the extension of myself which is my Afro-diasporic Danish kin. I felt a pull to voice my perspective, in my way. My desire and motivation is as pure and clear today as when it emerged in Paris in 2015, only now, I have acquired so much knowledge. Knowledge on self, knowledge on collective selves, knowledge on collective selves through History and histories, and across places and political moments. I have learned and refined my ideas. But the knowledge I have held all alone, is my embodied knowledge. Growing personally and as a scholar enabled me to write some pages on contributing to an archive on Danish Black African diasporic lives in all our diversity.

The one primary question I wanted to pose was how the particular conditions and conditionings shape subjectivities of Danish people of African descent. The question arose from my embodied knowledge and experience of being socialized in a way that sought to 'unrace' me, while I was also always racialized as Black 'other.' The discrepancy between the Danish cultural ideology of being raceless and racism-free functioned at the same time as actions, words, and discourse always produced and reproduced my 'difference' more or less subtly. This can be experienced like a paradox, at best, and as lies and gaslighting at worst.

I wanted to know how others navigated this tension of double-tongued motherland discourse. I knew this would be a shared experience with others who look like me. How did I know? Because the very result of racism as a dehumanizing relationship is to reduce a person to their *marker* of difference. Personhood and individuality disappear in it and we all become a Black'ish brown blur without faces or names, in the white gaze. The times in my life I have felt the most invisible is when I am reduced to my race. That is when I know, in hindsight, of course: oh, they don't *know* me, they don't even see *me*. "A feeling of inferiority? No, a feeling of not existing" Fanon writes (1952, 118). Therefore, for everyone who shared the same markers in the same context – markers of African blackness, as brown skin, coils and curls, beautifully full noses and lips, thighs and hips – would most likely encounter the same attitudes and have to explain their existence in Denmark in perpetuity, just like me.

I also knew this had nothing to do with the specific people I grew up around. They were not any worse or any better than the average majoritized white Danes anywhere in the country (even if they might like to think so in the leftist, free-spirited, 'multi-culti' environment I grew up in). But in fact, it can be more challenging to call out racism and antiblackness (and other oppressions) in social contexts where people are so firmly convinced that they are the progressive of the progressive. Their complicity in maintaining a racist status quo is unfathomable to

themselves. And in the name of self-evident white innocence so much racist (and sexist and homophobic) stuff was said throughout my life, in the company of 'the good guys.' It was dismissed through humor because it was 'obviously just for fun.' While right-leaning and conservatives are a different kind of oppressive, at least there is some honesty in blatantly saying who they (think) they do not like. It is coherent with their attitudes. Understanding that racism is not individual acts, or individual 'flawed' people pointed out as 'racists,' but a "hegemonic imaginary of the modern/colonial world-system" (Ramón Grosfoguel 2002) has allowed me to look beyond questions of intent and examine (racist) *structures* of knowing. The way 'we' know, as decolonial theorists such as Grosfoguel argue, is structured through relationships of power, not outside of them. Therefore, I have written a lot about the dominating Danish 'imaginaries' because this is where the knowable or that which is completely unimaginable, thus unrecognizable *as* knowledge, takes shape. For example, the notion of people racialized as Black as humans before anything else. In the world of Western modernity, that notion has yet to become naturalized as dominant knowledge and truth.

Therefore, if you grew up looking any kind of Black anywhere in Denmark with any kind of white Danish people surrounding you, I wanted to know what you did with those experiences of alienation. How you interpreted what happened and how it made you feel. How you thought of yourself, who you were and were not.

Core Concepts: A Language Offering

The individual storytellers I chose to highlight in this dissertation were those I remembered *by heart.* This was excellent advice I got right after returning to Berkeley from doing research for months (Jovan Scott Lewis 2021, personal communication). Each and every one of the interviews could have expressed the same patterns, but some of them just did it in a way that stuck with me. That said, a lot of the interviews that became 'my favorites' actually did not make it into writing. There was a certain order in which I needed to present my findings and as such a lot of very important themes simply did not fit into the dissertation. The ones I have presented in these chapters can therefore be understood as foundational themes conditioning many people of Danish African descent, as part of larger European Black or Afropean experiences.

I propose *Black Racial Isolation* as a key concept to theorize African Diasporan Blackness in Europe, as part of the West. This contribution thus decenters *segregation* as default circumstance for 'the Black experience' and Black people's relationship to white supremacy in Western contexts. Isolation and segregation can and do exist side by side, but often affecting differently categorized racial groups. I therefore conceive an analysis of Black racial isolation as complementary to other analyses that capture collective experiences of racial minority realities.

Racial isolation occurred as a defining condition shaping Black Danish people, across generations and across urban and suburban/rural contexts. I identified it expressed on several levels: 1) It exemplified the omnipresence of racial whiteness on the ideological level in the form on Euro-white-centric nationalist discourse, construction of Danish colonial History, and in everyday discourse in which it was hard to articulate racist experiences without 'race.' 2) Black racial isolation was a social fact; people were literally surrounded by majority white people *and* had little to no contact with other Black people. The specific Danish history and geopolitical present has made Black Africans a numerical minority, a practical challenge to collectivity. But the vast African diversity also presents scattered belongings among the immigrated parent generations. And 3) for a significant number of people, 'mixed-race' or not, white norms are

learned in the intimate sphere from childhood, having white Danish caretakers. White norms are therefore centered *and*, for those who did not *also* have Black kin, a natural relationship to embodied blackness is unavailable (by natural I mean unspectacular, unfetishized, unnamed as Black, but simply as relative/kin). This made people estranged from themselves and from other Black people.

Under such circumstances, Danish representations of Black or African people thus became almost only available reflections of blackness. The centrality of 'seeing difference,' despite a Danish commonsense to deny 'seeing race,' illustrated the role of a 'visual economy' in the Danish racializing modalities (El-Tayeb 2011; Ahmed 2000). One aspect was the particular Nordic and European *externalization of race*; perceiving 'color' as a surface layer, rather than a historically constructed socio-political position in society and thus a lived, embodied experience.

Externalizing blackness appeared as a way to create connection between a person and Danishness, despite their blackness, believing in a Danish core underneath their brown skin. This logic was expressed by white Danes and internalized by Black Danes as well. A visual distinction between 'looking like' and 'being' became central to negotiating African diasporic Danish people's belonging in Denmark, because Blackness and Danishness was constructed as a dichotomy.

The other aspect was more explicitly reflecting a Eurocentric discourse or régime of truth, and clearly throughout all three chapters: *racial spectacularization*. This combined the visual economy (spectacle) with extraordinariness and shock value. This happened from the hyper-mediation and public memory of Victor Cornelins and Alberta Roberts in the cage in 1905, to the scenes of subjection in *The Child Import* (Linde et al. 2016), to the sudden 'discovery' of 'possible' racism in Denmark in 2020 through a fetichization of 'minority pain' (Tuck and Yang 2014). I argued that racial spectacularization and the fetichization of Black pain as dominating Danish discourses reduces the black subject to their victimization. This representational practice both erases the humanness and ordinariness of Black people and the mundane reality of racism. Racism is the rule, not an exception. Representing racialized-experience-as-pain was partly why some people disidentified with pain-centered minority discourse and often divested from a racially minoritized self-acknowledgement altogether (Muñoz 1999; Tuck and Yang 2014).

Racial mirroring, however, showed up as essential in the Black Danish people's attempt to establish a positive sense of self. Of the scarce representation, they thus clinged to the least violent images, learning to find beauty and self-recognition in colonialist aesthetics. Available representations of blackness were then both negative and positive stereotypes, mediated by the white gaze, whereas Black self-representation was not readily available before the 1990's, mainly from the U.S. The visual racial landscape having shaped all generations' racial imaginaries was thus characterized both by *under*- and *mis*representation (Skadegård Thorsen 2020).

In that vein, the existing representation of racial minorities as always immigrants were equally alienating as the scarcity of representation at all. Seeing that a discourse of 'minority' self-representation is growing, Danish Black people find themselves as outside the construct of 'us' and 'them.' Being neither white Danes, nor prototypical (non-Black) 'immigrant other' they found themselves as 'a minority in the minority.' This was aggravated not by their citizenship status, but rather their racialization as Black by non-Black minorities. The concept of being a Black 'minority in the minority' illuminated the necessity for research through a critical analysis of race and racialization generally, and of *antiblackness* in particular. This also underscored structures of power not as dichotomies between alleged majority and minority, but as complex spectra in which every positionality is invested in maintaining the bottom of hierarchies. If one cannot be completely included, one can at least be not-Black, the logic goes. So-called mixed-race Black

people partake in divestment from blackness too, and reminds us that race is not an essence, but a relationship of power and dominance.

Post-racialism and *Nordic Exceptionalism* are two equally essential concepts to understand the discursive reality within which Black Nordics have come of age, within a general European post-WWII discourse and political context (El-Tayeb 2011; Habel 2011; McEachrane 2016; Boulila 2019). While 'race' is taboo, racial minorities are still clearly visible to the white majority and constantly hailed as different (Ahmed 2000). Influenced by both by racial denial and ahistorical national narratives, the native racialized 'other' is constructed as a perpetual foreigner. Thus, perceived as unbelonging to the nation, the European racial minority is rendered *out of place.* I conceptualized the Western *racial geographic* to identify how, without uttering the word race, the Danish dominant discourse functions to make sense of non-white people on the Danish territory by delegating them to other locations they allegedly 'come from.' This reveals a double standard of a dominant common sense that, at once, claims to be 'colorblind' yet strongly self-identifies danishness as white, and only white. Gloria Wekker's (2016) notion of *white innocence*, is therefore a pertinent core concept in theorizing race and racialization in the Danish context as well. The *racial geographic* is an iteration of the *exteriorization* of the racial 'other' via the 'internalist' narrative of Europe' deriving from the historical construction of the *West and the Rest* as coherent and true (Glissant 1989; Hall 2011a; Trouillot 2015). This meta discourse is at once residue from and a reproduced logic of European Modernity.

It is then in the naturalized construction of Black people *of* Denmark as truly belonging *outside* and *elsewhere,* that a moral obligation and debt of *gratitude* is imposed on the Black Danish person, in particular the transnational/transracial adoptee whose 'crossing' is made explicit. *Compulsory gratitude* is therefore a complex entanglement of racialized, affective relationships of both structural power and interpersonal dependency (Myong and Bissenbakker 2021; Gay 2021). It is a demand that presumes integration *as* assimilation and as inherently beneficial; a person's rupture from racial kin and lands, (dis)placed into whiteness is constructed as a special privilege (Myong 2011). It thus invisibilizes the consumptive relationship between the *white savior* (individuals and nation states) and the Black or otherwise racialized minority and how they fill adults' needs (entitlement) for children, and the usefulness of domestication within c*ivilizationist nationalist projects* (Wyver 2019; Eriksen 2020; Hermann 2021). The discourse of rescue echoes European Christian missionaries and colonialist hierarchies of place and race.

Transplanted into such an ideological environment and *being the only one* has therefore had various effects on the development of subjectivity among Danish people of African descent. One social conditioning of racial isolation is *racial dissociation* (Eng and Han 2019). Identifying exclusively with white people and white Danish epistemology, Victor Cornelins expressed having forgotten his blackness and 'fancying to be white.' Other strategies to construct a sense of self as belonging, despite one's Black otherness, was through *individualization* and *exceptionalization*. As such, certain people made use of what I called *the Ordinary Narrative.* While being aware of their own 'brownness' or Africanness they would situate themselves outside of available discourses on what it means to be Black or a racial minority in Denmark. If being a minority equates to suffering, then they were just 'completely ordinary' in comparison; implicitly not suffering. This construction of subjectivity and *individualized Blackness* was premised on a limited understanding of everyday racism (Essed 1991). The limited understanding was connected to the socio-historical reality of a non-existent Danish Black discourse, Black racial isolation, and white innocent post-racialism: there was simply no knowledge foundation to understand racism in Denmark. Black people identifying as *not*-Black/brown/African/minority was therefore connected

to a conclusion they drew between lived experiences of racism as *not*-racism: if racism did not happen, they were not Black.

A related and often overlapping strategy for making sense of a Black Danish self was through splitting, conceptualizing Danish belonging as premised on pushing away one's blackness/Africanness. Reducing their Africanness to a practical matter of a parent's origin, or indeed exterior color, would be a way to avoid considering racialized embodiment as a *lived experience,* and a shared *social position*. This showed up in the case of Victor Cornelins as well as the millennial Black Danish people having internalized their own blackness as mutually exclusive to Danishness and as a disturbance to their sense of individuality and personal identity.

Others, however, navigated their plurality with ease, experiencing no contradictions in *looking like* an African descendant and *feeling* Danish; they managed their cultural and racial multiplicity through *racial integration*. This then enabled them to seek community and break the racial isolation that conditioned them so far. Mirroring, recognition, and acknowledgement felt good and enabled a development in consciousness from individual to *collective consciousness*. Assuming a collective positionality and collective consciousness is a precondition to developing a political consciousness. Across the board, however, *feeling belonging* in African Diasporic spaces across the world was a rare and soothing experience. Feeling at *home* and feeling able to *just be,* stood out as positive embodied and emotional experiences. Blending into the social landscape and being claimed as belonging to a place and people was *disalianating*, and the reverse of default racial isolation (Césaire 2000; Fanon 1952). It was the experience of feeling seen, not gazed at.

There was therefore a theme of ambivalence and even contradiction in some of the conversations. On the one hand, some people were invested in dissociating from their own racialized experience, and especially from being associated with other African descendants or people of color generally. On the other hand, connection with other Black people felt good. On a small scale, the microcosm of the dialogical space I created for the interviews exemplified how recognizing your own story in the other person's words has an affirming potential. It was a practice of saying out loud hard or awkward words and an opportunity to speak and be not only heard but believed. But overcoming the practicality of identifying as Black/African/descendant/brown in order to make yourself known to others and create connections still appeared as hard; it compromised a Danish sense of self and allegedly canceled out individuality. This hesitant sentiment coexisted with the heartfelt joy over Black communion experienced abroad and the yearning for similar belongingness. Because multiple things can be true at the same time.

Themes for Future Research

It would be worth exploring, in future research, some patterns that occurred through the interviews but did not make it into this dissertation. For example, as above mentioned, the breaks from Black racial isolation that people experienced when traveling abroad, by reading pro-Black and African literature, and by consciously creating community. In short, when and how Black Danish people experience diasporic connection and healing. I am especially interested in what enables a political consciousness awakening among people who were previously racially dissociating or splitting themselves. Such a change and healing were expressed beautifully by Elora: "There is *jo* something that makes it so that you can acknowledge or *acknowledge* [in English] the awesomeness [*det fede*] in the other [part of you/your story]. I mean, I have truly lived a double life in a way, uhm, but the awesome [*fede*] thing is [...] to say, now I am where I am, I mean, to

stand by myself. That is awesome!"[85] She expresses a 'something,' but leaves it unarticulated. Its effect, however, is that she made choices, much like Anne, about who she surrounded herself with. And eventually she created a family in which she would see herself, and importantly, her child (and niblings) can see themselves in her.

Related to that, it is also important to further research the significance of family constellations with white parents. Where critical Adoption Studies represent a crucial discourse on transracial, white parenthood, critically analyzing white biological parenthood and families of Black children is lacking attention as a specific Black Studies issue too. Jacob had fascinating self-reflections on the matter. His experience represented something in between adoption and interracial families of mixed-race Black Danes, growing up in foster care but with contact to both of his biological parents. From the topic of normalized racist stereotyping by his white (foster) father, he made pertinent connections between white parenthood and the complicated odds for Black subjectivity development:

> "...I also think, in a way, you know, that to grow up, you know, in such a family that can think of saying such a thing, it also makes you, you know, get a bit of a weird relationship to being dark and you come off as kind of *de-attached* from the things that can seem like issues for others, you know, uhm. But it is clear that to grow up with a father who can say such a thing that, that surely has not been good in relation to how I kind of identify with, you know, the fact that I am dark, it surely hasn't. And it might be that I somehow have suppressed it to a degree which in theory is not healthy and it might be less healthy when I have to explain to my son that he too is… I mean, because I do not have a relationship myself, and it might be important to him, but it is not that important to me… I don't know, I mean…"[86]

This theorization between racism in intimate relationships, own subjectivity, and the relationship to the next generation came up several times across the interviews, particularly among people with very young children or those who were expecting.

Also related to kinship is the reality that, while I have studied first-generation Black Danish diasporic conditions, there might not in fact be a second generation. That is, among the first-generation a significant part is so-called mixed-race people, and – straight and queer alike – the vast majority have children with white biological partners: "My children are really white!" Dagmar exclaimed. And Jacob shared a similar observation: "Now, I am dark, right, and [son's name] is less dark and his children probably will be completely white, right, so you know, then it is gone!" What is implicit is then that, from having grown up as 'the only one' from the private sphere to society, many people recreate families in which they are again 'the only ones.' The only one read as Black in their new little family, their family of origin, and their in-laws. Because many

[85] "Det er jo et eller andet der gør, at du kan erkende eller *acknowledge* det fede i det andet. Altså jeg har så godt nok levet et dobbeltliv, på en eller anden måde øh, men det fede er [...] at sige nu er jeg hvor jeg er, altså at stå ved mig selv. Det er fedt."
[86] "Jeg tror også på en eller anden måde at, du ved, at vokse op, du ved, i sådan en familie, der kan finde på at sige sådan noget, det gør også på en eller anden måde at man, du ved, får lidt et underligt forhold til at være mørk og man virker sådan lidt *de-attached* fra de ting der godt kan virke som problemer for andre, du ved, øh... Jeg synes altid jeg har haft evnen til sådan at sætte mig ud over min egen næsetip, men det er klart at at vokse op med en far der kan sige så' noget det, det har da ikke været godt i forhold til hvordan jeg ligesom identificerer mig med, du ved, det faktum at jeg er mørk, det har det da ikke… Og det kan være at jeg på en eller anden måde har undertrykt det i en grad der måske i teorien ikke er sund og det kan være den bliver mindre sund når jeg skal til at forklare min søn at han også er… Altså fordi jeg ikke selv har en relation og det kan være det er vigtigt for ham, men det ikke er så vigtigt for mig… det ved jeg ikke, altså…"

have children who are not the mediatized 'ambiguously' racialized green-eyed trope, but literally have blue eyes and straight, blond hair, and white skin. Thus, there is no shared racialized experience here either. There are therefore great contributions to be made within Afrofeminist and Black Feminist theorizations of Black becoming from Afro European scholars specifically. The existence of Black matrilineage is often taken for granted in African diasporic theory conditioned by segregation or/and collective immigration as the (unnamed) default of racial relations in majority white places. However, Black racial isolation as Black experience calls for theorizations of Black kinship across and outside of family lineages of origin. Some Black Europeans neither grew up with nor reproduce their Black lineage. This reality heightens the importance of chosen family, of finding one's *mati,* and reiterates a Black Queer analytic as central in theorizing the diverse African diasporan lives in Europe generally and *Black belonging* in Denmark specifically.

Lastly, all of the varied gendered and sexual racialized relationships should be further studied as they relate to Black and African diaspora Danish subjectivity. It seems crucial to further research the effects of white single mothers; the effects of African and Black mothers; the absence of African and Black fathers; what could first generation Black straight cis men teach us? Where are the Black and African adoptees from the 1980-90's and what could they teach us? What are the connections between Black trans, gender non-conforming, and queer femme positionalities and Black radical political consciousness? Why are first generation Black cis women generally (as well as other racialized minority women) highly represented in my study, in critical academic research, and in organizing? These are just a few tendencies and questions my data provoked, by no means exhaustive of the understudied topic of Danish and Nordic blackness.

Subjectivity Formation in Black Racial Isolation

There was a tension between various strategies of preserving a sense of self, such as the Ordinary Narrative and other maneuvers of splitting oneself, and the prospect for connection with other relatable African diasporic Danish people. How can we meet each other if/when we are also avoiding each other, by avoiding ourselves?

In this regard it was eye opening to learn the concept of "the adoption fog" in the Danish radio program *Revolutionen* [The Revolution] on Radio 24syv, hosted by Laura Na Blankholm. The program from December 2022 was a conversation among filmmaker Sun Hee Engelstoft, artist Yong Sung Gullach, activist Se Eun Lee, and Moon Jo, of which the last three are chairperson, founding member, and member of *Adoptionspolitisk Forum* [Adoption Political Forum] respectively. It is an interest organization for and by transnational adoptees in Denmark. Each of them is positioned as Danish people of the Korean diaspora of adoptees from the 1970's and 80's. I was stunned by the ease with which they articulated the idea of "when you step out of the fog as an adoptee" (2022), even more so their unapologetic and matter of factual way they did it.

This was in stark contrast to some nervousness I experienced beginning to write about the Ordinary Narrative. The racial dissociation central to the Ordinary Narrative and other mechanisms of *unseeing* oneself *as* Black (or as a minority racialized person generally) can indeed be described as a fog of consciousness. Colloquially, theorizing my research among friends who are also intellectual colleagues, I have coined this state of consciousness "the sunken place." The term originates in the 2017 psychological thriller movie *Get Out* by African American Jordan Peele (2017). The sunken place can be described as an extreme psychic marginalization of the person's consciousness, reduced to mere sentience and functions of the autonomic nervous system. In its state, a white person's brain is implanted, and their cognition now rules the conscious actions of

the racially Black person/body. In the film, people end up in the sunken place by force, literally by being victims of involuntary hypnosis, having their mind controlled.

In lack of a common language, like the Korean community of adoptees, this pop-cultural reference was the most precise metaphor for what I had observed among Danish racial minorities, Black and others. Not just in my research but throughout my life, including myself, prior to Paris 2015. When I listened to the people of the Korean diaspora of adoptees, they affirmed that there was a particular mindset of unseeing the self that characterized the Danish racially minoritized subject formation. This had felt hard for me to articulate alone. I did not wish to further alienate people of African descent who absolutely disavowed their blackness/Africanness, but still did engage somewhat with the fact of their inherited lineage, like many in this study. But at the same time, it seems important to be able to name this state of mind. Because it is curious to so strongly deny something that is the first thing everybody else notices about you. It is paradoxical. But it becomes especially important to acknowledge this state for the ones who are 'stepping out of the fog', as they phrased it on *Revolutionen*, or emerging from 'the sunken place.' Essentially, in support of those who are choosing to see themselves as integrated and whole people, and who are coming into a political consciousness as such it is important to name the racial denial. Some of the heartbreaking stories I heard from the millennial generation were from people like Amanda, whose politicization began way before most of her friends, including those who looked like her. Being asked 'why do you care about that?', 'why are you so angry?' or being told 'that is not racism' by your 'other brown friends', as she put it, *that* made her feel angry and very alone. As an antidote to gaslighting by fellow Black and racial minorities, I acknowledge the different consciousnesses people can have so that a *political consciousness* is not invalidated as 'anger.' Which, by the way, happens to be a specific gendered racial stereotype for Black women – particularly those who speak (up).

My emphasis on the *conditions* that shape subjectivity was, as mentioned, partly in recognition that racism and antiblackness has got absolutely nothing to do with us, personally. Even if we might have internalized it as such when nobody was there to tell us the status quo was wrong and not us. Danish people of Black African descent are neither responsible for the harm done to us nor for the internalized *inferiority complex*, as Fanon (1952) would call it, or the *racial dissociation* it might have resulted in as with Eng and Han (2019). The emphasis on conditions – growing up in Denmark as a first-gen Black Dane – was also my choice to carve out a theoretical space to state that Danish people of Black African descent are indeed living a 'Black experience' regardless of whether they self-identify or understand themselves as Black. They are perceived as Black from the outside and this shapes their entire lives. That is a Black condition, therefore a Black experience. By analyzing antiblackness, rather than Black 'identities' I could therefore collect life stories, engage in conversation, and identify societal and cultural patterns that teach us about Danish society and its invisibilized norms. And of course, its effects.

A larger diversity of European blacknesses is being written and offer extremely important reflections back to others, not only in similar bodies, but in similar circumstances. For instance, Georgina Lawton (2021) was born and raised in rural England in the 1990's, brown as cherry wood, black-brown thick coily hair. A result of her white mother's affair with a Black African man, Georgina is a visibly African descendant. Yet her two white parents chose to willfully ignore her blackness. That meant they construed some story as an explanation to her 'color,' almost as a genetic glitch, and raised Georgina as 'raceless' in their white community. And oddly, most people played along in the little rural bubble they lived in, pretending to not know she was Black – at least

in front of her. If Lawton wrote her autobiography *Raceless* it is because she, eventually, could not make sense of the lie and its discrepancy with her lived experiences being hailed as Black. *Because it did not make sense*. Eventually she took a DNA-test and could officially locate her blackness as Nigerian as an adult.

I find this story at once completely heartbreaking and wildly absurd, *and* I believe there are many more stories like this than one might think. Not least in Denmark. I *can,* in fact, believe that someone could grow up in a European country and believe that they are white (or somehow *not*-Black) if that is what they were told and 'race' was a taboo topic, relegated to the past or other places. Remember, often people closest to us will let us know "I don't even see your color" as a sign of their love. And if a Black European did not ever meet other Black people who might have interrupted the raceless narrative, the lie could go on and on (with frictions here and there, but nonetheless). It was striking to me, however, that this could happen in England with their Black British history, Black discourse, Black vocabulary, and census boxes to check, something that sets Britain generally apart from continental European countries in this matter. It underscores that in any given setting, the rural/suburban and urban can be worlds apart. And that racial knowledge, in most cases, needs to be passed directly on from someone or from somewhere, as Philomena Essed (1991b) has argued.

In my work, I have illustrated the challenging condition for developing a Black sense of self, let alone a *Black political consciousness* while in racial isolation. Isolation was experienced on multiple layers as isolation from other Black people, Black discourses (ideas, words, world perceptions) or affirming Black representation, in person or images. I therefore challenge claims that 'being Black' is innate, a rather essentialist construction of Black people and personhood. Instead, I think of 'Black' as something you may *become*, provided that somebody teaches you. Alternatively, my findings suggest that assuming a Black subject position is preconditioned on *connection*. It can even be a minimum, as with Victor Cornelins – through Black diasporic literature. And by extension, Black political consciousness is then premised on *collectivity*; one cannot become a *Black political subject* in racial isolation, specifically in Western white supremacy (Freire 2000; Alexander 2005; Hill Collins 2000; Paschel 2016). Political consciousness requires a *shift* in consciousness. Whereas it is apparent that Danish people of African descent share a group knowledge, from the lived experiences in similar positionalities and circumstances, most people do not have the awareness of being part of a group. Indeed, the Ordinary Narrative is showing how *disidentification* is a typical minority-strategy; a group experience, not an exception from the rule (Muñoz 1999). So, what would be the fruitful conditions that would predispose people to assume a Black subject position and in that assume a collective positionality? Turning to M. Jacqui Alexander (2005) writing about "Remembering ourselves" resonates with my theory:

> "[...N]o one comes to consciousness alone, in isolation, only for herself, or passively. It is here we need a verb, the verb *conscientize* Paolo Freire used to underscore the fact that shifts in consciousness happen through active processes of practice and reflection. Of necessity, they occur in community. We must constantly envision this as we devise ways to practice the building of communities (not sameness) over and over again" (p. 283).

Referring to Freire's (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* she reflects on ways of relating to one another and coming to consciousness through relationships. This excerpt speaks well into this work, even though the notion of 'community' – Danish African diasporic community – is still just an abstraction for many, and for others, vulnerable projects in the making. We can therefore

meditate over Alexander's emphasis on *'communities (not sameness)'* and imagine what that might mean for us. What would be possible if we went to those spaces that awaken our *diasporic disavowal* (Ellis 2015), like Rose and her rejection of the network for 'brown' female professionals? Who might we meet? "This is diaspora made through the coming together of people mutually claiming to have no relation to each other. It is, therefore, the claim of separateness that constitutes the connection" (Ellis 2015, 80). Is this not connection, nevertheless? Danish society has taught us that community is premised on sameness (Jenkins 2011; Diallo 2017; Jensen and Loftsdóttir 2022). Yet, Alexander argues, we do not require sameness to build community with one another. Nadia Ellis, and Stuart Hall (1980) as well, suggest that what joins us together might just be that tension where separation and connection are articulated.

Connection as Antidote without Guarantees

By focusing on the conditions that have shaped us I also seek to *disalienate* Danish people in a larger diasporic perspective as well. African diasporas whose experiences of Blackness might sound and look different from a hegemonic discourse of Western Blackness as dictated by Black U.S. America primarily and the Anglophone diasporas more broadly. As astonishing as it may be for a consciously Black diasporic person to meet a Danish person who 'looks' Black but does not *identify as Black,* as fruitful it could be to cultivate a genuine curiosity in each other's histories and situated ways of knowing (Haraway 1988; Collins 2000). Rather than upholding a singular metric for alleged authentic blackness, imagined to be universal, those of us committed to (Black) humanity and liberation, might benefit from contextualizing and historicizing what we are specifically talking about. That could look like operationalizing theories of co-constructed relations of power (intersectionality, if you will) as interlocking systems of oppressions and inherently also systems of privilege (Bacchetta 2015b; Crenshaw 1989; Combahee River Collective 2021).

In the years this project has been under way, I have had two simultaneous and equally oppressive epistemological challenges as a Danish Afropean scholar and person. The struggle to formulate a Black Danish subject position and condition has been equally challenged by the European-centric dichotomy that equals white with Danish and Black/brown-skinned with foreigner and on the other hand a broader Western and U.S.-centric dichotomy that equates white to European and Black to U.S. American. Through these simultaneously functioning master narratives of the West, Danish Afropeans get erased. Left unimagined, owning one's own position is less about personal choice than concrete available options. Internalization of the dominant discourses – U.S. blackness – is therefore a sign of human behavior rather than a defected, lacking or inauthentic blackness. Mimicry of Danish majority culture and/or hegemonic 'cool' blacknesses are both survival strategies. These are options of constructing a self as long as the communities we belong to are represented as less than human, as default victims, as criminal, as foreign and entirely unrelatable. The balance between mimicry and self-erasure versus inspiration and empowerment is probably impossible to define. But I stressed the importance of developing vocabularies grounded in the local realities, the specific Danish African diasporic *situated knowledges*, as Donna Haraway (1988) expressed it.

I urge us to dream of and create what we wished we had growing up. Let us allow ourselves to imagine that we can 'belong to ourselves' (Noël 2019), that we can speak with and amongst ourselves – we do not need to speak in reaction to Danish/European dominant discourse (Habel and Kanyama 2014). We can indeed show our colors (Opitz, Oguntoye, and Schultz 1992) and in

doing so name ourselves as the specific Afro-diasporic subjects of Denmark and Europe that we are/becoming/growing into through relationships with each other (Ellerbe-Dück and Wekker 2015). We can look ourselves in the mirror and repeat after Frantz Fanon: "I am my own foundation" (1952, 205). Let us create and desire futures beyond the premises of Danish neoliberal multiculturalism where being 'offered' a platform to speak or 'a seat at the table' confines us within the limiting imagination of the majoritized and the nationalist status quo. The majoritized who do not imagine us as fully belonging in the first place and whose table was never built with any of us in mind, rather, it was built at our expense. I suggest we consider very seriously what exactly is there for us to (tentatively) be included into? Who pays for our (always impossible) inclusion? (Myong 2011; Puar 2013; Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2013).

If I am interested in the potential for developing a political consciousness as Danish people of African diasporas it is to collectively move towards humanization for humans. It is not a fight to become recognized as citizens in a nation state with 'human rights' as defined by the same European powers that constructed the dehumanizing, colonialist world-system of the West/non-West in the first place. Developing a political consciousness as Danish people of African diasporas is not to search for an authentic 'African' past nor to seek dominance or a colorblind future. Political consciousness is crucial for two main reasons: One, for our own healing, as individuals and collectives, aspects that cannot be separated. An aspect of which, in Jasmine Kelekay's (2019) words, is to claim a "racial identity as resistance to racism" (p. 390). And two, political consciousness is relevant for ending harm we are complicit in. It seems, though, as if the latter depends on the former. For that reason, I will not discuss our relative privilege much more. But I simply name it here as I am writing an invisibilized group into some archival existence, for the purpose of our wellbeing and healing in and of itself. Full stop. *And also,* for those of us invested in interrupting the status quo, "[w]e cannot go resolutely forward unless we first realize our own alienation," as Fanon said (1961, 163). Here, I am thinking 'forward' in a broad sense of creating sustainable relationships with others – ideally extended to all living beings, including the planet we live on.

If every generation has its mission, as Fanon (1961) also proposes, then I believe figuring out our subject position is an essential part of it. Formulating an *I* from within our *collective particular positionality* which neither pretends to be the wretched of the earth (Fanon 1961), since we have become so politically *whitened* (Bouteldja 2016, 25). Nor act as white(ned) saviors, because, despite Western privileges, we are "not yet white" and thus have the potential to know better (Fanon 1952, 117). As Black Europeans we are dominated within a country that is dominating (Soumahoro 2020, 140). We are not actually 'mixed' either. Race or culture is not mathematics. We are not the result of additive 'parts' of all the places, cultures, or genealogies that have shaped us. We are something new and *whole*, created out of that, but impossible to quantify. And owning the integrity of our positionality, our 'third culture' (Van Reken, Pollock, and Pollock 2010;) seems to me the most honest way forward "[b]ecause self-definition is key to individual and group empowerment" (Hill Collins 2000, 36).

Having to create a language for this ourselves can feel like a burden. But it could also sound like endless possibilities. It means we can invent words *and* worlds. Under the circumstances we stand in, sure, but what choice do we have other than to deal with our actual reality? Recognizing that we do not have to fill roles that somebody else cast us for, in a play of rigid categories and dichotomies, what could it sound like when we write our own stories, narrate them ourselves, and announce our *I,* not as superior or inferior, but as dignified and whole? These stories are already being told, of course. But as glimpses here and there. What would it take for a collective

consciousness to arise? And here, as I have stressed before, I am not referring to one single identity, but developing an understanding of our shared *conditioning* through which we could at once cultivate a love for our individual and collective selves. And through that learn to love those who hold less power than us in this present system, in bell hooks' understanding of love, meaning the will to nurture and cultivate the growth of self and others, a love that is incompatible with simultaneous harm (hooks 2000). Love would then look like action.

Being Black and Danish is conditioned by Black racial isolation. The antidote to isolation is connection. So, I am beginning to think about ways to foster connection moving forward. Through this project, I connected with many wonderful people and those who said yes to an interview connected with me, mostly one on one and a few groups. In the future I wish for a lot of people to be able to connect to one another. Patricia Hill Collins has said that "common challenges may foster similar angles of vision leading to a group knowledge or standpoint [...]. Or they may not." There are no guarantees. But at least, I would love to just experience a lot of us in the same space. Similarly, facilitating connection is not the same as a guarantee of feeling togetherness and building community. And community, while a precondition for critical consciousness is not the *shift* of consciousness itself. Alexander writes: "It is a job of changing the self. And it is a job. It requires work. It requires practice" (2005, 282). Put in this way, coming to consciousness therefore almost seems like alchemy – the exactly right conditions, components, and the divine timing of our own individual maturity. This, Alexander says, must come from our own yearning for wholeness, our yearning to belong. And so here I end, right where I began, writing about belonging. But I can envision and even create belonging differently now, precisely through the consciousness I came to through my yearning for belonging and the actions I took towards it: writing. By seeking knowledge, transforming silence into language and action as Audre Lorde said (Lorde 1993c). That shift in consciousness and that transformation of silence was essentially also a transformation from unseeing myself to seeing myself and then my kin. "...To belong to the self in community" then sounds like a way forward (Alexander 2005, 282). Toward wholeness and connection.

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