

## Introduction

I'm sitting in a lecture hall in a language school in a medium-sized town in Jutland, Denmark. Around me sit 16 other students, fellow immigrants from all over the world, all required to participate in approximately three years of language instruction in an effort to fulfill one of the requirements mandated in the integration contracts that they are required by the Danish state to sign. Some are refugees, many are here for family reunification resulting from marriage to a Danish resident or citizen, and one or two are here for work. This is Danish Module 2:6; the last class in a series of six in a language course aimed at people who are classified as having moderate amounts of education. Soon, these students will take the Danish 2 exit exam, the passing of which results in a very big check in the long line of boxes comprising the list of the necessary steps required to become a proper subject in the eyes of many authorities in Denmark, socially in terms of being "integrated," and legally in terms of the right to continued lawful residence in Denmark. Christian[i], a human resources director from a local production company, stands before us, lecturing about the particularities of working in a Danish firm. Christian begins the discussion by outlining what he feels are the differences between Danish workers, and workers who are not Danish:

*Her i Danmark har vi frihed under ansvar, hvilke man ikke har mange andre steder i verden.*

Here in Denmark, we have freedom with responsibility, which can't be found in many other places in the world.[ii]

After receiving only silence in response to his query about what the students felt the term "freedom with responsibility" meant, Christian expands on his initial statement with the following:

*Frihed under ansvar betyder, at man skal kunne motivere sig selv, uden at chefen behøver at sige noget, eller sætte alting i gang. Man skal kunne tænke selv og tage ansvar for sit arbejde. Det ikke nok bare at være en robot, der kun gør som der bliver sagt.*

Freedom with responsibility means that you should be self-motivated without the boss needing to say anything or initiate your work. You should think for yourself and take responsibility for your work. It's not enough just to be a robot and only do what you are told to do.

While Christian has not personally worked with any immigrants, he uses his experience with his *au pair* as a measure of what he feels to be the shortcomings of non-Danish workers:

*Min au-pair kan ikke motivere sig selv og kan ikke arbejde godt uden anvisninger. Udlændinge stiller ikke spørgsmål på samme måde som danskere gør, og de ender med at lave en masse fejl, og det er ærgeligt. De kan heller ikke tænke ud af boksen på den samme måde.*

My au-pair can't motivate herself, and doesn't work well without supervision. Foreigners don't ask questions in the same way that Danes do, and because of that, they make many mistakes, which is unfortunate. They can't think outside the box in the same way, either.

Christian follows up his comments by sharing his experiences working in Germany several years ago, which he described as solidifying his views about the special qualities of the Danish workforce. German workers, Christian explains, are not capable of the kind of flexibility and creativity that he sees among Danish workers. In order to successfully integrate into the Danish job market, Christian argues, foreigners must adopt these skills. Christian's commentary about differences between Danes and non-Danes are not uncommon

in the context of language instruction in Denmark. On the contrary, they are indicative of the preoccupation with imparting what are construed as quintessentially Danish cultural characteristics, a theme that crops up again and again during mandatory language instruction for immigrants in Denmark. This focus on culture, I argue, is part of broader, state-wide efforts to manage a group of individuals conceptualized to be problematic within a Danish context: non-EU immigrants. Interventions aimed at altering the conduct of non-EU immigrants within Denmark serve to alleviate the perceived threat originating in what is understood to be a risky group of individuals, thereby securing the well-being of the population at large (Foucault, 1988 & 1991; Rose, 1996). The following will describe the ways in which the “culture” of immigrants is seen as the source of this threat, thereby informing the practices of governing immigrants in Denmark, with particular emphasis on how perceived cultural differences come to be the focus of language classes in Denmark.

### **Constructing the “Problem” of Integration**

While the movement of people is hardly a new phenomenon, the ease with which commodities, capital, individuals and knowledge can transcend boundaries has increased exponentially, resulting in the acceleration of transnational migration (e.g. Inda & Rosaldo, 2002; Appadurai, 1996; Stiglitz, 2002). Denmark is no exception. During the 1960’s and early 1970’s, individuals were recruited as “guest workers” across Western Europe, creating a pool of flexible labor that helped to resolve the problem of labor shortages during the post-war boom (Castles, 1986; Coenders, Lubbers, & Scheepers, 2008). Workers frequently arrived from the recently decolonized countries of the global south, in tandem with the flow of capital, and were most often employed in jobs deemed undesirable by the native population. In Denmark, workers largely originated from Turkey, Pakistan, and what is now the former Yugoslavia. The recruitment of guest workers continued until the 1973 oil crisis, when the subsequent economic stagnation and restructuring of the labor market led to increasingly restrictive immigration policies (Castles, 1986; Olwig, 2010; Rytter, 2011). While guest worker residence was meant to be temporary, many of the workers stayed on in their new countries of residence. The primary source of immigration to Denmark and surrounding

countries in the 1970's stemmed from family reunification programs, which resulted in the further tightening of immigration policy (Fair, 2010; Schmidt, 2011). From the 1980's onwards, new immigrants have most often been refugees, individuals coming from other EU countries, as well as from other Nordic countries, or family reunification seekers (Coenders, et al, 2008; Eastmond, 2010; Jenkins, 2011). Currently, Denmark's immigration policies are among the strictest in Europe (Mouritsen & Olsen, 2013, Rytter, 2012).

The "problem" of integration has been a much-debated topic since the 1990's in Denmark, mirroring broader pan-European trends. While today immigrants and their descendants comprise just 8% of the population of the country, the space they occupy in popular discourse is significantly larger, with debates regarding the place of immigrants and their descendants in Danish society abounding in media and political discussions. Hervik (2011) describes at length the emergence of discourses conflating of immigrants and their descendants with social problems in Denmark in the 1980's and 1990's, wherein a dichotomy between "us," the ethnic Danes, and "them," the Others, but particularly the Muslim Other, were construed as irreconcilably different. The often marginalized position of immigrants and their descendants within communities across the country is depicted as something for which immigrants themselves are responsible, and is frequently construed in popular discourse as a product of the ineptitude, inflexibility and intolerance endemic to their "culture." As in many other settings, the ideas associated with the imprudent nature of the immigrant mimic to some extent the logics of neo-liberal thought and take on a decidedly moral tone; the problem of integration is shaped as one in which the immigrant is responsible; there is no discussion of the possibility of racism or structural barriers that might hinder the ability to live up to the measures of success as outlined in popular discourse. On the contrary, that racism might factor into the equation is generally denied and labeled as an unwarranted shift of gaze to a largely kind and tolerant native population, who are construed either as the true victims, having been treated unfairly by intolerant outsiders in their own country, or as being naïve and far too kind in their approach to immigration, having thereby been duped by the conniving, moral inferior foreigner. This is evidenced in the kinds of metaphors commonly used to describe the relationship between ethnic Danes and immigrants. The Danes as a natural family, as an "indigenous people" whose struggle is akin to that of other oppressed indigenous groups, or as hosts who are subjected to unruly guests are three common

metaphors recently explored by scholars of integration (Kvaale, 2011; Hervik, 2004; Olwig, 2011; Rytter, 2011). Discursive tactics, then, are employed to shape the “problem” of integration as primarily the fault of culturally inferior immigrants who, in their refusal to accept what are portrayed as Danish cultural values while living in Denmark, are the true racists.

Denmark’s construction of immigration as inherently problematic mirrors similar situations across Europe. The increasing problematization of non-European migration has meant that, even as borders within Europe become more and more porous, tightening of immigration policies have translated into a situation in which external borders are more firmly secured against extra-European migration than ever before. Within the European context, integration, or the attempt to regulate the relationship between immigrants and various European nations, has increasingly become conceptualized as a matter of “culture” (Balibar, 1991; Stolcke, 1995). While not new, what has variously been described as culturalism (Wessendorf, 2008), cultural fundamentalism (Stolcke, 1995), or cultural essentialism (Grillo, 2003) has come to positions of greater prominence in public discourse regarding immigration throughout Europe. Essentializing culturalist explanations of difference have a long historical trajectory and are intertwined with nation-building efforts beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century across Europe (Grillo, 2003). Trouillet, in his analysis of the emergence of the “savage slot,” argues that the desire to understand non-western Others, seen as fundamentally different, stem in part from the desire to manage them (2003). Seen from this vantage point, integration projects, relying on explanations of cultural difference to justify the interventions of which they are comprised, are not a new phenomenon in Europe, although their salience in the everyday lives of immigrants has grown more pronounced since the 1980’s.

European projects of nation-building have traditionally been premised upon notions of the inherent fixity of borders, both spatially and culturally (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991). That individuals, by virtue of their alien culture, could pose a threat rests on the presupposition that nation-states are bounded communities and therefore repositories of a homogenous population (Stolcke, 1995). Culturalism ties people to place, and an organicist notion of

belonging translates into the territorialization of culture. In Denmark, a scenario emerges in the Danish imaginary in which Danes, having sprung autochthonously from Danish soil, are the natural inhabitants of Denmark. Immigrants, who naturally belong somewhere else, are perceived as inherently different and in defiance the natural order of things (Stolcke, 1995). This is evidenced in the calls for foreigners to go home, where they belong, or to prevent them from entering Denmark in the first place, from the public as well as from politicians, as well as in policies such as the Repatriation Law (*repatrieringsloven*), which was passed in an attempt to encourage non-Danish residents to return “home” to their country of origin, regardless of their length of stay in Denmark. With culture mapping neatly onto place, diversity within “a culture” is downplayed; resulting in the creation of homogenizing discourses regarding culture for both Danes and the Other. Exclusion is justified on the grounds of cultural incompatibility; particular individuals, as repositories for particular “cultures,” are unsuited for life in Danish society. Thus, Danes are often portrayed as flexible thinkers, rational, and responsible human beings; whereas foreigners are depicted as puppeteered by the strings of culture, unable to escape its grip. So when Christian stresses that it is not enough “just to be a robot” in Denmark, he illustrates this: Danes can change and adapt; they can think creatively and take responsibility. After all, this is what Danish culture is all about. Others, presumably because of the strong hold that culture has upon them, are not capable of this. In Christian’s world, the immigrants in his audience lack agency, and when he himself has never worked with an immigrant, it is unclear whether he believes that even with his intervention, his audience will be capable of agency at all. A kind of cultural fatalism is thus reproduced.

## **Problem Management**

The demonization of immigrant populations has often been fueled by right-wing and conservative politicians and governments, as well as negative media portrayal. What was once the discourse of a marginalized, right-wing fringe became far more commonplace in Denmark during the 1980’s and the 1990’s. The previous government, supported by the country’s most read newspaper, *Jyllands Posten*, successfully rendered normative discourses

constructing immigrants as immoral, inferior and culturally distant (Hervik, 2011). This is evidenced in the “clash of civilizations” paradigm, in which The Muslims are conceptualized as the absolute antithesis of The Westerners, described by Silverstein as “the ultimate abject people” (2005: 376). Such constructions have become so pervasive in Denmark that, even with the election of a left- of center government, and despite discussions of the slackening of restrictions, major changes to the existing policy have yet to materialize, in part because of politicians’ concerns that such a move would make them unpopular with voters. Indeed, culturalist rhetoric is now so normative that it is no longer confined only to the right (Hervik, 2011; Strathern, 1995; Silverstein, 2005; Vertovec, 2011).

The discursive construction of culture of some Others as static, rigid and ahistorical has profound consequences for the lives of the bearers of that “culture.” For immigrants in Denmark, some of these implications are made manifest in the way immigrants are governed via integration programs, in which participants are frequently encouraged to adopt what is presented as Danish culture, and with that, a superior way of being in the world. Immigrants, by virtue of their perceived culturally-based riskiness, become targets of governance, whose imprudent tendencies must be curtailed. The immigrant becomes suspect, and, by virtue of enduring ties to other beliefs and other places, requires efforts to mold his or her conduct (Inda, 2006). The chronic “Denmark is not for Sale”, written by Søren Pind, former Minister of Integration, for one of the newspapers with a larger readership in Denmark, typifies this logic:

*Men der er ikke plads til hverken eftergivenhed eller til kompromis. Såvel som demokratiet ikke kan gå på kompromis med demokratiet – således kan Danmark heller ikke gå på kompromis med Danmark...Fordi vi meget enkelt i århundreder – mere end 1000 år – har forsvaret vort land mod ydre fjender, og har forhindret folk i at komme til, hvad vi opfattede som vores. Fordi det her var vores sted, hvorfra vi – det danske folk – kunne have vores kultur i frihed og sikkerhed. De moderne folkevandringer har sat denne adkomst – denne ejendomsret – under pres. Men i sagens natur er det jo et enten eller. Enten består Danmark med sin kultur – eller også, hvad man har set masser af steder, forgår den og Danmark med*

*den. Det er ikke svært (Berlingske, 2009).*

But there is no room for leniency or for compromise. Just like democracy cannot compromise with democracy – likewise Denmark cannot compromise with Denmark... simply because we, over the centuries – more than a thousand years – have defended our country against external enemies, and have prevented people from accessing what we considered ours. Because this was our place, from where we – the Danish people – can have our culture in peace and safety. The modern-day migration of people has put this advantage – this right of ownership – under pressure. But naturally it is either or. Either Denmark remains with its culture – or, as seen in plenty of places, the culture will parish and Denmark with it. It is not that complicated.

Pind's statements exemplify the notion that immigration presents a threat to the security and well-being of Denmark's legitimate inhabitants, ethnic Danes. In particular, they pose a threat to Danish culture. Immigrants, because of their incompatible cultural traits, are immoral, improper subjects. Often, immorality is couched in economic terms; either immigrants lack the work ethic of the majority population and are therefore more likely to drain state coffers via over-reliance on public assistance, or they work, but in so doing, take jobs away from individuals who rightfully deserve them, suppressing wages and allowing for a deterioration in working conditions in the process. Further, the pronounced emphasis on autonomy, personal responsibility, and flexibility, construed of as specifically Danish cultural characteristics, is in fact linked to the specific forms of self-governance characteristic of neo-liberal regimes of government (Dean, 2012; Foucault, 2008; Rose, 1996; Sharma & Gupta, 2006). Thus, in some instances and despite the perseverance of the welfare state (although this has increasingly come under attack), culturalist discourse is becomes tinged with neoliberal flare. Immigrants come to occupy a category of individuals quite similar to many other problem populations in Denmark and beyond: the unemployed, the underemployed, the chronically ill, etc. Thus, happenings in Denmark in some ways have come to mirror neoliberal logics across the globe.



## Teaching Danish(ness)

The following will illustrate the ways in which discourses regarding cultural difference as it pertains to integration are cemented into practice during the everyday happenings in language schools in Denmark. The ethnographic material presented here stems from 15 months of participant observation conducted in language and culture schools among immigrants governed by the provisions of a three-year integration contract, as outlined in the Integration Act (*integrationsloven*). The act and subsequent integration program delineate a series of steps that qualifying immigrants must perform as part of the process of becoming properly integrated subjects. One of the primary tasks mandated is participation in state-sponsored Danish language and culture classes for a period of approximately three years. Indeed, attending language and culture classes is deemed so important that one few ways of receiving a refund of the 50,000 Danish Crown (around 6,700 Euro) deposit required to live in Denmark under family-reunification rules is through the completion of the classes (although only one-half of the deposit is returned). Accordingly, language and culture classes are the primary site of research for this project, as it is here that newly arrived immigrants most regularly interact with representatives of the state. I engaged in participant observation at three language schools, but I also draw upon my own experiences as a newly-arrived immigrant, which predates the start of my fieldwork by two years. All three schools are located in Jutland, the large peninsula that connects Denmark to continental Europe. At times, I was a full-fledged participant, enrolled in the schools and expected to behave accordingly. More frequently, I took on the role of the observer, visiting classes that I was not enrolled in over a period of weeks or months. This involved sitting in on lessons, chatting with students during the break, going on fieldtrips and attending lectures, visiting the teacher's lounge during lunch, and attending social functions occurring outside of school hours. I have supplemented these visits by conducting interviews with immigrants and state officials. I found one-on-one interviews with students enrolled in language and culture classes to be much less fruitful sources of information, particularly if conducted in institutional settings. Spontaneous conversations, impromptu group interviews, or interviews conducted at other locations proved to be much more useful; so, with time, I began to focus more on those. The language employed was either Danish or English; with school employees, it was almost exclusively Danish, while with students, it was the language they felt more comfortable

using. In situations where there was no shared language, I relied partially on the help of informants who could translate, or supplemented talk with alternative communication practices, such as drawing pictures or relying heavily on gesticulation.

My own positionality both complicates and enriches my understandings of the actions of state representatives, and the understandings of fellow immigrants. I am myself an immigrant who has come in under family reunification rules and am therefore subject to the same kinds of state interventions as many of my informants. This is further complicated by my own history of activism with regard to immigrant rights in the US. While this certainly impacts my understandings of the field, it also affords a level of insight that might otherwise be impossible to a researcher lacking the intimate knowledge of the system. I have tried to remain aware of this situated knowledge throughout the research process, but am nevertheless certain that I have been unsuccessful on occasion. Further, while I often felt that my status as immigrant-under-integration contract facilitated establishing relationships of trust with fellow immigrants, it seemed, on many occasions, to complicate my relationship with instructors and other officials. I was a double outsider. Not only was I a stranger visiting “their institution;” I am an immigrant myself, and therefore a representative of the category of individual that they were employed to educate. This relationship was further confounded by being a US citizen, and, during the time of fieldwork, a US citizen during the time of the lead-up to a contentious presidential election, when American politics played a larger-than-normal role in newscasts and papers. Officials either assumed that I was doing a comparative study, which would result in the sharing of the great success of Danish integration with my fellow countrymen, or took offense that an American would dare study integration in Denmark, because being American is often equated with racism, imperialism and unfettered capitalism. I distinctly felt that my own nationality rendered me unequipped to conduct this particular study in the eyes of my Danish informants. Ironically, efforts to position me as morally inferior by virtue of my country of origin only served to solidify my ideas regarding the ways in which “culture” come to inform opinions of immigrants in among state officials. Further, it provided another example of the equation of Danishness and Denmark with superiority.

Everyday discursive practices of those doing the work of integrating immigrants reflect a concern with culture as something tangible, problematic and divisive. Concern with culture is evidenced in the pronounced preoccupation with imparting “Danish values” in language courses. Certain cultural tropes, such as those concerning democracy, feminism, sexual freedom, and freedom of speech, are equated with Danishness, but also with moral uprightness. While these were presented as quintessentially Danish, they also indexed a universal, humanist hierarchy, with Denmark representing the pinnacle of civilization and human achievement. Many of the teachers genuinely seemed to believe that they were imparting knowledge about a better way of life to their students, and clearly went about their work motivated in part out of a concern to better the lives of their students. Like missionaries spreading the good news of the Gospel to the heathens, these often very well-meaning instructors proselytized about the “good news” of Danishness. Bente, a director of a small school in a rural province in Denmark, where the student population is comprised primarily of Kurdish refugees, describes her role as follows:

*Vi gør hvad vi kan. Mange af disse mænd der kommer, ja, teknisk set er de unge voksne, i virkeligheden er de bare teenagere mentalt. De ved simpelthen ikke hvordan man skal opføre sig. Vores arbejde er mere end bare at lære dem sproget. Nogle af disse fyrer kommer direkte fra at hyrde geder i Ooga Booga land – hvad ved de om livet i Danmark? Vi bliver nødt til at lære disse unge mænd hvordan man opfører sig i Danmark.*

We do what we can. A lot of these men coming, well, technically, they are young adults, but they are really just teenagers, mentally. They simply don’t know how to behave. Our job is more than just to teach the language. Some of these guys have come straight from herding goats in Ooga Booga Land – what do they know about living in Denmark? We need to teach these young men how one should behave in Denmark.

Bente, by emphasizing the immature mentality and parochial mindset of her students, clearly sees her role as the director of the language school to be one of overseeing the civilizing the untamed. Where her students actually originate from is not important; all that is relevant is

that it is uncivilized; it is, after all, Ooga Booga Land. Similarly, Henning, an instructor, holds that, while he is teaching the Danish language, this is not his only task. His years of involvement in political activity on the left easily dwarf my own; and our conversations about politics in Denmark and in America flow easily. Part of Henning's impetus for working at the school stems from his political views; he believes firmly in the importance of integration, which he holds to be rooted in culture, and he takes his work quite seriously. He weaves aspects of what he feels are crucial characteristics of Danish society into his lessons; his past several units of instruction have centered on green energy, gender equality, and the benefits of democracy, all of which he sees as being particularly Danish in nature:

*Det er mit arbejde at lære dem at forstå forskellen mellem deres kultur og dansk kultur. Som i dag, da Afran valgte emnet ligestilling i hans mundtlige eksamen, jeg var så glad for det. Det er noget han ikke kender hvor han kommer fra. Det er noget han kan lære af os.*

It's my job to help them to understand the differences between their own culture and the Danish culture. Like today, when Afran chose the topic of gender equality for his oral exam, I was so happy about that. This is something he doesn't have where he comes from. It is something he can learn from us.

While Henning and Bente are not representative of all instructors, their sentiments were quite common, and although well-intentioned, serve to reify the dichotomy relation between morally superior Danes and the morally inferior Others, who are the vestibules of a "culture" that is centuries behind and resistant to change.

As with many other state projects of subject improvement, the responsibility for integration, or lack thereof, shifts to the individual. The state, through its extensive efforts to integrate the immigrant, has provided all the resources necessary for integrating. The immigrant, having been equipped with all the tools necessary for integration, is the liable party. In language classes, the integration of the immigrant is sometimes measured by the extent to which they can demonstrate acceptance of the hegemonic version of Danish culture

presented to them. During a lesson about the tradition of confirmation parties, commonly held for children around 14 years old in Denmark, the teacher, Bodil, shifted the discussion to the lax attitude towards drinking among Danish youth. Nadini, from Sri Lanka, performed integration when Bodil asked if she would allow her own daughters to drink at age 14:

*B: Hvad med dig Nadini? Vil du lade dine døtre drikke til konfirmationsfester når de er 14?*

*N: De må selv bestemme.*

*B: Men tamilske piger drikker da ikke, gør de? I må ikke drikke.*

*N: Jeg har prøvet champagne, men jeg drikker ikke alkohol normalt, men de må selv bestemme.*

*B: Nåå, OK ?! Men det er ligemeget, de lærer i skolen hvordan de skal passe på hinanden hvis de er i byen og har fået for meget at drikke.*

B: What about you, Nadini? Will you let your daughters drink at confirmation parties when they are 14?

N: They can decide for themselves.

B: But Tamil girls don't drink, do they? You're not allowed to drink.

N: Well, I've tried champagne, but normally I don't drink alcohol. But they can decide for themselves.

B: Oh. Ok?! They learn in school how to take care of each other if they drink too much out in the city, anyway.

In a discussion after class about youth drinking, I learned that Nadini and the other students actually felt quite uncomfortable with the topic, on the grounds that they did not think that 14-year-old brains and bodies were mature enough to handle alcohol, but felt that they needed to give the “correct” answer in class anyway. Nadini’s comments were a performance of integration: by insisting that she would let her own children drink, she demonstrated her adoption of superior, emancipatory Danish values. That underage drinking might provoke debate among ethnic Danes is disregarded; Danishness is presented as monolithic, provocative and unencumbered by backward tradition. Internal variation is subsumed under the same homogenizing forces that lend weight to Bodil’s statements regarding what “Tamil girls” can and cannot do.

In this and other instances, Danish culture is presented as non-negotiable and absolute, when in reality many of the issues presented as quintessentially Danish would be contested in other contexts in Denmark. For example, during an exercise meant to foster conversation between course participants, pictures associated with Denmark were passed out by the instructor to stimulate discussion. One of them was a graphic close up of a vagina, meant to display the free attitude ethnic Danes have towards pornography and sexuality. That a disembodied vagina might represent Danishness would most certainly be subject to contestation in other settings; in the space of the language classroom, objecting to the image’s contents on the grounds that it was inappropriate in the context of language instruction would indicate a lack of willingness to embrace Danish values. Susan, a woman from New Zealand, described her feelings about the exercise with disgust:

We had to look at this picture, and we knew it was there to provoke us. It’s insulting! This was also in a beginning level Danish class, so how much could we really even discuss about it, right? ‘It is a woman. She has no clothes. She has a lot of hair.’ We asked for a new picture because that was all we could think to say. The teacher told us to get over it and act like adults. You know, I want to learn the language. I enjoy learning languages. But I really don’t know how much more of this ‘cultural enlightenment’ I can take.

Susan felt insulted through this exercise, not because she found the image itself was offensive, but because she felt the content was aimed to provoke:

The vagina is not offensive. Pictures of a vagina are not offensive. Receiving pictures of a vagina from a strange man in an educational environment outside of medical or psychological fields is totally offensive. They claim that Danish people won't get offended, but I don't believe it.

Susan also felt it that complaining about the image would be impossible, on the grounds that it would demonstrate her lack of integration:

I'm envisioning a scene where we try to report it to the administration and get told that Danish people wouldn't see anything wrong with discussing this subject and we need to get used to that because we are in Denmark now after all. And probably a jibe about prudish foreigners thrown in.

In the above examples, foreigners are asked to demonstrate integration by accepting a version of Danish culture that appears to them to be intentionally provocative. While these two examples are admittedly on the provocative side, in many similar, if less extreme instances, students are often left with similar feelings of alienation and exclusion. The irreconcilable differences between Danes and everybody else get reinforced through the application of a hegemonic, confrontational version of Danish "culture," which appears to have been chosen to illuminate dissimilarity.

In a discussion about the gender equality and women in the workplace in Denmark, Mette, another instructor, highlights cultural difference in her questions to Fatimah, a chemist who

worked in an oncology lab before coming to Denmark, about working in Tunisia:

*M: Arbejder mødre i din kultur Fatima?*

*F: Ja, selvfølgelig!*

*M: Men ville din mand lade dig arbejde hvis du var i Tunesien?*

*F: Selvfølgelig ville jeg arbejde.*

*M: Men ville du have arbejdet hvis du havde haft børn? Mødre arbejder ikke som de gør i Danmark, gør de?*

*F: Jo, selvfølgelig. Jeg havde mit drømmejob i Tunesien og jeg ville have fortsat med at arbejde der! Jeg elskede det.*

*M: Men hvem passer børnene? Er der børnehaver og vuggestuer i Tunesien?*

*F: Selvfølgelig er der det! Ellers passer familien børnene. Min mor passer min niece og nevø for min søster hver dag mens hun arbejder.*

*M: Do mothers work in your culture Fatima?*

*F: Yes. Of course!*

*M: But would your husband let you work if you were in Tunisia?*

*F: Of course I would work.*

*M: But would have worked had you had children there? Mothers don't work like they do in Denmark, do they.*



F: Yes, of course. I worked at my dream job in Tunisia and I would have kept working there! I loved it.

M: But who watches the kids? Do they have nurseries and daycares in Tunisia?

F: Of course they do! Or family watches children. My mother watches my niece and nephews for my sister every day while she works.

Mette's questions are fraught with assumptions about what life is like as a woman and a mother in Tunisia. It seems that Mette believes that Fatimah's situation would have been far worse in Tunisia than it is in Denmark, where she has been encouraged to attend language school, and work as a cleaning assistant while her children attend Danish childcare institutions.

In imparting knowledge about a particularly Danish modality of life, teachers often relied on depictions of Danishness that contained underlined the importance of working and financial self-reliance. Many of the units instruction were organized around illustrated this tendency. During a unit entitled "Work in Denmark," teachers and other experts emphasized both the kinds of values students were expected to adopt and the particular kinds of education- and employment options deemed suitable for the demonstration of those values. When I inquired as to why this was felt an appropriate topic, one instructor explained that it was because they were trying to prevent people from relying too heavily on public assistance, since so many foreigners tended to become dependent upon the state in Denmark.

During this unit, the school organized an outing to a local basic healthcare school, where students met with the program director about the possibility of enrollment. Bettina, the director, focused primarily on the kinds of behaviors and practices she associated with success in the program. Like Christian, Bettina felt that in many cases, non-Danish students lacked the skills of their Danish counterparts:

*Her i Danmark er det meget vigtigt, at I møder velforberedt og til tiden, lige som alle de andre elever, ellers er det umuligt at følge med.*

Here in Denmark, it is very important that you come well-prepared and on time, just like all the other students, otherwise it is impossible to keep up.

Here, Bettina's emphasis on taking responsibility as a student suggests that she believes that many of the adult immigrants in her audience do not have the same set of skills that are characteristic of the young, recent elementary school graduates who comprise the bulk of the Danish student population at the school. Annette, a job consultant hired by the school, echoed similar sentiments when she visited the group to talk about work and educational opportunities in Denmark:

*Uddannelseskravene er meget anderledes i Danmark. Det er vigtigt, at du kommer til tiden, at du er velforberedt og har alle dine bøger og dine blyanter, dit hjemmearbejde skal være gjort og du skal være forberedt på at arbejde 37 timer om ugen. Det er vigtigt overalt i Danmark. Du skal også være social og følge reglerne. Du kan heller ikke være for følsom.*

Education requirements are very unique in Denmark. It is important that you show up on time, that you come prepared with all your books and your pencils, your homework should be finished, and you need to be prepared to work the full 37 hours a week. This is important all over Denmark. You also need to be social, and you need to follow the rules. You can't be too sensitive, either.

Here, the emphasis rapidly evolves from educational options into a discussion of the qualities necessary for success in the distinctive Danish school system. Annette assumes that the students in attendance need to be taught to display responsibility and autonomy, as well as to maintain control of their emotions, and prioritizes her time during her lecture accordingly.

Similarly, during a discussion following an exercise in which students filled out an application to be cleaning assistants, Birgitte lectured on the kinds of qualities the students should adopt if they wished to remain in Denmark:

*Herhjemme er værdierne på arbejdspladsen de samme som samfundets værdier. I Danmark er det nødvendigt, at du er selvstændig. Du skal også være ansvarlig. Du kan for eksempel ikke ryge indenfor på dit arbejde, eller drikke alkohol mens du er på arbejde. Man vil blive fyret med sådan en opførsel. Det er også meget vigtigt, at du er engageret i dit arbejde.*

Here at home, workplace values reflect society's values. In Denmark, you need to be able to be independent. You also need to be responsible. For example, you can't smoke in the workplace or drink alcohol on the job. You'll be fired for behavior like that. It's also very important that you are engaged with your work.

When, at this point in time, a student excused herself to leave early in order to pick up her daughter, who, I learned during a break had been ill, Birgitte used the opportunity to illustrate what she meant by engaged:

*Nå! Hun er ikke så engageret i dag, så hun gik hjem. Kom til tiden, bliv til det slutter, stil spørgsmål, kom med nye ideer – det er hvad engageret handler om. Det er hvad der forventes af dig i Danmark.*

Hmm! She isn't so engaged today, so she went home. Being on time, staying until the end, asking questions, and coming with ideas- that is what being engaged is all about. This is what will be expected of you in Denmark.

Again, Birgitte assumes that students must be taught appropriate behavior in a Danish context. Her statements illustrate her belief that Danish values are markedly different from those that her students bring with them from abroad.

### **A Hierarchy of Culture**

While all foreigners required to sign an integration contract are expected to complete the integration program, it became clear during fieldwork that some foreigners were considered more foreign than others. By relying on reductionist notions of culture that posited some “cultures” as superior to others, perceived cultural difference or similarity was used as the measure of who was believed to need extensive reformation, and who needed just a little. While all immigrants shared the characteristics of not being Danish, they were not created equal; some “cultures” were deemed more problematic than others. The immigrant, but, in particular, the immigrant arriving from the Middle East, was conceptualized as a particularly imprudent, irresponsible resident. An implicit hierarchy of foreigners was institutionalized through every day practices in language and culture classes, in which Denmark and its natural inhabitants were situated at the top. In an evolutionary scheme reminiscent of those produced by the earliest anthropologists, “cultures” were ranked, and Danishness was the yardstick against which otherness is measured. Consequently, some immigrants were seen as more culturally distant from Danes than others, and therefore, in need of greater intervention. This was sometimes evidenced in the comments of the integration professionals themselves; one instructor explained to me that he felt that Somalis needed more intervention because of their “culture,” which predisposed them to avoid contact with outsiders and rendered them less willing to work. He also directly referenced biological features in his discussion; initially, he had felt that individuals from Somalia would integrate easily, because they “didn’t look very African and were attractive.” His own ideas of phenotypic characteristics influencing integration were altered, however, and he now relied on culture to explain what he felt were the inherent difficulties with integrating Somalis. In a similar vein, a job consultant described how “the Arab culture” rendered men more aggressive, which made it difficult for them to work alongside Danes, thus making it hard for

her to help men of Middle Eastern descent to find work or apprenticeship positions. Additionally, an instructor who was rather sympathetic to the plight of immigrants in Denmark nonetheless informed me that, while Eastern Europeans did not require very much integration instruction because they were naturally inclined to be hard workers, it was necessary to teach them to think critically and question authority, since neither skill was emphasized in Eastern European “culture.” Similarly, one school director described her respect for Eastern Europeans, in part on the grounds of the similarities to Danes:

*Østeuropæerne, de har et dårligt rygte, men de arbejder hårdt. Jeg ved ikke hvilket arbejde de har og jeg vil ikke vide det, jeg er sikker på at deres chefer ikke betaler dem nok og at de ikke stiller spørgsmål. Men de vil have et bedre liv for dem selv, og derfor ville de kunne blive gode danskere en dag.*

The Eastern Europeans, they’ve got a bad reputation, but they are hard-working. I don’t know what they do for work and I don’t want to know, because I bet their bosses don’t pay them enough, and they won’t question it. But they want a better life for themselves, and because of that, they could make good Danes one day.

Additionally, the mandatory culture classes, where curriculum centered explicitly on teaching Danish culture and values to immigrants, were more mandatory for some immigrants than others. Individual caseworkers appeared to use their own discretion to determine who needed to participate and who did not. More often than not, individuals arriving from countries deemed culturally distant from Denmark were those who were required to attend. Furthermore, the very academic level of Danish instruction immigrants were allowed to study was in part dictated by their perceived cultural similarity to ethnic Danes. This is made explicit in the guidelines governing placement into Danish classes, where tracking well-educated individuals into Danish classes designed for less well-educated students can be justified on the grounds that knowledge of Danish culture and mentality must also be taken into account (*Integration i Praksis: En Håndbog*, 2001). Thus, it was hardly a surprise that the Danish language classes aimed at elementary school graduates were attended by individuals

with university degrees. The latent racial order was further called upon in statements such as “Well, we don’t mean *you*,” so frequently hurled in the direction of many of my informants when they voiced their concerns over the content of language school lessons.

Thus, the amount of intervention in some sense appears to be dependent upon perceived foreignness. Further, reliance on notions of incommensurable culture difference mean that some groups will never be accepted as fully “integrated,” no matter how much they assimilate. Hervik’s (2011) analysis of media portrayals of young Muslim politicians speaks to this. He holds that Islam is consubstantiated with terrorism, extremism and inferiority. A paradox presents itself, in that while immigrants are presented as less flexible, irrational and subject to the whims of culture and religion, they are simultaneously encouraged to change. So even as immigrants are taught about Danish culture, the fact that non-Danishness is associated with inflexibility, tradition and stagnation means that, seen from the vantage point of the institution, some foreigners would find it difficult, if not impossible, to do the very thing required of them, i.e. adopt Danishness. The ranking of cultures had profound implications for some of the immigrants in Denmark. Selectively excluding certain groups of immigrants from the highest tier of language instruction, for example, serves to make it difficult for people to attend university, because the highest level of Danish is required for entrance. Further, citizenship requirements in Denmark mandate that the exit exam in the highest level of Danish must be passed in order for an application to be considered. When students brought up what they felt were incidents of discrimination or differential treatment on the grounds of their immigrant status, their concerns were largely shrugged off by integration officials. Since Danishness is synonymous with tolerance, lack of success in terms of employment or education was presented as the fault of the immigrant, either through lack of integration, or through a failure to truly warrant the treatment they expected.

Despite the pervasiveness of culturalist themes in language schools in Denmark, it is important to emphasize that a significant minority of instructors and other integration officials found such a focus demeaning and often unnecessary. Sophie, an instructor teaching primarily refugees, had this to say about her students:

*Mange af de kursister er rimeligt kosmopolitanske. Det kan være svært for dem her. Mange*

*kommer fra velhavende familier og pludselig er de fattige og har ingen status. Mange af dem taler allerede fem eller seks sprog! Jeg prøver at fokusere på at lære dem sproget.*

Many of the students are pretty cosmopolitan. It can be hard for them here. A lot of them come from wealthy families and then suddenly, they are poor and have no status. Many of them speak five or six languages already! I try to focus on teaching them the language.

Sophie went so far as to intercede on behalf of several students who felt they were being mistreated by their immigration case-worker, who refused to speak to them in any language but Danish and often made disparaging remarks. In this case, Sophie spoke to both the case-worker and his supervisor, and her students were reassigned. Another instructor, Camilla, herself married to an immigrant, shared similar sentiments. In a conversation regarding the effectiveness of the school's teaching methods, Camilla announced to her whole class that "*Hvis jeg vandt i Lotto ville jeg overtage skolen og fyre halvdelen af lærerne*." If I won the lottery, I'd take over this school and fire half the teachers." For Camilla, the language instruction was lacking in focus and far too unstructured. Additionally, rather than take her class of highly-educated students to visit the local production or nursing assistant school like many of her colleagues, she organized a trip for them to visit the nearest university, where they could learn about the different English-language international programs they could enroll in immediately if they so chose. There is also regional variation; schools in urban areas with universities tend to focus more on language instruction and less on teaching students about Danishness.

## Conclusion

The everyday practices comprising the activities in obligatory Danish language classes are informed by, and reinforce, popularly circulating discourses regarding the cultural differences between "us," the Danes, and "them," the foreigners. Through focusing on the importance of

adopting what are construed of as uniquely Danish modes of being, integration programs serve to institutionalize foreignness and therefore, the exclusion of immigrants. Often, this focus reifies the difference between native Danes and everybody else through a pronounced emphasis on a static view of culture, where culture is seen as the root of difference between immigrants and Danes. Integration becomes in part about teaching immigrants to shed what are construed as incompatible cultural traits, and replacing them with superior, Danish ones. The practice of forging proper immigrants is done in part to ensure the continued well-being of the Danish population at large. Efforts to transform the immigrant through “integration” are aimed at turning a potentially risky population into a manageable one, but often integration becomes an exclusionary practice. Additionally, the focus on culture as a dividing factor conceals and seemingly softens what otherwise could be construed of as racist discourse, and the effects on the lives of immigrant in Denmark are just as pernicious.

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1 All names and locations have been changed or made anonymous.

2 All translations are author's own.

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