

Gendered racism: The emancipation of ‘Muslim’ and ‘immigrant’ women in Danish welfare politics and professionalism

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Abstract

This article examines the intersecting oppressions of Danish welfare politics and its emerging interest in emancipating ‘immigrant’ women and girls. It draws on Patricia Hill Collins’ notion of controlling images and, based on a documentary text corpus, it identifies how the images of the unfree immigrant housewife and the inhibited immigrant girl are formed through oxymoronic liberal arguments of care and control. The article demonstrates how this plays out in an assemblage of policy documents and suggests why welfare professionalism is called upon to ‘rescue’ ‘immigrant’ women and girls, situating welfare politics and professionalism within the racial welfare state and its racial capitalist and Orientalist logics. The analyses demonstrate how gendered and racialized signifiers help to structure welfare politics and professionalism, and how a space of emancipation is intertwined with a global economic division of labor. The article suggests that racialized welfare politics and professionalism are permeated by the desire to emancipate women, which remains a powerful impulse within Danish welfare state capitalism, liberalism and social-democratic reasoning.

KEYWORDS: gendered racism, emancipation of women, Danish welfare politics and policy, welfare professionalism, racial capitalism

Introduction

In recent years, a research field has emerged that dismantles the myths of exceptionalism and white innocence, as well as exhibiting racial and colonial trajectories and structures of the Nordic welfare states (Keskinen 2019; Toivanen, Skaptadottir & Keskinen 2019). This research trend has depicted the development of the Danish state as having been boosted by trade, the exploitation of enslaved people, engagement in colonial modernization projects, development aid, and participation in Western military alliances and interventions stretching from the Arctic to the tropics (Jensen 2012, 2015). Such observations are underpinned by conceptualizations of the racial state or the racial welfare state, which – despite declarations of egalitarianism and color blind universalism – organizes itself along racial gradients when it shapes space and place, conceptions and representations, inclusions and exclusions, deserving and undeserving subjects etc. (Neubeck & Cazenave 2001, 13–14; Schclarek Mulinari & Keskinen 2022, 4–5).

David Theo Goldberg (2009, 28-29) explains how three factors, curiosity, exploitability and threat, have been associated with race throughout the histories. Curiosity and exploitability demanded engagement and some sort of interaction between the dominant and dominated, whereas threat, pointing to race as marking insecurity and downfall, created distance. As we will show in this article, these factors also map how race is advanced within Danish welfare state politics¹, where 'the threat of race' has been associated with saving 'immigrant' women or the veiled 'Muslim' woman. For example, the defense of "Muslim" women and their rights was offered as the legitimation of the US-led military intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 (Abu-Lughod 2015, 4; Farris 2017, 2), in which Denmark participated. Throughout this article, we try to understand how and why current humanitarian and emancipatory welfare state strategies rely upon generalized images of 'Muslim' or 'immigrant' women.²

As research has shown, Denmark has not been an outsider to the colonial project (Loftsdóttir & Jensen 2012), although this has been

claimed. Suvi Keskinen (2022, 17-22) even highlights this claim as a defining point when identifying "racial Nordicization" as being intertwined with two other distorted realities: the claim of being an egalitarian welfare state and the claim of gender equality being a defining and superior feature of the Nordic welfare state. The question of gender equality in the Danish model has also been scrutinized by Rikke Andreassen (2012, 2013) and Christel Stormhøj (2021), who have shown how gender equality works as an exclusionary ideal and norm in media debates and immigration policies. Andreassen has depicted how gender equality is used as a tool to criticize and attack "Muslim minorities". Her research has excavated a dominant stereotype, namely the "oppressed immigrant woman" (Andreassen 2012, 2). This stereotype, which has been dominant since the 1970s, generated stories of 'immigrant' women being victims of violence, forced marriages and honor killings. From the 1990s, the stereotype became linked to questions about the headscarf, which was interpreted as preventing 'Muslim' women from entering the workforce (Andreassen 2013, 218). This discourse mirrored alarmist debates in several other countries about girls and/or women wearing headscarves – to the extent of proposing legislation to ban headscarves.

With this article, we furthermore build on research concerning "a postcolonial welfare analytics" of complex super- and subordination processes in Danish welfare work with refugees (Padovan-Özdemir & Øland 2022, 30–50) that are characterized by color blind universalism, liberalism and individualism (ibid., 41-44, 88-89). We also build on critiques of anti-Muslim racism within benevolent integrationist welfare states, for instance as it is described in Reva Jaffe-Walter's (2016, 1, 4) analyses of Muslim immigrant stereotypes, including the "figure of the oppressed immigrant girl" and the oppositions between "barbaric Muslims" and "enlightened Western liberals" in Danish public community schools. Finally, we draw on postcolonial scholars such as Edward Said (2003) and Lila Abu-Lughod (1991, 2015), who point to how the West shapes the Orient, including the image of the 'Muslim' woman in relations of generalizing

knowledge, thus forming and representing the Other as an object of conquest, improvement and mastery. These scholars will assist us in historicizing the images that we carve out analytically, as we will show how the mobilization of orientalist tropes constitutes racialization in Danish welfare politics and professionalism.

This article's research question is: How and why do current Danish welfare state politics urge 'immigrant' and 'Muslim' women to become emancipated? We focus on how controlling images work in complex ways through oxymoronic liberal arguments (cf. Padovan-Özdemir & Øland 2022, 41), and how and why welfare professions are called upon and tasked to enforce the emancipation of 'immigrant' and 'Muslim' women. Thus, the article will contribute with knowledge about the relation between controlling images, welfare professionalism and the racial welfare state, which is also a capitalist undertaking trading on its ideological liberalist foundation. As our analyses exhibit, such images are not only available as political representations or dominating images in the media, but function as complex racializing technologies of concern within welfare and integration practices. This is not unlike what Amalia Sa'ar (2005) has conceptualized as "the liberal bargain", promising women a better future with freedom, rights and protection, but assuming linear universal progression while denying its racial tracking.

Assemblage of document material

The article is based on a selection of documents exemplary of how Danish welfare politics and policies in the 2020s call upon welfare professionals to emancipate 'immigrant' women. Our assemblage of documents contains terms of reference and recommendations from *The commission for the forgotten women's struggle for liberation*³ [*Kommissionen for den glemte kvindekamp*] (2022b, 2022a), which sparked and reinvigorated our interest in gendered racism in welfare work (Brodersen & Øland 2023). We have thus arrived at the material from a position as researchers in welfare work where we have observed an increasing

focus on 'immigrant' and 'Muslim' women as a target group.

The commission was initiated by the former Social Democratic government in January 2022 to combat what was termed a "parallel normality" in which the "freedom of girls or women is non-existent and where their individual rights are of no importance if they collide with the honor of the family" (Kommissionen for den glemte kvindekamp 2022b, 1).⁴ The focus of the commission was set on combatting "honor-related social control", claiming "values that should apply for all people living in Denmark" (ibid., 2), and to "develop recommendations concerning how girls and women from immigrant communities can be supported in having the opportunity to decide in matters of their own lives" (Kommissionen for den glemte kvindekamp 2022a, 1). The commission consists of a chairperson and nine members who are either politicians or welfare professionals within social work who engage with ethnic minorities in different ways.

Furthermore, our corpus contains documents describing current policies such as interventions predating the commission and characterized by being intertwined with the commission's work. The policy *Mandatory offer to learn [Obligatorisk læringstilbud]*, the title being an oxymoron in itself, was prepared in 2018 by the former liberal-conservative government (Børne- og Socialministeriet 2018), and it aims to ensure "opportunities to learn Danish, democratic norms and values, and Danish traditions for all children in Denmark" (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet 2019, 1). However, the policy exclusively targets one-year-olds, who are not attending day-care, and their parents living in so-called marginalized housing areas. As such, location works to spare the white middle class from this intervention, despite the policy's sentiment applying to 'all children'. This makes it a racializing intervention. In addition to "language stimulation" (ibid., 7), the intervention involves mandatory teaching of parents about Scandinavian child rearing. Finally, our corpus includes the curriculum text for the educational module *Educational work in relation to negative social control [Pædagogisk arbejde i relation til negativ social kontrol]* provided

by University College Copenhagen (n.d.), and governmental reports and interventions concerning the employment of 'immigrants', especially 'immigrant' women (Regeringen 2021; SIRI 2021). As can be seen, there is no unifying characteristic of the documents at face value, but they are an appropriate assemblage of documents for this article's specific research purpose, because each document exemplifies particular assumptions and scripts in welfare politics and policies that are interconnected, and therefore suited to our analysis of controlling images.

Controlling images as an analytical lens

To understand the urging of 'immigrant' women to become emancipated through Danish welfare professionalism, we turn to Patricia Hill Collins' (2000, 2019) influential work within the tradition of Black feminist thought, in particular, her concept of controlling images, which she originally designed to capture a set of stereotypes that fuel the continuous subordination of Black women through language and culture in the US. Even though Collins (2019, 79) makes the point that controlling images resemble stereotypes, she prefers the term "controlling images" because it signals a focus on "the work they [the images] do in structuring unequal power relations". Further, Collins notes how the work of images is actively constructed by individuals, whereas stereotypes signal passive consumers of information (ibid.). Following these insights, we do not use stereotypes as a theoretical concept in our analysis.

Collins (2000) identifies four interrelated controlling images that are deeply intertwined with US economic history of slavery, the legal system, and the labor market. These images – the mammy, the matriarch, the welfare mother and the jezebel – circulate within the education system, mass media and government agencies, and they are all "designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (ibid., 69).⁵

Controlling images are relational and provide interconnected social scripts for understanding social hierarchies of a society (Collins 2019, 80), and they display tropes of a racialized femininity and provide ideological justification for the oppression of Black women. The images work as operators and sites for broader political domination (and resistance) within the social class structure (ibid., 78-80). By weaving specific social portraits produced discursively into a common and widespread image, controlling images as an analytical lens draws on an intersectional perspective. As such, controlling images can reveal "the specific contours of Black women's objectification as well as the ways in which oppressions of race, gender, sexuality, and class intersect" (Collins 2000, 72).

In this article, we find the concept of controlling images fruitful to investigate the gendered and racialized strategies aimed at 'Muslim' and 'immigrant' women operated by the Danish welfare state. We acknowledge that the Danish context differs from the US context, and we will not reproduce the images that Collins has identified. However, we do not think of systems of domination and exploitation as being confined within a nation-state logic, but as historical and social arrangements that are always entangled with other regions (Lowe 2015) and with global relations of postcoloniality as well as global racial capitalism (Go 2021, 40). This means that the forms of domination and differentiation may have similar ways of working, which explains our application of the concept. Still, our images need to be situated and explained outside the US, in this case within the Danish context of European Orientalist and racialized logics.

Consequently, we apply the concept of controlling images as a heuristic to tease out specific and historically grounded controlling images from the Danish context. We construct these specific images by pointing to what we see as the infrastructure of Collins' controlling images, i.e., the elements working from within the controlling images. Collins (2000, 70-72) identifies how binary thinking and the casting of the Other, who equals an oppositionist that must be combatted and surveilled, is central to how controlling images work.

This has guided our analytical strategy when reading and analyzing the documents. The main point is that the Other appears as a threat and an object to be fought. Collins elaborates on the thinking embedded in controlling images by disaggregating the elements, i.e., the interdependent concepts constructing the controlling images:

The foundations of intersecting oppressions become grounded in interdependent concepts of binary thinking, oppositional difference, objectification, and social hierarchy. With domination based on difference forming an essential underpinning for this entire system of thought, these concepts invariably imply relationships of superiority and inferiority, hierarchical bonds that mesh with political economies of race, gender, and class oppression. (ibid., 71)

In our analysis, we seek to identify the interdependent concepts (binaries, oppositional difference, objectification, and social hierarchy) that function as vehicles for the intersecting oppressions that construct 'Muslim' and 'immigrant' girls and women and which, in effect, may deny them the status as fully human subjects – as welfare strategies rely on binaries and oppositional difference to 'rescue' them. Through this analytical strategy, we have assembled two main controlling images: the image of the unfree immigrant housewife, and the image of the inhibited immigrant girl.⁶ Both of these images work through oxymoronic liberal arguments and the welfare professionals are tasked with emancipation based on these images. The way in which this appears is unfolded below – with reference to the documents and with research literature to contextualize, historicize and make sense of the controlling images identified in a current Danish context.

The image of the unfree immigrant housewife

One image appears significant throughout the documents, namely the image of the unfree immigrant

housewife signifying a woman who is, allegedly, oppressed and tied to her family and husband. Overall, this image problematizes the 'immigrant' woman and depicts her as someone who works as a housewife rather than having a paid job: "women with minority backgrounds are kept at home instead of participating in the job market; they are pushed back into religious marriages in spite of being divorced in accordance with Danish law, and they are over-represented in women's shelters" (Kommissionen for den glemte kvindekamp 2022b, 1). As such, this controlling image builds on an implicit oppositional difference to an image of an emancipated woman who meets ideals of independence and freedom through work and participation in the labor market. However, the problematization of the 'immigrant' housewife not only singles out her (absent) will to contribute to society's economy and production, but further accentuates the problematic nature and dynamic of the 'immigrant' home and family, which her supposed status as an oppressed unfree immigrant housewife maintains. The oppositional difference and the Othering that takes place in this image provides reasons for the current welfare policy's efforts to emancipate the imagined immigrant housewife and to justify welfare professionalism's attempts to push her out of the home.

The image of the unfree immigrant housewife becomes effective through the articulation of another oppositional difference, namely an alleged resistance to 'Danish' culture. The foreword to the recommendations from the commission states, "A great many minority-ethnic Danes have made good efforts to integrate themselves in Denmark (...). Unfortunately, there are also many with a minority-ethnic background who are mentally in another place; who live according to another culture and in a parallel normality" (Kommissionen for den glemte kvindekamp 2022a, 3). Further, the commission states:

Finally, there is one group of women that has adopted the culture of honor to such a great extent that they do not realize its problems, and maybe even play an active role in the continuation of them and in the execution of

honor related social control. For these girls and women, Danish democratic values and rights of freedom need to be made clear to them so that these values will get under their skin (ibid., 4).

The controlling image of the unfree immigrant housewife portrays the 'immigrant' housewife as living in a "parallel normality" and as accepting a "culture of honor", thus constituting a threat to Danish values and society. This threat is not only tied to her absence from the labor market, but also to her reproduction and execution of "honor-related social control" that gets coded as 'Muslim culture' through the mentioning of women with a background in MENAPT: Muslim countries in the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey (ibid.).⁷ The contrasting of 'Danish culture' with 'Muslim culture' works as an argument for emancipating the 'immigrant' housewife. This makes sense because of an implicit and opposing idea of Danish society as being marked by modern, enlightened, and rational thinking versus a 'Muslim' 'parallel society' characterized by underdevelopment and patriarchal and oppressive practices. According to Abu-Lughod (2013, 31), this image of 'Muslim culture' as underdeveloped draws on a widespread "cultural framing" where reasons and explanations are sought for in Islam, but not in the colonial and imperial histories of Europe. This framing also becomes apparent in the discourse on so-called honor crimes, depicting 'Muslim' societies as places where honor is closely connected to morality (ibid, 119-120). Sara Farris (2017, 7) notes that the assumed backwardness builds on a dominant notion that gender relations in the Western part of the world are more advanced and must therefore be taught to 'Muslim' women. The controlling image of the unfree immigrant housewife can be seen as conveying such knowledge about 'Muslim' culture in a densified form. In this way the image enables and serves as a reason for surveillance and intervention. 'Muslim' women (and 'Muslim' people in general) are positioned as the Other and interventions are justified by reference to this Other's nature as a primitive, undeveloped and inferior nature. In his writing on Orientalism,

Said (2003, 32) points to how knowledge on the Orient works as a means to elevate oneself and to create and dominate the Other "[a]nd authority here means for 'us' to deny autonomy to 'it' – the Oriental country – since we know it and it exists as we know it". As such, this controlling image draws on a European Orientalist logic of binaries and oppositional difference.

Welfare professionalism and surveillance of the unfree immigrant housewife

The image of the unfree immigrant housewife works to construe 'immigrant' women as putatively oppressed and underdeveloped, thereby turning them into an object of welfare state interventions that address 'immigrant' women and their families' everyday lives. In the commission's recommendations, the municipal authorities are called upon to take on greater responsibility and proactively respond to so-called honor-related social control, which are elements in the construction of the controlling image of the unfree immigrant housewife:

The staff from the local authorities, whom the citizens meet in their everyday lives, has a major task and an important responsibility as a communicator of the rights and duties that apply to everyone in Danish society. For this reason, the commission believes it is critical that the front-line workers, who encounter honor-related social control during their daily work, should be better qualified to intervene. Further, these employees must be met with strong support from the community in their effort to stand firm in their professional competence when encountering complicated conflicts rooted in cultural differences. (Kommissionen for den glemte kvindekamp 2022a, 6)

Again, cultural differences are construed as an oppositional and threatening difference that must be combatted. A central focus of the intervention

is parenting in 'immigrant' families, by which the commission recommends that health visitors⁸ become the new spearhead for surveillance and correction of parenting practices: "The commission recommends that the unique access of the health visitors to children and new parents should be utilized more actively in order to detect and report on honor-related social control – i.e. via regular use of screening tools when encountering the parents [in the school]" (ibid., 7).

As health visitors have access to the homes of 'immigrant' families, and because they possess knowledge on the child's so-called normal development and good parenting, they are positioned as a pivotal profession. In the description of their tasks and importance, the image of the cultural inferior and oppressed 'unfree immigrant women' – confined to the home – functions as a strong argument for the emancipating practices of welfare professionalism:

It is the conviction of the commission that there is potential in the health visitors' contact with minority ethnic mothers, in particular, who live an isolated life behind the walls of their home, without contact to their surrounding community. These can be women who do not yet master the Danish language, who are not yet entering the job market, and who do not have a network. However, it can also be women who are subject to limitations imposed by their spouse, family and network, which means that they rarely engage in the world outside of a very limited sphere. (ibid., 7)

In a wider sense, the emphasis placed on (the knowledge and access of) the health visitors expresses a tendency by which welfare workers, due to their positions close to citizens, are urged to exercise more explicit and firm control as part of their work. This demand is also expressed by the commission as it stresses the central role of social educators and teachers in interventions against 'honor-related social control' and the common project of emancipating 'immigrant' women and girls, prolonging the scope of

intervention from child rearing and day-care institutions to schools and education as such. Thinking with Said (2003, 27), we argue that the Danish welfare professionals are called upon to perform a range of practices in relation to 'honor-related social control'. This entails describing and making statements about social control, etc., based on knowledge about 'cultural difference'. We argue that this mimics Orientalism as described by Said (2003, 15): "Orientalism as a kind of willed human work [...] in all its historical complexity, detail, and worth without at the same time losing sight of the alliance between cultural work, political tendencies, the state, and the specific realities of domination". In other words, we point to *how* welfare professionals' willed human work not only connects to politics in the current situation, but also is invoked to perform according to the dominant political will.

The emancipation of the 'immigrant' housewife through paid labor

Welfare professionalism is tasked with addressing the socially *reproductive* aspects of the 'immigrant' housewife – i.e. to counter an alleged fear of her passing on a non-Danish, 'Muslim culture' to next generations. However, welfare policy and its calls for professionalism also addresses *productive* aspects of the 'immigrant' housewife, as efforts are directed at emancipating 'immigrant' women from the home and making 'them' available to the labor market.

This object is clearly put forward in the initiatives taken by the government agency SIRI (n.d.). While these initiatives are levelled at the recruitment of "women with non-Western backgrounds" (ibid.), they aim to increase the employment of 'immigrants' in the Danish labor market in general. Following an evaluation of municipal advancements to improve the employment rates of 'immigrants', the Minister for Integration stated a need for fierce and more effective efforts to increase the employment of "non-Western immigrants" (VIVE 2020; Regeringen 2021). The *Recruitment guide* [Rekrutteringsguide] published by SIRI begins with

a description illustrating the idea of a non-Danish/Western woman:

A larger number of women are living in relative isolation from Danish society, have limited knowledge of Danish norms, and experience social marginalization. [...] Some of these women are not aware of where to get help and advice. For these women, their understanding of the municipality often comes from their network. This might result in the women being reserved in their initial contact with the municipality, and that they wish as a starting point to have a minimum of contact with the municipality. (SIRI 2021, 6-7)

According to this rationale, to make the 'immigrant' housewife employable it is necessary to establish contact and 'motivate' her. The SIRI guide proposes different methods, from using municipal registers to identify the women, to outreach work, and using already employed 'immigrant' women in local networks as "ambassadors" (ibid., 13-19). The aim is to push non-Western 'immigrant' women into the labor market, and, as such, to convert the unpaid work they are assumed to perform in the household and for the family into work that is in demand in the Danish labor market. Thus, a report evaluating measures taken to match immigrant labor with the needs of different businesses reveals that a larger proportion of 'immigrant' women are increasingly being employed in the "health and care businesses" of the public sector (VIVE 2020, 39-40). In this way, the employability of the 'immigrant' housewife is linked to state initiatives to supply the welfare system with so-called 'warm hands' in a situation framed as a care crisis.

Through the transformation of the 'immigrant' housewife from being dependent on husband, family and culture into an independent woman selling her work on a market, she is made productive and useful to Danish society. As pointed out by Henriette Buus (2001), the plea for this transformation of gendered labor reflects how the life-form of the housewife is no longer considered independent and valuable. The entrance of the 'immigrant' housewife on the market for paid labor

can in one sense be paralleled to the general trend of women's employment in Denmark. However, the controlling image of the unfree immigrant housewife shows how the push to transform the labor of the 'immigrant' woman is intimately connected to the mobilization of historically grounded Orientalist visions of the Other and the continuous downgrading and subordination of 'immigrant' and/or 'Muslim' women (Said 2003; Abu-Lughod 2015). The term 'non-Western', currently used in policy documents, sums up the racializing content, which works as an implicit reason for pushing the 'immigrant' woman out of her home and into the job market. The employed 'immigrant' woman is promised dignity and human worth, which comes with her new status as being independent from her husband and the patriarchal culture. However, this new 'freedom' does not come without a cost, as it often implies entrance into low-paid positions in care and domestic work. Farris (2017, 15) spells out the contradiction: migrant women are urged to "emancipate themselves by entering the productive public sphere", but in reality, they are often "confined to care and domestic work in the private sphere". In her writings on racial capitalism, Gargi Bhattacharyya (2018) also points out how the work of migrant women has typically been limited to housekeeping and care work in unpaid or low-paid positions. This history is intertwined with the development of capitalist states, where cheap labor has enabled the accumulation of values (ibid., 125-149).

The controlling image of the unfree immigrant housewife can be said to exemplify racial capitalism due to the way this image works to degrade the value of 'non-Western' 'immigrant' women, and, at the same time, extract and benefit from their (un)paid labor. Following Bhattacharyya, we see how Danish capitalism, aided by Danish welfare politics and professionalism, builds on racialized differentiation, designating different status to 'workers' and 'non-workers' (ibid., iv). This differentiation is present in the valuations of 'immigrant' women being available and productive on a labor market, and these valuations overlap with a differentiation between the status of citizens versus non-citizens. The workings of this differentiation

can be further understood in relation to the (Danish, social democratic) ideal of the productive, working human being who is driven by a faith in innovation and who strives to create and optimize their own achievements (Nissen et al. 2015, 141). This ideal is present in the early stages of the construction of the social democratic welfare state, exposed by the concern for the unproductive human and the political initiatives to prevent idleness (ibid., 142). The productive human being still functions as a model for welfare politics and its focus on productive versus unproductive citizens.

It is worth stressing how the current attempts to encourage 'immigrant' women to abandon their status as housewives are framed as an act of emancipation and not as coercion. To understand how this works, it is vital to acknowledge that liberalism, as the ideological basis for capitalism, operates within the social democratic welfare state even though it is often presented as its opposite. According to Lisa Lowe (2015, 7), "the genealogy of modern liberalism is [thus] also a genealogy of modern race; racial differences and distinctions designate the boundaries of the human and endure as remainders attesting to the violence of liberal universality". Liberal ideas, such as rights, emancipation, freedom, free labor, and free trade were first introduced during the colonial period, that is, at a time when they appeared in sharp contrast to the governing practices. Lowe states, however, that liberalism made it possible to renew and strengthen exploitative relations, as these became part of a register of free will and choice. The mindset of colonial rule did not disappear; rather, it was reinvented in a new form of governance (ibid., 16). This makes it relevant to point out how current social inequalities are "the legacy of processes through which 'the human' is 'freed' by liberal forms, while other subjects, practices, and geographies are placed at a distance from 'the human'" (ibid. 3). The logics that civilize and provide freedom for some are thus the exact same dividing logics that constitute others as uncivilized and unfree through controlling images which legitimize interventions and designate positions at the lower echelons of society. As stated earlier, Denmark is not an outsider in relation to colonialism: colonial

relations are rewritten and veiled under an oxymoronic liberalism, which promises freedom through labor in low-status occupations.

The image of the inhibited immigrant girl

Across the documents, an image of an inhibited immigrant girl who calls for emancipation can be carved out. Overall, this image problematizes girlhood in 'immigrant' families and communities. It also stigmatizes socialization by 'immigrant' parents, because this kind of upbringing supposedly does not lead to the becoming of a Nordic or Scandinavian girl aligned with the Danish and Scandinavian educational tradition. The image legitimizes restriction and surveillance, which are supposed to replace primary socialization in migrant families with the state's socialization in daycare and school. This oxymoronic sense-making – to emancipate based on stigmatization and surveillance – will be unpacked below.

Binaries and oppositional differences play a pivotal role in the construction of this image. In the commission's recommendations it is stated: "In Denmark, children normally increase their right to self-determination and opportunity to make their own choices as they get older. This move towards freedom and independence is, however, not seen in families where the culture of honor is prevalent. Here, the opposite pattern is more likely" (Kommissionen for den glemte kvindekamp 2022a, 9). In this example, human difference is clearly related to stages of liberal deeds and is moreover shaped by binary thinking, which makes the difference an oppositional difference. Furthermore, the report construes "ethnic minority parents" as people who raise their children based on "what they know", insinuating that they lack proper knowledge and that "what they know" is based on "patterns that do not fit Danish society" (ibid.).

The binary difference and the social hierarchization of difference are also stressed in the *Mandatory offer to learn* manual (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet 2019), which is written directly to the professionals. In the manual the ability to

help oneself and be resourceful is presented as something 'immigrant' parents are ignorant about and which the (Danish) professionals should attend to:

Being self-reliant is central to the tradition of Scandinavian day-care. Though, in the Mandatory offer to learn you should pay attention to parents who do not know why you do things as you do, and therefore may misunderstand your actions and feel that you do not take care of their children. (ibid., 20)

This alleged opposition to Danish society is also confronted through forced distribution of ethnic minority children in day-care to ensure that day-care "mirrors the population" as depicted in this quote: "The commission (...) wants to avoid closed communities where oppression of girls' and women's liberty is normal. It is essential to ensure that patriarchal attitudes cannot exist in a protected vacuum without being challenged and confronted by Danish values pertaining to equality and human rights for all" (Kommissionen for den glemte kvindeskamp 2022a, 10). Therefore, day-care with a high percentage of ethnic minority children should be avoided (ibid.). The idea seems to be that day-care should not mirror the local community but rather the commission's idea of how the population ought to be composed – to ensure that 'immigrant' girls will become emancipated like Nordic girls, i.e., transformed into the image of state socialization.

In other words, difference is understood as an oppositional difference that needs to be managed by the means of well-intentioned interventions. Guidance, restrictions and prohibitions – in the name of democracy – aim to help the girls. This corresponds with Trine Øland (2019, 189), who discusses how welfare work reduces the Other to a negotiable Other "to be either excluded or to be fixed, conquered and overcome and thus disappeared into the national fabric". Øland further states (ibid.) that even though immigrants and refugees are ascribed rights, "welfare work by and large doesn't recognise the Other as a respectable Other in its own right, as a singularity existent in

the present and living an alternative to the grand narratives of exclusive progress and modernity". In accordance with this, Abu-Lughod (2015, 43) suggests that we "might have to accept the possibility of difference: Can we only free Afghan women to be 'like us' or might we have to recognize that even after 'liberation' from the Taliban, they might want different things than we would want for them?" The point is that to disentangle knowledge about difference from an Orientalist tradition, theorizing difference must take its departure from another place.

The antithesis of the Nordic girl

One vital part of this oppositional difference relates to the headscarf. The "Muslim girl" is defined by the commission as wearing a headscarf and is made an object, an Other, who is denied her own identity and agency, and is instead defined in a very narrow sense (Kommissionen for den glemte kvindeskamp 2022a, 12). The 'immigrant' girl is ascribed 'Muslim norms' by the commission, which states, "it is absolutely wrong when Muslim girls at a very early age are subjected to sexualized norms of decency and dressed in a headscarf" (ibid.). Such wording only makes sense because the 'Muslim' girl is understood as the exact opposite to the celebrated 'free Nordic' girl, who makes her own choices and has her own identity. In other words, the controlling image of the inhibited immigrant girl is the negation of "the Nordic girl" who is "smart, free, strong, and safe to be free" (Oinas 2017, 179). The antithesis of this image appears when 'Danish values' and 'Nordic childhood' are voiced in Danish welfare politics. The risk of naming welfare state practices as Nordic or Danish is that 'Nordicness' and 'Danishness' then resembles notions of a racialized group identity, and this labelling has exclusionary effects.

In this way, the 'Muslim' girl is racialized as an effect of being considered inferior, oppressed, inhibited – and a minor, who should not be listened to: "The commission does not think that minor girls should have the responsibility to either choose or decline such a significant religious symbol as a

headscarf" and "[a] girl in primary school is simply not old enough to decide to wear a headscarf. For this reason, it is the commission's firm belief that it should not be allowed for girls to wear a headscarf in primary school" (Kommissionen for den glemte kvindekamp 2022a, 12).

Parallel to the image of the unfree immigrant housewife, where emancipation is accomplished by entering the market for paid labor, the image of the inhibited immigrant girl refers to emancipation through the abandonment of the headscarf, which works as a symbol of the so-called sexualized norms of decency. Freedom and choice are celebrated as ultimate liberal values in the Danish welfare state, and 'immigrants' must align themselves with these values. This paradoxically means that 'immigrant' girls are demanded to live according to choice, but cannot choose to wear a headscarf. As Abu-Lughod (2015, 19) reminds us, the simplistic idea about freedom and choice has its flaws, and choice does not necessarily pave the way for a worthy life, just as "secularism has not brought women's freedom or equality to the West". Thus, to think that 'Muslim' women lack choice is to ignore, "the extent to which all choice is conditioned by as well as imbricated with power, and the extent to which choice itself is an impoverished amount of freedom" (ibid., citing Wendy Brown).

The significance of this simplistic differentiation, bordering citizens and non-citizens, can be identified when relating to our earlier point about racial capitalism playing a role as a structuring logic of the image of the unfree immigrant housewife. The racial differentiation already set in place concerning girls prepares them for roles in capitalist production. As Bhattacharyya (2018, 125–49) has suggested, bordering is about giving different rights and freedoms to different groups of people. Lowe (2015, 150) also points to this dynamic when she identifies differentiation as being an essential part of the logic of capitalism: "[C]apitalism expands not through rendering all labor, resources, and markets across the world identical, but by precisely seizing upon colonial divisions, identifying particular regions for production and others for neglect, certain populations for exploitation and still others for disposal". Following this argument,

we interpret the racial differentiation and hierarchization that plays out while welfare workers intend to save 'immigrant' girls as a way of designating them future roles in capitalism.

Thus, within this controlling image 'immigrant' girls are objectified, surveilled and told how to perform and act, and not ascribed agency. In this way, 'immigrant' girls are prepared for a passive and docile role in the machinery of society and not thought of as agentic participants, citizens or partners who are cut out for dialogue on an equal footing. Racial differences and distinctions, produced by the dehumanizing oppositional difference and objectification working from within the controlling image, thus allocate boundaries of the human within this modern welfare state framework. Simone Browne (2015, 7) refers to Silvia Wynter's sociogenetic principle and writes it is "the organizational framework of our present human condition that names what is and what is not bounded within the category of the human, and that fixes and frames blackness as an object of surveillance". Browne points to surveillance as vital to modernity and that the seeing eye is white. This is also the case in our assemblage of documents. Browne (2015) uses the term "intersecting surveillances", which is built on Collins' intersectional paradigms, to explain how oppressions work in tandem and produce injustice through practices and policies of surveillance. This also applies in our case: 'immigrant' girls and their parents are surveilled from many angles, which reinforces domination based on differentiation, objectification and social hierarchy.

These attempts to ensure 'integration' can be interpreted as what Jaffe-Walter (2016, 2) terms practices of coercive assimilation towards 'Muslim' girls in Danish schools: practices cloaked in benevolent discourses of care and concern. The wording "coercive concern" captures how these efforts, as well as the ones we study in this article, become effective through the intertwinement of freedom and control (ibid., 6).

It is striking that the differentiation and hierarchization of the category of the human contradicts how "the Scandinavian educational tradition"

is conceived of and praised in Danish welfare policy directed at welfare professionals, for instance, in the *Mandatory offer to learn* manual under the heading "Cultural and democratic formation": "The Scandinavian pedagogical tradition is built upon an understanding of democracy where all children have the opportunity to express themselves and have their needs and interests met regardless of background and differences" (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet 2019, 17). However, in the publication differences in needs and interests are soon narrowed down to religious festivals and traditions, which should be based on Danish norms; only superficial differences in the form of different festival traditions are imaginable and legitimate. As noted previously, differences are not accepted, but instead deemed in need of erasure and replacement to 'rescue' the 'immigrant' girl and women.

The welfare worker as an authority

As part of the objectification of the inhibited immigrant girl – and the interventions, restrictions and prohibitions proposed – the welfare worker as a public authority and knowledge as a neutral foundation for governance seem to be important prerequisites to make the controlling image work. "Mandatory offer to learn" is an oxymoron: the offer is obligatory, an order for those targeted by the policy. In the wording of the policy, the day-care manager and the social educators form a regulatory authority with a legal capacity: "The day-care manager and the pedagogical personnel have the role of an authority in the mandatory offer to learn because they have to keep a record of the children's attendance compared to the required number of hours, and of the parents' attendance in the courses, and they should notify the authorities if deviations occur" (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet 2019, 3). It is explained as a practicality: it should be decided who will do the registration, and it is said to be important to make clear announcements about registering to "build a collaboration with the parents that is based on respect and trust" (ibid.).

However, the policy mentions a number of serious sanctions for the targeted 'immigrant' parents, who are warned: "If the parents do not admit their child in the mandatory offer to learn, or take care of the intervention themselves, the municipal authorities must decide to withdraw the child benefit" (ibid., 2). The day-care professionals also risk being brought to justice and penalized if they do not perform their role: "The manager of the day-care institution is responsible for the registration and controlling of these children's attendance and for reporting to the municipal authorities, in cases where a child's attendance over a period of time is too low or too high" (Børne- og Socialministeriet 2018, 3).

The day-care employee is thus positioned as superior and as an authority. In this way, the controlling image trades on welfare professionals being employed by the welfare state, which takes advantage of the professionals as an authority in practice and for direct political reasons. Their professionalism is cast as per definition in compliance with the prevailing welfare policies. Hence, this is not considered to constitute a professionalism of its own, with distance and relative autonomy. Rather, the state seeks to control the professionals to control the 'immigrant' parents – that is, to combat putative social control in 'immigrant' families. This is seen when knowledge about social control is suggested as a curriculum in social educator and teacher training courses, as stated by the commission: "It is in the nick of time to ensure that the professional staff in day-care institutions and schools receive training in order to understand, identify and deal with honor-related social control" (Kommissionen for den glemte kvindekamp 2022, 8). To fulfil this aim, the professionals are suggested to attend a new educational module in further education titled "Pedagogical work in relation to negative social control", directed at teachers and social educators in schools, after school programs and day-care institutions. The commission states that "more knowledge will lead to less reluctance and more action in facing these issues" (ibid.). Thus, the commission considers knowledge to be unambiguous and applicable in ways which can immediately be turned into

actions that support the prevailing welfare policy. Through the further training of social workers, social educators and teachers, the commission expects that welfare workers will be able (and willing) to identify subjects who are showing signs of an oppositionist Other.

Conclusion

In this article, we have analyzed how current Danish welfare state politics and policies urge 'Muslim' and 'immigrant' women and girls to become emancipated through the incitement and engagement of welfare professionals. Furthermore, we have pointed to how these efforts are embedded in a political-economic logic, where racial capitalism is cloaked under liberal and social-democratic ideas.

Through our analytical construction of the controlling images, the unfree immigrant housewife and the inhibited immigrant girl respectively, we have scrutinized how these images are built on a common structure of racialization. Drawing on oppositional differences, the controlling images are performative of social and cultural recognizable images which convey a gendered and racialized content. The controlling images connect to sexist and racist logics that take shape as processes of Othering in welfare politics and professionalism. We understand this as a form of gendered racism, where sexism and racism overlap or even reinforce each other (Neubeck & Cazenave 2002).

The article has highlighted how welfare professionals are called upon to enforce 'immigrant' and 'Muslim' women to seek emancipation from 'patriarchal culture', and how this enforcement is sustained by policies, which work through oxymoronic liberal arguments where coercion and care compose an irresistible invitation to freedom. As such, the article has emphasized how visions of the nation state incorporate women's bodies in processes where welfare professionals, as agents, are regarded as vital players in promoting liberal-economic thinking, as a promise of modernity and freedom.

Our analysis has exposed a paradox in the dynamic of gendered racism in the present Danish context, namely the paradox of racialized Danish welfare politics and professionalism framed in a space of the emancipation of 'immigrant' and 'Muslim' women. This paradox can also be observed behind the racialized dual standard in the political discourse on families, where freedom of choice in relation to (white, heteronormative) families is generally valued as positive, while similar practices are problematized in families with immigrant backgrounds (Stormhøj 2021, 99-102). This double standard is accepted because white women are considered as making rational, independent choices, whereas 'immigrant' women are regarded as merely adapting to suppressive, cultural traditions.

However, the welfare state policy analyzed in this article, including its dominant controlling images of 'immigrant' and 'Muslim' women and girls, is grounded within capitalism in ideologies serving "the reproduction of the material conditions of production" (Farris 2017, 12). Thus, with this article, we have contributed to existing research literature on prevailing dominant stereotypes and images of the oppressed 'immigrant' woman and girl. We have done so by pointing to the observation that the stereotyping and controlling images are not only a discursive matter of media or political debates, but also a complex matter of welfare professions as lubricating agents invoked to serve the racist and capitalist welfare state and its ideological foundation in liberalism.

To further understand the enforced emancipation of 'immigrant' women, we have pointed to the historical intertwinement of social democracy, liberalism and global colonial relations. The logic embedded in the enforcement of freedom on 'immigrant' and 'Muslim' women can be viewed as an expression of how, even in a present context, "ideas of progress and development justifies colonialism and coloniality" (Suárez-Krabbe 2015, 3). By applying controlling images as an analytical lens, we have exposed social domination as being based on a system of thought which works through historically racialized, differential thinking about progressivism and developmentalism as

seeking to 'rescue' 'immigrant' and 'Muslim' women and girls. Since controlling images are actively constructed by individuals, however historically embedded individuals are, these images can be

undone by exposing the contradictions and paradoxes they bring about, displacing the hierarchical constructions on which they are based.

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Notes

- ¹ In this article, the term politics refers to a broad political context where policy is produced and circulated, whereas the term policy covers specific politics realized as content in the form of laws, mandates for commissions, etc.
- ² Danish welfare politics and professionalism addressing 'Muslim' women have coalesced with and permeated representations targeting non-Western 'immigrant' women (as it have in other countries, cf. Farris 2017), which is one of the reasons why we write 'Muslim' and 'immigrant' women in quotation marks, i.e. use inverted commas to communicate that these are historical labels that are effects of complex problematization. When we use phrases like *the image of the unfree immigrant housewife*, we do not use inverted commas because the wording in itself signals that we are pointing to an image, a construction or a representation.
- ³ This is our translation as the commission does not have an English translation itself. As Joan W. Scott (2012) explains, emancipation has been associated with the lifting of restraints, but also with liberation from intellectual chains in the sense of a changed consciousness.
- ⁴ All quotes from the Danish documents are translated by the authors.
- ⁵ The image of *the Mammy* as the faithful and obedient servant is intimately linked to the history of Black women as caregivers for white children. *The Matriarch*, a more recent image, problematizes Black women who are single mothers and the head of their household. Such female-headedness is regarded as an important cause of Black poverty, and due to these working women's time away from home they are also blamed for neglecting their children and contributing to their failure at school (Collins 2000, 75). A third image is *the Welfare mother* - a Black single mother, who receives social welfare benefits. This image shares important features with those of the Mammy and the Matriarch. Like the Matriarch, the Welfare mother is considered an insufficient mother, as she assumedly neglects her children or passes on poor values to them. However, where the unavailability of the Matriarch is defined as problematic, in the case of the Welfare mother, her accessibility is deemed the problem. The fourth image is that of a sexually aggressive Black woman, *the Jezebel*, an image tied to slavery and to more recent efforts to control Black women's sexuality (ibid., 79-81).
- ⁶ We name the images 'immigrant' girl and housewife, even though 'Muslim' girl and women are also used and given significance in the documents, which is also important when analyzing and historicizing the tropes appearing. Moreover, ethnic minority girls and women are used in the documents. We think of the girls and women as racialized groups, which are shaped as such while targeted by the racialized images and interventions.

- ⁷ MENAPT is a statistical category launched by the Danish Ministry of Immigration and Integration, cf. https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/country-governance/governance-migrant-integration-denmark_en#statistics [accessed 29 April 2023] and used by Denmark Statistics from 2021, cf. <https://www.dst.dk/Site/Dst/Udgivelser/GetPubFile.aspx?id=34714&sid=indv2021> [accessed 29 April 2023]. This is a new way that the welfare state statistics reproduce 'racial difference' by reference to culture and region through generations. Earlier it did so by referring to Western and non-Western and developed and less developed groups.
- ⁸ Health visits are conducted by health visitors who regularly visit families with newborn babies until they are approximately one year old. It is an integrated part of the universal welfare provision in Denmark to ensure that every child in the first year of their life is healthy and thriving. 95–99 percent of the population receive welfare visits from a health visitor. Health visitors are nurses with further education.