"I Wanna Be a Dark-Skinned Pork Roast" – and other stories about how 'dark' Danish rappers negotiate otherness in their marketing and music productions

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Abstract

This article explores processes of experienced otherness as it is represented in stories told by Danish rappers with Middle Eastern background. Referring to stories about 'being stopped' the article illustrates how these rap artists, because of their visible otherness, are forced to navigate in a discursive landscape that affects their becoming of subjects as well as rap artists. The article discusses how otherness experienced in everyday encounters seems to generate habits of thought and expression, which also influence the rappers' choices regarding their music production and marketing. I propose and discuss three different ways of how this is done: (1) A strategy where rappers play along with stigmatising stories about the criminal and dangerous 'other' or 'stranger,' hereby constituting a brand as a dangerous 'perker;' (2) a strategy where rap artists remove the danger from the stranger, hereby enabling themselves to pass as inoffensive exotic foreigners; and (3) a strategy where rappers confront the stigmatising stereotypes, creating alternative and possibly instructive stories about 'dark' Danes.

Introduction: a story about a pork roast

For many Danes pork roast with crackling – or in Danish '*flæskesteg med sprød svær*' – is the closest thing there is to a national dish. It is associated with a real Christmas dinner, served with red cabbage and white and brown potatoes, uniting the family around the table before dancing and singing around the tree on Christmas Eve as is the tradition in Denmark. In the course of the last two decades, where migration and integration have been recurring political and popular issues, the pork roast has gained a kind of political connotation as well. As the meat comes from a pig, devout Muslims do not eat pork roast. Hereby pork roast has become something exclusively – and exclusionarily – 'Danish,' substantiating a public narrative of 'Muslim identity as inconsistent with a Danish identity' and creating a symbolic and stereotypical polarity between 'us,' the Danes, and them, the 'others.'

When Faraz, a young upcoming rapper born in Iran but since his third year raised in Denmark, explained to me how he deliberately worked on branding himself as a "dark-skinned pork roast" (Interview with Faraz, October 20, 2010),[1] I became curious. I new that Faraz felt frustrated and annoyed about the otherness he experienced was put upon him because of his dark skin, hair and eyes. But why was he so strategically intentional in articulating and re-appropriating this otherness in his branding of himself as a rapper? What did he mean by referring to himself as a 'dark-skinned pork roast?'

Based on ethnographic field research in the underground multi-ethnical rap milieu in Denmark,[2] this article aims to investigate and describe how Faraz and other Danish rap artists with Middle Eastern background – or 'dark Danish rappers'[3] – experience otherness, and how they re-appropriate and negotiate this otherness in their music and as part of their branding strategies.

In popular discourse, the other – or the stranger – often appears as a pre-given and natural figure. However, as Sara Ahmed suggests, nobody is simply just a stranger or an other. Drawing on Frantz Fanon and his phenomenology on 'being' the other (Fanon 1986), Ahmed describes the stranger as "*some-body* whom we have *already recognised* in the very moment in which they are 'seen' or 'faced' as a stranger" (Ahmed 2000:21). In this sense, otherness is to be understood as a spatial relation. The other is a relational figure constituted in bodily encounters – face-to-face or mediated through stereotypical images formed and incorporated in encounters, but performed in other times and other spaces. Hence, the experience of otherness can be described in terms of the bodily and social experience of restrictions, uncertainty and blockage (Ahmed 2007:161).

In many cases, the bodily experience of estrangement has to do with the stereotypical conception of others, as imagined to be a threat or a burden to the national community. After 9/11 and the Danish cartoon crisis[4] public representation of Middle Eastern people in Denmark has increasingly been related to orientalistic imaginations about Muslims as personified symbols of terror, enemies and 'radical others' (Koefoed and Simonsen 2010:63-64). This imaginary link, creating a political relation between migration, integra-

tion and national security questions (Gad 2011:76-77), has stressed an already existing tension between a 'cultural anxiety' (Grillo 2003) and an 'ethno-nationalism' (Gullestad 2006) in popular discourse in Denmark. Where cultural anxiety is characterised by the fear of loosing treasured national values such as language, territory, self-determination, identity etc. (Grillo 2003:158), ethno-nationalism is to be understood as a close-knit set of specific understandings about geography, history, culture, religion and perceptions about skin colour and descent. In this imaginary geographical space 'foreign appearance' (e.g. a foreign look or a foreign family name) work as markers of cultural difference and social distance (Gullestad 2006:302). Thus, in stressing the notion of 'us' and 'them,' the radical others, cultural anxiety and ethno-nationalism seem to be two sides of the same coin.

The projection of danger onto the figure of the stranger allows for the imagination of home as an inhabitable, inherently safe and valuable space. By assuming that those whom one does not know are the origin of danger, the 'we' of the community is established, enforced and legitimated. Thus, the strangers become figures posing danger by their very presence in the streets and in the purified space of community, constituting what Sara Ahmed calls 'stranger danger' (Ahmed 2000:32-37).

As Stuart Hall has argued 'difference' and otherness are of central importance in popular culture. By showing how stereotyping as a representational practice works in different ways, and that this practice is caught up in plays of power, he argues that the field of popular culture is a field, where a struggle over meaning takes place. It opens out into a "politics of representation" (Hall 1997:277).

Following such observations this article discusses how dark Danish rappers deliberately relate to and negotiate the stereotypical image of the dangerous stranger in the way they represent and brand themselves as rappers. It also addresses this play of power as a negotiating process that can be understood in terms of what Ahmed calls the phenomenology of 'being stopped' (Ahmed 2006, 2007). Based on stories about 'being stopped' and attempts of 'passing through' told by dark Danish rappers, I illuminate how these rappers seem to be capable of using different aspects of their visible otherness in order to make it big in the rap business. Generally, I propose that it

Kristine Ringsager

is possible to speak about three different passing strategies: (1) A strategy where the rappers play along with all stigmatising stories about the criminal and dangerous 'other,' hereby constituting the very concept of 'stranger danger'; (2) a strategy where rap artists remove the danger from the stranger, by deliberately downplaying sides of the otherness that could be regarded as 'non-Danish,' instead focusing on the exotic parts of being a dark Dane; and (3) a strategy where the rappers use the music and the position as artists to try to enlighten and facilitate dialogue, in order to deconstruct and rearticulate the narratives about the 'dangerous stranger.'

As strategies these of course have equivalents in all musical fields that negotiate the relationship between an underground and a mainstream, and the proposed categories lean on familiar brands like the gangsta-rapper, the party-emo-rapper and the social conscious 'preacher.' In this field, however, the passing strategies in play are closely connected to negotiation of otherness. The present article offers an understanding of the strategies as analytical categories, but in reality they of course overlap, interlink and connect to each other in different ways depending on the individual agent.

Experienced otherness in the rap business

As public articulations, framed to receive special attention, music and other arts are often key rallying points for identity groups and central to the representations of identity (Turino 2008:106). The origin of the aesthetic expression of hip hop and rap music among marginalised 'black' people in America's big cities and a persistent representation of the genre as the political mouthpiece of the ghetto, seem to have led the way for similar use of hip hop among groups feeling marginalized in other contexts, for instance young dark people in Denmark. In this sense hip hop appear as a counterculture, sometimes giving rise to explicit political resistance, sometimes just emphasising an opposition to the established, the neat, the political correct etc. – as does every counterculture (Krogh and Pedersen 2008:11). In other words, rap music has become a cultural trend that dark Danes position themselves in relation to, in order to distance themselves from the political discourse towards migrants in Denmark. The well-established dark Danish rapper, playwright and actor, Zaki, illustrates this imagined connection between rap and foreigners:

Kristine Ringsager

"We have to do certain things to be real foreigners, otherwise you are integrated, and then you are suddenly something totally different, then you are in some kind of vacuum, and 'what the hell are you then?' Then you have said goodbye to your base, but you haven't really got any other country. Well, so you have to shave your head, wear street wear and listen to hip hop and rap. You can't for instance play rock music and have long hair." (Interview with Zaki, Jun 6, 2012)

Quite many young dark Danes do not just listen to rap and hip hop, they become producers and performers of rap music themselves. Among these rappers the production of rap music is an act of negotiating the otherness they experience as well as expressing frustrations over the common political discourse in Denmark. For a large part this is a musical community taking place on the Internet, primarily involving young male rappers uploading music and clips on YouTube and bonding on Facebook, where they like or dislike each others' uploaded tracks, mix tapes, videos etc. However, even though some of them might get tens of thousands of views on YouTube and have a huge fan base on Facebook, and some might attend and win different talent shows and become well-known in their local neighbourhoods, most of them will never become established rappers in the Danish music business.

Among the research participants I have talked to, a widespread explanation for dark Danish rappers' difficulties in getting access to the more established market and rap media is, that the artistic standards in the 'pale' and the 'dark' rap communities in Denmark are very different from each other. "There's race segregation in rap as well," as the rapper and university-educated social entrepreneur Ali puts it. Ali, who is born in Iran but raised in Denmark, elaborates his reflection:

"One of the reasons why they [dark Danish rappers] aren't taken seriously, why they aren't gaining access to the established Danish rap media, is because they are judged by other standards. [...] Danish rap media value rappers in terms of the rhymes, whereas the [dark Danish] rappers have other objectives such as flow and message, when they make the songs." (Interview with Ali, December 12, 2010)

Thus, many dark Danish rap artists find that their music is not recognised as 'good' in a pale Danish context and that they for that reason is marginalised from the established music industry in Denmark. Of course such experiences must be contextualised with other considerations such as quality, 'playlist-ability,' general adjustment to the market etc. However, in relation to the rappers' attempts at gaining acknowledgement and respect as rap artists, certain factors relating to the concept of otherness are brought up by my research participants.

For this reason it seems relevant to illuminate, how dark Danish rap artists experience that they are 'being stopped,' and which strategies they put in play in trying to 'pass through' and get access and acknowledgement to the established music industry.

Stories of being stopped – and of stopping oneself

"Yesterday, me and the boys were thrown out of a cafe, because we were 'gang members.' I was really happy, exited and a little proud, because for some time I have sort of felt that I might have become a kind of 'cultural type' with all the theatre stuff, I'm doing. However, he reminded me, who I really am deep down: a gang member" (Zaki's Facebook page, December 9, 2012)

This sarcastic Facebook status update by the above-mentioned Zaki, explaining how he was thrown out of a café stigmatised as a troublemaker, quite clearly illustrates Sara Ahmed's concept of 'stranger danger.' Even though Zaki is an extraordinary example of a dark Danish rapper, who has managed to make it big and get acknowledgement in Denmark not only as a rap artist, but also as an actor and playwright, in this situation he is made strange by his very bodily appearance, through what Ahmed characterizes as techniques of reading the body of the other and telling the differences between what is familiar and what is strange (Ahmed 2000:37).

In Ahmed's work on what she calls the phenomenology of 'being stopped,' she explains how certain bodies are blocked more than others, who pass more freely and extend their physical mobility into social mobility. Generally speaking 'whiteness' tends to include people, whereas 'black' bodies are

Kristine Ringsager

excluded. Being stopped produces 'the stranger,' which appears as a figure that is out of place (Ahmed 2007:160-161).

Zaki's experience of being singled out as a stranger and for this reason 'stopped' or excluded because he is imagined to be dangerous and related to trouble and violence is not outstanding. Actually, it is quite the contrary. All the research participants I have talked to during my field research, have had similar stories to tell – experiences of being denied access to clubs and discos, of being stopped by the police for no specific reasons, and of being linked to criminal actions because of their very presence in specific streets or neighbourhoods. Hence, despite being born or at least raised in Denmark, their visible otherness are unavoidable factors they have to deal with in their everyday life.

The experience of being singled out as a stranger induces, as Fanon has described, a special kind of bodily consciousness, and the feeling is one of negation. In his description of how the 'black' body is "sealed into that crushing objecthood" (Fanon 1986:82), a central point is how the black man adopts the white gaze. For the black man then, consciousness of the body becomes a kind of third-person consciousness, in trying to reconcile his own experience with the operation of a historico-racial schema within which his own corporeal schema is supposed to fit. Hereby the body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty (Fanon 1986:83-84).

Ataf, a well-established rap artist in his late thirties with Pakistani background, describes this feeling of a 'double consciousness' in his description of, why he never enters cafés in Copenhagen, the city where he is born and still lives:

"I never sit down at cafes. [...] Sometimes I walk in to buy a juice or some water, but I always feel that people pull this: 'what are you doing here?' It is not spiteful, more like wondering a bit. You get me? I live in this country, I was born and raised here, and I'm just as Danish as you. Or am I? Do you get me? [...] So you create a filter, a sensor, where you quickly can sense that 'you don't like me' or 'you feel uneasy having me around'" (Interview with Ataf, September 7, 2010)

Such stories of 'being stopped' – or stories of 'stopping oneself' – stemming from both external and internal singling out, are part of the everyday life

of all dark Danes, I have been in touch with during my field research – and have huge influence on these people's identity work.

As Stuart Hall has argued, identities – or identification – are constructed within discursive practices as temporary attachments to the subject position. Thus they are always the results of a successful articulation of the subject into the flow of the discourse (Hall 1996:6).

But as I touched on above, a person's articulation of identity is not always successfully received within the discourse they are articulated. Zaki was denied access and Ataf deliberately avoided engaging, and thus they were both stopped when trying to negotiate particular discourses. These examples show how discursively produced categories like 'race,' 'ethnicity' or 'nation' shape habits of thought and expression in powerful ways that become important aspects of a persons identity formation – and that once such habits become deeply entrenched, they frequently operate below focal awareness. They are taken for granted and do not come up for consideration as to their origin, nature, or accuracy (Turino 2008:103). In this sense, dark Danes develop a whole set of habits of thought and expression, that lead them to identify with each other and that distinguish them from pale Danes.

As identities are always constituted within, not outside, representation and constructed within, not outside, discourse (Hall 1996:4), rappers have to relate to their otherness and discursive categories like their 'ethnical background,' 'country of origin' or 'race' when working on a successful brand.

As Amro, an upcoming rapper in his mid-twenties, replied, when I asked whether he hoped to get signed by a record company: "I've heard that Universal is looking for a new migrant rapper" (Interview with Amro, February 4, 2013). Hereby he pinpoints what many other dark Danish rappers have explained: that their visible otherness is an unavoidable factor and for this reason something that they have to deal with in marketing and branding strategies. The above-mentioned rapper Babak, a university-educated and politically engaged rap artist in his late-twenties, explains, how he experiences being stuck in the role as a 'migrant rapper':

> "People often look at me from the perspective that I'm a migrant, who has something to say. I become the migrant, who has something

to say, instead of just a someone, who has something to say" (Interview with Babak, July 8, 2010)

Moreover, various of my informants have explained how they, if interviewed by journalists from Danish media, almost always are asked questions like 'how is it to make rap music as a migrant?,' 'what do you think about the integration situation in Denmark?' or 'do you feel you are Danish or Egyptian?' To my informants, these are questions that remove focus from the music and themselves as artists, in favour of underlining their social position as migrants and others in the Danish society. What kind of music they do, what they express etc. are looked at in correspondence to their position as strangers. In this way, the rappers experience that they are stuck in the role as 'migrant rapper,' which stop them from getting recognition for the very music they produce.

Whereas dark Danish rappers as illustrated experience that they are being stigmatised and marginalised as 'migrant rappers,' their otherness is at the same time something they in different ways deliberately use and negotiate in creating a unique brand. These strategic negotiations of otherness can be related to the process of 'passing.'

Strategies of otherness in play

Passing usually designates a movement through and across. However, passing can also be understood as a social process, making the individual capable of presenting its self as other than the person it normally understands itself to be – or is apprehended of. Of course theories on passing can be rightly criticised for focusing on and fixating categories such as race, ethnicity and gender (Khawaja 2011:286) – often in dichotomous either/or-relations. As a metaphor however, passing can be useful in reflecting on and describing how rap artists strategically accentuate and deliberately negotiate otherness, when trying to gain access to the Danish rap milieu.

According to Sara Ahmed, passing can be considered in terms of 'ability.' She describes, how the 'ability' for a 'black' person to pass as 'white' involves a technique of the self, the projection of a bodily image (e.g. alterations of speech, hair, style and gesture), which is conflatable with 'whiteness.' In

Kristine Ringsager

this sense, bodies become construed and reconstructed through techniques, which serve to approximate a certain image (Ahmed 1999:101).

In my research, 'Danishness' and the ability to 'pass through' as Danish, also seem to be significant factors in determining, which bodies move comfortably through space and time and which do not – factors which of course are also connected to visible phenotypical characteristics such as e.g. skin-colour. Moreover, the stories told by the rappers, I have talked to, speak of not just the one-sided passing technique, trying to pass as a (pale) Dane, but also of more complex and multi-sided passing techniques, where the otherness is bent and modified in different strategic ways, that Ahmed does not take into account.

As analytical categories, I propose the existence of three strategies, by which the individual rapper tries to pass as respectively the dangerous '*perker*'; the inoffensive exotic foreigner; or the confronting and enlightening dark Dane.

The dangerous 'perker'

For some dark Danes, the feeling of exclusion and experiences of being stopped for no other reason but their phenotypical characteristics, has lead to dissociation with Denmark and Danish identity. As many informants have explained to me: 'Why bother identify yourself as a Dane, when many people don't accept you as such anyway?' For this reason some young dark Danes choose to establish an identity as '*perker*' – originally a very pejorative and derogative ethnic slur in the Danish language. Etymologically the term 'perker' is a combination of the Danish words for respectively Persian (i.e. *perser*) and Turk (i.e. *tyrker*). However, in practise the term does not really point to any exact national background, but rather a cultural background of otherness, often referring to people looking Middle Eastern. Furthermore, '*perker*' seems to refer to the social behaviour of a person, indicating that he or she acts in opposition to social norms in Denmark.[5] Often the term is used to describe young marginalised 'Middle Eastern-looking' boys hanging in the streets (wearing the '*perker* uniform,' i.e. hoodies, baggy pants and Nike shoes) in groups playing it cool and 'looking for trouble.' In this sense *perker* also points to an aggressive and provoking attitude and behaviour.

By deliberately articulating an identity as a '*perker*,' people not only indicate that they are foreigners, but also that they place themselves in opposition to the Danish culture and 'Danishness.' Drawing on Gayatri C. Spivak's concept of 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak 1988),[6] I suggest that such construction of a '*perker*'-identity can be understood as a kind of strategic re-appropriative essentialism of otherness. It is a passing technique of some young Danish citizens with Middle Eastern minority background, whereby they, as a stigmatised group, revalue and re-appropriate the externally imposed stereotypical and negative label of being '*perker*' by self-assuredly referring to themselves in terms of exactly that label. By doing so, they try to put themselves beyond their social stigma, hereby rebuilding a feeling of being agents of their own identity formation.

In trying to produce a brand as a tough gangsta-rapper from the ghetto, some rappers deliberately accentuate the connotations linked to the 'perker'-identity. They intentionally play on the embodied orientalistic conceptions about the other as something dangerous and evil, but yet masculine, wild and fascinating (Koefoed and Simonsen 2010:62, 69-70). By producing rap music with lyrics in the multi-ethnolect often referred to as '*Perker*'-Danish (i.e. incorrect Danish mixed with i.a. Arabic, Turkish and English-American words) telling stories of the tough life in the ghetto, where they chill around with hoes in big cars, do drugs and criminal stuff and distance themselves from the Danish system, the rappers make the prejudices and stigmatising stories stand as unchallenged facts supporting the authenticity of the very brand. At times the lyrics also express misogynist views, which conflate with the gangsta-rapper attitude, thus supporting the stereotypical narratives of the others' unequal gender roles (Koefoed and Simonsen 2011:70-71).

This strategy is used by quite many young underground rappers, who address their music specifically to other adolescents re-appropriating the 'perker'-identity. An example of this is the now disbanded group '187,' whose song and music video 'Lige her' [Right here] released in the summer of 2011 within six months gained around 830 thousand views on YouTube. With lyrics like 'we're ready to fight,' 'we'll take over the system,' 'we hunt in herds' and 'if we don't get something, we'll make trouble' (my translations) and a music video situating the rappers among 50-60 other dark Danish young men, making associations to migrant-gangs obvious, they deliberately seem to act out the role as 'the dangerous stranger.'

Few rappers using this strategy have also managed to gain access to the more established rap scene in Denmark. One of these is Marwan, a rapper with Palestinian background, who released his debut album called *P.E.R.K.E.R.* in 2007 on the Danish independent label Tabu Records. The cover of the album pictures Marwan positioned as a prisoner standing with a name plate identifying him as '*Marwan P.E.R.K.E.R.*' in his hand, while having his mug shot taken, and the music and lyrics are almost clichés picturing life as a '*perker.*' The title *P.E.R.K.E.R.* and the branding of himself as such were deliberately strategies designed by Marwan and his record company. "Nobody had used the *perker*-term before, so it'll be perfect for you right now" (Interview with Marwan March 10, 2014), as Marwan retrospectively has reproduced a conversation he at that time had with his record company. In the case of Marwan, the strategy seems to have provided a way into the Danish rap market, also addressing a pale Danish audience finding the almost caricature image of the tough '*perker*' fascinating or funny.

The above-mentioned rapper Ataf, who formerly was known as *Den Sorte Slyngel* [*The Black Bastard*], pinpoints how the stereotypical '*perker*'-brand seems to be able to sell records, by explaining how people from record companies have urged him to continue to practise the tough '*perker*'-attitude, he previously did:

> "If I go to a record company or to producers, who want to do some of my stuff, they tell me: 'Hey, man, let's make it even bigger for your next album.' Then for instance they suggest to me: 'Let's make an album really just about BMW's, shawarmas and chilling.' Do you get me? You know, just this stereotypical stuff, because it sells in a funny way." (Interview with Ataf, September 7, 2010)

The inoffensive exotic foreigner

Unlike the strategy described above, where the rappers negotiate otherness by accentuating the danger of the stranger, another technique, used by some dark rap artists, is to remove the danger from the stranger, hereby passing as an exotic, inoffensive and unproblematic foreigner. The rapper Faraz, mentioned in the beginning of this article, and his strategic self-branding as a 'dark-skinned pork roast,' is an example of using this strategy in order to

address a pale Danish audience. As Faraz explains, he makes mainstream Danish party-emo-rap with a "twist of foreigner." whishing to appear as "a dark-skinned pork roast, dished up for the Danish family" (Interview with Faraz, October 20, 2010).

This strategy seems to involve a technique emphasising the exotic parts of being dark-skinned and downplaying or changing the 'offensive' character-istics of the other. The dark body's otherness is modified to fit with Danish society and ideas of 'Danishness', hereby making the rapper able to pass as 'one of us,' however still a foreigner. "People might think of me as a foreign-er, but not as a *perker*" (Interview with Faraz, September 20, 2010), as Faraz points out.

One aspect of this strategy is to make 'non-political' music, so to speak. As Faraz puts it: "Why shoot yourself in the foot by doing all that 'fuck the police, fuck the Danes, fuck this and fuck that-stuff'" (Interview with Faraz, September 20, 2010). Instead the lyrical focus is on topics like girls (but not 'hoes'), partying and not least what my informants call the 'Dan-ish drinking culture.' The titles of Faraz' songs '*Skål for i aften*' [*Cheers for tonight*] and '*Bartender*' are musical examples of this strategy. They indicate that even though Faraz might have a Middle Eastern look (and thus might be a Muslim, who do not drink alcohol), he is actively taking part in the 'Danish drinking culture,' thus he is not radical in his otherness. The fact that the young upcoming rapper with Iraqi origin, Murad, has chosen to market himself under the alias 'Ethanol' is another example of this.

As Faraz describes, this brand has brought him success and consequently a new experience of respect, credit and acknowledgement from pale Danes, who literally have given him access to places that were previously blocked:

> "This Saturday, I was booked to a private party downtown. I came with ten of my friends that I was told I could bring along. I looked around, and there were only Danes at the party. And I thought: 2-3 months ago, we sat in our basement and drank cheap wine and dreamed about being invited to such a party. You see, now it was us arriving, and there was a table 'reserved for Faraz.' The guard came and cleared the Danish table, we sat down, and the Danes brought

bottles and stuff to us. And took pictures with me. And brought champagne every other hour, all the time asking if everything was fine!" (Interview with Faraz, September 20, 2010)

As can be extracted from this statement, a lot of power relations stemming from Faraz' personal experiences of otherness and of being stopped seem to be at stake in using this strategy. In this sense the self-claimed 'non-political' approach to the rap music can be interpreted as part of a bigger strategy, where Faraz wishes to turn the stigmatising stories and power relations upside down by making personal success.

In tune with this interpretation, the above mentioned rapper Murad points out, that besides personal benefits the position as a well-established rapper, acknowledged by a broad Danish audience, makes it possible, or at least easier, to try to change people's image of dark Danes (Interview with Murad, February 7, 2013).

However, whereas this strategy might gain a profitable position among a pale Danish audience, the image is not always capitalised among ethnic minority youth. "It's a huge taboo," as Faraz points out, while showing me a Facebook posting, he had gotten, suggesting to him to make the next campaign for the Danish Peoples Party.7 He continued: "It's not '*perker*' enough, it's too integrated" (Interview with Faraz, September 20, 2010).

The confronting and enlightening dark Dane

While the two above-mentioned strategies, where the rappers respectively accentuate and downplay the danger of the stranger, seem to adjust the popular discourse towards dark people in Denmark, the last strategy, I propose, is very critical towards this discourse.

The rap artists pursuing this strategy use music as an enlightening tool to communicate messages confronting prejudices and stereotyping stories about ethnic and religious minorities that circulates in Danish popular discourse. By articulating their personal stories of being stopped and experiences of estrangement in their rap lyrics, they try to deconstruct the concept of 'stranger danger' and facilitate dialogue, hereby hopefully contributing to a re-positioning of themselves and dark Danes in general.

Rappers using this strategy usually do not become well-known artists with airplay on the mainstream Danish radio stations. However, as the above-mentioned rapper Ali, explains: "I would like to be famous, because then more people will listen to what I say, right? Then I can be an opinion former" (Interview with Ali December 21, 2010). In order to become opinion formers and spread their musically expressed messages, the rappers using this strategy often try to market their music through other channels than only the Danish rap and music media. This is often done, by drawing on network gained through political or social work.

Rappers pursuing this strategy are generally well-educated and socioeconomically advantaged people, and many of them are engaged in social work for instance at youth projects, working with production of rap music in deprived urban neighbourhoods. For this reason, they are often well-known among and admired by many dark adolescents, who also constitute a huge part of the listening audience. Moreover, some of the rappers are involved in different kinds of political work, that provides them with access to perform for instance at demonstrations and events with multicultural aims. By placing themselves as spokespersons and representatives for a section of the Danish population, whose voices often stand unrepresented in the debate, some of the rappers using this strategy also gain access to the Danish media as political commentators. The use of such alternative marketing channels means that these rappers reach people, who normally do not listen to rap music, particularly left-wingers of the Danish population.

Rap songs produced by rappers using this educational and enlightening strategy of negotiating the otherness they experience, are also quite often taken out of their musical contexts and used for instance as teaching resources at elementary schools and high schools. In this sense the songs become a kind of 'library rap,' as the rapper Babak has categorized his own music. Babaks song '*Mit Danmark*' [*My Denmark*] from 2006 (featuring Zaki) is an example of a song, which is often used as a teaching resource. With lyrics describing his personal stories of being stopped, Babak uses the song to express his rights to a Danish identity and to claim Denmark, where he is born and raised, as his home country, hereby negotiating and bending the very concept of 'Danishness.'

Some of the socioeconomically advantaged rappers also use their musical, educational and personal resources in trying to make the Danish rap industry include and acknowledge ethnic minority rappers as diverse as they come. An example of such an attempt is *Sorte Får Medier* [*Black Sheep Media*], a website and media association initiated by the above-mentioned rapper Ali. 'You have to act on your own, if you want things to change,' as Ali has often put it, hereby making it clear, that he will not wait passively for things to change, thus being stuck in the role as a victim of stigmatising stories. On the contrary he wishes to participate actively in the changing process. By promoting dark Danish rappers just next to pale Danish rap artists and making co-operative musical events like cyphers and concerts, where dark and pale Danish artists perform side by side, such an initiative tries to bridge the divide between the dark and the pale rap milieus in Denmark. An initiative like *Sorte Får Medier* indicates that besides individual ethnic minority rap artists' abilities to gain passage and thus access the Danish rap milieu on its already established terms, some people in the rap business also work on changing these very terms.

Concluding remarks: rights, respect and recognition

In the above, I have explored processes of experienced otherness as it is represented in stories told by dark rap artists in Denmark. Through stories about 'being stopped' it has been illustrated, how dark rappers – because of their visible otherness – are forced to navigate in a discursive landscape that specifically conditions their becoming of subjects as well as rap artists. Individual otherness experienced in everyday encounters, seems to generate habits of thought and expression, which also influence the marketing strategies put in play by dark Danish rappers attempting to get acknowledged in the rap industry. I have proposed three different passing strategies of how this is done: passing as a dangerous '*perker*'; passing as an exotic inoffensive foreigner; and finally a passing strategy that confronts the popular discourse creating alternative and possibly enlightening stories about dark Danes. The ability and intention of the individual rapper seems to underlie, which strategy is chosen, and hereby also which audience strata that are reached.

The strategic use of the rappers' visible otherness in marketing and branding of themselves indicate at least three things. Firstly, that ethnicity and a

persons' visible otherness are unavoidable aspects in the rap business as well as in the every day life of dark Danes. Secondly, that the rappers' experience of otherness is an experience of ambivalence that in some ways are experienced as negative and blocking, but which also deliberately is used to make a unique brand in the music industry. Thirdly, that the rap music scene is a scene where a political power struggle of representation as well as for rights, respect and recognition is fought, and where dichotomies such as Danish-Muslim and us-them are negotiated – a struggle in which the musical expressions themselves are agents.

This raises questions of how much are these different strategic musical negotiations of otherness can be understood as branding strategies adapting to the music industry, and how much can they be understood as agencies in the political struggle for rights, respect and recognition?

As shown, the political struggle for a rights, respect and recognition of the dark Dane is very clear for the rappers using the third branding strategy – a negating counter-strategy where the musical agencies in a dialogical and confronting way attempt at a re-articulation of what it means to be a dark Dane. This strategy is very alike Fanons perspective that the 'black' man has two possibilities – either he can position himself in accordance with or in opposition to the dominant discourse. "For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white" (Fanon 1986:178), as he concludes.

In this light, it could be argued that the two other suggested strategies then primarily are to be understood as marketing strategies, where the rappers subject and adapt themselves to the market – either as an assimilated exotic migrant or a dangerous or funny stereotypical 'perker.' Or are they also expressions of an agency struggling for rights, respect and recognition?

Looking at the rappers employing the strategy of branding themselves as stereotypical problematic '*perkere*,' my claim is that this can be understood as both subjection and self-determination, both as maintenance and transformation, at the same time. Whereas Fanon explains, how the 'white' gaze on the 'black' man, retain him in the established stereotypes (Fanon 1986), the '*perker*' brand is a deliberate choice, where the individual choose to position himself in line with the stereotyping gaze.

For a rapper like Marwan, the deliberate choice of branding himself as a 'perker' was both meant to give him a unique position on the market as a dangerous gangster-rapper or a funny stereotype – but also a way to distance himself from (and hereby in someway put himself behind) the very stereotypical '*perker*' figure. "I'll call it *P.E.R.K.E.R.*, because you see me as a *perker*. I don't see myself as a *perker*, but here you are! I feared the *perker*-term, and I wanted to hit the fear" (Interview with Marwan, March 10, 2014), as he has explained.

Furthermore, Marwan uses his lyrics as a critique of the stereotyping stories of the disingenuous '*perker*,' the refrain of the title song of the album thus stressing "Don't *B.E.L.I.E.V.E* in a *P.E.R.K.E.R.* / Don't *T.R.U.S.T.* a *H.O.*"[8] By that he undermines the truth-value of the musical stories of the album and articulates a critical and ironical distance to the very stories and representations, he plays along with.[9]

Regarding the branding as an exotic integrated dark Dane several critical agencies and power struggles are in play as well. On one level we might state that by wanting to brand himself as a 'dark-skinned pork roast,' the above-mentioned Faraz hereby adjusts his otherness and articulates it in a way that the pale Danish majority regard as normal or acceptable. Hereby he justifies himself as a subject, who is not met with gazes that demand explanation, which in turn eases the access for instance to gigs at night clubs and discos. On another level, however, this brand also illustrates that it is possible for the rap artists to play along and position themselves in proportion to the discourses that attempt to 'normalise' them. With his deliberate branding of himself as a 'dark-skinned pork roast,' Faraz, for instance, is not subjected to and controlled by the 'white' gaze. As Faraz' description of his performance at the night club clarifies, this branding is rather to be understood as a relational power counter-strategy, where he in one way submits to 'Danish norms,' while at the same time negotiating his position as an other. Thus it is possible for him to position himself in a way, where he is not a passive and powerless 'victim' of the demands of assimilation. Hereby, even Faraz' musical expressions, his seemingly innocuous non-political rap songs, have an underlying connotation of a personal political struggle for the right to be acknowledged as a Danish rapper with a dark touch, as a 'dark-skinned pork roast' – even though, as he grins: "Actually, I have no idea, how pork roast tastes" (Interview with Faraz, September 20, 2010).

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Notes

[1] All quoted interviews are made (and transcribed) by myself. The interviews are all made in Danish, and the quoted parts are my translations. I refer to the interviews by the name of the interviewed person and the date the interview.

[2] From 2010-2014 I have, as part of my forthcoming PhD dissertation (2014), conducted participant observation in the multi-ethnical rap milieu in Denmark, focusing on the role of rap music in the tension between inclusion and exclusion of ethnic minorities. I have participated in rap concerts as well as I have hung out with rap artists in studios and at different social projects working with the production of

rap music as a means of integration and socialisation of marginalised adolescence. Likewise, I have carried out interviews with various rap artists, ranging from fifteen years old amateur rappers at elementary schools to highly educated and/or well-established rappers in their thirties. Some of them are born and raised in Denmark, while others came to Denmark, when they were children.

[3] Through the article, I will refer to Danish rappers with Middle Eastern background as 'dark Danish rappers' (opposed to 'pale Danish rappers') unless further information is needed or other terms are used by my research participants. Likewise, I refer to 'people with Middle Eastern background' as 'dark Danes.' The colour-adjective 'dark' (instead of for instance 'brown') is chosen in dialogue with some of my research participants. Even though this category is to be understood analytically rather than empirically, I am aware of the fact that it neglects important aspects of the internal diversity and heterogeneity of the group, as well as the danger that my analytical focus on 'dark Danish rappers' or 'dark Danes' can contribute in a discourse closure around this category, which I personally do not vouch for.

[4] Cf. (Hervik 2012) or for Danish-speaking readers (Stage 2011) for further information about the Danish cartoon crisis.

[5] My informants have sometimes used the term perker as a verb (e.g. 'when we perker') or to describe a specific state of mind (e.g. 'when I'm in perker-mood')..

[6] The concept of 'strategic essentialism' – which, by the way, Spivak herself has disputed – is a path that often is explored as a minority strategy for influencing mainstream society. In this sense, strategic essentialism, as I see it, entails that members of a group, while being differentiated internally, may engage in an essentialising of their public image, in order to advance their group identity in a simplified, collectivised way to achieve certain objectives. Thus essentialism actually has little to do with the theory, which rather serves as a definition of a certain political practise.

[7] The Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti) is a national conservative political party founded in 1995, frequently described as right-wing populist by political scientists and commentators (Fryklund 2012). The Danish People's Party was the supporting party of the former liberal-conservative government, with whom they constituted an absolute majority in the Danish parliament from 2001-2011.

[8] My translation of the Danish lyrics: "La' vær' med at T.R.O. på en P.E.R.K.E.R. / La' vær' med at S.T.O.L. på en S.O. vel" (P.E.R.K.E.R.)

[9] The risk, by taking on this brand and articulate public stories from the position of a 'perker,' is that the rappers hereby, may be playing into the hands of those whose essentialism is more powerful than their own – whether they are politicians, empire-builders, researchers etc. Likewise, as Marwan himself has noticed, the ironical and critical distance to the stereotypical 'perker' figure might not always be understood by his younger listeners, who might imitate the musically described agencies of the out-law 'perker' (Interview with Marwan, March 3, 2014).