DEBATE

Annika Rabo[1*], Rikke Andreassen[2#]

[1]Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University, Sweden

[2]Roskilde University, Denmark

Comments on Rikke Andreassen's Muslim Women and interracial intimacies
by Annika Rabo

In the last decades, a massive interest in, concern over and even obsession about the "new" Muslim presence has developed in western and northern Europe. The smallest common denominator of contemporary Europeanness is gender equality, and gender relations and gender ideology are in no small part shaped in contrast to the perceived gender inequality among Muslims. In the same period, abundant research on Muslim women in Europe, or about gender relations among Muslims in Europe, has been carried out, often in reaction against such assumptions. Researchers in the social and cultural sciences hence often act as explicit or implicit spokespersons or champions of Muslims. Such a positioning – while morally upstanding – may however lead to unintended consequences. Rikke Andreassen's (2013) article *Muslim women and interracial intimacies* in Nordic Journal of Migration Research is a case in point. The aim of this text is to critically analyse Danish media debates in 2012 concerning marriage choices among Muslim women living in Denmark. In Danish newspaper articles and internet debates, Muslim women were, in short, blamed for not marrying other than "their own." But a good intention in academic writing on Islam and Muslims is no substitute for analytical and conceptual clarity. I realise that Andreassen is not endorsing demeaning discourses on Muslims or Muslim women and their sexualities. Yet, the text is deeply problematic. I am critical of the way that words such as *interracial intimacies*, *interethnic*, *ethnic Danes*, *ethic/racial*

minorities and *descendants* are used but never explained or defined by Andreassen. Instead, the deployment of these words results in an affirmation of the discourse/s she wants to unmask. By not questioning the bureaucratic and the popular – and often populist – classifications used in Denmark, and by adding some of her own, this text thus lends credibility to them.

The title of the article is: *Muslim women and interracial intimacies*. The term *interracial* recurs in the text, but it does not seem to be used in the Danish media debate. What does Andreassen mean with this concept and by linking it with "Muslim women"? Does she mean that *Muslim* **is** a racial category? Does she believe that there are races? Does she mean that in Denmark Muslims/Muslim women are treated as if they constitute a race, or that Muslim/Muslim women have come to regard themselves as such? It could, of course, be interesting to discuss if Muslims in Denmark are treated, seen or talked about as a racial category, or in ways that are similar to how "race" has been used. That, indeed, could have told us something about Denmark or Danish forms of racism. A reader, however, is not told why Andreassen chooses to link Muslim women and race/interracial. The title of the article reeks of Orientalism in which Muslim women's sexualities are unveiled and explained to an outside audience. The title of the article is also highly misleading because the text is not about Muslim women, nor their sexual or other practices, but it is about debates in Danish media.

The starting point of the article is a 2011 report by Statistics Denmark (Danmarks Statistik 2011) in which "marriage patterns for ethnic Danes, migrants and descendants" was published. This report caused a media debate. I looked at this report in order to understand

* E-mail: annika.rabo@socant.su.se

E-mail: rikke@rikkeandreassen.dk

if the concepts used by Statistics Denmark were the same used by Andreassen. The headline in the report states "Descendants seldom have Danish partners". The Danish word is *efterkommere*, (literally *those who come after*). Although *efterkommere* is a general concept, it seems as if in Denmark it has become a concept linked to the children of immigrants. This is quite confusing for a non-Danish reader. Andreassen cannot be blamed for this conceptual leap, but it would have been useful for non-Danish readers to have the context explained. As the text stands, a reader might assume that in Denmark only immigrants have descendants!

In the report, Statistics Denmark categorise the population into five different slots: persons of Danish origin (*dansk oprindelse*); immigrants from western countries; immigrants from non-western countries; "followers" from western countries; and "followers" from non-western countries. Andreassen seemingly equates *dansk oprindelse*/Danish origin with the term *ethnic Dane*, but nowhere discusses the explicit or implicit definition used by herself, Statistics Denmark or the participants in the media debates. It is not clear how Statistics Denmark draw the line between western and non-western countries, but in the report it appears that Russia and Ukraine, for example, are classified as non-western. The lowest rates of marriages are between those of Danish origin and immigrants from non-western countries, followed by persons of Danish origin and descendants of immigrants from non-western countries. The report states that it is not surprising that immigrants marry persons from the same country since they often are married when they come to Denmark. But since descendants (of immigrants) are born in the country this is much more surprising, according to the report. Andreassen concludes her reading of the report that it showed "ethnic Danes, migrants and descendants all had high rates of endogamy; i.e. they married members of their own ethnic group." Statistics Denmark, however, classify according to national categories. She does not discuss in what way the western–non-western dichotomy, or the national classifications like migrants from Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, Germany or Great Britain used by Statistics Denmark, can be, should be or in fact are equated with *ethnic groups*. It is very important to differentiate between national and ethnic classifications in order to underline that not only countries like Pakistan and Turkey but also Denmark may include nationals with different ethnic backgrounds.

The report from Statistics Denmark, as mentioned, caused a media debate with articles and subsequent internet comments in the spring of 2012. A few months later, another media debate started after *Politiken*, a mainstream newspaper, published an interview with four young well-educated women, classified by Andreassen as "racial/ethnic minority women", discussing their difficulties in finding marriage partners. This article led to internet debates and follow-up articles in *Politiken* as well as in the tabloid *Ekstra Bladet*. Apart from the Statistics Denmark report, Andreassen's material is made up of a great many of the articles published as well as the internet debates. The overall theoretical framework when analysing the material is discourse theory and her starting point is that although "there is a strong tendency to essentialize racial/ethnic minorities in the Nordic media, minorities are also increasingly given room to express individuality" (p. 117). Andreassen also utilises a critical look at gender and intimacy and contends that: "By looking at how gender, relations of intimacy and sexuality are constructed, performed and imagined, it is possible to grasp an important layer in the media debates about migration and minorities" (p.118). Finally, Andreassen, as a backdrop to her discussion, uses earlier debates "about interracial relations and intimacies in order to illustrate how this 2012 debate builds upon a long tradition of debating interracial relationships as well as regulating women's sexualities" (p. 118).

The terminology used by Andreassen and by journalists and internet writers is similar, except – as noted above – that racial and interracial is used by Andreassen but not in the Danish media. By reading Andreassen's discussion of the Danish media debate it seems as if *ethnic group* and *minority* refer to specific kinds of individuals who are born outside Denmark (or born in Denmark with parents who are not) and who are lumped together as social categories. It also appears as if *ethnic group* and *minority* are increasingly used by the "majority" as a euphemism for Muslim or Muslims. This is not, however, discussed or questioned by Andreassen. Perhaps this is a discursive practice in Denmark, but if so this needs to be pointed out and discussed. Her focus, as indicated by the title of the article, is on Muslim women. But how is this categorisation linked – or not linked – to "intimacies" among other "racial groups" in Denmark? What examples are there of other "racial or ethnic groups" in the country (except the "ethnic Danes")? Andreassen, like the media texts she scrutinises, seems to regard Muslims in Denmark as an ethnic and/or racial group juxtaposed with "ethnic Danes". Although she underlines that many "descendants" are Danish citizens, she, like the media debates she critiques, is unable to fathom that "ethnic Danes" could, in fact, be Muslims: born as such or converts to Islam. In the end, this text is part of, and contributes to, the very discourses she claims to critically look at.

The study of Muslim women (and men) in the Nordic countries (and elsewhere) is faced with a crucial conceptual difficulty. What do we mean by "Muslim"? Do we employ a broad and wide classification and include persons born in a country where the majority is classified as Muslim, or whose parents are born in such a country? This seems to be the case in Denmark where persons who are born in, or whose parents are born in Turkey or Pakistan, become categorised as Muslims. Or are researchers using a narrower classification, including only those who identify themselves as Muslims, or only those who practice Islam in some way? Or do we, finally, only include those who are members of religious organisations? There is an intimate relationship among naming, seeing and analysing on the part of researchers, bureaucrats, and non-Muslim and Muslim publics in the Nordic countries (and elsewhere of course). Our classificatory choices are never innocent but have a profound impact on methods and theory, while theoretical and methodological stances have a profound impact on the way we classify. Yet Andreassen, sadly, does not engage in such reflexions.

The *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* could, however, take on an important role in encouraging critical scrutiny. I hereby solicit comparative research about and analysis of the different ways that bureaucrats (including official statistics), researchers and citizens-at-large (including naturalised citizens and long-term residents) categorise people living in the Nordic countries. In Sweden, for example, "minorities" officially refer to the legally recognised five national minorities – Jews, Roma, Sami, Swedish Finns and Tornedalers – and never to the many Iranians or Iraqis who have settled in Sweden in the last few decades. In Swedish general population statistics, immigrants are not classified as western or non-western. Such classifications are, however, found in society at large. Critical comparative research on Nordic categorisations of people, their deployment in bureaucratic, academic and popular discourses, and the kind of political ramifications this entails could be a way forward.

Annika Rabo is professor at the Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University. She has carried out fieldwork in the Middle East, mainly Syria, since the late 1970s and her focus has been on state–citizen relations. In the last decades, she has mainly worked on family law in the Middle East. Her recent publications include: History: Europe. I: *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures, Disciplinary Paradigms and Approaches.* Anniversary volume 2013, Brill pp. 123–146, and 'We are Christians and we are equal citizens: Perspectives on particularity and pluralism in contemporary Syria', *Islam and Christian Muslim Relations*, pp 79–93 (2012).

References

Andreassen, R 2013, 'Muslim women and interracial intimacies', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 3, no.3, pp.117-125, DOI:10.2478/njmr-2013-0002.

Danmarks Statistik 2011, *NYT fra Danmark Statistik, 7 December 2011, nr 581, Invandrare i Danmark: Befolkning og valg.* Available from <http://www.dst.dk/pukora/epub/Nyt/2011/NR581.pdf> . [Last accessed 11.02.2014)

Response: The Nordic discomfort with "race"
by Rikke Andreassen

Dear Annika Rabo and readers of *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* (*NJMR*),

Thank you for your concerns, Annika Rabo (AR).

As I read AR's response to my article, I understand that AR is genuinely upset and angry with me. As many of AR's criticisms and questions will be answered if she re-reads my article, I will not in this response get into answering AR's criticism in detail; instead, I will use AR's criticism as a point of reflection, as I believe that we, as a research community, can learn from the differences between AR's and my approach to the field of migration and minority studies (and neighbouring fields). As I see it, AR's criticism, and her being genuinely upset by reading my article, point to a serious line of division within Nordic approaches to the field of migration and minority studies (and neighbouring fields). This division might be both national (the Swedish approach is often different from Danish and Finnish approaches) as well as generational (the vocabulary of senior scholars tends to be different from the vocabulary of younger scholars).

One of the things that AR is most upset about in my article is my consistent use of the term "race". I know that this term is contested and debated, especially in Sweden – cf. the extended Swedish debates in relation to the exhibition *Varning för ras* (*Warning against race*, running from November 1, 2012 to March 31, 2014 at *Mångkulturellt centrum*, i.e. Multicultural Center, a space for art, debate and research about migration and cultural diversity outside Stockholm). Sweden has for a number of years entertained a self-understanding of being the most anti-racist country in Scandinavia; a part of this anti-racism has involved a rejection of the term "race". Differently, in Denmark and Finland, the terms "race" and "racial minorities" have not created the same furore within academic contexts. Another central feature of the Swedish and Nordic anti-racist self-understanding involves colour blindness (Gallagher 2003; Myong 2009); here it is often argued that "race" is not important, e.g. "race" does not play a central role in forming societal hierarchies, and

whiteness functions as a dominating, and invisible, norm. Despite the contestability and disagreement among Nordic scholars in relation to using the term "race", I insist on using it, as I believe there is a strong political and academic importance in verbalising "race", racism, racial appearances and racialised minorities. I recently wrote an article together with my friend, activist and colleague Uzma Ahmed Andresen, who identifies as a Muslim, racial minority. The article is published in a special issue of the *European Journal of Women's Studies*, themed "Race and anti-race in Europe". The article takes place as a conversation, and I will just cite a short passage, where we talk about "race" as an unspoken category in Scandinavia.

Uzma: When I am in the USA, I am a 'woman of color', when I am in the UK, I am a 'racial minority', but here in Denmark I am always an 'ethnic minority' or an 'ethnic woman'.

Rikke: In a Nordic context, the term 'race' is associated with biological racism which dominated in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. The atrocities of colonialism and Nazism have made most Europeans reject biological racism; in the Nordic countries, the term 'race' disappeared with the rejection of biological racism and Nazism. Today 'race' is viewed as a historical phenomenon we have left behind; instead we use the term 'ethnicity' (Andreassen et al., 2008: 3).

Uzma: But racial visibilities in the form of skin color or hair texture continue to play crucial roles for the practice of discrimination as well as for individual identity constructions. I have two daughters, one is very dark like me and the other is very light like her father. They are treated very differently in kindergarten and in school; the light one is assumed to be an ethnic white Dane and she is fully included, whereas the darker one is assumed to be an immigrant's child and is verbally excluded from the Danish 'we' and national community that the institutions embody. I do not have a language to address this different treatment, as I cannot speak about "race" and racial visibility in Danish. I can only talk about 'ethnicity', and that makes no sense here, seeing that they share the same ethnicity. The lack of language and the disappearance of 'race' from our vocabulary prevent us from addressing existing patterns of racial inclusion and exclusion. bell hooks (1992) argues that bodily differences, e.g. skin color, both continue to influence individual people's lives as well as represent historical privileges and power struggles which should be named. Developing bell hooks' argument further, I would argue that if I could use the term "race" and talk about racial visibility in contemporary Denmark, then I would have a language for what is happening as well as a language that could connect my present-day struggles to previous struggles and inequalities. I would be able to link my present-day experience to a longer history of racial inequalities. While it is positive that we have left the mindset of biological racism behind, I need to question who benefits from the racial void in today's vocabulary (Andreassen & Ahmed-Andresen 2014: 26 ff.).

When I insist on verbalising "race" in my work it is not because I believe in "race" as a fixed, essential or biological category, as AR writes. I do not know any contemporary scholars working within the fields of "critical race and whiteness studies" who have retained this old-fashioned, biological view of race; contemporary scholars view "race" as a social construction. Dismissing contemporary discussions on "race" by accusing academics who verbalise "race" or use "race" as an analytical category of promoting "race" as a fixed category or biological racism is at best a misunderstanding of contemporary "critical race theory"; at worst, an attempt to hinder development of the academic field due to one's own (potentially narrow) understandings.

Internationally – e.g. in the USA, Canada and in the UK – the term "race" has been used for decades in anti-racist research as well

as anti-racist politics, so what is happening in the Nordic countries since we continue to refuse verbalising "race" but instead insist on, as AR argues in favour of, using "ethnicity" or national terms (e.g. "Turks", "Arabs", "Roma")? Why is it here in the Nordic region that we continue to not verbalise white privileges by applying a "critical race" perspective to our analyses? In the Nordic countries, the term "ethnicity" is the most common term used in migration and minority studies, but I would argue that "ethnicity" is no more neutral than "race". First of all, "ethnicity" has become a linguistic marker of "otherness"; it is a label used to signify "the others", "the migrants" and the "non-white." It furthermore functions (in both academic and media discourses) as a common denominator for the very large and diverse group of people who cannot be categorised as "ethnic Danes" (or "ethnic Swedes", "ethnic Norwegians" or "ethnic Finns"); i.e. "ethnicity" makes a clear division between "us" and "them". Over the last few years, some Nordic scholars have begun substituting the terms "Danes" with "ethnic Danes" (and "Swedes" with "ethnic Swedes", "Norwegians" with "ethnic Norwegians", etc.) in order to underscore that the majority population also has an ethnicity and in order to avoid the construction of "us" and "them".

One could argue that the term "ethnicity" belongs to a national understanding prevalent in the past, where each national country was inhabited by its own national, ethnic citizens. However, our Nordic history shows us that this past is imaginary, as there have always been different ethnic groups living within one national territory (Swedes and Sami in Sweden; Roma, Swedes and Finns in Finland, etc.) but more importantly to contemporary discussions, the term "ethnicity" carries with it a fantasy of ethnic purity and ethnical divisions which do not correspond to contemporary Nordic, demographic developments. The term "ethnicity" leaves little space for the many children whose parents do not represent one ethnicity; and there is very limited space for mixed-ethnic reproduction when using "ethnicity" as a primary marker for identity. Furthermore, adoption scholar Lene Myong has argued in favour of using "race" instead of "ethnicity" (Myong 2009: 241ff.). She has carried out a number of interviews with adult individuals adopted from Korea to Denmark, and she describes how the adoptees struggle because they fall between the categories "race" and "ethnicity". They are brought up in white, Danish families; their language, traditions and culture are Danish, hence they are ethnic Danes. But their racial appearance as Asian and Korean is not recognised as Danish. They continue to experience exclusion, not because of their ethnicity, but because of their racialised bodies. This exclusion is difficult to grasp – both analytically and politically – if we insist on only using the category "ethnicity". Furthermore, I do not believe that it continues to make sense to label Nordic citizens whose parents or grandparents came from Pakistan or Turkey by a foreign ethnicity or nationality, e.g. "ethnic Turkish" or "Turkish", when they are born and raised in Denmark/Sweden/Norway. At the same time, insisting on not talking about "race" and racial appearances when trying to understand their experiences of inclusions in and exclusions from the Nordic societies deprive them of a vocabulary to capture some of the discrimination they face in contemporary Scandinavia. When Uzma Ahmed Andresen asks, in the citation above, who benefits from the racial void in contemporary Scandinavian vocabulary, she points to the importance of valuing and including the experiences of non-white people in the Nordic countries.

During the previous years, a number of (mainly younger) Scandinavian scholars have begun to apply the category of "race" to their analysis of contemporary Scandinavian inequalities (e.g. Lene Myong, Mathias Danbolt, Ylva Habel, Kaarina Nikunen, Lin Prøitz,

Johanna Lundström Gondouin, Suvi Keskinen, Mons Bissenbakker, Michael Nebeling Petersen, Tobias Hübinette, Carina Tigervall, Dorthe Staunæs, Salla Tuori, Bolette Blaagaard et al.). Thus, one might argue that currently there is a shift taking place where "race" and racial approaches are being introduced to Scandinavian academia; the *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* is open towards this shift.

When I read AR's criticism of my article, I sense a strong discomfort about the term "race". While I agree with AR that using the term "race" and speaking about racial in- and exclusions is unpleasant, I still think the concept of "race" can grasp complexities and inequalities which "ethnicity" and national labels cannot. I am not arguing or insinuating that AR is uncomfortable with the term "race" in the same way as I am, but I think that the uneasiness and unpleasantness accompanying the verbalising of "race" might unveil interesting insights. To me, the term "race" is uncomfortable because verbalising "race" not only points to historical inequalities but also to historical privileges; privileges contributed to white (middle-class, able-bodied) citizens. To insist on using "race" is therefore to insist on pointing out whiteness and the privileges contributed to the "white bodies". In the Nordic countries, especially in Sweden and Denmark, we have a strong history of "race science" and "race biology" (Andreassen & Henningsen 2011). For most of us, this is a heavy and uncomfortable history, where whiteness and the Nordic white "race" were celebrated as the most developed and civilised while other "races" and people were ordered in a racial hierarchy below the white, Nordic man. Sara Ahmed has argued that bodies carry histories with them, and move and orient themselves in relation to this history (Ahmed 2006: 109ff.). Following this, the uneasiness accompanying "race" might relate to how "race" not only underscores the unpleasant aspects of our Nordic history but simultaneously points to how we, as racialised bodies, continue to benefit or be disadvantaged because of this history.

Ahmed has also analysed what she calls "the politics of declaration" (Ahmed 2004: 3), i.e. practices where (white) institutions make equality plans and institutional anti-racist declarations, e.g. when a university or scholarly community write a declaration admitting to previous racist behaviour as well as formulating how such behaviours should not happen in the future. Ahmed argues that these declarations of anti-racism function as performances which admit to negative racist practices in the past, after which the admission itself becomes a positive practice and hence becomes interpreted as an anti-racist practice. I wonder if we can use Ahmed's insight when analyzing our uneasiness with "race". Could it be that the common Nordic practice of avoiding the terminology of "race", because it is associated with historical biological racism, and instead applying a new vocabulary of "ethnic" and national labels, has (mistakenly) been interpreted as a positive and anti-racist practice? As Ahmed argues, putting anti-racism into speech or writing is not in itself an anti-racist action (ibid). So could it be that the Scandinavian academic community's insistence on not using what is seen as a racist vocabulary is not necessarily an anti-racist act but rather a practice of white dominance and maintenance of white dominance?

I do not know the answers to these questions, and I am myself struggling with these issues and with which terms to use; but as long as people of colour, including Nordic activists and scholars of colour, point to the importance of including "race" in order capture their experiences in contemporary Nordic society, and as long as I as a white scholar experience an uneasiness with the underscoring of my white privileges in the same society, I think we need to verbalise "race".

Rikke Andreassen (Ph.D. from University of Toronto, Canada, 2005; Associate Professor in Communication Studies at Roskilde University, Denmark) is a researcher, teacher and consultant in the fields of media, race, gender and sexuality, often addressing discrimination as well as racial/ethnic and gender equality issues. She has participated in various public debates about immigration and gender, and has published a number of articles as well as the books *Menneskeudstilling. Fremvisninger af eksotiske mennesker i Zoolgisk Have og Tivoli* (2011) and *Der er et yndigt land. Medier, minoritieter og danskhed* (2007). She is the leader of the Nordic research network *TheoryNord: Re-developing international theories of media and migration in a Nordic context*, financed by NordForsk.

References

Ahmed, Sara 2004, 'Declarations of whiteness: the non-performativity of anti-racism'. *Borderlands*, vol. 3, no. 2.

Ahmed, Sara 2006, *Queer phenomenology: orientations, objects, others*, Duke University Press, Durham.

Andreassen, Rikke & Ahmed-Andresen, Uzma (2014). 'I can never be normal: A conversation about race, daily life practices, food and power', *European Journal of Women's Studies*. Vol. 21, No. 21, Issue 1, pp.23-39

Andreassen, Rikke, Henningsen, Anne & Myong, Lene (2008). 'Hvidhed'. *Kvinder, køn og forskning*. 2009/8, pp.3-6.

Andreassen, Rikke & Folke Henningsen, Anne 2011, *Menneskeudstilling. Fremvisninger af eksotiske mennesker i Zoologisk Have og Tivoli*, Tiderne Skifter, Copenhagen.

Gallagher, Charles A 2003, 'Color-blind privileges: the social and political functions of erasing the color line in post race America'. *Race, Gender, and Class*, vol. 10, no. 4, pp. 22–37.

Myong, Lene 2009, *Adopteret – Fortællinger om transnational og racialiseret tilblivelse*, PhD dissertation, University of Aarhus.