

PRACTICAL ORIENTALISM – BODIES, EVERYDAY LIFE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF OTHERNESS

by
Michael Haldrup, Lasse Koefoed and Kirsten Simonsen

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ABSTRACT. In the light of the increasing questioning of multiculturalism in popular debate, the focus of this paper is the ways in which cultural/national identities are constituted and renegotiated in everyday, banal bodily practices. Denmark is the case, but the processes experienced in this context are seen as part of a broader European development. We first discuss recent changes in the political semiotics of Europe in which former East/West boundaries are blurred and new ones constructed and renegotiated in many scales. Many studies, we argue, do in this context underestimate the degree to which this process is going on in banal, bodily and sensuous practices. An entrance to this discussion is to follow the idea of ‘banal nationalism’, but we want, by way of examples from the Danish case, to suggest that what we are dealing with is a *practical orientalism*, articulated through processes of ‘othering’ developed in the concrete bodily encounters in everyday life.

Key words: Immigrants – Orientalism – Europe – social practice -embodiment

Introduction: The changing political semiotics of Europe

During the Danish election campaign in 2001 an advertisement from the then oppositional party spurred massive debate. The advertisement showed a photograph of a group of youngsters (of Middle Eastern origin) leaving a court building together with a relative, a girl, apparently a sister, pointing an obscene gesture at the cameras after her brother had been convicted guilty of rape. When seeing the advertisement TV viewers may also remember the girl shouting ‘Fuck the Danish Nation!’ at the cameras. Accompanying the photograph the advertisement showed a small picture of the yet to become prime minister, the name of his party and its slogan: ‘Time for a change’. The ad was met with broadly shared repulsion among commentators and other candidates for its stigmatization of an entire population group as potential rapists, but times were changing. The centre-right parties supported by the nationalist Danish Peoples Party won the

elections and paved the way for an upsurge in Danish neo-nationalism (see Koefoed and Simonsen, 2005). In the recent election campaign (2005) a similar debate about norms for political campaigning has unfolded around an election video produced by a relatively small centre party. The video showed quotes from a leading government politician (a minister for foreign aid and integration) making comments such as: ‘We are not preventing them from having children. Nor are we killing them. We even give them money to travel home’, and ‘We have been so foolishly kind to let them in and now we’re stuck with them’, in combination with scenes showing for example, ordinary social interaction between white Danes and people from other ethnic backgrounds. The video was heavily debated and even members from the now oppositional party the Social democrats and some local candidates from the party behind the video distanced themselves from its content, labelling it as ‘manipulating’ and claiming that it showed ‘out-of-context quotes’ that could have been expressed by everyone. What had happened during the first five years of the century in Denmark? Within a short time neo-nationalist attitudes had become commonplace and widespread in Danish society; statements that a few years ago would have caused scandal now were (and are) commonplace.

In this paper, we argue that this simultaneously symbolic and physical exclusion of internal Others is closely linked to the changing political semiotics of Europe. As Triandafyllidou (2002) argues, such neo-nationalist identity dynamics must be seen within the broader international context of the end of the Cold War and the Eastern enlargement of the European Union. Following her argument the rearticulation of nationhood in the emerging new Europe takes place within a ‘tri-polar’ identity space: the transnational or European, the national or member-state sphere and the local-regional, in-

cluding minorities and immigrant communities. Thus, newborn openings towards a 'European' identity are apparently accompanied by an increasing hostility towards different groups of immigrants.

According to Delanty (1995), the idea of Europe did not assume a coherent form until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In medieval times the common appeal was rather to 'Christendom'; it was conflict with Muslims that united 'Europe' under the religious identity of Christianity. With the colonial expansion of European powers from the mid-fifteenth century onwards, a discourse of 'civilizational values' started developing in which 'Europe' was identified with the process of modernity and the primacy of science and rationality. A 'colonial modernity' (Gregory, 1998) was developing in which the opposition between Christendom and Islam was replaced by the notion of a Western European cultural identity that was defined as an outward movement through colonization of the New World and in contrast to 'oriental' and 'savage' Others. During the Cold War European spaces were by and large overlaid by the political semiotics of US foreign policy, positioning 'the Soviet' as US/Europe's external significant Other (Dalby, 1990; Ó Tuathail and Agnew, 1992). Consequently the predecessor of the European Union – The European Economic Community – was identified as a 'Western' Europe in contrast to 'Eastern' Europe. The normative ideas that provided the basis for this 'European' identity were defined in opposition to 'East communism'; the 'openness', 'democracy' and 'freedom' of Western Europe were contrasted to the totalitarian systems of its (threatening) Other. That, of course, does not mean that this space was culturally and politically homogeneous. On the contrary, it constituted its own internal Others, for instance, through in many fields to construct the 'North' as the norm and the 'South' as Other – connected, but deviant (see e.g. Hadjimichalis, 1997; Gregson *et al.*, 1999). With the fall of the Berlin Wall, Western Europe's main threatening Other disappeared and the identity spaces of Europe became much more blurred. One aspect of this reorganization of European space and its Others were a repositioning between the nation-states of the European Union. For example, countries that were formerly located in the 'periphery' of the project, such as Greece and some of the Nordic countries, now try to reposition themselves as cultural bridges between West and East. Another aspect is a differentiation in the imagination of 'Eastern' Europe; a

distinction between 'good' West-oriented countries (now becoming part of the European in-group) and 'bad', backwards, violent, extremely nationalist countries, which are identified as Others in relation to the EU. The 'West' and its civilization values is the undisputed norm which EU and NATO accession countries have to follow to be embraced by the centre. Thus, the relationship between Europe and its Others is monitored and regulated through a system of disciplinary discourses and techniques invoking the oriental East as Europe's threatening external Other. Borders between Western and Eastern Europe are redefined, not by eliminating the distinction, but by moving the border further eastwards and inscribing Otherness in East-Central Europe (Neumann, 1994; Agnew, 2001; Kuus, 2004). Like this, the changing political semiotics of Europe harbour a resurgent orientalism not only present in Europe's relations to its external Others but also in a growing hostility towards its internal Others. The re-emergence of an identity struggle based on the notions of Europe and 'the Orient' have given way to both a new orientalism in the politics of Europe towards its external Others and a re-emergence of aggressive nationalism directed against Muslim, internal Others at the national level. Hence, incidents such as the ones quoted at the beginning of this article are examples of how this resurgent orientalism works on an everyday level.

Much analysis following Said (1995, 1997) and Gregory (1994) has tended to focus on orientalism mostly as a 'regime of knowledge', thereby placing the analytical scope on the workings of institutions, discourse and texts. It has repeatedly (and justly) been fleshed out that acts of representation are not innocent. The degree to which Orientalism is (re)produced and negotiated in banal, bodily and sensuous practices, on the contrary, has been less prominent in the discussion. As Gregory argues, the way people see, perceive, picture, imagine and speak of others is what in the last instance legitimizes the violent fight against the external Other (2004, p. 20). Incidents like the ones quoted at the beginning of this section are not only products of discourse, but reflect a *practical orientalism*, articulated through processes of 'othering' developed and enacted in concrete bodily meetings in everyday life.

By using this term to describe the transformation of rhetoric and everyday practices towards non-European immigrant groups, we want to highlight the interrelationship between the rearticulation of na-

tionhood and the transformation of security dynamics of 'The New Europe', and in particular how this transformation rests on small, often unnoticed and 'banal' acts and articulations in everyday life. We do this first by discussing Said's concept of orientalism in relation to Billig's inspiring notion of 'banal nationalism'. Then we take it one step further, arguing that everyday articulations of difference are embodied and embedded in sensuous encounters with concrete Others. Finally, inspired by Rodaway (1994), we demonstrate how practical orientalism works through the construction of particular sensuous geographies.

Orientalism, everyday life and banality

The obvious starting point for this enterprise is Edward Said's analysis of the discourse of orientalism in colonial Europe. Taking the late eighteenth century as a starting point, Said suggests that orientalism can be analysed and discussed as cooperate institutions dealing with the Orient – it works, he argues, as a regime of knowledge, a systematic, disciplined system of power – that not only describes, teaches and rules but also produces the Orient (1995, p. 3). Orientalism is a created body of texts and theories that works as a discursive system of dominance and authority in the uneven relation between the Orient and the Occident. In a recently published article Said also emphasizes 'that neither the Orient nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability; each is made up by human effort – partly through the identification of the Other and partly through affirmation'. It is a supreme fabricated fiction, 'lending itself to collective passion that has never been more evident than in our time with mobilisation of fear, hatred, disgust and a resurgent in self-pride and arrogance' (Said, 2004, p. 870). In order to take seriously that history and geography are man-made, we, in continuation of that, will argue that the relatively 'unstable' discursive system of orientalism and its powerful stereotypical representations (Said, 1997) is dependent on a daily reproduction. With this point of departure orientalism is not only established by 'institutions' and regimes of knowledge, it is also centrally performed, practised and (re)negotiated in daily life. The everyday consuming and (re)negotiation of orientalism in complex ways (re)produce the discursive system of power and dominance that establish it as a natural, self-evident, 'taken-for-granted' global moral order. This is not to say that orientalism is only passively reflected in everyday

life – it is rather distributed, manipulated, reproduced and opposed. It is linking the little banal social poetic with the grand dramas where contrasting images between the Orient and the West are fought in real visible wars, exclusions and repressions (see also Gregory, 2004). As the imaginative geography has spread across the globe and in very powerful ways has been put to work in international relations so has it shaped the contemporary common sense. What we suggest is that the concept of orientalism should be taken further beyond its institutional starting point. This is to stretch the term 'Orientalism' so that it covers the *banal* and *intimate* means by which orientalism is (re)produced in everyday life. An interesting entrance to this discussion is to follow the idea of 'banal nationalism' (Billig, 1995) or of the 'social poetics of the nation-state' (Herzfeld, 1997). These terms describe how, in established nations such as those in Europe, everyday practices reproduce national identity in ways so ordinary, so commonplace, that it escapes attention altogether. It may be in speech acts routinely and unconsciously using homeland-making phrases; small unnoticed words such as 'we', 'the' people, 'this' country, 'here', 'society' and so on, or media announcements such as 'the' weather, 'home' news and 'foreign' news. Or it may be in material symbolic items such as coins, banknotes and flags, hanging unnoticed from public buildings or used at birthday parties and other informal celebrations.

Billig and Herzfeld have developed their ideas in the context of the (re)production of nation-states. However, we think that the relatively unexamined concept of banality in cultural studies (see also Seigworth, 2000) also proves an interesting starting point for our analysis of practical orientalism. If we follow Said, orientalism is 'a practice that designates in one's mind a familiar space which is "ours" and an unfamiliar space beyond "ours" which is "theirs"' (1995, p. 54), then this practice in a European context could be analysed as 'banal' orientalism – an everyday routine way of talking and acting in life – a language that forces people to think in 'us' – 'them' dichotomies – a 'habit' that enables an internal orientalization to be (re)produced as a natural form of life. Banal orientalism is evident in the everyday use of linguistic markers – small, unnoticed words such as 'us' and 'them' – 'theirs' and 'ours' naturally appearing in everyday talks – producing non-European immigrants as the Other – so regularly that it has escaped out of sight. Material items such as 'food' and 'clothes' are inscribed

with symbols that are regularly negotiated in a European context – for example, the prohibiting of using scarves in different contexts in some European countries (France and Denmark) are in banal ways (re)producing material symbols of belonging that not only remind us who ‘we’ are and where ‘we’ are, but also who ‘they’ are and where ‘they’ belong.

Just because it is apparently a mechanism that ensures normality, the banal should however not be understood as something benign or innocent. Here, Billig builds on the work of Hannah Arendt (1963) on ‘the banality of evil’. Banality is not synonymous with the harmless. It reproduces exclusion and powerful institutions which control large weapon depots. It ensures support for wars and repression. It ensures the continuation of an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1991), which can mobilize and prepare for the campaigns ahead. In this way banal nationalism, which is reproduced in daily life through different lifestyles, habitus and narratives, has to be seen through the way in which it operates in relation to power at different levels. If we follow Billig’s idea of banality, then the institutionalized system of orientalism not only circulates in texts, it also becomes a part of ordinary life – of the search for social meaning and coherence: a narrative and poetic everyday practice that at the same time creates the background for powerful political discourse. Banal orientalism equips people with an identity and ideological consciousness, and encompasses and internalizes them in a complex series of themes about ‘us’ and ‘them’ – about the ‘homeland’ and the world at large. It is a daily reproduction that is instrumental in placing everybody, in time and space, in a moral international world order.

In this perspective orientalism is a form of identity that not always consciously is ‘flagged’ – it is based in the *doxa* (Bourdieu, 1994) – the undisputed, pre-reflexive presuppositions of ‘the game’ of everyday life. The idea of banality suggests that we study orientalism as a routine way of speaking about the world – a geopolitical consciousness circulating not only in institutional and textual bodies, but also in narrative practices and the way ‘we’ think about the world in our everyday life. In a European context it is evident that orientalism has seeped into everyday life, into language and into the understanding of the self. Modern orientalism plays a central role in the everyday thinking, in the way social meaning is established and negotiated – naturally appearing daily in the words of politicians, in media coverage and in the way the domi-

nant discourse is circulating in everyday narratives. In the later years, the concerns about the undermining of ‘our’ ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1991) link up more and more with questions on acceptance of the Other, refugees and immigrants. The language and the hegemonic grammar of ‘us’ and ‘them’ is articulated, reproduced and naturalized in so many different little ways that it has become a natural part of everydayness. In the daily debate over identity foreigners, mostly people originally coming from Islamic countries are discussed, essentialized and generalised as the internal Other – either as exotic inspiring Others or, dominantly, as problematic strangers – stereotyped as threatening and presented as disruptive elements that negate the enjoyment of the authentic culture. The contrasting images and the mental boundaries demarcating ‘us’ from ‘them’ are reproduced and translated into everyday narratives and have also spread and penetrated into central discussions on the future of the nation-state. Orientalism is then not a marginal but a central language in the public debate on the future of Western societies and identity. The daily reproduction of orientalism in banal speech acts becomes a form of ‘radical realism’ (Said, 1995, p. 72): the overwhelming number of stories, discussions and cultural stereotypes about the Other become a part of life – a small daily variation and repetition of the same metanarrative. This repetition creates and naturalizes the Other in a process that designates ‘them’ and ‘their’ mentality as different from ‘ours’. It becomes a sedimented dominant language that creates the continuous background for social and national exclusions. Like this, banal orientalism operates in a dialectic process of remembering and forgetting. Between what is visible and invisible. Several analyses have demonstrated more extreme or ‘visible’ elements of racism in the Nordic countries (see e.g. Pred, 2000; Wren, 2001). The current experience (e.g. in Denmark) is rather a banal everyday racism showing itself in a gradual slide in what is socially acceptable to say and suggest – in political discourse and everyday talk – in relation to the ‘alien’ Others (see the example described in the introduction). This is a process that may be described as an invisible transgression; the first negative cultural stereotypes are the most difficult ones, then it becomes more easy as it is more and more conceived as a part of normality. In this way banal orientalism speaks with the ‘voice of nature’ (Barthes, 1973), and makes everybody forget that ‘our’ history and geography is produced and constructed.

Body, practice and the construction of Otherness

We have argued that in order to understand the processes of internal orientalization in Denmark/Europe, it is necessary to supplement the institutional emphasis until now dominating writings on orientalism by way of a stronger focus on 'the banal' and 'the everyday'. Now, we want to take yet another step. In addition to Said's (and Billig's) textualist perspective we will argue for a practice-oriented view on orientalism, where bodily practice and embodied experiences adopt a more central position. *Practical orientalism*, then, is the translation of hegemonic discourses into everyday practices so that they enter into the habitual spaces of ordinary experience. It is about the way in which cultural difference is performed in the encompassing field of everyday sociality and sensual habit – how it colours the visual, flavours the olfactory and tempers the emotional (Herzfeld, 1997). The everyday meetings between East and West are infiltrated with sexuality and sexual codes as well as decisions about dress, language and food, altogether interwoven into a sense of cultural dualism.

This is not to say that Said did not have an eye for the body in orientalist discourse. For example, the imaginative geography of the Orient has been peopled with a range of representative figures or tropes; they are characters related to types such as braggarts, misers and gluttons, or they are part of a cultural repertoire containing monsters, heroes, terrors, pleasures and desires. Other examples may be found in orientalism's relationship to biology, seeking organic *ur*-forms among species or Linnaean classifications of man into types, or in the pointing out of repeated associations made between the Orient and (dangerous) sex. One place he even, with the help of Balzac, suggests that philological orientalism should not be seen as a 'dry-as-dust' word study:

what a marvellous book one could write by narrating the life and adventures of a word! Undoubtedly a word has received various impressions of the events for which it was used; depending on the places it was used, a word has awakened different kinds of impressions in different people; but is it not more grand still to consider a word in its triple aspect of soul, body and movement?

(Balzac, in Said 1995, p. 131)

Nevertheless, not surprisingly taking into account his aims, Said's main perspective still remains representational. In order to consider the construction of identities in everyday corporeal meetings, we need a stronger emphasis on the active involvement of the social body.

This effort might start from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of practice (1962), which identifies the body as part of a pre-discursive social realm based on perception, practice and bodily movement. Lived experience, to him, is always and necessarily embodied, located in the 'mid-point' between mind and body, or subject and object. In it, perception is based on *practice*; that is, on looking, listening and touching as acquired, cultural, habit-based forms of conduct. Perception, from this perspective, is not seen as an inner representation of the outer world, but rather as a practical bodily involvement. It is an active process relating to our ongoing projects and practices, and it concerns the whole sensing body. This means that the human body takes up a dual role as both the vehicle of perception and the object perceived, as a body-in-the-world – a *lived body* – which 'knows' itself by virtue of its involvement and active relation to this world. The bodies or the subjects are not locked into their private world, but are in a world that is shared with 'others'. Consequently, to meet or to see the other is not to have an inner representation of him/her either, it is to be-with-him/her. This underlines the understanding of the world as a genuine human interworld and of subjectivity as publicly available; the subjects are sentient-sensuous bodies whose subjectivity assumes embodied and public forms. Merleau-Ponty uses the notion 'body-subject' to underline this idea of embodiment. However, the corporeality of social practices concerns not only this sensuous, generative and creative nature of lived experiences, but also the way in which these embodied experiences themselves form a basis for social action. Bourdieu (1977, 1990), for instance, expresses that when he talks about 'habitus' as embodied history, which is internalized as a second nature. As a result of this, social structures and cultural schemes are *incorporated* into the agents and thus function as generative dispositions behind their schemes of action. Two aspects of these ideas of embodiment are of particular interest in the present connection.

The first of these is the public character or the radical intersubjectivity of these 'body-subjects'. Their practices and perceptions enjoy them to an interworld or an 'intermundane space' (Merleau-

Ponty, 1968, p. 269). This space is constituted by the 'reversibility' of the perceiving subject. Body-subjects are visible seers, tangible touchers, audible listeners. They form a part of the perceptual world that they open on to. In this way, the concept of intersubjectivity may be amplified by one of *intercorporeality*. It is, however, not the sheer sensibility of the body-subjects that institutes intercorporeality. It is as well the meaning involved in the bodily practices of the other that counts. One does not just perceive another body as a physical object; rather one is affected by the meaning of its appearance. The other body-subject is animated and its animation communicates, and furthermore, as a communication, its manners call for a response. You do not contemplate the communications of the other, they affect you and you reply to them.

Following from this, the other important aspect of embodiment in relation to the everyday meetings with 'other' bodies is emotion or affect. Robins (1995) stresses this aspect in relation to urban culture. Encounters with 'strangers' in public space, which many urbanists see as the crucial aspect of 'the urban', are for him loaded with passions, whether these are enjoyment and desire or rather anxiety, fear and aggression. For a closer understanding of emotion and affect, we might once more look to Merleau-Ponty (1962). As a first approximation, he argues that our relations with others (and with objects) are always 'mooded' and that there is no escape from such moodedness. Moods and emotions, then, are basic human attributes, but they are not inner physical or sensuous states. We should rather see them as the contextual significance of sensations; that is, as associated with practices, life mode and social situation. Emotions are, with Merleau-Ponty, *situated corporeal attitudes*, ways of being and acting in relation to the world. They are inseparable from other aspects of subjectivity, such as perception, speech/talk, gestures, practices and interpretations of the surrounding world, and they function primordially at the pre-reflexive level. Emotion, then, is a way of relating. It is part of the 'system' that body-subjects form with others. This means that they must be intersubjectively constituted, they shape and are shaped by relations between body-subjects. This movement away from an internal towards a relational characteristic of emotion might suggest that affect is a better term (for a discussion see e.g. Redding, 1999; Thrift 2004). In any case, it must be seen as an integrated part of everyday meetings with 'other' and/or 'different' bodies.

Thus, everyday meetings with other fleshy and sensuous bodies affect us, and this affection may take the form of different feelings such as love, desire, hate or anger. Thus the sense of mutuality involved in the phenomenological account should not be mistaken for harmony. Even if that is the case, however, the approach does not to a satisfactory degree appreciate differences among bodies and power relations involved in intercorporeal meetings. This deficiency is more than anywhere else pointed out in feminist critiques (see e.g. Irigaray, 1984; Young, 1990; Grosz, 1994). An interesting attempt to deal with the problem (with an even broader appeal than she suggests herself) is the contribution from Young (1990) in which she explores the possibility of a specifically 'feminine' bodily comportment and relation in space. She displays a contradictory spatiality based primarily on the historical and cultural fact that women live their bodies simultaneously as subjects and objects. A woman in 'our' culture experiences her body on the one hand as background and means for her projects in life. On the other hand, she lives with the ever-present possibility of being gazed upon as a potential object of others' intentions. This ambiguous bodily existence tends to 'keep her in her place', and it influences her manner of movement, her relationship to her surroundings and her appropriation of space. Young's argument then implies that feminine spatiality involves not only an experience of spatial constitution, but also one of being 'positioned' in space. That is why feminine existence tends to posit an enclosure between itself and the space surrounding it, such that the space belonging to it is constricted but is also a defence against bodily invasion. This is about power relations and in the last instance about fear of violence.

More generally, the main processes in this development concern the way in which gazes are involved in objectification of the Other and/or feelings of being objectified by the Other. Such power relations not only refer to female bodies, of course, but also to other deviations from the 'neutral' body – such as skin colour (see e.g. Fanon, 1986), age, disability and sexuality. All differences, which in similar ways can give rise to power and conflict and to specific practical and symbolic spatialities. However, even though vision and visualization are by far the most powerful of the human senses (cf. Lefebvre, 1991), we want to maintain that related processes may be found in relation to other senses. Therefore, an exploration of everyday political differentiations and conflicts must include a more

comprehensive understanding of different senses and sensual perceptions. Parallel to the duality suggested above in relation to the notion of intercorporeality, the notion of sense has a double or ambiguous character; on the one hand sense as in 'making sense' refers to order and understanding, it is sense as meaning; on the other one sense as 'the senses' refers to specific bodily sense modes – touch, smell, taste, sight, hearing – and is sense as sensation or feeling. It is exactly in the interface between these two meanings of the term that we find the intercorporeality, the affection and the examples of practical orientalism that we want explore in the next section. To pursue that goal, we turn to anecdotalism. For unless we can appreciate how the discourse of cultural difference enters the field of sensual experiences and everyday sociality and how this is reflected in everyday narratives, we shall never be able to understand (or counteract) the mechanisms in work.

Sensuous geographies of Otherness

In the following we will illustrate our point by means of examples taken from both public debates in Denmark and two interview analyses of our own; one performed in a medium-sized Danish provincial town (Koefoed, 2006), the other in the city of Copenhagen (Simonsen, 2005). Both analyses used narrative in-depth interviews, and even if 'practical orientalism' did not form the starting point for any of the analyses, it arose as a theme in both. We will of course not generalize these findings, but identify their content and argue that they are important in the understanding of the current conflicts over 'cultural' identity. For analytical purposes, we will structure the presentation of the everyday sensuous experiences and responses after four sensuous systems (as suggested by Rodaway, 1994): the *haptic* experience is about touch and refers to the tactile receptivity of the skin, bodily contact and the movement of the body through the environment, and it may as such also be seen as a kind of foundation for the wider multisensual geography; *olfactory* experiences, some other quite intimate ones, refer to the smell-taste perceptual system, in this way underlining the close connection between these two senses; *auditory* experience relates to the sensuous perception of sounds, to hearing and listening, and many authors make use of the term 'soundscape' to illustrate this geographical experience; and finally *visual* experience is concerned with sight and appearances; it is a deductive

sense that 'works out' the nature of objects and spaces from surface information. In particular the widely discussed cultural and political employment of this sense reminds us of the duality of sensing as at the same time sensation and meaning. By doing this we bring out the embodied and sensuous geographies through which 'practical orientalism' works.

The haptic

The tactile apparatus of the human body is often taken for granted as an essentially physical capability of the human body. Yet it is thoroughly cultivated. The skin mediates between our body and its environment and it does so in cultural specific ways. Touch, tactile receptivity and spatial orientation is not neutral from gender, age and cultural difference. It has been argued by some writers that the sensuous mediation between space and the body implies cultural difference with respect to phenomena such as crowding, performance in public space, interaction through touch and so on. While, for example, mutual touching and its significance for the organization of social and personal space by some writers have been claimed as important elements of Arab/Muslim culture, bodily distance and the maintenance of private, personal space are often mentioned as significant characteristics of Western space (on this see Rodaway, 1995, pp. 57–60). In public practices and imaginations, such issues are part of the construction of the spaces of the Muslim/Arab Other as essentially different from Western, modernized space, and thereby of the exclusion of immigrants from national (Danish) public space. Listen, for instance, to the opinions from residents in a small Danish town (hosting a refugee centre):

'They dominated it all, you know. If they...then they would be a band, walking in the middle of the road. If a car appeared and was about to approach them and, kind of, tooted at them, because they would not stand back, then they went... then they threatened at it...and were absolutely mad. They had a behaviour that we can't use for anything at all.'

'They walked around the town, you know, and then suddenly they stood there, like, looking through the windows and then, what the F... we were doing. And that is not really our mentality'

'My wife was about to go out to pick the raspberries, in our own raspberry... then five, libaneseans were f... crawling around in the bed. You see, they do not respect private property in the same way as we do in this country.'
(interview extracts, our translation)

In the three extracts above the embodied behaviour of Muslim immigrants is represented as a transgression of norms and rules of 'this country'. The 'haptic space' of the Other is seen as threatening, crowded and intruding; hence as disturbance legitimizing the exclusion/disciplination of the intruder, whose mad behaviour must be adapted to 'our mentality' and how 'we do it in this country'. This process of orientalizing is however not restricted to the imposing of Western, haptic geographies on the Other. In urban space the immigrant Other may turn into an alien intruder imposing his (male) animalistic order on the marginalized people in the city, as this quotation from an interviewee in Copenhagen suggests:

'and there you see that these "second-generation immigrants", they don't like them [i.e. socially marginalized persons of Danish origin]. So they spite them, and some controversies come up. Especially that particular group which is called, alcoholics and drug addicts is a threatened species...by the second-generation immigrants. Because they don't like them. And they clearly think, that then you can just hit them and kick them and do whatever you want to them.'

Here the threatening behaviour of the immigrant Other is converted into an 'ecological' narrative in which the disordered and potentially violent space of the 'second-generation immigrants' is imposed upon the 'native' alcoholics and drug addicts. The argument from above is reversed into a dismal fantasy about the appalling regime of oriental space that might emerge if not kept under surveillance and control. Both examples show how differences between oriental and Danish/Western space and behaviour are constructed as dichotomic stereotypes related through an unavoidable struggle.

The olfactory

Practical orientalism is performed and facilitated also through the senses of taste and smell. In particular, the intake of food monitored by the perpet-

ual taste and smell system plays a central role in the way orientalism is (re)produced in everyday life. For example, the taste and smell of food are grounded in the experiences and perception of self and Other. One example is the Danish 'war on meatballs' (as labelled by Frello (2003)) that began in the late 1990s when meatballs, a traditional Danish dish containing pork, was removed from the menu in some kindergartens in order to make it possible for Muslim children to join the common meals. This raised a very heated debate on Muslim parents' 'unwillingness' to embrace cultural integration. A survey conducted by PLS Rambøl (2003) ranked it as one of the most important issues in the public debate over refugees and immigrants – 54 per cent of the Danes felt that removing meatballs from the table was a transgression of a normative border. On government level the Danish Liberal Party's spokesman for 'right of citizenship' Eyvind Vesselbo expressed his deepest concern with the issue: 'Why should we accept that Danish children don't learn how to cook meatballs, which is a fundamental part of the Danish cooking.' (Vesselbo, 2003, our translation).

Widespread public opinion, as expressed in the above, was that a minority group of Muslims should not prevent Danish children from learning how to cook traditional Danish dishes. The embodied experience and the claim of the 'right to eat meatballs' was a rearticulation of a discourse in which Muslims were represented as the Other – an alien group preventing the Danes from unfolding their traditions and culture. As is expressed in the statement, cooking and eating meatballs is something 'fundamental' for the Danes. The war on meatballs was in this way not an innocent discussion on difference in food traditions and customs but a 'war' producing the Other (Muslims) as a threat to Danish identity – a (re)production of the picture of the Muslims as being a disruptive element negating the enjoyment of Danish identity and traditions – something that prevents the authentic Danish culture from being reproduced. Where the meatballs previously mostly have had meaning in a discourse contrasting 'traditional' with 'modern' ways of life, they were now rearticulated in a discourse on 'Danishness' contrasting 'us' and 'them'. Meatballs were articulated in relation to values such as tolerance, freedom and democracy presented in opposition to Muslims seen as intolerant and demanding. In a way, it was argued, the war on meatballs was a culmination of years of weakness in Danish society. It incarnated in concrete ways the humiliating picture of Danes as being a naive people

trying to treat everybody well and therefore opening itself up to exploitations by the Muslims. A similar argument was made when the local authority in a suburb of Copenhagen announced the prohibiting of the use of *halal* slaughtered meat in all public institutions and the mayor insisted that this step was taken to strengthen integration:

‘They have to know what good Danish food is. We think by principle that good Danish food consists of pork in different ways. So they have to be introduced to the meatballs. And then they can decide whether they want to eat it or not’.

(Rasmussen, 1999, our translation)

This concrete action was meant as a rehabilitation of Danish food culture that the Other has to adopt and assimilate. The Other is constructed as an inferior that has to be mastered by a strong Danish food control and discipline in which ‘eating pork’ prepared in various ways is made into the hallmark of adaptability and assimilation. Thus the eating of pork is often naturalized as universal and reasonable: ‘We eat pork in Denmark because it is a useful and well-adapted animal that provide us with healthy protein’ (Thielsen 2001, our translation).

In many ways pork becomes a mythological symbol of ‘Danishness’. The production of pigs not only affords substantial support to the Danish economy, it is also considered as a kind of a symbol that sustains the dividing line between ‘us’ the Christian Nordic People and ‘them’ the Islamic, Middle Eastern Foreigners. The Other can only transgress this line between ‘us’ and ‘them’ by in practice eating pork, as another informant explains:

‘There are those who really try to become a Dane, right? And live like Danes. A friend of my son eats pork. He even drinks. They have a whisky club together, you see. He also drinks alcohol and things like that. He is not a full-time Muslim you can say. His name was Osama but it was too problematic, he thought. So now his name is... what is his name? Anyway he changed it to a Danish name. Now his name is Pedersen.

(interview extract, our translation)

This narrative is a story about the assimilated Other that proves to be truly loyal to the Danes by eating pork and drinking alcohol. In the ritualistic act of

eating and drinking, the Other transgresses the border between ‘us’ and ‘them’ – according to the narrative Osama is no longer a stranger but has become one of ‘ours’. By changing his name to Pedersen he even proves that the acts are an expression of true belonging.

The auditory

The auditory refers to the ear and the way spatial and social relations are produced in everyday life through sounds, noises, music and spoken languages. It is not a passive but an active element that works through the act of listening in everyday life. In practical orientalism the auditory experiences facilitate and (re)produce the imaginative geography of ‘us’ and ‘them’. In Denmark there has been a recurring public debate over the Muslim claim to build mosques. The strong opposition in the public debate was marked by explanations that made reference to the experience of listening to daily religious practices.

‘Noise all over Aarhus will be the reality if a mosque is built. This is because the imam from the mosque several times a day will cry Arabian prayers from a loudspeaker system. Noises like that are not allowed in our town. Noises like that coming from loudspeakers will also work as religious propaganda and brainwash. In our society we have freedom of religion – but if religious freedom deprives others of their freedom it is not democratic. It is also alarming with the kind of power the imams have over refugees. As an example, criminal refugees will follow and be directed by the imams rather than being directed by the Danish police’

(Sivertsen, 2004, our translation)

In the above, the writer constructs the sounds of religious prayer as ‘noises’ that would dominate and occupy space and make it unliveable. First of all the experience of noises is linked to the expression of ‘universal reasons’. The Danish society does not accept noises at a certain level (loudspeakers) in public space. Therefore we cannot accept the claim of building a mosque. Second, the auditory perception of Muslim prayers is a (re)production of orientalism in the way the auditory govern the dominant perception of the Other. The experiences of prayer and masses are explicitly linked to negative stereotypes in the process of othering – The sounds

coming from the mosque are connected to ‘propaganda’ and brainwash and transformed into a narrative about the generalized Other being criminal, dangerous and despotic. Third, in a strange way, sounds coming from religious practices activate the occidental imagination of freedom and democracy as something belonging to ‘us’ and not to ‘them’. To give them the freedom of religion is not only a matter of being forced to listen to noises, it is also to undermine our own freedom, so the argument goes.

The auditory process of othering is also found in everyday life meetings and encountering:

‘But they can sit shouting abusive words in their own language. Now, I will not sit here saying so. But, yes, “dirty cunt” and things like that – on their own language. If you then ask them to speak Danish, right – then they complain to the chief that I have asked them to speak Danish, right? And then they are doing psychological racism against the Danes just because you ask them to speak Danish so you can understand what they are saying. We are after all still in Denmark, aren’t we? And then they are sitting there cackling in their own language.

(interview extract, our translation)

Here, the central dividing line between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is created through the sound coming from an oral speech act. There are ‘them’ (the internal Other cackling in their own language) and ‘us’ (speaking Danish). The informant explains that the auditory matters in the meeting between self and Other. A central conflict between self and immigrants is related to their use of language in the everyday encounter. The auditory experiences of spoken foreign languages are here related to the use of abusive words. The orientalizing of the Other is performed through a transformation from the auditory to the spatial: ‘We are after all still in Denmark’.

The visual

Last but not least, practical orientalism is performed through visual perception. The visual enters the everyday meetings with/affections by Other bodies in many ways. Appearances of bodies and visual objectification of Others are major inputs to the processes of othering. More than anything else, however, it appears in connection with gender, sex-

uality and the work of the ‘male gaze’. The woman being objectified and positioned in space is the process put into play, and so is the traditional ‘blame the victim’ claim saying that it is her responsibility to consider her appearance and clothing not to act as a temptation to male sexuality. It is however used in a strange converted way:

‘I don’t want to be Turkish. I don’t want to be a Muslim. I don’t want to be marked by the Muslim community. I mean, the freedom we have achieved. And now the girls in Denmark are supposed to put on more clothing. Our morality, it might not be too good. I mean, maybe we could behave ourselves better, and dress more decent and not expose the skin of the stomach. But actually I can’t see that it is anybody’s business if I want to have my stomach uncovered, because why should I stop doing that just because some foreigners that think it is an invitation have come into the country? But then they have to stay out of here. I mean, it is such things. And this is about values, because this is absolute. It has something to do with women’s liberation.’

(interview extract, our translation)

The woman speaking here talks about women being in public space and exposed to the male gaze, but this is the gaze of the Other man, the Muslim man. The process of objectification that we mentioned above is here turned around and used to signify the Other man who, in her words, cannot deal with the bodily appearance of Danish girls (he ‘thinks it is an invitation’), and whose culture therefore does not accord with Danish (Western) values. In this, she is drawing on (and contributing to) a rather widespread discourse in public opinion in Denmark saying that women’s liberation is something ‘we’ have and ‘they’ do not have – ‘they’ being (Muslim) immigrants deeply embedded in their ‘medieval’ culture. Questions of gendered power relations and visual dominance are changed into an ‘immigrant problem’, at the same time rendering invisible power in ‘Danish’ gender relations and reinforcing distinctions between ‘Danes’ and ‘immigrants’, in that way using feminism in the process of orientalizing.

This process of orientalizing does however not restrict itself to the Muslim man; it takes yet another turn and involves the Muslim woman as well. This can be illustrated by a feature article with the title ‘Whore and Madonna again’ published in the Danish (leftist) newspaper *Information*, where a ‘femi-

nist' author blames Muslim women wearing a scarf for sexual assaults conducted by Muslim men (Thomsen, 2000). She connects such assaults to a gendered practising of Islam and not, for instance, to social marginalization. Muslim men become the violating ones, and Muslim women, qua their religious bodily markers as 'pure women', are claimed to legitimize the men's violating actions. Wearing a scarf embodies the traditional, the patriarchal and the suppressive. It desexualizes its wearer by rendering her unapproachable and in the same move sexualizes the (Danish) non-wearers. In Thomsen's optic, then, 'we' (Danish emancipated women) become 'the sexualized Others', and in some strange way Danish men become invisible in the analysis. Bodies wearing this piece of clothing, the scarf, are then articulated as unacceptable in the encounter with modern, secularized, emancipated 'Danishness' and made to symbolize 'the alien' and 'the backward' which undermines gender equality and exposes Danish women to the threatening 'male gaze'. In this sense the visual and haptic are connected in the (above-mentioned) fear of the threatening body of the Other.

Both of these examples show how recognizable visible markers of difference, which are worked out as stereotyped objects of fantasy and fear, people practical orientalism. These are 'the suppressed immigrant woman', who is not only suppressed but also positioning herself as 'pure' in relation to the Danish woman, and 'the threatening immigrant man', who is both patriarchal, sexually uncontrollable and a potential rapist. In an imagination where ethnicity, gender and sexuality coincide, visual perception constitutes a cultural battlefield on which processes of orientalizations are put into work.

Concluding remarks

We have tried to show in this article that resurgent orientalism in Denmark is not merely a matter of textual or symbolic acts. It is not restricted to the politics of representation but is profoundly rooted in sensuous everyday encounters between immigrants and ethnic Danes. Through numerous small acts, comments, telling of anecdotes, corporeal attitudes and so on, borders between 'them' and 'us' are redrawn, reproduced and enacted. Thus, the construction of Otherness is basically an embodied practice – a practice that begins and ends in the practices of everyday life.

As we have seen, practical orientalism works through various sensuous systems. It includes particular ways of experiencing and relating to the Other as well as particular codes for how to represent him/her in everyday speech acts (e.g. as an intruding, undermining, occupying, repressing alien). In doing this, we argue, practical orientalism is not only confined to mundane realms of day-to-day interaction but ties up with and indeed contributes to the production of new cultural spaces in Europe. Like this, the changing political semiotics of Europe, discussed at the beginning of this paper, and the emergence of a practical orientalism in everyday life, are closely interrelated processes. The resurgence of Islam and Arab-speaking countries as the main threatening external Other to European civilization (and its North American heirs), that has emerged after the demise of the geopolitical codes of the Cold War, goes hand in hand with growing stigmatization of Arab-speaking/Muslim populations within Europe. Thus the excerpts from popular debate and interviews in Denmark discussed in this paper reproduce the post-Cold War spaces at the same time as they enforce the friend-enemy dichotomies of 'the colonial present' (cf. Gregory, 2004) in the realm of domestic everyday life. As we have seen, such enactments of difference not only (re)produce time-space separations in everyday life, representing the internal Other as belonging to a different and distant space as well as another (pre-modern) time. They also work by normalizing and naturalizing hierarchical notions of difference to an extent that quasi-racist views and expressions are regarded as unproblematic, banal, and almost commonsensical utterances. In this process references to profoundly embodied experiences (of overcrowding, violence, food, noise, visual (de)sexualization of the human body and so on) are central. The notion of *practical orientalism*, then, indicates that to Challenge the 'big' regimes of knowledge and the grand strategies of geopolitics does not work without at the same time challenging the 'small' imaginations and affects constructed in intercorporeal encounters in everyday life. The one presupposes and legitimizes the other.

Michael Haldrup
Roskilde University
Department of Geography and International Development Studies
E-mail: mhp@ruc.dk

Lasse Koefoed
Roskilde University
Department of Geography and International Development Studies
E-mail: lmartin@ruc.dk

Kirsten Simonsen
Roskilde University
Department of Geography and International Development Studies
E-mail: kis@ruc.dk

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