Fremmede kroppe: En undersøgelse af kroppens rolle som social klassificeringskategori belyst gennem litterære og videnskabelige tekster fra det 20. århundrede
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Summary

*Foreign bodies: An inquiry into the body as a category for social classification highlighted by selected Danish literary and scholarly texts.*

With examples taken from literature and various debates, the introduction to this dissertation illustrates how images of the other have been expressed throughout the 20th century. The examples show how the body, due to visible and corporeal differences, has been an indicator determining man’s origin, identity and cultural links. This embodiment of the other often seems so obviously that little thought is given to the origin of this classification of man. Consequently the intention here is to look into the ideas of classification that have legitimised the body’s function as a medium and taxonomy for an embodiment of the other.

Chapter 2 presents a theoretical approach to the body’s function as a social and cultural taxonomy. It outlines how the body theoretically can be regarded as a social body; comprising a “self-body”, which refers to the physical and essential body, and a “constructed body” that refers to the ideological and social setting of the “self-body”. Due to its essential character the social body can be seen as a point zero for an ontological being as well as the preferred medium in communication between men. On the other hand, as a consequence of the social settings and their interpretation of physical appearances, the body is always influenced by various ideas and hence is it simultaneously a receiver and transmitter in communication.

A similar topic has been highlighted by the Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman in his research on the perceptions and interpretations of physical disabilities. Goffman states that a stigma arises when individuals or a community encounter humans who do not match the existing physical parameters of normality. Within these parameters the body becomes a sign by which a person is subscribed a certain identity. This function however often contains a discrepancy between the “virtual” identity, meaning the identity the deviant individual is given by his surroundings, and the “real” identity being the one the individual intends to express. In this ambiguous situation the discrepancy will, according to Goffman, mostly be a disadvantage for the deviant individual or group. In this context it is a general rule that the level of stigmatisation goes together with the stigma’s visibility.

The social parameters of normality have also been a central aspect in anthropologist Mary Douglas’ research on perceptions of purity. According to Douglas there is a strong will in various societies to materialise the ideas of a community’s cultural mindset including, its social norms and boundaries, in such a way that they are reflected in the society’s perception
of the body’s shape and function. A similar relation has also been mentioned by the sociologist Henrik Dahl, who emphasises that man basically thinks’ in physical and materialistic surfaces. Inspired by Bourdieu Dahl suggests that the classification of objects and humans into various social and cultural categories is dependent on the interpreter’s habitus.

According to the theoretical approach the body can thus be seen as a surface that serves as a materialisation of a certain social and cultural mindset. This means that both body and otherness must be investigated in relation to the social frameworks within which they are described and interpreted. In this respect chapter 3 takes a closer look at the streams of ideas that have gained influence on the body’s function as taxonomy and communicator of man belonging and origin.

The Chapter starts with the works of Aristotle who was the first to classify the creatures of nature. Aristotle was convinced that nature was created by divine intervention that all plants and creatures were given shape and capabilities in order to fulfill a purpose determined by God. In order to explain humans’ and animal’s capabilities and characters, Aristotle created a complex system of balance between the four elements (earth, air, fire and water) and the cardinal fluids of blood; black bile and yellow bile. This perception of nature suited the views of the Christian Church perfectly and remained therefore valid throughout the Middle Ages. Profound doubt wasn’t raised until scientific discoveries in the 16th and 17th centuries came up with a more mechanical perception of the body.

During the 18th century European expeditions and colonisations increased the number of encounters with men and cultures of foreign origin. The experiences from the New World got the philosophers of the Enlightenment, such as Montesquieu and Rousseau to consider the profound reasons for differences in culture and character. Based on theories about the climate’s impact on man’s character and way of life they both concluded that nature had created and shaped man differently according to specific environmental conditions. In this perspective the Europeans health problems in the colonies were regarded as a consequence of their displacement, which made the philosophers conclude that man should stay geographically close to his place of origin.

Besides environmentally related health issues the people of the New World also looked physically different. In 1758 this inspired the Swedish biologist Carl von Linné to classify man by mapping physical characteristics to geographical areas. His findings were elaborated in 1795 by the German natural scientist J. F. Blumenbach who narrowed mankind down to five
different races. Those were placed into a hierarchy based on aesthetic standards in which the "Caucasian" race, from which Europeans originated, was the most beautiful.

Blumenbach’s classifications matched perfectly the positivistic science demands of measurability that became common sense during the 19th century. Still the classifications were lacking the knowledge of a broader framework that could provide a more dynamic and useful interpretation. It was Charles Darwin who in the second half of the 19th century, provided this knowledge, when he launched his theories of evolution, in which changes and variations became a question of “survival of the fittest” and “natural selection”. Although Darwin was cautious about the racial classifications, his theories emphasis on struggle, survival and hierarchies had a significant impact on the use of categories in order to explain and understand differences.

Meanwhile a further dimension was added to the scientific categorisations of mankind with the rise of nationalism. These “imagined communities” were also intended to classify mankind, but on the basis of such elements as language, culture and national spirit. In this sense there was a remarkable ambiguity between the two sets of classification – the merely metaphysical, emotional and spiritual nature of nationalism versus science’s rational, objective and physically measurable categories.

A similar ambiguity was also present in relation to the body and the other. Since encountering the other and the unknown contained a potential risk, it was necessary to keep the body both protective and protected. In this haze of trust and risk the body became an object for a spontaneous differentiation between the well-known and the other, which from the middle of the 19th century made the body a focal point in the creation of a “civil inattentiveness”. According to Goffman civil inattentiveness refers to a situation where individuals with appearances and physical behavior which are in accordance with the surrounding majority, will be regarded as well-known and assigned such a level of social trust that they will not attract special attention. On the contrary individuals with physical stigma will catch the eye of the surrounding community and depending on the character of the stigma, be regarded as a potential threat to the community’s security, stability and parameters of normality.

In this categorisation of deviant and other humans found the profound contradictions between the scientific and national mind common interested. This fusion of interests had an important influence on perception of the body. Subsequently it became an element in national identity’s creation of an authentic, inward-looking and secure community, while
modern science used the body to outline a prognostic logic based on a measurable and hierarchal division of mankind and societies.

Based on this historical approach, hypothesis and methodology of this dissertation are presented in Chapter 4. The hypothesis suggests that from the end of the 19th century a civil inattentiveness and a bodily classification of the other were established which reconciled the ideas of modern science and of national identity. In this process their profound oppositions found such a level of compatibility that they formed a national-scientific framework for classification of the other. Concerning the body's function as social taxonomy this framework was flexible and yet still firm when it came to interpretation of man's nationality and level of evolution, as well as physical and intellectual capacity.

Using the methods outlined by the Swedish ethnologists Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren the hypothesis is analysed through travel literature, folkloristic and scholarly texts. Inspired by their emphasis on dichotomies like chaos vs. order, nature vs. culture, society vs. the social landscape, the enquiry of the sources will reveal how the national-scientific framework has gained ground for using various dichotomies to embody the other in opposition to the Danish man and society.

Chapter 5 comprises a substantiation of the contradictions between the national and scientific mindsets. In a Danish context the ambiguity of the contradictions formed a problematic situation due to the country's military defeats and geographical diminution in the first half of the 19th century. This is illustrated through the works of the philosopher Harald Høffding who made several adjustments in his interpretation of Darwin, in order to create a synthesis between the national and scientific mindsets. As an example he stressed that a territorial decrease was not necessarily a sign of a weak or dying culture, rather the contrary. In this sense there was no reason for Denmark to fear extermination, if it just adapted and learned to navigate in the new world order as a small nation-state.

Regarding perception of the body, the traumatic defeat by Germany in 1864 underlined the need for the body to be protective and protected against the risks of the modern world. In order to meet the need to improve the physical readiness of ordinary people nationwide organisations of gymnastic, rifle and shooting clubs were established. Here physical exercises were practiced in accordance with the principles of “Swedish gymnastics”, based on scientific studies of physical movements. In addition to the physical aspects, sports clubs also served as a forum to enlighten and educate laymen in the spirit of the national identity.
Since the body had to match both scientific parameters and national ideals it was also influenced by their contradictions. The sources in Chapter 6 and 7 show how this was reflected in the classification of Danes and the other. The dissertation also highlights how the sources arbitrarily emphasised both essential and constructive aspects in their interpretation of corporal differences, in order to create a flexibility and synthesis similar to the works of Høffding. Within the national-scientific framework the right appearances, physical control over the body, the links to a peasant society and a certain defined territory became corresponding parameters for placing men and societies in a racial hierarchy.

Chapter 6 shows how the national identity’s images of the peasant and peasant society were key elements in the search for the Danes’ physical and mental characteristics. The research among the Danish population by geographer H. P. Steensby illustrates how anthropologic pioneers strived to find examples of the Danish primal man. Based on scientific knowledge they assumed that the best examples of the descendants of the primal man were to be found among the rural population. These assumptions were based on the idea of the peasant and rural communities as isolated areas hardly influenced by migration. It was further-more expected that these descendants would have a physical pureness expressed in a typically tall, bright and widely homogeneous appearance.

Equivalent images of peasant society as a source for the pure authentic Danish people are highlighted in works of the folklorist Thorkild Gravlund. His main project was a kind of mapping of the spirit or the “folk-character” of the Danish people. He assumed that this character was determined through people’s’ deep-rooted relationship with their native soil. In this matter Gravlund was convinced that the environmental varieties in soil and landscapes would cause varieties in the character of the people in the different regions of Denmark. Still the differences were of a minor significance and could never undermine the existence of what he called the “people’s will”. The people’s will was a trait that originated from the common experience of being related to a native soil and was as such the common foundation in the Danish folk-character.

This will, according to Gravlund, was strongest and most present among the peasant folk due to their close affiliation with the soil. Thanks to this relationship a harmonious unison had developed between nature, profession, culture and the character of the local people. In order to protect this quality, the folk-character also provided a prejudicial mindset which would instinctively enable people to choose a partner with the capacity that would ensure a breed with the right health, beauty, physical and spiritual traits.
Neither Gravlund nor Steenby doubted the physical and spiritual strengths of the authentic Danish peasant. Both also regarded migration from the south, urbanisation and the mechanisation of agriculture as serious threats to the character of the Danish people and community. From this perspective they presented the relation between the Danish and the other as a struggle between dichotomies such as countryside vs. urbanisation, north vs. south, light vs. dark, inside vs. outside, harmony vs. disharmony.

Chapter 7 highlights how the writer Johs. V. Jensen and the anthropologist Kaj Birket-Smith represented a more global approach, when they used the other as a mirror to identify the Danish people and their characteristics. In contrast to Gravlund and Steensby, Jensen and Birket-Smith were deeply rooted in the material world of modern society. They did, however, regard peasant society and culture as the prerequisites for the entire development of modern society and thus a profound parameter for the comparison of societies. Hence they assumed that roots in a peasant culture would be reflected in man’s capacity for physical and mental mastery of the urban and technical possibilities of modern society. What Steensby and Gravlund saw as an erosion of peasant society traits was, in the view of Jensen and Birket-Smith, the peak of the white man’s civilisation and potential.

Despite their contradictions there was coherence when Jensen and Birket-Smith displayed the white, bright, strong and controlled body as the symbol of the white man’s claim to progress and development. Coherence is also found in their categorisation of the other where they use similar corporeal dichotomies such as: light-dark, adult-child, man-woman, tall-small, sturdy-slight, civilised-savage, controlled-uncontrolled, beautiful-ugly, pure-dirty, alert-slow, human-animal. These were again connected to a set of broader general social descriptive dichotomies like: harmony-disharmony, progress-stagnation, countryside-urbanisation, culture-nature, north-south, Christianity-heathendom, enlightened-unenlightened.

From various national and scientific perspectives physical characteristics were thus organised under a wide set of social categories and hierarchies. Thanks to this connection it was through an interpretation of the body’s shape and control possible to classify humans, societies and cultures.

Despite the fact that these sources obviously feature a mixed use of national and scientific vocabulary, they only provide an implicit indication of the existence of a merging framework between the mindsets of nationalism and science. Chapter 9 takes a thorough look into
aspects which support the hypotheses of a national-scientific framework as the basis for the classification of the other.

By contrast chapter 8 examines how the overall *zeitgeist* was influenced by scepticism about migration and the other as expressed in these sources. In this context they reveal a rather remarkable paradox. On the one hand there was no doubt about the Danes belonging to one of the most developed races, cultures and societies. On the other hand, despite this level of development, it was feared that the other sap the strength of the Danish character. As an explanation of this paradox, it is argued here that the transformation of modern society created a sense of chaos and victimisation in relation to the images of peasant society. In this matter the images were remarkably enough regarded as both the foundation as well as the solution to the challenges caused by the transformation. Hence the images of peasant society and modern society became each other’s opposite and precondition.

Based on a review of the works of Norbert Elias, Zygmunt Bauman, Liah Greenfeld and Ernest Gellner Chapter 9 demonstrate that the nationalism of the second part of the 19th century formed a set of conscious boundaries for perception of the world and of mankind. As a consequence science was institutionalised in the name of the nation and accordingly functioned as a platform to display the knowledge, dynamics and capacity of the national project. The general outcome of modern science in other words supported the consolidation of the national idea and project. In this matter positivism became a crucial tool to maintain the social order due to its capacity to shape and support the applied perception of man and society.

From this perspective the national-scientific framework can be regarded as a merger of aim and means, where the aim – the national agendas striving for homogeneity, survival and hierarchical positioning – was reached and confirmed through the scientific research and methodology.

The national-scientific framework appeared therefore as an implicit, complementary and unifying order in which the physical appearances were constituted in such a way that it enabled a classification of humans, cultures, societies into Danish, Nordic, European or others. These categories were the knowledge applied to create a foundation for civil inattentiveness with the result that physical and conscious recognition became a sort of non-verbal knowledge when encountering the other and unknown.
After the terror of World War II the need for new parameters to describe mankind, culture and societies was immense. An attempt to break with the existing parameters laid down within the national-scientific framework was the foundation of UN and UNESCO. Chapter 10 focuses on how this break influenced Danish identity and science after 1945.

From the early 1950’s traditional peasant society in Denmark experienced a time of rapid and massive transformation. Thanks to industrialisation and advanced technologies, agricultural production increased in output and size, but, at the same time, the numbers of farms decreased. Still peasant society managed to maintain its position as a strong symbol of Danish identity. This was clearly expressed in the discussions about Denmark’s affiliation to the European Community in the late -60’s and early -70’s. Examples from historical novels written by Danish writer and EC opponent, Ebbe Kløvedal Reich, illustrate how the idea of belonging to a settled homogeneous group living of agriculture was represented as the authentic and positive characters of the Danish people.

In his general opposition to the EC, Reich created a picture of a potential battle between cultures. This he expected to start the moment human and financial capital migrating from the south of Europe clashed with the Danish agrarian rooted culture. Further examples show how the Opposition’s campaign revitalised the national-scientific framework ideal of peasant society by linking fear of migration and alternation from the south to membership of the EC. A more recent example of revitalisation of the peasant heritage featured in the local elections of 2009. Here, politicians reflecting the agrarian tradition suggested that the menu of public meal services should contain a minimum of twenty percent of pork meat. Thus despite the fact that the traditional peasant hasn’t been overly present in the Danish society for decades, the image is still a significant element of the national identity.

In the field of anthropology, the post-war period was especially influenced by the aims underlying the construction of UNESCO. One of UNESCO’s main issues was to encourage the mentalities in the area of education, science and culture to accept a higher level of tolerance and openness. To this end inspiration was found in the idea of cultural relativism, a school of thought with its origins in the 1920’s and 1930’s. This viewed mankind as one big family with a wide range of varieties in physical and cultural characteristics and strongly emphasised the importance of mutual respect for individual and cultural differences. In this regard UNESCO stated that scientific studies on biological significations or differences should no longer legitimize nor contain any judgments or assumptions about man’s mental characteristics and intelligence. Instead the organisation stressed that studies of what are called “ethnic groups” should be carried out on the basis of moral and social acceptance.
Examples from scholarly texts illustrate how these new guidelines were transposed by Danish scientists, among others Kaj Birket-Smith. These texts also reflect the scientist’s difficulties into ignoring any relationship between biological varieties and mental capacities.

The dissertation also outlines how UNESCO launched two contradictory agendas when on the one hand it stressed the singularity of mankind and, and on the other supported a politicisation of cultural and corporeal differences. The politicisation of physical differences did not lead to a devaluation of differences, rather the contrary. With the ascendancy of multiculturalism the symbolic value of differences increased, a wide range of minorities and outsider-groups began to base their identity on their specific physical traits. Hence minorities now often choose to stress visible signs like colour of skin, beard and, dreadlocks, as well as certain kind of clothing or food, in order to highlight their cultural distinctiveness.

In this way politicisation has promoted an interdependent relationship between the group that stigmatises and the group being stigmatised, so that groups subsequently will have their identity and status rooted in their opposition. Instead of reducing the importance of differences the concept of multiculturalism seems to have underpinned and perhaps even enhanced the body’s role as a communicator of ethnicity, identity and cultural belonging. Ultimately the post-war attempt to break with the classifications of the national-scientific framework have led to a further particularisation of that framework’s categories.

Having established UNESCO’s difficulties in creating a more inclusive mindset, Chapter 11 looks at science’s and multiculturalism’s impact on the relation between cultural identities, reviewing how multiculturalism’s attempt to break with the national-scientific categories have expanded the boundaries of the social recognition of differences. It has also enlarged the social and cultural spectrum of the body’s function as a silent medium for communicating an “us” and “them”. This unforeseen and unfortunate consequence has in many cases made the relations between the various identities sharper and harsher. The multicultural ideas that were meant to improve cultural integration today seem to have had a major influence on cultural segregation.

However recent research might offer alternative approaches and input to the ideas of multiculturalism. As an example a project like “The human family tree – Migration stories” launched by the National Geographic magazine in 2009 seems to have the potential to offer new support to the idea of the human entity. The project is a “genographic”-project in which man’s origin is determined by classifying genes in “haplotypes” and "haplogroups".
This genographic knowledge shows that the story of origin interpreted from the body’s appearances are not necessarily compatible with the one told by the genes. Furthermore it provides reasons for a radical shift in the traditional view on migration as a problematic phenomenon. According to this genographic knowledge, we all contain the heritage of different places in our genes, implying that migration is something all men have in common. In this perspective the genetics’ story of bastardisation and migration could lead to an invalidation of the opposition between singularity and diversity in multicultural ideology as well as undermining the emphasis and value of terms like authenticity and homogeneity.

A major downside to spreading the message of “The human family tree” project is, however, its idea of entity as based on something invisible. At least that seems to be logical as long as the multicultural mindset determines the body’s function as a social category for identifying people’s identity and cultural belonging.

But things might change since the social impact of multicultural ideology has recently led to criticism from various points of views. The most profound critics have argued that, due to its focus on differences, multicultural ideology continuously limits man to the confines of a certain cultural category rather than giving the individual freedom of choice. Hence, as a final irony, the conclusion of this dissertations is that the logic of the national-scientific framework, in tandem with the multicultural ideology’s exposing of the corporeal differences, constitutes a significant obstacle to the openness, tolerance and harmony that was have typified the second half the 20th century.