Ritualized Opposition in Danish Online Practices
of Extremist Language and Thought

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This article looks at extreme speech practices in Danish weblogs and Facebook comment threads that treat issues of refugees, migration, Islam, and opponents as a cultural war of values and conflict. The article highlights the ritualized ways in which anti-immigrant sentiments are being communicated, received, and responded to. Such recurrent ritualistic communicative patterns include the use of a distinct indignant tone, sarcasm, racialized reasoning, and the use of "high-fives," as well as a general indifference to facts. The article argues that these online speech patterns can best be understood as a form of "ritualized opposition" that relies on extremist, divisive use of language and a naturalization of racialized difference in its attempt to recruit and consolidate communities of support.

Keywords: extreme speech, racialization, ritualized opposition, social media, refugees, migrants, Denmark, sarcasm, humor

A few years ago, an international panel of scholars were gathered in Copenhagen to talk about the recent deadly terror shootings in Oslo (July 22, 2011), Paris (November 13–14, 2014), and Copenhagen (February 14–15, 2015). There were three scholars on the panel. Right before the Q&A session began, five hands went up simultaneously, ready to make the same set statement: "We should not use the word 'Islamophobia' since it makes it impossible to criticize Islam." One of these critics insisted that the term "Islamophobia" seemed to block them from telling the "truth" about Islam, such as making a connection between Islam and pedophilia. This extremist statement about Islamophobia did not relate to the specific points and arguments of the panel presentations, but instead, used it as a platform to express a form of solidarity discussed in this article. Ironically, this panel event, and its five opposers, turned out to deliver a visual expression of a new concept in the study of web commentaries: high-fiving. Several of these question-posing journalists were seen high-fiving outside the building afterward. In this example, the high-fiving took place as a ritualized act of opposition right in front of the attendees and, as such, offers a useful concept for analyzing certain critical media events in Denmark, specifically focused on interactive weblogs and Facebook comments that provided a platform of solidarity for harbored sarcasm and indignant tones. The comments I analyzed in this article are made regarding five Danish media events: two television debates, Facebook extremist comments, extremist cartoons, and road signs.

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The article looks at extremist views that are expressed in language practices as they appear in Danish interactive weblogs and Facebook comment threads and focuses on issues of refugee presence, migration, and Islam. These views on minorities are also directed against domestic adversaries who see things differently from the extremists. The views reflect a political strategy that was launched by the new right-wing government of Anders Fogh Rasmussen in 2001 called the "Cultural War of Values" strategy (Hervik, 2014). The strategy is nationalist in character, using populist, anti-immigrant rhetoric directed against domestic political adversaries as well as migrants and Danes with ethnic minority backgrounds (Hervik, 2011).

Communication practices in this article highlight ritualized ways anti-immigrant sentiments are communicated, received, and responded to, including recurrent communicative patterns like the use of sarcasm, racialized reasoning, the use of high-fives, and a general indifference to facts. Instead of seeing different communication practices as efforts to convey facts or enter into dialogue, ritualized opposition or agonism (Tannen, 1998) relies on extremist, divisive use of language and a naturalization of racialized difference in its attempt to recruit and consolidate communities of support. This effort is a key motivating principle that runs through the media events and interviews analyzed in a new Danish research project called "The Study of Experiences and Reactions to Racialization in Denmark" (SERR). Studying through a grounded process helps researchers better understand public debates and popular conversations that are not guided by the media message—similar to the prior anecdote about the opposition using a panel discussion on another topic as their opportunity to express ritualized opposition. Instead, the interactions are characterized by ritualized opposition where the communication refers to "something else" and "stand-in for" place of the original or literal dilemma (Tannen, 2002).

Besides being a vague concept, it is important to remember that extremism has long been used to denounce political dissent (Kundnani, 2015, p. 28), where extremism is a kind of reaction to a norm. Extremism is used both in terms of radical right thought and language, but also, albeit less frequently, in terms of the nonradical right and its allegedly extreme tolerance and naivety. In this article, extreme speech and activities are almost exclusively associated with "right-wing" extremism, which reflects a development in which radical right-wing activities have grown strong and increasingly militant in the Nordic countries. Examples can be seen, for instance, in the vandalism and violent organized attacks on mosques in Sweden (Gardell, 2015). According to the pool of interviews in the SERR project, there is agreement among the interviewees that groups are becoming organized and increasingly militant, particularly in groups like Dannerværn and Holger Danske Gruppen.

Before analyzing some of the ways in which extremism occurs in the Danish extreme media culture, the concept of extremism will be discussed. Then, the methodology will be presented followed by a discussion of the crosscutting thematic patterns identified by Mattias Ekman (2015) and the discursive strategies employed in ideological websites whose purpose is to present Muslims and Islam as the biggest threat to Western societies.

The Concept of Extremism

The concept of extremism in its practical sense holds many layers of meaning and, as such, refuses to flatten out context and categories as the term "hate speech" does (Pohjonen & Udupa, 2017). At the

same time, the concept is ambiguous and highly politicized, especially since the War on Terror was launched in the early 2000s. Since that time, "extremism" has been largely associated with "violent extremism," and this meaning, in turn, is associated with "Islamist extremism." Little interest in the news media and political field have been directed toward the explosive growth of similar modes of expression by the extreme right, which have become so explicit that the label "terrorist" has become racialized and used almost exclusively for non-White, non-Western acts of violence. As such, the term reflects the ideology of fault-line thinking and is not the outcome of sound analysis (Hervik, 2011; Kundnani, 2015). When "extreme" is applied to speech in this theme issue, the meaning can be tied to either the words used, the message conveyed, the tone of language, and the communicating persons as well as the sources evoked. Since some "extreme" utterances can be inseparable from violent action, they need not be. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that to capture "extremism" as a phenomenon, we should not confine it exclusively to speech but also include activities.

Methodology

This research is drawn from "Danish Exclusionary Reasoning in Social Media and Web-News Commentaries," which is part of a larger team research project called "The Study of Experiences and Reactions to Racialization in Denmark." SERR consists of five different subprojects, of which this article draws from one: the social media project. The social media project consists of 20 ethnographic interviews and a pool of more than 35 critical media events with strong anti-immigration, if not extremist, content that captured people's attention and monopolized the media platform, threatening to cause serious harm to people implicated in the event (Hepp & Couldry 2013). These events and their commentaries and media coverage were identified through monitoring sites, going to events, searches of the infomedia database, and scrutinizing the network relations of primary and secondary agents involved in the commentaries. Eight interviews were conducted with people holding a far-right, nationalist-oriented anti-Muslim platform. During these interviews, analytical categories such as *Islamophobia*, *racialization*, *extremism*, and *racism* were not introduced, and interviewees were encouraged to speak about their deepest fears and anxieties about people in Denmark who diverted from the majority norm of being White residents. In all interviews, sources of information and channels of redistribution of "knowledge" were discussed. This article and the SERR research project adhere to a media-anthropological insistence on not looking exclusively at actors in online social networks, but also include their personal motivations and how they articulate their views and ideas in other fields of interaction. Therefore, offline engagement, including in-depth interviews with Internet actors, is included in the analysis.

In the next section, the concept of extreme speech and thought in a primarily Danish context will be discussed. After, the theoretical framework revolving around "ritualized opposition" will be elaborated on. Then, the discussed terms will be applied to six examples of extremism in Denmark, with ritualized opposition and racialized extreme speech and activities that show key features of ritualized opposition presented. The examples are followed by an analysis of a critical media debate about road signs in Northern Denmark, which is characterized by its use of humor, sarcasm, and irony as ritualized opposition.

Extreme Speech and Thought

Mattias Ekman (2015) has examined three extremist online "counter-jihad" platforms in this network: The *Gates of Vienna*, a blog with a European outlook; the Swedish *Avpixlat*, a news site and blog; and Robert Spencer's *Jihad Watch*, an American blog. Ekman identifies crosscutting thematic patterns in the discursive strategies deployed in these ideological websites that serve to present Muslims and Islam as the biggest threat to Western societies, such as "Islam as a demographic threat," "Islam's silent infiltration," "Muslims impose sharia law on Western societies," "Islam is a totalitarian political ideology," "Muslims are violent and sexist," "The 'political correct' conceal or censor the truth," "leftists, humanists and liberals are aiding Muslims," and "Multiculturalism is dead."

The Western world, the narrative goes, is under attack. Silently, Europe is being occupied, while naive left-wingers and others help Muslims in traitorous and cowardly fashions, which risks ending in a civil war as Europeans stand up to stealth Islamization and the imposition of sharia law. Politicians have declared multiculturalism dead and have initiated campaigns against minarets, headscarves, beards, pork meatballs, halal, and much more, while using single cases or even single symbols as a metonym for cultural difference as well as making assumptions of personality.

Ekman derived these dire storylines from his study of extremist websites, which were also frequently used by Anders Behing Breivik, the White, blue-eyed terrorist and mass murderer in Norway. In the SERR research project on racialization and resistance to racialization in the Nordic countries, interviews and social media commentaries were discovered to contain the same extreme language and thinking in arguments, vignettes, images, and slogans. During the interviews, participants would offer their interpretation and say which Internet sources and people they preferred to follow. Events could be debates about segregated swim classes in *some* Danish public swimming pools, the provision of pork dishes in child care facilities in Denmark, hand greetings, noisy kids in movie theaters, parking irregularities, and so on. When they did so, the same transnationally circulating narratives and exclusionary reasoning popped up as those identified by Ekman.

Today, there are literally thousands of websites and blogs that form an online network of Islamophobic actors (and their audience) producing and distributing "knowledge" about Muslims and Islam. Through this network, extreme arguments and thinking are introduced and circulated. From key political entrepreneurs, ideologues, and others, and a news media that is increasingly commodified, commercialized, and conflict-oriented (Cody, 2011), ideas, as well as practices, are confirmed and rearticulated and thus mainstreamed. In this process, local keyboard activists and social media influencers can draw on, share, and perpetuate these narratives, thereby heightening the sense of seriousness and danger of local media events. It is at this point Matti Pohjonen and Sahana Udupa (2017) suggest we should look at extremist speech and activity as a spectrum of cultural practices, which implies they have to be studied ethnographically and as a way to infer the historical, political, and cultural forces that are present in these practices.

Deliberate focus is paid to the broader extreme speech practices as a way to achieve a grounded sense of where hate speech and confrontational reasoning come from and how they thrive on ritualized

opposition rather than facts and informed debate (Pohjonen & Udupa, 2017). The attractiveness of this focus is the possibility of avoiding what discourses of antiracism easily end up doing, either seeking documentation that opponents and objects of criticism are "racists" or guilty of invisible acts of racism or seeking to understand (though not accept) these extremist views from the inside. In addition, giving in to actual practices there is simply no easy binary division between acceptable and nonacceptable speech (Pohjonen & Udupa, 2017). The shift can be conceived of as returning to a person-centric, whole person dimension, often celebrated by anthropology, especially psychological anthropology, that doesn't allow for the flattening out of categories and context as hate speech seems to do. Even if the tone of linguistic commentaries may at first seem more direct, crude, and vitriolic online, people's extremist practices are not confined to the online sphere but include a totality of exchanges with neighbors, co-workers, and family, as well as watching television, reading newspapers, going to meetings, and listening to public talks. Once we have established these general implications of a naturally blurred boundary between acceptable and non-acceptable speech, employed a fuller account of the persons producing extreme speech based on extreme thought, and overcome the singular focus on online text, a better opportunity emerges to make sense of what goes on in this extremist practice in both language and thinking, which is the overall goal of the article.

Ritualized Opposition

In her study of public discourse, Deborah Tannen employs the concept of agonism, which refers to the aspect in argument culture where being adversarial is the default position. Where Walter Ong defined agonism as "programmed contentiousness" or "ceremonial combat," Tannen (2002) "use[s] the term to refer not to conflict, disagreement, or disputes per se, but rather to *ritualized adversativeness*" (p. 1652, emphasis in original). Tannen (1998) explains that

> The argument culture, with its tendency to approach issues as a polarized debate, and the culture of critique, with its inclinations to regard criticism and attack as the best, if not the only, type of rigorous thinking, are deeply rooted in Western tradition, going back to the ancient Greeks. (p. 257)

The term "ritualized opposition" refers to the metaphorical battle in the debates rather than a literal opposition. For Tannen (2002), this started with an interest in the use of dynamic opposition and verbal aggression among close friends and family that may function as a means to reinforce intimacy, which is a ritualized attack, not a literal one (p. 1653). This changed in her treatment of academic discourse as well as rhetoric of the news media. In these areas, opposition is destructive and searches for weakness and flaws in the work of the opponent while not being interested in the actual argument or its general strengths. In another words, agonism (ritualized opposition) refers to arguments that are unrelated to the original conflict or disagreement being brought to the table. Ritualized adversativeness is the knee-jerk opposition turning everything into a metaphorical battle and a battle of values (Tannen, 1998, 2002).

The word "agonism" comes from the Greek word *agonia*, which refers to a meaning that includes an automatic warlike stance. When debates are mediated in news magazines, the idea is that setting up a debate is the best way to deal with a topic. Yet news media also thrive on inviting people to the studio who

express the most extreme, polarized views representing "both sides" of the story. Again, this ritualized opposition highlights drama and conflict as a form more than revealing informed coverage of a difficult topic.

The terms "rituals" and "ritualized" are concepts used within the contact fields of media anthropology and communication studies often making use of concepts in different simplified ways that do not follow the depth of history and theorizing of them in anthropology. Following Nick Couldry (2005), "ritual" here refers to formalized action, using pattern, form, or shape, that gives meaning to the media event (p. 60). He adds a second, broad approach to ritual: "the insistence that the meaningfulness of these rituals depends upon broad, even transcendent values" (p. 60). Although research originally tied rituals to existential, mostly religious issues, the term "transcendent value" is by no means restricted to religion. Instead, "ritualized" opens up for the wider patterns of meaning that transcend the actual event or practice. In philosophy, the term "transcendent value" transcends the conditions of the possibility of knowledge itself, while in phenomenology, the term pertains to conscious experience.

For Couldry (2005), rituals are not so much approached as sites of management of conflict and masking of social inequality (p. 61), but in a broader (and lighter) version, media rituals refer to "the whole range of situations in which media themselves 'stand in' for something wider, something to do with the fundamental organizational level on which we are, or imagine ourselves to be, connected as members of society" (p. 61). For Tuchman (1978), strategic rituals refer to the enactment of standardized working procedures of journalists. Similarly capturing the transformation of experience into the journalistic genre is Livya Polanyi (1989), who pointed out that journalists do reporting, but they write stories. Reporting recounts events more or less as journalists believe they happened, while a story is a narrative that makes a point and expresses a meaning. News operates like the telling of a narrative. Some would call news a myth or a ritual. Common to all of these conceptualizations is that they serve as "a tool for emphasizing attention to the stories rather than the elements that go into them (i.e., facts)" (Peterson, 2007). So, what is important is not the information news stories contain, but the ways in which they articulate that information and how they are linked to larger systems of meaning. Journalists can adopt different stances such as eyewitness, representative, investigator, and interpreter and can draw on the field of journalism's own definition of "objectivity" and demand simplification and generalization to claim authority. Audiences derive meaning from these narratives, which are social meanings, and not from objective facts themselves (Peterson, 2007). The different ways ritualization and related concepts open up for alternative anchoring points in the news media and politics allows us to understand that publicly circulating narratives (such as a global clash between the "Western democracies" and "the Muslim world" and neonationalist beliefs, such as the "nation in danger" logic), can appear as a message detached from actual facts on the ground (Hervik, 2019).

Before turning to some specific forms of ritualized opposition in Denmark, the Danish context will be introduced through six brief glimpses taken from SERR research material that, in addition to illustrating the widely occurring extreme speech and thought, are intended to break with the decades-old image of Denmark as a fairy tale-like society and culture.

Denmark's Radio First Debate

The national public service television station Denmark's Radio (DR), and the semicommercial TV2, frequently choose to orchestrate debates on issues pertaining to the presence of people with migrant or refugee backgrounds in Denmark around the protection of Danish values. Debates are confrontational and include outspoken personalities of the far-right in Danish politics and people with views that are critical of the far-right. One example among hundreds is a television debate organized by Denmark's Radio on May 19, 2016. This debate received the headline: "The Debate: Who Threatens Danish Values" and continued for a few days on DR's Facebook page. The host in the studio frames the issue by asking: "Are we in the middle of protecting Danish values or, on the contrary, emptying them of meaning in an attempt to save them?" The phrases "Danish," "Danish values," and "Danish identity" are now loaded terms that, in public use, associate with the far right (Klingsey, 2008). In the studio is the outspoken anti-Muslim, if not Islamophobic, Martin Henriksen, member of the Danish People's Party, who supports the government; a centrist; an imam, but also the host's framing of the debate that supports the right-wing agenda. Besides an imam and chair for the radical right Free Speech Society (*Trykkefrihedsselskabet*), there are a handful of politicians—a total of eight guests.

In the debate, Martin Henriksen explains, "We receive foreigners extremely well, and regardless of how well, we receive people, but then the problem is that there are too many people in Denmark with a Muslim background. So, in some areas, we are simply too different." This racializing view builds upon three declarative sentences that function to establish facts as incontestable truths and usually go uncontested.

1. "We receive foreigners extremely well."
2. "There are too many people in Denmark with a Muslim background."
3. "In some areas, we are simply too different."

These statements are highly controversial and subjective. Given the minister of integration, Inger Støjberg's, celebration of 50 restrictive policies separating "native" Danes from minorities with refugee or migrant backgrounds, it is hard to maintain that Denmark is receiving foreigners well (Bilefsky, 2017). In addition, the ministry's official website continues to count, now at 112 (March 2019), restrictions made during the present government as an accomplishment. Henriksen states that there is a certain category of people in Denmark who are "too" different and incompatible in some areas. Since the restrictions are geared toward eating habits, clothing styles, living arrangements, schooling, number of children, and many more, this statement underscores a widespread extremist way of thinking and writing.

Second Television Debate

The second illustration of extremism derives from the same television debate series with a similar setup with people holding polar opposite views set for a debate that is meant to be dramatic and entertaining. The new debate took place on September 22, 2016, and was titled: "Has Denmark been filled up? Does Islam take up too much space?" (*Er Danmark fyldt op? Fylder Islam for meget*). This little window of extremism comes from an exchange between Martin Henriksen and Jens Philip Yazdani, an 18-year-old head of the student council at Langkær Gymnasium in Aarhus. The debate is tense, almost toxic, and

afterward, social media engagement explodes with comments that are equally confrontational and uncompromising. At a certain moment when the debate is particularly heated, Jens Philip Yazdani points out with emotional emphasis that while his parents came to Denmark and he was born and raised in Denmark, "We are just as Danish as anybody else!" Martin Henriksen interrupts and declares: "That will not make you Danish. Stop that nonsense." Jens Philip Yazdani goes on to say, "We are raised in Denmark, we have gone to Danish public schools, to Danish gymnasium. We are just as Danish as anyone else."

Eventually, the host, Clement Kjærsgaard, intervenes and tries to calm down the overheated debate. He then poses a question to Martin Henriksen, while he seeks to confirm his question with Jens Yazdani.

Host:	"Martin Henriksen, Jens Yazdani was born in Denmark, raised in Denmark. . . And you went to Danish public school?"
Jens:	"Danish public school."
Host:	"Danish gymnasium?"
Jens:	"Danish gymnasium."
Host:	"Is he not Danish?"
Henriksen:	"I don't know him. So that I can hardly answer."

In fact, Jens Yazdani's mother is Danish and his father is Iranian. But it is the absence of Whiteness and the name that play a role in this extremist racialization of Jens Yazdani. The extremism and its invisible presence are, in fact, enhanced by the host, who is also White, when he fails to question Martin Henriksen's Danishness according to the same criteria as Henriksen is using, after all, and following the logic that you cannot tell people's identity and belonging on the basis of skin color, name, or appearance. White males like the host and Henriksen cannot, on the basis of their "White" phenotypical appearance, be assessed as "Danes." They could just as well be "White" foreigners from another country.

The extreme media culture is not illustrated solely by Henriksen's statement and the framing of the debate, but includes the host, who, on the one hand, allows the tone, allows interruptions, and adds fuel to the fire by raising the question about Danishness, but on the other hand, does not reproduce a reciprocal relationship in regards to Henriksen (and himself), who are White, and asks if the person of color is Danish on the basis of appearance, while not asking Henriksen (or himself) the same questions. If you cannot determine Danishness on the basis of appearance, then Henriksen (and the host) cannot be seen as Danish either, or alternatively seen as non-Danish.

The debate is set within an adversarial frame of mind, where opposition is regarded as the best way to reveal the sides of the debate. Two people with widely different and polarized views "stand in for" or "represent" something wider as they are connected to members of different racial groups in Danish society (Tannen, 1998, p. 8). As the debate evolves, the extremist racialization in the debate enhances Martin Henriksen's Whiteness and Jens Philip Yazdani's non-Whiteness, which unfolds as a racial battle lost to the

White host. As Deborah Tannen (1998) has noted, while democracy may begin in conversations, it may get derailed in polarized debate (p. 25).

Facebook Extremist Comments

The third illustration of extremism in Denmark comes from an interview SERR conducted with a Danish Facebook user for her comments on issues relating to Denmark and Islam. During the conversation, the interviewee is being asked in context: "How [then] do Muslims interpret the Qur'an?" She answers: "Well, among other things . . . that women are worth less than men. And other people, they actually have to be killed." Such extreme declarative statements do not consist of an attempt at nuanced, fact-based renderings of the Qur'an or other sacred texts, but are confrontational simplifications and distortions that only make sense against Islamophobic narratives. The statement is simultaneously about "race" and "gender" (how Muslims are, and the status of women in Islam), which in racial experience is not an intersectionality. It is the only way in which racialization occurs (Benn Torres & Torres Colón, 2015, pp. 6–7). The narrative behind the statement, which Ekman also found in his study of extremist platforms, is repeated endlessly as part of the extreme media culture in Denmark in the press, television, and social media. As such, it illustrates Elizabeth Bird's (2003) argument that we cannot isolate the role of media in culture, because the media are firmly anchored into the web of culture (p. 3).

Extremist Cartoons

The Facebook commentators who were interviewed used extremist cartoons found through surfing the Internet or from their network of like-minded commentators. The fourth and fifth illustrations of extremism are two extremist cartoons taken from the Facebook account of an extreme right-wing interviewee. They are reposted, shared by others, and high-fived by many.

Besides the obvious Islamophobia, these two signifiers of extremisms are relevant for their approach to both Muslims and a group of people who the extreme right often refer to as the "left." According to Aurelien Mondon (2013), "The extreme right is a reaction, a reaction to the left and the extreme left, and more broadly to the enlightenment" (p. 18). Thereby, extremism culture is not exclusively directed at Muslims, and more generally so-called non-Westerner migrants, but also connects to domestic adversaries within the White majority, who are seen as endlessly naïve, tolerant, and ignorant. As Bangstad (2014), Keskinen and Andreassen (2017), and Eide, Kjølstad, and Naper (2013) have also shown, the extremist language is also directed against the left-wing, cultural Marxists, feminists, multiculturalists, politically correct, humanists, and so on, and as such, the extremism relates to the Eurabia conspiracy and Norwegian terrorist Breivik's killing of 77 young people of the Labor Party in Norway (Bangstad, 2014).

These two examples follow a pattern where a plain disagreement leads authors to use cataclysmic events and ideology from beyond the immediate circumstance in order to invest it with power and seriousness. Two decades ago, editorials of Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* first depicted disputed Danish Muslims with Pakistani backgrounds as the same "kind" of people as the Taliban extremists and then regarded them as despicable as the Nazis (Hervik, 2011). In the two figures, the use of the wolf (see Figure 1), the truck as a deadly weapon (see Figure 2), and blood are used to raise the local stakes, as well as depicting the "left" as

endlessly naïve. At the same time, the cartoons, which are found by searching the authors' names on the Internet, embrace the simplified complex representation insofar as the label "Islam" on the nasty wolf is accompanied by the tiny letters "radical." In this way, the cartoons can be verbally defended by claiming to represent only "radical" Islam, even though it is obvious that evil is clearly associated with "Islam" in general.

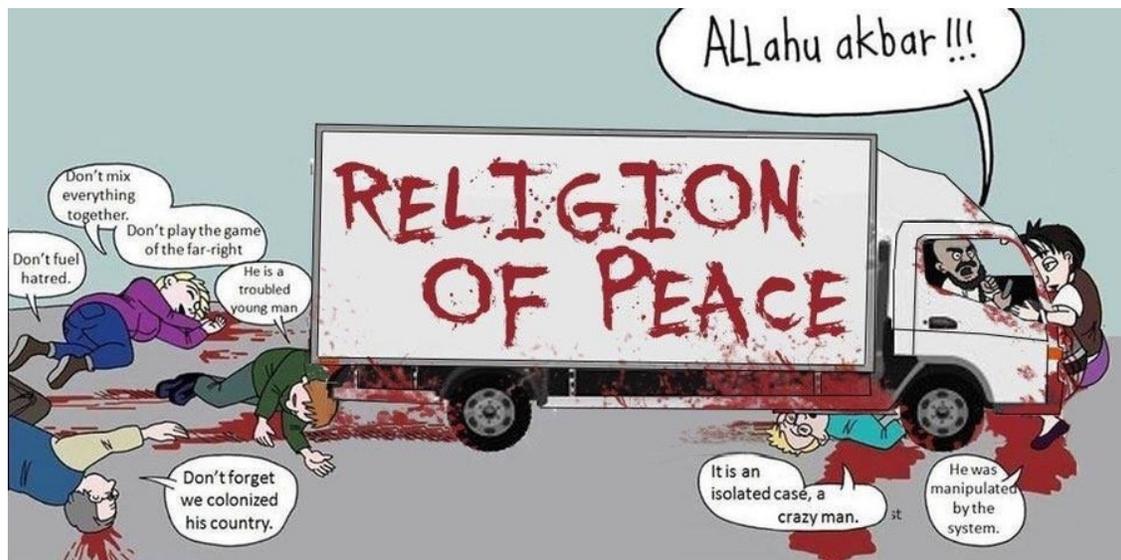*Figure 1. Death by political correctness.*

Figure 2. Religion of peace.

Racialized Reasoning

The sixth illustration of Danish extremism comes from an interview with an active far-right Facebook writer. She explains:

> We are a homogeneous *Norden* in Europe, and, basically, I think it is beautiful. We in Scandinavia [Denmark, Norway, and Sweden] are a distinctive kind of people. We, in Scandinavia, we form a distinct race [*folkefærd*]. We are pale, light in our skin. We reason and we . . . we may ask when do people become genetically civilized.

Later, the interviewee insists: "There will be a civil war. More and more [Muslims] are elected to our town councils. I don't think they should be given rights to vote at all." She goes on to make two more statements: "A cleansing civil war—it is about being the last chance. There is so much anger. In the [Facebook] threads you can see that it is ordinary decent people who are angry, they are furious." The interviewee continues:

> They should be repatriated to their own culture. The more they become and the more they breed. . . . If they have come by fate. Genuine exceptions. They can't just remove their descendants if they are Semites, or if they come from the Far East, they are Asians.

This interviewee also, emphatically, rejects any criticism of her stances as being racist. At the same time, she is using warlike rhetoric with statements that are part of a traditional racism that—besides the power dimension—racializes people into morally, genetically, and intellectually inferior. Such racism does not come as a single axis, subordination and inferiorization of certain other people, but coexists with other forms of subordination such as class and civilization.

The six empirical illustrations of extremism are taken from Danish practices of media events, commenting, and interviewing, as well as active commentators on social media, and in this way, they write and formulate themselves with an audience in mind. Extremism can be seen in the declarative statements about Muslims in Denmark: There are too many, they are too distinct, they are incompatible, they are dangerous; and the left-wing people don't understand these truths, while we are the ones who will fight to decide who belongs to the nation. This communication celebrates a certain community by castigating Muslims, non-Western immigrants, and the liberal left-wing.

Different Forms of Ritualized Opposition Critical Debate: Road Signs

In this section, I will introduce different forms of ritualized opposition within a single critical media event about road signs (showing refugees the direction and distance to where they came from). The extremism can be found in interviews as well as public commentaries that contain the inferiorization of human beings that occurs along racial lines. The writers of commentaries do not seem to care much for facts and accuracy, as they make extreme and agonistic statements.

The writers of the extreme right who were researched in the SERR project are also keen observers of the development of Facebook and other digital media constraints and opportunities. Most interviewees were making an effort not to use vitriolic language and had second readers who adjusted their language before publishing. They found that too-offensive language would be either shut down directly by Facebook or readers reported "extremist" statements to the police. Instead, several adjusted the tone of language and wrapped in the extremism more softly, for instance, garnishing it with extensive use of humor, sarcasm, and moral outrage.

Throughout the examination and analysis of commentary fields in Danish blogs, Facebook posts, and web-news commentary threads, the repeated use of different elements of forms of ritualized opposition was noticeable. Within a single media event concerning activist signs, two forms of ritualized opposition, namely high-fives and sarcasm, came to the forefront.

This case concerns the installation of homemade road signs on access roads to Thisted, a town in the northern part of Jutland (Denmark), allegedly hung up by members or supporters of the radical right-winged Party of the Danes (not represented in the Danish Parliament). The signs (see Figure 3 and Figure 4) looked like normal road signs but indicated the number of kilometers to, respectively, Iraq (Irak) and Syria (Syrien). The Danish state operates an asylum center in Thisted municipality. Thisted has been in the limelight due to accusations of male asylum seekers' inappropriate behavior in the town's nightlife. Thus, the road signs were meant to be a provocative demonstration of discontent with the current situation and the apparent message to the asylum seekers: "You are in the wrong place," and "Please leave in the direction of the arrow."

Figure 3. Facebook debate about activist road signs near Thisted.

Figure 4. Facebook debate about activist road signs near Thisted.

Facebook responses in the comments section included the following:

Anne Marie (April 23, 2016, 16:56): "Take to your heels, and we wish you a nice trip home."
     (no likes)
Birthe (April 25, 2016, 07:56): "A guide to the dissatisfied 'refugees.'" (1 like)
Rie (April 23, 2016, 15:14): "It is just a kind remark. . . . We show them the way to their
     own country since we treat them so poorly here in Denmark." (91 likes)

Ole (April 23, 2016, 15:14): "Well, then asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and other fortune
    seekers know which way to go, when they return to where they came from." (144 likes)

It is important to note here the significant difference between Tannen's ethnographic object and ours. While Tannen looks at opposition that is prescribed and, according to her, independent of the issue, or the academic text being debated, the opposition verbalized in our study emanates from online actors' (contributors and participants/validators) real concerns, frustrations, and anger regarding immigration to Denmark.

We should not undermine or ignore personal motivations leading people to exclude and discriminate— we need to take them seriously, listen to the content of their messages, and acknowledge them, in order to study them. Yet a simultaneous look to form or format could take us further in the analysis and understanding of the spreadability and persistence of online extreme speech as well as the ritualized opposition that "stands in" for the literal message and transforms it to "something else."

High-Fives as Ritualized Opposition

On April 23, 2016, the daily newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* created a Facebook event in which a link to an article about road signs was posted accompanied by the following text: "What do you think about the road signs?" A lot of people reacted to the post, and the Facebook event lasted for two days (which is the standard duration for these kinds of debates). In this period, the question received 825 comments together with around 4,900 positives likes, laughing smileys, and hearts (that is, people who approved of the signs). In comparison, only less than 400 reacted negatively with angry, sad, and gaping smileys. And while several participants commented that it was a humiliating and shameful act devoid of empathy, the majority of participants commented that the signs were a good idea and funny.

The off-topic questions and comments (identical with ones from previous seminars) as well as the seemingly coordinated critical stance toward the panel (putting up hands before the floor was opened for questions) suggested that they didn't want debate but battle. They took over the floor and dominated the answer to *Jyllands-Posten*'s question. No one else was able to ask questions. The subsequent high-fiving had a ritualistic/symbolic function to it that, in a way, confirmed these were "foot soldiers" who had successfully completed their mission for the day. One of these participants would later write an article on the basis of his experience in the seminar, which was subsequently published on some of the largest radical right websites.

High-fives happen when other commentators make visible or explicit that they agree with a particular comment or statement and/or think that it is spot-on, well written, and deserves praise. Originally, "high-five" was first recorded into the Oxford English Dictionary in 1981 referring specifically to the ritual of two people slapping palms together above their heads as a ritual sign of the celebratory emotion "way to go" ("The history of high five," 2014). We argue that high-fives, as well as comments that receive the high-fives, have a community-building and mobilizing function through these expressions of sympathy and support. During the study of Facebook and blog events, so far three versions of high-fives have been identified. They are expressed in:

1. Likes
2. Praising comments
3. Sharing another's comment on one's own Facebook wall

A fourth may be the inclusion of some irrelevant declarative statement about Islam. SERR calls them "high-fives" not for the behavior itself but the symbolic dimension of behavior. This is what makes it ritualized opposition. Liking or sharing another participant's comment is oftentimes more than just saying "I agree with you" or "well said." We can also perceive them as a way of expressing "we are on the same team (community)." The challenge, though, is to find out when the like is "just" a like and when it is more a ritualistic marker of an imagined community of sympathizers.

The social exchange that happens in the high-fives can be seen as having a mobilizing effect, which perhaps is most visible when other participants write that they want to share the comment in question on their own Facebook wall. When that happens, the message (in the comment) is not only spread, but others are actually doing something/taking action. One of our interviewees is particularly outspoken about high-fiving. She uses the word "like-hunters" and explains that it is nice to see your comment receive a lot of likes because then you know you have "hit the nail on the head." For this interview, themes with clothing restrictions, such as Hells Angels insignias on the back of leather jackets and the burkini, are two of the most interesting and easiest ways to get likes.

Sarcasm as Ritualized Opposition

Sarcasm can also be perceived as a certain ritualized way to perform and mainstream extreme speech. According to Elisabeth Camp (2012), "in speaking sarcastically a speaker implicates the opposite of what she actually says" or "inverts" the literal meaning (p. 588). Sarcasm can be a snide remark, or written sign, in a more or less humorous form that enables speakers to present a harsh or discriminating statement and at the same time minimize potential retaliation because "it is said as a joke." Or, using irony, the speaker is able to express something without actually saying it. Commentators not only use sarcasm, they also speak *about* sarcasm, when they refer to the joke inherent in the road signs (see Figures 3 and 4) and reproduce it through high-fiving other comments. In this, high-fiving participants' shared idea of sarcasm's fundamental position in Danish cultural practices is obvious, and accordingly, the capacity of knowing and understanding sarcasm becomes an exclusionary mechanism that leaves some outside of this cultural community of the like-minded.

Rie's prior statement—"It is just a kind remark. . . . We show them the way to their own country since we treat them so poorly here in Denmark"—receives a lot of likes (91) and gets 24 subcomments. Her short, sarcastic comment with the embedded kindness that serves to reverse a critique of Denmark's treatment of refugees is inhumane and ignores their human conditions. In other words, sarcasm is used within a Danish digital cultural framework.

Ole categorizes asylum seekers and refugees together with migrants and fortune seekers and adds that the signs "simply let them know which way to go, when they are to return to where they came from"—implicit: they should not stay. The sarcasm is hidden in the use of the word "simple," which signals kindness and practicality. Again, the sarcasm does not have asylum seekers and refugees as the primary audience.

Instead, the internal debate in Denmark about receiving, treating, and managing incoming asylum seekers and refugees is the primary object of sarcasm. Another expression of sarcasm comes from lumping four categories of people into the same bucket of unwanted foreigners. Ole Duborg's sarcastic comment is high-fived with 144 likes.

These two comments from Ole and Rie received many likes and comments, and these kinds of reactions are another important part of ritualized opposition. They confirm the community. This ritualized opposition is recurring (thus recognizable); ridiculing (express opposition); safe and transforms discrimination into something funny and likeable; and exclusionary, as it not only calls for the expulsion of people without legal and fair treatment of their individual cases, it also blocks out those adversaries who do not understand "good humor," which, in the end, is not humorous at all.

In sum, through sarcastic commentaries, commentators reach out and speak to a community of adversaries rather than seriously debate the challenges of receiving refugees. The original dilemma about refugees coming from a war zone with traumas (and Danish engagement in bombings); loss of family, friends, and residences; fragmented identities; fractured families; or escape from child enslavement or miserable dark living conditions is left untouched, as if to say, this is not Denmark's problem.

There are four additional points to be made from the analysis. The first is to note that the signs are in Danish, which shows who the targeted audience is. In fact, they are even put up by an extreme right nationalist/racist political party trying to establish itself. Secondly, joking, laughing, and sarcasm also point to sign-debaters speaking from a privileged position in which one is not a Syrian or Iraqi. Thirdly, sarcasm is viewed as an embedded, if naturalized, part of Danish culture. Thus, if you don't like the joke, you are not part of the community, and you can, or should, leave the country—which is also a point expressed in several other prior comments. Fourthly, the use of sarcasm not only blocks out immigrants but also the leftist, humanists, halal hippies and the politically correct, which are labels that those who object to the brutality in the sarcastic comment are given.

Extreme speech in the Danish online practice as analyzed here can best be understood as ritualized opposition, rather than approached through factual content or strength of argument. A focus on the factuality of the messages will inevitably yield moral outrage and attempts to set the record straight through a hard view of facts, which may be welcome and necessary; however, it also bears the contradiction, if not irony, of deepening polarization in society. Extreme language and activism of the right and radical right have successfully used ritualized opposition to ignore the facts and used it instead to build stronger bonds of solidarity that are shielded from facts and logic. Moreover, this success—from a radical right perspective—has now led to a mainstreaming of the right—to such an extent that it has become hegemonic.

Since ritualized opposition infuses the specific events and speech acts with wider elements of ideological discourse and circulating narratives, we need to rethink the term "digital extremist culture." The very focus on social practice shows that digital communication cannot be separated from the broader membership of society, where ideological inspirations and values are acquired, tested, discussed, and lead to forms of exclusion and inclusion. Digital communication cannot be separated along cultural lines from nondigital forms in a social practice approach.

The ritualized opposition analysis of high-fives and sarcasm suggests a form of community building functioning to recruit new members and strengthen existing communities through exclusion of certain categories of foreigners. As such, ritualized opposition in the Danish exclusionary reasoning holds an enemy-like approach to adversaries and foreigners that leaves no room for dialogue.

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