

Chapter 8

Mixed Parentage: Negotiating Identity in Denmark

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There are many who ask where I come from, though I can see myself that I'm half Japanese... Now I live in Denmark, so I think personally that I am Danish. But anyway as such, I like better the thought that I am Japanese. I think it is more interesting and different (Naja, 16 years).

“Mixed” Children—An Overlooked Category

When we consider how globalization today leads to more marriages across national and ethnic borders, it is a paradox that such families are hardly mentioned in academic research and literature in Scandinavia (Torngren 2011). Such “mixed” marriages and children challenge notions of “us” and “others,” as they represent a mixing of persons with different ethnic backgrounds (Williams 2004, 2010; Edwards et al. 2012). Small and King-O’Riain (2014) highlight an increasing political, public, and intellectual interest in themes related to “mixedness.” The most common designation imposed on mixed race people of all ancestries is the inference that they are fragmented beings (Mengel 2001, as cited in Ifekwunigwe 2004, 9). People of “mixed” parentage may also contend with old conceptualizations of mixed people as somehow less than a whole person. They are also “seen as culturally weak and confused individuals with a troubled mind” (Ifekwunigwe 2004).

In this chapter, we examine the situation of children of mixed parentage in Denmark with particular attention to notions of identity and belonging, with a point of departure in the Danish context and the phenomenon of mixedness.

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Our work is driven by three central questions: What are the children's own lived experiences in the temporal context of historical and contemporary understandings of mixedness? How do they define themselves? Do they contest the old notion of the "troubled mind" and show a way towards other paradigms? In Denmark, out of a current population of 5.66 million, 8.9 percent are immigrants and a further 2.8 percent are the descendants of immigrants¹ (Statistics Denmark 2015, 2016). As of 2015, there were 94,587 couples where one spouse was of Danish origin and the other an immigrant or a descendant of immigrants. According to Bille (2011), there are 39,354 families with children where one parent is Danish and the other parent is an immigrant or a descendant. The number of children of mixed parentage increased from 74,731 in 2007 to 85,773 in 2010—a rise of 15 percent in 4 years according to specially acquired data from Denmark Statistics. In Denmark, these children are categorized broadly as "Danes" (see the above footnote). In Norway, another Scandinavian country, there is also no specific category for children of mixed parentage: Children of one Norwegian and one immigrant parent must be categorized either as children from an immigrant background or as Norwegian children (Backe-Hansen et al. 2014). Such mainstream categorizations do vary from one country to another in different time periods.

However, countries with diverse populations—resulting from increased immigration and demographic changes—such as the United States or United Kingdom—have established a category of persons with a "multiracial" identity. That points to an important shift in thinking about race and ethnicity in these countries. In the U. S., people of mixed parentage were included as a separate group in the 2000 Census and seven million people chose this option. In the 2010 U.S. Census, approximately 9 million individuals, or 2.9 percent of the total population, self-identified as mixed. The current growth rate of biracial families is three times faster than that of the rest of the population (Pew Research Center 2015). Similarly, Aspinall and Song (2013) note that the mixed race population is the fastest growing segment of the British population and numbered 1.25 million in the 2011 Census.

Numbers and statistical categories do not tell us how these children negotiate their identity or relate to their parents' values and life. The children's experiences merit attention in their own right, and also provide useful insights into fundamental aspects of Danish society and transnational connections that might otherwise remain unnoticed. In this chapter, we focus on how children and young people describe themselves, form social networks, and express their subjective experiences of mixedness and transnational relations.

¹The definition of "descendants" is as follows: descendants are born in Denmark. Neither of their parents are Danish citizens nor were they born in Denmark. When one or both Denmark-born parents become Danish citizens, their children will not be classified as descendants. If both Denmark-born parents keep their foreign citizenship, their children will be classified as "descendants." Persons of Danish origin are persons—regardless of birthplace—who have at least one parent who is both a Danish national and born in Denmark (Statistics Denmark 2016, our translation).

Consequently, we believe that this study can serve as an entry point into a discourse about race—the socially constructed focus on the biological features including phenotypes such as skin colour and facial features that is a controversial topic in Denmark. Here we agree with Nader (2001, 614), who argues “If the biological category of race is without meaning, the social category of race is determining life chances.” The dominating Danish discourse about ethnic homogeneity hinders the ability to address everyday life paradoxes related to such chances (Jenkins 2011). In this light, historical attitudes towards mixedness, intimate relationships, and parenting across ethnic boundaries are an overlooked theme. How race has been tabooed through history impacts current understandings of racialization in the case of children of mixed parentage. This shapes the exclusion/inclusion dynamics faced by the participants in our study.

In the 1960s and 1970s, many labour migrants from Turkey, Yugoslavia and Pakistan arrived in Denmark. Some formed intimate relationships with Danish women, leading to children of mixed parentage who were visibly different. These relationships and families tend to be understood in terms that derive from earlier times of “racial mixing,” i.e. the history of slavery and colonialism. Larsen (2008) states that Denmark used about 100,000 black African slaves during the 17th until the 19th century—a fact hardly mentioned in mainstream Danish history. In Europe during the period of colonization and slavery, an image of the “other” as inferior and belonging to “another race” was formed. The relationship to the “other” (including Danes who traced their family back to slaves) is complex and problematic. This silenced part of Danish history reflects traditional restrictions on practices of racial mixing, where marriage across racial borders and children of mixed parentage would be stigmatized and sanctioned.

As we have seen, despite the increasing number of “mixed” children, the Danish state tends to ignore these children as a specific category in contrast to the UK and the U.S., where there are “mixed categories of identity” that reflect their colonial past and slavery and immigration history respectively. Consequently, in the UK, there is more openness and acknowledgement of being mixed in the past decades especially since 2000 (Tizard and Phoenix 2002).

In Denmark, people of mixed parentage are still invisible in the general statistics and their strengths and needs are not discussed in sectors such as educational and psychosocial services. It is certainly intriguing to think of this growing part of the population who are portrayed as “white” Danes while their mixedness officially ignored, yet—as we shall see—it is highly relevant to their lives and experiences within Danish society.

Mixedness—An Ambiguous Term

To examine how children of mixed parentage construct identity and a sense of belonging in everyday life, our use of the term mixedness needs to be understood. The term itself appears to presuppose the existence of “pure” marriages and

children. Therefore, we view the very category “mixed” as potentially problematic despite its use by researchers such as Aspinall and Song (2013) and Edwards et al. (2012). However, we have chosen to use it because our study shows that it is a socially relevant category, like the term “race” (see Nader 2001, above).

For the purposes of this study, we define children of mixed parentage and people of mixed descent as immediately descended from two racialized discrete and socially identifiable groups. These groups are socially constructed, implying culturally distinct practices and hierarchical positions (Olumide 2002; King-O’Riain 2014). These understandings can be contested by different stakeholders. “Being mixed” or “fifty-fifty” are the self-descriptive terms used by our research participants. One of the challenges of socio-psychological research is to link the abstract theory and the lived experiences of the participants. In the following section, three historical phases of mixedness are delineated, showing how mixed parentage has been conceptualized within a broad Euro-American context (Ifekwunigwe 2004).

From the 17th to the 19th century, mixed persons were considered culturally weak and genetically confused individuals, mainly due to—now discredited—evolutionary myths. Accordingly, people of different races were prevented from mixing through segregation and legal sanctions (Ifekwunigwe 2004). In the 20th century, these views have been challenged and legal restrictions were removed. A number of authors, some of whom themselves identify with mixed race, argue for the recognition of more complex and changeable identities (Ifekwunigwe 2004; Root 1996; Tizard and Phoenix 2002). They reject the now obsolete, but surprisingly persistent notion that people with mixed backgrounds are weak and have ambiguous feelings of identity (Olumide 2002). Currently, new myths appear: Mixed people may be considered to possess a stronger genetic profile, be more beautiful, healthier, and more intelligent than “mono-racial” people. These views arise from the older implicit premise that they are somewhat different from “mono-racial” people (Edwards et al. 2012). This premise is in turn challenged by new studies which indicate the diverse ways in which mixed people feel about how they are perceived (Ali 2012; Aspinall and Song 2013).

Through our empirical research we seek to establish how children of mixed parentage position themselves and construct identities in everyday life (Bang 2010). In the following, we present our methodology, theoretical framework and analysis of identity construction among children of mixed parentage in contestation with ideas of apparent purity and homogeneity.

Researching Mixed Children’s Own Perspectives

The first author conducted ten qualitative interviews, and the ongoing project was discussed by both authors (Bang 2010). The qualitative method involving a phenomenological approach gives us a deeper understanding of identity construction processes (Golafshani 2003, 600), as it is ultimately an effort to understand the meaning of human action or human experience in general (Conklin 2007, 276). We

Table 8.1 Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Background		Locality
			Mother	Father	
Naja	16	Female	Japanese	Danish	Copenhagen
Alex	11	Male	Indian	Danish	Copenhagen
Marek	18	Male	Indian	Danish	Elsinore
Mona	16	Female	Indian	Danish	Elsinore
Lærke	11	Female	Thai	Danish	Copenhagen
Nicola	11	Female	Thai	Danish	Copenhagen
Maiken	14	Female	Japanese	Danish	Copenhagen
Mia	14	Female	Philippine	Danish	Copenhagen
Ashvin	16	Male	Danish	Indian	Copenhagen
Henrik Christer	17	Male	Vietnamese	Danish	Elsinore

focused on children aged 11–18 years old and young people from Asian-Danish backgrounds—one Asian and one Danish parent—in order to focus on a narrow group of research participants based on both authors’ Asian background. This age group was chosen as children and adolescents in this developmental period are able to communicate more explicitly than in earlier phases. Also, this age range marks an important transition period from childhood to adulthood, where psychological processes such as identification and autonomy are especially salient.

The participants were very open and positive. The primary language was Danish, mixed with some English. They had volunteered to participate in the research, which they found interesting. They were contacted through relevant networks and all participants were located around the municipality of Copenhagen and a nearby town in relatively ethnically heterogeneous areas. Table 8.1 introduces all the participants in main demographic terms:

Theoretical Framework

We combine a post-structural approach, a first person perspective on people’s feelings, and theory about negotiating mixed identity with transnationalism. This is advantageous as it reduces the risk of reductionism (Køppe 2008, 15–17; Verkuyten 2005, 17). Holding the position that identity is socially established and negotiated, we also consider it important to gain an understanding of an individual’s personal feelings or reflections on topics about belonging and occupying a mixed position (Verkuyten 2005, 3). Within the broad theoretical framework of this book, how these children and young people relate to migrancy as a social space is an empirical question. In our case, perhaps “partial migrancy” is a better term as one parent is native and the other parent is a “migrant.”

Our theoretical understanding adds nuances to the concept of growing up in migrancy. Elsewhere in this book, writers emphasize that an increasing number and

proportion of the world's children are growing up in this space when they themselves are not migrants but their parents or even grandparents once were. In our study, only one parent is a migrant. Furthermore, the first chapter of this book elaborates that migrancy is inscribed on certain bodies by the larger society in general and legislative practices in particular. As we shall see, for some of the mixed children and young people, their appearance and responses to how they look are paramount.

We simultaneously look at how the environment affects each child, and how they choose and reflect on their own surroundings. Our eclectic approach allows us to look at identity from different perspectives.

The mixed identity theory, developed by Maria Root (1996), a pioneer researcher in the field, also inspires the construction of our framework. According to Root, there are three major strategies of negotiating identity, which may overlap:

- The first strategy describes how a child can bridge borders by having feet in both camps and respecting multiple perspectives simultaneously. The child can practice situational ethnicity and race by foregrounding or backgrounding different aspects of identity in different contexts.
- The second strategy highlights how a child can choose to belong to only one group.
- The third strategy outlines how a child of mixed parentage decisively goes beyond any borders and categories when having to describe or define himself or herself.

The subject is shaped according to the discourses he or she is taking part in (Rasmussen 2007, 349; Chow 2006, 202). This is important when we look at children and their experiences of alterity in society. Thus identity is constructed through communication and interaction with other people. Identity or self-narrative can be seen as a product of time and history, which perpetually changes according to certain beliefs and values. Identity construction is partly shaped in accordance with which discourse the person is taking part in.

The post-structural discourse allows for new ways of existing in the world. The child can construct a powerful self which reformulates outdated notions of identity (Hall 1992, 281; Honneth 2004, 463–464, 474). We acknowledge that although the individual is subjected to means of regulation and elimination within the discourse, the human being still has the possibility of constructing a powerful self. Thus, we want to avoid reducing the children to just reflections of social positions and consider their identities as more than a result of social structures and discourse (Verkuyten 2005, 22).

Our Understanding of the Children's Narratives

In this section, we present the children's own personal voices on how they view life in different domains. We have chosen to focus on four specific themes, which are based on close reading and analysis of their narratives. Our inquiry is centred on

self-descriptions, friends in school, festival and leisure time, and transnational ties. Our focus is directed towards different kinds of identity formation patterns among the children and how they negotiate identity in various settings.

Self-descriptions

Some participants define themselves as “half-half”—for instance Danish-Asian, such as the participants Lærke and Naja. In this way, they define themselves as a mixture of their Danish and Asian descent. Thai-Danish Lærke states:

Well, I guess I am Danish, but in a way I am also Thai because my mother is from Thailand, but I was born in Denmark, and when you are born in Denmark, you are Danish (...) Sometimes I don't know if I am a Dane or if I am half-Danish or half-Thai. There are a lot of people who don't think, well, if their mother or father is from Denmark, and the other parent from another country, then they just say that they are half-Danish and half-American or something like that.

It is evident that identity negotiations are constructed and influenced by different social contexts, such as family compositions, the influence of the non-native parent, transnational relations, friends and teachers in school and media coverage. Family composition seems to have an impact upon Japanese-Danish Naja and how she views herself. She presents herself in a way which can be analyzed as indeterminate (Aspinall and Song 2013) or ethnically ambiguous (E.A.), a term used by Ann Phoenix in Singla (2015, xii).

There are many who ask where I come from, though I can see myself that I'm half Japanese... Now I live in Denmark, so I think personally that I am Danish. But anyway as such I like the thought that I am Japanese. I think it is more interesting and different.

On the other hand, Vietnamese-Danish Henrik Christer goes beyond any categorization and simply regards himself a multi-cultural person perceived as a world citizen and a cosmopolitan, combining French/Vietnamese and Danish aspects.

I think it is wrong to be either or, well not wrong, but I like the idea of being a mixture and having different perspectives on different cultures and nationalities. I have studied French in primary school and high school, and I don't understand anything, but I like the culture, and I feel the French way of being appeals to me. However, other times, I also like to sit in a vest with a beer in my hand and watch football (laughing) and eat potatoes. In a way, I see myself very, well not multi-cultural, but maybe a little multi-cultural, I try to be like that.

In different ways, most participants described so far in our research relate to both cultures and claim their mixedness. Still, one participant—Mona—mainly identifies herself with being Danish—not mixed. She considers herself Danish above all. She lives in an upper middle class, predominantly Danish neighbourhood and describes her identity like this:

Well, I guess I am Danish, since I have grown up here. Even though I have a mother who comes from another country, I am still surrounded by my friends who influence me a lot,

and they are all Danes. Besides, this is what I am most comfortable with, and I don't think I would ever say that I was Indian. I do not know what it means, or how it is, because I have not really been in India so often, and I do not know what the country has to offer...

However, Mona defines herself in contradictory ways. For instance, she describes having a hybrid identity in terms of having different perspectives. She describes how the practice of evening prayer ritual, which she has learned from her Hindu Indian mother, is important to her:

I say my prayers in the evening, which is not so normal for Danes. I lie down in my bed and say the prayer, which my mother has taught me... My father doesn't have faith in any religion, so no Christianity.

The children's narratives show us that most of them negotiate identity by positioning themselves between both cultures when having to describe themselves to others. They express that they have roots in both groups and identify themselves with more than one culture, which gives a broader perspective on life. Some negotiate identity by mixing categories and claiming their mixed Danish-Asian heritage. However, one participant simply claims himself as a world citizen and thereby ignores any categories or need to place himself between two cultures. Another participant considers herself only Danish and plays down having a mixed heritage. Her self-narrative is contradictory, as she considers herself Indian in more private contexts. It seems that the dominant discourse in society is powerful; who does not want to fit into the Danish community? Moreover, it shows that the hidden race discourse is alive. Overall, most participants express having a mixed position, but Danish society has apparently not created a category that allows individuals to express such a mixed identity.

Social Networks

Another important focus in our research is context. To what extent does context influence who the children identify with? When they are among friends in their everyday life, do they then feel Danish or Asian or something completely different? In the following quote, Naja expresses how she identifies herself with her Asian heritage among her Japanese friends and emphasizes culinary commonality with them. On the other hand, she identifies as Danish during other common activities, such as dancing.

Then you have something in common with the Asian friends like food and culture (...) particularly food. Then we talk about, well, we eat a lot of rice and stuff, the Danes eat more potatoes, and then we cook together sometimes (pause). Well, a lot of my Danish friends, they don't like sushi, which is strange because I am so used to it... When I spend time with my Asian friends, then I just feel more Asian... I guess that is what we have in common, we are Asians (...) I dance with two of my Danish friends, so we have that in common, dancing and stuff.

Another participant, Henrik Christer, expresses very clearly this notion of having a changeable identity among his friends, but, in contrast to Naja, he declares that he feels more Asian among his Danish friends in his everyday life. This is the case when he has to explain in detail a specific Vietnamese cultural tradition like the Asian New Year:

Sometimes I feel more Asian when they ask about traditions that are normal for me (...) for instance, the Asian New Year, and then they ask if I also celebrate the Danish New Year and stuff. Then they want to know how I celebrate the Asian New Year. I think there is a difference in terms of who you are with—when you are with some friends who are more Danish than you, then you might feel more Asian, then the feeling is kind of amplified, I guess, but it isn't something I have investigated further, really (laughs).

Some narratives show us that a few participants only identify themselves with their Danish friends in school. This notion emphasizing common activity—participant in leisure time and being part of a “girl band”—is expressed by siblings Marek and Mona respectively:

Well, again it is limited how much I spend time with these people. Most of my time is spent with my classmates. Of course I know some of the others; I just don't spend time with people with another ethnic background, only Danes. I don't know why. I don't know if it is an unconscious choice. Well, I guess that is just how it is. Well, I think the girls from the drum majorettes have shaped me into becoming the person I am today. I started when I was only 8 (years old), it was new and you have in a way developed in relation to this environment... Yes, I guess all of them are Danes.

When we look at how the children negotiate identity among their friends, the participants express how identity is a situational construction. Some participants foreground or background their Asian identity according to which context and friends they are among. One participant foregrounds his Asian identity among his Danish friends, while another participant foregrounds her Asian identity when she is among her Asian friends. This shows that identity is changeable and complex, as one given situation can amplify either feelings of belonging or alienation. Only a few do not relate to different groups, which can be seen as yet another example of wanting to be included into the dominant group and not having an in-between identity. As seen before, the dominant discourse is powerful, as the fear of being othered is always present. One participant experiences this among his friends when they ask questions about his Vietnamese culture.

Subjective Experiences of Being Mixed

When we questioned the children about negative and positive aspects of being mixed, the answers indicate awareness at different levels. For eleven-year-old Indian Danish Alex, there are symbolic disappointments related to the fact that his mother has lived under different climatic conditions and avoids participation in Danish winter activities. At the same time, he points to the positive metaphoric

“spice” in his everyday life through his mother’s Indian culinary practices (Chaudhary 2007):

... my mother doesn’t like cold weather and in the winter, she wouldn’t go and play with snowballs with my father and me, she just wouldn’t join us. It is irritating, because I really want her to join us. The advantage is that I don’t have to eat just meat and potatoes all the time. My mother likes to make shish kebab, it is also meat but it is delicious.

For Naja, the advantage of having a Japanese mother are linguistic and broader geographical experiences through travel to Japan:

My mother, she rarely speaks Japanese, and we just had a Japanese cousin visiting us.... I can’t speak but understand when she asks us to brush our teeth... some Japanese. We had three weeks vacation in Japan, met my mother’s relatives. Japan is really different, I miss it. Japanese are so polite... It is really good service in the shops.

Mona, on the other hand, perceives herself as Danish, yet she is able to describe the advantages of being mixed as follows:

I think it is more interesting as you can try different things from two different cultures and find out how they are. You just don’t have one culture, it can be boring... It is great that when I come to India, I have a belonging to the country as compared to being only Danish and not knowing about other things. In your presentations... in school you can draw on two cultures, you can add perspectives and that is smart.

In terms of leisure time, most participants combine different aspects of the Danish and Asian cultures, such as religion, traditions and food habits, which show that they identify themselves with their mixed heritage. One example is Marek, who declares that he celebrates Christmas and Easter, but also Indian festivals. Moreover, he expresses how he relates to Indian religion:

I think I am a Hindu. I guess I am a mixture of my father and mother from not really believing in anything and yet believing in Hinduism (...). I have some prayers that I say sometimes, but I don’t say the Lord’s Prayer, I don’t, so I will define myself as being a Hindu.

When asked to describe themselves and their experiences of discrimination, the replies were rather evasive entailing subjective negation from some participants. Naja positioned her “Japanese” category as not subject to discrimination, unlike “others” with the explicit phenotype “black” as the ones who were discriminated.

Racism... no not all. I think also, not many people have anything against Japanese. I think if you are Black, then people have many prejudices ...in my school, there are such persons [with prejudices].

Alex, on the other hand, does not identify himself with having an Indian phenotype, implying the ethnic ambiguity mentioned earlier.

... When people look at me, they don’t think: ‘He is Indian’. People think I am Norwegian or Swedish.

Similarly, Mona also answers that she has not experienced discrimination because others cannot immediately tell she is of mixed-race background due to her

light skin colour. She points out that her brother Marek has a darker skin colour. Their narratives indirectly underpin the salience of physical appearance, especially skin colour in relation to discriminatory experiences, where light skin colour is privileged (Meszaros 2013).

No, because I don't look so Indian, so people don't think about it, especially as compared to my brother, he looks more Indian than me.

In contrast to the above three narratives of negation of personal discriminatory experiences related to phenotypes, Marek recollected one episode seven years back, in which he was perceived as Indian—not a mixed person—and told to return to his home country. The emotions of rejection paint a vivid story. Living in a predominantly white neighbourhood, with just one mixed Vietnamese-Danish friend, the comment was highly hurtful for him.

I think perhaps, it was once in the leisure time club, when I was young. I think I came to blows with one person... Liv, a Danish girl. I think I was in 5th class, where she said that I should go back to my home country, because she said that I was Indian... Go back to your home country, well, where to take home, my homeland? I am home. I think that's the only time.

Asked further about his reaction, he replied:

I think I was sad, actually. But yes, it went on and then she apologized also a week later. I didn't talk to my parents about it, it was once, it was not so important.

Reflecting on the issue of discrimination, Marek mentioned a current episode about naming “Racist of the year” in school. Despite claims of humour, he judged it as mean and patronizing, especially considering the stigmatization implied especially for his Turkish class mates.

There is some discrimination. There was the title—racist of the year, they said it was for fun. I could not just see the fun in it, because then I looked at my Turk classmates and... they did not feel amused.

Thai-Danish Nicola experienced being bullied in the school through ethnic slur “Chinese” because of her phenotype:

... the whole school is filled with immigrants and of course there are also some Danes, but there is probably a majority of immigrants, some always bully others. For example, now I am called Chinese, I have nothing against Chinese, but I'm not so happy to be called Chinese.

Nicola emphasizes that she is bullied often and how she responds either by overlooking the episode or questioning the persons perpetrating the discriminatory behaviour:

... so I ignore them because I do not really want to discuss with them. But then, if they are of my own age or class I can ask them why must you call me that?

Japanese-Danish Maiken talks positively about her Asian heritage when she spends time with friends or is approached by other people. Maiken considers herself lucky to tan faster and at the same time points to the disadvantage of standing out:

Well, it is not negative because the advantages are that you tan faster. I know a blonde Danish friend who gets totally red in her face. Still, it can be annoying at times, for instance, if you have your picture taken, and you stand among blonde girls who have totally white skin. Then you just stand there and look very yellow (laughs).

Even though Maiken laughs and uses humour and considers herself lucky, she comments that other people subject her to the “gaze”—i.e. subjected to being a visible object—due to her Asian appearance. Philippine-Danish Mia also feels that her Asian looks can have an impact on how she is treated. She narrates her experiences of discrimination by her handball coach:

Well, during a match, I have to sit on the bench and if someone with another ethnic background joins the team, he is discriminating against them as well.... I have told some of my friends about it and then just laughed (...) Besides, I think team handball is boring because I cannot really play when my coach doesn't want me to (...).

She convincingly demonstrates how the exclusion of herself and others is contingent on their ethnic minority background.

These narratives demonstrate a nuanced understanding of mixedness in this context of partial migrancy among the participants. They are able to perceive a range of positive aspects such as spices in food, double festival celebrations, linguistic plurality, broader cultural horizon, and belonging to another country, which will be discussed in the next section. One participant appreciates her mixed background, as she considers just one culture “boring.” The narratives also bring out negative aspects of being mixed as they experience racism related to phenotype: comments on skin colour or other visible features or the “gaze” that separates them from their Scandinavian classmates. They express in different ways how racial discrimination and othering causes hurt. The hidden race discourse exists. It is remarkable that none of the children discuss their different looks among friends or family, although they are aware that they look more “Indian” or more “Japanese” than others. Their silence about these experiences among their family and peers reflects the historical silencing of these issues and missing reflection of these salient themes with the “significant others” (Mead 1934). Finally, this confirms how difficult it is to negotiate oneself out of the margins if society ascribes a marginal position to you. The racial hierarchy exists and mixed children are subjected to it in different ways. Other studies also report that mixed persons have been subjected to racial slurs or felt annoyed by people’s assumptions about their mixed-race background (Ali 2012). At the same time, there is a positive possibility of close relations in other contexts such as the migrant parent’s country of origin leading to broader awareness and horizons.

Transnational Relations

In relation to the “migrant” parent’s country of origin, our research shows that some participants view their stay in Asia as just another aspect of their daily life. Indian

Danish Ashvin views his father's country, India, as a familiar place, where he spends time with his cousins, yet foreign regarding the Indian cuisine:

It is very different. Well, the food is different, which I have to adjust to, because they like it very spicy...if it gets too spicy, it is annoying to eat it. Apart from being in India during my holidays, I guess it is the biggest difference compared to being in Denmark. Instead of being with friends and playing football, I spend my time with my cousins in India and play cricket, so in a way it is the same. The culture is different, but you just adjust to it, and then it is just another part of your everyday life.

However, he also expresses the contradictions he feels when he identifies himself with multiple cultures, for instance, when it comes to different communication norms entailing respectful politeness towards the older generation in India (Chaudhary 2007):

Well, I like it in India (pause). I feel different because I don't have the same manners like the Indians. That is normal when I live my life in Denmark which is very different. I don't know how to explain it, but I feel kind of different from them, but I still like to be there. My family lives there, and I know them well, and I know who they are. I feel different, definitely, but it isn't something I feel bad about. I really haven't thought of it before.

Although most participants are perceived as identifying with their Asian background, Maiken is the only one who actually wants to live in Asia, based on some academic awareness and interest opportunities in Japan:

I would very much like to study at the university in Japan, but I don't know if I would live there, but I would like to try it out maybe a year or two because it sounds very exciting and challenging and stuff like that.

Mona, however, seems to feel uncomfortable when she visits India:

...there is a lot of pollution, and I really don't like the poor people, but of course I like to see my family. Then there are lots of cheap things to buy...but it gets too much for me when I stay there for a longer period of time. It smells badly (unclear), and you have to run across the streets, something I am unfamiliar with in Denmark where everything is more structured and clean (laughs).

Mona appreciates the Indian family ties, yet she feels uncomfortable being in India because of structural conditions—such as poverty and environmental pollution—and she thus perceives her mother's country of origin in predominantly negative terms.

Most participants in our research describe having roots in both groups and holding different perspectives when they visit Asia. One participant expresses how he simultaneously feels at home and foreign in India, and seems to describe a situational identity which changes according to context. Another participant faces the dilemma of combining different cultural lifestyles, which can be seen as a way of navigating and adjusting successfully in different settings no matter what. However, one participant identifies primarily with the Danish system, implying a "one camp belonging," yet perceiving the transnational family ties positively. These narratives do document active transnational ties in different ways and reflect the

partial migrancy especially relations and awareness of migrant parent country of origin.

Emerging Strategies and Paradigm

Practices of childhood in different social fields and negotiation of identity are far from trivial. Our findings show how many paradoxical ways of negotiating identity exist in everyday life among children of mixed parentage. The participants negotiate identity by combining various approaches, such as “having both feet in both camps” and practicing situational ethnicity, choosing only one group or simply going beyond any categories in various contexts. Some reject describing themselves with a limited category. They seem to require a new category of their own that expresses having an in-between “mixed” status. They contest the current categories and challenge this limited way of thinking, which hardly reflects real life. One participant stands out, as he simply declares himself a multi-cultural cosmopolitan and rejects narrow labels. Even the participant who declares herself to be Danish indicates a simultaneously positive awareness of multiple belongings. Our data shows that the participants overall construct their identity based on different negotiating strategies in everyday life (Root 1996).

Our theoretical understanding takes into consideration the context and the realities of society which shape the identity of the child and enables us to show how interaction with parents, peers, siblings, and community are important factors in shaping an individual's life. Along with examining the context, the theory places human existence in a specific historical time and space; the child can construct changeable identities while adjusting to a specific social environment.

The three strategies mentioned in the theoretical framework bring into focus the changeable aspects of different contexts, as identity is understood as a constantly changing phenomenon throughout life. Such a multi-dimensional model gives an opportunity to have more memberships and multiple identities with different groups (Root 1992, 6; Spickard 1992, 22). In fact, today a child of mixed parentage can choose to embrace some or all aspects of his identity, although within societal constraints (Spickard 1992, 21–22). In this way, social ambiguity and fluid identities are seen as possible ways of viewing oneself as defined and united.

The participants' narratives demonstrate that you can belong to multiple cultures. They see it as a strength and advantage, despite clear disadvantages. This notion challenges the simplified perception of belonging to just one group, a contrast to the historical perception of mixedness as pathologized (described in the beginning of the chapter). In fact, the children's self-narratives and identities are much more dynamic, having their own complex nature. Although most of the participants are proud of their mixed origin, they also report having suffered from discrimination and bullying. There is a big gap between how they see themselves and how the world views them due to continued ignoring of mixedness at the societal level. As there is no policy focus on the impact of mixedness in the educational and social

institutions in Denmark, children of mixed parentage are, should the need arise, also deprived of relevant psychosocial services and counselling, adapted to their experiences of “mixedness” (Singla and Holm 2012; Singla 2015). Their experiences of growing up in the social space of partial migrancy should be included in such services.

Along with expressing a feeling of belonging to more cultures, the children’s narratives challenge the old stigmatizing idea of being confused and troubled individuals, who should be pitied. A new paradigm slowly seems to be emerging in the field of mixedness studies, while the old one still exists. Children’s own voices and narratives contest this outdated perception, as they claim a powerful, interesting and proud identity by expressing various positions. McKenzie (2012) is in line with this notion: the voices of white mothers with children of mixed parentage in Nottingham show how they are proud of their children’s mixed and hybrid identities and interchangeable cultures, although these are simultaneously stigmatized by others. This study challenges other studies, which still pinpoint problematic aspects of mixedness (Barn et al. 1999; Twine 2010). Thus, a new paradigm is developing that argues against problematic discourses that focus on troubled and confused minds. However, at times they are ignored, stigmatized and discriminated against by Danish society.

Furthermore, when the children were asked about discrimination, their answers were evasive. Several of the children had experienced prejudice in their everyday life. Such discriminatory behaviour affects the mental health—not only of the child—but also of the person who discriminates (Cohrs and Kessler 2012). The hidden race discourse from mainstream society exists and some of the children express what it feels like to be excluded in everyday life situations.

Methodologically, it requires a very safe setting to reveal such experiences, which we, to some extent, must have managed, as they all seem to confide in us. Suki Ali (2012) has studied mixed children, mixed race politics, and senses of solidarity among mixed race people in Britain, arguing that no child should be raised as a mixed child without being able to discuss being mixed. In our study, not even one participant talked openly with their families or “significant others” about looking different than their peers or some family members. The silence is striking. Although the participants are proud of their mixed background, they have ambiguous and negative feelings when required to discuss their Asian looks: Physical appearances matter. The links between history and the present day are fascinating, significant and disturbing. A study about Danish-Japanese young people in Denmark (Nielsen et al. 2016) also entails that that their identity is affected by mixedness in different ways, though the theme should receive more attention so that young people can embrace the gift of being mixed with all the advantages and disadvantages that come along with it.

Nevertheless, identity can be regarded as a construction and a changeable phenomenon, which indeed reveals itself as very context-dependent in our study. At the same time, the process of negotiating identity should be seen in interplay with society’s restrictions and ideology. In order to avoid discrimination, some argue that young people only identify with one group or nationality. As we have seen, it is

not always possible to ascribe a positive alterity while being marginalized. This proves that constructing a powerful identity has its limitations contingent on the broader context.

Concluding Comments

Our study adds nuances to the phenomenon of mixedness empirically and theoretically, rather than simply positivizing mixed identity. The history of race and mixed identity within the Danish context contributes to an understanding of contested childhoods and growing up in “partial” migrancy for these children and young people. They negotiate different identities in different settings. They have agency, which they use to claim complex and changeable selves, and they contest the notion of belonging to just one group even though they are still ignored and at times stigmatized by society. Although they are still young individuals, they are not just passive individuals to be cared for. Their mixed identity is plural and dynamic (Tizard and Phoenix 2002, 234) and if supported they have potential to contribute positively to any society.

Although they do experience exclusion and contradictions, the participants in our study still contest the stereotypical notion of being confused and lacking a sense of belonging. They express their simultaneous subjective belonging to several places or cultures, as growing up in sedentariness and in migrancy.

New studies—not only from Denmark, the UK and the U.S.—show that similar identity processes take place on a global scale, in countries like Germany, the Netherlands, France, Japan, and Brazil. While some hide their mixed background due to shame and fear of harassment, others highlight their mixed identity as an advantage (King-O’Riain 2014, 9, 263). A need for new categories is emphasized in Denmark. The young individuals of mixed parentage in Denmark contest being labelled as “Danes,” “migrants” or “foreigners”—they are just mixed. As this is becoming increasingly common, the emergence of a new paradigm such as indicated by us is perhaps only to be expected. Though embedded in the Danish context, these findings can be generalized to other Nordic countries as there are commonalities in the way these categories are constructed. The findings can also be generalized to a global context to some extent, based on the methodological analytic generalization.

The present study underpins the need for further investigation on mixed children’s and young people’s situation, also in Denmark. On the group level, it is crucial to discuss mixedness with their families and the significant others. How are their relationships with peers, teachers, caregivers and other professionals? Much more research in this field is needed, both at the societal, group, and personal level, as a growing mixed community is evolving globally (King-O’Riain 2014, 274). Due to globalization, the population of mixed people will expand to become an increasingly noticeable part of contemporary society. Therefore, we must examine related themes around identity, such as status, resources, privileges, race, ethnicity,

inclusion, exclusion, stigma, and power. The contested belongings have to be addressed, and we must move beyond simplistic dichotomies, because mixed children and young people are growing up in the context of migrancy, yet they are both ethnic minorities and majorities at the same time. They influence the present and the future of the societies into which they are born and the society which their “migrant” parent comes from originally. They also influence their families as active and mixed persons in context of migrancy. Thus, it is crucial to embrace the mixedness of identity in contemporary societies.

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