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What It Means to (Not) Belong: A Case Study of How Boundary Perceptions Affect Second-Generation Immigrants' Attachments to the Nation¹

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ABSTRACT

Across Europe, the symbolic boundaries drawn against Muslim/Middle Eastern immigrants and their children are increasingly rigid and exclusive. While there is broad agreement in the literature that external symbolic boundaries matter for individuals' self-identifications, the process by which boundaries translate into experiences of (not) belonging is theoretically underdeveloped and empirically understudied. Through inductive analysis of in-depth interviews with second-generation immigrants of Middle Eastern descent in Denmark, this study contributes to the literature by examining boundary *perceptions* as the mediating link between externally drawn boundaries and subjectively felt belonging. The analysis demonstrates widespread agreement in interviewees' perception of a bright boundary. At the same time, however, there is variation in the degree of belonging, which is explained by the interviewees' perceptions of their own position in relation to

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the boundary. A central contribution of the study is a suggested reconceptualization of the concept of belonging to improve our understanding of the complexity of how second-generation immigrants simultaneously feel attachment to and distance from the nation.

Keywords: symbolic boundaries, boundary perceptions, national belonging, second-generation immigrants

INTRODUCTION

One of the most hotly debated topics in contemporary Western Europe is immigration and the place for immigrants in recipient societies. Increasingly, these debates are framed around issues of boundaries and belonging; that is, the question of who can be counted as part of *our* community. In several Western European countries, the answer to this question is a rather exclusive notion of national membership which means that even the children of immigrants, born and raised in the country, are considered not truly or completely part of the nation. A central worry accompanying the resistance is that “they” are not committed to “our” way of life and to being one of “us” (Foner and Simon 2015).

Inspired by these observations, this article examines how second-generation immigrants of Middle Eastern descent experience national belonging in Denmark; a context where their symbolic inclusion in the surrounding national community is far from self-evident—at least in the eyes of the members of the majority population.

The literature on second-generation immigrant identity has developed our understanding of the complexities and challenges of belonging experienced by ethnically or racially distinct minority individuals. Especially in the American context, where this research has a longer history, researchers have demonstrated that ethnic identifications may be less of a choice (in contrast to white (European) immigrants’ “symbolic ethnicity”) and more a reactive response to the perceived distance with which they are met by the host society (e.g., Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut 2008; Zhou and Xiong 2005). There has, however, been less attention to the question of *national* belonging (Schneider et al. 2012: 232), and the research investigating the topic is dominated by social psychological studies that tend to treat national belonging as an either/or property of the individual rather than being formed and negotiated in the meeting with the host nation’s boundaries.

This means that studies have mainly focused on individual-level correlates of belonging without properly addressing the role of the cultural context. While building on research that has recently placed emphasis on the power of others' ascriptions for second-generation immigrants' possibilities of belonging (in particular Hopkins and Blackwood 2011; Slootman and Duyvendak 2015; Zhou and Lee 2008), this article distinguishes itself by explicitly theorizing about how individual belonging is constrained or enabled by dominant cultural notions of "us" and "them." I also employ a more inductive approach which seeks to uncover what national belonging means to the study objects themselves, leading to a more nuanced understanding of the concept and its cultural conditions.

The study is based on in-depth interviews with second-generation immigrants in Denmark with Middle Eastern backgrounds. As argued below, Denmark is part of a greater European trend of growing resistance towards Muslim/Middle Eastern immigrants and I treat the case as one of bright boundary drawing. The study investigates how this boundary is experienced by its targets, offering insight of potential comparative significance to other cases of bright boundary drawing. The conditions under which the findings may generalize are discussed in conclusion.

The purpose of the case study is theory-building, offering contributions to three distinct research areas. First, there is a growing literature on the consequences of national boundary drawing for integration. The dominant approach is to conceptualize boundaries in terms of immigration and integration policies (Ersanilli and Koopmans 2011; Goodman and Wright 2015; Wright and Bloemraad 2012) and to ask what different ideas about the requirements to become a national means for different integration outcomes. While this is a very important question, the broad-brush approach of these studies means that the process by which the macro-political level is supposed to translate into immigrants' lived experiences is usually theoretically underdeveloped and left empirically unexamined. The present study shifts attention from the macro to the micro level,

focusing on the boundary *perceptions* of second-generation immigrants as the proposed mediating link. With this focus, the study also offers a corrective to the tendency to see second-generation immigrants as passive victims of boundary drawing by demonstrating the different ways in which they accept, challenge and negotiate boundary messages from the host nation.

The second contribution relates to the literature on everyday nationalism (building and in different ways expanding on Billig's (1995) concept of banal nationalism; Antonsich 2015; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Skey 2013). The main argument in this literature is that much of the "work" done by the nation as an imagined community (Anderson 1991) goes under the radar because researchers have failed to pay sufficient attention to how ordinary people (often unconsciously) make use of and draw on concepts of national boundaries and belonging to give meaning to their everyday lives. While this literature has focused on those who "unquestionably belong" (i.e., people of national ancestry) (Skey 2013), I ask similar questions about how the nation is comprehended and imagined among a group of individuals—second-generation immigrants—who are not safely positioned within the boundary from the outset. Given their less secure position, they are likely to be much more aware of the character and contour of the boundary. By showing how second-generation immigrants' everyday lives are marked by their awareness of national boundary drawing, the study advances our understanding of the contemporary force of national imageries.

The final contribution relates to the concept of belonging. In contrast to the dominant conception of national belonging in the literature, I find that interviewees operate with a two-dimensional understanding of their attachment to society. In line with expectations, many of them struggle with feeling (completely or truly) Danish due to their sense of a lack of acceptance from the Danish community. However, almost all of the interviewees feel that Denmark is their home and that they belong there. To make sense of this schism between feeling at home but not Danish, I propose the concept pair of *belonging in* and *belonging with*. I argue that these concepts enable a more nuanced

understanding of the complexity of belonging for individuals who find themselves in-between attachment and othering.²

NATIONAL BELONGING AND PERCEIVED BOUNDARIES

The concept of belonging has grown in popularity in recent scholarship but is seldom explicitly defined in the studies where it is used. In its most basic sense, belonging involves identifying with and feeling attachment to a social group. As highlighted by Lähdesmäki and colleagues (2016) in a recent review of the use of “belonging” in academic writing, belonging moves beyond the concept of identity by referring to more than self-categorization; it involves ideas of connection and embeddedness related to the experience of being part of a bigger community (Skey 2013). One of the most widely used metaphors for what these emotions concern is the notion of being “at home” (Duyvendak 2011; Lähdesmäki et al. 2016; Yuval-Davis 2006). “Home” is understood here not as a physical place but “a symbolic space of familiarity, comfort, security, and emotional attachment” (Antonsich 2010:646).

² The research agenda advocated here parallels an emerging literature on how distinct symbolic boundaries shape individuals’ responses to stigmatization (Guetzkow and Fast 2016; Lamont and Mizrachi 2012). While the present study shares with this research the micro-level approach and the idea of studying the effects of boundaries on those targeted by them, I take a step back to ask how boundaries are perceived in the first place and how this affects individuals’ ideas about their belonging. Thus, I understand responses to stigmatization as a step following later in the causal chain.

Although belonging may be derived from attachment to other communities than the nation, national belonging is considered to be of central value, because—in a world consisting of nations—the nation is a social context that permeates everyday life (Billig 1995). From this sense of belonging, people derive feelings of comfort and security (Skey 2013), worth and recognition (Lamont et al. 2014:12), grounded in the image of being included in a bigger “us” which transcends many other particularities (e.g., class, gender, age). This is also associated with a sense of status, as being part of the “us” gives competence to making judgements about “others” who are not so safely positioned within the national community (Skey 2013). Highlighting the dimensions of power involved in constructing belonging, Antonsich (2010:652-653) argues that any analysis of the “personally, intimate feeling of being ‘at home’” must necessarily take into consideration how this feeling is conditioned by the “politics of belonging”; that is, broader societal definitions of who belongs. This argument reflects the basic point that self-identification always occurs in interplay with the categorization done by others (Jenkins 2014). To capture this, I present the concept of boundary perceptions.

The boundaries in focus are symbolic, understood as “conceptual distinctions that we make to categorize objects, people, practices and even time and space” (Lamont 1992:9). Because symbolic boundaries point out who belongs with whom, they constitute the foundation of social boundaries (i.e., materialized differences in behavior, social groupings, and resources). Their power depends on being established as intersubjective schemes; that is, widely accepted understandings of “us” and “them”. In turn, I define boundary perceptions as the outsider view of these distinctions – in the present case second-generation immigrants’ ideas about what in- and excludes from being part of the nation.

The boundary perspective is central in nationalism studies. Recent scholarship in both citizenship- and integration policy and majority attitudes has focused on how the different ways in which

nations are imagined has consequences for who is seen as a member of the nation (Bail 2008; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Kunovich 2009; Wright 2011a, 2011b). Less attention has been paid, however, to how those on the margin of the national community (i.e., immigrants and their children) perceive the boundary and how this affects their subjective experience of national belonging. Following Alba's (2005) distinction between bright and blurred boundaries, the expectation is that belonging is more easily developed in national contexts where the distinction between "us" and "them" is less clear (blurred). In contexts where the distinction is unambiguous (bright) (Alba's example: Muslims in Europe), the expectation is that individuals falling on the "wrong" side will experience exclusion and hindrance of belonging.³

I focus on second-generation immigrants, as they constitute a particularly central group for understanding how boundary perceptions affect feelings of national belonging. While most people are usually able to take their national belonging for granted because they are considered to belong "without question" (Skey 2013:84), second-generation immigrants inhabit a symbolic space that renders questions of belonging highly salient. Indeed, second-generation immigrants are in many ways positioned within the nation in the sense that they possess a host of markers usually associated with national membership; they are born on the country's soil, have been brought up in national institutions, speak the language fluently, and have national citizenship. At the same time, they carry markers of difference which may produce the experience that the majority population does not see

³ Note that Alba's (2005) theoretical argument concerns "parity of life chances" for the second-generation members of an immigrant minority compared with their peers in the ethnic majority. While Alba's focus is thus on the functional/material side of integration, I argue that national belonging can be considered an essential resource, the access to which is expected to depend on the majority's boundary drawing.

them as fellow nationals; they lack national ancestry, they may be visibly different from majority members, they may be of another religion than most, and so forth. As a lack of belonging among members of this group cannot stem from being unfamiliar with the national society, second-generation immigrants occupy a position that puts the symbolic processes of belonging at the forefront of analysis.

As mentioned, the study is situated in Denmark, where 9.5% of the population are immigrants, with another 3% being of the second generation (Statistics Denmark 2016). Especially since the beginning of the century, there has been a strong, persistent political focus (from governments of different political colors) on limiting the number of immigrants, with reference both to economic and social cohesion arguments. Middle Eastern culture in general and Islam in particular are often framed as being in opposition to “core Danish values” (Jensen et al. 2010; Mouritsen and Olsen 2013), with suggested associations of maladjustment and criminal behavior (Simonsen 2016a) and the implication that people of these backgrounds are particularly difficult to integrate into Danish society. Shifting focus from politics to public opinion, survey data shows that the Danish majority population gives relatively high priority to both ascriptive and achievable criteria of national membership (i.e., above the mid-point in importance rankings, see e.g., Simonsen 2016b; Wright 2011b). The observations that Middle Eastern culture and Islam are central, negative focal points of Danish politics and that the majority population regard ascriptive criteria (e.g., ancestry) as being important for being a true Dane motivate an understanding of it as a case of bright boundary drawing. At the same time, the priority given to achievable criteria may serve a counterbalancing effect, as second-generation immigrants are likely to be able to live up to them. As a final remark in connection to the interpretation of the case, the survey data quoted above place Denmark in a middle field on both the ascriptive and achievable dimensions as compared to other Western countries. In addition, political and public concern about Middle Eastern immigrants is widespread

across Western Europe (Foner and Simon 2015). Thus, Danish boundary drawing does not appear exceptional, and while the particular way in which the boundary is drawn will be unique to the Danish context, the insights from the study may carry comparative significance for understanding the situation of second-generation immigrants of Middle Eastern descent in other Western European countries.

DATA AND METHOD

To investigate micro-mechanisms of boundary perceptions and belonging, I conducted in-depth interviews with 20 second-generation immigrants in Denmark. The data collection process aimed at producing a saturated picture of second-generation immigrants' understanding of how "us" and "them" are defined in relation to the Danish nation. This happened after few interviews, indicating broad agreement in boundary perceptions. Although the sample is small, the point is to enable in-depth understanding of boundary perceptions, notions of belonging, and the processes connecting the two, rather than give a precise picture of the distribution of individuals in different categories of belonging in the population of second-generation immigrants in Denmark (for which qualitative interview data are ill suited anyway). The value of the study thus lies in evidencing "the operation of a set of cultural understandings currently available for use by cultural members" (Denzin 2001:63), which in turn informs a suggested reconceptualization of the concept of belonging.

The interviews took place in the spring, summer, and fall of 2015. The interviewees' parents have Middle Eastern backgrounds, which is the case for most 15–25-year-old second-generation immigrants in Denmark (i.e., Turkey, Syria, Lebanon/Palestine, Iran, or Iraq (or, in a few cases, a mix of these countries); Statistics Denmark 2016). All of the interviewees live in or around Aarhus, the second-biggest city in Denmark (after Copenhagen). It is unclear whether the urban setting

should make interviewees more or less observant of boundaries, but it is fair to say that interviewees typically have bigger networks of other second-generation immigrants in big cities as compared to individuals living in smaller towns. This means that interviewees probably have more people to share their experiences with, potentially making them more reflective about the issues at hand.

The sample is almost gender-balanced (11 female, 9 male), and all of the interviewees come from lower middle-class backgrounds (the class position of the majority of non-Western immigrants in Denmark; Sabiers and Harboe 2014). I chose to focus on young people (aged 16–23 at the time of the interview), both because this is the age cohort with the most second-generation immigrants of Middle Eastern origin and because issues of identity and belonging are generally particularly salient in this life stage. As such, I assumed that the interviewees would have these questions on their minds and that they matter in their everyday lives. At the same time, this is also a period of socialization, which might render these individuals particularly sensitive to boundary drawing as compared to older second-generation immigrants. This is not a problem for the study but should be considered when evaluating the potential generalizability of mechanisms across age cohorts.

Interviewees were recruited through local schools (primarily an ethnically mixed 10th grade center, an ethnically mixed high-school, and a few university students), with a few subsequent contacts made by snowballing. Prospective interviewees were told that I was interested in talking to young people with Middle Eastern backgrounds about what it is like to live in Denmark when one's parents come from another country. Those interested in participating in an interview were invited to contact me, and contact was sometimes established through a teacher.

Lasting between 1–2 hours (mean duration around 1.5 hours), the interviews were conducted at a place of the interviewees' choosing, typically in a quiet room at their school or a meeting room

offered by myself at the university. One interviewee invited me home to his family's apartment. The fact that most of the interviews were conducted in a school setting might have accentuated school-related themes in the conversation, although this seemed a natural theme for discussions in all of the interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, starting with interviewee self-presentation, conversation about everyday life, family, and friends, and then moving to more focused questions on whether the interviewee feels at home in Denmark and feels Danish. The last part of the interview would then move from the personal to a more abstract level, inquiring into the interviewee's ideas about what is typically Danish and whether anything includes or excludes one from being seen as Danish. This course of the interview—moving from the personal to the general—was intended to avoid priming of boundary perceptions before the interviewee had a chance to reflect more freely on his/her belonging. As shown below, however, boundary perceptions were often spontaneously provided as grounds for (not) belonging, demonstrating that the interviewees themselves closely linked their own sense of Danishness to external notions of “us” and “them”.

Concerning my role as interviewer, it is relevant for the reader to know that I am a member of the Danish majority population (revealed to the interviewees by way of name, accent, and appearance). Reflecting on how this may have affected the interviews, one initial note is that the interviewees naturally have extensive relations to members of the Danish majority population, such as their teachers and classmates. In contrast to their teachers, however, my age (25 at the time of the interviews) clearly helped send the signal that I was not a distanced authority but more “on their level”, as also reflected in the style of language used in the interviews. I also experienced an advantage associated with the fact that I do not share background and experiences with the interviewees, as they were very committed to explaining and elaborating on how they think and feel as they could not rely on me knowing “what things are like” (see also Lamont 1992:18–19 for a

similar experience in cross-cultural interviewing). Finally, rather than regarding the interview as a supposedly artificial situation (as sometimes advocated in methodological discussions), it should be acknowledged that identities are always context-dependent. As such, being interviewed by a majority member may represent one interaction among many with members of the Danish majority in which interviewees are made aware of questions of belonging (Bochove et al. 2015:5). While social desirability (i.e., interviewees wanting to “prove” or perform their Danishness) could be a reaction to this interview set-up, the fact that notions of belonging span a wide spectrum across interviewees (as shown below) suggests that my majority background did not make interviewees hesitant to express ambivalence, distance, or negative attitudes about Danish identity.

For purposes of analysis, interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the software programme NVivo. The analytical approach was inductive, conducted over two rounds of coding—first an open phase of in-vivo codes, using interviewees’ own words and expressions to capture the content. Guided by my research questions and these in-vivo codes, I subsequently established a closed coding frame for the analysis. The main codes concern feelings of belonging (from secure identification to dis-identification with Danes), reasons stated for having these feelings, and perceptions of in- and exclusion criteria in terms of being accepted as Danish. See below and in the online appendix for details concerning the content of these codes.

BOUNDARY PERCEPTIONS

The first step of the analysis focuses on interviewees’ boundary perceptions; that is, what they experience as criteria of inclusion and exclusion. These criteria were mentioned naturally throughout the conversation, as in connection with conversation about experiences with not being seen as Danish, and they were later explicated when I asked more directly about conditions for

national membership. Focusing on a group of individuals who are particularly targeted in Danish boundary drawing, I expected interviewees to perceive the boundary as bright, in effect producing complicated national belonging. Indeed, there was broad consensus among the interviewees about the experience of it being difficult to achieve inclusion in the Danish nation. Almost all of the interviewees mentioned three criteria of exclusion: to be a (practicing) Muslim, to speak other languages than Danish—primarily Arabic—or to speak with an accent, and finally to have a “non-Danish” appearance.

The second step of the analysis (below) focuses on feelings of belonging and sheds further light on these criteria and what they mean to the interviewees. For now, it is relevant to note the widespread agreement about what excludes one from the Danish national community, as this suggests that the boundary exists on an intersubjective level and colors individual understandings of the social world. To the interviewees, the three criteria together materialize in the experience that it is the Arabic-cum-Muslim Other who is excluded from the Danish nation.

DEGREES OF (NOT) BELONGING

While there was wide agreement about the experience of a bright boundary, I found variation in the degree of national belonging across interviewees. Four categories of belonging that emerged from the coding of the interviews are described in the following, and the subsequent analysis points out how the different degrees of belonging connect to how the interviewees understand their own positions in relation to the boundary.⁴ Figure 1 displays my definition of the categories, the typical

⁴ Note that I did not find any meaningful differences regarding age, gender, or education in the four categories of belonging.

kind of statement that would make me place an interviewee in that category, and, in parentheses, the distribution of interviewees over the continuum.

Figure 1. Continuum of feelings of belonging

At the one end of the continuum, seven of the 20 interviewees express feeling Danish while the remaining 13 all have reservations against taking on that identity label. Identifiers are characterized by their confidence in stating that they are Danish and in experiencing this as a feeling that cannot be challenged. This also means that it is a constant or permanent feeling they can take with them in different aspects of their life. This contrasts with the three ambivalent identifiers who say that they *sometimes* feel *somewhat* Danish—but never completely so because it is not a secure and stable feeling. The degree to which they feel Danish also varies across social arenas, being weaker, for instance, in family settings or when they feel their Danishness challenged. Moving to the right on the continuum, the six non-identifiers differ from the ambivalent identifiers in terms of experiencing their lack of Danishness constantly: everywhere they go, they are non-Danish. Lastly, the four dis-identifiers actively reject even imagining being Danish. They are very secure in this conception and often place themselves in opposition to what they believe it means to be Danish.

The following analysis casts light on how the boundary is experienced as ever further from the interviewees' reach as we move to the right on the continuum. I start with the 13 interviewees with reservations against identifying as Danish.

RESERVATIONS AGAINST IDENTIFYING AS DANISH⁵

Seeing yourself being seen: "When you've got black hair, you're not Danish."

Common to all 13 interviewees with reservations against identifying as Danish is a strong sense of not being seen as a Dane. This idea is permanent and not tied to specific situations. As one interviewee explains, "it's just like, no matter where you go, you know that people they think, like; 'He's not Danish'." When asked how they know that people perceive them as not being Danish, all of these interviewees mention a certain gaze: "It's how people look at you." More often than not, it is not that "people"—understood as members of the Danish majority population—explicitly say to the interviewees that they are not Danish; rather, it is a subtle feeling of being "othered". The sensitivity to *the gaze* is closely related to an idea of being revealed by one's appearance. For some interviewees this is reflected in incidents where people that they do not know (e.g., customers in a shop where they work or substitute teachers in school) have been surprised by how well they speak Danish. While in a sense flattering, this praise has a clear subtext—namely that they were not expected to speak Danish well because they look like they do not come from Denmark. Nadima, an 18-year-old woman with parents from Turkey, summarizes such an experience: "I don't get why it's

⁵ All interviewee names and personal details have been anonymized. Quotes are translated from Danish to English by myself.

such a surprise [that I speak fluent Danish]... But it's like, when you've got black hair, you're not Danish."

For many interviewees, the awareness of how they are viewed by others is what prevents them from seeing themselves as Danish:

Interviewer: What about—would you say that you feel Danish?

Naja: No [laughs a bit].

Interviewer: No? How can that be? Why aren't you Danish?

Naja: I don't know. It don't feel it [nervous laugh]. Well, in SOME respects, like... That I'm, well, I'm born in Denmark, and I've got a Danish passport, and stuff like that. But there's always something else, which IS foreign, and you can see that on me.

Interviewer: So...

Naja: Then I think you can never be, like, 100% Danish, -ish.

Interviewer: Okay. When your parents come from another country?

Naja: Yes. Maybe if you're from Sweden or Norway, or... But not if it's like the Middle East and like that.

Interviewer: Okay. Is that because you look different? Or what is it about?

Naja: I think so.

(16-year-old woman, mother from Palestine and father from Iraq)

Like Naja, many interviewees understand themselves as “foreign”, although they also note that they are born in Denmark and have lived in the country all their lives. Relatedly, several interviewees state as a fact that they “come from” their parents’ native countries—something which several spontaneously mention in their self-description. For others, this primarily becomes relevant when people in their surroundings ask where they come from. The fact that the interviewees provide their *parents’* native country in response appears to reflect a genuine feeling of it not being completely right or true to say “I come from Denmark”, as they feel that “Danes” do not see it that way.

In parallel to seeing oneself as coming from somewhere else, many interviewees refer to themselves as “immigrants”, reflecting how “Dane” is a category that they perceive to be largely unattainable. They therefore resort to a category that resonates with how they feel they are seen. In this way, they place themselves outside of the boundary to the Danish nation and, so to say, unconsciously affirm its existence—as when Ulima, a 20-year-old woman with parents from Syria, says that she “can’t deny” that she “is from Syria”; a statement which she acknowledges refers more to appearance than birthplace.

In no position to be “just” Danish: “I don’t know what Danish IS”

The group of ambivalent identifiers often stress that they “behave like Danes” (i.e., go to parties, drink alcohol, have Danish friends). For them, the primary—often sole—reason for being insecure about declaring that they are Danes, or that they feel Danish, is the gaze described above; that is, the idea that despite them embracing “Danishness”, they are not always seen as Danes.

In contrast, the non-identifiers and dis-identifiers also show a fundamental insecurity about what it means to be Danish, and they point to this as an additional reason for not being able to say that they

feel Danish. Interestingly, then, although I ask specifically about the subjective experience of belonging (*feeling*), they require a clear-cut, objective definition:

Interviewer: Do you feel Danish? Are you Danish?

Imad: I, I don't know [smiles]. Because, you can say... What IS, what is Danish?

I mean... I don't know?... I don't know... I can't say, like, "I'm Danish." Because I don't know what Danish IS... Is it, is it this, that idea that you... love the Queen and the royal family, and eat *frikadeller* and all that? Or is it just that you... want to live in the country? If it's just that you want to live in the country, then yes.

But... if it's that thing with the royal family and that stereotype, then... then I don't know, actually. So, it's unclear.

(18-year-old man, parents from Turkey)

In these conversations about what it means to be Danish, interviewees list both very minimalistic definitions of Danishness (having Danish citizenship, wanting to live in Denmark) *and* draw on very stylized, "thick" stereotypes (eating pork, loving the royal family, celebrating Christmas). This appears to resonate with the results from survey research reported above in that the Danish majority values both achievable and ascriptive criteria of belonging. The fact that the two groups of criteria point in different directions (toward "blurred" and "bright" boundaries, respectively) seems to create a sense of despair among the interviewees in this group. It is suggested that the possible list of criteria is indefinite and that they will never be able to figure out nor satisfy the "full" definition. At the same time, however, they wish that there would be one such definition, and some of them challenge me or "Danes" in general to provide it, because they feel that "Danes" should know. Two points should be noted here. First, asking members of the Danish majority population to provide *the* definition implies that these interviewees do not feel entitled to have their own opinion about the

matter. In this way, they suggest that they do not have sufficient “national cultural capital” (Hage 1998; Skey 2013), understood as the resources invested in those who are unquestionably national to make judgements about the location of more marginalized groups in relation to the boundary. Second, it reflects a lack of comfort with just feeling Danish. As one interviewee says, she feels Palestinian and does not need to define what that is, because “feelings are feelings, and I feel I’m Palestinian”—but “Danish, I don’t feel... that’s not a feeling, as such.” Thus, while the claim to be Palestinian requires no further justification, it appears to these interviewees that Danish is something that cannot merely be felt; it must be objectively defined. And because of the indeterminacy of the definition, they conclude, like Imad from the quote above: “I can’t say that I’m Danish. Because I don’t know what Danish IS.”

These feelings are coupled with a notion that their peers of Danish ancestry can just *be* Danish; they do not need to explain, justify, or even *think* about what they feel:

Interviewer: Do you think your thoughts about this thing—feeling at home and being Danish—that they are different for YOU than for someone who has Danish parents?

Maya: Uhm, I’m almost sure that they are, yes. They, well... They ARE just more Danish, that’s how it is. Because their parents are Danish.

(16-year-old woman, Lebanese parents)

As such, the need for a definition only applies to those without a secure place within the boundary. Sometimes, interviewees perceive this disparity in the access to the Danish label as unfair, but it usually stands unquestioned. The understanding is that some are more entitled to be Danes than others, and this entitlement comes down to who your parents are.

Being the negative other: “This guy here, he could potentially be a terrorist”

The dis-identifiers are distinguished from the non-identifiers by actively distancing from what is perceived as Danish. This distancing appears to be a reaction to the experience not only of being seen as non-Danish but of being negatively othered. This is specifically tied to observations of what happens in Danish (social) media and politics, suggesting that political awareness or political interest is a characteristic that may push individuals from the non-identifier category to the dis-identifiers. Interestingly, interviewees in this group refer to the debate about newly arrived refugees and migrants as something that affects them deeply—not just as empathizers but as *fellow* targets in what they call the “send-them-home” debate.

All of the interviewees are Danish citizens and know that they cannot be “repatriated”. Joking with “being sent home” (understood as their parents’ native country) marks an idea of being unwelcome and unwanted. It also suggests that Denmark may not be a completely secure home, at least in the symbolic sense. This is often coupled with indignation and concepts of unfairness:

Zada: There are just some people where you just think “OK, relax”, like—I’m also born here in Denmark. I’m a Danish citizen. I have a Danish passport. Why, uhm, like... How Danish do I need to be, really? How Danish do you need to be to be in Denmark? To be a Dane, really?

(17-year-old woman, parents from Lebanon/Palestine)

In addition to feelings of unfairness associated with never being Danish enough, the interviewees in this group have the impression that people in their surroundings have stereotypical ideas about “people like them”, especially tied to their religion: Islam. This makes them feel “exposed”, in turn leading them to take active steps towards proving that they are the “good kind of immigrant” by distancing themselves from the criminal, radicalized, troublemaker that they feel is often the default

expectation of them. This means avoiding speaking Arabic in public because they feel that people are afraid of Arabs and might think they are terrorists. The men in this group also say they are perceived as criminals or gang members if they dress in loose sweatpants and padded jackets, and the women who wear the Muslim headscarf have a clear idea that “Danes” think they are oppressed (rather than having freely chosen to wear it). In this way, the interviewees are very sensitive to the visual markings of negative otherness that are tied to their bodies and reduce them to a stereotype that they must constantly disprove:

Malik: ... hair color, and eye color, and skin color... A significant part of me which I need to present—it’s associated with criminals and terrorists, so... when I present myself, it’s on the basis that he, this guy here, he could potentially be a terrorist.

(18-year-old man, parents from Syria)

Importantly, the idea of presenting oneself as “the good kind of immigrant” is not tied to any desire to be seen as Danish. The wish is to be seen just as Zada or Malik—an appeal to boundary blurring, which is attempted by distancing themselves from that which they feel has shown them distance: the Danish national community. As Malik from the quote above says: “you need to be accepted by the Danes ... and that has proven impossible.” For the same reason, they consider it an act of self-deceit and lack of self-respect if anyone with immigrant background tries to behave as and claim to be Danish.

FEELING DANISH

The analysis of interviewees with reservations against self-identifying as Danish stands in stark contrast to the last group of interviewees: the identifiers. This is illustrated in the simple, uncomplicated, and self-evident manner with which they express what makes them Danish: it is about having been born and raised in Denmark, about living and attending school in Denmark, about knowing Danish “inside out”, about speaking Danish and “thinking in Danish”, and about seeing one’s future in Denmark. Laila’s statement is very representative:

Interviewer: What MAKES you Danish?

Laila: Well, I just think it’s that thing with me being born and raised here, and uhm... this is where I have my education, this is where I want to live, and... live on, like. I don’t have, well it’s not like I have any intentions of moving to Lebanon ... this IS where I want to be... this is the language I want to speak. And this is where I want to get my education.

Interviewer: Yes. So your thoughts about your life—they belong in Denmark?

Laila: Uhm. When I see my future, I see it in Denmark.

(16-year-old woman, parents from Lebanon)

As the quote shows, the minimal requirements regarded as insufficient among interviewees with reservations against feeling Danish now form the basis for national belonging.

How does this relate to boundary processes? My analysis shows that there are two rather different routes to national belonging in this group of interviewees; one is boundary crossing and the other is boundary expansion. For three interviewees, boundary crossing (i.e., moving from one side to the

other while keeping the boundary intact; Zolberg and Woon 1999:8), has been possible because they do not possess the excluding markers mentioned by the other interviewees, allowing them to “pass” as Danish:

Reza: ... so, I’m not a Muslim myself, or anything. I’m like, very Danish, if you can say it like that. Like integrated, in a way. And I like to go to parties and stuff like that with my friends...

(18-year-old man, parents from Iran)

By motivating his feeling of Danishness in this manner, Reza shows that the boundary has been personally permeable, while confirming the contours of the boundary by drawing on the exact same exclusion criteria that prevented the 13 interviewees above from national belonging. The two other interviewees in this group, two young women, also subscribe to the notion that being Danish is about adopting behavior that involves partying, drinking, and having a boyfriend—and that being Muslim is antithetical to being Danish.

Finally, the interviewees in this group draw on the boundary marker of appearance to motivate their own Danishness. Both of the women do not wear the Muslim headscarf, and they say that they know they look rather Danish (in terms of being light-skinned, having red cheeks, and wearing tight jeans)—which they state as a reason for being seen as Danish. They compare this to their siblings or friends who look, and therefore also feel, more “foreign”. By motivating their Danishness in contrast to being Muslim and not looking Danish, the three interviewees reproduce the conception of a rigid and bright boundary, leaving very little personal agency and room to maneuver in order to be included among the insiders.

The route to feeling Danish for the remaining four interviewees differs considerably from the three boundary crossers. While they also note the same exclusion criteria—speaking Arabic, being

Muslim, looking different—their idea of the excluding power of these criteria is much less categorical than is the case for all of the other interviewees in the study, including the boundary crossers. They acknowledge that people with darker skin and black hair are not immediately considered Danish, but this does not imply a conclusive judgement. In fact, they find it natural that people have questions, and they take on the task of explaining or even of meeting the need for explanation before questions can arise:

Jamal: When I'm asked whether I'm Danish or... Palestinian-Lebanese, then, well, I'm Danish WITH a Palestinian background. So I'm a Dane. And that's how I feel. And, yes.

Interviewer: What does it mean that thing with...

Jamal: First and foremost, it explains the looks. Then that's clarified... Because, if I come out and say that uhm... "I'm a Dane", then that person will have some questions in his head. So it's much easier.

(16-year-old man, father from Palestine and mother from Lebanon)

Like Jamal above, all of the interviewees in this group are aware of their different appearance, but their looks are only a mark of otherness until they are explained.

Importantly, it has not always been self-evident to the interviewees in this group that they could be Danish. In particular, it has been a challenge for them to reconcile their religious identity as Muslims with their ideas of what Danish behavior entails. Several of them refer to previously having had "black-and-white" beliefs about the incompatibility of Danishness with having a Muslim background. However, growing older and acquiring Danish friends has produced more nuanced ideas about what it means to be Danish. Iqbal, a 23-year-old man with Palestinian parents,

recalls how he realized that some of his friends with immigrant backgrounds began partying and drinking in their teens, while some ethnic Danes in the elite sports club he attended did not drink. This told him that he could be a Danish Muslim—sharing many things with Danes, while refraining from “showering naked [at the gym], eating pork, and drinking.” For all of the other interviewees in the study, being Muslim is seen as a very strong exclusion criterion, but these four interviewees have expanded the boundary to make room for Danish-Muslim identities, aided by experiences of acceptance from members of the majority population. Moreover, in contrast to how the other interviewees might refer to themselves as immigrants, these four boundary expanders refer to themselves as Danes and find it important to do so publicly in order to tell people who might have another impression that “actually there are some people who have other roots but who still feel that they are Danes.” This attitude involves taking on a great deal of responsibility and agency in terms of making it possible for *majority* members to also expand their vision of the boundary.

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

Figure 2 sums up the analysis. For most interviewees, the boundary is perceived as the solid, thick angle farthest to the left. This boundary encapsulates a circumscribed, narrow definition of what it means to be Danish, and it excludes all others who do not fit the majority template by not “looking Danish”, having mixed language use, and practicing Islam. Even the boundary crossers depend on this definition of the boundary in their self-understanding of their Danishness. What distinguishes them from the ambivalent identifiers is that they are free from the gaze related to a different appearance and therefore feel accepted to the extent that they can identify as Danish. The three categories of interviewees with reservations against identifying as Danish are placed with increasing distance to the boundary to illustrate their different ideas about how close they are to the Danish

community. Ambivalent identifiers think of themselves as engaging in “Danish behavior” but lack the confidence of boundary crossers because they do not have the luxury of being free from the gaze. Non-identifiers are one step further from the boundary because their need to get an objective and clear-cut definition of Danishness has been disappointed, leading them to give up on the idea of being able to prove to “Danes” that they belong. Finally, dis-identifiers are very outright and almost political in claiming it impossible to ever be Danish because their observations of the political debate tell them that one can never be accepted by the Danes.

Figure 2. Interviewees’ self-positioning in relation to the Danish national community and associated boundary perception

The figure also shows that the boundary expanders actually move the boundary (the dashed angle) as far out as to capture the non-identifiers, as the redefined boundary allows them to be practicing Muslims while also being Danish. The difference between boundary expanders and the groups of interviewees with resistance to being Danish seems to be positive and meaningful relationships to

majority members which have helped them gain a sense of agency in redefining the terms of inclusion and exclusion. The only group that cannot be counted as Danish under the re-defined boundary are the dis-identifiers, who actively renounce a wish to be Danish, which is an important part of how boundary expanders “perform” their Danishness.

In sum, the analysis demonstrates how different degrees of belonging are related to different interpretations of one’s position in relation to the boundary. At the same time, the broad consensus in interviewees’ boundary perceptions also indicates the macro-power of boundaries as *intersubjective* frames that affect individual lives by restricting the possibilities of imagining belonging. Even the four interviewees who have managed to expand the boundary told stories of obstacles to reaching the point where they could begin to see themselves as Danish.

TWO DIMENSIONS OF BELONGING

While the above has focused on belonging in terms of identification as Danish, my analysis suggests that the sense of national belonging actually has two dimensions rather than the one defined in the literature (cf. earlier in this article). Below I discuss these two dimensions, which leads me to present a reconceptualization that nuances our understanding of second-generation immigrants’ scope for negotiating belonging.

During the interviews, I asked each interviewee, “Do you feel at home in Denmark and do you feel Danish?” (as if it was one question). Drawing on existing literature (Antonsich 2010; Duyvendak 2011; Skey 2013; Yuval-Davis 2006), I conceptualized these as two sides of the same coin; that is, that (lack of) home and (lack of) national identification go together. As shown above, it does indeed seem as though there is a connection for the dis-identifiers for whom Denmark is not a completely secure symbolic home. However, all of the other interviewees were very confident in stating that

they feel at home in Denmark. Even among the four dis-identifiers, only one interviewee said that he does not feel at home, while the three others said that it is a mixed feeling, as some things speak for and others against feeling completely at home.

To understand what “home” versus “Danish” means to the interviewees, I suggest a distinction between *belonging in* and *belonging with*. The feeling of *belonging in* Denmark is self-evident to the interviewees, motivated with reference to the fact of having been born and raised in the country and always lived there. It has to do with everyday life, knowing “how things work” and being used to the conditions in Danish society. As such, it is a very practical feeling that bears resonance with Bourdieu’s (1990) habitus concept; interviewees express feeling safe and comfortable because they know the unspoken rules about how to behave. In short, they are like fish in the water; Danish society is their natural environment. Several interviewees contrast this to how they see their parents “fall through” in Denmark because of their heavy accents or inability to speak Danish or because they do not understand Danish norms. Feeling *belonging in* also means that most interviewees cannot imagine moving away from Denmark because that is where they feel most at ease and most “in tune” with society’s values and how life is lived.

Belonging in could be understood to be all of the things required in a definition of national membership: intimate knowledge of society, commitment to living one’s life there, and respecting the norms and rules that apply in that society. Self-identifying as Danish is often much more demanding for the interviewees, however, as illustrated in the above analysis. In contrast to *belonging in*, *belonging with* depends on the idea that others think that *you belong with them*. Reflecting on Antonsich’s (2010) point that we need to consider both the personal sense of belonging (understood as the feeling of “home” in Antonsich’s conceptualization) and the boundaries circumscribing it, my analysis shows that boundary perceptions only affect the idea of (not) being part of the Danish national community, whereas the idea of home is unaffected.

The fact that home is more easily accessible than feeling Danish resonates with findings from Ersanili and Saharso's (2011) study of second-generation immigrants of Turkish descent in Germany, France, and the Netherlands. Based on survey data, they show that respondents in all three countries feel significantly more "connected" to the country of settlement (what I call *belonging in*) than they feel like nationals of that country (*belonging with*). While the authors grapple with interpreting this finding, I believe that the distinction between two forms of belonging gives meaning to it, indicating the potential for broader applicability beyond the present case. Furthermore, the fact that interviewees insist on distinguishing between "home" and "Danish" is central to understanding the potential ways in which belonging may be constructed and claimed, even in the face of a bright national boundary. Because interviewees see home as tied to a process of socialization rather than social identity, it gives them a sense of control and entitlement, especially through comparison with their parents, who have never completely understood the norms of Danish society. The distinction can thus be interpreted as a means of handling the peculiar situation in which these second-generation immigrants find themselves: being in-between attachment (to Danish society) and othering (by the Danish community).

DICUSSION AND CONCLUSION

With its micro-level perspective and inductive analytical approach, the study provides new insights into the experience of (not) belonging in the face of bright boundary drawing. It moves beyond the simple assertion that second-generation immigrants' national belonging is complicated in such a context, and illuminates different ways in which belonging is negotiated and expressed. A significant finding is that reservations against national identification vary in degree, while identification with the national ingroup provides a sense of security that renders scaling irrelevant.

The different degrees of not belonging matter because they are associated with different levels of hopes of belonging and with varying feelings of closeness or distance to the majority community. This suggests that future studies should devote more attention to the different experiences of *not* belonging.

The study also highlights the power of national belonging; it is associated with a sense of confidence and agency for those who manage to claim it and conversely a loss of power for those who do not. From this perspective, the unequal access to belonging experienced by many of the interviewees in the study may have consequences that parallel those of economic inequality, as it affects their sense of efficacy and ability to act on equal terms with people who “belong without question”. In particular, the experience of not being entitled to having a say in what it means to be Danish involves the risk that these individuals will refrain from engaging in a broad range of debates of concern for the society in which they live.

Reflecting on the power of belonging also relates to the suggestion to treat belonging as a two-dimensional rather than one-dimensional concept. Indeed, finding another way to claim national belonging appears to be crucial for feelings of entitlement for the interviewees. In addition, the distinction helps bring to light that—contrary to popular stereotypes—the resistance among second-generation immigrants to see themselves as nationals does not mean that they are not attached and committed to society and the norms that apply. Quite on the contrary, they want to live their lives and to be part of the society in which they feel most at home. What is missing is not commitment but rather feelings of acceptance as fellow nationals.

I hope that the proposed mechanisms and concepts will inspire analyses of other cases of bright boundary drawing to assess the comparative significance of the present findings. One condition that appears to be crucial for the experiences documented in this article is the meeting with ascriptive

notions of national membership that challenge basic identity traits of the individuals in question, such as their religion and appearance. In addition, the salience of national belonging makes it difficult for these individuals to avoid defining themselves in relation to or against Danish boundary drawing. Finally, the fact that the interviewees are born and raised in the national society seems to be an important factor, both in making it difficult to disregard the boundaries drawn by that society and in enabling the claim to *belong in* the nation even when it seems impossible to *belong with* the members of the national majority. Considering these conditions, it seems likely that the disconnect between identifying as a national and feeling at home in the nation also could be found among second-generation immigrants and national minorities in other societies (e.g., Muslims in Europe, as suggested in the discussion of the study by Ersanilli and Saharso (2011)). How far the insights travel must, however, be decided in future empirical studies.

In closing, I want to underline the value of examining the boundary from the perspective of those on the margin. Whereas national belonging may be naturalized to the extent that majority members take it for granted and do not experience it as something that plays a role in everyday life, questions of national belonging seem to pop up on a daily basis in the lives of the individuals in this study. Most of these questions have their basis in the everyday nationalism that majority members express. While few interviewees told stories of direct racism or discrimination, the experience of being looked at in a way that tells them they are different and being asked questions of belonging that “Danes” would not be asked are daily confrontations with boundaries that place them outside the national community. The majority members who praise these young people for their language skills or who insist on knowing where they “really” come from likely do not realize that they are effectively drawing boundaries. The subtle demarcation of difference, however, enters into a matrix of identity denial for these young people. Considering the boundary from their perspective might also make majority members more aware of the practices of everyday nationalism which—often

unintentionally—reproduce a narrow idea of who can be part of the national community out of concepts of national belonging that are not questioned by those who fit the template.

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Appendix. Central codes from the closed coding phase

Code	Subcode	Description	No. of sources	No. of references
<i>The feeling of (non-)Danishness</i>		Relations to the feeling of being Danish (continuum, four categories)		
	Dis-identification	Rejection of Danishness	4	18
	Non-identification	Lacking feeling of Danishness	6	23
	Ambivalence	“Yes and no”	3	12
	Strong identification	Feeling Danish without reservations	7	30
<i>Reasons for being Danish</i>		What interviewees perceive as elements which make them Danish		
	Danish future		2	3
	Danish school		3	7
	Danish friends		5	11
	“This is where I come from” – “this is my country”		4	10
	“It’s what I feel”		4	6
	Born and grown up in Denmark		7	14
	“I behave Danish”		5	10
	Talk Danish		8	11
<i>Reasons for not being Danish</i>		What interviewees perceive as elements which make them non-Danish		
	“The feeling is just not there”		3	4
	“Don’t know what Danish is”		4	9
	“How others look at me”		12	43
	“How politicians talk about ‘us’”		5	7
	“I don’t have Danish parents” – “genetically I’m not Danish”		5	8
<i>Home in Denmark</i>		What kind of feeling (lack of) “home” is to interviewees		
	Yes	Feeling at home in Denmark	19	69
	No	Not completely at home in Denmark	3	11
<i>Proving you’re Danish</i>		How interviewees prove their Danishness when they feel it is needed	11	17
<i>Proving you’re not the bad kind of immigrant</i>		How interviewees prove that they are the “good kind” of immigrant	11	35
<i>Boundary perceptions</i>		Markers which excludes one from being seen as Danish		
	Religion	Being Muslim / practicing Islam	16	21
	Language	Speaking other languages than Danish, primarily Arabic	19	40
	Looks	Looking “non-Danish”	17	23
<i>Where do you come from?</i>		Replies to the question (when asked by acquaintances, strangers, etc.)		
	Denmark		6	9
	Parents’ home country		18	31
<i>“We immigrants” – “we foreigners”</i>		Self-description as immigrant		
	Perker*	*Degrading term for describing the criminal, trouble-making immigrant	5	9
	Talking about oneself and friends as immigrants		9	14