

# SPEAK UP!

set up tolerance

The Magazine for manifold remarks and unlike identities

2006 no. 1 Community - retelling and renegotiating

## HOME SWEET DOLLHOUSE

It is understood that more is better and rich is best. We are encouraged to ignore our social history in the interests of our collective fantasy of the past.

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## I WANT TO HAVE MY CAKE AND EAT IT!

Building bridges and fighting for pride bi-culturalness.

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## ON THE INVISIBLE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESSES

How we cultivate a democratic discussion of the democratic.

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## THE PRICE FOR A WIFE

An Interview concerning the stereotype images of Philippine women in Denmark.

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## - a struggle of definitions - the modern women's liberation

By Uzma Ahmed Andresen

*Parts of the Danish Women's Liberation Movement have apparently found a new cause: to make women from ethnic minorities independent. The starting point for the Danish feminists' involvement with women from minorities is often that the culture and religion of the women's background is oppressive, and that the only way the women can be liberated is by copying the values the women's movement stands for, in a Danish context. In this way, the distribution of roles automatically becomes one where the women from minorities are students and therefore should learn from the ethnic Danish women.*

A group of women that are gathered in the association Kvinder for Frihed (lit: Women for Freedom) have collected 500 signatures opposing the fact that Asmaa Abdol-Hamid is studio host on the debate programme "Adam and Asmaa" on DR2. The

reason being that she wears a headscarf. According to the association, the headscarf is a sign that Asmaa Abdol-Hamid is repressed, and therefore a bad role model for other women. What one can question is the fact that the association only reacts against the headscarf and, in this way, are not able to recognise that Asmaa Abdol-Hamid actually lives up to all the demands and expectations that are normally associated with an independent woman in today's Denmark. She has a command of the Danish language, is educated, has worked as a social counsellor and has now proved that she is so skilled that she also can be a studio host. The fact that Asmaa Abdol-Hamid has opinions which differ from the opinions of the Kvinder for Frihed association, should not be a reason for her to be removed from the tv screen - on the contrary! We find ourselves in a country where there is freedom of expression and with it the freedom to have differing fundamental opinions on life. It gives nuances in the debate, no matter whether we like

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## 'Retelling stories' as a vital pivotal point in cultural change

*Speak Up! Interview with Wibeke Haldrup Pedersen, historian and curator at the National Museum in Copenhagen.*

*We ask why we Danes have such a great need to mark our identity? Is there really a discussion on redefining the term Danishness?*

Wibeke Haldrup Pedersen makes it clear that we are dealing with a very concrete background for the Danes' current disassociation from people of other cultural or religious backgrounds. "For example, the distance to immigrants and refugees has, in reality, very little to do with the abstract discussions on foreignness and Danishness which are raised by certain sections of the political spectrum. If anything, this distance has its roots in the earlier working-class struggle to protect those welfare goods which, historically, they have worked a long time in order to achieve. What has happened is that we have slowly built up a middle class which is rooted in the working class, and this new middle class has realized a great deal of privileges - following on from the working-class struggle and the transformation from a national state to a welfare state."

*Speak Up: In this way it has something to do with the fear of losing privileges more than the fear of something which is different?*

"Yes, to a high extent. As a continuation of the increasing globalisation of the labour market, a large part of the population experience that their workplaces are being moved overseas whilst, at the same time, there is an influx of immigrants and refugees who also want a place in the Danish labour market. The struggle for positions in the workplace, wage levels, and national social insurance arrangements such as

cash benefits, pensions, early retirement benefits and so on, in this way seem to be a contrast to globalisation, immigration and a multicultural society. The massive discussions on identity and Danishness have their background in these social relations and are basically political discussions relating to power and privileges."

*Speak Up: How do you see the construction that is 'Danishness' unfolding?*

Wibeke Haldrup Pedersen refers to minister for culture Brian Mikkelsen's initiative regarding the cultural canons. She sees the canon project as an attempt to construct and deliver to the population a finite description of themselves, and a particularly



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qualified Danish way of being. But in this way the canon project also excludes a lot of other people - all those Danes that cannot recognise themselves in the construction. "In the debate on society we constantly hear a list of stories: partly on Danish de-

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growing images

of narrow Politics

Speak Up! set up tolerance



Power resides in the normal ... page 14

# WELCOME

to the first issue of the magazine Speak Up! set up tolerance

We are pleased to present this first issue of the magazine Speak UP! set up tolerance. It is an independent magazine that focuses on freedom of speech, visibility, responsibility and possibility in the current social and political everyday.

Speak Up! set up tolerance is a magazine that changes in appearance, content and distribution from issue to issue - depending on the theme discussed in the changing work and editor group.

We have invited Uzma Ahmed Andresen who is the chairman of The Society for Ethnic Equality to join the work and editor group to contribute to the first publication of Speak Up! titled *Community - retelling and renegotiation*.

We have invited a number of writers, artists and other contributors who all are engaged in the ongoing debate in society - to relate to the theme from their point of view, and from their interests i.e. professionally, culturally, religiously or in any other.

This first issue of Speak UP! is formed like a newspaper and manifests itself by texts and images that have an informative, poetic, political, culturally analytic and aesthetic character.

Welcome to  
Speak Up! set up tolerance

*Uzma Ahmed Andresen,  
Tanja Nellemann and Grete Aagaard*

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## Community *retelling and renegotiation*

**- Is it possible to find new ways of handling a paradox that on one hand consists of living as a fellow citizen in a society basing itself on the idea of community and equality and which, on the other hand, recognises cultural differences with the dilemmas and compromises that these entail?**

**How do we get to the point where we can obtain a positive view on the possibility and the challenge of an open community that bases itself on diversity and acceptance of both (dis)agreement and non-identical equality?**

**Perhaps the community should be retold and renegotiated amongst us?  
(ed.)**

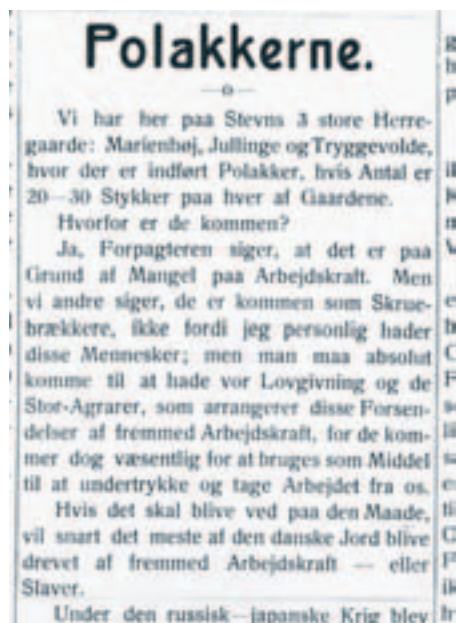
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Speak UP! set up tolerance is a part of the art project 'Set Up Tolerance'. The project is socially and politically-motivated. Set Up Tolerance focus on inter-humanity encounters and significant communal production that can contribute to a nuanced view of, for example, the stereotyped opinions we might have of each other. Tanja Nellemann and Grete Aagaard are visual artists and have initiated the project.

[www.setuptolerance.dk](http://www.setuptolerance.dk)

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This page: On the 31st of May, 1908, a newspaper reader wrote about his view on the immigration of Poles: "...the rest of us say that they have arrived here like scabs; not that I personally hate these people, but one must eventually come to hate our legislation, and those great agrarians who arrange these consignments of foreign labour, because they are used mostly as a means to suppress and take work from us." Some generations later, in 1966, Mrs Wachuta and Mrs Oktoba were visiting Reverend Wick from the church of the Holy Cross in Nykøbing Falster.

Front page: Mrs Josefa Furman was decorated by King Frederik IX for a long and faithful service.

Photo: The Royal Library: Lennart Larsen, Knud Melsen

mocracy, partly on the role of Christianity in Denmark, and partly the story of one or another particular spiritual way of being Danish. In this way Danishness becomes, for me, very intangible. The word 'un-Danish' is used incredibly often in the debate, and it presupposes that there is something that is undeniably Danish. The word 'un-Danish' linguistically covers a variegated collection of attitudes, values and estimations of the way in which we associate with each other. In this way the debate is characterised by an extremely superficial use of words and terms: "We think that these words we use have the same meaning. But the reality is that they don't. The prolonged debate which ran over winter, on what freedom of expression is and how freedom of expression should be administered, is a classic example showing that when we begin to define terms we actually have a different understanding of them. The aim of the culture canon project is that of being society-stabilising and, as such, forms an attempt to create a common foundation on which we all stand. We are, though, talking of a rather fragile foundation, since we are dealing with a postulate which assumes that we are all in agreement on what it is that forms the core of 'Danishness'."

*Speak Up: What is your understanding of a common identity - for example, a common Danish identity?*

"I see several conditions for a community: partly the language and partly the geographic situation; meaning the natural foundation which over the centuries has formed the basis for the farming society whose production shaped our economic and working possibilities. The current economy in Denmark today is to a large extent dependant on the knowledge and expertise of the population; for example,

**The word 'un-Danish' is used incredibly often in the debate, and it presupposes that there is something that is undeniably Danish.**

within the medical industry. In addition, there exists common experience and recollection in the public sphere, such as music, film and other cultural events, which offer a starting point for community. All in all these very concrete factors make up the conditions for community. The abstract talk about unique cultural and spiritual conditions for a specific Danishness, affecting much of the debate today, use terms like 'community', 'Danishness' and 'coherent forces' as ideological 'tag words' that are empty in meaning."

*Speak Up: What is your understanding of the relationship between the individual-focused society and being able to create cultural coherent forces?*

"I think that the individual in today's Denmark is very self-assured. It is, I believe, the result of a general rise in welfare and an increase in the level of education. A self-content and strong individual should be able to offer an even greater amount of space to other individuals. I have difficulties finding this capacious and open form of solidarity. In the 1970's showing solidarity was extremely popular. Solidarity was almost synonymous with democracy, because the fight for common goods was part of common ideals about a common society, where few had too much and even fewer had too little. Apparently there is not much place for such values and moral terms in today's Denmark, and, unfortunately, this has an effect on minorities as

well as immigrants and refugees."

*Speak Up: Doesn't creating stories about life in a manifold Denmark hold a certain kind of quality, though?*

"When I see the problematic conditions that a large number of immigrants and refugees live with today, it is like witnessing a re-recording of my own childhood. I was raised in a working class family and I was one of those, via the State Education Fund, SU, that received help in order to go to university and, consequently, experience a social mobility. I can certainly empathise with how the youths on Blågårds Plads live ... as a child in the 1970's I myself lived in Vesterbro.

A Vesterbro where the street scenes were even more dominated by porno boutiques, drug addicts, teenage prostitutes and alcoholics on the benches of Enghavs Plads.

**My point is that the story which today dominates the public sphere, the story about how our present now is primarily formed by a certain cultural conflict between nationalities, is wrong."**

And a Vesterbro, by the way, where it wasn't unusual if one's classmates were beaten with a belt if their father thought that they needed to be punished. Maybe - and hopefully - the milieu around Nørrebro is not nearly so rough. I can also somewhat recognise "ghetto problems" like those in Vollsmose. A large part of my family live in a similar block of flats in Ballerup. My point is that the story which today dominates the public sphere, the story about how our present now is primarily formed by a certain cultural conflict between nationalities, is wrong."

In Wibeke Haldrup Pedersen's experience there are many voices speaking at the same time, and in all directions, and much of what is said gets blurred because things become mixed together. But this mixing together is, however, not just unimportant, precisely because *it happens* and becomes central to the way in which the public debate is carried out.

"It is said that the class struggle is dead but the classes within society and the upheaval is still there, just in new forms, especially if we look at the material conditions of life. Other stories than those of cultural difference are necessary - stories which have as a starting point the social struggle and changes in quality of life we see today."

Wibeke Haldrup Pedersen points out that the western European society is a con-

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Speak Up! set up tolerance

# Contradictions

right & WRONG

Speak Up! set up tolerance

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glomerate of different life forms: "that meet, support each other in public, and negotiate their conditions and their situation. In this respect it is important to tell stories of every day life in the social classes which are partly active in, and partly the result of, these intense cultural processes."

With this kind of approach a form of storytelling may open up which shows how cultural upheaval is tackled within different social classes.

Wibeke Haldrup Pedersen emphasises that there is a need for a concretization of the term 'the global village'. Her observation is that the industrial way of organising work still exists: "the geography of industrial production has merely been broadened. It is no longer the national borders that are interesting."

In this way the industrial workers' struggle is still relevant: "The whole discussion on globalisation is, as I see it, determined by material conditions, and it is here where the story on globalisation should begin."

Wibeke Haldrup Pedersen talks about a concrete engagement



This page: In 1978 there was a cultural meeting in Vognmandsmarken in Copenhagen. The low-level meeting took place between Turkish "first-generation immigrants" and ethnic Danes.

Front page: It is often brought up time and again in public debates that immigrants and refugees of different cultural backgrounds live a medieval family life. The main emphasis of all these discussions in the public arena is focused on arranged marriages, honour killings and suppressed women. These pictures from Vognmandsmarken, taken towards the end of the 1970's, illustrate that reality - as always - is more nuanced.

Photos: Lene Åkerlund

in the citizen: "Ownership in a democratic society occurs where the individual and the group contribute positively and where one feels that others have your best interests at heart. That is, that you have confidence in the politician whom you give your

voice to - and that you also respect the politician whom you disagree with. In this way it is crucial that you basically have confidence in your fellow humans as well as the rest of society. The confidence forms itself in the sense that you believe that your contribution will

be managed positively. For a political refugee, for example, this confidence is naturally not self-evident." The challenge is how we develop this confidence instead of shutting out all that doesn't resemble us. An example of this is the discussion on our religious cultural inheritance:

"We are so occupied by the fact that there is such a big difference between Islam and Christianity, that we forget to consider how we understand the question of religion and religions. A common starting point can be that religion has something to do with values and morality, and the way we mix with each other in an acceptable manner day to day," concludes Wibeke Haldrup Pedersen.

Speak Up! interview edited by Wibeke Haldrup Pedersen

continued from the frontpage - a struggle of definitions - the modern women's liberation

the opinions that are raised, or not. Kvinder for Frihed's outcry which followed in the wake of the introduction of Asmaa Abdol-Hamid as studio host is an example of the modern women's liberation struggle.

"A public service channel should not have a host who bears religious symbols, and least of all a religiously-enforced headscarf, that symbolises sex discrimination and the repression of women. We are not against Asmaa Abdol-Hamid as a person, but as a role model. We hope that DR2 takes these protests on board and chooses another host - we are not averse to a Muslim, as long as they are without a headscarf," stated Vibeke Manniche, chairwoman of Kvinder for Frihed, *Politiken* newspaper, 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2006.

If Kvinder for Frihed really wanted to make changes, in order to 'save' those women that could be damaged by perceiving Asmaa Abdol-Hamid as a role model, they should start a dialogue and speak out in relation to the differences of opinion that might exist. Instead, the association chose to let Asmaa Abdol-Hamid's headscarf be representative of women from minorities, equating it with cultures and religions that have apparently been defined beforehand as being repressive.

In the association regulations it is stated:

"Kvinder for Frihed will actively work to ensure that the rights of freedom for girls and women continue to be upheld. We regard equality and freedom of expression as the primary collective rights of freedom; as the very fundament of a living, modern democracy... This implies that Kvinder for Frihed will actively react against any attempt to demand special rights, that in any way offend the rights of freedom for girls and women, no matter whether such demands are proposed with reference to culture, tradition, politics or religion."

Instead of focusing on symbols such as headscarfs, Kvinder for Frihed and similar women's rights campaigners could put their efforts into helping and supporting the real repressed women, those both with and without headscarfs. A good place to begin could be those women that live in violent marriages for years with their only purpose that of achieving permanent residency, so they can live an independent life in Denmark. In this way, the vast majority of them are possibly subordinated by both their spouses and the Danish legal system. The problem occurs because the law de-

### Or do they hold onto their impression of the repressed scarf-wearing woman on the basis of a lack of knowledge? Or because it is easiest?

mands that women in situations of family reunification should have lived in the country for a total of 7 of the previous 8 years, in order to obtain permanent residency. The basis for residency is repealed if the woman leaves her husband, because the reason for the woman receiving residency is on the grounds of marriage. Even though a paragraph can be found as an exception, which is valid for women from minorities who are treated violently, the women are not assured of anything because the paragraph cannot be applied until the woman herself is able to document that violence has taken place. This can be difficult, especially because violence in marriage happens behind closed doors and without witnesses. In addition to this, it can be difficult to prove psychological violence.<sup>1</sup>

If one looks into this as a starting point, that minority women should be set free and 'saved' from their own cultural background and religion, then it also implies an informed truth - that minority women cannot decide what is good for themselves. It is often pre-supposed that it is the men that repress the women, to adapt to the man's

wishes and put their own wishes aside. But do Kvinder for Frihed and the other 'modern women's rights campaigners' really know anything about the women they claim to be saving? Or do they hold onto their impression of the repressed scarf-wearing woman on the basis of a lack of knowledge? Or because it is easiest? I think it's both one and the other. Those that fit the picture of the repressed minority female, do actually have an enormous need for support to develop independence. At the same time it is important to recognise the variety that exists amongst minority women. For it is in this way that we can be involved in breaking the prejudice which exists about minority women as lacking resources, and being dependant, repressed wretches. The women's liberationists do have one thing right, though: Women from minorities are a marginalised group. But this is not because of a lack of focus on the group, but rather that the women's liberation movement and politicians maintain a one-sided and often erroneous picture of women from minority backgrounds.

One of the women who, knowingly or unknowingly, makes herself the spokeswoman for the biased views which parts of the modern women's movement represent, is Eva Kjær Hansen, Minister for Equality. In a debate of the new Ministry

Women's World Denmark 2006  
SEE THE FILM on [www.hennah.dk](http://www.hennah.dk)

of Equality 'perspective and action plan' at the National Museum, 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2006, she declared that women from minorities have a need to learn more about their rights: "The women should know that they can get their own bank account, and that they can be divorced," she said. But when the minister informs the women of their right to divorce, she simultaneously forgets to inform them that the consequences of such an action will most probably be that their residency will be revoked and they will have to travel out of the country. Here it would be fitting if the minister admitted that starthjælpen (lit: the start-up benefit) of 4.493 kroner - which many of the women from reunited families will receive until they gain permanent residency after 8 years, if at all - is not their direct ticket to independence. On the contrary, when receiving starthjælp they will also need to apply for support from the social authorities for basic matters, for example, dental bills, winter clothes for themselves and/or their children, spare-time activities, and transport. If the support is approved it involves a special evaluation from a social worker for each individual, extra expense. In addition to this, daily life is difficult, to make warm food each night and buy fresh fruit for oneself and one's children. All in all, not something which encourages the feeling of living under decent conditions and on an equal basis with other women in Denmark.<sup>2</sup> And if we consider whether or not there is any energy left to get involved in the Danish way of living, or the female culture, then this is probably almost non-existent.

**Is it now a problem that the ethnic minorities, who are usually criticised for not being self-sufficient, get by without any help from public resources, I wonder. Or is the problem in reality that the women in this way are outside of the social system and therefore outside of state control?**

Integration Minister, Rikke Hvilshøj is yet another of the powerful women who have problematised the values and priorities of ethnic minority women. She has especially gone after the housewives. In an article in Jyllands-Posten newspaper, dated 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2005, Rikke Hvilshøj states that "approximately 13,000 immigrant women are actually excluded from Danish society. They receive no public payments and are outside of the reach of the authorities. It is often their husbands who hinder them in

their integration." And following on from this statement she states: "It is of no use that some men keep their wives at home. It also damages the children, if their mother never comes out of the house." In addition to this, she points out that due to a rule change in 2003, councils can get economic support to help to activate self-supporting women.

Rikke Hvilshøj is quite confident in her statements about those 13,000 minority-women, despite the fact that she has no data on them. She doesn't know them and hasn't any basis to be able to piece together a total picture of the women and their situations. In spite of this, she concludes that they constitute a problem. That is very creative! Is it now a problem that the ethnic minorities, who are usually criticised for not being self-sufficient, get by without any help from public resources, I wonder. Or is the problem in reality that the women in this way are outside of the social system and therefore outside of state control? In other connections, for example, if one seeks Danish citizenship, it is a criterion for success if one is independent. But when there is talk of housewives with a different ethnic background, Rikke

Hvilshøj equates staying at home and letting one's man be the familial provider with being repressed. That is not the picture that is projected on ethnic Danish women who are housewives. This group spans from women whose men earn so much money that they can provide for their wives, to well-educated wives who make an active choice to stay at home, because they think it is best for a family with

small children that one of the parents is at home. In an ethnic Danish context it is a sign of luxury, surplus and a content state of mind. Why is it so difficult to imagine that it's the same reasons that are applicable to, if not all but some of, the 13,000 women from ethnic minorities? Maybe the men and women from ethnic minorities have no ambitions for themselves or their children? Shouldn't they want to create a good balance between family and work

life, where there is space for both children and adults to have a fine everyday life, and where the family altogether functions?

The sad thing is that Rikke Hvilshøj's liberation project and 'rescue attempt' was launched at the same time as the following confirmatory statement from several integration consultants whom the Ministry of Integration apparently align themselves with: "The government plan to get 25,000 more immigrants into work in the next five years, is being undermined by the fact that a very large amount of immigrant women live an isolated life without contact to Danish society." The motive of helping the women from minority backgrounds to become integrated seems, therefore, more like an excuse that the government hasn't reached its target figures. Should the women be placed in the labour market for their own sakes, or for the sake of the statistics?

When ministers sitting in positions of power - which naturally follow with office - express themselves in undocumented, superficial and general phrases, and follow up these phrases with various plans of action and laws that affect a whole group of the population, defined in relation to ethnicity and religion, then they create a picture of reality that doesn't necessarily reflect the actual situation. What ministers gain from branding women from ethnic minorities in the name of women's rights one could ask oneself. Do they do it to shift focus from the fact that the law, in reality, is so tight on issues of foreigners that, for example, equality for women who have become reunited with their families here in Denmark, isn't possible? Does it serve immigrant women in a positive way if they are sent out into the labour market, in the name of integration and liberation, to find that any work they can get is work which keeps them in a repressed position, such as a cleaning job at night where they don't meet any colleagues that they can become 'integrated' with?

And what do sections of the modern women's movement gain from following suit? Is their new struggle on behalf of women from minority backgrounds bound up in fear of loss of values? Do some ethnic Danish women feel themselves threatened or provoked by women from ethnic minorities who dare to priorities differently than themselves? Or do they feel so full of legitimate indignation over cases where

women from minorities are living in a violent and repressive marriage, that they are not able to grasp the fact that we all - women from minority as well as women from majority backgrounds - are different and have different lives, with different priorities? It is difficult to come to any conclusions; but if one boils it all down, then the women's movement used to be a struggle for the right to define oneself as a woman seen in relation to new norms and values. It is a struggle I myself fight today, and it would be nice if all women could stand together in this struggle instead of turning me, as a women from an ethnic minority, into an object for their cause.

*Footnotes:*

<sup>1</sup> "It is essential to keep the perspectives concerning equality in mind. The lack of recognition that violence has actually occurred is, in itself, a sign of inequality. A minority of the women get independent residency on the basis of the violence which they have been exposed to. Instead, the women get residency permits on the basis of referral to other considerations. In regards to the violent husband, it is also a minority that are reported to the police and brought to trial for the violence which they have perpetrated. In this way they are never made responsible in reality. The result is that the women never get the redress which they deserve. This illustrates the way in which the state supports the patriarchal structures. From the report "Trapped between law and life - on the minority women in the North struck by violence." By Diana Højllund Madsen, Center for Ligestillingsforskning, Roskilde University centre 2006. <http://www.ligestilling.com/norfa/vold.html>

<sup>2</sup> According to the latest evaluation of starthjælpen from the alternative analysis centre, CASA (April 2004) the conclusion is that persons who receive starthjælp only have a very slight chance of finding a job and becoming economically independent. In addition to this, it was concluded that it is difficult to start an education. Finn Kenneth Hansen and Henning Hansen "Starthjælp og introduktionsydelse - Hvordan virker ydelserne?" CASA April 2004.

Uzma Ahmed Andresen, chairwoman for Society for Ethnic Equality (Foreningen for Etnisk Ligestilling) and spokeswoman for the women's network hennah.dk

[www.etniskligestilling.dk](http://www.etniskligestilling.dk)





Speak Up! set up tolerance

## ON THE INVISIBLE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESSES

By Tanja Nellemann

### *Passing on behavioural patterns and premisses for togetherness.*

*I asked my mother and her friend about their understanding of democracy and how it is expressed in their daily lives.*

Britta: I think that first and foremost democracy exists as values and norms for our way of being together. There is that thing about it, though, that if we don't talk about these values and norms, then we're not able to either rely on our democracy or change it. What one doesn't talk about, or pass on, has no value. Or, in other words: a thing one isn't conscious about, is given no value. Wittgenstein said, "The limits of our world, are the limits of our language." "What we mention is what we are capable of seeing." That has a lot to do with the fact that what we focus on becomes our reality and that it's in relations and cooperation that development occurs.

Lis: I guess it's also something to do with the fact that one should be hands on, so democracy doesn't become something that is static, something one can put on the shelf and say, that was that! Because if it is put on the shelf, then it doesn't exist any more, and it isn't moving.

B: I think that democracy and democratization starts in nursery school, maybe even as early as in the crèche, and particularly when one starts school proper. It's something to do with really simple and fundamental rules about how one behaves together with others. How do you see it, Lis?

L: Yes, I think that democratization begins with the way children become socialised, and that it is this which permeates everything.

In the nursery class we try to teach the children to see that there are others than themselves. Norms of togetherness are established primarily in the home and then later in the institutions. It is not so much what one says, but the way one behaves towards one another. This reflects the agenda which exists at home. I think that it is the children's observations on how we behave as adults that is important in order for them to develop social and inter-human competences. I can very quickly recognise, decode, and see what the individual child brings from home. I recognise the parents in the child.

B: I recently heard B.S. Kristiansen say in an interview that it is difficult to play volleyball with a team that doesn't know the rules! As I see it now, the problem in Denmark is that we ourselves have also forgotten the rules for democracy. And what happens with ourselves when we don't play along with the rules?

Lis: When a new class starts with me, we agree on some class rules as to how we want to interact with each other. From one class to the next, the need to specify the rules varies a lot. How much understanding is contained within the group of children, also varies considerably.

B: For example, I think that one of the fundamental rules of democracy is self-discipline. Even when we disagree, we disagree according to a set of ground rules. We don't act according to our own feelings alone, we also act according to our sensibilities. If our emotions control our actions, then everything is concerned with being in love - on the other hand, if everything is sensibility, then everything turns black.

L: But in nursery school we try to teach the children that it is okay to have those feelings, it's okay to be miserable and angry or to feel offended, but we try to focus on building up some tools to tackle the disagreements. It's fine that the feelings are there, but one can't argue with them alone.

B: One can very easily end up as an anti-social and undemocratic person if one only acts on one's own emotions and doesn't have the ethical, and the reflective, and 'the other' as well.

L: Yes, it is important to learn to acknowledge that there are others in the room apart from oneself; both in the family, in the school and in society. To be able to listen to others but also to dare to speak in a large group.

B: I have just seen a programme on the tv, "parents all over" ("Forældre forfra"), where a psychologist said to a parent couple, If you want respect from your children, you should also show them respect.

Mutual respect it is called, and it is a very simple and fundamental rule for democracy, though it isn't so easy to keep control of - as we have seemingly forgotten in relation to our immigrants, for example. We have just made an immigration law with some restrictions that neither display recognition nor respect.

B: We have a nationalistic tradition that dates back to the 1800's, where the definition of being a Dane is that one is born in Denmark, speaks the language from childhood, and has a particular, common religion. With such a basic perception of what it is to be Danish, it is difficult for an immigrant to ever be integrated!

I think that we should stop talking about Danishness and instead should talk about some of the democratic values or virtues which we have talked about here, for example: There are others in the room than yourself (self discipline); make some common rules and follow them; show respect in order to gain respect; and so on, and so on.

And I also believe that we should discuss these values in order to be clear about what kind of a society we want to have, and we should talk about them in this exact context, where they live - or, maybe, precisely where they do not live.

*Britta Toft, deputy head of the language center in Vejle and Fredericia.*

*Lis Nellemann, nursery school class leader at Skødstrup school.*



# A VEILED DEBATE



Shop window, Cairo  
Photo: Yasmina Ben ari



Shop windows, Cairo Photo: Yasmina ben Ari

### By Yasmina Ben ari

After years of hypocrisy and delayed agenda France has had to face its first 'Veil affair'. The big time story first occurred in November 1989. Since then, the veil has regularly been exposed as a front page story. During fall 2003, the question reached a climax when discussing the introduction of a law concerning the potential prohibition of 'visible religious symbols' (i.e. the veil) in public schools.

Very soon many analysts saw the visual impact of the veil in a country still dealing with colonization guilt and an unclear position regarding the thousands

of French Muslim immigrants. Relative ignorance about Islam opened the doors for self satisfying shortcuts. Asserting Muslim women as repressed and condemned to a life of resignation, that is, at home, somehow claimed legitimacy. The veil became the symbol of various statements regarding secularity – at least in its French version. Republican and secular values were used to stigmatize the veil, and the thousands of French Muslim women wearing it.

Since 2003 the debate has been ongoing, only interrupted by short international breaking news. From newspapers such as *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *Liberation*... to lifestyle magazines and

the coloured press, the veil was everywhere. But what about the inner reasons for such a fad?

In a country that may not have dealt with its religious past, and certainly not with Islam itself, passionate positions, in the media, as in the streets, have shown the deep questioning the veil implies. The question of the veil – referred to as Islamic - therefore seems to cross the entire French society and many others today. By many still looked upon as an external cultural reference though, however worn by French citizens. The veiled debate seems to destabilize as it questions French identity from within. How does the relation to 'the other' evolve in a country of-

ten unable to deal with differences whatever they may be? Sadly enough the debate has often turned short, associating the veil with altogether immigration, fundamentalism, secularity, and feminism.

A recent organisation for the freedom of Muslim French girls living in the suburbs, provocatively called 'Neither Prostitutes nor Submitted' (NPNS), is an interesting example of Europe's tendency of essentialism when it comes to integration programs. It was created in early 2003, after the brutal deathly burning of young Sohane whose 'mistake' was to date a young man from another 'community'. Founded by a familiar of Sohane, the NPNS progressively started to openly condemn the use of the veil as a sign of submission. It is a fact that some suburbs, mainly because of the state's abandon, have become dangerous places for women. When not wearing the veil, women become easy targets for frustrated and uneducated youngsters. Indeed, France has faced, and still does, an important amount of group rapes ('tournantes'). Considered to be of small moral value just because they are unveiled, they suffer hell. Not to mention the state's arrogance and family's shame when it happens. In that context, the veil has become a social line between 'pure' and 'impure' girls, it's true. Now, is it the veil itself we are talking about here?

Well, the NPNS organisation decided to send volunteers into mosques in order to tell the girls they should not veil themselves, with the argumentation of it being an effective act of submission to masculine order.

What I see here, is simply the misuse of a debate for the benefit

of those who claim that Islam is a globalising and conservative conception of life in society. Implying that by essence, women are persecuted within and by the use of Muslim values, wherever they may arise and interact. NPNS had an urge to stop violence in the French suburbs and we should thank them for that but like too many, they have participated in a judgemental and discriminatory look upon the veil and veiled woman across the world.

There is no such thing as 'a veil'. Hijab, niqab and many others, show the plurality of such an object that needs, more than any other, to be contextualised and thought through a frame of tolerance. We need tolerance for the millions of European Muslims desperately trying to get a grip of their identity in a context of universalising values.

The way to go is the opening of a real dialogue about the internal development of European model of integration.

We are losing what is indeed the most important issue here, our mixed cultures.

*Yasmina Ben ari is specialised in Arabic and Muslim world politics and gender issues. (Masters). She lives in Copenhagen.*

Photo: Yasmina Ben ari



## A grandmother's good advice, dreams and hopes for her grandchild

By Uzma Ahmed Andresen

### Interview with Mumtaz Khan, speaking about Jamilla

*1: It is the second time in your life that you're going to be one of the main people around a little child – in the past you've had that role in relation to your two children, and now as a grandma for your grandchildren; how is that?*

Apart from being a mother myself, being a grandmother is the greatest experience of my life. It is very special when one's own daughter becomes a mother. In the Pakistani culture it is the most important step, that one's own children get married and, thereafter, the marriage bears fruit in the form of a new life. It is a new, refreshing and life-giving branch that has grown from the tree of life. My life tree. It is extremely special. I didn't think that I could feel so strongly about a new, tiny life. When my daughter got married she was still a student. Personally, I wanted her to have her studies finished before she became a mother. But the wish for a grandchild was already there when she got married. When both my son-in-law and daughter settled down, with a job and a home, I had a serious talk with my son-in-law. I said that I wanted a grandchild. Surprisingly enough, my son-in-law was very obliging and actually promised me that I would be a grandmother, at the latest a year after our talk. And he kept that promise. And our little princess came into the world.

*2: What kind of thoughts do you have concerning your grandchild growing up here in Denmark? After all, it isn't the country you yourself grew up in?*

When I came to Denmark as a youngster, everything was strange for me. Together

with my children, I had to get to know another culture. I have, so to speak, come through the worst of it, by having to raise my own children in a Denmark that is, unfortunately, not the same tolerant, curious and open Denmark as it was then.

However, I still worry on behalf of my grandchildren. When my children were small they were aware that they were immigrant children. It was both good and bad. They gained a strong identity and had a clear cultural affiliation to the Pakistani culture, whilst, at the same time, living in the Danish culture. Jamilla is a child of a mixed marriage, as her father is Danish through and through. I am a little worried that Jamilla could maybe become confused in relation to which culture she has the strongest affiliation to. I am confident, though, that my daughter especially will pass on the Pakistani culture to Jamilla; not least by teaching her our language. But I see it also as rewarding for her, that she will grow up with two cultures.

*3: Do you believe that her childhood and the values around her will be notably different, both in relation to when you yourself raised your children, and how you yourself grew up?*

I don't think that the values will be different. My daughter and son-in-law will influence Jamilla with the values they themselves have grown up with. But it is, as I said, another Denmark she will be raised in than the Denmark my children grew up in. But I think that Jamilla's parents will, respectively, protect and expose her to both the good and the not-so-good in society, so she can learn from it.

*4: If you were to give your grandchild some good advice, what would it be?*

I would like to see her acquire the same values that I have passed on to my own children. I hope she becomes a good person, showing concern for her fellow human beings. She should be strong and take responsibility for her life and her family. She should be honest towards others, but also to herself. I hope she also finds an affiliation to the Pakistani culture. One of my biggest wishes for Jamilla is to show her my Pakistan when she is old enough to take in the experience for her-

self. It would be lovely to be able to show her her Pakistani roots and the country that her grandparents originated from.

If I were to give Jamilla a proverb to live by it would be that one gets further with honesty.

And here are some comments from the uncle, Jamilla's mamu. And Kokila, who is Jamilla's stand-in grandmother. They were both present during this interview.

*Always drive a BMW. A good piece of advice from mamu. Ride in style. And always be sure to wear sunscreen. And remember: Never be in doubt that your mamu loves you very much. But don't skit my BMW!*



Jamilla with her mother Uzma Ahmed Andresen and grandmother Mumtaz Khan.

*A piece of advice from Kokilanani: Smile to the world and the world will smile back. But don't smile too much in Pakistan, it can be easily misunderstood (There are some cultural differences which I will let you in on along the way.)*

*And remember, when you need to learn how to make chai and samosas, then come to me.*

# THE BEC OF SCHUST

By America Vera-Zavala

*She laughs incredibly loud, she talks with her hands and she loves colourful shoes, apart these things we are not very much alike*

She was born in 1948 in Madison, Wisconsin, USA. She has travelled around the world but the country she chose for her exile was the neighbouring one, the closest. She tells me: "I was held responsible for everything that you hate." The Canadian identity, I would say, is very much based on everything that the United States is not. Everything is worse in the US, which means that Canada is always a bit better. Canada is now her home. She became a Canadian citizen and lives in Toronto, Canada's largest city, since 1974. But she still likes to travel and always did. "Since I was a child I always asked for suitcases as presents." The suitcases were symbols for travelling. She loves big cities.

*A: Any favourite?*

*S: Hanoi, Vietnam, Mexico City, Venezuela for political reasons.*

She went to the university 1966-1970. She was a university student in '68, the year everyone wishes that they had gone to a university. Her family was not particularly political, and in any case not left wing. She became involved in politics there: in a political theatre group, and the anti-war demonstrations, the black student strike. And she talks about the good times, before the bombs. Two young people who were not students bombed the Army Math Research Building. It was their protest against the war. They had phoned in a warning but one person still got killed in the building that tracked Che Guevara in the Bolivian jungle and made his assassination possible. After that incident every thing changed, and repression became noticed on campus. When the National Guard moved in she moved. And left her name behind.

cut into of statistics  
A tale of statistics

Speak Up! set up tolerance

# COMING ER

the dolls were babies, but they turned into bimbos overnight. "And it was terrible, you don't understand but it was," she says convincingly. When she was married she took her husband's name, as every woman did that time. but she also kept her own name, Schuster Gindin.

She became political and included politics in her different projects. As an artist, as a mother and as a citizen she combined art and politics, on a street, in a neighbourhood, in a city. As a mother she was involved in her children's school. She felt that she had two choices she said: "Either I should fix the school or move my kids."

I came to Toronto, to spend one year here and since I came I have disliked the word community. It is constantly repeated, I don't understand it, it has a suspicious positive tone and to me it is irritatingly classless. The only person that has made me understand and dislike the word less is Schuster. To follow her and see how she interacts with other people is to understand that a community is not something settled but something that you build. It is in this process that interesting things can happen and where change can occur. To be part

A: What is your name?

S: Schuster.

A: But what was it before that?

S: Barbara, Schuster is my last name.

A: Why don't you like your name?

She explains that when the Barbie doll came, she was about 12 years old and people started calling her Barbie. Until then all

of a community is to be part of a process. Schuster makes those processes become interesting.

I have walked around with mayors of cities, or the main speakers of the conferences and the leader of the pack, they all think they are in front running the show, but there are people in the back running the show. They have to move, speak and act differently; Schuster does this in a perfect way. She talks with her neighbours, mobilises people on the streets against parking lots, she is involved in saving barns and making them into cultural houses, and she always has a few good ideas about how to make a boring debate interesting. Next time.

She has had many projects as an artist: a documentary about local homemade wine production in the cellars of Toronto, gigantic flowers exhibited outdoors at the harbour front and then in her own neighbourhood, work with children, photographs of workers at their jobs, photographs of an urban popular theatre project called pasta-rasta, photographs of water and beaches...

The project I have asked her mostly about is called "Playing House" (with the rather boring subtitle: contemporary alternatives to the traditional nuclear family home). It was exhibited 1986. The idea was to build alternative dollhouses, but also analyse 'the doll house'. "We interviewed women, we could see how they wanted to create, in the dollhouse the ideal family they did not have, how they created rooms to hide what was hidden." It was eerie, she says. "We discovered that instead of changing their own lives they created fantasy lives. Grown up women built doll houses and at special trade shows they could get ahold of pieces to decorate the house with."

The exhibition showed the alternatives. From one house they created 5 different interior options: our house, the housework house, the women and children's house, the mixed co-op and the senior's house. "We wanted to create alternatives within the existing frames." Some people helped them with miniature things that normally were not put in the doll house. "Who would put in a wheel chair in a fantasy?" About the women that made the doll houses she says: "It was more working class women that did it than others, probably because they could not afford to change their life the way they wanted to." As artists they did something different. "We wanted to see how possible

it was to change the world."

I ask her about loss, and even though she never says it, her way of talking about the peace movement in the USA around '68 signals that she lost peace. She is quick - she smiles, looks at me and says: "Things I lost without ever having them," and then she tells me about photographs she has wanted to take and sometimes were gone when she went back with the camera. Her greatest loss is a book that she wrote but never got published. After the rejection she did not write again for many years. "It felt like you didn't do anything." Now she is writing again.

A: Will you send this one to a publisher when you're finished?

S: Yes I will, and if I don't get it published this time I think I will give up.

A: But you have made books?

S: Well, yes, I have published books where my photographs have been but it doesn't feel like the same thing.

She sometimes has an expressive face, and in that moment her face tells me that she very much wants her book to be published. She has blue eyes, eyeglasses, and greying hair.

She has done many things as a human being. Her husband Sam, and her two sons Jonah and Lucas, as everything else when it comes to Schuster are also an important part of her life.

Her husband and his best friend have told me that Schuster used to be very shy and quiet. It is almost impossible for me to believe, yet it makes sense. She was not born but became Schuster Gindin.

America Vera-Zavala is a writer and an activist. She has written the book *Deltagende Demokrati 2005* (participating democracy) and active in the ATTAC movement in Sweden. Lives in Stockholm

[www.americavz.com](http://www.americavz.com)

[www.farr.se](http://www.farr.se)  
[www.attac.se](http://www.attac.se)



Installation by Schuster Gindin



Installation by Schuster Gindin

## HOME SWEET DOLLHOUSE

By Schuster Gindin

***“I finally got my crystal chandelier for my dining room. Paid a lot more than I wanted to ... \$250.00 ... but it’s just what I wanted. You know, I’d never spend that much on one for my real dining room.” Overheard at annual Metro Miniature Show***

Almost every little girl owns (or covets) a dollhouse. She plays and fantasizes with a tiny version of domestic life for hours at a time – a particularly female educational toy. “With them, little girls imitated in play the work of the adult household and learned by doing, without getting underfoot.”<sup>1</sup> Dollhouse play limits the imaginative world to the domestic one. No one ever gives a little girl a doll-sized factory, highrise office or apartment building. Architecturally, her boundaries are set. It is ironic, in that it only allows for the mythology of the traditional nuclear family living in a house.

Dollhouses and miniatures have a history extending from ancient Egyptian civilization to the present. Eighteenth and nineteenth century Dutch and German dollhouses were elaborate and often completely accurate reproductions of typical bourgeois households.

The building and collecting of miniature houses, shops, furniture and household objects as an adult hobby, built by and for grown-ups, is a lesser-known subculture in contemporary North America. How-to books in libraries, miniature shops along commercial arteries in cities and small towns, week-end ‘shows’ at an airport hotel, suggest the scope of its popularity. In fact, miniature construction and collecting has become the third largest hobby in the world.

The somewhat covert nature of this pastime must be due in part to its almost exclusively feminine and domestic character. However, the element which sets it apart from newly appreciated feminine domestic arts such as quilting, embroidery, needlework or lacemaking is its strong fantasy component. Some miniatures are exact replicas of historical buildings or objects; a reference work to illustrate and preserve the past. Most are simply wishes. In North American culture our agricultural and often foreign roots are forgotten, and poverty is boring. It is understood that more is better and rich is best. We are encouraged to ignore our social history in the interests of our collective fantasy of the past. The miniature houses which hobbyists build are sentimental renderings of home life in another, “simpler” era, nostalgic not only for rich people’s homes, but for the fam-

ily (and often servants) which inhabited them.

The enticement is illustrated by excerpts from one popular book on the subject, “Anyone who has ever dreamed of owning a large, beautiful, elegant house but can’t afford one will find nearly the same joys and excitement in planning and building a miniature version of that house ...” It goes on to extol the relief felt in avoiding real-life mortgages, taxes, cigarette burns

without any private space for a woman. Children have their rooms, men have their dens, but the “master bedroom” is shared. Women are relegated to kitchens and laundry rooms without the space or privacy for any work unrelated to homemaking or parenting.

The practitioners of this hobby are mainly women. Many women work in conjunction with their husbands or fathers. He cuts the plywood sheets, and does the ba-

out the year. Being surrounded by thousands of tiny objects and their makers is a very immediate, and quite overwhelming, experience.

The shows cater to the schedule of a working class clientele, who are the majority in this hobby (as in life.) They are held on week-ends, beginning at 2 pm on Saturday, which gives people time to arrive and set up their tables and displays in the morning. The show ends by 5 or 6 pm on Sunday, so that people can pack up and get home for work on Monday morning.

People fund their hobby by specialization. In order to complete a miniature room or house to their precise standards, they manufacture more of whatever they do best, sell it at the shows, and then buy their colleagues’ work with their profits.

In this fleamarket atmosphere, there becomes obvious a clear class distinction among the women hobbyists. The line of division falls along the classic opposition

# HOME SWEET DOLLHOUSE

and footprints on the carpet; “... the sense of controlling you environment ... brings peace and comfort in the threat of helplessness that permeates today’s reality.”<sup>2</sup>

The hobby itself, then, is actually a model; a model of our society’s attitudes toward house and home, which encompass issues of sexism, property, ideals. “The dream house is a uniquely American form, because for the first time in history, a civilization has created a utopian ideal based on the house rather than the city or nation.”<sup>3</sup> Yelena Bonner, wife of Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov, noticed this in 1986 when she spent six months in the US and wrote her impressions for Newsweek magazine: “I maintain that Americans do not want war. What Americans want is a house. This desire expresses a national trait, the desire for privacy. The house is a symbol of independence, spiritual and physical.” We each expect, with our mortgage, to purchase our own little world. The house becomes the world, each a small sovereign statement of individuality. One senses a retreat down a path which ends in agoraphobia. Miniatures are an exaggerated expression of this larger reality. To control space, it must be defensible; that is, one cannot feel vulnerable. One must have the choice of its function, décor, inhabitants, size, shape, and architectural features. The amount of space which women feel able to control is often on a smaller scale. Our houses are designed

with power tools. She does the finishing and decorating of the house. This, of course, implies a) a husband/father who b) has power tools and the skills and space to use them, and c) is supportive or interested in helping his wife/daughter with her hobby.

One woman who lacked a handyman and didn’t have the woodworking shop or skills at her disposal devised an alternative building technique. The method is modular, and consists of cutting matboard with an Exacto knife to the size of each wall, floor and ceiling in the proposed structure. ‘Studs’ are cut from thin strips of basswood or pine and glued to the matboard. The entire structure is glued together when all component walls, floors and ceilings have been finished. This construction technique requires no power tools, no unusual skills, no expensive equipment or separate workroom. And no man. It takes up very little space and can be done anywhere. It is modular, and so can stack up to be stored in any closet or box.

In mastering this method, a woman can create and control an entire fictional domestic world; yet she need not claim more than a corner in real, full-sized life.

In addition to specialty shops, a prime source of miniature items with which to furnish the house are the special fairs, or shows, held by miniaturist clubs through-

of time vs. money. In this case the issue has transcended the practical to become a principle. One of the primary satisfactions of this hobby is to make something out of nothing, no matter how long it takes. Odds and ends, scraps, this and that, leftovers; this is the stuff from which their beautiful illusions are made. Selling to or trading with one’s colleagues is part of the insider’s world of the hobby organization. Those who excel at their craft are widely known and respected. Those who are not producers at all, but only consumers, are thoroughly scorned. Gossip and anecdotes run along the lines of how much a customer has paid for some little scrap made out of paper, ink, ashes and dye. Imagine paying so much for nothing, when they could have made it themselves!

It is a closed economy, encompassing only their hobby and no other part of life. The time and skill invested are not considered as value added. Producers would spend the time anyway, for their own enjoyment. They only want to make enough money so that the hobby is self-supporting; to buy the objects which they can’t satisfactorily produce themselves. They are not trying to get rich, or even to make a living at this. They are not small business people. This is not a job.

Most dollhouses are wired and electrically lit, and the variety of lamps and furnishings made for them is incredible. There

exists in miniature every piece of furniture in almost every style (although a dearth of modern), appliances, musical instruments, lamps, dishes, linens, paintings (original and reproduction), books, photo albums, crocheted baby clothes and a variety of needlework, carpets and draperies (with appropriate hardware), eyeglasses and food. Whole platters of prepared food "that looks so real you gain weight just looking at them". To fill the miniature candy dishes there are packages of miniature licorice allsorts, all handmade of course.

In the act of furnishing, the doll household and its imaginary members can be manipulated to conform to a personal ideal which may be much more complex an undertaking to realize in reality. For example, one woman's dollhouse is set up to accommodate a family of four, which is the size of

her own family. However, one child in the dollhouse is a daughter, which she never had. The husband in the fantasy household has many of the same interests or habits as her own does; collecting hunting trophies which she regards as hideous, and creating piles of ruffled-up newspapers and empty coffee cups wherever he has spent time. However, in the dollhouse these exist in the man's den only. His presence is not felt in any other part of the orderly, feminine house.

In addition to the fantasy of controlling household space and occupants' behaviour, there are other aspects of control which dollhouses satisfy. In contrast to work, at home or outside of it, time and labour are under one's own control in the creation process. To exercise one's humanity, by valiantly and ingeniously bringing into existence an object of one's imagination,

is the creative impulse which can also produce art.

Also, domestic life and household organization are areas of prior expertise. The crucial difference about their reproduction in miniature is that of allowing the ideal concept to be completed. This may be the only instance of housework ever being done, once and for all.

Dollhouses offer a way for people to appropriate the things they aren't able to afford. Hobbyists are resigned to not having what they want in real life. There is no questioning or apparent hostility in their assessment of the world and its material divisions and inequities. Out of the scraps and odds and ends available, they construct a model of what they wish they could have.

In fact, they have a feeling of resourcefulness, of self-reliance, of outsmarting the

system which has kept from them so many of the things they'd like. One way or another, they refuse to be deprived. Self-sufficient, they create their own.

*Footnotes:*

1. *Betsey B. Creekmore and Betsey Creekmore, Your World in Miniature, New York: Doubleday 1976.*
2. *Kathryn Falk and Edlycoe Griek, The Complete Dollhouse Building Book, New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1982.*
3. *Delores Hayden, Redesigning the American Dream, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1984 p. 18.*

*This essay was originally published in the Canadian journal Women & Environments, Spring 1988.*

*Text, costume:*

*Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen*

*Photographer: Jesper Jon Sørensen*

## The Cocksong

1. Muscles, control anger are force  
I'm doped to be as strong as a horse  
stains of blood in the battleground  
no way back, I've got to win this round!

2. My task in life is not easy  
it's vital and (it) keeps me busy  
my focus entails tough restrictions  
I'll be standing by all my decisions.

*Refrain.*

*Powerful, persistent and proud  
a cock makes man's world go 'round  
a cock, Goddamn, ya, that is what I am  
but the game would be (much) nicer if I  
was the man*

*a cock, that fucks it up - suck!  
a cock suck, that's a dead fuck! a vain cock  
is worse than (being) in pain  
and even worse ... is a cock in his chains.*

3. Lying in the ring in great pain  
I check out my feathers, in vain  
showing emotions is pointless  
I can keep the coolest surface.

4. Two cock egos in a big ring  
exciting to see who will be the king  
my mission is to fight and win  
the man behind me is my twin.

5. My body of erogeneity  
I catch the reflection of me me me  
I make the chicks giggle and blush  
strutting my stuff, to make them lust!

6. Look at me, I am a deity  
important to society  
there's no use in being humble  
life is short, so keep it simple!

## Cockfight

*Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen: Educated as a visual artist. In her art practice she focus on issues related to society, gender and identity which are mainly presented in video and performances.*



# I want to have and eat it!



Cairo, 2006 photo: Amal Wahab

By Amal Wahab

*Greedy? No, I just feel lucky as both Norwegian and Egyptian, Arab and westerner, female, Muslim and feminist. It hasn't always been easy to be so much all at once. When I was a teenager it was difficult being so different.*

*I dreamt that one day I could be accepted as Norwegian, and did everything I could to fit in. My primary goal was to speak Norwegian fluently, and pretty soon Norwegian became my actual mother tongue. I dressed like all the other teenagers and shared a cigarette with my classmates when they took a sneaky smoke in the toilet during breaks.*

**Don't become too Norwegian**

No matter how much I tried, I always reached a point where my surroundings put me in my place, with a quiet reminder that I shouldn't believe that 'I was Norwegian'. The message came, of course, from my Norwegian surroundings, but my parents were also scared stiff, in case I grew up into a person that they didn't

recognise. At home every conflict ended in the same way, with compromise and a warm embrace.

On the other hand, bullying at school became a part of my everyday. I fought against it. And maybe it made things more difficult for me. I challenged the image of what it means to be Norwegian with a minority background. (I don't like the term 'immigrant' - I feel that the term builds up a wall in society).

As youths from minority backgrounds, we were expected to be a bit dum, a bit ashamed because we were the so-called 'immigrants', yet also be beaming with gratefulness. I don't think that I ever did any of that. For many, I was a strange mix. And it is that which is so funny: Every day I continually see that people have problems placing me in a category; precisely because I don't fit in anyone's category, and plainly refuse to be forced into one.

The bullying escalated from nasty words to rotten oranges which rained down on me at break time and ended with an axe in a wrecked car when I was in college. Did this hurt? More than anyone can imagine, and I often ended up crying in front of the whole class during lessons.

## DILEMMA,

*Ambara Hashi Nur is project coordinator and chairwoman of the Somali women's union in Århus. The Speak Up! editorial staff have travelled to west Århus, to Trivselshuset to discuss culture, tradition and contact potential.*

*Speak Up!:* What is your experience of how the multicultural society is functioning in Denmark?

"In the last 5-6 years there has been a lack of counselling for new-Danes in Denmark. Many people are not given the right counselling when they arrive here in this country. They are lacking someone who can guide them in the new conditions

**Ethnic minority women are a marginalized group – in spite of the huge focus placed on the group, but rather because of a one-sided focus that keeps women within the existing images.**

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Amal Wahab

# my cake

## Long live integration

Such grand, important words as integration, assimilation and segregation sound rather professional, don't they? They make many an expert sound important. I don't really know if my parents thought consciously in academic terms when they raised us as integrated people with a twin culture. But I know that they were there for me; they were supportive and tried to be understanding, whilst at the same time they set demands and limits which sometimes were extremely strict for a girl who really wanted to be Norwegian and only Norwegian. Like, for example, when I was called Cinderella, because I always had to be home before midnight.

Today I realise that just allowing us to go to a party where alcohol was being consumed, where there was snogging in the corner, where many a girl and many a boy lost their virginity - that alone was a compromise on their part which they should be given a lot of respect for. It was their way of saying: 'We know it is difficult, we know that we have to find new limits and morals, we're trying to reach out a hand, but we can't make it happen all at once.' Many a time we had discussions at home on Islam, on women, on sex, on on on ...which often ended with me pulling my face and shouting "Oh my God! What a load of old-fashioned shit," before slamming the door to my room once again. But I was fond of my parents -

even when I hated them like crazy because they had brought us to Norway and had insisted that we kept our Egyptian identity.

## When pride was born

After a while I understood that I would never be accepted as Norwegian. I was too dark-skinned for that. Meanwhile, my parents always allowed themselves vacations to the old country, in a time when most others were thinking about earning a fortune. Many Pakistani friends of mine never travelled to Pakistan. When they grew up, their parents couldn't recognise them. What arises is something I call an adaptation collision. I thought it was a shame for them that they never knew any other place other than Norway, whilst, at the same time, they were asked to be absolutely 'un-Norwegian'! It's not so strange that many pack up and leave.

But back to my situation. By travelling to the land of my origin, I became immersed in the Egyptian culture. It was perhaps these trips that, slowly but surely, made it possible for me to be proud of being a "two-in-one package". In Egypt I became admired and respected by friends and family. Everyone thought it was so exciting that I spoke Norwegian, that I behaved a little differently, that I was dressed unlike most of the others. Even my grandpar-

ents, who were neither educated nor city folk, were fond of me precisely the way I was. For the first time I realised that everyone around me was positive because I was different. It was here that the pride of belonging to two cultures was born.

Today I feel privileged because I have a foot in each culture. I feel loyal to both camps. It is a few years since I became a mother to two children,

## Today I feel privileged because I have a foot in each culture

and I try to raise them to feel the richness which is inherent in belonging to two countries; to two cultures. I also try to teach them one of the basic rules my parents taught me. "If you don't respect others as they are, then you shouldn't expect them to respect you."

## The dream goes on

My dream is that minorities in Scandinavia in general can learn to spread their wings and enjoy life as bi-cultural individuals. I dream that we will all raise our children to be bi-cultural people with respect for others. And, not least, I hope that we can build bridges.

Personally, I build bridges as often as I can. A few weeks ago it was at a Norwegian Christmas celebration at my home, with my home-made christmas cakes in my little Muslim family. By the way, I forgot to mention that a couple of

years ago I started wearing a headscarf (hijab) - something that hit like a bomb in my Muslim surroundings. Nobody thought that I would be someone who would wear the Muslim scarf.

My Norwegian friends, on the other hand, told me they had expected that precisely this would happen. Even my two Norwegian godchildren were not surprised by my headwear.

In case you are sat thinking that I was forced to do this by an oppressive Arabian husband, you might as well think again. He knew nothing of it until he saw me standing there wearing it. One of the most tiring things is that I, as a Muslim woman, have to defend all of my choices, even the most private ones. If I don't do that most people assume that I am in an arranged marriage, have been circumcised, and get intermittent beatings from my father, brother

or husband. These things are hurtful; they steal my personality and identity. But I can write about that some other time.

In the meantime, I hope that parents with a minority background raise their children with enough security and freedom for them to be able to choose to be bi-cultural human beings. Bi-cultural pride is precisely something that will grow of its own free will.

*Amal Wahab has been working as a freelance journalist since 1998. She is educated cand.mag. from Oslo University, Norway. In 2005 she established the company Midtøsten Medier (Mid East Media) to promote journalistic material in Norway especially concerning issues with the Middle East, Islam, 'building bridges' etc. She is a Norwegian-Egyptian and currently lives in Egypt (to cover themes connected to the Middle east) but currently travels back and forth between Norway and Egypt.*



www.midtostenmedier.org

## COMPROMISE AND RESPONSIBILITY

which they find themselves in. I advise many Somalian women. They need to get to know the Danish system and how to navigate within it, or they will make many mistakes."

"Everyone in the world has their own religion and culture. Each person has their own way of living, so therefore I don't think one should get the terms mixed up. The labour market is one thing, religion another, and culture a third - so we must consider each thing for itself, or we will be confused."

Ambara stresses the difference as well as the wishes between culturally conditioned initiatives and the conditions of religion, and talks about which cultural differences

can function together in the Danish perception of democracy.

"One cannot carry out the circumcision of women in Denmark - it is an old tradition from Somalia, which does not fit with Danish tradition at all. In Denmark, in the past, the man had a key to the woman's chastity belt. It is the same thing. Tradition is tradition. It shouldn't be mixed with religion. When the Muslim tradition is dogmatic no-one can change it, but we can change our culture. We can remove much of our culture."

Ambara advises the women that they should keep their religion in their hearts, - "religion is up to themselves, but let us be together and let us get to know each

other, so we can understand one another." We need to have a dialogue. If one does not listen then one will never find out what we want as individuals.

It demands something from both parties, for us to meet. It takes patience, and if no-one makes the effort then we will never get anywhere. If only one party reaches out and the other doesn't, then it will not work, concludes Ambara.

*Speak Up!: What responsibilities do new-Danes have towards their fellow citizens in the Danish society?*

"First and foremost, everybody that lives in Denmark should learn to speak the Danish language. As soon as one can

speak a little Danish, one can get by in society and get a job. The Somali women can do many things: handwork or work in industry, and they should be paid a wage for it. The local authority in Århus pays them via supplementary benefit, but most of the women would rather work and earn money themselves. The Danish system and the Danish people have misunderstood them."

The problem, as Ambara sees it, is that many Somali women in Denmark want to get out into the labour market and are just waiting for the state, the government and the councils to do something. "They are ready to get a job, but many Somali women are suffering because they cannot get a job whilst they wear a headscarf; and

# Whose skin does a skin-coloured

By Rikke Andreassen

**We regard many ways of speaking and relationships as ordinary. We don't consider them too much, and take them for granted. But these generalities are neither innocent nor unimportant; for it is in the ordinary and the normal that prejudice and differences between people are created and maintained. It is in the definition of the normal that the actual struggle takes place. The struggle for the normal often takes place secretly. Hidden. Often we are not aware of the conditions that make the white, ethnic Dane appear as 'the normal', whilst others are placed as 'the different'. For example, have you noticed that a skin-coloured plaster is only skin-coloured for those of the Caucasian race?**

## Power resides in the normal.

We all speak from a place, from a position, and there is power in these positions. With power I don't mean physical power, but the power which lies in being privileged. That is, the power which is situated in the fact that one's words are treated as meaningful. There are some positions in our society that are more privileged than others and, therefore, some positions give more power than others. These positions depend on gender, ethnicity, religion, social background, education, sexuality, well-being, and so on. When we speak about the world, or speak with each

other, then we don't speak from a neutral or objective place but from the position we have. And the things we say are afforded meaning dependant on this position. This can be illustrated with an example: Imagine that you are sitting watching the news on TV and an item about cerebral research is shown. As part of the item the TV news team has invited an expert into the studio. The expert is to speak about cerebral research. In theory, this expert could be anyone who knows something about cerebral research. For example, it can be:

- 1) An ethnic Danish man, Caucasian, 50 years old, dressed in a suit and speaking in technical, medical terms.
- 2) A 24 year-old girl with a pierced face and a green mohican, who swears as she speaks.
- 3) A Muslim woman wearing a veil, whose name the TV journalist can't pronounce correctly.

**Those that have power don't have it because they maintain that they are better than others.**

Even though the content of what the three experts say about cerebral research is the same, it will be perceived differently by the TV viewers. And the 50 year-old, Caucasian, ethnic Danish man will probably not reflect on whether his words are given another credibility and meaning than those of the other two. Initially, we are not perceived equally or justly. People meet us, and assign to us various expectations in relation to what sex, ethnicity and age we have, and so on.

Richard Dyer, professor in film studies,

has said: "power in contemporary society habitually passes itself off as embodied in the normal as opposed to the superior". (Richard Dyer: "White", in Jessica Evans & Stuart Hall(Ed.), *Visual Culture: The Reader*, 1999). Those that have power don't have it because they maintain that they are better than others. The 50 year-old Caucasian, ethnic Danish expert in cerebral research isn't attributed greater credibility than the two other experts because he is a better person, or because some believe that he has a higher worth than the others. He is attributed meaning and power because he represents the normal. His gender, ethnicity, age and attire are associated with expertise and seriousness, and one almost expects that wise words will come from his mouth. One doesn't expect the same from the two other experts, and their chances of appearing as experts are therefore more limited, even though the two could have certainly been professional cerebral researchers.

## The ethnic and the rest of us

The integration of ethnic minorities is not going so well in Denmark. On the other hand, co-existence between ethnic minorities and the ethnic Danish majority shows, time and again, examples of how power lies in the normal. When we talk of ethnicity and race, we seldom think of Danish ethnicity and the Caucasian race. Race and ethnicity are something we associate with 'the others'. A colleague of mine who is of African origin is often characterised as 'coloured', whilst I, as a Caucasian ethnic Dane, have never been characterised by the colour marker. As a representative for the Caucasian race I have no colour. I am neutral. I am the norm. The only colour I have ever been assigned was when I had to

paint a self-portrait in art class in primary school, and my teacher said that I should colour my face and hands with "the skin-coloured paint". My classmate, adopted from Sri Lanka, was never skin-coloured, even though her flesh was covered in skin like mine. She was advised to colour her self-portrait with "dark-brown paint".

In Denmark we have a number of terms which we use to describe ethnic minorities in this country: 'refugee', 'immigrant', 'second-generation immigrant', 'descendant', 'bi-lingual', 'Muslim', 'ethnic' and 'of other ethnic origin'. These terms are not neutral. They are connected to certain expectations. The terms 'ethnic' and 'the ethnic other' are problematic in this way, because they so clearly place 'the Caucasian ethnic Dane' as the norm and the normal. From a linguistic point of view, we all have an ethnicity. But in Denmark it is the Caucasian Dane who has become so much the norm in public discussions that we apparently don't have an ethnicity. We don't talk about 'ethnic Danish people', only about 'Danes'. The term 'Dane' is automatically associated with the Caucasian, ethnic Danes. This linguistic difference can seem small or irrelevant, but it isn't. It is precisely there to construct a difference in content between 'us' and 'the others': 'us' who are 'neutral' and 'normal', and 'them' who are 'different' and have an ethnicity.

Another problem in talking about 'the ethnic' is that one groups them together. As if all ethnic minorities were one, or as if it was a homogenous group with a common background, common wishes and a common future. It is the same as if we consequently spoke about 'all Jutlanders', as if all the people from Jutland were the same, or together formed a common identity. Or that 'all redheads' were a common group.

## Pigeonholes

This generalised grouping is an expression of using pigeonholes. In Denmark we often set up these pigeonholes. We expect that a person is as our notion of them tells us, in relation to the gender and the ethnicity which the person represents. An example of a pigeonhole is when my colleague - a university lecturer at a humanities faculty - said to a female student of Pakistani origin: "It is difficult with you girls from the Middle East, because you never say anything during the lessons". He said this because he thought that it could help the student to express herself more during lessons. So she could do better at university and maybe get better grades. But it is neither a neutral nor an acceptable thing to say. It is precisely this type of expression which confirms prejudice about girls from the Middle East, and these prejudices are re-inforced when we say them out loud. When I spoke with him about the episode later, my colleague claimed that the student

they can't take the scarf off, so they get disappointed and must stay at home."

Our conversation about work, economy and gender roles continues and Ambara tells that it is perhaps the Somali men that are most 'under pressure' here in Denmark. They have lost their position as provider for the family, have maybe not been able to find a job, and their wives are receiving social welfare. So the men suffer, says Ambara. The women have taken up 'an economic position' by also having their own income. This is a family (and gender) pattern that is markedly different from the one the majority have known and been used to in their homeland.

We talk a little more about gender roles and power distribution both in Denmark and Somalia, and she laughs out loudly when we explain to her about Danish terms such as 'den bløde mand' (the sensitive, new man) and en 'tøffelheld' (hen-pecked husband), before we leave.

Please note page 16

Ambara Hashi Nur presenting SWOD

re invent  
the story  
of Better  
relationship

Speak Up! set up tolerance

# plaster match?



Photo: Babara Katzin

could have simply said something to him, if she didn't agree. But it is not so simple. She could not 'simply' disagree with him because they were speaking from different positions: He as an older, Caucasian man, and as her lecturer who gives her grades; she as a young student, of Pakistani origin, who is dependant on her lecturer's sympathetic view. Their power positions are different. The lecturer wasn't speaking from a neutral place and, in terms of power, it wasn't an equal conversation which they had. It is therefore not enough to have good intentions if the things one says are culpable in maintaining prejudice.

Trying to see people as individuals before one sees them as an ethnicity or gender, is central. My colleague saw the student as Pakistani and a woman before he saw her as an individual, and he assumed that she would automatically behave as he, and his imagination, believed that a woman with a Pakistani background would behave.

Our perception of ethnicity is not created in a vacuum, but in interaction with a string of other perceptions like, for example, the perception of gender, femininity and masculinity. In the story with my lecturer colleague, the female student is not shown merely as a Middle Eastern student – but as a female Middle Eastern student. As if the perception of her is not just a perception of a woman, but precisely of a Pakistani woman whom, because she is of Pakistani origin, is expected to be quiet, reserved and shy. The story is an example of a construct. The female stu-

dent is not born quiet, gentle and shy, but she has become this way; maybe because she is raised like that or because she meets people all the time in her surroundings, for example in school and at university, that expect her to be this way, and position her as if she is this way. Or, if she continuously sees ethnic minority women of Middle Eastern origin described in the media as repressed.

## Culture racism

Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries a so-called biological racism was still going strong in most of the western world.

One regarded human development as a forward-moving epoch, and the various races found themselves in different stages in their development. Highest

and most civilised was the European Caucasian man. Lowest and most backward were Aborigines from Australia, and all other races were meticulously placed between the two, in a racial hierarchy. The individual person was expected to match the behaviour and mental capacity which his/her race prescribed. World War II and its crimes against humanity brought an end to this type of racial thinking, and nowadays there are very few people who argue that some races are superior to other races. Instead, many talk today of cultural difference, and attribute particular expectations to people depending on their cultural

and ethnic backgrounds. The generalised comments on Somalian parents exposing their children to mutilation (said by Pia Kjærsgaard in 2003), that men of Arabian origin expose women to sexual assault, or that Muslim women are repressed, are examples of this form of 'culture-thinking'. These comments are also an expression of thinking in pigeonholes, where one unreflectively believes that all people belonging to a particular culture or religion, or originating from a particular region in the world, act in the same way.

Just as we don't believe that all Jutlanders

**Just as we don't believe that all Jutlanders or red-heads behave in the same way, it is naive to think that all ethnic minorities or all Muslims behave in the same way.**

or red-heads behave in the same way, it is naive to think that all ethnic minorities or all Muslims behave in the same way. Believing that a culture determines people's behaviour is closely linked to the belief

that race decides behaviour. It might well be that the culture-determining interpretation is thought-through even less thoroughly, as it builds on a perception of culture as static and unchanging. And we know that culture, just like society, changes continually. In similar ways the statement about Muslims and other non-ethnic Danes being at a more underdeveloped stage in relation to ethnic Danes, reminds us of the biological racist belief of days gone by and the racial hierarchy. The statement "a Muslim culture from the Middle Ages will never be as valid in this country as the Danish culture" (quoted from Brian

Mikkelsen at The Conservative Folk Party national conference, september 2005), resonates undeniably like tones from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, only with race replaced by culture. This form of cultural stereotyping is called culture-racism. It is no less judgemental nor less discriminatory than the earlier biological racism. It is just more camouflaged.

## Plasters and thoughts in more nuances, please

Instead of looking at others, especially ethnic minorities, as culture-determined products - that is to say, as people whose behaviour is dictated by their culture - it would be advantageous to begin by looking at people as individuals. On the question of which actions are most valid, it is important to understand that 'same difference' isn't the same as 'indifference'. The various cultures and religions are equally valid, but one could certainly distance oneself from the actions of individuals. I make a stand against the circumcision of young girls, in the same way as I do not accept sexual assault (whether it be from ethnic Danes or ethnic minorities). But I do not meet all Somalis with an idea that they all circumcise and mutilate their daughters. Neither do I believe that all men of Arabic descent are sexually aggressive or out to rape me and my fellow sisters. Just as I do not believe that all ethnic Danish men in their forties are paedophiles, even though it has been shown that some of them are. The idea that all who represent cultures, religions or areas of descendancy - who are different than the majority - should be like each other, is not nuanced. It is just as generalised as the use of language on the skin-coloured plaster. Therefore, let us think less generalised and more manifold. This will also deprive the Caucasian race and the normal of a little of its power - and, likewise, encourage integration.

*Rikke Andreassen:  
Associate Professor in communication and media science at Malmö University, Sweden. Cand.mag in History and Visual Communication, Aarhus University and Ph.D. at the University of Toronto - focusing on the media's presentation of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality. Rikke Andreassen runs the consulting firm Q & A - which is involved in research and giving advice concerned with gender and racial discrimination.*

[www.rikkeandreassen.dk](http://www.rikkeandreassen.dk)

www.somaliwomen.dk



Asha Qadar Hassan presenting a *harro*, which is a traditional wedding gift given from mother to daughter. A *harro* is originally used to store meat

Af Ambara Hashi Nur

Dear sister

*I would like to give some information about our organization: Women's health and preventing FGM-Female Genital Mutilation*

A group of Somali women refugees arrived in Denmark in the early 90s. They found the democratic, political and social organizational challenges and opportunities in Denmark more inspiring, demanding and interesting, and concluded that there was a need for an organization that not only supported members but also understood the complexity and dynamics of the Danish society.

The founding members of the Somali women organization include well educated, organizationally competent persons with many years of experience. These assets have among other steps led to the intensification of the organization's efforts to promote the interests of its members by actively participating in overall integration activities in Denmark.

The organisation SWOD was formed and its objectives are to strengthen, promote and visualize the position of the Somali women and their opportunities and duties in society, both nationally and internationally.

We employed already existing methods of empowerment, in order to strengthen the members' sense of coherence and through that inform about health. In order to create a better dialogue and communication between various ethnic groups, preventing and combating FGM, the main activities are carried out through debates that promote advice and

guidance about biological and cultural knowledge.

**Our activities in general**

The title IFTIIN is the title of one of our projects, and it is in Somali and means 'Enlightenment'. The aim of this project is to promote ethnic women's health and prevent FGM. We aim at carrying out the project through new and creative ways.

This project will empower ethnic women in Europe by promoting their health and thereby prevent FGM, because through changes in lifestyle women will be able to reduce lifestyle related diseases and promote women's knowledge and attitude to the subject, and thereby enable them to make radical changes in their way of living. We wanted to achieve our aims by using new empowerment methods such as Appreciative Inquiry and Forum Theatre. The reason why we imply methods such as Forum Theatre is because we believe that drama, music and humour will help us reach our target group and the public. Furthermore, Appreciative Inquiry will also be used as a method for empowering women. Here the participants interview each other and thereby identify each persons success stories.

The Somali organization is a membership organization open to voluntary sector organization and local institutions. Somali women's organization offers its members a range of services such as project management and raising awareness about all disadvantaged groups.

Another project is the Daphne Programme II 2004-2008. It has been initiated in order to prevent and fight violence against children, young people and women and to protect victims and groups at risk.

# challenge of the community

**Somali Women's Organization support women:**

- \* who suffer of depression, anxiety, eating disorders contact problems, psychosomatic disorders, self injuring and behaviour, dissociative disease.
- \* who have conflicts in their relationships and loss of orientation at different life stages
- \* who have experienced sexual abuse and any kind of physical, mental and sexual violence.
- \* who have had traumatic experiences

**What we offer**

- \* counselling and information about the psychosocial treatment facilities in the region,
- \* workshops and seminars
- \* supervision by professional (single and groups)
- \* cultural and political events
- \* initiation of networking with regional national and international organizations
- \* other educational lectures
- \* partnership in international projects concerning our spectrum of themes
- \* carrying out EU-projects

Forum theatre is an interactive form of theatre, where actors present a critical or problematic situation in, for example, the workplace...Audiences and participants share responsibility for the development of the play. They are responsible for the way in which the story is improved or worsened. Through understanding mixed with humour and release through laughter, the participants obtain self-recognition. (ed.)

Ambara Hashi Nur:  
Chairwoman for SWOD, Somali Women's Organization in Denmark and project coordinator, Trivsels-

huset, Århus. Lives in Århus. She is active locally and internationally concerning woman empowerment and equality

**SOMALI HÅNDCRAFT**



Ambara Hashi Nur and Asha Qadar Hassan present somali handcraft



Handcraft produced by Asha Qadar Hassan

How to agree on the construction of NATIONAL history

Speak Up! set up tolerance

# The price for a wife

WHERE ARE THE POOR SOULS?

*A Speak Up! interview with Filomenita Mongaya Høgsholm.  
By Uzma Ahmed Andresen*

*When I met with Filomenita Mongaya Høgsholm one morning at a quiet café by the lakes in Copenhagen, I found myself opposite a woman whom, in her red silk outfit, exuded professionalism, firm*

*beliefs, and a worldly co-existent citizenship, based on experiences throughout her own life. But later, as the conversation unfolded, and we began to talk about what it's like being an Asian woman in Denmark, I saw not only a mother of two adult daughters and a son, but also a wounded and indignant woman.*

Denmark is a lovely country in which I have, myself, lived for many years, and have been married to a Dane for 35 years. But there are prejudices which are revived again and again: I remember it so clearly, even though it is at least 20 years ago. I

*continue page 18*

## I want to give others the help I never received myself.

*By Behice Gökdemir and Rikke Andreassen*

### **I learnt to speak Danish in the workplace**

"I had a Turkish friend whose Danish boyfriend got her a job at the Kirsebærhaven care centre. I also wanted to work there. My friend talked with the care centre. She said to me: 'You're going to an interview tomorrow.' I went to the job interview even though I couldn't speak very much Danish. I had experience looking after my elderly parents-in-law. They said: 'You can begin tomorrow.' I was employed as a relief worker. I could only speak a little Danish, but I learned quickly to speak Danish in the workplace. My colleagues and the older residents helped me. The demented residents were especially good. They asked about the same things all the time, so I got lots of practice speaking Danish. It was much better than going on a Danish course. My colleagues urged (and urged and urged) me to get an education as a health and social worker. I didn't really want to but they got me the papers to join and I applied for the course. After finishing my studies I was employed full-time at Kirsebærhaven. Today we have Muslim residents. I have taught the other health and social workers, and assistants, how one should tie the Muslim scarf. I have also taught them a little about Islam, so they can better work with the Muslim residents.

It is ten years since Kirsebærhaven employed me. They gave me a chance. But they also gave themselves a chance - they got a competent co-worker and, moreover, they got a consultant in inter-cultural care for the elderly. I am always on duty on the Christian holy days. I am a Muslim, so I don't celebrate Christmas. It's good being at work over Christmas. There is a cosy and happy atmosphere. If it was today, I don't think that there would be many old-age homes that would employ me. Over the last ten years there has been so much negative discussion on Muslims and ethnic minorities. It affects the views of Danes. There is more racism now. It damages integration. I probably wouldn't be given the chance today."

### **My daughter is from Turkey**

"I live together with my daughter, Beyhan, in our house. I didn't have any children when I was married. Therefore,

I adopted a child when I - personally and economically - was ready to have a child. My daughter is from Turkey. She needed a family and I wanted to help. There have been periods in my life where I needed help, but where there wasn't any help to find. Therefore, I would like to help others now, because I know how important it is. Families are also important. My family in Turkey has helped me a lot; amongst other things, when I was getting divorced. My daughter is handicapped. She has spastic paralysis from the waist down. I felt that I had enough strength to accept a handicapped child. When she was younger I took her with me to work, when I was working the evening shift. She was too young to be at home alone, so she came along with me to the old-age home. The old residents like children. Having children around them cheers them up."

### **I like gardening**

"I was trained as a seamstress in Turkey. Therefore I sew a fair bit in my spare time. I also like gardening. There is a large garden around my house. I plant flowers and grow vegetables. I do many things in my spare time. At the moment I am on a computer course. My daughter is really good with computers. I want to be better. I have passed an introductory computer course. Now I am taking my PC driving license. In my spare time, of course, I also spend time with my daughter and with my friends. I have many friends, from many different lands: Some from Turkey, some from Denmark, and others from Africa. One of my favourite things is ski-ing. I really enjoy being on a ski holiday. I head off with some friends to Norway, and we ski all day - or ride on snowmobiles. It's wonderful just to be out in the snow. It is nice to be out in nature."

### **Behice Gökdemir**

*1962 Born in Istanbul, Turkey. 1983 Married and moved to Denmark. 1983-95 Lived in Høje Taastrup - learnt approx. five words of Danish. 1995 Divorced. 1996 Employed at the Kirsebærhaven old-age home in Valby. 1996 Learnt to speak Danish at work. 1997 Bought an apartment in Valby. 1998 Adopted her daughter, Beyhan. 1999 Active in the NIF (Trade Union Network) which works to encourage the participation of ethnic minorities in*



*Private photos: Behices together with her daughter in the plane*



*Behice at work*



*Holiday in Norway*

*trade union movements and the labour market). 1999-2000 Trained as a health and social worker with a final exam grade of B+. 2000 Employed permanently as a health and social worker at the Kirsebærhaven care centre. 2000 Bought a house in Valby. 2004: Mentor at the Social and Health school in Copenhagen. 2006, 1. Jan. Seeks new challenges - begins a new job as a health and social worker at a rehabilitation and care centre.*

*continued from page 17 ..The prize of a wife*

was upset about something I read in the newspaper - it stated, "The price of a Filipino wife: 20,000 Danish kroner". I remember thinking: When one talks of prices, isn't that something to do with prostitution? Whenever I heard the words 'white slave women', relating to Filipino women who get married to Danish men, I became angry that I was witnessing a helpless situation.", tells Filomenita Mongaya Høgsholm.

*You could very well be in the same target group as the state-*

*ment which the newspaper came out with. Have you, yourself, experienced prejudices affecting your life?*

Yes, it turns out that the newspaper headlines also had an effect on me! Because people cannot always differentiate between one Asian woman and another. It hit hard because it was through my 11 year-old son's experience that I became affected. He had really been looking forward to taking a couple of days holiday in Jutland with his friend and his friend's

divorced mother, and also a friend of hers. Both women had been neighbours of mine some years earlier. But what should have been a relaxing holiday on the Jutlandic moors turned into a really bad experience. When my son came home he told me how angry and embarrassed he felt when one of the women asked him, in all sincerity, "How much did your father pay for your mother?" I couldn't help but think why she hadn't asked me that question back then when we only had a garden fence between us?

*But is there no truth in it, when the media takes up a story about Asian women who arrive here either as wives in a family reunification or as au pair girls?*

Yes, of course there are some terrible cases we hear of sometimes, where women have been brought here against their will, but when I think of the generation of women to which I belong myself, and other younger women who have married men from Denmark, I can't help but notice that there is always another side

which doesn't get exposed by the media - because this group of women is also comprised of very ordinary Filipino women, who are not from poor circumstances, and certainly weren't prostituted.

In order to see why they came to Denmark and other Western countries, one must look closer at the Filipino culture. In Filipino culture girls have the same value as boys, and we are raised with room to develop lots of self-worth



Babara Katzin  
Eduacated as a visual artist. She works with art as communication and social interaction

## Out of context

Photo by Barbara Katzin

and responsibility, which is later realised as power – even in the only power that counts, namely economic power in the family. It is also quite common for women to work outside the home, single or married. Travelling abroad is also a part of the dream. Most would sooner acquire further university education, either in the USA or other parts of Asia or Europe. But for the less well-off, and less-educated, the wish to go abroad has also been possible to realise by working in low status jobs on several continents.

*But it must be out of necessity rather than desire that so many women travel abroad?*

One can't get around the fact that seeing a better economy on the horizon tempts people to leave – that's a global reality! But one

must still believe that the women do it as independent individuals, if they themselves tell it that way. It is wrong to take away their own power, just because it is easier to help women when they are portrayed as poor souls and victims. For me it is positive to see that the women go abroad and, in this way, are better equipped to improve the living standards of their families in their homeland. It also gives women a different status in society. In my opinion, it is the road to female equality.

#### notes

<sup>1</sup>The articles have been collected to form a report which was published in 2005 "Dialogues in Dignity – Celebrating Asian Women." The report can be obtained by writing to [filomenitah@yahoo.com](mailto:filomenitah@yahoo.com)

*Filomenita Mongaya Høgsholm (DK): Journalist and editor of ABAKADA published by Philippine Women Network in DK. For many years Filomenita Mongaya Høgsholm has been engaged in getting women of ethnic minorities in Denmark organised. She has been involved in various networks for women of ethnic minorities in Denmark and abroad and has, amongst other things, been editor for the award-winning immigrant women's magazine "Soldue" and on the asylum-seeker newspaper, "New Times", which was produced in Kulturhuset under the auspices of the Danish Red Cross. In 2003 Filomenita Mongaya Høgsholm was, in addition, the chairwoman of a dialogue seminar forming part of the Images of Asia festival, where 1<sup>st</sup> generation migrant women from various parts of Asia expressed themselves.*

## Rosalyn Venning

**Presented by  
Filomenita Mongaya Høgsholm**

Rosalyn sits on the committee of Babaylan, The Philippine Women's Network, as the spokesperson responsible for economy. She is trained in accounts in the Philippines, and came to Denmark because she married the anthropology student, Torben, who, for a period of time, worked in Malaysia - and has done on and off since then.

Rosalyn comes from the Southern, Muslim part of the Philippines, namely Mindanao Island, where Muslim families - especially noble families such as Rosalyn's - do not recognise any country borders<sup>1</sup>. Family members have inhabited the islands nearby for several generations, either those belonging to the multi-ethnic Malaysia (Sabah), the heavily-populated and almost 100% Muslim Indonesia, and the small but very affluent Brunei. Many of these 'royal' people are related to one another. Something similar can be found in today's Middle East, where the tribes are related to each other across country borders; that is to say, a

Kuwaiti can very possibly have cousins in Jordan, for example, or the present Palestine or Saudi Arabia, and so on.

True to her family tribe, Rosalyn has kept alive the Court dance she learned as a child and brought it with her to her new home and new country, Denmark, where several of her 4 sons have been born. Her exotic Muslim dance steps and rhythms have spellbound numerous people who have hosted various Philippine parties and other arrangements, in the ethnic milieu in Copenhagen. For example, during the *Images of Asia* festival she produced a pantomime - a love story à la Romeo and Juliet - between the badjaos, a Philippine Muslim tribe that live by the sea. The pantomime was shown as part of the Asian Comments programme in September 2002.

In the period 2003-2005 Rosalyn was, in addition, the South-east Asian representative on the Copenhagen Municipality Ethnic Council.

<sup>1</sup> Rosalyn is in fact a 'dayang dayang' which is equivalent to the title 'little princess' because her mother is 'dayang' and a real princess; that is to say, she is descended from a chief, a sultan.

who is  
forgetting  
the Redefined  
borders in the  
Globalized  
World

Speak Up! set up tolerance

We would like to introduce one of the coming issues of Speak Up! already now. The work title will be Life preferable to lifestyle! This time the magazine will take form as a 'women's magazine'. If you have a good idea or suggestions of writers and/or participants please contact us at the email address [speakup-setup@hotmail.com](mailto:speakup-setup@hotmail.com)

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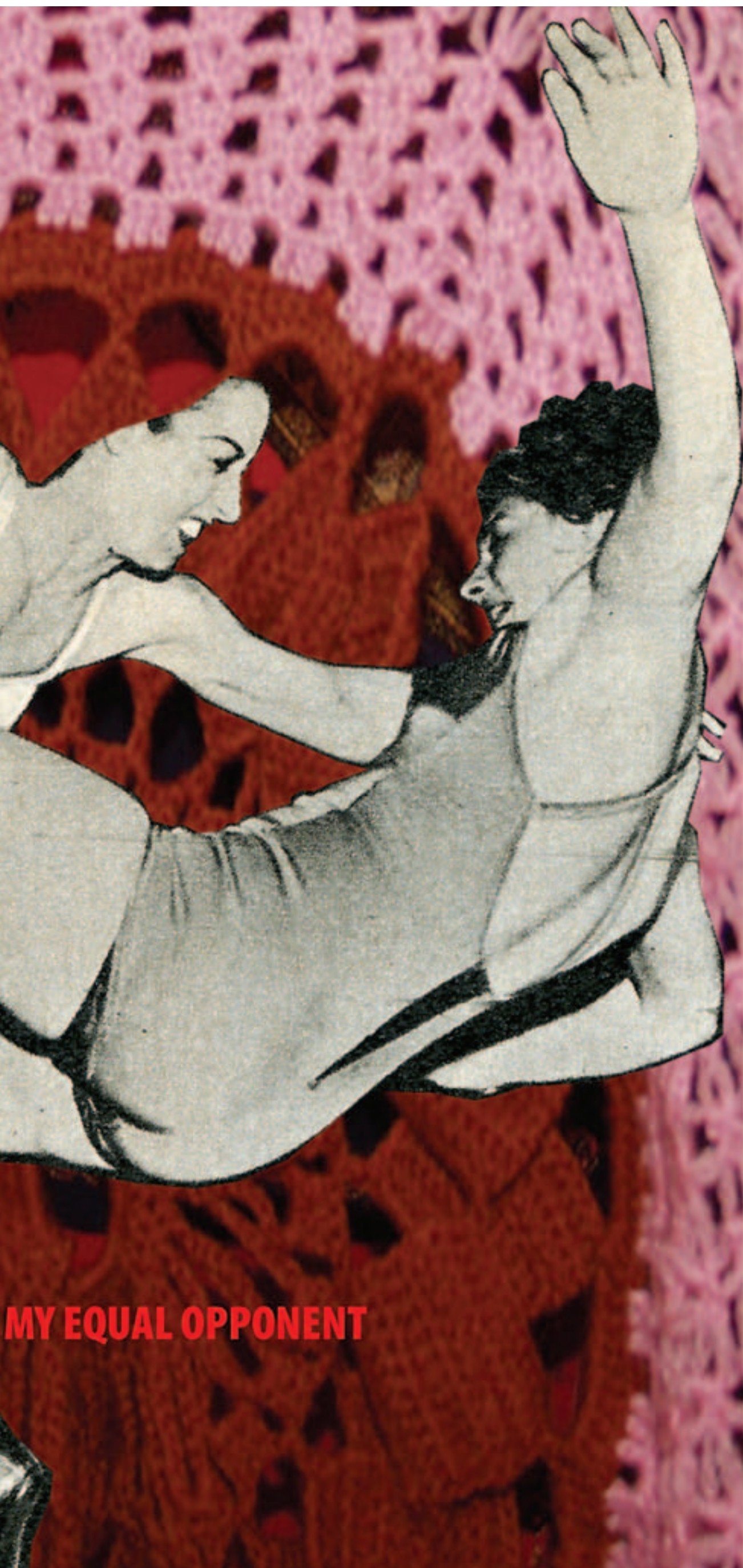
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