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# Dark Blood: An Analysis of *Slaves in the Family* (*Slavernes slægt*)*

Birgitta Frello

**Abstract:** The article presents an analysis of the Danish documentary series, *Slaves in the Family*. It demonstrates how an analytics of hybridity can unpack the naturalizations and denaturalizations of categories of purity, arguing that it is vital to capture the unstable tension between understanding "hybridity" as a mixing of elements on the one hand, and as a displacement of categories on the other. *Slaves in the Family* criticizes and destabilizes ideas of purity by rearticulating the story of Danish colonial history and of Danish national identity. However, the article argues that the series' narrative about family and race is uneasily situated between the two conceptions of hybridity. Consequently, notions of purity are reinstalled by the way the series articulates "kinship" as the basis of true relations and authentic identity.

**Keywords:** sociology, hybridity, mixed race, multiraciality, film and media, Nordic

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## Introduction

In January 2005, the Danish TV channel DR2 launched a documentary series of four episodes, *Slaves in the Family* (*Slavernes slægt*).[1] The series focuses on Scandinavian descendants of enslaved persons from the former Danish colony of the West Indies: St. John, St. Thomas, and St. Croix—now the US Virgin Islands. The islands were Danish colonies from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries until sold to the United States in 1917. In Denmark, the West Indies is depicted mainly as an exotic place with which Danes have a special historical relationship. Slavery is not at the forefront of Danish public narratives of the colonial history, although the sugar plantations in the Danish West Indies were heavily dependent on the labor of enslaved West Africans. In relation to slavery, the focus of Danish public narrative is not on the slave trade, nor is it on the fact of slavery, but rather it concentrates on the *abolition* of slavery, granted without permission from the Danish state by the then Danish governor-general, Peter von Scholten, who had been strongly pressured by a slave uprising in 1848. The documentary series, *Slaves in the Family*, aims at presenting a critical perspective on this story as it is conventionally told.

An important way the series wrestles with the absences and repressions in the Danish relationship with colonial history is through various narratives of hybridity. Over the four episodes viewers are introduced to eight stories of people of mixed Scandinavian and African or African Caribbean descent. The audience accompanies these descendants as they explore their genealogy and discover previously unknown blood relatives—in Scandinavia as well as in the West Indies.[2] The reason why tales of hybridity are central to the series, however, is not just because of the mixed descent of the participants. Rather, it is primarily because the participants' racial genealogies structure the series' overall narrative and provide the

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raison d'être for the project as a whole. Thus, the transgression of notions of purity is emphasized not only in the individual participants' reflections on the meaning of their "mixed" genealogy but also in the series' overall narrative.

## Narratives of Hybridity

To claim that the narratives of the series are narratives of hybridity involves placing the series within a specific discursive and analytical frame, which is concerned with the unequal power relations and the paradoxes involved in notions of purity, as well as with attempts to transgress such notions. In the following discussion, I will therefore briefly explore how hybridity can function as an analytical concept that can capture very different ways of conceptualizing the transgression of purity. I clarify my approach to the analysis of hybridity by distinguishing between "liberal hybridism," as conceptualized by Ien Ang, and hybridity as "displacement," as conceptualized by Stuart Hall. This distinction enables me to capture and distinguish between articulations of hybridity in terms of the mixture of elements (cultural, racial, etc.) on the one hand, and in terms of the displacement of categories on the other. This distinction will then be employed in analyzing *Slaves in the Family*.

I argue that the series' overall narrative is caught in an uneasy tension between these two notions of hybridity. The series displaces the notion of a benign and homogeneous "Danishness" by rearticulating Danish colonial history and Danish national identity and including the slave trade and the presence of descendants of enslaved persons in the narrative. In the narrative of the series, this rearticulation rests, however, on a liberal hybridism that glosses over differences in history and power. I further argue that despite the explicit focus on hybridity, the series ends up reinstalling notions of purity by the way "kinship" is articulated as the basis of true relations and true identity. Through this analysis, I demonstrate that the displacement of certain categories of purity does not automatically ensure against articulating other categories as "pure." Furthermore, I demonstrate the importance of attending to the specific discursive setting within which struggles over cultural classification take place, since this always happens in particular contexts that are already discursively structured as a result of previous struggles over meaning.[3]

Hybridity as a concept links etymologically to biology, in that it refers to interbreeding across species. Furthermore, it has been applied in relation to miscegenation, which also connects it to racist discourses about the "contamination" of the White race by Black blood resulting in the birth of mongrels. A large part of the literature, which employs or criticizes the concept of hybridity, discusses its problematic history—notably its racist implications. I choose "hybridity" as my central analytical category in this context, not *despite* its problematic history but rather *because* of it, since, due to this racist legacy, the concept of hybridity indicates the depth of the stake in constructing, reconstructing, and displacing relations of purity and transgression. Hybridity not only concerns exotic mixtures between cultures and races but also concerns fears about the contamination of a perceived fragile purity—of race, culture, etc.[4]

In recent cultural analyses the category of hybridity has mainly been employed as a critical and liberating alternative to oppressing ideas of purity. Focusing on the transgression of purity accentuates the repressing consequences of, for example, national and racial purification projects.[5] *Slaves in the Family* fits within this critical tradition, since an important purpose of the series is to criticize Danish notions of

purity and self-sufficiency through demonstrating how much the Danish history and populace are enmeshed with other places and races.

It is important to note, however, that the transgression of notions of purity does not carry any political or critical meaning in itself.[6] Therefore, insisting on "hybridity" as an alternative to "purity" does not automatically abolish inequalities. Consequently, I prefer to consider the concept of hybridity as a discursive resource, which forms particular images of the world and hence also shapes particular spaces of possibilities for acting in the world, and it is in this respect that I find it suitable as an analytical—rather than as a descriptive or a normative—category. Rather than criticizing ideas of purity by focusing on hybridity, I analyze below how relations between purity and hybridity are articulated in *Slaves in the Family*. Focusing on the distinction between liberal hybridism and hybridity as displacement highlights how representations of national identity and history are involved with relations of power.

## Liberal Hybridism and Hybridity as Displacement

Ang criticizes the ways "hybridity" is often applied as a term that simply celebrates mixture.[7] Used in this way, it risks glossing over power differences between unequally positioned groups in defining the meaning of the hybrid and the pure. She exemplifies this with reference to the official Australian discourse on national identity where the ideal of multiculturalism has replaced the ideal of Whiteness. In this context, the idea that every Australian citizen somehow has an interest in a shared culturally and racially mixed past can be seen as just another attempt to deny and mask the history of racism against the Aboriginal population. They did not ask to be "mixed" or "hybridized." Hybridization is something that has predominantly been done *to* them, not *by* them. Thus, "the very equation of hybridity with harmonious fusion or synthesis—which we may characterize as 'liberal hybridism,' simplifies matters significantly and produces power effects of its own, which reveal some of the problems with an uncritical use of the idea of hybridity."[8]

Therefore, the question of whose interests are served by articulating identity in terms of "hybridity," rather than "purity" in specific instances is crucial. This is at issue in Hall's conceptualization of hybridity in terms of displacement, a perspective also endorsed by Ang. In Hall's writings, a central concern is the relation between the "center" and the "margin." This involves studying how relations between the West and the rest rely on the construction of Whiteness through the exclusion of the non-White and how the penetration of the center by the marginalized "Other" undermines the naturalized dominant position of the center. As Hall writes, "the displacement of the 'centered' discourses of the West entails putting in question its universalist character and its transcendental claims to speak for everyone, while being itself everywhere and nowhere."[9]

"Hybridity as displacement" is about the introduction of "otherness"—not in terms of a simple "mixing" of elements with different racial or cultural origin but in terms of an "impurity" that contaminates, disturbs, and displaces the idea of purity. This way of conceptualizing hybridity not only involves a critique of purity but also involves a critique of power since it focuses on naturalizations and denaturalizations of categories of race, nation, etc. and therefore also on positions from which questions of belonging can be decided. Therefore, while liberal hybridism is a "stabilizing" discourse that obscures power

inequalities, the discourse of hybridity as displacement is a "destabilizing" discourse that underlines such inequalities.

These two ways of conceptualizing hybridity are both present in *Slaves in the Family*. Although they both aim to transgress notions of purity, they nevertheless imply very different ways of understanding the hybrid and the pure and the relations between the two. Therefore, together they open the possibility of capturing important tensions and paradoxes in the way the series presents its alternative narrative of Danish history and the relationships between Danes and Caribbeans. The following analysis of the series demonstrates this.

## Narratives of History and Slavery

"The slaves have been made invisible in the public space."[10] This sentence is stated in a voice-over in the first episode of the series. The very statement that "the slaves" have been *made* invisible implies that the lack of representation of slavery in public space is not just an issue of omission. It is also an issue of active repression. This argument is illustrated by a sequence in which the camera follows the protagonist of the first episode, Camilla, walking around in the West Indian warehouse at the Copenhagen harbor. As the name indicates, the building's history testifies to the economic importance of the Caribbean colony. Today, the West Indian warehouse contains statues, copies of classic Greek forms, while Denmark has no monument memorializing the era of slavery. The series aims at contributing to a correction of this repression of history by focusing on the importance of the colony—including the slave trade—in building Danish trade, industry, and wealth.

Until recently, the dominant narrative of Danish identity has been relatively stable, emphasizing egalitarianism, cultural homogeneity, peacefulness, tolerance, and a humanitarian attitude toward less privileged people. It also contained a narrative of racial tolerance and even active anti-racism evidenced by, for example, the central place that the rescuing of the Danish Jews occupies in narratives about Denmark during World War II. In relation to this authoritative narrative, the former Danish colonies—and in particular the overseas colonies—occupy a modest place indeed. Karen Fog Olwig notes that Denmark was never confronted with the critique of colonialism that the major colonial powers encountered, and she argues that the reason for this lack of confrontation may rest in Denmark divesting itself of its colonies relatively early.[11] The colonial past is, however, not simply absent from public Danish identity narratives. Rather, it is—paradoxically—articulated *through* the Danish narrative of humanitarianism, egalitarianism, and tolerance. Through an analysis of the 1992 exhibition *The Danes in the West Indies* in Copenhagen, Olwig demonstrates how the abolition of slavery is presented as a noble gesture, which was performed despite its grave economic consequences for the Danish state. In this way, the history of the Danish policy toward the West Indies links to the dominant narrative of Danish national identity, depicting the abolition of slavery as a humane act that contributes to the benign narrative of Danish history. Such a connection avoids rather than addresses the implications of slavery.

Hence, the colonial past is not completely absent from public Danish discourse. However, its presence sometimes contributes to obliterating, rather than illuminating, unpleasant parts of this past. Therefore, illuminating these unpleasant dimensions of the Danish engagement in colonialism immediately fuels the

ongoing debate about national identity in Denmark. And this is one of the explicit purposes of *Slaves in the Family*. Thus, the series' critical contribution to the debate about national identity not only focuses on representations of history but also on the narrative of homogeneity. This was expressed in condensed form by the producer, Alex Frank Larsen, at a presentation of the series at a Danish high school prior to the television broadcast. Larsen concluded his presentation by stating, "we are all immigrants."[12] By stating this as the central message of the series, he indicates that "Danishness" is not as "pure" as Danish nationalists would have it. Thus, the statement situates the series within the frame of a debate not only about Danish colonial history but also about "Danishness" and the relation between the ethnic Danish majority and the ethnic minorities in Denmark.

## Slaves in the Family

As indicated by its title, *Slaves in the Family* not only focuses on Danish colonial history in relation to the former Danish West Indies but also has a specific approach to this history, in that the story is told through the lens of kinship. Finding one's ancestors among the enslaved West Indians has been made possible by the meticulous Danish archives from the colony. In these archives the enslaved persons and their relatives are registered. The archives are now being made available electronically and this is part of the background for the production of the series. In the series, the idea of focusing on kinship is expressed by Svend Holsøe, who is introduced as "the leading scholar" of the Danish era of slavery. He says: "This generation of Danes is for the first time being allowed to or allowing themselves to be honest about their past and particularly if … certain members of their family were African. Family becomes very important here, because the whole process of slavery and of enslavement was to negate family."[13]

This quotation indicates that kinship is not just a lens through which the "uncomfortable" story of the Danish complicity in slavery is told. It is also of immense importance for coming to terms with the past. The importance, which Holsøe grants to kinship, is supported by the producer of the series, Larsen, in an article that was published in a Danish magazine prior to the launching of the series. Here, he draws a parallel to African Americans who search for their roots and find no, or very limited, information when they look more than a few generations back in time. He refers to the sense of "vacuum," which this situation of not being able to "close the circle" leaves to people who search for their ancestors, and he concludes his comments: "This is the chance, which is now appearing in Denmark. Here we can close circles."[14]

Holsøe and Larsen both stress the importance of knowing one's family history. However, while Holsøe talks about it in terms of "allowing" oneself to be "honest about the past," Larsen refers to it in terms of "closing circles," and he places the African American and the Danish descendants of enslaved persons on the same footing, referring to their attempts at "closing the circle." This difference indicates a tension, which is present throughout the series and that can be illustrated by the following question: is the family history important because the Danes need to face up to the reality of Danish colonial history—and hence also the complicity in racism and slave trade—or is it important because it can satisfy an individual search for identity which is equally shared among descendants of slave traders and enslaved?

## Displacing Danishness

As mentioned above, the series' critical perspective concerns both the critique of Danish dealings with the past and the critique of Danish fantasies about homogeneity. The first critical perspective argues that slavery is part of Danish history, and it is time Danes acknowledge this and grant slavery visibility in the public arena. Larsen expresses it:

> In terms of humaneness the era of slavery was one of the most painful parts of our history, but we almost never hear about it. Particularly remarkable is the fact that young people of today who grow up in an ever more mixed society do not learn about these crucial preconditions for their own time and existence. It looks like a national taboo.[15]

This perspective is voiced strongly in the first episode, which includes a small section on the commemoration of the 150-year anniversary of the abolition of slavery on St. Croix in 1998.

The commemoration included various reenactments of central historical episodes, notably the declaration of the Danish governor-general, Peter von Scholten, of the abolition of slavery, performed by a Danish actor. However, demonstrators interrupted the commemoration. One of these, the local politician Adelbert Bryan, is seen shouting to the camera: "I am saying to you people: Denmark must understand that nobody in Denmark is my friend ... until the heads of their state apologize to the African people of the world that they have enslaved and brutalized and massacred them. That is my position."

This critical perspective relies on acknowledging the power difference between Whites and Blacks, Danes and Africans, slave owners and enslaved. It insists that focusing on the benign versions of the history does not erase the crimes that were committed. The second critical perspective concerns ideas of homogeneity, based on exclusionist versions of Danishness. When Larsen emphasizes that Camilla, whose search for her roots we follow in the first episode, has Black ancestors even though she is "blond as a Viking,"[16] he draws attention to the power struggle that is involved in defining Danishness and that involves a categorical distinction between *Self* and *Other*. The claim involved is that this categorical distinction should be overcome, since we are all hybrids. Acknowledging hybridity implies displacing the centered discourse of Danishness and insisting on the presence of the Other in ourselves. And in this case, this involves not only some "exotic" blend of Black and White but also the uncomfortable history of the slave trading past. These critical perspectives together contribute to displacing the "centered" perspective of dominant Danish self-narratives.

## Celebrating Family

Nonetheless, the series also involves a discourse of hybridity as "blending," which is akin to the "liberal hybridism" that Ang criticizes. This discourse appears because the series—despite its explicit purpose—comes close to negating specific Caribbean "Black" experiences, connected to the legacy of slavery. A closer look at the presentation of Camilla's story serves to clarify this point. Camilla Marlene Jensen is a young Danish teacher. The audience is informed that she is "as Danish as anybody, twenty-nine

years, born and grown up in Copenhagen," with no knowledge of her Black ancestors. However, sometimes people ask her if she has "dark blood" running in her veins. Camilla decided to investigate and discovered that her great-grandfather, Charles Pickering, was Black and came to Denmark from St. Croix. At the beginning of the search, Camilla tells the viewers how much it means to her to find out about her ancestors. She states that she is "not going to find peace of mind" if she does "not find out where Charles and his mother came from," and that she feels that she owes it to them, "because for so many years people have closed their eyes. For so many years people have not been talking about this part of history—of Danish history. It has been pushed aside."

The documentary shows Camilla conducting her search in the archives of Copenhagen, London, and St. Thomas. We watch her telling her story and we accompany her on camera as she travels to the Virgin Islands and looks up places and people who are connected to her Caribbean family history. In a speech to a local audience, she talks about how proud she is of her heritage and that she can "understand why I took certain directions in life, why I went to live in South Africa for five years. I see a connection now."

Generally, the documentary series narrates the story of the descendants of enslaved persons in terms of the reuniting of family bonds that have been culpably broken by slavery and colonial power. During the visit to St. Croix, Camilla encounters a woman who is on the same quest as herself; ironically, the woman is also a Danish descendant of Charles Pickering. This encounter leads to a "family reunion" in Denmark, a gathering of Danes looking at pictures and talking about their common family history.

All four episodes in the series focus on family and family reunions. In the second episode, the two cousins, Lotte Cornelins and Ben Besiakow, travel to St. Croix where they look up formerly unknown relatives of their grandfather, Victor Cornelins, who was "imported" into Denmark at the age of seven in order to be displayed at a 1905 exhibition about the Danish West Indies in Copenhagen. The last two episodes include various stories about Nordic descendants of Black Africans, not all of them clearly related to slavery or to the Danish West Indies. Viewers meet the Zamore family, which consists of Swedish descendants of a Black man, Antoine Zamore, who, we are told, was kidnapped when he was a child in West Africa in the 1740s and later came to Sweden. Part of this family consists of a group of (White) American siblings, who only recently became aware of their Black forefather and who traveled to Sweden in order to participate in the seventieth anniversary of the association of members of the Zamore family. In the last episode, the audience meets descendants of Hans Jonathan, an enslaved man, owned by a Danish family on St. Croix. He was brought to Denmark in the late eighteenth century and later migrated to Iceland. The audience is told the dramatic story of Jonathan's life and meets some of his Icelandic descendants and accompanies them to a family reunion.

Hence, the overarching structure of the series indicates that "coming to terms" with Denmark's colonial past is somehow tantamount to arranging for remotely related individuals in the Nordic countries to meet and talk about their common descent. By finding the descendants of some of the enslaved West Indians and arranging for them to meet, the family ties, which were broken, are restored. And although the crimes of the past cannot be undone, at least maybe some kind of new beginning can be hoped for—or at least this is the conclusion that is indicated by the images and voice-over in the series.[17] Thus, the series presents these Nordic family reunions as parallel to what African American descendants of enslaved

persons experience when they search for their family history. Thereby, the series represents every descendant of enslaved persons as a victim of history—whether this person is White, middle class, and Scandinavian or poor, Black, and Caribbean. The first episode ends with Camilla going to Peter Island where she meets an old blind fisherman, Conrad Smith, with whom her family history is connected—not by blood but because the family who owned her ancestors sold land to his ancestors. This encounter concludes Camilla's story and is accompanied by the voice-over narration:

> By this encounter a circle is closed in the long journey of Camilla. For the first time since the time of the slaves, descendants of the two related slave families from Peter Island are reunited. Thanks to Camilla's energetic quest they can now start drawing the ties of kinship across race, culture, and nationality.

Can they, indeed, "start drawing the ties of kinship"? Do they have anything in common and does it make any difference if they do? What kind of "circle is closed" by this encounter—other than maybe Camilla's quest for a personal identity?

## White Victims: The Problem of Liberal Hybridism

By telling this fragment of Danish colonial history through the lens of kinship, the series claims a part in the history of the destruction and negation of family on behalf of the participating White Scandinavian descendants of enslaved persons. The story depicts an image of natural bonds, which go back for decades or centuries and which unite people "across race, culture, and nationality" whether they ever knew about them.

By doing this, the emphasis of the narrative shifts away from hybridity as displacement and toward liberal hybridism. Hybridity as displacement focuses on reviewing history, claiming responsibility for the atrocities that were committed by the Danish state and by other Danish agencies during colonial time, destabilizing the self-satisfied Danish historical narrative about homogeneity and tolerance, and calling for a more "hybrid" version of the narratives of Danishness and Danish history. In contrast, liberal hybridism focuses on reuniting what has been reprehensively torn apart. By assuming the lens of kinship, *family* becomes the organizing unit of the tale, and family relations determine who the victims are and who the perpetrators are. Consequently, the series grants the participating (White) Scandinavians a part in the history of oppression and enslavement on the *victims'* side—independent of the actual circumstances of their lives. Thereby it glosses over differences in power and life conditions and reduces the tale to a narrative of liberal hybridism. This move annuls the categorical distinction between White and Black, Scandinavian and African Caribbean, slave owner and enslaved, and it invalidates any acknowledgment of power imbalance as witnessed by, for instance, the significant differences in the life circumstances between (White) Scandinavian and (Black) Caribbean descendants of enslaved persons. The categorical distinction is denied, rather than transgressed, and the potentially subversive story of hybridity is displaced by a sentimental quest of a "true" personal identity. Yet another quote from Larsen's article serves as an illustration: "A lucky coincidence of factors carry the reason why so many Danes can suddenly dig out

their true identity and sometimes embrace unknown relatives on a remote continent after more than 100 years of separation."[18]

The narrative of the series is predicated on racially hybrid kinship, as when it is emphasized that "dark blood" can be found in the veins of Camilla, "the Viking." Nevertheless, kinship is articulated in terms of essence, that is, in terms of finding one's *true identity*—a true identity that Camilla chooses to "discover" in her descent from one out of sixteen possible grandparents.[19] This is how encounters among strangers can be articulated in terms of "reunions." The effect is that a discourse of purity is paradoxically reinstituted *through* narrating hybridity.

However, it is important to distinguish between the narratives of the individual participants and the overall narrative of the series. The Nordic and the White American participants in the series largely incorporate their remote ancestors into their own identity projects, and they do so in many different ways. When Camilla states that by finding her African roots, she now understands why she felt "at home" in South Africa,[20] she essentializes the entire African continent; she claims connections across centuries and across broad geographical distances. She does not, however, claim to be a victim herself. The American Zamore siblings use their recent discovery of their Black ancestor as a way they can reconcile themselves with the shame that they feel about their family history of racism. Neither of them claims to be victims—to the contrary.

Some of the Icelandic descendants of Jonathan take pride in the strength they see in him because of the struggles he survived. Whatever they make of their genealogy, again, none of them view themselves as victims. In this respect the participants in the series generally define themselves as "White," most of them articulate their relation to the history of slavery as a relation in which they feel compelled to deal with the atrocities committed by Whites against Blacks—not as victims but as somehow in relation to the perpetrators. As Marianne Munis, one of the few participants whose mixed descent is visible in the color of her skin puts it in the fourth episode: "My Danish side is ashamed of having treated my African side in this way.... That's really not OK. It's actually cruelty. It is reprehensible." The construction of "White victims" is a part of the series' overall narrative, not an aspect of the narratives of the individual participants.

By emphasizing the series' construction of "White victims," I do by no means imply that "just because" you are a Black Caribbean, you are automatically a "real" victim of slavery while a White Scandinavian can never be so. The series briefly mentions that there were also Black slave owners. This indicates that race alone would not suffice to distinguish between victims and perpetrators—even if "race" was an unequivocal criterion, which it is far from being. Thus, the problem cannot be reduced to a question of assigning collective guilt or collective status as victims based on race. Rather, the problem is that the series renders individual experience and life circumstances irrelevant by depicting the family as the collective unit, which lives through history and which—collectively—can be the victim of this history. This is how it makes sense that Mitch Kent, the descendant of the planter who owned Camilla's enslaved great-great-grandmother, expresses feeling guilty toward Camilla when he tells her about a brutal suppression of a riot on the plantation in the 1820s. Although Camilla has no personal experience whatsoever with the legacy of slavery, still, through the logic of kinship, he carries the blame, and he positions her as victim.

The voice of Adelbert Bryan, claiming that the Danish "heads of state" should "apologize to the African people of the world," indicates that maybe not all Black Caribbean slave descendants would subscribe to this version of the story of the "kin of the slaves." His voice is, however, not included in relation to this perspective. Nor is the racial distinction, which his comment relies on, discussed or in any way addressed. No doubt, the series expresses sympathy with the Black Caribbean descendants of enslaved persons, but apart from Bryan, their voices are only heard when they contribute to and support the Scandinavians' search for their roots. Their histories are not given any independent treatment.

## The Displacement of What?

The effect of this choice of narrative angle is that a series that explicitly sets out to call attention to and problematize a dark period in Danish history and to draw awareness to the hybrid genealogy of the Danes ends in a position close to incorporating the Other and appropriating the status of victim. The narrative of the series remains trapped in an uneasy tension between a critical insistence on hybridity as displacement of purity and a liberal hybridism, which masks difference. Despite the critique of the blind spots of popular Danish accounts of history, the series fails to overcome the centered perspective that Hall criticizes. Thus, *Slaves in the Family* provides an illustrative example of the more general problem that sympathy-driven narratives risk consolidating inequality if they do not manage to overcome the ethno-centrist perspective. To the extent that the series engages a destabilizing discourse of hybridity, this happens in terms of the insistence on focusing on an unpleasant past, which is absent from most popular accounts of Danish history. What is displaced, if anything, is the historical narrative of national identity.

Furthermore, it can be argued that the racial hybridity, which is the primary focus of the series, hardly displaces much in a Danish context. The question of having "dark blood" is not at the heart of the dominant narratives of exclusion and otherness in the Danish context. The major fault lines of the Danish debate on purity, in relation to Danishness, have shifted. Although visual difference *does* count when it comes to identifying Danishness, the bodily signs of difference that are most often designated as markers of a threatening otherness are not primarily "African" but rather signs that can be read as "Muslim." Hence, the main issue in terms of purity and contamination is not "race" but "culture"—or rather "religion," which then, in its turn, is racialized: it is read on the surface of the bodies of its "carriers."[21] As opposed to this, criticizing the slave trade and the fact that the Caribbean colonies were sold without prior consultation with the population on the islands is a relatively "safe" and uncontroversial case in Danish public debate, since hardly anyone in Denmark today would defend the policies of this particular past.

Therefore, it is hardly a coincidence that the critical perspective, which Camilla derives from her descent, concentrates on shedding light on the Danish role in slavery and does not relate to contemporary Danish discourses of otherness, while the critical perspective, which the American Zamore siblings derive, concentrates on their own racist family history. Questions concerning White racism against Blacks hold a completely different acuteness in the US than what is the case in Denmark. It can be argued that in Denmark, the racialized Other is not Black but Muslim.

This also implies, however, that Danish nationalist constructions of ethnic minorities, in terms of contamination, are not really displaced by the series—despite Larsen's probable intentions. "We are all

immigrants," he states, but some forms of immigration enter nationalist discourse in terms of the threat of contamination, while others simply add an exotic flavor to an unimpeded discourse on national purity. *Slaves in the Family* aestheticizes and romanticizes the "mixture" between Black and White, rather than displacing the notion of "Danishness." What (potentially, at least) is dislodged by the series' narrative is the self-congratulating equation between Danishness and humanitarianism but not the Danish nationalist discourse on homogeneity.

**Notes**

[1] *Slaves in the Family* is the official English title. A more accurate translation of the Danish title is "Kin of the slaves." The vocabulary concerning slavery has changed over the last decade—in Denmark as well as internationally. In 2005, it was still common to refer to "slaves" rather than to "enslaved persons," which would be the term used in a critical context today (2021).

[2] By focusing on kinship, *Slaves in the Family* can be seen as partaking in a general contemporary revaluation of blood relations within narratives of personal identity. This tendency can be seen both in various media productions, which focus on tracing unknown ancestors, and in the widespread interest in genealogical research as a pastime. Such investigations are often related to historical transnational migrations, be they more or less voluntary, as in European migrations to America, or forced, as in the slave trade. Frello, "Towards a Discursive Analytics of Movement."

[3] The argument that I present in this article is based on the analysis presented in my "Slavernes slægt" article. This analysis focuses primarily on some of the individual stories, whereas, the current article investigates notions of hybridity. For an analysis that focuses on cultural memory and race, see Marselis, "Descendants of Slaves."

[4] See, for example, Friedman, "Global Crisis"; García Canclini, "State of War and state of Hybridization"; Young, *Colonial Desire*; Papastergiadis, "Tracing Hybridity in Theory"; Pieterse, "Globalization as Hybridization"; Brah and Coombes, *Hybridity and Its Discontents*.

[5] On the critical potential of the transgression of purity, see, for example, Bhabha, *Location of Culture*; Chambers, "Signs of Silence"; Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*; Hall, "New Ethnicities"; Hall, "Local and Global"; Hall, "What Is 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?"; Hall, "When Was 'the Post-colonial'?"; Hall and Sakai, "Tokyo Dialogue"; Pieterse "Hybridity, So What?"

[6] See, for example, Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese*.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., 195.

[9] Hall, "New Ethnicities," 446.

[10] All translations by author.

[11] Olwig, "Narrating Deglobalization."

[12] "*Vi er alle indvandrere*," http://www.agweb.dk/agny/aktuelt/orientering.htm, cited April 18, 2005.

[13] Due to the editing, the two sentences appear in the episode as if they belong together. It is not clear, however, whether Holsøe links the two aspects himself.

[14] Larsen, "Danskernes sorte slægtninge," 11.

[15] Ibid., 15.

[16] Ibid., 6.

[17] For a further description of this dimension, see Frello, "Towards a Discursive Analytics of Movement."

[18] Larsen, "Danskernes sorte slægtninge," 9.

[19] On relatedness as a construction, see Carsten, *After Kinship*. On the relation between notions of hybridity and notions of kinship, see Wade, "Hybridity Theory and Kinship."

[20] Quoted in Larsen, "Danskernes sorte slægtninge," 6.

[21] On the social meaning of bodily signs of racial or ethnic difference in a Danish context, see, for example, Andreassen, *Der er et yndigt land*; Staunæs, "Where Have All the Subjects Gone?."

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