Research Essay
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Burning Love: Pork Politics, Nationalism, and Othering in Contemporary Denmark

By: Samantha Ruth Brown

Abstract:
This paper examines the so-called Danish "meatball war," a political contestation about the place of pork, halal, and kosher foods in Danish public institutions. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and an analysis of newspaper articles and government documents, I argue that this particular conflict offers a window through which we can observe the transformation of Danish nationalism and a breach in their shared folk psychology. As politicians and political commentators argued for the serving of pork in public institutions, their rhetoric created a new narrative that explicitly ties pork to Danishness, and halal and kosher products to Otherness. It likewise led to discussions about whether it was "truly Danish" to protect particular traditions or to adjust and welcome diverse communities with open arms. By focusing on political discourse in the media and social media posts, the meatball war offers an illustrative example of how food and foodways are used as weapons against particular groups, and the ways in which politicians create and amplify cultural conflicts in order to capitalize on populist and anti-immigrant sentiments in contemporary Europe. While much of the discussion was aimed the Muslim and refugee communities, the debate nonetheless excluded other communities, like Jews, from the national imaginary.

Keywords:
nationalism, European politics, migration, foodways, Denmark, pork

Introduction

In 2003, a group of primary school children at Rådmandsgades Skole in Copenhagen made the traditional Danish dish *brændende kærlighed* in their home economics class. *Brændende kærlighed*—literally translated[1] as "burning love"—is a dish consisting of mashed potatoes, covered in a pile of bacon and fried onions. Typically, pork is not used at the school, as approximately 80% of the children do not consume pork products for religious reasons.[2] This led one child's father to react to the class by saying that, "It's bloody good the children could finally learn to make some proper [Danish] food" (Mikkelsen, 2003).

Despite this reaction, the school's principle, Lise Egholm, assured a reporter from *Kristeligt Dagblad*—a widely circulated Christian newspaper in Denmark—that these comments should not be taken too seriously, as it is extremely rare for parents to interfere in the type of food that the school purchases and serves. A newspaper article was published, titled "Food Regulations without Friction," emphasizing the overwhelming lack of conflict between parents and school authorities, and the school continued to purchase halal and kosher products to accommodate its diverse student population (ibid).

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Ten years later, however, this was no longer the case; during the summer[3] of 2013, when Parliament was on recess and major stories were limited, the Danish tabloid *Ekstra Bladet* (similar to the British *Daily Mirror* or the *Sun*) published a series of articles discussing the lack of pork products and use of halal meat in public institutions. This article had major repercussions for food and identity in Danish politics. Politicians, including the then Social Democratic Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt, have referenced the articles and their content as a means of gaining support from potential voters and as of means of discussing larger societal issues, particularly as related to Muslim migrants in Danish society. By focusing on the lack of pork in 30 daycare centers and the use of halal beef at a public hospital, the "meatball war" (*frikadellekrig*), as named by the newspaper *Ekstra Bladet* itself, began in 2013 and continues to impact school lunch choices and political discourse to this day. Although many of those affected by the choice to not serve pork or to serve halal products saw the matter as old news and unproblematic (Sæhl, 2013), others questioned whether these measures were forcing a particular religion (i.e. Islam) upon others.

Between 2013 and 2016, the discussion intensified, as various actors called into question notions of identity, or "Danishness" (*danskhed*), and how the country might accommodate Muslim and migrant communities, particularly refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq.[4] Disagreements about these topics opened a contested space in nationalistic dialogue around whether modifying traditions to accommodate others is characteristically Danish, or whether true Danishness means emphasizing Danish "tradition" in the presence of others. While some institutions, such as the Rådmandsgades Skole mentioned earlier, continued with business as usual, determining the school menu based on the population they serve, the municipality of Randers took more concrete measures to "preserve" Danish foodways[5] by mandating that public institutions serve pork on a regular basis in 2016 (Holst, 2016).

This paper has three main arguments. First, I argue that the meatball war is an example of how food and foodways are used as weapons against particular groups. In the case of Denmark, politicians and multicultural skeptics use pork products and halal or kosher foods to marginalize non-white, non-Christian communities in Denmark, particularly Muslims, but also Jews. This fits into a larger historical trend of using food as a political weapon. Instances of this have been studied by scholars such as Irving Lewis Allen (1983), Roland Barthes (1997), Susan Kalčik (1984) and Margaret Magat (2015). As noted by foodway scholar Susan Kalčik (1984), "food is a marker of ethnic identity"[6] and "can be manipulated as a 'weapon' to wield against those seen as invading" (37). Not only this, but because food can operate as a highly charged marker of ethnic identity (Oring, 1986), food is often "particularly powerful when utilized in negative stereotypes" (Magat, 2015: 443).

My research also finds that that politicians have inserted themselves into the discussion of foodways in order to capitalize on populist or anti-immigrant sentiments within Danish society. This is part of a larger political trend, where anti-immigrant rhetoric and political demonstrations can be seen in both Denmark and across Europe. Since the end of the Cold War, and particularly after the 9/11 attacks, European voters have become increasingly concerned with issues related to migration. Because of this, parties on both the left and right are embracing more stringent policies and rhetoric in response to voter concerns and the growing popularity of populist parties. As argued by scholars like Tim Bale, populist radical right parties initially adopted xenophobia rhetoric to scare voters about the potential effects of Muslim migrants, to justify restrictive immigration and integration legislation, and attract migration-skeptic voters. These policies have since become adopted by major parties across the political spectrum, and, in many cases, have perpetuated and contributed to negative stereotypes about non-white communities. This shift helps to explain why politicians chose to become involved in the meatball war, sustaining the war in the public sphere, and causing it to evolve, as a politically expedient tactic. As this trend in Europe has already been examined by a number of scholars (e.g. Bale, 2008, Bale et al., 2010, and Mudde, 2013), this article focuses on Denmark as a specific case study that illuminates how broader this trend has played out in Denmark given its specific cultural background and history.

My third argument, and the focus of this paper, is that the meatball war caused a transformation of Danish nationalism, where a new narrative explicitly ties pork to Danishness and halal and kosher products to Otherness. Although pork has long been a part of Danish foodways, it was not until 2013 and the start of the meatball war that pork, as well as halal products, were used as a vehicle to discuss issues that do not pertain to pork itself, but rather, to wider societal concerns. Utilizing pork in this way caused a breach in the society's "folk psychology" (Bruner, 1990), or unstated assumptions or beliefs that people live by on a daily basis. As a result, a new nationalist narrative puts a greater emphasis on the consumption of pork products, and at times even refers back to Norse mythology and Danish histories of pork production.

A better understanding of how food is wielded as a political tool in the name of nationalism is significant for various reasons. First and foremost, this particular conflict offers an opportunity to observe how cultural practices are adopted in the reformation of contemporary nationalism as a means to justify the exclusion of communities that don't quite "fit" the national image. This reality is not unique to Denmark, and can explain how nationalism and identity are shaped in other contexts as well. This is especially pertinent to European states that feel threatened by Muslim migration and states with an extensive history of anti-Semitism[7] and Islamophobia. Various examples exist elsewhere. As in Denmark, the Christian Democratic Union Party (*Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands* or CDU) in the Slesvig-Holsten region of Germany, of which Angela Merkel was the party leader, criticized cafeterias that no longer serve pork, and suggested that at least one dish is made with pork daily (Harder, 2016). And in 2017, the right-wing party Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*, or AfD) utilized campaign placards that stated, "Islam? Doesn't fit in our kitchen" ("*‚Der Islam?' Passt nicht zu unserer Küche"*), accompanied by a photo of a piglet. In France, right-wing parties, such as The National Front (*Front National*), have used pork as a national symbol and argue that both Muslim and Jewish groups should not have option to choose a pork-free lunch (Haar, 2016). In the United Kingdom, halal meat has become a politically-charged topic, with both public and private institutions being criticized for their use of halal products (Power, 2014). Similarly, dialect labels like "kebab Norwegian" (*kebabnorsk)* and "pizza Danish" (*pizza-dansk)* are used to describe languages that incorporate vocabulary from "immigrant" languages, or are spoken with a particular accent, thus linking food to perceptions of insiders and outsiders.

Food and foodways have a powerful place in all countries. In states such as the Nordic countries, where extensive welfare systems result in frequent intervention of government workers in people's daily lives, foodways can quickly become tied to politics, identity, and belonging. Scholars in Denmark have previously found that when the power of food is not properly understood, it can result in certain groups feeling violated or marginalized (Larsen, 2011) and offers an example of the government "excluding while claiming to integrate" (Sjørselv, 2011). Other examples of the link between food and politics in Scandinavia include the so-called "Golliwog" or "FGM" cake in Sweden (Harding, 2012) or the instances of Indian children being taken from their parents in Norway in large part because of their traditional eating practices (Thekaekara, 2012).

The following analysis is organized into five sections. The next section provides a theoretical framework for the analysis of nationalism and the shifting narratives of the meatball war. I examine how food is used as a weapon by drawing on prominent foodway scholars, such as Kalčik and Oring, and introduce readers to Michael Billig's (1995) concept of "banal nationalism" and Lisa Wedeen's (2008) concept of "episodic nationalism." In the following section, I provide a brief history of the Danes' relationship with pork, dating back to Nordic mythology and through the 2013-2016 meatball war. I then analyze why and when the use of pork and other meats was elevated from folk psychology to a controversial political topic that shaped local and national politics and quotidian interactions. Throughout these sections, I provide examples of instances where food, primarily pork, are utilized in a way that Others the country's Muslim population. This includes, for example, a Facebook post about apocalyptic Denmark under a Caliphate where pork is banned, and nationally significant events, such as the 2014 competition to name Denmark's national dish, where nearly half of the participants (44%) chose fried pork with potatoes and parsley sauce (*stegt flæsk med persillesovs og kartofler*). In final section, I conclude the analysis and reflect on broader trends in Europe.

I employ interpretive, mixed methodologies that include, but are not limited to, an analysis of newspapers, political discourse, and social media, and my own ethnographic experiences in Denmark. These methods assist me in understanding the transformation of Danish nationalism over time. My interpretivist approach helps me to highlight the complexity of the social realm by alerting me to how concepts, ideas, language, and frames shape how actors perceive and act in the world.

Transformative Nationalism and Food as a Weapon

Nationalism manifests itself in unexpected and frequently unobserved ways. Grocery stores are one such example of this: "Made in USA" stickers remind American consumers to support "local" production and the American market. The same can be said for Denmark, where Danish flags and labels with Danish place names fill supermarket shelves. A nationalistic emphasis on eating local or eating Danish exists also exists. This is driven in part because of environmental concerns, in part to support Danish communities and the country's economy, and in part because many Danes are socialized to believe that they can trust the quality of Danish products as compared to products from, say, Italy or Poland.

This less apparent and yet widespread type of nationalism is what Billig (1995) refers to as "banal nationalism." While nationalism is a doctrine that promotes the idea that boundaries of the state should coincide with those of the nation (Gellner, 2009), banal nationalism refers to "ideological habits which enable the established notions of the West to be reproduced" (Billing, 1995: 6). Billig notes that, not only does nationalism exist during the process of nation-building—as emphasized by scholars like Benedict Anderson (1983)—but it is constantly reinforced in Western society in banal scenarios, such as newscasts and sports games. The same can be said about foodways.

It must be noted, however, that "banal does not imply benign" (ibid). While nationalism can serve to create and reinforce nations or "imagined communities,"[8] it also underscores who is included and who is excluded. In the example above, production in Denmark, Italy, and Poland is essentialized to the benefit of Danish producers and to the bane of the Italian and Polish. It is these small, quotidian acts of nationalism that shape larger societal tendencies.

Food and foodways play an important role in banal nationalism, as "foodways serve as highly charged markers of ethnic identity both for those within a group and for those without" (Oring, 1986: 35). This is in part because "food traditions are likely to be tenacious and survive when other aspects of culture are transformed or disappear" (ibid). Food and foodways maintain symbolic significance, acting as a means of in-group identification, and causing many people to inextricably link certain foods and foodways to particular groups. For instance, Muslims are associated with consuming halal products. Yet the majority of chickens in Denmark have been slaughtered using halal methods for decades because of a growing market for halal products in Europe and large exports to the Middle East (Hussein, 2013), a trend in animal processing that can also be seen throughout much of the continent (Lever and Miele, 2012).
The attention given to halal products in politics and the media highlights how food production methods can be as important as the type of food that is prepared. As Barthes (1997) argues, food production can create a certain national continuity:

> Food permits a person (and here I am speaking of French themes) to partake each day of the national past. In this case, this historical quality is obviously linked to food techniques (preparation and cooking). These have long roots, reaching back to the depth of the French past. They are, we are told, the repository of a whole experience, of the accumulated wisdom of our ancestors. French food is never supposed to be innovative, except when it rediscovers long-forgotten secrets. (24)

Although some food traditions date back to periods before the concept of nations existed, they continue to be nationalistic in nature. The romanticization and nationalization of particular practices and traditions is consistent with other features of nationalism, where a shared, national past is imagined (see Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995).

On occasion, food and food stereotypes are used "as a weapon against an intruder" (Kalčik, 1984: 37). This might occur when a particular ethnic group's foodways—whether it be the production or ingredients—do not coincide with cultural understandings of what is acceptable, or when a person or group is perceived as a threat. The use of food as a nationalist weapon can also be understood through the concept of "episodic nationalism" (Wedeen, 2008). Wedeen argues that, rather than viewing nationalism as linear or constant, it should be viewed as episodic, because individuals embrace different identities and respond in varying ways based on context. Expanding upon Wedeen's conceptualization of "episodic nationalism," I argue that episodic nationalism is often triggered by particular events. In the Danish case, the *Ekstra Bladet* journalists' decision to publish the articles that began the meatball war, coupled with a general shift towards restrictive immigration and integration policies, triggered politicians to contribute to the debate and emphasize nationalist interests. In this way, the meatball war can be understood as an episode in the transformation of Danish nationalism that has resulted in particular consequences for Danish national identity. This can be applied to other major events that caused a major shift in Danish national identity, such as the Muhammad cartoon crisis in 2005 (see Yilmaz, 2016).

Banal nationalism, which can be a weapon itself because of its ability to exclude, marginalize, and offend, is also powerful in its ability to reinforce and justify certain institutions. Banal nationalism reinforces the legitimacy of military use to protect a nation and its sovereignty: "forces can be mobilized without lengthy campaigns of political preparation. And the national populations appear also to be primed, ready to support the use of those armaments" (Billig, 1995: 7). In the case of the meatball war, an emphasis on protecting Danish foodways and culture reinforces and justifies strengthened border control, restrictive immigration policy, and the marginalization of religious minority and migrant communities.

From Sæhrímnir to the Meatball War: A Brief History of Pork in Denmark

In Norse mythology, *Sæhrímnir*, a boar, is sacrificed and eaten by the *Æsir* (and *einherjar*) and subsequently brought back to life so that the process can be repeated the following day.[9] Well-known Danish authors have also written stories about pigs, such as Hans Christian Andersen's tale of a helpful metal pig in Florence. While stories like these have offered symbolic value to pork in Danish society, politicians there is also a particular appreciation for pork in the Danish case due to their historical and contemporary reliance on pork.

The Danish relationship with pork can be traced back 6000 years to the late Stone Age (Boyhus, 1998). During the medieval period, pigs were kept in cities to feed off food scraps until they were large enough to be eaten, as well as near forests to scavenge for food, but this changed during the 17th century. By the beginning of the 1800s, Denmark had lost much of its empire and ability to extract profits from its colonies. Aided by the Industrial Revolution and the expansion of technology and the world market, Danish pork production grew rapidly, allowing farmers to purchase inexpensive grains from abroad and export bacon, particularly to England and in aid of industrialization and the British Empire. During this period, collective farms became increasingly ubiquitous and the first Danish collective slaughterhouse opened in Horsens in 1887. This collective slaughterhouse still exists and is a part of the country's largest slaughterhouse corporation Danish Crown. Collaborating with the company's workers, producers bred a Danish Landrace Swine and registered it for the first time in 1896. This new breed was significant because of its long body and extra ribs and helped Denmark to become one of the world's major bacon-exporting countries (Øhstrøm, 2014).

Since the late 1800s, pork production has continued to grow, resulting in greater economic reliance on the practice. However, as the majority of bacon was exported to England, Danes needed to become acclimated to other cuts of meat. This resulted the campaign "Pork on the Fork" (*Gris på Gaflen)*, initiated in 1957 by the Danish Bacon and Meat Council (*Danske Slagterier*), to incite greater pork consumption and expansion of the Danish meat market (Haar, 2016).[10] This campaign resulted in a series of cookbooks to further encourage pork consumption; it has been viewed as one of the largest and most successful advertising campaigns in Danish history (Amtsavis, 2015).

Given the country's emphasis on exports, the success of campaigns like "Pork on the Fork," and the overall growth of the Danish population, the pork industry has continued to grow. In 2014, there were 12.8 million pigs in Denmark, approximately 10 million more than in 1950 (Haar, 2016). Danish Crown has grown from the small collective slaughterhouse that it was in 1887 and is now one of the world's largest exporters and one of Europe's largest producers of pork. In 2016, Danish Crown had an annual turnover of 60 billion Danish kroner (approximately 900 million US dollars) and employed 26,000 workers (Danish Crown, n.d.). In addition, Danes consumed approximately 31.9 kg. (70 lbs.) of pork per person in 2011, in comparison to 28.1 kg. of beef and 24 kg of poultry that same year (Andersen, 2014: 2).

For a country with a population and size similar to that of Wisconsin, these numbers point to pork as a significant part of their economy and foodways. Pork has undoubtedly played an important and central role in Denmark's history and continues to do so today. It has also previously been a source of conflict, as people raised concerns about stray pigs in public places in the Middle Ages, pigs scavenging in landfills in the 1800s, and the welfare of pigs in recent years. What differs though, during the meatball war, is how pork has been used as a means to discuss issues that do not pertain to pork itself, but to wider societal concerns. Although pork has historically been a significant marker of "Danishness," it was not until 2013 and the start of the meatball war that pork, alongside halal and kosher products, became a public, political weapon to demarcate who was Danish and who was not.

The Meatball War

Political Reactions. On July 15th, 2013, the tabloid *Ekstra Bladet* published the first article of the meatball war, titled "Kindergartens banish pork" (*Børnehaver bandlyser svinekød*; Svensson and Rebouh, 2013). According to the reporters, at least 30 daycare providers had forbidden pork products or chosen to only serve halal meat to the children in order to prevent treating religious minority students differently. The article highlighted areas with dense immigrant populations, such as the neighborhood Nørrebro in Copenhagen and a suburb called Ishøj.[11] The municipality of Ishøj had decided to stop serving pork in any of its preschools. Its reputation for having a substantial non-white community, coupled with this blanket policy, made it an easy target for the media and politicians.

Shortly thereafter, the discussion began to incorporate other public institutions as well. Hvidovre Hospital, located in a suburb of Copenhagen, had decided to serve halal beef years before. Lars Aslan Rasmuseen, the Social Democratic spokesperson on social issues in the municipality of Copenhagen at the time, spoke out against its use: "It is the exact opposite of diversity when one excludes a group by way forcing a particular method of slaughter on them. This here has been done to pamper and satisfy the most reactionary forces in the municipality [of Copenhagen]. It is a totally misplaced accommodation" (Miles, 2013). To him, choosing to only serve a particular food, or in this case, beef produced a particular way, meant suffocating diversity as opposed to promoting it, and as arguably against Danish ways.

This is similar to one of the major arguments following the 2005 Danish cartoon crisis, where the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published a number of provocative drawings of Muhammad, including a drawing of the prophet Muhammad depicted with a bomb in his turban. Those in favor of the right to publish the cartoons wanted to ensure that a plurality of views could be expressed and resolved in various forms, rather than suppressing certain views (Grøndahl, 2015). Many of those who argued against the cartoons saw them as violating hate speech laws and as an example of systemic discrimination (ibid). Much in the way that the debate following the 2005 crisis prioritized "Danish" values (i.e. freedom of speech) over religious values (i.e. against defamation of religion), the meatball debate continued over the next month, with many politicians and journalists agreeing with Rasmussen.

Responding to concerns, the vice president of Hvidovre Hospital, Torben Mogensen, explained that they had decided to serve halal slaughtered beef "because it was the best meat for the price" (Mogensen, 2013). This response came after criticism and "fear that the Hvidovre Hospital was out to impose Danish Muslim faith and Muslim habits upon others" and "that animals suffer during halal slaughter" (ibid). Mogensen explained that halal meat was chosen for economic reasons, that all halal meat is marked on their menus, and that the animals in Denmark are stunned (in order to be knocked unconscious) before they are killed, as with other animals.

Despite his response, the controversy continued to grow. Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt intervened in mid-August 2013. She expressed issue with the lack of pork in daycare institutions and with halal meat production, urging Danish meat producers "to introduce a halal label, so the Danes can look at their meat and see how it was killed" (Sæhl, 2013):

> It shouldn't be like this in Denmark, where one slowly sneaks Danish traditions out of our public institutions. Whether one has a Christmas tree or eats pork roast or plain old meatballs. One should not slowly sneak those out of our public institutions because one has to accommodate another culture. I am simply against it (Vangkilde and Klarskov, 2013)

Thorning-Schmidt's comments came after the Minister for Food, Agriculture, and Fisheries, Mette Gjerskov, argued against the need for a particular halal label, because the animals are stunned before being slaughtered, and because changes would be required at the EU level due to the harmonization of European food labelling (see Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 for more information). In this way, Thorning-Schmidt's comments were a largely symbolic, political move to assure voters that she is taking seriously their concerns about halal practices and pork consumption, without requiring true legislative change. However, while the speech's intent may have been to cater to voter's concerns, it added to the demarcation between Danishness and Otherness.

Following Thorning-Schmidt's reaction, TV2, a major Danish channel, aired a short clip from the Aarhus slaughterhouse, showing how the cows are slaughtered in Denmark. Although practices and regulations differ in other countries, the production of halal meat is almost identical to the conventional Danish practice. The "halal cows" are stunned using a bolt gun that does not break the cranium, and the throat is sliced horizontally, accompanied by a small prayer. The other cows are stunned using a bolt gun that shoots into the brain, and then the throat is sliced vertically, starting slightly deeper in the chest. The only difference between the halal and non-halal slaughtering of chickens is the prayer. The director of the slaughterhouse, Svend Erik Pedersen, explained that he has a difficult time understanding why the halal process is a problem: "The debate that exists about halal slaughter has been blown out of proportion. […] I think that people are mixing up [concerns] with animal welfare and how the process is done in other countries that do not stun the animals" (TV2, 2013).
Yet in February 2014, the new Minister of Food, Agriculture, and Fisheries, Dan Jørgensen, made an executive order that halal and kosher practices were legally obligated to ensure that the animal is completely unconscious before it is bled to death. He explained that,

> To my knowledge, no one has practiced slaughtering without stunning [the animals] for many years. But when we choose to implement the change regardless, it is because occasionally, there is a demand for slaughtering without stunning, and I want to be completely certain that it is not going to happen in Denmark. (Ritzau, 2014)

This executive order offers yet another example of a largely symbolic political gesture to persuade voters that their concerns about the process of slaughtering animals are being met, as his administration had already announced in August 2013 that halal slaughtering of cows only happened when the animal had been stunned (Aaes, 2013). Here, we see ethical arguments (such as in the name of animal rights) are used to mask discrimination, in this case against Muslim and Jewish communities.[12]

However, several politicians disagreed with the increasingly circulated anti-immigrant and Islamophobic rhetoric. In February 2014, when Manu Sareen was appointed as the Minister for Children, Gender Equality, Integration, and Social Affairs, he contradicted Thorning-Schmidt's comments, arguing that "the individual municipalities, preschools, kindergartens, and hospitals must themselves be allowed to assess whether they will completely drop pork from their menus to accommodate the Muslim minority" (Nilsson and Christansen, 2014). Notably, Sareen is the first minister of Denmark with a non-European background, and he has previously spoken out against Danish immigration and integration legislation.

Later in 2014, Minister Jørgensen also started a competition to find Denmark's national dish, which resulted in over 60,000 people voting between eight different Danish dishes to determine what the "most" Danish dish was. Of the eight dishes, five of them included pork. Nearly half of the voters (44%) chose fried pork with potatoes and parsley sauce (*stegt flæsk med persillesovs og kartofler*). Camilla Plum, a well-known Danish gastronome, was among those angered by both the initiation and results of the competition. Plum wrote on her Facebook page,

> So now we're sure that our immigrant population is not going to feel truly Danish…Geez Dan [Jørgensen]…It's a shame you did this when you could have used this opportunity [to make] more inclusive statements…or was it just another message that says until *those* immigrants have learned to eat our pork, they can forget everything about being truly Danish? (my emphasis; Barfoed, 2014)

Professor of Food Sociology Lotte Holm also noted the exclusionary mechanisms of competitions like this, especially in how they can marginalize vegetarians, those who do not eat pork, and Danes who might eat other regional dishes. She notes, "food is a part of our identity, and it is attached to a 'we' in our identity. It's suffocating when we talk about a 'we' that someone does not feel a part of. For someone to go around and say that this is the right way to be. Or to say this is how one eats in Denmark. It's provocative if one does not identify with it" (Fajstrup, 2014).

Early in 2016, the municipality of Randers furthered the meatball war by passing legislation that requires that pork be served on an equal footing with other food at public institutions in order to protect Danish foodways. It is unlikely that this legislation would have been passed had it not been for the meatball war, as the municipality lacked political consensus on the matter previously, and many of those working at public institutions in Randers did not see it as an issue. Director of the daycare Børnehuset Jennumparken in Randers argued that, "there is no reason to create an unnecessary problem. Danish vegetables, Danish fruit, and whole wheat bread represent a substantial part of our diet. It does not need to be pork to be Danish" (Hjort, 2016). A common theme throughout the meatball war is that many of those who work at or attend the criticized institutions, such as the director of the Hvidovre Hospital and the parents of children at said schools, do not see changes in favor of more pork or less halal meat as necessary. This is elaborated on in the following section.

The legislative change in Randers happened at approximately the same time that I was in Denmark for research and coincided with the closing of the Danish borders between Sweden and Germany. At the time, the government was conducting its *nytårskur*, or series of trips where politicians travel around the country, holding speeches about their party's aspirations for the coming year. Thus commenced my own experiences with the meatball war.

Although I had been following along with the meatball war in the news, attending the recently elected center-right government's *nytårskur* in small town Denmark helped me understand how these issues were resonating with voters. The specific talk I attended was held by the Minister for Immigration, Integration and Housing, Inger Støjberg, a member of Denmark's Liberal Party (*Venstre*). Støjberg is known internationally for publishing advertisements in Lebanese newspapers to dissuade asylum seekers from travelling to Denmark, for introducing and passing legislation to confiscate asylum seekers' valuables in order to pay for their stay, and for celebrating her fiftieth restriction in Danish immigration policies with a cake, which she documented on her Facebook page. She is a popular politician amongst Danes who view immigration as a threat to the Danish welfare state and Danish culture. Although it is difficult to know exactly how many support Støjberg's policies, 20% of people in a survey in 2015 said that she was the best minister at that time and others believed she was likely to be the party's next leader due to her popularity and close working relationship with the populist Danish People's Party (*Dansk Folkeparti* or DF) (Kristensen, 2015).

During the speech I attended, Støjberg spoke about how the recent border control reinstitution "was not out of desire but out of necessity" and how other measures have been taken to help both stem immigration and increase integration (Støjberg, 2016: speech). She spoke of different migrant groups, explaining that "there are some groups that are easier to integrate. Bosnians were much easier to integrate, and it was because their culture is not miles removed from ours"[13] (ibid). She also explained how migrants have changed Denmark, notably using a story of a kindergarten that was reminiscent of the 30 kindergartens discussed in *Ekstra Bladet*'s initial meatball war article. Two acquaintances of Støjberg had moved to the Danish city of Aalborg and were searching for a kindergarten for their daughter Sofia. They had found what appeared to be a perfect kindergarten, until the principal mentioned that pork was banned from school lunches. Because Sofia loved sliced ham in her pack lunches so much, the parents decided to choose a different school.

This story has since been proven to be false; after the talk, a journalist contacted a number of people who had attended the speech, including myself, but eventually dropped the article when Støjberg apologized for the fabricated story, explaining that it had been told to her in privacy by people she trusted (Holm, 2016). The supposed kindergarten, Pilehaven, is located in a multicultural area of the city of Aalborg with a higher concentration of Muslim families. Highlighting the neighborhood of Pilehaven—like that of Ishøj—is purposeful as it taps into a Danish geographical imagination about neighborhoods with substantial Muslim communities

The history of the meatball war and location of the institution made the story readily plausible, resonating with voters who were resentful of the government's recent decision to close the country's physical borders with Germany and Sweden to stop potential asylum seekers, and yet fearful that their small country's culture might be overpowered by globalization. This ability to play to voter's emotions explains why Støjberg continually used the story throughout her tour of the country without verifying the story's credibility until much later. It was an act of banal nationalism, one that could be used to gain voters' support, satisfy and attract new supporters, and legitimize increasingly restrictive legislation passed by an otherwise liberal party that sees these changes as necessary, rather than desirable, as she put it.

The Quotidian Response.

As the previous examples illustrate, the meatball war has impacted the narrative used by many Danish politicians and has created a space for a contested national narrative. Tarek Hussein, a well-known commentator who was a law student at the University of Copenhagen at the time, was bothered by the debate. In early August 2013, he submitted an opinion piece about the meatball war to the Danish newspaper *Politiken*. In it, he wrote:

> Now I may not be integrated (assimilated) enough, but it must have happened without me noticing that pork has suddenly become a Danish treasure and such an integral part of Danish culture that without it you are considered a traitor […] I haven't known whether I should laugh or cry these last few weeks. One can undoubtedly not avoid getting the impression that every time our politicians run out of something to talk about, the media chooses to turn to the lowest common denominator, which, in Denmark, is the bashing of the country's minorities and their customs. (Hussein, 2013)

While Hussein's comments were circulated in the print media, much of the discussion within the newly contested narrative also took place over social media.

In the fall of 2013, an apocalyptic Facebook post was widely circulated, initially among supporters of the Danish People's Party, and eventually others as well. In the post, it is 2044, Denmark is ruled by a Caliphate, and Christmas is forbidden. An excerpt from the post reads:

> The mother gets a tear in her eye when she explains […] we have covered the window so that we are not arrested, uncle has smuggled a pork roast and a duck into the country and dad has found red cabbage and everything else so tonight we are going to hold the first authentic Christmas evening for the first time in 20 years…The mother looks at me and says, mother I am sad that we let it happen, sad that we didn't do anything, and I'm ashamed to be Danish and one of THEM who accepted that we should accommodate the Muslims, about changing Danish traditions…

As Thorning-Schmidt and Rasmussen's comments previously illustrates, there is a notion of accommodating others at the expense of Danish foodways and traditions. In this way, the new nationalist narrative has been able to link food practices to how willing people are to accommodate others and subsequently presenting an urgent need to determine where the societal limits are. In the post meatball war era, when pork is served at fewer institutions or halal meat is the sole option, this means that the country is accommodating too strongly and thus justifies excluding or marginalizing people, particularly Muslims and Jews, who might threaten Danish foodways.

Because the post was initially widely circulated in groups that support the Danish People's Party, others believed it was a type of social media propaganda for the populist party. The apocalyptic post seemed to largely resonate with supporters of strict migration policies who believed that a lack of migration reform could result in a Muslim majority country, but many also disagreed with the underlying assumptions of the post. This led to a satirical follow-up post that mocked the initial one. The story begins:

> Just as the uncle lifted the pork roast up from his sack, the door was kicked in and the Caliphate's cyborg-robot-drone-warrior barged into the house! "WOLLA, YOUR PORK ROAST IS GOING TO BE CONFISCATED! IT IS UTTERLY AND COMPLETELY ILLEGAL" they said in unison, with their monotone yet embarrassingly ethnic robot voices. The uncle searched desperately for his pistol (made of good, Danish produced LEGO blocks), but was almost instantly pulverized by a Caliphate laser.

Although the posts differ in respect to cultural reference points, in both posts, pork represents the epitome of Danishness, and they're both political in nature. The second post was accompanied by a picture of Mogens Camre, a former politician for the Danish People's Party, dressed in a full Danish resistance uniform, with a holster of potato sausages and red hotdogs. Beneath the picture, a quote reads, "Muslims should live in Muslimland—and that is not here." This quote comes from Mogens Camre's speech at the Danish People's Party's annual celebration in September 2004 and it has since become a well-known saying of his.

Furthermore, once Minister Støjberg's story about a kindergarten in Aalborg that did not serve pork was proven to be false, an image of Støjberg next to a pork roast (specifically a *hamburgerryg* or a salted, cured cut of pork) was widely circulated on social media. The post was used as a form of satirical resistance by those who saw recent measures like the legislation change in Randers mandating pork, or border-control reinstitutions and family reunification restrictions, as being founded in essentialized stereotypes of non-white communities.

Contextualizing the Meatball War in an Era of Restrictions

Three years before *Ekstra Bladet* published its investigative work into the meatball-free daycare centers in 2013, a Muslim nutritional science student was forced to either taste a pork dish or drop out of her program. While she had previously been exempted from eating meals that conflicted with her religious observations, a new rule in 2010 required that all students taste the food they prepare. In 2012, the Board of Equal Treatment ruled that the new rule was contrary to the Danish Antidiscrimination Act. Yet the case was not settled until 2015 at the High Court of Western Denmark, which agreed with the Board of Equal Treatment and required the school to compensate the student with 40,000 Danish kroner (approximately 6,000 US dollars; see Ligebehandlingsnævnet, 2012; Ritzau, 2015).

Through an analysis of Danish newspapers since the early 1990s, I found only a small handful of examples where personal dietary restrictions clashed with institutions. This is because, I would argue, it was not until the 2013 articles that food became a political hot potato in Denmark and, resulting in a breach in Danish folk psychology that would change the place and understanding of these foods. Several people have echoed that this breach occurred. , In 2013, when the debate started, the Social Democratic Mayor of Ishøj responded by arguing that, "it's not until *Ekstra Bladet* decides to get into it that someone starts to complain about [the lack of pork]. There had never before been anyone that did so.

We've been using this system for many years, and no one has ever complained" (Sæhl, 2013). The political expediency of the moment, alongside growing Islamophobia and xenophobia in Europe, allowed for this debate to unfold and result in various changes in legislation and within the Danish national imaginary.

Restrictions in European migration policy has happened at the national and supranational level through the externalization and securitization of Europe's external borders, creating "Fortress Europe" (Geddes, 2008). During this time, restrictions related to "borders" has also developed beyond external, physical borders, and includes the increase of territorial borders (physical boundaries), organizational borders (access to the labor market, welfare entitlement, and citizenship), and conceptual borders (notions of identity, belonging, and entitlement) (ibid). Similarly, EU states have found ways through their own legislation and international agreements to criminalize migration, such as in the case of the Dublin Regulation, which requires asylum seekers to seek asylum in the first European country they enter.[14]

While right-wing populist parties are frequently credited with the implementation of restrictive policies, the role of center-right and social democratic parties in immigration control and integration policy is largely underestimated (Bale, 2008; Bale, et al., 2010). Bale et al. (2010) examine how the growth and success of center-right and populist parties impacted the response of social democratic parties in Western Europe by comparing Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Norway. In the case of Denmark, they found that, towards the end of the 1990s, the Social Democrats "started to shift towards a more restrictive position on immigration" or adopt the view of right-wing parties (415). Despite this shift, the Social Democrats were defeated in 2001 and lost their position in the government. Through political contestations like the meatball war, the Danish Social Democrats have maintained and even increased their restrictive positions in order to retain voters that might otherwise vote for the populist Danish People's Party, given their support of an extensive welfare system, but opposition to liberal migration policies.

In fear of losing support, Prime Minister Thorning-Schmidt, a Social Democrat, utilized the meatball war as a means of signaling to voters her party's strict stance, highlighting that Danish culture will not be the "victim" of increased globalization. This rhetoric is contextualized in her party's implementation of restrictions in immigration policy, which have continued even after Denmark's Liberal Party took over the government after the election in June 2016.

In the 2016 election, the Social Democrats gained seats but were unable to stay in the government, as the parties of the right-wing block were more successful overall. The second largest party as of 2016, the Danish People's Party, was also one of the most vocal about their views on the meatball war, both nationally and locally. This party, along with Denmark's Liberal Party and Denmark's Conservative Party, were instrumental in passing the legislation change in Randers, regulating that pork must be served on a daily basis.

Minister Støjberg has also experienced major success. In addition to spreading the story about the kindergarten in Aalborg, Støjberg published advertisements in Lebanese newspapers to dissuade asylum seekers from travelling to Denmark and had been in the process of proposing 34 migration legislation restrictions, such as confiscating asylum seekers' valuables, in order to pay for their stay, as well as extending the waiting period for family reunification from one to three years. A number of these restrictions were successfully passed at the beginning of 2016.

Conclusion

Through the meatball war debate, pork transitioned from being an important commodity and cultural object to a political tool that could be used as a weapon against those seen as outside of the national imaginary. The breach in this folk psychology resulted in a transformation of Danish nationalism, where food has become both a gauge to determine how far people will accommodate other groups and as a means of exclusion. In the post-meatball war era, politicians and others are able to reference foods like pork meatballs and halal beef to circumvent directly discussing issues like identity, belonging, Danishness, and migration. When pork is served at fewer institutions or halal meat is the sole option, it is an indication to some that the country is accommodating non-white communities "too" strongly, thus justifying excluding or marginalizing groups that might threaten Danish foodways. While this trend is consistent with nationalism and a history of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in Denmark and across Europe, the use of pork and halal meat as a political tool between 2013 and 2016 was significant and new in its own way.

While this shift has resulted in less visible changes, such as the transformation of a national identity and the placement of limits on inclusion, it has also resulted in more concrete legislative changes. While it is difficult to determine how large of an impact the meatball war had on the immigration and integration legislation restrictions that have been passed over the past decade at least two instances can be directed linked to the meatball war: in 2014, a largely symbolic executive order was made to streamline religious slaughter, and in 2016, Randers municipality mandated that all public institutions serve pork on a regular basis.

These contestations are playing out in other cultural arenas as well. Shortly after the municipality of Randers required pork be served at public institutions, Latvia's Minister of Justice suggested banning full face veils to protect Latvian culture and address security concerns at a time of rising migration to Europe (Martyn-Hemphill, 2016). In addition to veil bans, the discussion of, and in some cases implementation of, legislation to ban minarets, halal production, or requiring the serving of pork, has prevailed across much of Europe. As noted in the introduction, politicians in Germany have criticized cafeterias that no longer serve pork and suggested that at least one dish is made with pork daily while right-wing politicians in France have begun to use pork as a national symbol and argue that both Muslim and Jewish groups should not have the option to choose a pork-free lunch. Therefore, understanding the meatball war as a contestation over identity and the resulting shift in nationalism can help scholars in understanding why and how nationalism changes, alongside subsequent legislative and discursive shifts.

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[1] All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

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[2] In this case, the students were called *tosprogede* (bilingual), which has particular connotations in Denmark and is especially used to describe children of immigrant background, particularly those who speak Arabic or Turkish and Danish, instead of, say, Spanish or French and Danish.

[3] The summer news cycle is referred to as *agurketid* (literally "cucumber time," also known as "the silly season" in United Kingdom). This is because media is known for focusing on what is often considered "trivial" or "frivolous" matters in absence of major news stories.

[4] Between 2000 and 2015, the largest refugee groups were Syrians (20,448), Afghans (14,376), Iraqis (12,050), followed by other groups such as Iranians (7,221), Serbs and Montenegrins (6,228), and Somalis (5,642).

[5] Foodways are the cultural, social, and economic practices related to the consumption of food. Therefore, this can include both what is consumed (ex. pork) and how it is processed (ex. halal products).

[6] For the purposes of this paper, I borrow James C. Scott's interpretation of identity in *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (2009):
"All identities, without exception, have been socially constructed: the Han, the Burman, the American, the Danish, all of them. Quite often such identities, particularly minority identities, are at first imagined by powerful states, as the Han imagined the Miao, the British colonists imagined the Karen and the Shan, the French the Jarai. Whether invented or imposed, such identities select, more or less arbitrarily, one or another trait, however vague—religion, language, skin color, diet, means of subsistence—as the desideratum. Such categories, institutionalized in territories, land tenure, courts, customary law, appointed chiefs, schools, and paperwork, may become passionately lived identities" (xii-xiii).

[7] Although the emphasis on pork products speaks strongly to an extensive history of anti-Semitism in Europe, the focus of this paper will be on how the meatball war has affected the Muslim community, especially Muslim refugees and other migrants. Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are negotiated differently in the public sphere in Denmark and other countries. For this reason, a study of the meatball war's impact on the Jewish community merits its own study and should be researched further, likely as a case of both evident and indirect discrimination through open acts of Islamophobia.

[8] An "imagined community," as formulated by Anderson (1983), is not imagined in the sense that it does not exist, but rather in that the community is too large for the members to all know and meet each other and yet they continue to feel connected or obligated to each other.

[9] The *Æsir* are the main gods of Norse mythology, while the *einherjar* were those who had died in battle and were brought to Valhalla. *Sæhrímnir* is referenced in both the Poetica Edda and Prose Edda. Both were written in the 13th century, but the former was a compilation of earlier traditional material and the latter was composed by Snorri Sturluson.

[10] This can be compared to the 1987 "Pork. The Other White Meat" campaign, launched by the National Pork Board or "Beef. It's What's for Dinner" advertising campaign, launched by the National Livestock and Meat Board in 1992.

[11] A large number of *gæstearbejdere* (or "guest workers"), immigrants who were invited to work in Northern Europe during the 1960s-1980s were placed in Ishøj.

[12] Similar examples can be found, inside as well as outside of Denmark, where parties will argue that Muslim immigrants do not respect, for example, gay rights and women's rights, as a means of justifying the exclusion of Muslims generally. See Ferruh (2016) for a greater discussion of this.

[13] Although Bosnians are considered to be one of the most "integrated" groups in Denmark now (Ankestyrelsen, 2014) it was not always seen that way during the 1990s (see Berg, 2002).

[14] See Brochmann and Hagelund's (2012) book *Immigration Policy and the Scandinavian Welfare State 1945-2010* for a comprehensive overview of the history of legislation change and discourse in Scandinavia since the end of WWII.

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