'Mohammed Atta and I'

Identification, discrimination and the formation of sleepers

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ABSTRACT   This article uses the popular thought figure of the sleeper as a methodological tool to get a new angle on the cultural analysis of majority–minority relations in Europe. I do so on the basis of an autobiographical essay written by Nazneen Khan, who considers the theoretical possibility that she too might have become a terrorist. The analysis focuses on descent and religion, as specific sources of identification and belonging, and on how and where, in present-day identification, sleeper identities might be identified. The analysis reveals that the definition of the sleeper in the mass media is not the only one possible. This figure can be reconfigured more dynamically and processually as someone who has experienced repeated rejection within structured relations of power influenced by ideologies focusing on blood and religion. In addition, I argue that populist ideas in Europe can themselves be regarded as (racist) sleepers.

KEYWORDS   *belonging, identification, racism, 11 September, sleeper, terrorism*

In the English language, the figure of the sleeper is defined as a hidden and suddenly revealed perpetrator or achiever. The sleeper refers to someone who unexpectedly commits surprising deeds or misdeeds (Bendix, 2002). Most typically, it is used to refer to secret agents coming from the outside and living an ordinary life for years, waiting for a sign to commit their mission. After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the media in several countries used this thought figure to describe the 19 terrorists involved. The terrorist sleeper was defined as someone belonging to a foreign culture, but living in a completely integrated way in the West while remaining secretly devoted to ideals alien to the cultural environment they lived in (Bendix, 2002); in other words, the terrorists were apparently integrated people harbouring secret intentions. In this article, I will use the popular thought figure of the sleeper as

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a methodological tool to get a new angle on the cultural analysis of majority–minority relations in Europe.[1] I do this on the basis of empirical material from contemporary Norway.

In the Norwegian language, there is no term for the figure of the sleeper.[2] There is only a verb, *å slumre* (to sleep lightly) which, in the present participle (*slumrende*), might be used about the secret part of a sleeper, for example in phrases such as 'a lightly sleeping identity' (*en slumrende identitet*) or 'light sleeping capacities' (*slumrende egenskaper*). Nevertheless, the idea of the sleeper may still be present even if there is no word. For example, this idea seems to have been important within historical anti-semitism. Between the two World Wars, integrated Jews in Norway were alternatively regarded as secret spies or Bolsheviks (Johansen, 1984).

But, in relation to present-day Muslims, the sleeper does not seem to be a central figure of thought.[3] In the Norwegian mass media today, and particularly after 11 September and after the murder of Kurdish-Swedish Fadime Sahindal by her father in January 2002, male Muslims are generally not regarded as integrated, but often as potentially dangerous offenders, and female Muslims are regarded as victims of male dominance and violence. One could perhaps maintain that there exists a popular majority image of veiled Muslim women as sleeping beauties in need of a prince in the form of secular liberation.[4] But this image is not based on a notion of the integrated modern Muslim. Majority Norwegians generally do not trust Muslims. Many people, for example, hold that the young Muslims who are present in the public 'speak with two tongues' – one in public and one among themselves; in other words, that they are lying in public. Practising Muslims are regarded as 'traditional' and not as 'modern'. In public media debates, one needs to stop being a Muslim to become 'modern'.[5] Since the condition of being a sleeper is to be integrated and to have majority people's confidence, one could argue that there is no general conception in the mass media of Norwegian Muslims as potential sleepers.

Nevertheless, in May 2002, an interview in a Norwegian newspaper with the headline 'Mohammed Atta and I' caught my attention. In the interview, Nazneen Khan, one of the few Muslims who actively participate in public debates in Norway, maintained that: 'All western Muslims who are honest to themselves can to some extent understand the young men behind the terrorist attacks on September 11' (*Klassekampen*, 8 May 2002: 16).[6] When I read the autobiographical essay that had led to the interview (Khan, 2002) in an edited volume in Norwegian about the effects of 11 September, I found an interesting piece of evidence.

Nazneen Khan is a 34-year-old Muslim believer, although not practising; her family is of Pashtun/Afghan origin; her father is a medical doctor; she belongs to an affluent extended family based in London and New York; she was born in Kenya and lived in the UK until she came,

with her parents and a sister, to settle in a small town in southwestern Norway at the age of 10. Later, she obtained an MA in international politics from the London School of Economics and Political Science and worked as a journalist in Norway for several years, until she accepted a position as a lecturer in journalism Oslo University College in August 2002 (*Aftenposten*, 26 August 2002: 10; Khan, 1999).

In the above-mentioned essay, Khan (2002) allows herself to consider the purely theoretical possibility that she too might have become a terrorist; in other words, she considers the possibility of harbouring a sleeper within her own self. In her view, the terrorist ideals were not all imported from elsewhere, but were to some extent *produced in the West* in the encounter between Muslims from the Middle East and representatives of the current cultural climate in Europe. Because of the rejection and non-recognition of who they are, some people develop a rage and a need for belonging that leads them to terrorism.

Khan's essay is complex and rich; it is informative about Muslims in the West, Muslims in Norway, the hegemony of the majority in Norway, as well as her own somewhat atypical position in Norway as a publicly well-integrated Muslim.[7] In my analysis, I focus on the specific sources of identification discussed by her. This article is thus not about terrorism, but about identification and about how and where, in present-day identification processes, sleeper identities might be located. For the purpose of this article, I do not see the sleeper as the whole person, but as particular identities that are suddenly revealed.

I define the modern *self* as the continuous and processual effort of a person to bring together their various and often shifting, contradictory and incongruous roles, identities and experiences. It is a neverending attempt to create what I call *a sustainable self-image*, a coherent and yet flexible image of the self. The attempt is a process with no end product. *Roles*, on the other hand, are the dynamic aspects of the individual's positions in various social institutions and subsystems while *identities* are those qualities with which the individual identifies and of which they desire social confirmation. Here, potential sleepers may be located. Some identities are directly tied to social roles while others, such as national and ethnic identities, can be more or less pronounced aspects of several roles. I thus combine a dramaturgical perspective on the self, based on the shifting performance of the various roles and identities in different contexts, with a perspective focusing on the reflexive efforts of the individual of bringing together their various performances and experiences in a unified conception of the self. In a circle that can be positive or negative in its consequences, each person develops their own sense of self by taking the perspective of important others. The self emerges and is validated in the act of recognition by these others (Mead, 1934).

The article is primarily based on Khan's 11 September essay (2002), on   531

a few newspaper interviews with her and on Khan (1999), an earlier autobiographical essay in a book on feminism.[8] While Khan's 2002 text is both theoretical and autobiographical, her 1999 essay is more clearly an autobiographical account, using real life events to discuss questions of existential importance. In this earlier essay, she discusses the dilemmas of no longer being a 'decent Muslim woman', as well as her lack of guidance, roots and basic security (*trygghet*) in developing her own way of life in relation to both her Muslim heritage and the secularized Norwegian practices around her. I focus primarily on the later essay, only using the 1999 work to expand on some of its issues.

I begin the article by presenting an analysis of Khan's text. She critically discusses the unquestioned assumptions underlying the media definition of the terrorists as people harbouring alien ideals. I then use theoretical ideas and empirical themes that I have developed as a majority researcher in Norway over the last 30 years[9] to expand on her account by contextualizing it in four partly overlapping directions: 1) the identity politics inspired by economic and cultural globalization; 2) the individualization of identification; 3) the cultural meanings of childhood experiences as a possible locus for the sleeper; and 4) ethnicity and religion as sources of belonging in relation to changing majority frameworks of interpretation in Norway. Khan's focus on these identities, and not, for example, on social class, can to some extent be regarded as an extension and inversion of commonsense ideas about the substances of ancestry and religion that now underpin identity politics and imagined moral communities in the Norwegian majority. This means that majority identification can also be regarded as the locus of potential sleepers. Majority and minority ideas of belonging seem both to be parallel and to reinforce each other within a structured relationship of power.

Khan's autobiographical reflections

The text under consideration is 20 pages long. As a genre, it is a mixture of autobiographical writing and critical intellectual reflection. Khan's ability to examine her ideas and feelings is rare among both majority and minority Norwegians. She scrutinizes analytically her own dilemmas of belonging in order to comprehend her own conceptions of self as well as some people's path to terrorism. The essay starts out in the following way:

'Osama bin Laden is the best thing that has happened to the Muslim world.' The traffic in one of London's numerous streets threatens to drown us out. My father and I. 'How come?', I wonder when we hurry along among masses of people on a cold December day. 'Now Muslims have to find out who they are and what they stand for. The West has to examine critically their own attitudes towards Islam.' (Khan, 2002: 146)

The setting in this opening paragraph takes the Norwegian reader back to Khan's childhood in London, but not to a particular house or neighbourhood: 'Fate desired it so that in reality I have no place that is mine. No farm or village [*bygd*] belonging to the kin group' (Khan, 1999: 76). Nevertheless, the lively hustle and bustle of unknown people in an anonymous London street is no doubt a well-chosen setting for two people living in a diaspora spanning four continents.

In my reading of this essay, the key sentence in the opening paragraph is also the key to the whole essay: 'My father and I.' It is impressive in its incompleteness − the emotional intensity of a strong timeless kinship relation in no need of a verb. Khan thus anchors what she has to say in the primordial relationship to her father. This interpretation is supported by the fact that her other essay opens in a similar way, with a light-hearted and privileged Sunday morning moment. Khan is chatting in her mother's bed about which of her grandmothers provided her with her rebellious temperament (Khan, 1999: 75). In modern society, the most central source for many people's self-image is the relationship to their parents, anchored in biological genealogy, realized during childhood and further developed in the adult present.

Khan then turns to discuss her imagined identification with the life of Mohammed Atta and the other terrorists of 11 September. On a certain level of abstraction, most Norwegians might perhaps understand the duty to fight (what is regarded as) an enemy, even if it is now almost 60 years since many good Norwegians celebrated the bombing of German cities. Khan, however, presents a more specific line of argument:

> They were 19 men, all between 20 and 30 years old. Well educated. Civilized. Young men in cities and born into liberal Muslim families. Not poor. Not ignorant. Not men in ragged clothes and cloth-top shoes. Consumers of the West, but willing to kill thousands of people in the fight for justice. We will never know which ideas grew and became strong in the head of Mohammed Atta, the young city planner who is regarded as one of the brains behind the airplane attack. We will also never know what exactly released the hatred, or why Atta and his fellow believers renounced the society around them, and embraced what we know for sure is a distorted version of Islam. (2002: 148)
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> Let us try a thought experiment, in our hunting for insight. A thought experiment with a basis in real facts. The hypothesis is that I understand these 19 men. I have the feeling that I can understand a little bit of what went through their heads. Perhaps it is arrogant to think that I can penetrate into the minds of other young Muslims settled in the West, and comprehend that they choose to cover themselves completely in terms of dress, pray five times a day, and abandon themselves to strict rules concerning how to live their lives. And blow themselves up instead of embracing the western secular and liberating ideal of the glorified individual. I who have done just that: I have eagerly embraced the rebellion the West has given me access to. But I

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can comprehend, because I myself have been standing in front of the narrow path, and I have felt its attraction. Because at a certain point I, too, wished to show the world that I had an identity. A culture and a religion I was proud of. Because I was tired of the demonization of my cultural heritage, but also tired of being regarded as deviant by 'my own people', and of explaining why I feel more at home in a worn-down bar decorated in the style of the 1950s, than in a mosque. True enough, only with a coke in my hand. But I never entered the narrow path, and I never will. I have my own challenging road to walk. But I still think I understand. I think I can understand Mohammed Atta. I think I understand where his rage comes from. (2002: 149–50)

Khan continues her reflections by discussing processes occurring after the arrival of Mohammed Atta and the other terrorists in Europe. When they arrived in Europe, she says, their interest in Islam suddenly rose. The modernity they embraced before leaving their home countries became an enemy in Europe (2002: 150). If we apply the idea of the sleeper to her account, Khan's idea is that the sleeping identity was developed in the West. The rage is a western rage, inspired by the sum of many trivial everyday rejections. Choosing belonging as her main perspective and assuming that everybody needs to belong, Khan presents a model for the process of how discrimination and lack of confirmation may over time lead to a rejection of the discriminating society and its values:

What is it that makes these men dare to turn away from western ideas about freedom? Are they only driven by motives of power? Vengefulness? Or a desire for belonging? For this thought experiment I choose the last alternative. The need for belonging. For me it explains a lot. If not everything.

Where do the motivation, the rage and the conviction to do the monstrous acts we witnessed on 11 September come from? Could it be that the explanation of their hatred is rooted in how these men experience their everyday lives? An everyday life that is interwoven with international political events. (2002: 151)

The polarization between 'Christians' and 'Muslims' characterizes our political and social sphere, and expresses itself in stigmatizing attitudes in everyday life. Muslims do not get jobs, or are not allowed to rent dwellings, just because they are Muslims. These attitudes have consequences for social interaction, influence everyday life and ignite our basic need to belong. The need for belonging is a fundamental motivation and factor explaining the way we define ourselves in relation to other people, and for how we on the basis of this regard the world around us, make our political and social choices. A rejection or a simplification of how we look at ourselves can lead to an aggression that in its turn can nourish deep and destructive identity crises. These crises easily look stereotypical for outsiders. But the crises nourish

individuals hunting for signs confirming that the road they have decided to choose is correct. Most extremely, if the alienation that has already settled down is often confirmed, it might be possible that these individuals embrace ideals and images of the world that demonize the society they live in, and that they choose to distance themselves from social life. Instead they choose an alternative universe and an alternative community. The experiences leading to the choice of distancing themselves can be extremely small, even insignificant for the naked eye. But the effects can be catastrophic. The poison of ignorance is more dangerous than we allow ourselves to think. (2002: 153)

Khan continues by presenting a mininarrative revealing some of her own personal experiences:

'Are you Norwegian???' Her voice was piercingly nasal. She looked at me in all her Nordic glory. Tall, blonde and slim. Dressed in clothes made by Versace. The time had stopped. I looked at her, shocked. I was unable to answer. 'Well, are you Norwegian, or what?' She did not want to give in. She had heard me speak. Damned accent. It always ruins everything for me. 'Uh . . .', I stammered. She sniffed, and shook her head. Smiled condescendingly and sent me a look filled with sympathy. 'Uh, Norwegian, yes, eh . . . it depends on what you mean by that, but uh . . . perhaps that is what I am. . . .' She rolled her eyes. Turned away on her thin heels. I hoped they would break, and that she would fall. But no. She disappeared elegantly in the crowd of perfect and nicely dressed-up people (one might believe they were cloned). I was left, standing alone with my glass filled with lukewarm coke and melted ice. I left that party very early. While I looked at myself in the mirror in the bathroom at home I mimicked the lady's question: 'Well, are you Norwegian?', and managed to answer her: 'You ignorant woman, of course I am not Norwegian, even if I speak perfect Norwegian with an accent [*dialekt*] from southwestern Norway, and even if I go to parties with successful people in the best part of Oslo. What do you think?!'

 Afterwards I have regretted that I did not ask her: why do you want to know? What would you have responded if I said yes, and what would you have responded if I said no? I also wonder if my anger is quite legitimate. We all have a need to know where people come from, who they are, and what they do. One cannot disregard that ethnicity has always given people a factor of recognition and a source of meaning. . . . Ethnicity is the very basis for our entire social interaction. (2002: 153–5)

This account is interesting because the events are so trivial. The woman asks a seemingly innocent question and Khan is both baffled and enraged. Why? For most majority people, it is probably difficult to understand why small events like this one can inspire so much anger. Therefore, it is particularly important to analytically unpack such micro-

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practices in order to get an analytical handle on the many seemingly natural assumptions underlying discrimination and how enervating it can be to experience over and over again not being regarded as an un-marked participant in social encounters; always to be singled out as different; not to be one of the 'us' who are not asked this question.

Khan dresses fashionably and speaks perfect Norwegian. The question usually comes when she opens her mouth and speaks her southwestern accent ('Damned accent. It always ruins everything'). I think the reason is that regional accents and dialects are regarded as more authentically Norwegian than the standard language.[10] The combination of an 'authentic' accent and 'not looking Norwegian' probably triggers the question. The looks and the accent point in different directions.

Without reflection and without actually saying so, the woman thus focuses on Khan's 'non-Norwegian looks'. The encounter illustrates Ruth Frankenberg's (1993) point that 'whiteness' is a category normally disregarded by whites themselves and most clearly seen by those who are excluded from that category. It is no natural biological essence, but a structural advantage, a privilege and a mental perspective associated with unmarked and nameless cultural practices. As this category is seldom discussed, it provides no basis for self-reflection (Frankenberg, 1993). Because of situations such as the one described above, Khan, for her part, is constantly forced to consider the social meanings of her looks in Norway.

The woman asks a question, but she does not really seem to be interested in Khan's own understanding. Underlying the question is the assumption that persons should be categorized in terms of only one national identity; one is either Norwegian or Afghan or whatever else. The complexities of each person's many ties of identification are difficult to formulate within this polarized frame of interpretation. This is probably why Khan is baffled; her many strands of belonging do not fit into polarized categories. The encounter thus exposes the vulnerability of the complex diasporic self in a society that is popularly – and wrongly – regarded as homogeneous.

There is also an implied dimension of social class (and maybe of age) in terms of lifestyle, based on consumption, in this account from the best part of Oslo. Not only is the woman wearing a Versace dress, but Khan is also able to read this class-specific sign. This ability makes them alike, but that does not count here. In addition, they are both women. Never-theless, the woman focuses on nationality. Social class and gender are strongly present, but not explicitly in the foreground.

Khan continues to discuss the effects of discrimination:

If you are confronted, more often than you wish to remember, with prejudices or ignorance, questioning your identity, you will probably become alienated. The experiences are banal in their simplicity, but every episode

reinforces the feeling of difference. When this is supplied with negative images of the culture you originally belonged to, an explosive cocktail of bitterness and contempt is created. (2002: 155)

A marked group identity is prominent, as is the glorified postmodern ideal in the West about the possibility of changing identity. The illusion of renouncement. The renouncement of roots. The renouncement of one's original identity. For some people such a renouncement is simple. If one belongs to the majority culture in a western country, one can look at oneself as a part of a larger community without problems. It is unproblematic to move among identities. Your culture is not stigmatized. Even if you distance yourself from your original cultural background, you remain part of it because of politico-religious background and something as banal as skin colour. If one belongs to the minorities, this renouncement is much more complicated. Name and skin colour carry heavy references that cannot be ignored. It is as my mother cynically says: 'your face is your passport'. Better just admit it. (2002: 158)

The account then moves on to a conversation with a few young 'Pakistani' boys in Oslo. They were all born in Norway, educated in Norway, live in Norway 'and will probably die in Norway'. Still, they do not see themselves as Norwegians, but as Muslims. Khan further scrutinizes her personal feelings of connectedness:

Even I, being a liberal and against violence and terror, would never be willing to spy on extremist Muslim groups in Norway. I do not think so, anyway. My loyalty is in an abstract way on the side of Ummah. Even if I cannot be characterized as practising, just as a believer.

The answer is not complicated. It concerns identity. Largely it concerns an imagined [*innbilt*] identity. A primitive need to find a tribe. . . . Could it be that we are in the middle of an era in which the question about who we are is pressing itself upon us with such a force that it is impossible to escape? Where we have to take a stand in relation to antiquarian concepts such as blood ties? (2002: 161–2)

Even if the Ummah that Mohammed Atta and his kinsmen are a part of is a sick and distorted Ummah, an Ummah the majority of Muslims do not want to identify with, the step is not long to want to be part of the community they invite you to belong to. The banalities of everyday life are the most dangerous. (2002: 163)

The reflections move imperceptibly among notions of skin colour, culture, heritage, kinship, ethnicity and religion. In both essays, religion and ethnicity are foregrounded, not Khan's performative roles and identities as an upper middle-class, urban, cosmopolitan, well-educated female journalist and writer. The main focus is on being a Muslim believer, framed in terms of 'blood ties' and 'tribe'. This framing is quite illogical, but not surprising. The community of believers shares the belief 537

in Allah, as well as the sacred texts and the Arabic language in which they are written, but they do not share blood ties and they do not constitute a tribe. Yet this is how she formulates her ties of belonging. Thus, her discussion exemplifies the importance of descent in relation to consent in contemporary identification and the idea of the late anthropologist David Schneider that nationality, kinship and religion belong to the same cultural realm (he called it the same 'cultural galaxy') (Schneider, 1969).

Khan's blend of skin colour, ethnicity and religion is connected to her focus on discrimination and lack of recognition. What do Versace-dressed (or, for that matter, Hennes & Mauritz-dressed) Norwegians know about the differences between Pashtuns and Arabs? Or between the many denominations of Islam? For many of them, the bottom line is that she 'does not look Norwegian', and that is what she has to live with. It is her looks that actualize the discrimination of her other sources of identification, turning her face into a passport.

In the last piece of personal experience in the essay, Khan is standing in the underground in London, close to what she perceives to be two Arabic youths. Like the hustle and bustle of street life, the underground is a prototypical place to meet unknown people who are difficult to identify. She is again a perceptive observer of fashion and consumption styles. The woman wears a black burka and a pair of extremely fashionable Nike shoes in gold and red:

> I experience a desire to talk to the couple. To tell them that I am on their side. That I am not as western as I look. That I can also put on a burka. It is idiotic. But the thoughts are there. I do not understand why they pop up. I am assimilated. Pacified. I have nothing in common with the Arabic youths, except that I too sometimes pray to Allah. (2002: 164)

Khan fears both assimilation and not belonging.[11] She ends the essay by stating that a mental innovation is needed in order to become liberated from the myths of religion and the nation, to bury the myth that identity is a zerosum game and instead promote the understanding of hybridity, of both one and the other. 'The others' are no longer 'the others'; they are 'us' (2002: 164). Her identification with the terrorists is purely theoretical. She just allows herself to think the unthinkable. In the following, I want to contextualize her ideas in four ways, beginning with political economy.

The political economy of identification

The end of colonialism in the 1960s and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 are two key moments in the most recent history of the world. One moment undermined western cultural and economic hegemony; the other discredited Marxism and the collective working-class movement.

The year 1989 marked not only the fall of the Berlin Wall, but, for many people, also the loss of the most credible way of understanding social conflict. The discrediting of Marxism and the acceleration of social change have left people without the necessary concepts to grasp new economic and social tendencies.

In *Globalisation and its Human Consequences*, Zygmunt Bauman (1998) argues that the increasing power of investment capital, entering and leaving local communities with no social responsibility, has led to *freedom of movement* as a central expression of global inequality. Some people move freely as tourists and experts while others are stuck in poor regions. This applies to the world at large as well as to each country. In addition, parallel to the swift movements of capital, follows the loss of local autonomy for those who are forced to remain where they 'belong'. Khan refers implicitly to this fact in her reflections. The 19 terrorists had the freedom to move, but they renounced it by becoming martyrs.

Neoliberalism and economic globalization have reduced the power of traditional political and social institutions to control and protect their members. Many people, not only in Europe, but all over the world, are turning to religious, ethnic and national identities as a means of understanding themselves and of mobilizing themselves in defence of their interests (Turner, 1994: 419). In order to understand the potential of these ideologies for the formation of destructive sleepers, they need to be historically and structurally contextualized. In the case of the Muslim terrorists, one also needs to consider the possibility that they brought some of these ideas from where they came from.

Jonathan Friedman (1994) observes two parallel processes of *cultural re-identification* in the world today, related to the emerging dominance of new models for social classification: first, the reinforcement of diasporic identities of former migrants; and, second, the nationalist ethnification among the majorities in the very same countries. Both are due to the decentring of capitalism after decolonization. The decentring of capitalism implies a decentring of cultural hegemony that allows new identities to come into the foreground. He sees the present widespread identity politics not as the result of the flow of capital and commodities per se, but of the way social actors *interpret* these flows.

Individualized self-fashioning

The ways actors interpret the flows are influenced by individualization as a long-term cultural development. In modern society, commodification, social differentiation and bureaucratization have, over the centuries, resulted in a nostalgic longing for an assumed former wholeness as well as the development of distinct autobiographical genres of reflection about the continuity of a self *behind* the various social roles of the individual. Reflexivity rests on role distance (Høibraaten, 1980) and is, so   539

to speak, the hallmark of modernity, having been developed and extended more widely over the centuries (Giddens, 1991). The distance between a person's public performance and their 'true self' implies a potential risk for the forming of a sleeper.[12]

With individualization, the discourse of individual rights and liberties has become hegemonic, foregrounding specific value concepts such as freedom, rights, choice, independence, individuality, uniqueness and achievement at the expense of dependence, obedience, duty, togetherness and community. This change has accelerated since the 1960s and is especially pronounced in the new middle classes. Ideally, each person has to choose their own values among those available. Khan sees the path to terrorism (and, thus, to developing a sleeper identity) as a choice and an act of freedom. At the same time, the terrorists renounced the freedom of the West.

On the one hand, the ideologies and practices of individualization correctly place ethical responsibility with each individual self; on the other hand, the intense focus on individuality hides the value of sociality in people's lives. The self is continually developed in dialogue with others, and each person depends on other people who are able and willing to confirm the presented identities and self-image. Because confirmation is always uncertain, dignity and recognition have become key concepts (Berger et al., 1973; Taylor 1989). On the basis of these ideas, Khan's reflections can be interpreted as the expression of a heightened need for belonging due to lack of recognition in a racist society.

The West promises freedom and uniqueness, but not equally to all inhabitants. For example, in practice, Muslims in Norway do not have the right to say publicly that morals in Norway are getting worse, although this is a very familiar topic of conversation for many majority Norwegians. Because of widespread negative stereotypes, modern Muslims are often denied the possibility of being treated as individual and unique. Discrimination puts limitations on freedom and autonomy.

Young persons with an immigrant background often make complex and innovative compromises in order to be loyal to different value systems. In the ideological vacuum after 1989, Islam might seem to have something to offer because of its insistence on the community of the Ummah across nations and its resistance to the power policies of the US. When Muslims experience that their religion is systematically denigrated and even defined as criminal in itself (Islam is the religion that permits lying, and so on), their self-respect becomes fragile. The focus on religion and descent and some people's distrust of everything western may be interpreted as precarious solutions in the fight for dignity, self-respect and a sustainable self-image. For many people, religion and descent constitute a 'natural' foundation for a flexible and continuous self-image. These identities thus seem to imply specific connecting qualities. In these qualities, a sleeper might be located.

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The role of childhood memories in the construction and objectification of modern selves

In my interpretation of Khan's essay, she explicitly emphasizes and brings together religion and descent, anchoring these identities in the relationship to her father in London and, through this relation and location, to her childhood. This interpretation illustrates, first, that in current ideologies, the relation between parents and children is regarded as primordial and unconditional, with a strong emphasis on the biological aspects of parenting. In a lifeworld of imagined belonging, parents are manifestly real. Second, in the present stage of capitalist modernity, childhood is often seen as the 'natural' foundation of the adult, and childhood experiences are used as powerful symbolic resources in the building of the modern self (see Gullestad, 1996b). There is an increasing interest in reflexive life-telling, in general, and in childhood, in particular, as manifestations of the modern quest for a self. It started with the Romantic movement to establish childhood as a realm of experience lying within each human being, a landscape of feeling and a quality of life that might be continually reinterpreted. Being popularly regarded as the cause and origin of the present, childhood experiences are regarded as deep and genuine parts of the person – to be one's own in a deeper and different sense than later experiences.

Looking back to one's childhood means, to a large extent, to turn to the memories of the intimate sphere of everyday life in the family, where group identities and loyalties were transmitted as stories, myths, habits, food practices, religious practices, and so on. The link between the child of the past and the adult of the present is the body as a repository of memories and an action system. During childhood, religious belief and national/ethnic identity are installed through bodily practice in the family. Class habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) is also installed, but this is not central in contemporary ideologies. Childhood memories – the way they are selectively perceived, identified, interpreted and remembered – thus constitute a crucial part of the experiential grounding and metaphoric resources needed to imagine the culturally most salient forms of present-day belonging. In the light of the present and the anticipated future, some memories become more salient for the individual than others. They contribute to the present force of ethnicity, nationalism and religious belief.

In relation to the figure of the sleeper, it is particularly relevant that childhood memories are perceived to be 'deep inside', 'natural' and 'authentic'. They, thus, potentially constitute a different and alternative symbolic locus for the sleeper identities than the one based on rejection and non-confirmation as an adult. I therefore see an interesting contrast between Khan's explicit focus on non-recognition as an adult and the way she implicitly anchors herself in the relation to her father in her

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childhood London. Nevertheless, for many people, the two loci can be combined, for example in childhood memories about the humiliation of a parent or in the fact that childhood loyalties reinforce the sense of belonging developed in adulthood.

Khan's childhood experiences obviously inspire her to identify as a Muslim. In contrast to her, some young women in Norway who have broken with their Muslim families publicly describe their entire childhood as a process of brainwashing. In the cultural climate in Norway today, many Norwegian Muslims seem to feel that they are left with the radicalized choice of either accepting the identities they have received during childhood or renouncing them. Khan is atypical in the public sphere precisely because she is able to simultaneously critically examine and embrace what she already is.

Integralist ideologies in Norway and Europe

Khan's reflections are located within the cultural climate of present-day Norway and Europe more generally. The most immediate context is the public debate in Norway. This context has inspired her reflections, and the enlightened part of it is where her readership is located. In my work on the Norwegian immigration debates, I have found that there is generally a strong feeling of innocence in Norway in relation to both historical colonialism and present-day racism and a sense of superiority in relation to the ideas and practices of Muslim 'immigrants'.

The sense of superiority felt by many majority Norwegians in relation to 'immigrants' in general, and Muslims in particular, relies on: the equality and interchangeability of the genders; a conceptual division between Norwegian modernity and what is perceived as Muslim traditionalism; a close link between territory and descent; as well as the reinforced importance of Lutheran Christianity in contrast to Islam. The crucial point is the dichotomization of categories based on the combined ideas of descent and culture and the inferiorization of 'them'. At the same time as social life itself often runs far ahead of such simple dichotomies, such polarities have become discursively rigidified, creating symbolic fences between the categories. Culture is salient, but not necessarily defined by actual practice; instead, looks and family name work as markers of cultural difference and genealogical distance. Over the last 10–15 years, Norway has been characterized by an increasing ethnification of national identity combined with new culturalist justifications of racist discrimination within the structured majority–minority power relations. To some extent, I see this as a displacement of real frustrations caused by the effects of economic neoliberalism. The oil money in Norway does not prevent the extensive restructuring of social classes, local communities and places of work as well as the reduction of certain welfare state services.

Despite different historical traditions and political cultures and despite differences of emphasis and timetable, the increasing colour-coded discrimination of certain inhabitants as 'them' is often surprisingly similar in many European countries. Populist politicians have been able to revitalize and recombine symbolic resources with long traditions. As this article is being written (November 2002), the populist rightwing Progress party is the largest party in Norway, with about 30 percent of the vote according to the opinion polls. Even more alarming is the fact that their populist ideas are gaining considerable ideological influence all over the political spectrum.

With special reference to the European Union, the anthropologist Douglas R. Holmes (2000) calls these ideologies 'integralism' and links them to the counter-enlightenment of the Romantic movement as a resistance to modernity. It was precisely the ties based on rootedness in the land (*enracinement*) that Émile Durkheim, in a different period in European history, sought to counteract with the notion of 'organic solidarity', based on the complex division of work in modern society (Durkheim, 1933).[13] Thus, old ideas about the connecting substances of what Durkheim called 'mechanical solidarity' and Ferdinand Tönnies's (1957) *Gemeinshaft* are now being extensively revitalized — in everyday life practice as well as at the level of organized politics.

These ideological changes can be interpreted as a 'return to basics' in order to consolidate majority hegemony. They signal a dramatic change in the ethical substance of people's lives, of the unwritten and self-explanatory rules of everyday life. The anti-racist pact among the general public in Europe after Nazism and the Second World War seems to be being slowly and imperceptibly eroded, and arguments and ideas from former times are reappearing in new forms. I want to argue here that the identities involved in the longing for the warmth of an ethnically-based *Gemeinshaft* or 'mechanical solidarity' can be regarded as sleepers that are waking up and being revitalized by being combined in new ways and used in a new situation, helped by politicians and intellectuals who contribute to their formulation and legitimization. In this way, majority people who suddenly commit racist actions might no doubt also be regarded as destructive sleepers.[14]

Closing note: the theoretical possibility of radical difference

My analysis in this article builds on and extends the reflections of Nazneen Khan. Her discussion is complex, contradictory, ambivalent and critical. On the one hand, she, more or less just like everyone else, uses ethnicity and religion as anchoring points for identification; on the other hand, she sees the dangers of these sources of belonging and reacts negatively when other people, such as the lady at the party in the best

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part of Oslo, focus explicitly on nationality and implicitly on 'skin colour'. It might also be argued that the fact that her text is directed at a majority Norwegian readership – including the woman at the party and people like her – has influenced Khan to focus more on these dimensions than she would otherwise have done.[15]

These ideological patterns are choices that often do not present themselves as such. Family, childhood, religion, 'skin colour', ethnicity and nationality – all these anchoring points for identification appear to be natural and self-evident and therefore part of 'what is really me' in a different and more profound sense than achieved identities. But also, in the elaboration of these sources of identification, there is, of course, an element of choice and achievement, both concerning which aspects are picked out for elaboration and cultivation and concerning the intensity with which they are embraced. The temptation to fall back upon nostalgia and on imagining an ethnically-based homogeneous *Gemeinshaft* is to a large extent *shared* by both majorities and minorities as differently situated strategies within the new multiethnic Norway and Europe more generally.

Khan's reflections can be used to argue that the definition of the sleeper in the mass media is not the only one possible. This figure can be reconfigured more dynamically and processually as someone who has experienced repeated rejection within structured relations of power influenced by ideologies focusing on blood and religion. In spite of the very real clash of values between Islam and secularized Christianity and partly because of the history of political and economic relations between the East and the West, Khan's imagined identification with the terrorists is not based on 'alien ideals'. Within Khan's perspective, terrorism presents itself more like a boomerang than the intrusion of something entirely alien. As we have seen, people with 'different looks' may react to discrimination by putting even more emphasis on the discriminated identity in an attempt to reverse the stigma, demonstrating that the identity most attacked usually becomes the most cherished by the subject (Maalouf, 1998). In addition, I have, in this article, made the point that integralist ideas in Europe can themselves be regarded as sleepers.

Nevertheless, many questions remain unanswered. One question is the extent to which the attempts to comprehend Mohammed Atta in terms of the serious problems of everyday discrimination discussed in Khan's essay give any real insight into terrorism. In newspaper interviews, the former neighbours of Atta's family in Cairo maintained that they were not practising Muslims in his childhood and that he became a fanatic in Europe (*Dagsavisen*, 8 September 2002). This information supports Khan's interpretation. Nevertheless, the material considered in this article cannot explain what happened to the terrorists. Some terrorists were obviously planted in the West and thus arrived with destructive intentions. In addition, it is one thing to play with the idea of com-

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prehending the rage of Mohammed Atta, but a completely different story to actually become a terrorist. Human motivation is generally too complex to be wholly comprehended within one perspective. Thus, the sleeper identities discussed in this article did not necessarily − or not wholly − motivate the actions of the terrorists. For example, specific interpretations of the geopolitical situation, including a critical analysis of US foreign policies, as well as specific Wahabi Muslim interpretations of the role of the martyr also need to be considered.[16] Intellectuals in the West have a well-known propensity to make people and organizations such as Al Qaeda (or, for that matter, the LTTE of Sri Lanka) into mirror images of themselves. Researchers have to counteract that tendency by allowing for the theoretical possibility that radical differences do exist. Among other things, this possibility forces intellectuals (such as Nazneen Khan and myself) to look at ourselves with a more critical and reflexive distance than before.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. I use the term 'sleeper' in a metaphorical way and not as a precise technical term.
2. In fictional literature about secret agents, the English word sleeper is often used instead of a Norwegian translation.
3. 'Third world' immigrants started coming to Norway in the late 1960s. By January 2000, 'non-western immigrants' (first and second generations) made up approximately 3 percent of the total population. The majority are from Asia, with Pakistanis, Vietnamese and Turks as the largest groups. In January 2000, there was, according to Vogt (2000: 252), approximately 50,000 Muslims in Norway and 24 mosques in the Oslo region: four Pakistani, two Turkish, four Arabic-North African, three Shi'a centres, one Bosnian and one African.
4. See also Thorbjørnsrud (1999), who analyses majority women's 'weeping for the Muslim Cinderellas'.
5. There may, of course, be a discrepancy between what is presented in the mass media and the ideas people hold about Muslims. But, since many people know Muslims only from the media, the media images are fairly important.
6. All quotes in this article are translated from the Norwegian by the author.

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7. While Khan is atypical as a well-educated public person, her views are typical of many young Muslims in Norway (Østberg, 2003).

8. I have also profited from an email correspondence with Khan about her essays.

9. See, for example, Gullestad (1992, 1996a, b, c, 2002e) as well as my recent project about the Norwegian immigration debates (1997a, b, 2001a, b, 2002a, b, c in press).

10. In sociolinguistic terms, Khan speaks with an accent from southwestern Norway. However, Norwegians do not distinguish between dialect (*dialekt*) concerning grammar and accent (*aksent*) concerning pronunciation. The word *aksent* is popularly used only about foreigners. Speaking dialect or with a regional accent is common in Norway and, since the 1970s, also in public life. In this respect, Norway is different from most European countries except Switzerland and the Faroe Islands.

11. In our email correspondence, Khan says that she finds herself in a constant pendulum situation in Norway, having to find creative solutions in order to 'find peace'. This usually involves playing down and suppressing the Muslim parts of herself. See also Gullestad (1992: Ch. 6) about the meanings of 'peace and quiet' in Norway.

12. The figure of the sleeper makes visible a contradiction in liberal societies between, on the one hand, the distinction between the private and the public (and everybody's right to the secrecy of privacy) and, on the other hand, the centralized enlightened state focusing on transparency. The contradiction between the two norms – privacy and transparency – often produces a hermeneutics of suspicion, expressed in constantly looking for signs of tendencies that need to be put under state control.

13. Durkheim's choice of terms is, however, counterintuitive; 'mechanical solidarity' is based on organic metaphors of blood ties and roots.

14. There have been two racist deaths in Norway over the last few years.

15. In our email correspondence, Khan says that she has the impression that majority Norwegians think that, as an upper middle-class person, she does not count in the debates about immigration. These experiences can be analysed with reference to the specific egalitarian ethos in Norway (see, for example, Gullestad, 1992, 2002b).

16. The terrorists seem to have developed an eschatological ideology in which they, by means of their martyrdom, give Islam what they consider to be its rightful place in the world at the same time as they also revenge their personal humiliation.

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