

“You’re ethnic”, she says with glowing eyes. “How exciting!”

Even though I badly want to tell her that it is hard not to be, I figure the little joke will create more confusion than dialog and leave it be. At least she is excited, I say to myself, even though I know a romantic prejudice can be as harmful as any other.

I try to analyze her widening smile as her son proudly proclaims that my “ethnic” background is not too present, since my Danish mother always has been the only one responsible for my upbringing.

She tries to sound sad when she asks more questions about my absent father, but it is clear to me that she is ecstatic. Her son has found an interesting “ethnic” girlfriend, who does not bring along all the cultural baggage *and* who has lived alone with a single mother. In her eyes I belong to both a minority and to a different class.

She cannot believe her luck.

She asks about my full name, emphasizing “full”. She probably wanted to check just how ethnic I am.

She herself has a typically Danish surname, which is written on the door of her typically Danish house, right next to her typically Danish husband’s typically Danish surname – which of course is not the same as hers, as is becoming typically Danish.

She has two typical Danish spoiled children, whose biggest difficulties in life consist of which iPhone they want, as is typical for the richer and richer Danes, and she is only surrounded with the same typically Danish people with the same typically Danish lives.

I knew already back then that I was going to be referred to in all of her conversations the next couple of days: Her son’s new girlfriend’s class and ethnic genes was hot news to include in her typically Danish gossip.

I want her to like me.

It is important to me that she likes me, so when I obviously disappoint her by saying my perhaps not typical, but very Danish name, I mention that I had my father’s surname for the first two years of my life, which is very “ethnic” indeed.

My mother was wise enough to scratch my Serbian sounding surname when my father left me for good, thereby saving me from being put at the bottom of the pile of job applications in most typically Danish workplaces, or constantly being asked about my cultural heritage by the typically curious Dane, who would unknowingly remind me of the language, the culture and the family I missed out on.

But the hurtful story of why the name was erased when I turned two does not seem to interest her. Instead, she compliments me on my pronunciation of my alcoholic and violent father’s family name.

“But you are very lucky”, she says smiling, confusing me; “having the best from both worlds.” Her son tightens his proud grip around me as she compliments my eyes’ pigment and my skins tint.

She believes she can see that I have “ethnic” skin but typically Danish eyes.

Her husband, brothers, sisters, kids and parents all have the typically fair skin and light hair of the Danes, but none of them the so typical Scandinavian blue eyes, as I do.

She admires them almost as much as her son.

My interesting “otherness” shows, but my eyes, eyes being the gateway to the human soul, looks Danish. I am thereby categorized as a romantic “other” but not a dangerous “stranger”.

She should only know that my bright blue eyes come from Montenegro and that I inherited my golden skin from someone who grew up just across the street. But saying that would destroy her picture of me as “ethnic”, and as I have stated: I really wanted her to like me.

I therefore let the stereotype live on, even though I knew I thereby contributed to a problem. A problem that would not affect me as such, but perhaps it would shape other genetically or culturally different not so typically Danish Danes.

I cannot help but to think about the many experiences my almost typically Danish name, my almost typically Danish appearance, and my definitely typically Danish lack of religion, has spared me for.

Thinking back of my first meeting with my mother in law - whom I love and adore today, and I think she feels the same way, even though I have turned out to be less “ethnic” than she originally hoped for – I cannot help but to think about myself and the choices I have made in my life. Like the choice I was to make years later about studying the phenomenons of globalization and migration, multiculturalism and racism, hurtful and romantic prejudices.

Even though I see myself as a Dane with Danish roots and routes, I cannot help but to wonder: Did my genes from Montenegro, which come up to the surface in my modern, western, Danish life in situations like the one I have just described to you, play some part, if even a small one, in making me into the person I am today?