

## Why I Support Poland in the World Cup

“Oh, you’re so Danish!” People say that sometimes, and I am. I mean, I *was* born there and lived there for 19 years, *but* as Danish people come, I’m pretty undanish. The problem is, that sometimes when I do things that people don’t expect, they think “aha, inexplicable behavior! It must be because he’s from a different country”. That’s natural enough to think, but it’s pretty wrong. I actually make a lot of effort to be crazy, and writing all that off as due to my nationality is an insult to my work.

It all started with me not understanding why blackface is offensive. Coming from Denmark, my own existence had always been very monochromatic, and racial tensions were never really part of my life. In my 1000 student high school there was one black person, and she was adopted. Anyway, I came here, and I tried to engage as much as possible with people who don’t look like me – that’s one of the reasons I’m studying abroad for eight semesters. In particular, I was helped along by a campaign that Sustained Dialogue ran last year, called “My Culture is Not a Costume”. Sustained Dialogue is an organization that arranges discussions about race and diversity. Like, really good discussions. White people are underrepresented though, and that’s not ok. EVERYBODY should go. You should go.

Sustained Dialogue made try to think of ways in which I myself was being discriminated against, to try to better understand. That’s hard. I’m male and white and super good looking. The only thing that popped to mind was my being from another country. To be fair, being a foreigner hasn’t traumatized me. Aside from having to face the boundless evil of the Border Guards in Logan Airport, and having my name spelled wrong by everybody, the signs are subtle. It’s tiny things like, when it’s minus 5000 degrees outside (and no, that’s not the Celsius scale, it’s simple hyperbole) and I say I’m cold, people look confused and ask me, “but aren’t you

from Denmark? Isn't it pretty cold there?". Yes, I tell them, it is, and I love it just as much Angolans love malaria.

Another example: When I'm smiling and singing, as I sometimes am, people conclude, since they read in some Buzzfeed article that Denmark is the happiest nation in the world, that the reason I'm happy is because I'm Danish. Wrong. My friends back home don't whistle happily when the fire alarm goes off at five in the morning. I'm happy because I have wonderful friends that make me feel appreciated every day and because I can afford a winter jacket when it's cold outside and because I get another chance when I mess up and because I don't have asthma and because I get to live in a fucking castle with a bell tower. I'm happy because I'm me, not because I'm Danish!

When we don't know people, we latch on to stereotypes to describe them. That's why some think Chinese people all look the same – in the West, "Asianness" is something you can meaningfully use to describe people. Well, I thought so too, but when I went to China, they didn't look the same at all. All of a sudden, when I came to Beijing, "Asianness" was not a very good descriptor anymore. Anyway, my Danishness is only one part of my identity, like my sexuality or the fact that I love garlic and rock music. What's more, it's a part of my identity that I haven't chosen, and while it has obvious effects on who I am, it's not something I can have an emotional attitude towards. I can't be proud of it. I root for the Polish football team in the World Cup. It's mostly to be provocative and teach people that when you don't know any of the players personally anyway, why in the world would you choose to support the ones that happened to be born relatively closer to you geographically?

The good news is that your senseless assumptions about Danes are not dangerous. You have not hurt me. Many people face discrimination that hurts. But you have made me stop and think. My point is that living here with you has helped me understand stereotypes in a way that I didn't understand them before. Thank you. And please, when I'm crazy and you appreciate it, give the credit to me and not to my country.