Erasing Communities:

Coloniality, Racial Banishment, and Denmark's Ghetto Policies

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Denmark's 2018 public housing policies, arguing they function as a mechanism for managing Muslim communities in public housing estates. It analyses these policies based on a theoretical framework of coloniality and the framing of Muslims as threats to Danish social cohesion. The article then shifts focus to the experiences of racialised residents in targeted housing estates, drawing on ethnographic data from Copenhagen, Aarhus and Odense. These residents highlight the significance of community care, intergenerational ties, and informal support networks. The article demonstrates how the ghetto policies reflect a coloniality enacted through racial governance, aiming to banish and erase Muslim communities from their neighbourhoods. By introducing the concepts of coloniality and racial banishment, the article argues that Denmark's housing policies serve as tools of social and spatial control, used to manage its Muslim population, erase their spatial history, and dismantle community life.[1]

KEY WORDS

HOUSING POLICY, MUSLIMS, RACIAL GOVERNANCE, COLONIALITY, URBAN DISPLACEMENT, COMMUNITY ERASURE

INTRODUCTION

In 2021, Denmark began large-scale demolitions of public housing estates. This started four years after the government introduced its ghetto policies, outlined in *One Denmark without Parallel Societies: No Ghettos in 2030* (Government, 2018, henceforth: the ghetto report). These policies aim to eradicate public housing estates where so-called non-Westerners make up more than 50% of the residents. This article focuses on the civilising premise to demolish these neighbourhoods and manage non-Western communities. This civilising premise is juxtaposed to the counter-narratives of community care, social uplift and intergenerational ties. The racialisation of non-Western residents as a Muslim Other (which is never mentioned explicitly in the policy documents) is at the heart of the government's public housing policies. Nevertheless, the experiences of those who inhabit these public housing estates depict a diverse community built on informal support networks. Throughout this article I interchange between 'Muslim', 'Other' and 'non-Western' to emphasise the racialisation of non-Western immigrants and descendants as Muslim Others. Non-Westerners might not *actually* be Muslim, however in political discourse and public consciousness non-whiteness is assumed to be non-Western, which in turn is assumed to be a representation of the Muslim Other (Hassani, 2024).

I use the concept of "the ghetto" to refer to how these neighbourhoods are described in the 2018 report and the ghettoisation discourse in the years prior to the introduction of these housing policies (Seemann, 2021). There is a racialised element in the ghetto-rhetoric which underscores the racial composition of these housing areas as essential to their deprivation. The current Social Democratic government has since adopted "parallel societies" as the main descriptor of these neighbourhoods. While both concepts—ghettos and parallel societies—problematise racialised populations, there is a long history of critical scholarship on ghettos that connects the Danish ghetto with the historical idea of the ghetto as a neighbourhood for abject citizens. I deliberately use "the ghetto" to highlight the rise of the Danish ghetto as a structurally racist phenomenon linked to a racial hierarchisation, which is invisibilised yet remains omnipresent in Danish racial welfare regime (cf. Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017).

Most of Denmark's public housing estates were built during the housing boom following World War 2. Many of these estates have since been inhabited by various influxes of labour migrants and refugees (Shultz Larsen, 2014). The influx of labour migrants and refugees from the global South attests to colonial structures that push people of the global South towards life in the global North (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018). These structures cannot be disconnected from the national and local histories. Hence, I bring a discussion of these structures into the Danish urban context through the concept of racial banishment as an expression of coloniality (Groglopo & Suárez-Krabbe, 2023; Roy, 2022). Ananya Roy (2022) defines racial banishment as state violence against racialised people and communities, seeking to erase their presence from urban environments. Her concept is useful to think with in relation to the Danish ghetto policies, as the government has made racial hierarchization an explicit signifier in its attempt to dispossess racialised communities and promote a white repossession of urban landscapes. The implementation of state control over public housing estates—which historically were community run and managed through the concept of tenants' democracy—and the subsequent banishment of racialised communities is a concrete configuration of coloniality in Denmark. In this sense, the government's integration paradigm should be understood as an essential feature of this coloniality expressed through a civilising discourse aimed at controlling Denmark's Muslim population materially, socially and culturally.

The article starts with a discussion of a community-centred methodological approach to ethnography. It then traces historical and conceptual frameworks that explain how frames of coloniality manifest in the Danish context. I analyse the policy discourse that problematise Muslim residents in public hous-

ing, unpacking the 2018 ghetto report's premise of integration and connect it to the wider otherisation of Muslims in political discourse. I then conduct an ethnographic analysis of racialised communities impacted by the policy in Denmark's three largest cities. I focus on narratives from three young women, who grew up in estates currently targeted by the ghetto policies. These narratives highlight community life, intergenerational connections, and informal support networks. Finally, I discuss how racially hierarchizing policies express a racial banishment of non-white bodies and communities, which in turn can be understood as a material manifestation of coloniality. I argue that Danish ghetto policies manage the Muslim population and erase Muslims' spatial history and community life tied to public housing estates through racial banishment. This reflects a settler-colonial practice of home dispossession and spatial erasure that are becoming hallmarks of gentrification efforts in many cities across the Global North (Kent-Stoll, 2020).

COMMUNITY-CENTRED ANALYSIS OF URBAN POLICIES

Depicting a counter-narrative to the deprived Danish ghetto, Copenhagen-based artist of Palestinian descent, Banaan Al-Nasser, uses the demolitions of a public housing estates in Denmark as a creative point of departure. Her art installation—*All that Remains*—represents residents' memories on broken yellow bricks from demolished buildings. Zooming in on the bricks, they include pictures of children playing outside their family flat, a mother waving to her child outside from her flat window. The installation includes miniature make-shift satellite dishes that beautified so many of our childhood flats and opened the world of the Global South to our parents lingering for a home they had to leave for physical, economic or generational safety.

This piece of art is not trivial. What the Danish government imagines of the ghetto betrays the fond childhood memories my interlocutors and I had; far from war, economic instability and surrounded by

"All That Remains", art installation by Banaan Al-Nasser at Viborg Art Hall, photo: Rine Flyckt

community. The art piece rejects the dehumanised image of the dangerous ghetto that threatens Danish society. Ultimately, Al-Nasser's art highlights the state's racialised violence of destroying and dismembering communities that have played an essential supportive role for disenfranchised populations.

I was raised in a stigmatised housing estate in Copenhagen's western suburbs; the same one my grandparents settled in when they arrived in the country. This is the auto-ethnographic backdrop that guides my reading of policy documents and my conversations with my interlocutors. I see Al-Nasser's installation as a reflection of my own connection to the history of public housing in Denmark. Simultaneously, it is a representation of the narratives of my interlocutors who embody different migration histories, life stories and community involvements.

I take note of Gani and Khan's (2024) recent critique of how positionality statements can become performative acts that risk reifying and upholding racialised power dynamics in research. Instead Gani and Khan (2024) highlight how auto-ethnographic methods have been developed by women of colour to ground their research in their experiences and communities. My research approach to Denmark's ghetto policies draws on this legacy. While the seeds of this project were grounded in my auto-ethnographic experiences, they developed in conversations and reflections with racialised communities most impacted by the racist tropes that inform the ghetto policies. My interlocutors are mutual conversational partners; they

shared their experiences, and I shared mine, layering and challenging each other's perspectives. My ethnographic approach is thus a community-grounded analysis of state violence and power over racialised communities drawing on policy analysis, spatial narratives, qualitative interviews and participant observation in public housing estates in Denmark's largest cities: Copenhagen, Aarhus and Odense.

FROM COLONIAL LEGACY TO COLONIALITY IN THE PRESENT

Denmark views its history as benevolent: it was a small empire that supposedly never inflicted too much harm on its colonies (Jensen, 2018; Padovan-Özdemir & Øland, 2022). The dominant national narrative is that its colonial violence never reached the calibre of its British, French and American counterparts. It is a narrative that refuses to re-evaluate Denmark's legacy in its current policies (Padovan-Özdemir & Øland, 2022; Suárez-Krabbe & Lindberg, 2019). However, Denmark has a four-century-long colonial history contributing to the enslavement, extraction, exploitation, and dispossession of peoples, resources, and land in the global South and the Arctic (Graugaard, 2009; Jensen, 2018). In fact, Denmark's colonial powers remain in the Artic region through its annexation of Kalaallit Nunaat (what Denmark has named Greenland) and the Faroe Islands. Although these two countries are supposedly autonomous territories, they remain under Danish jurisdiction. Particularly, Kalaallit Nunaat cements Denmark's geopolitical importance to NATO and US militarisation policies. Thus, from the beginning of the UN's decolonisation efforts in the 1950s and 60s, and through manipulative colonial politics, Denmark has refused to pave the way for independence. By annexing both Kalaallit Nunaat and the Faroe Islands, Denmark has ensured its colonial control, particularly over the countries' foreign and defence policies (Larsen, 2018).

The Danish dehumanisation of Muslims as inferior to 'Westerners', has a historical forerunner in the racialisation of the Inuit population of Kalaallit Nunaat in mid-century Danish modernisation policies in the colony (Hassani, n.d.). In reality, by enforcing capitalist structures, these policies promoted the erasure of Inuit economic, cultural and linguistic practices (Graugaard, 2009; Jensen, 2018). The Danish racial capitalist state formation was thus built on colonial frames that enforced racial hierarchization and preceded the arrival of Muslim labour migrants in the late 1960s.

Denmark's role in Western imperialism is not and has never been insignificant, although often played out to be on the periphery of the major global powers (Jakobsen & Rynning, 2019). How are these frames of coloniality expressed through *local* governance? I am here drawing on Quijano's (2000) seminal essay on how coloniality upholds global structures of power, capitalism and subjectivity to maintain white supremacy on a global scale. Focusing on coloniality in the Nordic region, Groglopo and Suarez-Krabbe (2023) clarifies how Quijano's concept of a matrix of coloniality enables us to understand how race and racism become organising principles that permeates social, political, economic and environmental systems. Groglopo & Suarez-Krabbe argue that coloniality's structural *and* social influence enables us to move from an analysis of macro-structures to the local and everyday lives. In fact, I argue there is an urgency to analyse the concept of coloniality in its local iterations, both through policy analysis (structural) and ethnographic analysis (phenomenological). In this regard, Kent-Stoll (2020) explains how coloniality as a concept clarifies the racial capitalist logic that shapes urban policies. Understanding coloniality through Ananya Roy's (2022) concept of racial banishment enables a way to understand how racialised bodies and spaces become erasable, while white bodies and spaces are seen as urban progress (Kent-Stoll, 2020).

Coloniality allows us to approach the racial question to understand modes of power on a national, urban, and political economic level that uphold and reproduce colonial structures of white supremacy. The focus is thus on the political processes that racialise Muslims. These processes say more about the racial

welfare state than anything significant about Muslim communities. Taking Denmark's housing policies as an example, it is worth emphasising that public housing was an essential part of the Danish welfare state. That is until Muslim communities moved in, and the white middle-class moved out. As the ghetto report states, these communities punched "holes" in the map of Denmark (Government, 2018, p. 5). In the government's framing of holes, Muslim residents are literally erased. This erasure allows for infractions on liberties that would normally be contested. This is essentially the coloniality of being (Quijano, 2000); the power to decide whose humanity is invisibilised; whose communities are deemed a threat to the nation-state; who can be banished and thus have their social presence and community histories eradicated from city spaces.

Danish research on housing policies often highlights territorial stigmatisation (Jensen & Christensen, 2012; Risager, 2022; Shultz Larsen, 2014;), the connection between urban and migration governance as well as experiences of displacement (Jensen & Söderberg, 2022; Lundsteen, 2023; Söderberg, 2024a). There is, however, a limited conversation on how these policies seek to banish Muslim communities from major cities. This article tackles this by building on previous scholarly conversations, emphasising how the racialised aspect of these policies is essential to understanding Denmark as a racial welfare regime (Hassani, n.d.; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017). The ghetto policies exemplify the state's use of urban control over the urban poor, leveraging urban spaces as tools for immigration governance (Turan, 2021). However, a substantial point in the *ghetto* report, is the inherently racial concept of the ghetto. The main culprits that render an area a ghetto are not simply the urban poor, but rather the number of racialised residents across income levels, employment or other socio-economic factors. The racial is an essential component to the policy, even more so than the neoliberal measures that are introduced through these policies.

THE GHETTO REPORT

To understand the coloniality of Denmark's social policies, we must retrace the political and epistemological developments behind them. These policies are saturated with civilisational discourse—particularly in relation to integration policies—yet do not explicitly mention Muslims or religious and cultural practices. The concept of civilisationalism reproduces the colonial discourse of the "civilised West" vs. the "primitive Rest". In Danish integration policies, it is often expressed as the basis of racial hierarchisation and the need to adopt (civilised) Danish values, rejecting (primitive) Muslim values. To unpack the politically oppressive character of "integration" as the main socio-political framing of the ghetto policies, we must understand how integration is framed as integration into "civilisation" (Schinkel, 2017):

> The government envisions a cohesive Denmark. A Denmark built on democratic values such as freedom and the rule of law. Equality and open-mindedness. Tolerance and gender equality. A Denmark where everyone actively participates.
>
> Over the past nearly 40 years, Denmark's ethnic composition has changed significantly. In 1980, there were 5.1 million people in Denmark. Today, we are close to 5.8 million. The population growth comes from abroad—both immigrants and their descendants. The majority of the new Danes have a non-Western background. (Government, 2018, p. 4)

These two paragraphs introduce the ghetto report. The former emphasizes two key elements: cohesiveness and democratic values. While it does not yet clarify what is meant by a cohesive nation-state, it defines democratic values as freedom, rule of law, open-mindedness, and gender equality. Understanding this framing within a wider discourse of white supremacy, these are often concepts claimed Muslims lack (Bhattacharyya, 2009; Ghumkhor, 2019; Norton, 2013; Razack, 2004). Nevertheless, the paragraph does not acknowledge any racial or power dynamics, presenting itself as colour-blind. This sort of

colour-blind rhetoric is an attempt to divert attention away from racial structures by promoting a raceless framing in which race remains implicit yet omnipresent (El-Tayeb, 2011; Hassani, 2023; Padovan-Özdemir & Øland, 2022; Theo Goldberg, 2006; Younis & Jadhav, 2020). The second paragraph shatters the colour-blind veneer by focusing on non-Western population growth. Pandering to the moral panic of non-Western immigration is a well-known element in Great Replacement conspiracy theories (Obaidi et al., 2022). Such conspiracies argue that the white population of Europe is quickly being replaced by a Muslim immigrant population.

The report continues with a colour-blind description of people who are disconnected from Danish society:

> The problems are evident. Children, young people, and adults who live their lives in Denmark but are effectively disconnected from Danes and Danish society.
>
> Holes have been punched in the map of Denmark. Many live in more or less isolated enclaves, where far too many residents fail to take sufficient responsibility (Government 2018, p. 5).

Maintaining colour-blindness, the report does not specify here who the subjects are that are isolating themselves from Danish society. However, going back to the introductory paragraphs, it clearly includes nationalised immigrants and their descendants. In fact, a resolution passed in parliament in 2017, just a year before the ghetto report was published, emphasises the racial distinction between non-Westerners and *real* Danes:

> The Danish Parliament notes with concern that there are areas in Denmark today where the proportion of immigrants and descendants from non-Western countries exceeds 50%. It is the Parliament's view that Danes should not be in the minority in residential areas in Denmark. The government and Parliament have implemented a series of stricter measures that have significantly reduced asylum immigration and counteract parallel societies. The Parliament urges the government to continue working towards a political goal of reducing the number of asylum seekers and family reunifications coming to Denmark (Parliament Resolution, 2017).

This resolution was passed with a majority of MP-votes from the centre-right and paved the way for a policy-distinction between non-Westerners and white Danes. It is thus no longer enough to be a naturalised Danish citizen. Instead, the racialised categorization of individuals as non-Western facilitated the introduction of public housing policies tied to the proportion of non-Western residents—naturalised citizens and non-citizens alike—in a given housing estate.

Islamophobia and xenophobia in legal policies have previously been limited to campaigns that vilified Muslimness (e.g. banning female judges from wearing hijab or women from wearing niqab in public spaces) or border control (particularly targeting asylum seekers and their families). This new racial distinction between non-Westerners and Danes expands the government's reach to target several generations of racialised citizens through policy. This is exactly what the ghetto policies do. Under the guise of integration, the ghetto report is an introduction to how the government can socially control non-Westerners through social policies. The reasoning for this control is based on what the government defines as the burden of parallel societies on the social cohesion in society. The report highlights five issues with parallel societies: 1) a threat to democracy, 2) unsafe, driving out resourceful citizens, 3) limited opportunities for children and youth due to language barriers, 4) a threat to women's freedom and the existence of domestic violence, and 5) an economic burden on the welfare state (Government 2018, p. 5). The first point emphasises how housing areas with a large proportion of racialised residents pose a *threat* to Danish liberal values. This is the justification to dismantle these communities. The second point underscores middle-class (presumably white) residents moving away from these housing areas, emphasising feelings

of "unsafety". The government does not make the colour lines explicit here (cf. Du Bois, 1994); however, the resolution passed in parliament the preceding year notes how (white) Danes are becoming a minority in some of these areas. It is their feelings of "unsafety" that is prioritised. The third point claims children and youth lack upward social mobility. This is attributed to their failure to learn Danish properly. The government's claim is contradicted by recent educational research, which shows that socially disadvantaged racialised students often achieve higher social mobility than their parents (Khawaja & Jaffe-Walter, 2024).

The fourth point is perhaps the most explicit in its reference to Muslims while remaining hidden in colour-blind terms. The government's concept of negative social control, or the related concept of honour related conflicts targets Muslim families outright yet remains implicit in its focus on non-Westerners (Jaffe-Walter, 2024). The implication here is that Muslim men dominate women because of their religious values, resulting in domestic violence and restrictions in sexual freedoms. This refers to imperialist logics of saving Muslim women from Muslim men; an orientalist trope that has been a driving force for the War on Terror and the depiction of the dangerous brown man (Bhattacharyya, 2009) and the oppressed veiled woman (Ghumkhor, 2019). Finally, parallel societies are a financial burden, stemming from the high number of unemployed residents. A deeper analysis is needed to link this point to the racial capitalist foundations of Denmark's migration and border policies (Hassani, n.d.). However, it is important to mention here that this point on capitalist value is connected to the previous points on the positioning of Muslims outside society, particularly Muslim women through Muslim men's control. For instance, when the government introduced a policy in 2025 to force immigrants on social benefits to work for their benefits, they argued that this would help immigrant women join the labour force. In other words, the racialised Other only holds value through their contribution to capitalist structures. There is research depicting the historical context that increase migrant and refugees socio-economic precarity, including: discrimination in the job marked, increased vulnerability to economic downturns, and being likely to possess low-skilled, low-income precarious jobs (Padovan-Özdemir & Moldenhawer, 2017). By enforcing a system of *labour-for-benefits* rather than *labour-for-wages,* this policy introduces a new era in racial capitalist exploitation in Danish social policies. The policy increases migrant socio-economic precarity, but, more importantly, it creates a potential for an apartheid system in labour rights.

The policy analysis depicted in this section demonstrates how Danish civilisationalism, understood as white supremacy, is often underlying much of the political rhetoric which emphasises the Others' supposed irrationality, incompatibility and oppressive character. While this Other is assumed to be Muslim, it will never figure as such in grey literature. Instead, the emphasis is often placed on the integration of the non-Westerner (Rytter, 2019; Schinkel, 2017). This, I would argue, is an example of a coloniality of being, which dehumanises the Muslim as a quintessential Other.

ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNITIES AND CARE

The article so far has emphasised the state narrative on ghettos. Such a policy analysis is essential to understanding the racial structures that seek to banish Muslim communities from Denmark's major cities. In the following, I shift my analysis from structures to communities. The following analysis centers racialised residents' experiences, demonstrating how the government are destroying a vital lifeline for migrant settlement in Denmark.

The ethnographic analysis draws on 23 interviews, five neighbourhood walks with residents in public housing estates, and several fieldtrips and visits over extended periods of time across public housing estates in Copenhagen, Aarhus and Odense. The fieldwork was conducted in 2023-24 over multiple visits. Interviews were conducted in Danish and transcribed us-

ing AI transcription tools, which were then corrected ad verbatim as needed. Interviews were coded and analysed in Danish, and interview-extracts were subsequently translated into English. I emphasise three narratives: Sarah from Aarhus, Dina from Odense and Nadia from Copenhagen. These three young women narrate their experiences coming of age in public housing estates currently targeted by the ghetto policies. Each of these stories highlight recurring themes that emerged from the research.

PATTERNS OF SETTLEMENT

Public housing in Denmark is based on a not-for-profit housing model that has attracted working class and lower middle-class families since its inception. Municipalities are allowed to allocate up to 25% of public housing in a particular estate to people with various social needs (including but not limited to refugees given asylum in Denmark). This has meant that there has always been a mix among residents between social tenants and tenants who acquired their homes through an open allocation system. However, many who achieve socio-economic stability often choose to purchase a home, thereby leaving the public housing sector (Sørensen, 2015). The exploitative measures most labour migrants arrived under in the 1960-70s, meant they often remained in precarious financial positions, particularly after the 1980s recession. Many could never afford the option of homeownership. Likewise, many refugees arriving during this economic recession, as well as a shift in the labour market towards a skilled labour force, meant they often remained excluded from employment. They rarely achieved financial stability to enable homeownership (Andersen et al., 2013).

Most of my interlocutors, who had a refugee background, moved into housing estates directly from asylum centres after gaining permanent residency status in Denmark during the late 1980s and 1990s, when obtaining permanence was easier for refugees. My interlocutors who came as labour migrants or are descendants of labour migrants, their families moved into the estates upon arrival and the family remained in the neighbourhood. In a few cases, my interlocutors needed accommodation for their growing family or following a divorce. Regardless, all families needed decent affordable housing, and the only ones readily available were the ones stigmatised in public for their "ghettoisation". Often, these families found a close-knit, supportive community that remains invisible in political discourse but became the primary reason for their long-term settlement in a particular neighbourhood.

My conversations with residents in these housing estates were widely diverse, even within the same estate. They emphasised different strategies for navigating society in terms of migration status, citizenship and socio-economic resources. What is important to note is that nothing in my interlocutors' narratives, or elsewhere, indicates that these communities self-segregate. Rather, various societal factors, including government encouragement of (white) middle-class flight towards homeownership, and the affordability and availability of stigmatised public housing estates, have meant that socio-economic precarious residents have ended up in these so-called ghettos and established meaningful supportive communities.

"WE'LL CATCH EACH OTHER": A MICROCOSM OF SOCIETY IN AN AARHUS ESTATE

Sarah is a young Palestinian woman raised in a housing estate in Aarhus, Jutland. Her parents arrived during the Lebanese civil war and were given social housing after being granted permanent residency. Sarah's family, like many Palestinian refugees in Denmark, were displaced from Palestine following the Nakba in 1948 due to Israel's settler-colonial project. They were exiled in Lebanon, living in permanent refugee camps, until the Lebanese civil war displaced them again.

In 1991, Sarah's family settled in a housing estate with working-class Danes, and Turkish and Kurdish labour migrants who arrived in the 1960s and 70s. The

flats were spacious and affordable, making them an obvious solution for the municipality to house newly arrived refugees. Sarah shares her experiences in the following excerpt:

> "[I]t's as if that refugee camp my parents lived in, in Lebanon was just…. Like, a little selection of those people were placed in [X]. They all knew each other's families and knew who everyone was—they knew each other's families from Lebanon.
>
> […] There's a completely different immediacy in the way people act. A completely different way of being caught when you fall and of taking responsibility for one another, where there's this expectation that we'll catch each other. […] Just things like when my mom is sick, how many people make food for her. Or come by after they've been traveling, or even just when I visit her. The old neighbour who remembers me, who knows I love those pastries she makes, […] and she makes them and tells my mom to come and pick them up. Then we end up standing at the door chatting for a long time." (Sarah, interview 2023)

Describing her life in this housing estate in Aarhus, Sarah describes a social fabric that is communal, reminiscent of the refugee camps in Lebanon. Palestinians in Lebanon live in permanent refugee camps; they are not entitled housing outside the camps and have limited opportunities for education and employment (Al-Natour, 1997). Nevertheless, these refugee camps are microcosms of society; there are schools, stores, GPs, etc. Like these encampments, Sarah's estate gave her family everything they needed. Until recently, cars were not allowed inside the estate; children could roam safe and free, and neighbours knew each other. As the number of refugees grew, neighbours created a microcosm of a society on the margins of Denmark. Neighbours who understood the challenges of exile made everyday life not only survivable but convivial, despite the dehumanising and racially capitalist exploitative state-narratives of integration (Gilroy, 2004; Padovan-Özdemir & Øland, 2022).

"HOW TO LIVE IN A NEW COUNTRY-HACK": COMMUNITY CARE IN AN ODENSE ESTATE

Another young woman, Dina, describes a similar experience in more detail emphasising community care and support. Dina, who is of Syrian background, was raised in an estate in Funen, outside of Odense. Like Sarah's family in Aarhus, Dina's family was allocated a flat after being granted asylum in the 1990s. In the following excerpt, she explains the feeling of safety in this neighbourhood, and why this was important for the refugee experience of exile:

> "[E]ven though people came from different places and countries and so on and had different stories and different experiences of fleeing […], there was still a sense of community. Like, there was still this thing where, well, we all have something in common, and that's that we all started fresh in Denmark, and in some way, that was something we shared. Like, people had an understanding of each other, even if they didn't understand each other linguistically or culturally. But there was still some kind of understanding, and there was a kind of compassion, in a way, that I can really remember—or that I can think back on now. […]
>
> But also, sharing experiences, being there for each other, and making sure that others knew if there was some kind of tip, or some kind of hack, or something—like, '*how to live in a new country*'-hack, you know? Those things, people shared with each other." (Dina, interview 2023)

Residents in the Aarhus estate and the Odense estate were mostly refugee families. However, not all residents shared the same background. Instead, Dina emphasises the foundations of communion: the shared experience of exile. This framing is distinctive, standing apart from the government's categorization

of "non-Westerners," which obscures such nuanced relationships. Many refugees in Funen were Palestinians who had fled the Lebanese civil war, but in the 1990s, and later, during the War on Terror in the early 2000s, refugees from Somalia, Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan began arriving and later, Syrians fleeing the civil war settled as well. Dina emphasises care, compassion and support in her recollections. The housing estate Dina grew up in housed refugees from many different parts of the Global South; however, in government discourse, they were all merged into the same colour-blind non-Western categorisation, which has been sensationalised into fears of parallel societies.

"EVERYONE KNOWS EVERYONE": INTERGENERATIONAL TIES IN A COPENHAGEN ESTATE

If Aarhus and Odense are known for their refugee communities, the housing estates in Copenhagen's western suburbs were home to many labour migrants. These families arrived in Denmark during the post-WWII production boom. Many residents in these housing estates have intergenerational narratives of community building through everyday life. One young woman of Moroccan descent, Nadia, described her family connections to her housing estate. It spans three generations. Her grandfather having arrived as a labour migrant, and joined by his wife and children, including Nadia's mother, who was a young girl at the time. Nadia's housing estate has been in and out of the government's lists of socially deprived areas for several decades. Nevertheless, many migrant families rooted themselves in these neighbourhoods. Families became lifelong friends that extended familial ties. Nadia explains the community that is created by living in such proximity:

> "I grew up in a place where everyone knows everyone. We have community, we are together, we do things, we organize different things together. We eat dinner together. We eat breakfast together. Like, that whole social community is what I grew up with" (Nadia, interview 2023).

This familiarity extends generational and cultural spaces. Community building here is understood as an avenue to settlement and intergenerational rootedness. It is spatial comfort and local belonging that is not equated with state-defined Danishness. In fact, integration rarely came up among my interlocutors when speaking about their community. Rather, this conviviality existed regardless of government discourse. It existed despite the territorial stigma attached to the housing estates. Residents knew the socio-economic challenges of being part of the politically disenfranchised. Nonetheless, my interlocutors emphasise the respite these communities provided their families. They related how these estates enabled them, as descendants of migrants and refugees, to achieve upward social mobility and an ease navigating a society that often reduces them to a threat to the white supremacist image of Denmark.

NAVIGATING RACIAL GOVERNANCE AND BANISHMENT

The young women above describe how their supportive communities helped their families establish themselves in Denmark, enabling them to achieve upward social mobility. Though their parents struggled to achieve economic stability, all my young interlocutors had professional and university degrees. When they remained in their childhood estate, like Nadia, it was by choice: proximity to elderly parents, accessibility to employment and rootedness in the locality. If they moved, like Sarah and Dina, this too was an informed decision. They moved to Copenhagen for professional and social opportunities, like many in the typical migration stream of young adults from Jutland and Funen. At the time of our interview, Dina's parents were facing evictions because of the ghetto policies. Dina explained that despite her parents' reluctance to leave the community they helped establish, it was better to take control of their rehousing and join her in Copenhagen than let the municipality relocate them to an estate far from

their community. Dina's parents' choice demonstrates Groglopo & Suarez-Krabbe's (2023) argument that coloniality has both structural and social implications. Thus, coloniality is a concept to understand how racial hierarchization becomes a policy tools, which influences social life and everyday choices. Within the context of Denmark's ghetto policies, this is expressed through racial governance focusing on social, cultural and economic parameters.

Roy's definition of racial banishment is useful to understand the ghetto policies as "state-instituted violence against racialized bodies and communities" (Roy, 2022, p. 41). Banishment emphasises legally imposed spatial exclusion through social control techniques that are punitive, demonstrating governmental coercive power (Roy, 2022, p. 44). Roy suggests understanding racial banishment as the other side of George Lipsitz concept of "the possessive investment in whiteness" (Lipsitz in Roy, 2022, p. 44). These two concepts share the same racial significance in Denmark's ghetto policies. They aim to banish racialised communities to enable white Danes to fill the so-called "holes on Denmark's map" (Government, 2018, p. 5). It is in this pattern of racial dispossession and white repossession that a settler-colonial logic is expressed.

Roy continues to argue that social control of racialised communities is implemented by fusing "civil and criminal legal authority". Denmark implements such a social control by criminalising certain racial tropes attributed Muslim families under the category "honour-related conflicts". While not explicitly targeting Muslim religious and social life, government guidelines on the reporting duties for teachers emphasise sexual conduct, dress, friends and "re-education trips" (longer vacations to parents' country of origin) as possible indicators of honour-related conflicts (Children and Education Ministry, 2020). These indicators are in public consciousness associated with Muslim values that conflict with Danish values (Jaffe-Walter, 2024). Public employees are tasked with monitoring Muslim families for signs of "negative social control", where Muslim parents are allegedly controlling their children's social lives, particularly related to sexual and social behaviours (Jaffe-Walter, 2024). Thus, through carceral logics, the government responsibilises public employees to enforce punitive tools to socially control Muslim families (Hassani, n.d.).

CONCLUSION

Danish public housing policies are aimed at managing, surveilling, and ultimately banishing Muslim population from public housing estates. The ones who can evade and navigate these policies are the ones who have Danish citizenship, socio-economic stability and whose community life is not necessarily grounded in local proximity. They can obscure the racialisation of their Muslimness because of their class positioning and thus evade—to a certain degree—the state-sanctioned racism expressed through the ghetto policies. What remains is housing policies that can be understood as localised expressions of coloniality seeking to banish and dispossess racialised Others from urban centresto then financialise public housing and ultimately promote a white return to the cities.

Returning to Al-Nasser's art installation, *All That Remains*, it foregrounds a counter-narrative to the government's vilification of racialised communities. The broken bricks serve as a powerful symbol of the violence, destruction, and community banishment caused by the ghetto policies. Al-Nasser's work thus underscores the historical and familial ties these banished communities have to their housing estates. Through an analysis of the ghetto report, I have argued that this racial banishment is an expression of coloniality within the nation-state, rooted in white supremacy. As a manifestation of local expressions of coloniality, Denmark's housing policies renders certain bodies erasable while positioning others as essential to progress. However, this is only one part of the story. Drawing inspiration from Al-Nasser's focus on residents, this article spotlights the stories of racialised residents in three different housing estates affected by government policies. These stories reveal

experiences of embeddedness, care, intergenerational family histories and informal support networks that are essential to community. It is within these narratives—emerging from the vilified margins—that we find the potential for decolonisation. Decolonisation is intrinsically associated with land and homes—it is not simply an intellectual process. It is a vital aspect of navigating colonial structures of power for these communities to cultivate and sustain a sense of shared home, despite their disenfranchisement and banishment.

NOTES

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