

Parenting in the Courtyard – Understanding the Moral Dimensions of Socially Embedded Practices in Stigmatised Neighbourhoods in Denmark

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This article investigates the challenges faced by parents raising children in stigmatised neighbourhoods based on eight-month ethnographic fieldwork. By exploring parenting practices within the public spaces of local communities, the study reveals the intricate interplay between moral considerations, daily practices, and social interactions. It demonstrates the association between parenting practices and not only the parents' social status and belonging but also the perceived respectability of the neighbourhood. Examining parents' efforts to ensure their children's safety and foster their independence, this study uncovers the diverse norms that shape parents' agency and community integration. Thereby, it highlights the tensions parents face in maintaining the community's social respectability while challenging prevailing notions of territorial determinism. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding parenting in stigmatised neighbourhoods, emphasising the need for contextualised approaches to understanding the social dynamics and morality of parenting in these communities.

Keywords: Parenting; morality; stigmatised neighbourhoods; territorial stigma; public space; local community

Introduction

“I like living here. It is a good place for the kids,” Berfin says as we sit with four other mothers outside the social housing office. We talk about what it is like to raise children in a neighbourhood with an infamous reputation. It is a cloudy, early autumn day. Around us, some 20 children run, skate, and bike on the pavement or play with borrowed toys on the grass nearby. Twice a week, on everyday afternoons, the social housing unit hosts an open-play event for all children in the neighbourhood called ‘Borrow and Play’ [Lån og leg]. Berfin continues: *“I like the social community here, but not so much the*

schools and institutions in the neighbourhood. We have a lot of fun together here, even if we are unrelated. But we know each other, greet one another, and have some kind of bond. Some of us know each other – our parents and grandparents were part of building this place when Denmark needed a workforce. So, I was born here, and now live here with my daughter. It is funny how Taastrupgaard is known as a ghetto. When I was a kid, there were also criminal activities here. Now, there are far fewer. Of course, things can still improve, but I think they have improved. We have this little team here. That is lovely.” Unsure of whom she refers to, I ask if she means the group of mothers on the chairs, coming and going while we talk. *“No, it is the social housing team. They make a big social effort for the children and youth. Starting this ‘Borrow & Play’ [Lån & leg]. It was the same when I was young here. They meant a lot to us and helped us engage in good activities.”*

Berfin lives in an infamous neighbourhood publicly known as a ghetto.¹ I met her during a research project about children (ages 4-11) and parents' everyday lives in the two stigmatised neighbourhoods of Taastrupgaard and Gadehavegaard in Greater Copenhagen. My encounters here inspired the purpose of this article which is to reflect on how the local community plays a significant role in parents' daily lives, and how parenting practices, in turn, influence and shape the local community. Like many other parents, Berfin sees her neighbourhood as a good place to raise children despite its bad reputation. Thus, to some parents, their relation to the local community has developed over time into one that carries significant meaning, as a sense of attachment and social identity emerges through social engagement as a meaningful locality (Olwig, 2000). Berfin describes this as a sense of generational continuity, raising her daughter in the neighbourhood where she was born and raised, as well as a notion of locality rooted in the everyday practices, like drinking coffee, supervising children, talking with neighbours and “having fun”. As studies of neighbourhoods suggest, the sense of local community and trust arise from experiences of social continuity and everyday interactions of micro-integration, sometimes called neighbouring (T. G. Jensen, 2016a; Laurier, Whyte, &

¹ Ghettos is here used as an emic term that a Danish context can be understood as ‘pluri-ethnic zones’, that is, comprised of several ethnic groups who have freely chosen to live in the neighbourhoods. Wacquant use the term to differentiate the Scandinavian and French neighbourhoods from ethnographically homogenous American ghettos. (Johansen, 2022, p. 420).

Buckner, 2002). This also includes the social lives of children (Rasmussen, 2004; Ross, 2007) and parenting as it unfolds in the public spaces of the neighbourhood.

Reflecting on the community's social cohesion, Berfin praises the efforts of the local social housing team's community work, like the recurring open-play days, which facilitate everyday interactions between children, parents, and other neighbours through 'good activities'. In a Danish context, local community work is set in motion by state policies that frame cooperation between municipal actors, housing organisations and residents to support local identity and social cohesion (Birk & Fallov, 2020). On the one hand, Berfin questions the legitimacy of a public discourse that portrays the neighbourhoods as dominated by crime, social problems, and lack of integration. On the other hand, she appreciates the social effects of local community work funded by stigmatising policies. Her account illustrates the schizophrenic role of a Danish state that sustains a deeply discrediting territorial stigma through policies and public discourse while simultaneously funding local community work that builds social cohesion and destigmatisation at a local level (Fallov & Birk, 2022; Schultz Larsen & Delica, 2021; Stender & Mechlenborg, 2022). Thus, the particularity of a neighbourhood, social relations between neighbours and its political context influence everyday parenting practices, though in complex, ambiguous ways.

This article examines how the morality of parenting is a social and locally embedded practice that materialises in everyday parenting practices and reflections on parenting norms and mutual moral obligations. Here, I find inspiration in Webb Keane's point that ethical life starts in sheer everydayness and the mere fact that people are evaluative (Keane, 2015, p. 17). According to Keane, ethics relates to the fundamental question of how one should live and what kind of person one should be. At the same time, morality is a particular kind of ethics that revolves around the question of "*what one should do next*" (ibid., pp. 18-20). Keane points to the fact that ethics are socially embedded because people's conclusions are usually shared with others and afford opportunities whereby people evaluate themselves, others, and their circumstances (ibid., p. 18, p. 31). In this sense, parents' everyday practices in the public spaces of the neighbourhoods imply moral questions about how one should be as a parent *and* what constitutes a proper community for children. As I will argue, everyday parenting practices are embedded in territorial community: as parents strive to create conditions for a good

childhood for their children, their efforts also involve other children, their parents, and the symbolic status of the local community and can cause divisions between different social groups.

Parenting in Stigmatised Neighbourhoods

Taastrupgaard and Gadehavegaard were built in the 1970s to realise social visions of the welfare state to provide better living conditions for children and families, but their public image gradually deteriorated (Søberg, 2022). The two large non-profit housing estates lie in the Copenhagen suburb of Høje Taastrup, separated by 50 metres of commercial area and a four-lane main road. The neighbourhoods are approximately the same size, with just under 1000 apartments and 2000 residents each. They are closed off to traffic and appear to be isolated enclaves. The apartments have small gardens or balconies facing the inner courtyards connected by foot- and bike paths and park-like outdoor areas with playgrounds, benches, and green vegetation. During the 80s and 90s, local authorities' referral policies allocated refugees and people in marginal positions to the neighbourhoods, while those better off moved into their own houses in the suburbs (T. S. Larsen, 2014). This changed the social composition and public perception of the neighbourhoods and legitimised a localised approach to housing policies that, since 1994, has involved the Danish state intensely in the neighbourhoods. In the most recent policy, called the 'Masterplan', 15 residential areas, including Taastrupgaard and Gadehavegaard, have been characterised as ghettos because of their relatively high concentration of non-western migrants, high crime rates, and low employment, income, and education among residents (Boligministeriet, 2019).

Several studies of stigmatised neighbourhoods in Denmark describe how residents experience a complex social reality with injurious and discrediting effects of a stigma that also causes internal divisions. Nevertheless, many residents consider the neighbourhoods good places to live and describe a positive sense of belonging, and in some cases, resist the repressive elements of these policies (Fallov & Birk, 2022; S. Q. Jensen & Christensen, 2012; S. Q. Jensen, Prieur, & Skjott-Larsen, 2021). The Danish state's ghetto policies, associated with national identity and sociocultural cohesion (Hervik, 2015; Risager, 2021), also influence perceptions of the relations between parenting, childhood, and local spaces. Policies and public discourse assume that children living in stigmatised

neighbourhoods grow up in parallel societies with limited contact with fundamental Danish norms and values (Bregnbæk, 2021; Regeringen, 2018).² These policies intensify the state's intervention in parenting practices in the stigmatised neighbourhoods, making daycare mandatory from the age of one, enforcing educators' and front-line workers' surveillance of children perceived as being at risk, while also funding parenting courses and local community work committed to supporting local integration, social cohesion and destigmatisation (Johansen, 2022; Johansen & Jensen, 2017; Schultz Larsen & Delica, 2021).

However, few studies have explored how the local community shapes parenting and how it is affected by territorial stigma. Parenting studies have primarily focused on parenting within the family and in encounters with institutions. They describe how the dominant Western view of parenting rests on a notion of *parental determinism*, the idea that parenting determines a child's development and future, which marks a shift away from a culture where childcare is the concern of a wider community (Füredi, 2001; B. R. Hansen & Zechner, 2019). From a policy perspective, childhood is a period where healthy and productive citizens are shaped (Bach, 2015; Lee & Abbott, 2009), and studies have explored how this perception of parenting influences cooperation between professional staff and parents in vulnerable positions in early childcare (Bregnbæk, Arent, Martiny-Bruun, & Jørgensen, 2017; Dannesboe, Bach, Kjær, & Palludan, 2018) and schools (Gilliam, 2022; Jørgensen, 2017). Thus, parents are held responsible for their children's development, their everyday choices are marked by risk consciousness, and parenting is perceived as a skill that can be taught. Consequently, parents who lack the necessary skills or resources can be a potential risk to their children (Faircloth & Murray, 2015).

As argued above, the Danish ghetto policies envision the neighbourhood as an additional risk, framed as a problem of integration, invoking images of communities where children are outside Danish culture and society. Policies justify interventions in parenting practices within the family and thus influence the cooperation between parents,

² As Pierre Bourdieu argues, places are related to each other in spatial hierarchies. While the significance of the local geography and social position is part of a historical process, the state has the privilege to classify and stratify places (Bourdieu, 1991 in C. S. Hansen, 2019). Studies of Western societies suggest that spatial hierarchies shape parents' notions of proper places for their children to grow up, imagined as rural spaces where children can roam freely and build their own worlds, while urban neighbourhoods are the dystopian counterpart imagined as dangerous places haunted by crime and violence where children need parental protection and guidance (Jones, 2000).

local institutions, and social workers (Bregnbæk, 2021; Gulløv & Kampmann, 2021; Johansen & Jensen, 2017). According to studies, ethnic minority Danish families in particular experience the policies as intimate interferences into the social norms and rationalities of parenthood. Mette Louise Johansen (2022) describes how minority parents in stigmatised neighbourhoods experience a plurality of conflicting social norms that guide everyday parenting practices in the community, so that parents are caught in a double bind between the morality of the state and their local diasporic community. As the description of Berfin suggests, parenting practices and norms also change as second-generation migrants become parents, and their familiarity with the Danish state and its institutions affects parenting practices. Research suggests that second-generation minority Danish parents, as well as other Danish parents from all social backgrounds, adopt intensive parenting practices, as their children's success in the educational system depends on it (Dannesboe et al., 2018; Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017). Laura Gilliam (2022) describes how second-generation minority parents act as cultural brokers between schools and first-generation minority Danish parents, translating implicit norms and mitigating conflicts. Here, I approach the everyday brokering of parenting moralities and practices with an interest in emphasising the voice and agency of parents within their local community.

Methodology

The article is based on fieldwork conducted from March to November 2022 in Taastrupgaard and Gadehavegaard. The ethnographic material for this article mainly consists of semi-structured interviews with 30 parents and 21 children (aged 4-11), informal talks with numerous residents, and participant observations of everyday life, activities, events, and projects in the neighbourhoods. In this article, I focus on interviews, talks and observations that describe parents and children's use of public spaces and discussions with parents about how parenthood, everyday life and childhood are linked to the neighbourhood and local communities.

I contacted participants through social housing projects in the neighbourhoods, meaning the participants are mainly parents and children who engage in their local

community, its events, and institutions.³ It is a methodological and analytical point to challenge an understanding of a local community as a cohesive social arena that impacts children's everyday lives or parenting in a particular way (cf. Bøe et al., 2021). Parents approach the same neighbourhood, local relations, and institutions in different ways, with different frames of reference and perceptions of the meanings of local practices (Lidén, 2003; Kärholm et al., 2022). Thus, I found substantial variation in parents' dual orientation toward local relations in the neighbourhood and beyond. Some parents consciously avoid social relations with neighbours, as well as local playgrounds and schools. However, most parents find value in the local neighbourhood and engage in it in different ways. Parenting is an inherently ambiguous endeavour that often revolves around mediating contradictory concerns or balancing ideals with the troublesome realities of lived life.

Findings

Perceptions of Risk and Safety in Community Spaces

Initially, I describe how parents perceive and engage in their children's use of community space. This is interesting because the architecture of Taastrupgaard and Gadehavegaard affords children independent mobility with its traffic separation, park-like outdoor areas and numerous playgrounds. At the same time, these material conditions run counter to cultural notions of parents' responsibility to manage children's safety in public spaces. I found a considerable variation in parents' management of their children's independent mobility and, consequently, their interpretations of risks, safety, and positive aspects of unsupervised play in their neighbourhood. Sometimes children aged five or younger move about on their own on the playgrounds or join groups of children playing on the lawns, while most children aged eight, nine and older can go outside without parents following them.⁴ Thus, I describe how these parenting practices express opposing views

³ Due to the coronavirus pandemic, shifting restrictions were imposed on social contact during my fieldwork. This meant that the fieldwork focused on everyday life and community activities in public spaces that were open for more general participation, while my access to institutions and private homes was limited to occasional visits in periods where the lifting of restrictions on social contact made these visits possible.

⁴ Other studies have documented a decline in children's independent mobility, including in the Nordic countries, where children are generally ten to eleven years old when they are first allowed to explore

of the public space, the moral obligations of parenthood, and parenting as a collective or individual responsibility.

Turhan and Emet live in Gadehavegaard with their two children. Their five-year-old son Adem likes to spend time on the playground below their balcony.

Turhan: Our son can go outside in the afternoon when he feels like it. He knows he must stay where I can see him from our balcony. If we see that he does not have anyone to play with, we sometimes go down to him.

The playground's proximity and the possibility of visual contact allow Adem to be outside on his own. Their sense of home extends into the neighbourhood's public space, and they trust their son's ability to stay in sight. Emet adds that they mostly watch Adem so they can help him if he disagrees with the other children on the playground or is too alone.

Zarife and her husband live in Taastrupgaard with their three children, who like to hang out in the courtyard. Sometimes the children press their mother for more independence, but she takes precautions.

Zarife: I want to be able to see them. I find the bike paths and parking lots unsafe. Moreover, they cannot go past the school by the lake. I get anxious if they are down there. The oldest one (11) has a mobile phone. So it is easier to get hold of him. I tell them they can play on the playgrounds where I can see them. And on grandmother's playground. Then I can ask her to see where they are. And then they must be home for supper.

Zarife's perception of the urban landscape focuses on dangers, water and traffic, and her reflections about her children's access to the neighbourhood revolve around ensuring their safety. Her anxiousness expresses an emotional aspect of parenting that guides her decisions on where and when her children can be outside. Visibility gives her a sense of safety, but it is about more than just being able to see her children. A mobile phone in her son's pocket or her mother-in-law's eyes can be an alternative way of maintaining visibility. Furthermore, the physical landmarks and times of day constitute borders for her children's movements in the neighbourhood, giving them room to negotiate some degree of independence when they obey these limits.

their local neighbourhood unaccompanied (Björklid & Gummesson, 2013; Wales, Mårtensson, & Jansson, 2021).

Signe lives in a ground-floor apartment in Gadehavegaard with her husband and their seven-year-old daughter, Maja, who likes to play outside with her friends from the neighbourhood.

Signe: I can also feel the same fear if I cannot see and find her when she is outside. Yesterday, she was outside playing with her friend, Kasper, who lives in the courtyard beside ours. Normally, they are allowed to bike on their own between the buildings because I, or his mother, Sara, can see them outside our windows. [...] Then, I called Sara and asked if they were at her place, and she said no. Then I got nervous and asked her to look for them. I can get paranoid because things can happen quickly. Maybe it was also that documentary about the child abduction in Portugal a couple of years ago. It is not that I do not trust Maja. I do. We talk about how she cannot talk to strangers. If one asks if she wants candy, she must say no and come to us immediately. We even spied on her to see how she behaves.

Sara soon found the children outside, close by, safe and so consumed in their activities that they had forgotten everything else. Normally, the nearby courtyard with visible contact constitutes the area where Maja can go, which can be expanded when Maja is with friends her mother knows. Thus, the social network of both child and mother influences the extent of independent mobility. As Signe points out, the degree of independent mobility is not a question of trust, which she has established by observing how Maja behaves independently. It is something in Signe herself, a paranoid sense of fear mediated by stories of child abduction in faraway places, that colours her perception of public spaces in the neighbourhood and decides its limits.

Under the emotional pressure of everyday life, it can be difficult to be consistent as a parent (see also Valentine, 2004, pp. 40-41), and parenting strategies can be layered and sometimes contradictory (Clemensen, 2020). I found that parents use different strategies to balance risk and autonomy when their children ask for access to playgrounds, courtyards, and friends outside their home. Parents define geographical borders and educate their children on how to react if they encounter strangers, or rely on maintaining visual contact, be it their own or that of someone they trust, such as siblings, kin, or other parents in the courtyard. As these excerpts describe, the urban landscape of both neighbourhoods, with their playgrounds, lawns, and friends nearby, enable children's engagement in activities and participation in the public life of the neighbourhood.

However, some parents, like Signe and Zarife, are concerned about physical and social risks; both even describe how it is an emotional effort to give their children some autonomy in their neighbourhood. Their perspectives seem to be aligned with how, in Western cultures, children's use of public spaces is associated with risks and potential dangers, and children in these spaces are perceived as vulnerable and in need of protection (Gulløv & Olwig, 2003; Porter, Spark, & de Kleyn, 2020; Valentine, 2004).

Moreover, the high concentration of residents in marginal positions means that children and parents live with the visible presence of vandalism, policing, drug-dealing youth, neighbours with mental disabilities and homeless people (see also Bech-Danielsen et al., 2020, p. 12; Bech-Danielsen et al., 2021, pp. 20-1). Thus, parents' fear and sense of risk are also grounded in concrete encounters with neighbours they experience as unreliable or unpredictable. Bettina told how a group of young boys spat after her two boys (aged 5 and 7) in a parking lot in Gadehavegaard. Then, as she explained, "*I had to get hold of them, the young boys, and have a good talk with them. I would like to have some order here, so I must help bring it about.*" Bettina has a well-established social position in the community and a sense of obligation to intervene when older children or other neighbours threaten her children's sense of safety. I met a few parents in both neighbourhoods who, like Sofie with three children (under 12), find the coarse language and lack of moral order of the children in the courtyards threatening and therefore keep their children at home. Even though Sofie has lived in the neighbourhood for a decade, she does not feel like she is part of the neighbourly relations, wondering why so few people greet her or appear friendly. Norbert Elias (1994) suggests that social differentiations between social groups occur in neighbourhoods, where groups that are socially cohesive and organised, often because they have lived longer in the area, feel a sense of moral superiority in relation to newcomers and marginal outside groups. It appears that Bettina's social position gives her a sense of entitlement to educate the children of other parents in an effort to re-establish her sense of moral order and a sense of safety in the neighbourhood. On the other hand, parents in a more marginal position, like Sofie, are more hesitant and tend to keep their children home if they do not consider the local environment safe. Thus, parenting practices cannot be reduced to individual strategies but are embedded in parents' social status within the local community.

The ambiguous sociality among neighbouring parents

In the warm season's late afternoons and early evenings, the playgrounds, benches, and lawns of Taastrupgaard and Gadehavegaard are filled with children and parents who watch their children play. Zarife is fond of the social life that emerges spontaneously as parents and neighbours who pass by gather in the courtyards.

Zarife: When the kids are outside playing, me and my husband go outside with them. And then we sit on the bench with our coffee while they play. Then people join us, first one, then two, and suddenly the bench is full, and we sit outside until 8 pm when it is the weekend.

At first glance, these groups can appear open and inclusive, as Zarife describes, but over time I observed how parents would gather in the same subgroups, often on the same benches. Many people would join Zarife and Berfin on the bench in the courtyard close to their home, but those who stayed were often other parents of Turkish descent who had lived in Taastrupgaard for generations. Thus, while everyday parenting practices in the courtyards became a part of the micro-integration and an occasion to maintain a sense of local belonging, they would also materialise the different social ties and subgroups, often, but not only, marked primarily by national or ethnic minority or majority notions of belonging.

The implicit social groups of parents in the courtyard were complex to decipher, as the polite, inclusive, but slightly distanced relations between neighbours blended with closer and more exclusive social preferences. Once, when I had joined Berfin and Zarife on their preferred bench, I asked if everyone was welcome to sit down. Yes, Berfin replied, and shared a story about how norms for socialising among parents are reflected in the local parenting norms:

Berfin: One time, a woman had just moved in. The other women sat on the grass, having a small tea party. So, I ignored her and went to the others, and she did not come over. Then later, when we were done, I asked her, 'What are you doing? Why don't you come over?' She said, 'But I do not know you. I did not know if it was okay just to come over.' Then I said: 'But we are not standing here to call for you. We are not kids. You just come and sit down. Moreover, if they do not like it, then they will probably ignore you.' You must jump in and take the first step yourself. That is also what we teach our kids. We are not always there to ask: Can you play with my daughter? You walk to the playground, and then you must find your friends on your own.

In other words, if you want to be part of the group of parents on the bench, it is your responsibility, and it comes with the risk of rejection. You grow when you learn to fend for yourself as a child and an adult. Berfin's story relies on an egalitarian notion of local spaces that signals accessibility and respect for the shared quality of territorial communities but also marks a temporary territorial claim where your social identity is at risk if you are perceived as an intruder and ignored (cf. Goffman, 2020). Studies of Scandinavian communities have pointed out that the idea of equality, achieved in temporary spaces and situations, is a fundamental value in 'proper sociality', but that these situations can also involve mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion (Bruun, Jakobsen, & Krøijer, 2011). The gathering of parents in the ambiguous social community space poses a risk of exclusion and differentiation due to the interplay of divergent social norms. Egalitarian social norms in neighbourhood relations promote inclusive acceptance and shared rights to community spaces, relying on weak social ties (T. G. Jensen, 2016b). In contrast, there are also more exclusive dynamics at play driven by stronger social ties based on friendship, kinship, and ethnicity.

Neglect or a sense of shared responsibility?

Interestingly, it is the parents who feel an individual responsibility for their children's safety and wellbeing, who engages in the ambiguous sociality in the courtyards. Other parents rely on the parents already in the courtyard and a sense of shared responsibility. Muna lives in Taastrupgaard with her husband and son, Adem, who likes to go outside in the courtyard with his friends or on his own.

Muna: It is the best thing that children can play outside. We are relaxed when they are playing outside because we know that the mothers are sitting outside and they look after the children. Even though I am mostly not outside, I know that many of the mothers I know [are]. [...] The sense of security in Taastrupgaard is the best.

Muna appreciates the presence of other mothers in the courtyard because it makes it safe to send Adem out on his own. He knows where to find her, and she trusts the other mothers to look after Adem. Muna does not make any arrangements with other parents but relies

on a notion of the community that includes an implicit shared responsibility for parenting among neighbour parents, which also seems to put her in a more peripheral position within the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, other parents in the same courtyards do not trust other parents to look after their children. Berfin explained her perspective to me: “*I am always with my daughter, you know. You do not trust one another because everyone has their own kids [to look after]*”. For Berfin, it remains her responsibility to take care of her daughter when she is outside, despite her profound sense of belonging in the neighbourhood. She would only leave it to other parents if they had agreed to it.

Kudret, another parent in Taastrupgaard, explained to me one day how parents’ different perceptions of their responsibility towards children in the courtyard affected her:

Kudret: Once, there was a mother whose child of two or so was alone on the playground. So we called [the mother]. We said, hello, where are you? ‘I am just at my mother’s, drinking coffee.’ So, why don’t you take your coffee near your children? That is what I often see. I used to keep an eye out and call. But now, I do not bother. It is really a pity for the kids. They do not want to go home. They pee their pants and come to ask [for help].

Kudret often meets children left to themselves in the courtyards, but while she used to care for these children and try to get their parents to take on their responsibilities for them, now she has resigned herself to not getting involved. This frames her ambiguous position as she is emotionally affected by neighbours’ neglectful parenting in a community she cares for. Thus, the sense of shared responsibility that gives Muna a sense of security is to Kudret experienced as neglect and encourages her to act as a cultural broker, expressing the implicit moral expectations of other parents. As Dill Bach (2015, p. 30) argues, the individualisation of parenting responsibilities means that children’s behaviour is directly reflected on parents as a source of credit or shame, and their behaviours can strengthen, establish, and weaken social relations between parents. The sense of individual moral responsibility for children’s wellbeing is not only an occasion for socialising but also marks the social respectability of the parents and their belonging to an established group in the neighbourhood.

First generation minorities and men adopting dominant parenting norms

Looking more closely at these social differentiations, it becomes apparent that it is mainly second-generation minority Danish parents, including Berfin and Zarife, and majority Danish parents, including Bettina and Signe, who supervise their children and use the social life on the benches as an occasion for maintaining social ties. However, it is a more complex picture, as some first-generation minority Danish parents, like Kudret, also share these concerns about parents' sense of responsibility for their children. Kudret's social position may be strengthened by her kinship with other families of Turkish descent, while her work as a nursery assistant familiarises her with dominant parenting norms.

Gender shapes the social life of parenting, as it is mainly mothers who supervise their children in the courtyard and use the social life on the benches as an occasion for neighbouring. Consistent with Gill Valentine's findings in her study of childhood culture in public spaces in the UK (Valentine, 2004, pp. 38-44), it appears that mothers bear the burden and responsibility for children's use of public spaces. Some mothers are single parents, others have partners who have full-time work, and some fathers leave it to the mothers to follow their children when they use the neighbourhood spaces, like Bekir, who observes that his wife gets joy from drinking coffee with their neighbours on the benches. One interpretation can be found in Lyn Richards's suggestion that some men consider the neighbouring a residual relationship for those who are unable to form other social relations (1990 in Laurier et al., 2002, p. 351). Another explanation may be that most fathers work constraining jobs and have everyday rhythms that restrict their opportunities to be as engaged as mothers in their children's everyday lives in institutions and the neighbourhood (Jørgensen, 2017, 2019).

Some fathers who are engaged in parenting practices in the local community feel morally responsible for local children's wellbeing. Ibrahim, a father to four children in Taastrupgaard, discusses his concerns for children and youths in the neighbourhood who come from families with few social and mental resources. If he knows the child's parents, he sometimes tries to help them indirectly. As he explains, this is a delicate task:

Ibrahim: I cannot just talk to the parents. If you judge someone's parenting, that is the worst thing you can do. [...] I cannot tell them what to do. Only advise them with examples from my own life. [...] We need to do something

to break down the prejudices and be better able to cooperate. It is not a problem to ask for help if your kid is having problems; it is a strength.

Ibrahim has attended local parenting courses for migrant fathers in the community and often talks with enthusiasm about the need to engage parents in their children's everyday lives. When Ibrahim addresses the need to break down prejudices and be better at cooperating, he refers not only to the local community but also to local families' cooperation with state representatives from schools, institutions, and the local municipality. Anne Hovgaard Jørgensen (2017) has shown how ethnic minority parents experience an implicit mistrust related to a hegemonic negative image in public discourse and cooperation with institutions, which portrays fathers as either too oppressive or too absent. However, she finds evidence for an emerging new role of fathers who adopt ideals of intensive parenting and trust in welfare institutions, also among first-generation immigrant parents (*ibid.*). This new fatherhood role seems to be what Ibrahim is oriented towards and something he seeks to address in his everyday conversations with fathers in the neighbourhood. To fathers like Ibrahim, the parenting courses involve them in the local community as cultural brokers and advocates for culturally dominant parenting norms, albeit from a different position in everyday parenting practices.

Social respectability and mutual moral obligations among neighbouring parents

It is an ongoing concern among many parents in these neighbourhoods to manage their children's everyday lives in the local community spaces. Everyday life in public displays the moral status of a stigmatised community, and some parents feel a moral obligation to resolve conflicts and re-establish social norms, even though they tire of the social consequences of living in a place with a local concentration of people in marginal positions. In this last part of the analysis, I look closely at other situations where parents try to shape other parents' practices or solve conflicts between children to maintain a morally respectable community. As described above, parenting practices can cause concerns among parents in the courtyard, and when it does, some parents react and try to re-establish what they consider a proper social norm and concern for the local community.

Zarife explains that some parents and kids on bikes and mini-scooters stay out in the courtyards until 10:30pm, and make a lot of noise. She has 'scolded people' and had the housing office put up notices with the rules of the housing association, but to no effect.

As others have suggested, noise at ‘anti-social hours’ is one way to be a nuisance to your neighbours and challenge the moral obligations among neighbours (Richards, 1990 Laurier et al., 2002, p. 352). To Zarife, the noise displays a lack of care for neighbours and children, who stay up ‘too late’. She expands on this perspective with a story about how, when two boys took a ball from the football field, their parents flat-out refused to talk with their boys. “*It is that kind of behaviour that gives people prejudices about Taastrupgaard,*” Zarife says, referring to the other parents' faulty moral behaviour.

Birgitte Romme Larsen (2011) has described how self-presentation and social respectability are integral to reproducing a local social and moral community in a rural Danish village. When the refugee Daniel and his family settle in the village, it is through criticism and instructions from neighbours that they slowly learn and internalise the local values of and standards of self-representation (ibid., pp. 152-154). As Larsen argues, the mutual moral confirmation among neighbours depends on the social practices visible in the village, such as gardening, windows, and curtains (ibid., pp. 147-149). While similar social processes seem to play out in the two neighbourhoods described in this article, the particularity of the neighbourhood’s architecture changes the conditions for self-presentation and social respectability.

Children’s use of public spaces seems to commit parents to a local community across ethnic groups and minority and majority positions. The presence of playgrounds and benches means that children’s activities and the socialisation between parents become part of the local community. Children are as involved in neighbouring practices as adults, and their conflicts and social relations are also a part of the micro-integration that constitutes local identity. Thus, parenting and childrearing become a part of the sociality and moral community in the neighbourhood. Moreover, parenting practices and children’s conflicts seem to be an ongoing cause for concern among some parents in the neighbourhood. Parents who engage with these concerns struggle with the social consequences of a social housing policy that has concentrated parents in vulnerable and marginalised positions in the neighbourhood. The emotional pressure associated with their children’s independent mobility that some parents describe became apparent one late summer afternoon when I heard a commotion in one of the courtyards.

Loud shouts, angry voices, and people running towards the raised voices. When I arrived, Zarife was shaking; her husband had an arm around her and led her away from the courtyard. Afterwards, accounts of the incident differ. Some say Zarife hit the other mother. Others claim it was only a verbal assault. Both mothers have lived in the neighbourhood for two generations, and while they belong to different ethnic minority groups of Turkish and Arab descent, the families know each other well. The next day, tensions have settled, the parents speak again, and Zarife's husband has talked with the two boys, who are again part of the larger group of children playing in the courtyards.

A few days later, Kudret shares her concerns that some parents do not know how to help their children if they get into conflict, but instead, parents end up fighting each other. One day, Kudret explains, her daughter Melissa (10) had a conflict with Josef (10). He took a ball from her, and when she confronted him, he hit her. *“Even if it was Josef's fault, I did not go to his parents to shout. We have known each other for many years, and I do not want us to fall out. We always cooperate. So, we had a glass of cordial, the children and I, and talked together. The children said sorry and became good friends”*.

When conflicts arise in their neighbourhood, Kudret points out, parents are not only responsible for their children but for their children's relations with other children and for their own relations with other parents. Kudret's notion of her parenting responsibilities not only focuses on how she can help the children become friends again but also on how she can cooperate with other parents and avoid conflicts. While a community of parents exists, it depends on parents' cooperation and the ability to de-escalate conflicts.

In this perspective, neighbourhoods constitute territorial communities that entail a sense of mutual moral obligations among parents and children engaged in public space use and relations (Crow & Graham, 1994; Laurier et al., 2002). However, these moral concerns also cause internal division between social groups, as suggested by Zarife's emotional tensions and her critique of the faulty morals of noisy parents in the courtyard, as well as Kudret's worries for neglected kids paired with her concern for children's abilities to resolve conflicts. This can be interpreted as a moral differentiation and a way of coping with territorial stigma akin to what Wacquant calls 'lateral denigration' (Wacquant, 2007, p. 68 in S. Q. Jensen et al., 2021, p. 194). In effect, the parents project the stigma onto other groups to emphasise their own moral worth, which simultaneously

hampers local solidarity and establishes their social position and the respectability of the parenting norms that govern the community's public spaces. This indicates that parents who value the community's moral integrity actively resist the neighbourhood's symbolic degradation. However, they also face difficulties due to a local concentration of parents with limited social resources to support their children. As a result, this situation sometimes perpetuates the territorial stigma and reinforces social differentiation within the community.

Conclusion

In this article, I have examined how the morality of parenting is a mutual concern among parents in neighbourhoods affected by the social and symbolic consequences of a territorial stigma. As Webb Keane suggests, the perception of morality in Western philosophy can conceal, but not revoke, how ethics are socially embedded (Keane, 2015, pp. 17-19). According to this perspective, the ethics of parenting cannot be separated from the moral questions of everyday life in its social and spatial context. Everyday life among neighbours puts parents in situations where they are held accountable for their choices, in ways that not only reflect their social status and belonging but also affect the respectability and social status of the neighbourhood. Parenting plays out in the public sphere of stigmatised communities and involves moral considerations and choices characterised by doubt and ambiguous intentions. Parents find that their own and others' parenting practices raise questions about not only what good parenting is but also what constitutes a good local community for their children. While the materiality and architecture of the neighbourhood afford children's independent mobility and can provide occasions for parents' local sociality, cultural perceptions of children in public spaces, territorial stigma, and encounters with neighbours in marginal positions cause concern among parents. Some parents find a balance between risk and autonomy for their children – especially those in an established position with a social network and a sense of moral legitimacy to act to apply their sense of order and safety in the neighbourhood. Other parents withdraw from the local community altogether or remain on its periphery, apparently because a sense of distance from neighbouring relations makes them doubt the legitimacy and effect of their interventions in children's behaviour or parents' parenting practices in the community. There seems to be an association between parenting norms

and parents' participation in the social life of the local community, in the sense that parents on the periphery of the community are those who rely too much on the collective responsibility for children's wellbeing and safety, or who have too little trust in the moral accountability of children and parents in the courtyards. While it is mainly second-generation minority Danish and majority Danish mothers who parent in the community's public spaces, other parents are also engaged. This indicates that parents' social norms and participation are influenced by other sources, including kin, work experience and the state's local involvement in parenting courses. The analysis underscores the influence of parents' sense of mutual moral obligations in fostering social cohesion and shaping a moral order within the community. These everyday practices work against societal imaginaries of what a childhood in a 'ghetto' looks like, proving territorial determinism wrong and giving their children a good-enough community to grow up in. However, it is important to recognise that this moral work can also exclude parents and impede local solidarity when parents project the territorial stigma onto other groups. It becomes clear that parenting involves moral choices and dilemmas bound up with the concrete conditions of parenthood and childhood. Thus, following the everyday lives of parents and children in these stigmatised neighbourhoods is a reminder that the politics – and ethics – of parenting are also shaped while parents care for their children and their local community.

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