What Is in a Word? An Exploration of Concept of 'the Ghetto' in Danish Media and Politics 1850–2018

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ABSTRACT

Since the early 2000s, the concept of 'the ghetto' has been used excessively in Danish public debate and national policies targeting the integration of non-Western immigrants. This study, theoretically inspired by historian Reinhart Koselleck's conceptual history approach *(Begriffsgeschichte)*, explores what can be learned from historicising the meanings and political implications of the ghetto concept to understand its present-day influence and implications. Empirically, the article builds on an investigation of how the concept of the ghetto has been used in Denmark over the last 170 years. The analysis underlines the multiple meanings of the ghetto, providing an opening for understanding its concurrent political implications. Why and how did a concept – one that less than one hundred years ago was affiliated with the mass atrocities of the Third Reich – become a tool in Danish integration policies?

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INTRODUCTION

This article will discuss how the concept of 'the ghetto' has been discussed and envisioned in Denmark for the last 170 years. My interest in the concept and its meaning(s) stems from the concurrent political claims about the existence of ghettos across Denmark. These claims have provided a strong argument for initiating drastic policies targeting and transforming urban areas. Noteworthily, such policies have also been argued to support the integration of non-Western immigrants and their children. As a matter of fact, ghettos are a persistent theme in the Danish migration and integration debate.

One example of ghetto policies is the so-called ghetto list that has been published by shifting Danish government every year since 2010. In December 2021, it was renamed to a 'list of parallel societies', which makes a conceptual analysis even more interesting.[1] The list is based on statistical criteria such as the number of non-Western immigrants and their descendants, unemployment, crime rates and educational level in urban districts with more than 1000 inhabitants. Thus, from a political point of view, the ghetto is an area inhabited by immigrants and their children from specific parts of the world. In areas that are on the list, residents are subjected to demands that people outside those areas are not. For example, language testing of children attending their first year of education is mandatory in schools where 30% of the pupils live in so-called ghetto areas. In areas that have been on the list for four consecutive years or longer, apartment buildings are being torn down.

But why call these parts of Danish cities 'ghettos'? Why not just refer to them as 'social housing areas' or 'areas with many immigrant residents'? The ghetto has played a tragic role in Europe's history, which makes the choice of the term even more peculiar. In 1940, a ghetto was established in Warsaw by the Nazi authorities. More than 300,000 Polish Jews were forced to live there under horrible conditions. Thousands starved to death and thousands more were sent to extinction camps. Yet the Warsaw Ghetto was not the only one, and neither was it the first. Historically, the purpose of ghettos was for controlling Jews and ensuring that they did not contaminate good Christians with their strange religion. During the time of the holocaust, ghettos became a cog in the National Socialist killing machine. This well-known history makes the past–present use of the ghetto concept in Danish integration policies and public debate even more peculiar.

This article is not the first that focus on the ghetto and its meaning and implications in concurrent Danish policies targeting migrants (see Freiesleben 2016; Grünenberg & Freieleben 2016; Schierup 1993; Schmidt 2021; Simonsen 2016). However, most of the existing contributions tend to have a rather narrow focus on the decades following the period of immigration of workers from Turkey and Yugoslavia in the late 1960s. While the ghetto concept has increasingly been used during that historical period, I seek in this article to situate it as part of a much broader historical debate about migration, ethnicity, social class and minority religion in Denmark.

THEORETICAL STARTING POINTS

This article seeks to tease out empirical detail that can elucidate why the concept of the ghetto even became relevant for Danish policies targeting urban areas with

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1   https://im.dk/Media/637738688901862631/Parallelsamfundslisten%202021.pdf.

immigrant populations. It is informed by two strands of existing theoretical literature. One source of inspiration is the existing scholarship on the ghetto that both historicises the concept and summarises its main characteristics. A well-known example of this is the work of sociologist Loic Wacquant (2004), who offers an almost ideo-typical definition of the ghetto, namely as a socio-organisational device that is made up of the four elements of stigma, boundaries, spatial confinement and institutional encapsulation. Yet, in my approach, I have also found inspiration in historian Daniel B. Schwartz's insistence that while definitions are important for understanding the ghetto, so too is pointing to distinctions within and between these definitions (Schwartz 2019: 4). What aspects of perceptions of the ghetto persist over time, what aspects change and what aspects resurface?

These questions resonate with historian Reinhart Koselleck's argument for the relevance of an approach to social history based on *Begriffsgeschichte*. This approach is relevant because it investigates in a diachronic manner the 'persistence or change of a concept. To what extent has the intentional substance of one and the same word remained the same?' (Koselleck 2004: 82). Persistence, change and novelty can be dimensions of meaning(s) of the same word (ibid. 84). Koselleck made an important distinction between words and concepts: while all words are per se ambiguous, they can become unambiguous when they are used; concepts, on the other hand, must remain ambiguous. Concepts unify within themselves multiple meanings (ibid. 85). Think of concepts such as 'the state', 'democracy' or 'citizen'. The implications of these concepts have changed according to time and context. Further, the inbuilt ambiguity of concepts creates a field for *political struggle*, not unlike Ernest Laclau's concept of 'the floating signifier, which also pointed to semantic battles for hegemony' (Andersen 2003: 37–38). Here, Koselleck speaks about a 'flexible "general concept"' (Koselleck 2004: 44).

To give an example of Koselleck's approach, when he discussed the concept of 'revolution', he provided an account of the concept's *historical* development back to the period *before* the French revolution. Although Koselleck was Eurocentric in his approach, I will argue that his approach is a useful starting point for understanding 'the ghetto', including both the concept's historical and current political implications. Further, concepts convey notions of communal unity – as well as notions of exclusion (Andersen 2003: 38–39).

METHOD AND DATA

In my recent research, I have used diverse types of data (discussions in the Danish parliament, court cases, policy documents, newspaper articles and existing research) to investigate the conceptual history of the ghetto in Denmark (Schmidt 2021). In this article, I concentrate on how the ghetto was described in Danish newspapers between 1850 and 2018. The reason for my choice is that newspaper articles have proven to be the most comprehensive avenue into public discussions of the ghetto over time. The word was infrequently used in Danish newspapers before 1850. Yet it was not so that authorities were unaware about the existence ghettos or special areas for Jews across Europe. For example, a local police director posed the idea of establishing an area for Jews in Copenhagen in 1692 that was clearly based on existing European structuring of ghettos (Carøe 1919; Schmidt 2021). However, the idea was rejected by the king, who was eager to uphold good relations with Sephardic (Portuguese) Jewish merchants.

I retrieved data from three databases from 1850 onwards, namely Mediestream,[2] the Infomedia database[3] and *Politiken's* online archive.[4] The process of data collection and systematisation included two phases: first, I went through the headlines and content overviews of articles that included the word 'ghetto' over 10-year intervals, only downloading articles that I considered relevant. Relevance was based on the following criteria: 1) the article described the ghetto as a place, 2) the place was associated with certain social phenomena or events (e.g. poverty, minority religion, language, race, riots, violence, genocide, social experiments, class and migration) and 3) it was associated with cultural production. The articles falling within categories 1 and 2 were used in this article.

The extent of the searches specifically for the period 1990–2018 was affected by restrictions in the Infomedia database. Infomedia is accessible online via the Royal Danish Library, but the library does not allow material from the database to be downloaded or stored, which makes the analysis process difficult. In the end, I chose to focus on the five newspaper articles that the database indicated as the most relevant for each year (i.e. between 1990 and 2018). The titles and publication dates of these articles were added to an Excel spreadsheet, so that I could revisit them during the second analytical phase of working with the data.

In the second analytical phase of the project, I read all the collected articles decade by decade. Based on this reading, I could determine specific ways of looking at the ghetto and specific events associated with the ghetto within specific time periods.

An exception to the strict focus on newspaper articles is for the period 2004–2018. During this time, no less than three governmental action plans targeting ghettos were issued. Given the current article's initial ambition to investigate the wider historical background for the Danish debate and legislation targeting ghettos, these action plans were too important to leave out of the analysis.

1850–1900: THE GHETTO AS AN ENTITY EXISTING OUTSIDE OF DENMARK

> La Roquette street is most certainly one of the most interesting in Paris [...]
> When entering the street from [Place de la Bastille], one is tempted to call
> it a ghetto. It is narrow and dirty, and the sidewalk is sticky because the
> sun is mean here with its rays. (Kalich 1874)[5]

The ghetto, as described in Danish newspapers from 1850 to 1900, and illustrated by the above quote, was an alien phenomenon – one to be found in cities located elsewhere in Europe and North Africa. Just as importantly, the ghetto – regardless of the geographical context – was mostly described as dirty and poor, a description that was probably not far from the truth. The ghetto in Rome, which Daniel B. Schwartz determined to be synonymous with such areas in the 19th century (Schwartz 2019:

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2   mediestream.dk. By February 14, 2022, 35,464,209 newspaper pages had been digitalized.

3   infomedia.dk.

4   politiken.dk.

5   All translations of Danish quotes into English were made by the author of this article.

58), had once been 'the scariest neighbourhood in Europe' (*Jyllandsposten* 1875). A more grotesque and dehumanising description was that of children in the Amsterdam ghetto that one newspaper described as being 'like pigs, romping around the dirty paving' (*Dagbladet* 1885).

Descriptions of ghettos in European cities were either linked to international events, part of reportage from some of these cities (e.g. Rome and Paris) or included in small essays (e.g. about Jewish life across Europe). Regardless of the geographical context, in the late 19th century, the ghetto was predominantly described as being Jewish. The (Jewish) ghetto was always exclusively a geographical place, neighbourhood or part of a city. Only in a few instances was the ghetto described as a mental or ethical state of mind, such as when one article described the circumstances in Berlin in the early 1800s and how changes in policy had helped Jews 'leave the moral ghetto' to adopt a French-inspired, fashionable lifestyle (Hillebrand 1871).

Some newspapers linked ghettos with anti-Semitism and the stigmatisation of Jews. In these instances, the policies that might lead to the establishment or permanence of ghettos were labelled as unjust. For example, when the German region of Schleswig issued a regulation targeting Jews in 1854, the newspaper *Kongelig Priviligeret Aarhus Stift-Tidende* (1854) described it as a test of 'medieval barbaric spirit'. Similarly, articles described harsh policies persecuting Jews living in Russia that were condemned internationally (e.g. *Kjøbenhavns Børs-Tidende* 1890).

The ghetto was not only described as being characterised by poverty and dirt but also racialised and exoticised. As noted in a long 1873 travelogue from Rome (where the Jewish area of the city indeed carried the word 'ghetto': *Ghetto di Roma*):

> [In the ghetto] you encounter beautiful fresh faces, and you encounter
> hideous wrinkled faces [...] To me, it has always been conspicuous that
> the Jewish type is so uncommon among the inhabitants of the Ghetto
> [...] This is perhaps partially a result of the features of the Orient being
> less apparent among the dark Italians than among the fair Nordic people.
> However, it is apparent that despite the seclusion they have lived under,
> they have not significantly maintained the marks of their tribe. (Tolderlund
> 1873)

Anti-Semitic riots often played a central role in newspaper articles. In 1891, anti-Jewish riots broke out in Corfu because of the alleged killing of an eight-year-old girl (*Kolding Folkeblad* 1891). According to rumours, the girl was Christian, although she was actually Jewish (*Aarhus Amtstidende* 1891). In an article describing the riot in Corfu, Jews in the ghetto were described as having lost their 'Jewish racial features'. The murdered girl, her father and one of her sisters had blond hair (*Kjøbenhavns Børs-Tidende* 1891).

Another important international event for this period's understanding of the ghetto was the abolishment of the ghetto in Rome. Although Pope Pius IX had taken the initiative to tear down the gates to the ghetto, King Victor Emmanuel allowed the Jewish population to leave the neighbourhood in 1870 and granted them the same rights as other Italians (*Dagens Nyheder* 1878).

Only one newspaper article linked ghettos to the Danish context between 1850 and 1900. In 1873, the newspaper *Lolland Falster Folketidende* published an article about the ghetto in Krakow. The author started by referring to his childhood memories of Copenhagen. In those years, 'the Jew, Israel' had a junk shop in Læderstræde (a

centrally located street in the Danish capital) that the author often visited. His visit to Krakow's ghetto reminded him of these experiences. It was in streets like this, he concluded, that the cradle of Israel had stood.

1900–1960: THE GHETTO AS AN INTERIOR AND SITE OF GENOCIDE

Danish newspapers continued to describe the ghetto as a phenomenon characterising larger metropolitan cities in Europe, but the concept had also transferred to other geographical contexts, and New York and Chicago in particular. Distinctions were sometimes made between ghettos (such as those in Rome and Corfu) that had designated areas for Jews and those of poor neighbourhoods with a large Jewish population, such as New York (*Jyllandsposten* 1902). Whitechapel in London, with its large Jewish population, was described as 'this ghetto in the eastern part of London' (*Randers Arbejderblad* 1902). Chinatown in New York was described as 'a melancholic ghetto' (*Jyllandsposten* 1906), which underlined how the ghetto concept was not always linked to Jews. Yet newspapers continued to describe the (Jewish) inhabitants of ghettos in racialised terms and/or in ways that underlined a sense of disgust. Jewish men living in (what was called) the ghetto in Amsterdam were, for example, described as 'abominable', 'creeping' and 'cheating' (*Jyllandsposten* 1903).

Poverty and persecution were continuously included in the descriptions. Elements such as revolt, unrest (such as in New York in 1908; see *Demokraten* 1908) and diversity were added. The inhabitants were Jews, but they often came from very different places in Europe. An evening in the London ghetto was described as follows: 'Because from certain drunk breasts, through the mentioned beautiful mouths, stream loud screams and proclamations in all tongues—German, Russian, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch. Everywhere seems to come together through Yiddish and English' (*Varde Folkeblad* 1903).

The concept of the ghetto also took on another variation as a neighbourhood containing people of a certain social class. In an article describing the need for better housing conditions for blue-collar workers in Copenhagen (where the inner city was a slum), the author noted that 'moral disinfection was needed', and although it might be good for the police to have criminals living in 'a sort of ghetto', one ought also to be careful because just as many neighbourhoods created criminals (*Adresseavisen Kjøbenhavns Adressecomptoirs Efterretninger* 1900).

Links between the ghetto, its inhabitants and (often stigmatised) minorities were made in both subtle and less subtle ways. The language of the ghetto in London was called '*Rotvælsk*' – the Danish term for a Roma language (*Randers Arbejderblad* 1902). When a group of Roma were held in a third-class passengers' waiting room in the central train station of Copenhagen in 1906, they were described as being held in a ghetto (*Adresse-Avisen* 1906). However, the ghetto could also be linked to the elite, such as when the Jewish bourgeoisie in Copenhagen was described as speaking 'ghetto Copenhagian' (*Jyllandsposten* 1904).

Compared with the period 1850–1900, one significant change in descriptions of the Jewish ghetto took place in the first decade of the 20th century. The Jewish ghetto was now associated with a neighbourhood in Denmark, and, more specifically, the inner city of Copenhagen. One of the first descriptions of a Jewish ghetto in Copenhagen can be found in Danish newspapers in the spring of 1908. An article in

Aarhus Stift-Tidende entitled 'The Ghetto of Copenhagen' depicted the background for the change:

> Now there are only Jewish neighbourhoods in a few Russian cities and cities outside of Europe. Most lately, however, it seems as if a ghetto has been established in Copenhagen because almost all the numerous immigrating Russian Jews have settled down in one part of the city. In the old, dark hovels, located in the neighbourhood around Vognmagergade and Brøndstræde, they have settled down in communities. And when you walk through these streets, you will see these small, swarthy men and women who are of the category of the Russian Jew. (*Aarhus Stift-Tidende* 1908a)

Between 1903 and 1910, around 3000 Russian and Polish Jews left their homelands and settled in Denmark (Schmidt 2021; Thing 2008; Trap 1912). Most of the immigrants did indeed settle in the Copenhagen's inner city – in the streets and neighbourhoods mentioned in the above article. As already noted, and characterised by poverty and poor housing standards, the area was also – before the arrival of Russian refugee Jews – described as 'ghetto-like' (*Adresseavisen Kjøbenhavns Adressecomptoirs Efterretninger* 1900).

The ghetto in Copenhagen was, like those in other parts of Europe and North America, associated with unrest, violence, murder (*Aarhus Stift-Tidende* 1908b) and substance abuse. Furthermore, the Copenhagen ghetto made headlines in the aftermath of the infamous Bulotti murder of 1908, when the murderer Wasili Michael Karazoff (who had immigrated from Russia and become known as Bulotti) was caught in the area. Although what was known as 'the ghetto' was limited in geographical terms, the arrival of refugees living there was described as a 'deluge' (*Folkets Avis* 1908). As in earlier periods, newspapers described the Jews living in the Copenhagen ghetto as being of a specific race and from the proletariat (*Skive Folkeblad* 1930).

In Danish newspapers, the ghetto was associated with urban areas and secluded social, ethnic and religious groups that in one way or another were seen as challenging or even polluting society at large. The consequences of such understandings outside Denmark were illustrated by attacks on ghettos and their populations across both Eastern and Western Europe. Danish newspapers reported violent assaults on inhabitants of ghettos in Germany when the German National Socialist (Nazi) Party seized power in 1933 (*Aftenbladet* 1933). How the Nazis forced Jews to live in ghettos both in Germany and, later on, in the countries that Germany occupied was also a part of the description (*Berlingske Aftenavis* 1941; *Nationaltidende* 1938). Danish newspapers described the harsh living conditions that German Jews were forced to endure, sometimes underlined by stories of those who had tried to flee to Denmark (*Svendborg Avis* 1934). Yet it was not until 1945 that the scale and horrors of the genocide made newspaper headlines (e.g. Kronika 1945). The atrocities that took place in the Warsaw ghetto were particularly reflected upon and became a recurring theme starting from the autumn of 1945 (e.g. Allen 1945) and in the decades that followed. This focus was not least a result of the arrests and trials of Nazi war criminals internationally (e.g. *Information* 1951). Many of the arrested Nazis were prosecuted for the murder of inhabitants of Jewish ghettos across Europe.

The tie between ghettos and religion is not difficult to identify. The ghettos of Europe were inhabited by Jews, and Jews were forced into ghettos because of their religion. Whenever Jews came to live in settlements in inner cities, as was the case in Copenhagen, because

of poverty, housing market conditions and also, most probably, as a result of network ties, these settlements were called ghettos. However, the ghetto was not exclusively described as being inhabited by Jews, and this understanding gained prominence in the 1950s and onwards. The concept of 'the negro ghetto', for example, as employed in newspapers' description of incidences such as race riots in the US and of Apartheid in South Africa (referring to specific geographical areas such as neighbourhoods), was used throughout the period (e.g. *BT* 1963). The concept of the ghetto thus took on various meanings based on the context and intention. However, the ghetto, regardless of its inhabitants, continued to refer to the spatial confines of that which countered the norm, be it in terms of class, ethnicity, opposition, religion or confinement. Although the concept of the ghetto and what was seen as the ghetto broadened and took on new meanings, these meanings were not random but politicised and even strategic.

1960–1980: THE GHETTO IN RELATION TO URBAN CHANGES AND MIGRATION

The political and strategic implications of the ghetto concept became more apparent in the 1960s. The concept was used to characterise a multiplicity of contexts and groups, ranging from children who would move to areas of the city because of traffic (Sigsgård 1963) to new ways of living together (e.g. *kollektiver*; or house sharing, housing for elders and housing for the handicapped; see *BT* 1964) and rundown areas in Copenhagen's inner city (e.g. *Berlingske* 1964). Although discussions of the ghetto continued to point back to the atrocities of the 1930s and 1940s and conflicts based on race in the US and South Africa, the concept of the ghetto was also used in ways that pointed towards a particular present and potential future.

The *religious* implications of the ghetto concept were broadened. The Roman Catholic Church was, for example, described as a ghetto prior to the Second Vatican Council. Also, the Danish People's Church was described as a ghetto (*Dagbladet* 1963), along with the mandatory Christian education that pupils received in Danish primary schools (*Aalborg Stiftstidende* 1968).

The link between immigrants and ghettos became a theme in Denmark in the late 1960s and early 1970s. One example of this is in the descriptions of the Vognmagermarken social housing area in the Østerbro quarter of Copenhagen (*Aktuelt* 1970). Housing conditions had been deteriorating badly in this area as guest workers from Turkey and Pakistan moved in. Another example of the dawning of a connection between ghettos and guest workers was the discussion over plans for the building of barracks for this group of immigrants in the Copenhagen suburb of Avedøre Holme in late 1969 and early 1970 (e.g. *Frederiksborg Amts Avis* 1970).[6] The project ended as a financial scandal, one with a large deficit and only a few guest workers wanting to live there (*Politiken* 1972). Other residential areas housing immigrants were also labelled as ghettos, most notably Ishøj and Vognmandsmarken (e.g. Bernheim 1977). However, newspapers did not exclusively use the concept of the ghetto in relation to immigrants. In the 1970s, just as in the 1960s, the ghetto concept was used to describe rundown areas, particularly in Copenhagen and its suburbs (Hejberg 1975), but also in other parts of the country.

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[6]   The idea of establishing specific housing for guest workers and debating (and criticising) such initiatives with reference to the establishment of ghettos was also seen elsewhere in the country. See *Roskilde Dagblad* 1969.

1980–2004: BACK TO RELIGION

Danish researchers (e.g. Schmidt 2015; Yilmaz 2016) have pointed out that an important shift happened in the focus and description of policies targeting immigrants in Denmark from the early/mid-1980s onwards. Whereas the focus before it had been on social inequalities, after that period the lens shifted to a problematic culture, notably one formulated within the boundaries of religion/Islam (Yilmaz 2016; 84). This shift was also noticeable in the debate over ghettos. The expressed link between ghettos, religious practices and particular religious institutions will be the focus of the remainder of the current article.

The first link between Muslims and ghettos was made in newspapers such as *Politiken* and *Aktuelt* in October 1983 (Bennike & Lind 1983; Rosenberg 1983). Articles described how Laurits Christensen, the Mayor of Taastrup (from the Conservative Party), had prevented the sale of a piece of land to two Muslim organisations (the Muslim Association and the Turkish Islamic Centre) who had wanted to buy it with the intention of building a mosque. The mayor's argument against the mosque was that he did not want 'an Islamic ghetto' in Taastrup, nor would he allow the municipality to be transformed into 'a Mecca of the North'.

Yet, throughout the 1980s, 'the ghetto' continued to be a broad term used to characterise areas on the edge of society linked to the deterioration of working-class residential areas (Christensen 1986) and the social exclusion of 'the proletariat' (Lundsgaard 1983). Ghettos could, according to the newspapers, evolve when youngsters with social problems were permitted to move into social housing that had previously been reserved for old people (Christiansen 1989). Equally, there continued to be a focus on migrants living in ghettos without reference to religion (*Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten* 1981). Religion and culture, however, were increasingly looked upon as factors for ghettoization, along with unemployment, social problems and the number of immigrants living in certain urban areas. Mayors and municipal administrations, both in the Copenhagen suburbs and Aarhus, called for political action and warned against ghettoisation (*Den Ny Frederikshavns Avis* 1989; Jensen 1989). On a national level, there was a growing focus on policies targeting the social integration of immigrants, not least for newcomers and children in 'ghetto schools' (Bregengaard 1989).

The ghetto as an area characterised by social deprivation and people with low incomes or no jobs – the 'social ghetto' – is an image also found in the 1990s (Lausten 1990). So too is the understanding of the ghetto as a place inhabited by a specific social group – including old people (Mortensen 1991) or very rich people (Toft 1992). However, the ghetto was increasingly a concept tied to discussions of immigrants and migration legislation (e.g. Plesner 1990). One argument for political actions against so-called ghettoisation was the rise of racism (e.g. *Politiken* 1991). Some articles stressed that to prevent racism, the ghetto should be looked upon as an area characterised by social problems, not one inhabited by immigrants and refugees (*Politiken* 1992). However, also based on intensified legislation, the ghetto was framed as an area inhabited by poor people, drug addicts *and* immigrants. Just as in the 1980s, one political ambition was to ban such people from living in specific areas (Juul-Madsen 1992). Although researchers tried to point to the possible positive aspects of migrants living closely together in ghettos, such arguments were most often marginalised (Karker 1996). Importantly, national initiatives against ghettoisation were now backed by large sums of money. In 1994, the state released 55 million Danish kroner to improve conditions in areas in and around Copenhagen known as ghettos.

In the 1990s, perspectives on the coupling of the concept of the ghetto and immigrant religion increased further. For example, the mosque as a religious institution was mentioned in relation to ghettos, either as an element of such (argued) geographical entities or an institution existing in ghetto areas (e.g. Lauridsen 1998). Some claimed that the building of mosques would further ghettoisation. The mosque and the ghetto were also used to point to larger, normative problems within society. In one article in *Aktuelt* published in November 1999 under the headline *Vi er midt i en kulturkamp* [We are in the midst of a battle of cultures] (Olsen 1999), for example, the mayor of Albertslund, Finn Aaberg (Social Democratic Party), noted that 'we have to cherish how public spaces are arranged according to secular values, not religions'. He continued: 'Religion must stay a private matter that is practiced in the church or the *mosque*' (emphasis added). Aaberg then claimed that 'with *ghettos*, we do not foster integration but hate between people. When people do not talk with each other, when children do not attend the same schools and day-care institutions, the myths about the other are created' (emphasis added).

Aaberg's statement points to the period's intensified discussion about 'Danish cultural values'. Although the securing of Danish values was an ideological project for the Liberal–Conservative government that took office a few years later (in 2001), this concern was also apparent in the late 1990s. Here, both the mosque and the ghetto constituted parts of a complex web of perceived problematic societal interactions and spaces perceived as challenging Danish values. Thus, the ghetto slowly regained the meaning of being an area that challenged society and social cohesion at large. Ghettos continued to play the role as areas characterised by social deprivation, inhabited by socially vulnerable groups (unemployed, substance abusers and immigrants; Thierry 2000), as sites for cultural differences (Lindbo 2002) and even as being culturally productive (Shah 2002). However, ghettos were increasingly seen as areas that should be regulated, changed and disciplined via legislation (Wilhelmsen 2004). Disciplining of some urban areas was increasingly described as a necessity for upholding societal norms and – as noted – Danish values.

The ghetto was recurrently tied to discussions of religion. As noted in an article about ghettos in *A4* in 2003, quoting the member of parliament Naser Khader (then a member of parliament for the Danish Social-Liberal Party): 'In the ghetto areas, unemployment, traditional lifestyles, religion and hatred of Danish society is mixed into a dangerous cocktail' (Olsen 2003). The argument that the building of a mosque might lead to the establishment of a ghetto was a part of political discussions in 2001 and 2002, when plans for a mosque in Østerbro and Islands Brygge (both neighbourhoods in Copenhagen) were debated (*BT* 2001). In the fierce political debate over the suggested mosque in Østerbro, this institution was portrayed as a means for city authorities to design ghettos in particular ways. The mosque could promote a 'designer ghetto' and 'a positive ghetto' (Gregersen 2001; Gregersen & Hansen 2001). In the end, the permission to build a mosque in Østerbro was rejected precisely because of the fear of ghettoisation.

2004–2019: INTENSIFIED LEGISLATION AND FOCUS ON RELIGIOUS NORMS AND VALUES

In this final period, several events tied the ghetto to Islamic practices and the mosque, and they did so with greater vigour than in the earlier periods. The first of these events was the 2004–2016 debate concerning the establishment of a mosque

in Gjellerupparken in Aarhus, the second comprised the 2004, 2010 and 2018 governmental strategy plans targeting ghettos and so-called parallel societies, the third was publication of the poet Yahya Hassan's first collection of poems in 2013 and the fourth was the TV documentary series *Mosques Behind the Veil*, which was shown on the Danish TV channel TV2 in 2016. These events, debates and political initiatives were not exceptional during a period in which there was a combined focus on the ghetto, the mosque and Islam. In summary, the particular focus on the ghetto as a Muslim-dominated area, which was further proven by the construction of mosques, became more prevalent from 2005 onwards.

Here, I will focus on one event: the 2005–2006 debate regarding the proposed establishment of a new mosque in Gellerup in Aarhus. One vocal voice in the debate was an organisation called Aarhus mod Moskeen (Aarhus against the Mosque). In April 2005, a board member of the organisation wrote a letter to the editor of *Jyllandsposten* with an uncompromising perspective on the combination of ghetto, mosque and Muslims:

> Earlier strategic harassment, attacks and robbery against heathen, weak and pale Danes in the *ghetto* has fostered the expected result: the empty apartments have immediately been filled with fellow believers [...] Now the soldiers of the Quran only need the great mosque army barracks that they have demanded for the training of forced Quranic recruits in the area. (Petersen 2005, emphasis added)

Although Aarhus mod Moskeen did not have a significant number of followers in the end, it received a lot of media attention. Besides, it was not the only political player that saw the proposed geographical location of a mosque as problematic. Local representatives of the Liberal Party in Aarhus argued that the mosque should not be located in a part of the city where many Muslims lived (Vestergaard & Simsek 2006).

Municipal debates over the location of the mosque continued over the following years, and although most participants were positive, the mosque was still not built. One reason was the lack of sufficient funding, while another event that put the construction on hold was the 2016 TV2 series *Mosques Behind the Veil*. The series built on undercover, hidden-camera investigations of a number of Danish imams and gave their viewpoints, including perspectives on domestic violence and the right of women to say no to sex with their spouse. One mosque portrayed in the documentary was the Grimhøj Mosque in Gellerup/Aarhus. Not surprisingly, the proposed establishment of a mosque in Bautavej in Aarhus was annulled in May of the same year, based on suggestions from the Danish People's Party, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Alliance, and plans for it have been on standby since then. More than 10 years of discussions regarding mosques, however, underline how deeply intertwined perspectives on the mosque and the ghetto have become.

This leads me to the last point and the inclusion of another concept into the debate: that of *parallel societies*. In March 2016, when the public debate fostered by *Mosques Behind the Veil* was at its most vocal, Aarhus's mayor, Jacob Bundsgaard, proposed a 10-point plan for the prevention of Islamism. These points became parts of an action plan that the municipal board initiated under the headline 'We do not accept corrosive parallel societies' in August 2016 (*Aarhus Municipality* 2016). Interestingly, neither the words 'ghetto' nor 'mosque' were used in the paper – but the term 'parallel society' was written 23 times. What a parallel society is as a concept and a (possible)

empirical entity is difficult to define (Von Freiesleben 2016: 65). However, the concept refers to an increased level of cultural distancing between minority and majority in society, where the minority formulates alternatives to the values and norms of the majority (Secchi & Herath 2021: 150).

The concept of parallel society in Danish public and political debate has been linked to the concept of the ghetto since 2004 (2016: 82). The starting point was then (Liberal) Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen's New Year address, in which he spoke directly against ghettos (Rasmussen 2004). Although Rasmussen did not use the concept of a parallel society in the address, the word was used in the government's action plan against ghettoisation, issued in May 2004, in which ghettos were described as potentially leading to the establishment of 'ethnic enclaves and parallel societies' (Danish Government 2004: 12). In other words – as noted by Von Freiesleben – for the first time, the 2004 action plan described parallel societies as being a direct consequence of the ghetto (Von Freiesleben 2016: 84).

The concepts of ghetto and parallel society were also interlinked in the government's 2010 action plan, 'The Ghetto Back to Denmark—A Confrontation with Parallel Societies in Denmark' (Danish Government 2010). Importantly – and in line with the earlier use of the concept – parallel societies were, for instance, defined as 'areas where Danish values are not fully rooted'. The focus on parallel societies was stressed further in yet another government action plan from 2018, this time entitled 'One Denmark Without Parallel Societies—No Ghettos in 2030' (Danish Government 2018). In other words, parallel societies were now seen as the primary problem and ghettos as the secondary one. One noteworthy aspect of the 2018 action plan is how the concept of a parallel society (in contrast to the concept of the ghetto) was described as a matter of specific location (i.e. the ghetto) but was further detached from referring to a specific locality. For example, parallel societies were described as having been constituted by people of non-Western descent who did not have an education, were unemployed and did not know the Danish language 'sufficiently' (ibid. 4) – regardless of where they lived.

CONCLUSION

The starting point for this article was my hypothesis that a long historical perspective could help us understand concurrent debates and legislation on the ghetto in Denmark – and most probably elsewhere. As I noted in the beginning, using a concept with such a horrific history as the ghetto should give us pause.

One conclusion of this article is that the ghetto is a concept in the Koselleckian sense, whereby what a ghetto is has not been univocally defined across time periods. This is also a conclusion that I find to be important for an overall theoretical engagement with the ghetto. The ghetto is not an ideal type.

Yet the historical tour of the ghetto as a concept underlines a number of qualities and themes that can help us understand how the concept has gained relevance across time. In some periods, one or more of these themes may play a dominant role in the meaning that the ghetto carries. One such theme is *minority religion*, as illustrated by both discussions of the Jewish and Muslim ghetto. Another is *class and poverty* – a theme that stands forth across all historical periods. A third theme is that of *danger*, and whether danger is a result of the values and practices that outsiders (*immigrants*) carry with them or a result of crime. A fourth is that of ghettos

as particular *urban spaces* that are seen as *antitheses* to society at large. In some periods, the establishment of ghettos has served as a means to (arguably) uphold social cohesion or harmony; in others, tearing down areas suggested to be ghettos has been argued as serving the same goal.

In other words, the ghetto is a tool for political disciplining; a disciplining that is argued as relevant and important via its reference to the ghetto – or people forced to live in such areas – as dangerous and polluting in different ways. The 1800s and 1900s' evocative yet harsh descriptions of ghettos as areas characterised by dirt and darkness is telling in that respect. Concurrently, the filth that sticks to urban areas in Denmark that carry the label 'ghetto' is in the statistical categories of the 'ghetto list'.

As noted in the introduction, living in an area on the ghetto list has a tremendous impact for residents. Not only do their homes carry a heavy societal stigma, their apartment buildings are being torn down, and areas are being reconstructed – with little or no consultation with the people living in them. Living in a ghetto thus implies residing in an area where rules and regulations are different from other parts of society. And herein lies the central power of the ghetto concept: it allows – if accepted – a combination of a *state of exception* (Agamben 2005) with *spaces of – and urbanisms of – exception* (Murray 2017: 305–308).

In this way, the 2021 adaptation of the concept of 'parallel societies' instead of 'hard ghettos' is striking. While the adaptation is argued to be a means of removing the misleading stigma of the ghetto concept (Danish Ministry of Interior and Housing 2021), a paradox remains: Is the social stigma really removed in this process or are the trenches between 'us' and 'them' simply being dug deeper?

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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