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Ghetto–Society–Problem. A Discourse Analysis of Nationalist Othering

Kristina Bakkær Simonsen

Abstract

This article examines the role of the ghetto in Danish political discourse. While ghetto studies have previously been conducted within the field of urban sociology, the article departs from this tradition in offering a discourse analytical perspective on the former Danish government's strategy against ghettoization (The Ghetto Plan). Integrating perspectives from the literature on nationalism with Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analytical framework, the analysis argues that the ghetto marks an antagonistic anti-identity to Danish society. This discursive construction of the ghetto against society has the effect of confirming Danish identity, while at the same time precluding possibilities of the ghetto's integration in society. Highlighting these implications, the study feeds into societal debates on integration, and suggests a framework for studying nationalist othering in a discourse analytical perspective.

Recent years have seen the appearance of the ghetto in Danish politics, with all national parties having a statement about it on the Parliament's webpage by 2012 (Folketinget 2012). When introduced, the ghetto theme entered a broader debate in Denmark, which echoes concerns raised in much of Western Europe, over the nation's unity and cohesion in light of 'failed integration'. This article examines the entry of the term ghetto in Danish political discourse through an analysis of the document which gave it an official and state-sanctioned definition, namely the now former liberal-conservative government's ghetto strategy of October 2010: *Return of the Ghetto to Society. Taking Action against Parallel Societies in Denmark* (subsequently *The Ghetto Plan*).

The strategy's title puts the ghetto in opposition to society and defines its problem as one of lacking integration with the rest of Denmark. This ghetto–society–problem nexus suggests that not only did the introduction of the 'ghetto issue' on the political agenda establish a certain reality (the ghetto); it also engaged a struggle between two identities which had problems fusing. This proposes the relevance of discourse analysis to illuminate how the former government's ghetto strategy is not just

about the ghetto but also about the Danish identity which the ghetto is seen as problematic in relation to. Hence, my question: What is the function of the ghetto in the discourse on Danish identity presented in *The Ghetto Plan*?

Laclau and Mouffe's (2001 [1985]) discourse analytical framework is particularly useful for the examination of this question since it zooms in on struggles over meaning and highlights how all identities are relational. In this light, the article claims that the ghetto can be seen as an antagonistic identity given rise to in the discourse on Danish identity.

The study contributes to contemporary societal debates on integration by pointing out the paradox of *The Ghetto Plan* that Danish national identity needs the ghetto as a negation which allows Danishness to appear as a fixed and full identity. *The Ghetto Plan* thus unites Danish society against the common threat that the ghetto represents, and (in stark contrast to the strategy's stated goal) this implies the impossibility of the ghetto's integration in Denmark. At the theoretical level, the framework developed here offers itself for comparative research on the role of antagonisms for national identity. In relation to this point, I suggest that many of the thorny and tense conflicts over the non-integration of certain segments of contemporary Western European national societies can be given meaning through the analytical lens applied here. Other researchers may thus use the present study as an inspiration for analyzing antagonisms in other national contexts.

The article begins by briefly sketching the socio-political climate of the Danish debate over integration, which constitutes the context in which *The Ghetto Plan* was introduced. I then present how urban sociology approaches analyses of ghettos, before arguing for the importance of abandoning the idea within this tradition that ghettos have essences 'behind' or 'before' the level of discourse. This leads me to present the discourse analytical framework which I engage in the analysis of *The Ghetto Plan*. I conclude with remarks about the function of the ghetto in nationalist discourse.

The Ghetto Enters Danish Politics

Immigration has been high on the political agenda in Denmark since the 1990s (Jensen and Thomsen 2011:826-27). Almost without exception, the social and political debates around the issue employ a problematizing and 'immigrant sceptical' (Andersen, Larsen and Møller 2009:275) vocabulary. One of the central actors particularly associated with this vocabulary is the Danish People's

Party, which advocate a nativist conception of Danish community. In the 2007 national election, which led to the formation of the liberal-conservative government (supported by Danish People's Party) who later authored *The Ghetto Plan*, Danish People's Party captured 13.9 per cent of the vote. The steady increase in electoral support of this party can be seen as a reflection of the profound salience of the immigration issue in the electorate, forcing all other parties in parliament to also deal with the issue and to adopt parts of the immigrant sceptical attitude (Andersen, Larsen and Møller 2009:275). On the legislative dimension, this has resulted in the introduction of ever stricter immigration policies since the 1990s (Mouritsen et al. 2009:6-54).

In this 'immigrant sceptical' climate, immigrants are often portrayed as a security threat. The securitization both has an economic dimension, which presents immigrants as a burden to the welfare system because they detract more than they contribute, and a cultural dimension, which presents immigrants as a challenge to the cultural homogeneity of society because they do not support the values responsible for maintaining social cohesion. The latter concern was expressed in the 'cartoon crisis' of 2005/2006 in which the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published 12 cartoons of the prophet Mohammed. The publishing created a major national and international roar with strong reactions from Muslim communities, accusing Denmark of being disrespectful to minority-religious or cultural groups. Throughout the crisis, freedom of expression was upheld by central Danish actors as a specifically Danish value, with the suggested implication that people (among these, some immigrants) not celebrating the freedom of *Jyllands-Posten* to print the cartoons were not real Danes (Agius 2013:242).

This way of interpreting the 'cartoon crisis' reflects what Mouritsen et al.'s (2009:6-54) analysis of the Danish immigration debate shows, namely that a strong historical narrative on Danish national identity informs perceptions of the contemporary challenge from immigration. That historical narrative connects cultural homogeneity and social cohesion to democratic values. For the liberal-conservative coalition government (authoring *The Ghetto Plan*) in office from 2001 to 2011, this translated into a 'highly moralised form of liberal perfection' (ibid.). This entailed rejecting multiculturalism and the accommodation of 'other' cultural values by reference to the superiority of liberal-cum-Danish values. As such, the government succeeded in connecting the liberal values of the governing parties (the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party) to the nativist values of their supporting party, the Danish People's Party (Agius 2013:246-49).

This forms the context in which the ghetto suddenly rose to the Danish political agenda in October 2010, starting off with the then prime minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen's (the Liberal Party) opening speech to the Parliament on October 5 (Delica 2011:28). Although the speech concerned many other issues, it was the issue of the ghetto which attracted headlines in the news media (see e.g. Thobo-Carlsen 2010). Anders Fogh Rasmussen (prime minister from the Liberal Party from 2001 to 2009) had already touched on the subject in his parliamentary opening speech in 2004, but in 2010, the ghetto – formerly denoted 'socially vulnerable housing area' (Bjørn 2013) – won broad prominence as a political hot topic and buzzword among all political parties (Larsen 2011). According to Løkke Rasmussen, 'holes in the map of Denmark' had emerged in which 'Danish values are obviously no longer leading'. He called for greater frankness in the debate about these problematic areas and, as a first step towards that, turned 'ghetto' – the term that 'we', according to Løkke Rasmussen, use about 'these areas in daily speech' – into a political category. The speech underscored the need for strong action and announced the forthcoming release of a strategy, focusing both on 'the walls' and 'the people living behind the walls' (Rasmussen 2010).

The strategy was published on October 26, 2010. It argues the importance of taking action against ghettoization, provides a definition of the ghetto, points out 29 residential areas qualifying under this definition, and sketches initiatives to 'bring back the ghetto to society'. At the press conference of its release, Løkke Rasmussen stated that he wanted to move value politics from 'fluffy words' to 'street fight' (Ritzau 2010); that is, to real initiatives and action. Making 'ghetto' a measureable and concrete thing (rather than a 'fluffy word') was a first step towards that.

Worth mention is the fact that while a few other central actors were critical of using the term ghetto to denote the designated areas (among these head of Copenhagen's police force, Johan Reimann), there was broad consensus among political parties on the rhetoric applied when discussing the issue. Thus, the Social Democrats and the Socialist People's Party – the two main opposition parties – also presented a joint ghetto initiative (Socialdemokraterne and SF 2010) which, although critical of the government's inaction, followed the government in using the term ghetto, and in reading the problem it represented as an issue of lacking integration. The media also quickly adopted the ghetto-term and up until today (2015) it is a common and widely unchallenged understanding that these areas qualify as 'ghettos' on the margins of the Danish society. This lack of challenge to the problem definition in Danish politics is contrasted by the academic debate within urban sociology on the definition of the ghetto, which I sketch below.

Studying the Ghetto in Urban Sociology

Research on ghettos has a long tradition in urban sociology, dating back to the beginning of the 20th century. Academic interest has waxed and waned over the century, receiving now again great attention (Haynes and Hutchison 2008:347-52). The present section does not intend to give a comprehensive review of the literature but serves to make clear how a discourse analytical approach like that of this article stands in contrast to the works of urban sociologists studying the ghetto. This entails a shift of analytical focus from studying the materiality of the ghetto (the space and its inhabitants) to studying its symbolic existence and position in a wider web of meaning.

Several authors engage in a conceptual exercise of giving the ghetto a definition which can distinguish it from other forms of urban spatial separation. Such distinctions, they argue, are important because there are different dynamics at work, different conditions for the ghetto's re-integration in society, and, in turn, different policy recommendations to be made when targeting these different forms of segregation.

Marcuse (1997) develops a classification which distinguishes three forms of spatial separation; the classic ghetto, the new outcast ghetto, and immigrant or cultural enclaves. The ghetto and the enclave are distinguished by the fact that the segregation of the ghetto is involuntary while voluntary in the enclave. The outcast ghetto is different from the classic ghetto in that its members are completely excluded from the mainstream society and economy whereas the inhabitants of the classic ghetto, although spatially segregated, remained part of the larger society by serving its economy (ibid.:231-39).

Wacquant (2004; 2008) uses another dividing line to delineate the specificities of the ghetto. According to Wacquant, the ghetto constitutes an autonomous centre with its own institutions; it is inhabited by a racially homogenous group which is deemed undesirable, and state inaction serves to maintain the deprivation of the area. This he contrasts to another type of spatialized marginality which he terms 'ethnic cluster'. The ethnic cluster is first and foremost based on class rather than racial identity, and the inhabitants constitute far from a homogenous group. In addition, marginalization is typically attenuated by state action (Wacquant 2008:5; 150-62). Hence, Wacquant argues that the ethnic cluster can work as a springboard for assimilation through processes of cultural learning and social and spatial mobility whereas the ghetto constitutes a rather manifest barrier to integration because it creates both material and symbolic isolation (Wacquant 2004:5).

Wacquant's analyses in France and the US serve to illustrate his conceptual point that ghetto and ethnic cluster should be distinguished since – according to Wacquant – France (as the rest of Europe) has ethnic clusters but no ghettos, which is a phenomenon reserved for black segregation in the US. This is much in line with Marcuse's (1997:239-42) conclusions, reserved for the American context, that only the black pattern satisfies his definition of the outcast ghetto while the Asian pattern resembles that of the enclave.

In a Danish context, Larsen (2011) examines the areas pointed out as ghettos in *The Ghetto Plan*. Using Wacquant's conceptualization, he asks whether it makes sense to employ the concept of the ghetto to the Danish case and answers in the negative (thus confirming Wacquant): '... the problem with the ghetto term is that, as a social diagnosis of these areas, it is wrong' (Larsen 2011:63). As an alternative, he proposes the concept of 'deprived residential area', by which he understands social housing estate areas with a high concentration of resource-poor residents.

These criticisms of applying the concept of the ghetto to certain empirical cases recur in the works of several urban sociologists. While this can have its merits, I argue that there is a gap in the literature between, on the one hand, contending the concept's invalidity in Denmark (Larsen)/Europe (Wacquant)/American immigrant enclaves (Marcuse) and, on the other hand, not inquiring into the meaning and consequence of the continued use of the concept in political discourse. Common to Marcuse, Wacquant and Larsen is the understanding of the ghetto as, in Marcuse's (2007:380) words '... ultimately a spatial concept ... an empirically determined, physical, quantifiable, experiential object'. This leads them to ask what the ghetto is and which mechanisms within it serve to produce and sustain it. Such questions lack in probing the broader (symbolic) *function* (not just the social functionings) of the ghetto. The discourse analytical lens applied in this article is not preoccupied with definitions but rather starts from the assumption that words matter regardless of empirical 'fit'. Analytically, this entails moving the focus from the ghetto as a substance to studying the ghetto as a discursive boundary, asking what meanings and ideas hinder its integration with the rest of society.

A Discourse Analytical Framework

The discourse analytical framework of Laclau and Mouffe (2001) so to say annuls the question posed by urban sociologists of whether empirical facts fit with the theoretical ghetto concept for the

areas designated as such. The distinction between discourse (concept) and essence upon which these authors rely is a distinction the validity of which is denied by Laclau and Mouffe (ibid.:107-8), who hold that nothing is non-discursive. It follows that there is no way to assess (nor access) the essence of any 'thing' outside the discourse in which it is invoked. In this perspective, a more meaningful question than asking whether there are ghettos or not is to probe the function of the ghetto in the discourse deployed in *The Ghetto Plan*.

The dispute about the very meaning of the term ghetto can be taken as support of Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) denial of essentialism. It also illustrates another important point, namely that the social always contains a surplus of meaning, preventing any identity from ever becoming fully fixed (ibid.:111). This makes discourse 'a relational totality of signifying sequences that determine the identity of the social elements, but never succeed in totalising and exhausting the play of meaning' (Torfing 1999:87). The relational character of identity follows from the impossibility of ultimate meanings, implying that one moment can only obtain meaning through its relation to other moments in the discourse (Laclau and Mouffe 2001:106). This also means that any temporary fixation of meaning presupposes struggle, highlighting the essentially political character of any identity (Torfing 1999:67-9).

What happens, then, when social agents realize the impossibility of attaining their identities? This situation describes the (pre)condition of social antagonisms. A social antagonism constructs the limit of a given order as the negation of that order (Laclau and Mouffe 2001:124-27). In other words, experiencing the impossibility of one's identity gives rise to a discursive articulation of an 'Other', which is seen as that which prevents me from becoming fully 'me'. This 'radical otherness' (Torfing 1999:124) not only has a negative but an anti-identity and is composed of excluded elements which enter into a chain of equivalence, having in common only their negation of the discursive formation in question. This gives the 'impossibility of the real ... a form of presence' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001:129), producing the paradox of social antagonism that 'it constitutes and sustains social identity by positing a threat to that very identity' (Torfing 1999:131). In effect, in the presence of antagonisms, political action tends to be guided by the illusive goal of becoming one's true self by annihilating the anti-identity which prevents such realization (ibid.:129).

How this framework is to be applied to examine the function of the ghetto in the government's discourse remains to be discussed. The prevalent theme of the ghetto as a non-integrated area (in popu-

lar discourse and academia alike) suggests the possible relevance of the concept of social antagonism. Working from this concept, I argue that the ghetto marks the negative side of Danish identity, hence moving the analytical focus from the ghetto to Danish identity. In this, I synthesize contributions from the literature on nationalism with Laclau and Mouffe.

Özkirimli (2010:205-17) understands the nation not as an essence but as a symbol, the meaning of which is fought over by different (nationalist) groups. According to Armstrong (1982:5), the symbol of the nation is constituted and reproduced in symbolic boundary mechanisms in which the national group defines itself 'not by reference to their own characteristics but by exclusion, that is, by comparison to "strangers"'. In other words, nationalism constructs national identity in confrontation with an Other, in that process making the boundary (rather than the centre) the locus of identity. Spencer and Wollman (2002:118) repeat this idea in their statement that at the heart of the nationalist project is 'the problem of the other', that is, confirmation of own distinctness through exclusion. This is echoed in Laclau and Mouffe's (2001:xvii-xviii) claim that a fully inclusive 'we' is impossible since any identity which wants to appear integrated and cohesive must exclude something as its outside. It is, hence, 'only through negativity, division and antagonism that a formation can constitute itself as a totalising horizon' (ibid.:144).

To pinpoint the *nationalist* character of the antagonism, Özkirimli (2010:205-17) adds two characteristics to the discourse. Nationalism, he argues, is a discourse fixing the meaning of the nation through three sets of interrelated claims:

- a. *Identity claims* divide the world into 'us' and 'them', positing a homogenous and fixed identity on either side (the antagonism).
- b. *Temporal claims* seek to demonstrate the undisputed diachronic presence of the nation.
- c. *Spatial claims* reconstruct space as 'national territory'.

Detecting these three elements in *The Ghetto Plan* is crucial to convincingly carry through my argument that it engages a nationalist discourse, using the ghetto as a negative reference point for 'the Danish order'. I will invest most effort in analyzing identity claims (us-versus-them-oppositions between Danish society and the ghetto) since they highlight the antagonistic relationship that the above framework suggests is essential for the nationalist discourse. Temporal and spatial claims are,

however, necessary too since what marks the distinctness of *nationalist* antagonisms is the interweaving with arguments about time (e.g. history, ancestry, past, present, future) and space (e.g. territory, soil, nature).

The analysis is restricted to only one document, a restriction which might be questioned since it seems far from enough material to uncover the totality of the nationalist discourse. It is, however, a very deliberate choice, motivated by Sutherland's (2005:187-88) distinction between micro-discourse (localized social text) and Grand Discourse (macro-social reality). Grand Discourse must be assessed at the theoretical level as a structure giving meaning to the world while it can be analyzed empirically in the form of concrete micro-discourses. Hence, I treat nationalism as Grand Discourse, that is, an integrated frame for understanding the world which, cf. above, integrates identity, spatial and temporal claims, and embeds within it micro-discourses of specific nationalist movements, drawing on that overall frame. The idea is that in Danish society, there will be a multitude of micro-discourses drawing on the nationalist discursive frame. In this light, *The Ghetto Plan* is taken as a *case* of nationalist antagonisms given rise to by the government's micro-discourse on Danishness. Treating the ghetto as a case implies the conviction that nationalism may give rise to many other antagonisms and may create different Others at different points in time – something which this study does not seek to uncover. Rather, it explores one potential antagonism at one specific point in time to shed light on the workings of nationalism as Grand Discourse.

The possibilities of using this study as a springboard for more general insights into nationalist antagonisms depend on whether the ghetto constitutes a peculiar or typical antagonistic identity. One way of evaluating that question is comparing the qualities of the ghetto-as-antagonism to other nationalist antagonisms. I consider two: other nation states and immigrants.

Other nation states. Antagonist constructions of other nation states can be explained by Anderson's (1991) idea that the national community is imagined as inherently limited and sovereign. This constructs the nation as internally homogenous and externally closed, and makes the boundary to other nations crucially important to maintain. Other nations must, in other words, be 'othered'.

Harbsmeier (1986) argues that this national self-understanding creates symmetry in international relations since – in contrast to, for example, religions – nationalities do not make Others into infidels but acknowledge that, as nations, they belong to the same category and normally do not dispute each other's right to be nations. Only if other nations threaten 'our' sovereignty will they be perceived as antagonistic enemies.

This stands in contrast to the ghetto, which is much more readily perceived as an enemy. While other nations are accepted as societies ‘parallel’ to the Danish, the ghetto cannot be given the same acceptance. The existence of a parallel society *within* rather than outside the nation both violates national sovereignty and challenges the illusion that heterogeneity only characterizes what is beyond the national boundary.

Immigrants. While other nation states may be perceived only as adversaries and not as enemies because of their external position, immigrants, as the ghetto, reside within the nation and thus challenge the idea of internal homogeneity. Immigrants are, however, often diffused, making it harder to construct them as a parallel society threatening national sovereignty. This relates to Johnson and Coleman’s (2012:864-65) contention that spatialization of the Other is of crucial importance. Regional othering (pointing out a region within the nation as deviant), they argue, is part and parcel of nation-building because it enables identification of the Other as ‘an empirically specifiable group’.

These two peculiar qualities of the ghetto – its position *within* the nation and its *spatialization* of otherness – point to its pronounced pertinence as a locus for a hostile anti-identity in nationalist discourse. As Eriksen (referred in Johnson and Coleman 2012:865) argues, ‘[a]lthough there might be multiple oppositional identities, in practice, it is often the “significant Other,” or the identity conceptualized as most opposed, most pressing, or most timely, that is brought to the forefront of identity questions’. The above discussion suggests that an Other with the co-existing qualities of within-and-spatialized most acutely offers itself as ‘significant’ compared to potential others having only one of these qualities. If not the ghetto, this could be national regions (cf. Johnson and Coleman) or national minorities occupying a specific space as, for example, Scotland in Great Britain or Quebec in Canada.

Analysis

The analysis employs the above theoretical framework to the micro-discourse of *The Ghetto Plan*. I start by laying out the document’s conception of the ghetto, which leads to an examination of antagonistic identity claims which construct oppositions between ghetto and society. The analysis then considers whether also spatial and temporal claims feed into the antagonism since this will strengthen the argument that *The Ghetto Plan* draws on nationalism as Grand Discourse. Finally,

the analysis reflects on the role of the government as a national unificator and draws out the implications of the study for the possibilities of integrating the ghetto in society.

The Problem of the Ghetto

The Ghetto Plan (the Government 2010) is a 48 pages long document describing the government's strategy to target the problem of ghettos in Denmark. The official title *Return of the Ghetto to Society. Taking Action against Parallel Societies in Denmark* gives the two central categories of the document, namely 'ghetto' and 'society'. The problem to be targeted is presented as an issue of the ghetto's non-integration in Denmark. The separation of ghetto and society is semantically illustrated in the beginning of the Danish wording of the title *Ghettoen tilbage til samfundet*, which places the two at either end of the sentence. This separation is echoed in the first paragraph of the first chapter, which deals exclusively with describing Danish society and Danish values, only subsequently (in the second paragraph) describing the ghetto as a place 'where Danish values are no longer leading' (ibid.:5).

This theme of integration as a key ideal runs through the first chapter in a simultaneous celebration of social cohesion and rejection of parallel societies. According to the government, strong Danish values work as glue to 'hold Denmark together', and the ghetto's non-integration is explained as an effect of its deviance from these norms. This indicates a clear opposition between the characteristics of the ghetto and those of the 'rest of society' (5), an opposition to which I now turn.

The Ghetto versus Danish Society

As mentioned, the policy document begins not with the ghetto but with a celebration of Danish values and Danish society. This clearly sets the discursive frame within which to understand the ghetto as a problem; it is through the lens of the Danish 'we' speaking in the first paragraph that the ghetto marks a deviant and problematic identity. 'Denmark' may usefully be understood as a nodal point within this discourse, that is, an empty signifier which serves as a privileged point to which all other moments in the discourse must attend. The emptiness of that point gives it a structural and structuring role; it is given meaning by moments entering into a chain of equivalence as a consequence of

their common reference to the same symbol (Torfing 1999:98-9). Moments substantiating Danishness are given in the first paragraph:

In Denmark, over generations, we have built a safe, rich and free society.
The crucial glue has been and still is our values. Freedom to be different.
Equal opportunities for men and women. Responsibility for community.
Democracy. Respect for society's laws. A basic trust in wanting each
other well (5).

One instantly notes the staccato reeling off of qualities describing Danish values, marked by full stops between each sentence. Importantly, the full stops do not indicate that the contents of the sentences are unconnected. Rather, listing all these qualities without arguing for their connection makes sense (only) when one understands that they refer to the common symbol of Danishness, that is, that they constitute a chain of equivalence, in concert giving meaning to what it is to be Danish. Note how this paragraph reflects Mouritsen et al.'s (2009) point (referred above) that in the historical narrative on Danish identity, liberal values are presented as essentially Danish.

As the quote shows, the government stresses unity and community, semantically underlined by using only 'we' as the grammatical subject throughout the document. Torfing (1999:192, italics added) argues that the empty signifier of the nation 'functions as a way of symbolizing an *absent* communitarian fullness', that is, a never reachable national 'we'. The nation must, hence, construct 'enemies of the nation' which function as an antagonistic reference point in the discursive exterior against which the different moments in the discourse can be united. As Howarth (2000:107) puts it: '... if the terms a , b and c are made equivalent ($a \equiv b \equiv c$) with respect to characteristic d , then d must totally negate a , b and c ($d = -(a, b, c)$)'. I argue that the ghetto can be seen as such a threat (d), which functions to unite Danish society ($a \equiv b \equiv c$).

This argument finds support in the second paragraph, which presents the ghetto in negating terms alone – as a place 'where Danish values are no longer leading' and where, for that reason, society's rules are less effective (5). Filling in this identity, which is at first only a negation, transforms it into an anti-identity. This is evident in formulations which describe ghettos as areas 'which are secluded from the rest of society' (5), 'that resemble fortresses' (6), 'where there is a very unbalanced composition of residents in comparison to the rest of society' (15), and 'where other ground rules apply' (31). The government also gives a precise and quantified definition (37) serving to point out actual

ghettos in Denmark. The definition consists of three criteria out of which two must be met for a housing area to qualify as a ghetto. Table 1 shows the criteria and how they compare to ‘the rest’ of Danish society (as reported in the document).

Table 1. Ghetto Criteria

Criterion	Ghetto	Danish society
Non-Western immigrants and their children	> 50 %	6.5 %
18-64 year olds neither employed nor in education	> 40 %	15 %
Number (per 10,000 inhabitants) convicted for offences against the penal code, the gun law, or the law on euphorants	> 270	83

The government makes a point of comparing these threshold values to those for the total population in Denmark (cf. Table 1), arguing that values as high as those of the ghetto involve considerable deviation from ‘normal’ Danish residential areas. Interestingly, no arguments are presented for the choice of these exact threshold values, wherefore one might ask why, for instance, the ethnic criterion is not set at 20 – or 70 – per cent? In addition, this quantified definition of the ghetto implies that some areas may turn into ‘normal’ residential areas from slight changes in one of the criteria, if they are near the threshold, while other areas may suddenly turn into ghettos.¹ This indicates the value of analyzing the ghetto as discourse rather than a physical space since that space is not constant over time.

More intriguing than the above quantitative point is the absence of arguments logically connecting the three criteria as constitutive of the same phenomenon. In fact, the three criteria seem rather different concerning, respectively, ethnicity, resources (economic/cultural), and crime/morals. The appearance of coherence is constructed by a simple listing of the three criteria (very similar to the listing of Danish values in the quote above) – hence, inscribing them in a chain of equivalence. The logic of equivalence is furthered by the fact that not all three criteria are necessary conditions for qualifying under the government’s definition of a ghetto, indicating their quality as substitutes for each other. Empirically, this creates great variation across the 29 ghettos.² *Discursively*, however,

these areas constitute the same phenomenon: an anti-identity to Danish society. This point is carried through by the invocation of the concept of ‘parallel society’. The ghetto is dangerous to the Danish self-understanding as an integrated, harmonious and coherent community because it represents an alternative, self-sufficient society which will not be integrated with ‘the rest’. As shown, this antagonistic relationship is established through two opposing chains of equivalence, each with an internal logic of homogenization which simultaneously expands the external difference into an impossibly wide gulf between the ghetto and society.

A Nationalist Antagonism?

It remains to examine whether the ghetto-society antagonism analyzed above draws on nationalism as Grand Discourse. Referring back to Özkirimli (2010), what distinguishes nationalism from other group discourses is the interweaving of antagonistic claims with temporal and spatial claims.

Temporal claims are evident from the very beginning of the document, namely in the formulation that ‘*over generations*’, the Danes have built this unique society (5). Using the word ‘generation’ rather than more neutral categories as ‘time’ or ‘decade’ adds to the temporal claim connotations of family and kinship. As such, the temporal claim interacts with the ethnic dimension of the antagonism; immigrants stand outside Danish society not only by virtue of cultural differences but also because they are excluded from the genesis narrative of Danish values.

Although not containing many other temporal signal words, the document is infused with a fairytale-like story describing the ghetto as a *state* of recent decay and promising restoration (through governmental initiatives) in the future (cf. also the title *Return of the Ghetto to Society...*). Two points are of interest here. First, it is important for the nationalist discourse to present the ghetto problem as a recent development – if it had always been there, the image of an enduring strong and unified Danish society would crumble. Second, the ring of temporariness also serves to invoke hope, cf. the government’s unabated belief in the possibility of transforming these areas and re-integrating them in Danish society (5). This confirms the fairytale narrative and the hope of a happy ending in sight.

Spatial claims are particularly conspicuous in the document. Most expressions about space in the document refer to the ghetto but implicitly serve to confirm the idea and value of this space as national territory. As with the temporal claim, spatial claims interact with the antagonism because spatialization of the Other adds to its anti-identity the role of violator of *our* space and integrity. By its mere existence, the ghetto pollutes the unity of the imagined national space of Denmark, illustrated in the most obviously figurative sense in a map printed in the document, where Danish land is coloured green and blue dots indicate municipalities with ghettos (7). This map echoes the image invoked in Løkke Ramussen's speech of ghettos as 'holes in the map of Denmark', suggesting that these ugly spots must be erased from the map for Denmark to become a fully integrated identity again.

The importance of space in the description of the Other is highlighted by the fact that although all three ghetto criteria refer to people, and none to space, descriptions of the ghetto in text are almost always spatialized – and this in contrast to Danish space. Danish society is open, integrated and normal while the ghetto is a closed, isolated fortress – a special area. Even values are spatialized. In the ghetto, 'Danish values are no longer deeply rooted' (5). Articulating values as things with roots is a way of nationalizing space, infusing the soil with Danishness. According to Johnson and Coleman (2012), such spatialization of nationalist antagonisms is an effective and often necessary way of dealing with the difficulty of identifying an 'empirically specifiable group of actually existing concrete individuals' which can be pointed out as the Other. In the present case, it is particularly difficult because the three ghetto criteria refer to (potentially) very different groups of people. 'Yet, when identity becomes mapped on a particular place ... certain elements of that messiness can be glossed over' (ibid.:865). Spatialization, in other words, confirms and buttresses the chain of equivalence between the three ghetto criteria of ethnicity, resources and crime/morals. Seclusion becomes a multidimensional category; physical, social, cultural and economic (The government 2010:37), with (ghetto) space as the principle uniting them all.

The Government as Unifier

In sum, *The Ghetto Plan* presents Danish society as socially cohesive and integrated; the ghetto constituting a threat to cohesion because of its lack of all the values which integrate. The obvious

answer on how to secure cohesion is that the threat must be removed – the ghetto must be exterminated ('broken' or 'converted' are typical expressions in the policy document). This reveals an interesting interpretation of the word 'integration', etymologically meaning 'making complete', that is, bringing together previously separated parts to make up a new, greater whole. However, in the policy paper, there is no bringing together of parts, only the removal of one part to make the other complete again. In other words, what is sought is restoration (of society) through subversion (of the ghetto).

Lefort (in Torfing 1999:192-93) contends that social unification can only be obtained by a symbolic power outside society, for instance, the monarch. In democratic systems, however, this symbolic power cannot be embodied by a particular body, since governmental turnover is frequent. Hence, the symbolic power becomes an empty space which can only be temporarily occupied by a force successfully hegemonizing the empty signifier of the nation. In *The Ghetto Plan*, the Danish government installs itself as a unifying force through the use of a 'we' whose referent is rarely specified. It is therefore not clear whether the government uses it in terms of the national 'we' or the government as a 'we'. The effect is a fusing together of those two we's. This explains the importance of presenting 'integration' as a one-way transformation of the ghetto, not of Danish society. If Danish society also had to change in order to obtain the goal of integration, the government would no longer be able to present itself as a unificator, since its appearance as a credible embodiment of the nation depends on its ability to preserve hegemony over what it means to be Danish.

The strong call for action in *The Ghetto Plan* underscores the government's role as unificator, for instance, in formulations such as 'We shall not accept parallel societies in Denmark ... We will transform these areas so that they become an integrated part of Danish society' (5). This glosses over a latent contradiction in the plan, however, since the lack of integration is everywhere in the document constructed as a problem created solely by the ghetto and its inhabitants. It is the ghetto which 'shuts itself off to the surrounding society' (5), children in the ghetto 'contribute to the maintenance and reinforcement of existing parallel societies' (21), and 'greater personal responsibility for integrating oneself' is required (29). This problem construction is convenient since 'blame for failures along the path of unification [can] be located in their proper places' (Johnson and Coleman 2012:875), that is, the government-cum-national we can escape blame for the never complete character of Danish identity by placing it on the ghetto.

(Im)Possibilities for ‘the Return of the Ghetto to Society’

The above discussion gives reason to doubt the prospect of ‘real integration’ as is the government’s stated goal (5). This is not a speculation about the government having wrong intentions but a point about a potentially adverse function of the discourse invoked in *The Ghetto Plan*. Referring back to the etymological meaning of integration given above, as a process in which formerly separate parts unite to make up a new whole, I suggest that in a discourse perspective, integration must be understood as the inscription of discursive identities in a signifying chain that emphasize their equivalence. Hence, the ghetto can only be integrated in Danish society if the difference between the two is collapsed into equivalence. *The Ghetto Plan* does the exact opposite by constructing them as two opposing chains of equivalence in an antagonistic relationship.

The analysis shows that the antagonistic construction of the ghetto is productive in the sense that it enables the nationalist discourse to handle the impossibility of a saturated Danish identity. The theoretical point is that establishing identity always implies exclusion of a constitutive outside, and in the present case, this is done by transforming what was previously a limit (of identity) into a frontier (towards the ghetto) (Laclau and Mouffe 2001:143-44). This explains why it would be unproductive, indeed destructive, to discursively integrate the ghetto with Danish society, since ‘[t]he collapse of difference into equivalence will tend to involve a loss of meaning since meaning is intrinsically linked to the differential character of identity’ (Torfing 1999:97). The implication is that although *The Ghetto Plan* frames the ghetto as the area shutting off itself to the surrounding society, it is (at least to the same extent) the discourse on Danishness which creates a boundary to the ghetto in order to preserve and confirm Danish identity.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the ghetto can be seen as an antagonistic identity given rise to by the discourse on Danish identity invoked in *The Ghetto Plan*. It has done so by taking a quite different approach to the ghetto than that of urban sociology. Rather than treating the ghetto as an essence which must fit an a priori given definition for researchers to engage it with their theories, the framework employed here works from the central conviction that identities are not ‘things’ which *are* but meanings which continuously *become*. This contributes both to the current societal debate on integration and to research on national identity.

The finding that exclusion of the ghetto is necessary for Danish identity to appear fixed and full has the paradoxical and controversial implication of erasing any prospects for integrating the ghetto because such integration would not only dissolve the ghetto but also the current idea about Danishness. This confronts Wacquant's idea that what determines (im)possibilities of integration is the social make-up of urban marginality. Whether these areas qualify as Wacquantian 'ghettos' or 'ethnic clusters' (or Marcusean 'immigrant enclaves'), the antagonistic construction of them against Danish society is what matters. Laclau and Mouffe (2001:xvi-xix) hold that exclusion and antagonisms are enduring conditions of the social, and hence, we must accept that full integration is never possible. A crucial distinction is, however, seen between antagonistic enemies and antagonistic adversaries, which boils down to a matter of the legitimacy of our opponent (Torfing 1999:121). This suggests the possibility of conceiving the ghetto as a legitimate adversary to be tolerated, but as long as Danish identity is constructed with such strong emphasis on cohesion and internal integration, the ghetto will necessarily be an enemy to be destroyed. This is the paradox of the current political debate on integration, which Mortensen (2004:127) highlights: 'The greater the emphasis on strong integration, the bigger the problem of the non-integrated'.

The strong emphasis on integration and the approach to the (immigrant) Other as an enemy rather than an adversary seem not to be exclusive to Danish politics. Rather, such discourse also dominates much of contemporary Western Europe (Duyvendak 2011:84-105; Triandafyllidou 2001; 2002). This is reflected in the increased electoral support of right-wing nationalist parties such as the Swiss People's Party, the Dutch Party of Freedom, and the French Le Front National over the last decade.

While the article is limited to one case and one policy document, it has produced a general framework for studying nationalist antagonisms which offers itself to comparative research. The observation that the nativist discourse does not appear to be limited to the Danish context suggests that other researchers should be able to find similar antagonistic constructions of the immigrant Other, portrayed as an 'enemy within'. Of great interest in future studies would be analyses of the idea suggested here, that antagonisms which can be spatialized and which reside within the nation will more readily become constructed as significant enemies rather than adversaries.

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¹ This is in fact the case since the ghetto list is updated annually.

² Immigrant proportion varies between 18.4 and 89.9 per cent in the 29 ghettos; people unemployed and out of education vary between 26.9 and 54.4 per cent; and convicts vary between 188 and 462 per 10,000 inhabitants. Finally, the number of houses constituting a ghetto area varies between 379 and 3,591.