THE INCLUSIVE PARK & THE CONDEMNED GHETTO

Narrative Contradictions in Neoliberalizing Nørrebro

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01 SEPTEMBER 2024

Erasmus Mundus Master Course in Urban Studies (4CITIES)
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To my **Grandpa Gene**, who has always considered truth with patience and humor,
who listens well yet teaches better,
who always involved himself in local affairs and has stayed with the trouble for almost a century,
who, despite living in a world so different from mine, has modeled a caring and critical way of being,
Thank you, Grandpa, for everything.

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Figure 1 *- An artifact in the Red Square, Source: Author*

ABSTRACT

This ethnographic case study examines the dialectical contradictions between ghettoization and inclusivity in Nørrebro, Copenhagen, focusing on Superkilen Park and the Mjølnerparken housing complex in the wake of Denmark's 2018 'Ghetto Laws'. Through extensive fieldwork, the study posits that these seemingly paradoxical realities are, in fact, material contradictions inherent to neoliberal urban development. The research analyzes the creation of rent gaps and racial stigmatization discourses, arguing that a purely political-economic framework is insufficient to comprehend the mechanisms and impacts of displacement caused by the Ghetto Laws. The study then nuances its hypothesis on neoliberal contradictions by introducing critical theories on racial banishment and neo-colonial discourses in Danish society. Additionally, the thesis explores emergent democratic practices in Nørrebro, offering a hopeful perspective on future challenges to dominant power structures. This research contributes a crucial critique of neoliberal urbanization in a traditional welfare society, challenging prevailing narratives and constructing a nuanced account of the socio-spatial actants involved.

Keywords: Copenhagen, Mjølnerparken, Superkilen, ghetto laws, neoliberal urbanism, stigma, racial banishment, rent gap, democratic practices

I. INTRODUCTION

Figure 2 *- Mjølnerparken & Superkilen, Source: Author*

"The first time I came by Mjølnerparken, I thought it was inaccessible to the public and its residents alike. Two-meter-tall fences decorated with signs demanding credentials and hard hats surrounded buildings completely wrapped in scaffolding and plastic sheeting. I attempted to enter the four-building complex from a few different points, but there was nothing to see beyond dumpsters of debris and piles of construction equipment. Defeatedly, I returned to Superkilen to find someone to interview when I stumbled upon an Arab man ripping up bread and throwing it into the grass nearby. I asked him if he lived in Mjølnerparken. Despite barely speaking English, he communicated that he had

lived there for some time. I tried asking some more questions, but our lack of a shared language and his unwillingness to use Google Translate made further conversation futile.

I wished him a good day and began to walk away, but he soon followed me. Thinking I was a tourist looking for a hotel nearby, he pointed me in the direction of a hostel at the end of the park. I took the opportunity to ask him again about Mjølnerparken. He said he was still living there while construction was underway. I asked him if he knew Mohammed Aslam, the president of the housing association with whom I was trying to get in touch. He replied, "Yes, follow me," and began walking back into Mjølnerparken.

First, through an assemblage of shipping container construction offices, then through a double thick wall of scaffolding, and finally through the building itself, we tunneled into the central courtyard of Mjølnerparken's northernmost housing block. There was nobody around on a Sunday at noon. The entire facade was hidden by scaffolding, with huge piles of construction equipment and demolished rubble lying in the courtyard. The children's playground had been fenced off and remade into a staging area for the workers' tools. I couldn't believe anyone was living here like this; it looked utterly uninhabitable. The man led me to one of the many stairwells and found Mr. Aslam's name on the downstairs mailbox. We climbed into the surprisingly functional elevator and rose to his apartment on the fourth floor. When we disembarked the elevator, a closed door read Mr. Aslam's name while another lay wide open. The apartment inside was not so much evicted but abandoned. Drawers pulled out of cabinets lay on the floor alongside empty soda bottles and packs of rolling papers. A few personal goods remained in the home; it had been destroyed, not demolished. We knocked on Mr. Aslam's door; its number and nameplate sat cleanly upon it. I was surprised at how undisturbed it looked compared with the apartment across the hall. No one answered; the man who had brought me here shrugged and merely said: "Sunday."

We came back down into the courtyard. I tried to ask him more questions, but he said he knew nothing else and clearly didn't want to continue in our broken English. I thanked him, wished him a good day again, and went separate ways. I exited the housing block and walked around its perimeter. Two lonesome construction workers happened to be working on the other side of the building. A few floors up, they gathered loose rubble and tossed it into dumpsters below. They watched me curiously as I passed by with my camera.

Flanked by two modern Scandi-designed parks on either side, the veritable rubble that is modern Mjølnerparken is encircled by hot young Danes jogging cheerfully around its perimeter. Families play in the avant-garde playgrounds of Mimersparken and Superkilen only 50 meters from the derelict housing estate. On the south end of the estate, you can find the first wave of restorations almost complete. Modern balconies line the side of the old brick buildings, making each apartment seem as if it were constructed anew to look exactly like its adjoined neighbors. As I look up, I see an old woman in a hijab sitting on a still incomplete

balcony overlooking the Black Market of Superkilen. Her feet are resting on some construction equipment; I assume it is her home that she is waiting to retake from the developers. I guess she is one of the lucky ones who has not been forced to relocate."

The above is an excerpt from my first day of dedicated fieldwork in Nørrebro, Copenhagen, after more than a year of continuous research design re-structuring. This bizarre interaction affirmed a lot of my initial theoretical uncertainties. Quickly, the words of my supervisor came back to me: "You are reading too much; you need to get into the field and let the empirics guide your work." Sure enough, he was right, and after only one day, I could feel the shifting identity of my research as it responded to the existent reality of this unique place. Being forced to employ methods more synonymous with investigative journalism than traditional social sciences reinforced my instinct that this would develop into something more like an investigation.

Hidden beneath the layers of conviviality, inclusivity, and social welfare of Danish statecraft lies a much more complicated relationship with 'the other.' Having historically concealed many of its problematic ideals and actions, a more explicit racist language has recently emerged in Denmark. Colloquially called 'The Ghetto Laws'—which I often describe as 'being just as bad as they sound— are the basis for this claim. Discursively, they make up a justification for social mix, social housing transformation, and a vision of a more integrated Danish society. Practically, they have evicted tens of thousands of Denmark's most vulnerable residents and forced the sale of thousands of non-profit housing units into the private market. How did we get to this point? How do these laws emerge in a society so often championed for its social innovations and inclusive designs? What narratives surround the discourses on integration, welfare, and the right to the city? What spatial manifestations do they take up, and what contradictions emerge in the urban fabric?

I.i Finding the Story

I first encountered the paradoxes of Danish identity during a 2017 bachelor's exchange at the University of Copenhagen. My impressions of Denmark had been shaped by the growing progressive political movement in the United States led by Bernie Sanders, who celebrated Denmark's accomplishments as a highly developed welfare state with quality education, free healthcare, and low social inequality. After the promise of a progressive president was scrapped and Trump was elected, I became one of many young U.S. leftists who began to see Denmark as both a socio-political ideal and a viable residential option. So, off I went.

Once I arrived in Copenhagen, these ideals were complicated. At the university, I took 'The Anthropology of Danish Culture and Society,' jointly taught by a cheerful young Dane who almost blindly loved his country and a bitter middle-aged Englishman whose gloomy demeanor mirrored that of his main research interest: cemeteries. These two rowed often, providing contrasting views on the merits and shortcomings of Danish society, its ideologies, its state, and its ways of seeing the other. They balanced each other well, and my perspective on Danish society was transformed from romance into a thoughtful

appreciation of society, one we could never make back home but worked well enough here.

Six years later, I am forced to develop a master's thesis idea and turn to the European city I know best: Copenhagen. Since living there in 2017, I had visited another four times and had experienced the city as a tourist, a student, a visitor, and a resident. I was quickly drawn to a unique park I remembered from the past: Superkilen. Designed by star Danish architect Bjarke Ingles, Superkilen is a multi-functional park in Nørrebro, which celebrates diversity by bringing in furniture, light fixtures, and artworks from countries around the world. It is eclectic, colorful, unique, and memorable. The park was imagined and advertised as a space that could actively foster social change and create an inclusive and cohesive space in Denmark's most diverse neighborhood. While initially skeptical of these claims, I believed in the decisive role of quality public space as an arena for socio-political change. Even despite witnessing the impacts of gentrification—rising rents, hip new cafes, and more Airbnbs—I was, for some inexplicable reason, convinced that Superkilen was not only an untouchable institution of public good but a vital space of political organization and resistance. Admittedly, it didn't truly occur to me that it could be a serious contributor to the problems of gentrification in Nørrebro. And then I learned about the 'Ghetto Laws.'

Directly next to Superkilen is Mjølnerparken, a 1980s social housing development of four blocks. Mjølnerparken once housed almost 1,000 families and was an essential arrival space for new migrants and refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. That is until it was designated a 'ghetto area' in 2011 due to its poor performance on a series of social indicators imposed by the Danish state. Following this, in 2018, the ghetto list became codified into what is colloquially called the 'Ghetto Laws' (or Parallel Societies Act). Among other changes, this new legislation added the explicit requirement that 'ghetto areas' must not exceed more than 40% 'non-Western' residents by 2030. This transformed ethnicity into the explicit indicator for determining 'ghetto areas' and forced many non-profit housing associations to sell off or demolish large portions of their existing units. Since 2018, roughly half of Mjølnerparken's 560 units have been sold. Their former residents (more than 80% of which are 'non-Western') have been evicted. Those who remain now live through a full-scale 24/7 renovation. All of this led me to question how this racialized displacement could be happening a mere fifty meters away from such a transformative and inclusive urban park.

I.ii Paradox or Contradiction: Developing a Hypothesis

At first, these inharmonious realities feel like a paradox. How can it be possible that we have such an inviting, inclusive park that celebrates diversity and offers a space for active social change directly next to Denmark's most notorious 'tough ghetto?' Why didn't the park's promise of effective social change help solve the social isolation the state claims is a present danger in Mjølnerparken? How can such potent narratives of inclusivity and ghettoization occur at the same time, in the same area, in a society that prides itself on social support, integration, and equality?

These are the questions that guide this thesis, but rather than resolve them in an inductive way, I prefer to propose a hypothesis*:*

These differing notions of ghettoization and inclusivity at the forefront of Nørrebro's urban development are not a paradox at all but a dialectical neoliberal contradiction. They are two sides of the same coin, which seeks to exploit rent gaps and privatize state resources via various legal, financial, and social discourses and practices.

The following is an investigation into this claim that seeks to challenge Danish narratives of inclusivity and cohesion. I begin by providing a deep historical background to the development of Superkilen and Mjølnerparken and the passing of the Ghetto Laws. I employ constructivist epistemology to test my hypothesis via ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Spring 2024 in Nørrebro. I analyze the role of various neoliberal processes at work via Neil Smith's 'rent gap theory' (1979), David Harvey's 'accumulation by dispossession' (2017), and Tom Slater's 'false choice urbanism' (2014). This is complemented by the concept of 'racial banishment' (Roy 2019) and 'critical placemaking' (Toolis, 2017), among other theories and concepts. State-led gentrification, racial stigmatization, and fake participatory processes become emergent themes for consideration in the role of neoliberal urban development and are further examined in the results and discussion.

This research attempts to uncover and challenge the realities of neo-colonial discourses and neoliberal urban regeneration efforts that dominant narratives of Danish conviviality have masked. I show how narratives can be potent political tools manipulated to justify social inequalities and injustices. However, I also demonstrate how counter-narratives and local civic organizations can have a lasting impact in challenging dominant power structures both discursively and actively. In this way, I construct a sense of public space that is possible for us to project our visions of urban society onto as a political act of making place and being present.

Figure 3 *– The Red Square of Superkilen, Source: Author*

II. CASE HISTORY

Figure 4 *- The Black Square of Superkilen, Source: Author*

II.i Copenhagen

Copenhagen, Denmark's capital city, has a population of roughly 600,000 people with a metropolitan population of approximately 2.4 million. It sits on the western side of the island of Sjælland across the Øresund straight from Sweden. With a contemporary population of roughly 5.9 million people, Denmark is a historically agrarian society with a solid social democratic welfare state established at the beginning of the 20th century. Copenhagen, once an industrial and trading hub of the small country, began to transform following World War II, when urban and regional planning shifted away from industrial manufacturing and towards service industries. A new urban master plan called the "Finger Plan" was established in 1948. With the historic center at the palm, five fingers stretched out to the southwest, west, and northwest. The plan "recommended that housing and commerce should be positioned along radial roads and railways while retaining large green

wedge areas towards the center of the city. As part of the attempt to remedy the widespread housing shortage and clear slums, the plan advocated the construction of new housing estates with single-family homes and council housing estates in the suburbs" (Alves, 2022, p. 1181).

Over the next half a century, Copenhagen would effectively transform itself into a modern European capital bursting with cultural institutions, expressive architecture, a substantial non-profit housing sector, and even a safe-to-swim urban harbor. Today, Copenhagen exports a young and vibrant cafe culture and is lauded for its world-class welfare system, urban cycling, modernist design, fine dining, and much more. Among other accolades, it has been named UNESCO World Capital of Architecture (2023), World's Safest City (2021), World's Most Livable City (2021), World's Happiest City (2020), and World's Most Sustainable City (2021) (Visit Denmark). These accolades help Copenhagen paint a powerful narrative of innovation, modernity, and friendliness. Discourses around Copenhagen and Denmark center on these narratives and are constantly reproduced by awards organizations, tourism blogs, and social media influencers, making it both an attractive destination and a powerful urban imaginary.

II.ii Nørrebro

Much like Copenhagen, the neighborhood of Nørrebro carries an international reputation for cultural excellence. Originally a working-class neighborhood up until the 70s and 80s, Nørrebro has been transformed into—and you won't believe this—"the coolest neighborhood in the world" (Visit Denmark, 2021). Jokes aside, Nørrebro is a special case in Denmark. Just northwest of the old city center, Nørrebro is Copenhagen's youngest, densest, and most ethnically diverse neighborhood, with almost 50% of the population under 30 and ~30% of immigrant background (Schmidt, 2012).

Figure 5 *– Satellite view of Copenhagen and Nørrebro, Source: Google Earth, Edit: Author*

Nørrebro has been home to several waves of immigration, beginning with Turkish, Pakistani, and Moroccan migrant laborers in the 1970s and 80s, Middle Eastern refugees fleeing conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan in the 2000s and early 2010s, and a wave of domestic labor migrants from Southeast Asia today (Andersen, 2016). These groups have mainly been concentrated in enclaves in and around Nørrebro by a series of top-down planning decisions.

These sites unfairly have been the stage on which the growing ethnocentric anxieties of dangerous parallel societies have played out over the last thirty years. Originally split into an inner (generally whiter and more affluent) and outer (generally more ethnic minority and lower-income) Nørrebro, modern Nørrebro now encompasses both sections, forcing policy planning, political organizing, and other institutional actors to imagine and legislate the two divergent spaces as one cohesive whole. Furthermore, it has continued to become increasingly more expensive, as housing prices have risen by over 30% since 2012 (Werner and Evensmo, 2022). This has led to competing visions over how the neighborhood should develop and for whom new investments should be made. To address the diversity of needs and resources in the neighborhood, planners and designers must take up alternative approaches to urban development or risk ostracizing—or even worse—banishing certain residents from participating in the urban process. Indeed, this tension is central to this thesis and will be particularly dissected in the dialectical cases of Superkilen and Mjølnerparken.

II.iii Superkilen

ii.iii.i Superkilen Celebrated

Superkilen is a park unlike just about anything else. A linear park squeezed in between the urban fabric of Nørrebro, Superkilen (translated: Super Wedge) consists of three different spaces: the Red Square, the Black Square, and the Green Park. The park was jointly funded by non-profit developers Realdania and the Copenhagen municipality as part of a large urban regeneration project that also included the renovation of the Nørrebrohallen sports center and the construction of another park nearby called Mimersparken. The project selected by a committee of residents, architects, and planners was designed by renowned Danish architecture firm BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group) with accompanying inputs from Berlin-based landscape architecture film Totopek, as well as Danish arts group SUPERFLEX (“Superkilen” 2012b. BIG).

Figure 6 *– Superkilen Park, Source: Author*

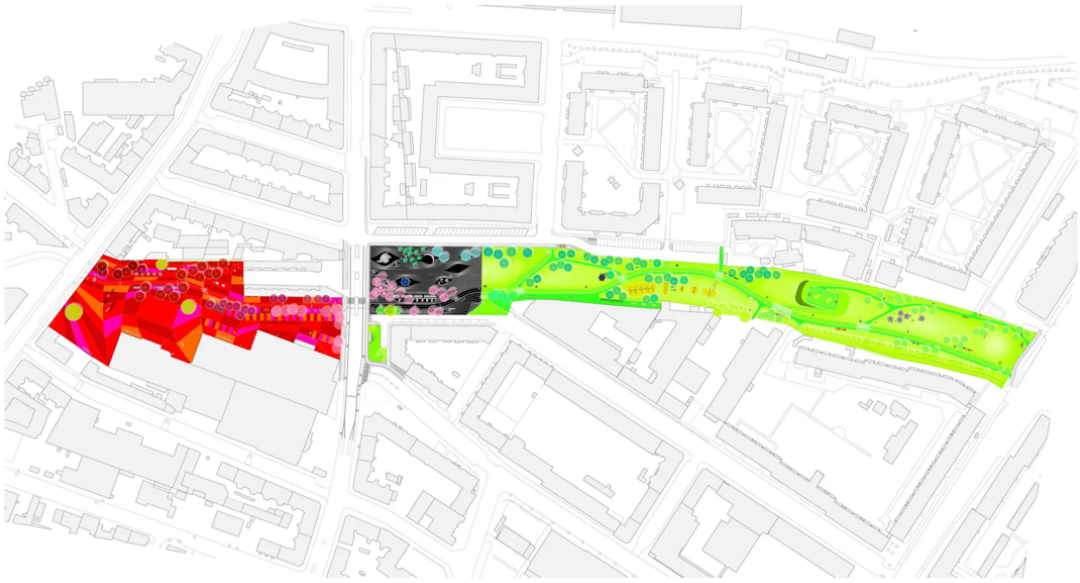

Figure 7 *– Superkilen in three parts, Source: (Steiner, 2013).*

Built on the former site of the old tram depot, Superkilen's unique design includes over 100 objects—furniture, lamps, garbage cans, swings, and art pieces—from over 60 countries around the world, highlighting the diverse communities that inhabit the surrounding area of outer Nørrebro. "Labelled 'citizen participation extreme,' participants were asked to recommend objects from the countries they had migrated from to be installed in the park" (Turan, 2021, p. 64). According to BIG, these objects represented a "surrealist collection of global urban diversity that in fact reflects the true nature of the local neighborhood" (Bloom, 2013).

Quickly, narratives were produced about the nature of the park's design as emblematic of a sort of Danish geniality and a powerful celebration of diversity. It was also praised for its 'bottom-up' participatory planning process that included the voices and wishes of the local residents. Superkilen was heavily advertised by a team of PR agents hired by BIG to construct these narratives—that the space itself was responsible for fostering "a sense of belonging and ownership among disenfranchised neighborhood dwellers from more than '50 different nationalities'" and that it actively helped to integrate socially isolated communities into the neighborhood at large (Turan, 2021, p. 64). This narrative was further pushed by developers Realdania, who claimed: "Superkilen is a great example of how some public spaces in Nørrebro can enhance the quality of life because it acts as a social engine for togetherness and integration across different groups in the neighborhood" (Werner and Evensmo, 2022, p. 282).

The aggressive marketing campaign worked, and soon Superkilen was winning architecture awards from around the world, celebrating its ability to create social cohesion and represent the diverse urban communities of Nørrebro (Werner and Evensmo, 2022). Along with the park's 'expression of a heterogenous society,' the park's colorful design and unique furniture pieces made it a prominent landmark and point of identification for the city to market itself to the world, even pasting it on the cover of its welcome brochure placed in the metro cars, airport lounges, and tourism offices. This celebration of Superkilen by these awards agencies, design conferences, and architecture blogs helped to globally reproduce

the dominant narrative of the space as an expression of a social and political order that painted Denmark as open, democratic, and convivial.

ii.iii.ii Superkilen Critiqued

As powerful as those narratives may be, Superkilen has not evaded the loud critics. Residents and researchers alike have questioned the authenticity of the participatory process it conducted as well as the reality of its promised social inclusivity. Further, many residents questioned who the "social change" it promised was strictly for and to what extent the residents who advocated for a greener park instead of the BIG design were genuinely included in the decision-making process.

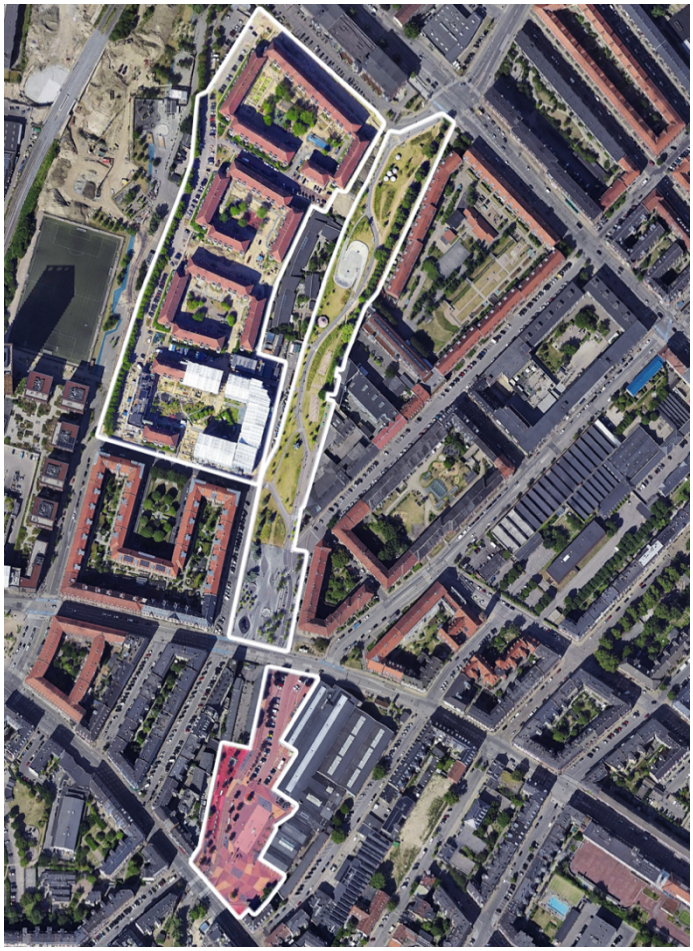

Figure 8 *– Close Overview of Superkilen & Mjølnerparken, Source: Google Earth, Edit: Author*

While there is little public transparency about this participatory process, the residents who have come forward have reported feeling shut out by Realdania and BIG. Realdania, who provided half of the total funding for the park, is a huge non-profit organization that invests in public works all around Copenhagen and Denmark. "Rooted in the welfare city as an association fueled by money from one of the large lenders and member-based mortgage-credit institutions, Realdania took over as the major financial player in the development of Denmark's physical environment. The foundation has had a significant influence on the urban public space policies and development of a fairly coherent 'Danish model,' using a strategic approach in which urban public space has a role in supporting an 'ideal image of society'" (Skovgaard Nielsen, 2019, p. 45). Since its establishment in 2000, there has been a significant decrease in state-financed urban renewal projects, with Realdania picking up the majority of the slack. If a public building in Copenhagen has scaffolding wrapped around it, you can be sure to see the Realdania logo in the bottom corner. They are ubiquitous, as is their influence. In fact, the Danish architecture magazine, Arkitektur "conducted a survey, and over 50% of 600 architects [surveyed] said that they felt Realdania had too much influence" (Bloom, 2013, p. 13).

BIG, as well as the city of Copenhagen, have been accused of using the space to promote "place marketing" rather than a sense of "placemaking" by advertising it as a successful social experiment for social integration (Akšamija, 2020, p. 94). Critics further point to the fact that the artifacts and objects of the park make it feel more like a museum than a public space and that a better design would have done more thorough ethnographic research before designing such a space. "The design concept for Superkilen should have

focused more closely on the everyday spatial practices of the multi-ethnic community of Nørrebro" […] "To build social cohesion, Superkilen needed to do more than simply support ethnocultural differences through representation" (Daly, 2020, p. 80). This is further problematized by the objects' true sourcing as well. While the designers asserted that the local community helped select and source the diverse set of artifacts from their home countries, a deeper investigation into this actual process reveals that "only five out of 108 displayed objects were selected by residents" (Stanfield and Van Riemsdijk, 2019, p. 1367). Thus, the project's official narrative of inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and democracy downplayed and depoliticized the ongoing issues surrounding anti-immigration, xenophobic, and neoliberal socio-spatial politics in Nørrebro. The objects present a romantic view of open and integrated Copenhagen without truly including their voices.

Figure 9 *– View of Superkilen, Mjølnerparken, and Mimersparken, Source: Google Earth*

This is deeply contrasted with Mimersparken, the other park in Realdania's 2012 development package. Mimersparken had a much more transparent and direct participatory process that incorporated requests from residents, resulting in a much more functional rather than conceptual design. As per the request of Mjølnerparken families, the park has a football pitch and a large playground. However, this participation unfortunately came as a double-edged sword. By participating in the park's design, rather than letting Bjarke Ingels do whatever he wanted, Mimersparken, unlike Superkilen, absorbed much of the stigma of its surrounding area. For better or worse, Superkilen became the symbol of Danish integration, while Mimersparken of a parallel society. "Superkilen has won one prize after another from architectural and design foundations, reinforcing the designers' discourse of integration, social diversity, and democracy. Meanwhile, another public space design—Mimersparken, at another edge of the neighborhood, whose planning and design process the neighborhood dwellers meaningfully participated in, and one that is used as much as Superkilen—has attracted no recognition" (2021, p. 69). While Mimersparken is not a key public space for consideration in this thesis, I believe it is important to mention how two parks developed simultaneously as a part of the same plan in the same neighborhood can have such distinct approaches, impacts, and legacies.

II.iv Mjølnerparken & The Ghetto Laws

Sandwiched between these two parks lies Mjølnerparken, a social housing complex consisting of four blocks built in 1984 on the site of an old paper mill. Mjølnerparken is a concentrated enclave of ethnic minorities in Nørrebro, with a substantially higher percentage of residents with migrant backgrounds, at 83% compared to greater Nørrebro's ~30% (Schmidt, 2012, p. 605). Its 560 units house roughly 1,700 residents from more than 80 nationalities (Lundsteen, 2023).

Figure 10 *– Overview of Nørrebro with Superkilen highlighted in red and green; Mjølnerparken highlighted in blue, Source: Google Earth, Edit: Author*

Despite being centrally located in an "up-and-coming" neighborhood, Mjølnerparken and its residents have been socially isolated from the rest of Nørrebro. This has led far-right politicians to present it and its surrounding area as a sort of fortress facilitating the formation of a parallel society, unintegrated into the rest of Danish society (Stanfield and Van Riemsdijk, 2019).

However, this concentration was neither formed accidentally nor by the migrants themselves. Many of them have been intentionally placed there by the Danish state: "Both UNHCR refugees and asylum seekers are told that they have been granted refuge simultaneously with the announcement of their municipal assignment [with] essentially no opportunity for an appeal" (Fair, 2008, p. 230). This means that refugees can be placed in housing estates already stigmatized as 'ghettos,' thus extending that stigma onto them before they even arrive. This is part of the state-led process that has led to the concentration of Muslim migrants in Mjølnerparken. Already consisting of a significant population of Middle Eastern migrants, Copenhagen persistently housed new refugees from the 2015 Syrian and Iraqi refugee crisis in Mjølnerparken, pushing the total number of non-Western residents to 83%. This has led to the estate being labeled an official "ghetto" by

the state since 2011 and as a “hard ghetto area” since 2018 (Turan, 2021). So, what exactly does this mean, and how did we get to this point? In this section, I will give a historical review of the discourses that led to the stigmatization and subsequent formalization of ghetto areas in Denmark and what it could mean for the future of the neighborhood and its diverse inhabitants.

ii.iv.i Denmark’s Non-Profit Housing Confronts Migrant Diversity

In Denmark, social housing is organized slightly differently than in many other European countries. Instead of being purely socialized or publicly owned, these houses are owned by state-subsidized non-profit housing organizations. These houses account for roughly 20% of all Danish housing (with 33% living in private cooperatives, 19% private rentals, and 18% owner-occupied private properties) (Alves, 2022, p. 1182). Different from many other European countries, in Denmark, socialized housing is not just for low-income residents. Instead of the term ‘social housing,’ they call it ‘non-profit housing’ or, more commonly, ‘general housing’ (*almen bolig*). This terminology is important because it “points to the fact that social housing in Denmark is, at least in theory, meant to be housing for the general population. Anyone can subscribe to the waiting list. From its onset, the Danish social housing sector was thus not a social housing sector. Rather, it was meant to be the sector where the great majority of Danes would live” (Skovgaard Nielsen and Haagerup, 2017, p. 2). Mjølnerparken is a part of one of these non-profit organizations named Bo-Vita, which owns and operates dozens of similar estates around the island of Sjælland. These estates each have a resident democracy group that governs and decides on interventions to provide maintenance, renovate flats, and more. This structure, which places the non-profit housing sector between the state and private market, helps to shield it from neoliberal attacks that want to divest public resources and has helped Denmark maintain a significantly high proportion of low-rent, high-quality housing (Risager, 2022).

The Danish welfare model epitomizes the role of a strong state's capacity to provide the social and material needs of its population and has long been advertised as a bastion of socioeconomic equality and cohesion. However, the small, primarily white country has faced growing pressure from rising cultural diversity due to increased immigration, which some on the political right have claimed is a threat to the entire Danish welfare system. From 1980 to 2017, Denmark saw a rise in the immigrant population from 3% to almost 13%, while Copenhagen had a population of roughly 24% migrant background (Skovgaard Nielsen, 2019). Concerns about minority enclaves, safety, crime, and parallel societies emerged in the political discourse, inciting political and cultural pushback from a wide range of Danish politicians. “Policymakers across the political spectrum have increasingly painted immigrants not as equal members of the system but as a “pressure” on the welfare state and a threat to social cohesion” (Stanfield and Van Riemsdijk, 2019, p. 1360).

With ethnic minorities generally concentrated in non-profit housing estates, this racialized stigma had its most profound impact on the country’s housing policies. Increasingly, attention was focused on ‘disadvantaged’ social groups and ‘malfunctioning’ geographic areas. Synonymizing cultural assimilation with labor market integration, Denmark passed its first major integration law in 1998, cutting welfare payments to migrants (Madsen et al., 2023). Then, in 2000, Denmark instituted “flexible letting (*fleksibel udlejning*),” a policy that allowed municipal governments “to allow people with jobs or

students to skip the waiting list for a dwelling in vulnerable housing estates" […] This has allowed municipalities to refuse to let a dwelling in a deprived housing estate to a person on social benefits" (Skovgaard Nielsen and Haagerup, 2017, p. 4).

These policies were further intensified in 2010 when then right-wing Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen introduced the "ghetto plan" in a speech to parliament. "In the speech, he talked about 'holes in the Danish map,' which were, according to him, 'places where Danish values clearly are no longer dominant.' He primarily defined the 'ghetto' policy problem as a problem of lack of 'Danish values': 'the freedom to be different. Responsibility for the common. Respect for the laws of society. Freedom of speech. Equal opportunities for men and women" (Lundsteen, 2023, p. 265). In practice, the initial Ghetto Plan made a yearly list of vulnerable non-profit housing areas that scored poorly on key integration variables like Danish language proficiency, education, and unemployment. The policy was aimed at multi-ethnic concentrations, as their 'enclaves' became increasingly synonymous with failed integration policies central to ethnocentric interpretations of modern Danish society. Welfare cuts, rent hikes, and increased policing are just a few of the changes introduced to manage these 'holes in the map,' further othering the residents and creating difficult situations that forced migrants to bend to the hand of assimilation or get out. And then, in 2018, the Ghetto Laws proper came to be…

ii.iv.ii The Ghetto Laws - 2018

Once again, in a major national speech, Rasmussen warned the nation of the dangers of concentrated enclaves of minorities, describing them as 'cracks on the map of Denmark' "that had the power to 'reach out their tentacles onto the streets' by spreading violence" (Lundsteen, 2023, p. 261). It was a racially charged rhetorical preface to the announcement of what was later presented by the Danish Government as the package *Towards a Denmark without Parallel Societies: No Ghettoes by 2030* (colloquially known as the "Ghetto Laws" or the "Ghetto Package," and now officially renamed "The Parallel Societies Agreement"). The package's presentation took place in what Rasmussen considered the most notorious of all Danish ghettos, Mjølnerparken, having bullied Bo-Vita into letting them use the newly constructed community space for the press conference.

In addition to formalizing the zones and setting a target date for their removal, the Ghetto Laws also tightened the criteria for determining ghetto areas. The crime and education indicators were changed, and three new sub-labels were initiated. 'Vulnerable Areas' were areas susceptible to becoming future 'Ghetto Areas,' which had at least 20% unemployment, 50% non-Western population, low-income levels, and some criminal activity. A third type, 'Hard Ghetto Areas' (HGAs), were estates listed as a 'Ghetto Area' for four years or more (Turan, 2021, p. 62).

However, the most controversial amendment made to the existing set of anti-ghetto laws was the explicit inclusion of ethnicity as a driving indicator for defining failed areas. Areas labeled a 'Ghetto Area' or 'Hard Ghetto Area' would now be required to house no more than 40% non-Western residents by 2030, forcing non-profit housing estates to sell, demolish, or densify their blocks. Notably, this Western/non-Western distinction is defined in the Danish census as: "people born in, or descendants of parents holding a citizenship in, an EU country, as well as Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Norway, San Marino, Switzerland, Vatican, Canada, USA, Australia, and New Zealand," while, "people born in, or

descendants of parents holding a citizenship from countries outside of these are defined as non-Western" (Werner and Evensmo, 2022, p. 284). This means that a person who arrived in Denmark as a child, was raised in Danish schools, speaks Danish fluently, went to a Danish university, and works in a Danish company could still considered to be 'non-Western' if their parents are not from one of the above nations. Further, the explicit racialization of the law came with harsher prison sentences and evictions for those caught committing crimes or carrying weapons in the ghetto areas, as well as imprisonment for parents who sent their children to home countries for long enough to 'reverse enculturation' (Turan, 2021).

The Ghetto Package takes the complex task of social integration and thrusts it on non-profit housing associations demanding 'socially mixed areas' that challenge the perceived threat of parallel societies. Both sides of the political spectrum used racialized discourses to problematize these anxieties, forcing the displacement of thousands of vulnerable residents in non-profit housing units. "The law compels housing associations to reduce the proportion of family [housing]—by far the most common type of [non-profit housing] to a maximum of 40% of total housing stock in HGAs. These reductions may be implemented through privatization, demolition, new-build, and, to a lesser degree, conversion" (Risager, 2022, p. 203). The resultant fallout has entailed thousands of evictions as new urban developments are slated to transform formerly ethnic districts of the city. Such a policy does not even beg the question but answers it directly: 'For whom and against whom is the Ghetto package truly working?'

ii.iv.iii Mjølnerparken

Why, then, did Rasmussen consider Mjølnerparken the prime example of a Danish ghetto? In many ways, Mjølnerparken is the center of the center of racist discourses on the dangers of migrant clusters in Danish politics. Tied to histories of working-class whiteness, gentrification, and a new globalized cultural export, Nørrebro is quite possibly the most valuable tract of land in all of Denmark. Its legacy as a hearth of Danish identity is often nostalgically invoked by far-right politicians, as in the following 2003 essay by Danish People's Party's Pia Kjærsgaard:

> *"To those of us who grew up in Copenhagen in the 50s and 60s, Nørrebro stands in a special light. It was probably not the most up-market part of the capital. People were, by nature, accustomed to a little bit of everything if they were from Nørrebro.*
> *Because on the northern side of Queen Louise's Bridge we could find everything: solid and decent working-class people with high self-esteem were the most common, but also odd characters, petty thieves and thugs, artists and young, believing, conservative Christians who had just arrived on the four o'clock train, and people who - with and without inhibitions - drank too much. Loose girls and nice girls.*
> *One could find all this in a thrilling mix of Copenhagen. In Nørrebro, one was not easily shocked - one had seen it all before. There was no room for snobs. But there was…lots of tolerance.*
> *Today, Nørrebro is totally changed - The tolerance has gone.*

And one of the main reasons for this is that Nørrebro has become a Muslim enclave. And where Islam goes in, tolerance goes out." (Schmidt, 2012, p. 615).

Mjølnerparken, not built until the 1980s, is not dressed with the same odd nostalgia but is seen as an intruder into this romantic imaginary of Nørrebro as a space of multifarious Danishness. With a high percentage of non-Western residents (83%) and its positioning in Copenhagen's 'coolest neighborhood in the world,' it acts as a prime target for the kinds of socio-spatial changes the ghetto laws sought to bring.

Figure 11 *– Superkilen's skate bowl with Mjølnerparken in the background, Source: Author*

Narrativized as a fortress resistant to change or integration, it is important to note that before the 2018 law, Mjølnerparken was itself making significant changes to the four blocks to improve the material and social conditions of the residents and lift it from the original 2010 demarcation as a 'ghetto.' The residents' association passed a general redevelopment plan in 2015, which included renovations of current homes, construction of a new neighborhood center, conversion of some ground floor housing into daycare and business units, new green infrastructure, and more. The plan included an express intention of opening the housing blocks to the surrounding areas, creating more flow throughout, and integrating it into the encompassing neighborhood (Lundsteen, 2023). However, with the area being codified as a 'Hard Ghetto Area' in 2018, this plan was forcibly amended to include the sale of 276 of the 560 apartments into the private market, displacing almost a thousand residents.

Today, the evictions have been carried out, and the four buildings have either been rebuilt or are under complete renovation. Scaffolding stretches across each facade, playground spaces are converted into building material stockpiles, and few original residents remain. The damage has already been done; the other has been displaced. Where could the narratives of convivial integration possibly go from here?

II.v Contradicting Conclusions

It is difficult to reconcile these simultaneous and confused manifestations. How do we explain a landmark park designed to celebrate and foster integration with its spatial proximity to a ghetto condemned to hundreds of forced evictions? Again, we turn to my hypothesis that these two concurrent realities are not so much a paradox as a contradiction requisite in the processes of neoliberal capitalism.

The beautification of Nørrebro through urban interventions like Superkilen reflects a growing neoliberal trend defined by David Harvey in “The Art of Rent” (2002). Superkilen can be seen here as merely a superficial and symbolic gesture of social inclusivity rather than a true democratization of political power. Simultaneously, the Ghetto package and its incontestable use of racialized language to problematize lower-class, non-Western residents reflects what post-colonial scholar Ananya Roy conceptualizes as “Racial Banishment” (2019). The Ghetto Laws mark a severe transformation of racialized discursive tensions into material manifestations in the urban fabric, namely the displacement of the very people Superkilen claims to celebrate. This highlights the central discursive paradox in Denmark’s idea of multiculturalism: “Sensationalized visions of immigration are celebrated, but residents of immigrant backgrounds are still stigmatized” (Stanfield and Van Riemsdijk, 2019, p. 1357).

Starting here, what do we find next? Can we consider the Ghetto Laws a form of state-led gentrification? Is Superkilen anything more than a symbolic sham— or is it just ‘lipstick on a pig’? How can we reconcile the contradictions inherent in this capitalist dialectic?

Figure 12 *– Superkilen’s Green Park and Mjølnerparken, Source: Author*

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Image 1 *– The Green Park of Superkilen, Source: Alexander Krause*

The first section of this review is *The Neoliberal Script*, in which I highlight the major mechanisms of neoliberalization in urban development and "regeneration" processes. This set of theoretical and practical processes begins with Neil Smith's 'Rent gap theory' (1979) and David Harvey's "Art of the Rent" (2014), in which cities use supply-side economics and city beautification to exploit market gaps and create monopoly rents, artificially raising ground rent prices. Next, I illustrate how social housing is transformed into market assets for capitalist accumulation through state dispossession (Harvey, 2017) and racialized evictions (Roy, 2019). This is especially important to understand when analyzing a society with a strong welfare state and largely homogenous demographics, such as Denmark. Here I will connect the retrenchment of the welfare state and the liquidation of its assets to the banishment of racialized residents under xenophobic neoliberalism. Then, I critically reflect on the role of citizen participation as an urban planning practice. Literature provided by Silver et al. (2010) and Van Criekingen and Kębłowski (2014) highlights how participation rarely provides an actual forum for equitable democratic involvement but rather suppresses opposition voices, forces consensus, and silences vulnerable voices. Finally, *The Neoliberal Script* concludes that neoliberalism is nothing but a false promise of socio-economic prosperity that feeds off of vulnerable people and exploitable spaces to foster deeper socio-spatial inequalities. It creates simultaneous spaces of decay and renewal, proving that neoliberal urban development must constantly find new centers of exploitation and development, rendering it not only discriminatory and nefarious but totally unsustainable.

I then move on to components that offer a more optimistic view of the realities at play. In *The Promise of Public Space*, I develop a set of theories that stem from Lefebvre's

concept of “The Right to the City” (1968). First, I outline the process of transduction, a pragmatically optimistic view on how to seek out emergent and radical processes in capitalist society. I then develop the right to the city as a means-oriented process of becoming democratic that we can never stop engaging in rather than an end-driven state of being. Finally, this section translates these principles of agonistic democratic practice into public space by exploring literature on critical placemaking to challenge hegemonic narratives of urban society.

III.i The Neoliberal Script

iii.i.i Gentrification Studies: Rent Gap & Regeneration

The neoliberalization of the urban fabric is a deeply studied, well-documented, and formally theorized phenomenon. Scholars have been analyzing the financial, governmental, spatial, and social mechanisms that drive it since the 1960s and have, in their path, founded many new subfields within urban studies. Gentrification Studies has captured scholars' attention, inspiring them to develop new theories and principles around processes like rentierization and rent monopolies, which are utilized to develop urban areas unevenly.

Neil Smith was one of the pioneers in this regard when he attempted to understand what the new narratives around an “urban renaissance” and the “return to the city” actually depicted. Critical of urban regeneration projects in Britain, Smith set out to understand why specific urban areas saw massive investments that displaced residents were being celebrated as a part of a new urban cultural renaissance. Through his development of the Rent Gap Theory, he concluded: “The so-called urban renaissance has been stimulated more by economic than cultural forces…Whether gentrification is a fundamental restructuring of urban space depends not on where new inhabitants come from but on how much productive capital returns to the area from the suburbs” (Smith, 1979, p. 538-540).

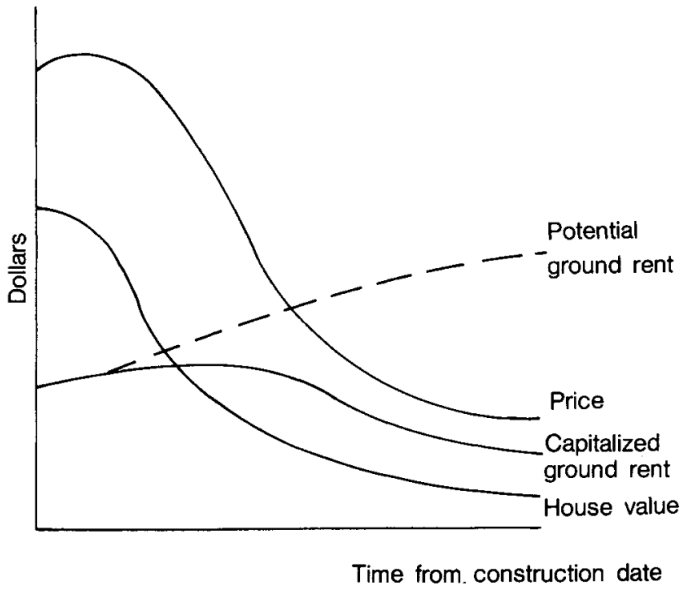

Figure 13 *- Graph representing the Rent Gap Theory (Smith, 1979, p. 544)*

The Rent Gap represents the relationship between several economic factors: the price an urban plot is materially worth (ground rent), the amount of rent appropriated by the landowner given its current use (capitalized ground rent), and the amount of rent that “could

be capitalized under the land's "highest and best use" (potential ground rent) (Smith, 1979, p. 543). Neoliberal developers search for sites with low material value but high potential to transform into multi-functional places that can be rented at a significant surplus value. They do this through various mechanisms, such as exploiting a space's symbolic or cultural value or creating supply-side housing bottlenecks.

These spaces with low land but high potential value form through a process called "filtering," which is a capital depreciation of an urban area through disinvestment, demographic decline, or other socio-spatial practices. This process continues to expand the rent gap as land depreciates over time. It is only then that developers are willing to buy the land and redevelop it. Smith explains: "Gentrification occurs when the gap is wide enough that developers can purchase shells cheaply, can pay the builders' costs and profit for rehabilitation, can pay interest on mortgage and construction loans, and can then sell the end product for a sale price that leaves a satisfactory return to the developer. The entire ground rent, or a large portion of it, is now capitalized; the neighborhood has been "recycled" and begins a new cycle of use" (Smith, 1979, p. 545).

Urban regeneration, gentrification, and displacement should not be interpreted as accidental or chance manifestations but expected entirely from the neoliberal city. For Smith, "gentrification is a structural product of the land and housing markets. Capital flows where the rate of return is highest, and the movement of capital to the suburbs, along with the continual depreciation of inner-city capital, eventually produces the rent gap." This is perfectly expressed in European cities in which "the depreciation of capital in nineteenth-century inner-city neighborhoods, together with continued urban growth during the first half of the twentieth century, have combined to produce conditions in which profitable reinvestment is possible" (Smith, 1979, p. 546). This process can happen in any city; even those with a large social housing stock and rental regulations (i.e., Copenhagen or Vienna) still face capitalist urban development that exploits the rent gap to create surplus rent for developers.

So, how do developers find and exploit the rent gap in Copenhagen? To answer this, we can look at the 'coolest neighborhood in Europe: Nørrebro. What has driven gentrification there comes down to several simultaneous processes, which David Harvey has described as "The Art of Rent" (2002). For Harvey, gentrification processes are oriented around the creation of monopoly rents, which "arises because social actors can realize an enhanced income stream over an extended time by virtue of their exclusive control over some directly or indirectly tradable item which is in some crucial respects unique and non-replicable" (2002, p. 94). This means that social actors attempt to create situations in which they can control not only the means of urban spatial production but also the production of unique urban cultures. "Urban governance of this sort is mostly oriented to constructing patterns of local investments not only in physical infrastructures such as transport and communications, port facilities, sewage, and water, but also in the social infrastructures of education, technology and science, social control, culture, and living quality." (Harvey, 2002, p. 103).

This commodification of culture allows cities to market themselves to investors, developers, and tourists. The city becomes a brand replete with cultural artifacts and exclusive environmental features. "Capitalists are well aware of this and must therefore wade into the culture wars, as well as into the thickets of multiculturalism, fashion, and

aesthetics because it is precisely through such means that monopoly rents stand to be gained" (Harvey, 2002, p. 107). The Art of Rent and the commodification of cultural identity are essential concepts in the analysis of Superkilen as an urban investment in Nørrebro. Funded by the city and a private developer, Superkilen is a prime example of how the commodification of culture, city marketing, and place attractiveness can be used to push gentrification within a welfare society.

In addition, gentrification studies have also theorized "green gentrification:" the process by which areas gentrify due to urban greening initiatives. These also occur unevenly across a city and can be an extremely cost-effective way for social actors to increase the potential ground rent of a site. Research by Isabelle Anguelovski and James Connolly has found that "[real estate] developers are able to contract better loans for new constructions or put their projects to fruition if they are able to market the property itself as green or benefit from it being located in the vicinity of a newly greened neighborhood…They are also able to sell or rent such new units for higher prices, thus directing those new units to higher income, often gentrifying residents" (2024, p. 4). Urban greening can be used to increase the aesthetic character of an area, subsequently driving up rent prices and displacing residents.

This is what Anguelovski and Connolly call "urban green grabbing," demonstrating the speculative aspects of urban greening initiatives in the neoliberal market (2024, p. 4). This process is often challenging to contest, as urban greening initiatives often garner bi-partisan support from politicians and citizens alike. Calls for new urban greening are exacerbated by climate change anxieties, leading to a 'greening 2.0.' This new form of greening is "deployed, marketed, and branded for its multi-functionality, universal benefits, and positive trickle-down effects on urban real estate markets," as well as surrounding citizens. (Anguelovski and Connolly, 2024, p. 3).

Figure 14 *– The hill in the Black Square, Source: Author*

But this is rarely the case, as the uneven distribution of urban greening projects creates urban renewal projects that continue to widen the rent gap. This leads to the displacement of incumbent populations who must leave their now-greened neighborhood for areas with likely lower access to natural resources. Anguelovski and Connolly call these "urban green sacrifice zones" (2024). In these zones, displacement is the only part of the urban greening process that many vulnerable residents actually experience.

Ananya Roy argues this is a requisite part of urban regeneration processes of all kinds. These projects fail to improve the

lives of residents despite claiming to make the city more “livable” or “inclusive.” She argues: “The limitations of urban upgrading are the limitations of the ideology of space. In such policy approaches, what is redeveloped is space, the built environment, and physical amenities rather than people’s capacities or livelihoods;” this “equates upgrading with aesthetic upgrading rather than the upgrading of livelihoods, wages, and political capacities” (Roy, 2005, p. 4). By forcing urban development that greenwashes and commodifies cultural identity while failing to provide protection or improvements to the material and political conditions of residents, private and state developers continue to advance the harmful effects of gentrification.

iii.i.ii Social Housing to Social Controlling: Accumulation by Banishment

Neoliberalism and the retrenchment of the welfare state are concurrent phenomena that continue to impose serious political and economic inequalities on the urban environment. The privatization of public services and resources is a major crisis facing traditional welfare states today. While some manage a slowly shrinking system, others face far-right threats of a wholesale dissolution. Denmark is an exemplary case of the former.

This retrenchment affects an array of social programs and resources, including, most notably, social housing. The transformation of social housing into market assets follows a simultaneously complex yet simple formula. For David Harvey, this can be explained via “Accumulation by Dispossession:” a neoliberal fix that absorbs capital overaccumulation through the financialization of housing, privatization of public services, and the redevelopment of properties with a sizable rent gap (2007).

Accumulation by dispossession provides a critical framework for understanding neoliberal urbanism because it simultaneously refers to the inequality inherent in capitalist urban expansion and emphasizes the reality of concurrent winners and losers of urban development. The assetization of social housing cannot occur without the requisite eviction of incumbent residents, most of whom in Denmark are low-income with a migrant background. To justify this forced displacement and ‘regeneration,’ the privatization of social housing has mobilized classist and racist narratives that social housing blocks concentrate too much poverty, create parallel societies, and fail to provide social mobility to their residents. Researcher Edward Goetz explains: “In all of these places, the state has determined that older forms of social housing are now obsolete, that they unduly concentrate lower-income households, and that they suffer from architectural and urban design flaws that undermine the proper functioning of community. In each of these places, social housing estates are being replaced by new developments that incorporate income- or social-mixing and new urbanist design in order to avoid, according to advocates, the mistakes of the past” (2016, p. 1).

The Danish state has employed all of these narratives in the justification of the Ghetto Laws and subsequent evictions at Mjølnerparken. Further, in this context, the use of ghettoization as a narrative to blame residents for their lack of prosperity has become explicitly racialized via the 2018 Ghetto Laws. Breaking from Neil Smith’s (1979) assessment that gentrification is a structural product of housing markets, we see how the intersection of race and class contributes to our theory of dispossession and eviction. Ananya Roy argues that understanding evictions through this intersection can help us understand how the state operates and what it prioritizes. “Evictions thus provide a window

onto the urban land question, specifically who owns land and on what terms, who profits from land and on what terms, and how the ownership, use, and financialization of land is governed and regulated by the state." (Roy, 2017, p. 2). Thus, in the context of the Ghetto Laws, in which evictions have been explicitly laid out along ethnic lines, "it is not sufficient to understand evictions as the unfortunate workings of real-estate markets; instead, they have to be understood as an instantiation of what Wyly et al. (2012) term the ''racial state"" (Roy, 2017, p. 8).

Here we are considering not just the financialization but also the racialization of housing transformation. Racial banishment is a critical way of conceiving this, as it emphasizes not just a dislocation from a particular space but a wholesale sociopolitical exclusion by the state. Roy's conceptualization details it below:

> *"Banishment shifts our attention from displacement to dispossession, especially the dispossession of personhood which underpins racial capitalism" […] "Banishment is not the movement of racialized bodies from one place to another or what we might call displacement. It is expulsion from everywhere" […] "The forceful and justifiable removal of individuals and populations from "commonly held spaces and resources" is a "contemporary liberal form of sovereign dispossession" and rests on the designation, in advance, of those who are risk failures" (2019, p. 228-229).*

Urban space becomes directly racialized by this practice and forces minorities not just toward the peripheries of a city but also of society. With assimilation into dominant society often the only alternative, we can see how racial banishment acts as an agent of social control while being simultaneously narrativized as socio-spatial ordering and maintenance of mainstream ideals of civility.

The neoliberalization of the housing market cannot be understood without this intersectional acknowledgment of racial and ethnic discrimination. In Denmark, growing diversity from immigration has put pressure on the status quo of ethnocentric social democracy. This provides the fuel for many of the political battles in Denmark. Can the state sufficiently incorporate this diversity into its welfare model, or will it break the system? The Ghetto Laws are one explicit answer to that question: 'The Government wants a cohesive Denmark. A Denmark which is built upon democratic values of freedom and legal rights. Equality and liberty of mind. Tolerance and equal rights. [. . .] A parallel society has been created among people with non-western backgrounds. Too many immigrants and descendants are not tied to the surrounding society" (Lundsteen, 2023, p. 276). This language paints the immigrants in opposition to what the Danish state considers to be Danish values of tolerance, freedom, and equality in order to justify the forced dispossession of personhood and banish them from the social order. Their only other option is Danish assimilation.

Roy ties the processes of racial banishment and forced assimilation directly to the right to housing in the concept of 'dis/possessive collectivism:' "As a political potentiality, dis/possessive collectivism challenges the 'proprietary prerogative' at stake in the idea and ideology of home and land. It is thus a politics of our time as well as a politics waged against the secure categories of personhood and property through which

Figure 15 *– Mjølnerparken construction, Source: Author*

liberalism is constituted" (Roy, 2017, p. 10). The right to property, to home, to personhood can be denied because of migration status, class, and ethnicity in an attempt to deploy chauvinistic social control over a vulnerable population that some Danes see as a threat to their nationhood. The privatization of social housing is never limited to mere financialization but is "accompanied by more aggressively paternalistic and disciplinary techniques whose objectives aim at behavioral manipulation, social control, and reduction in state responsibilities" (Goetz, 2016, p. 1). This punitive aspect is an explicit part of the 2018 Ghetto Laws, which includes various forms of disciplinary social controls explored further in the results and discussion.

Figure 16 *– Construction Equipment at Mjølnerparken, Source: Author*

All of these processes demonstrate that the state is not a victim of neoliberalization but a facilitator or even driver of these processes. "The state, with its monopoly of violence and definitions of legality, plays a crucial role in both backing and promoting these processes…As in the past, the power of the state is frequently used to force such processes through, even against the popular will…The reversion to the private domain of common property rights won through past class struggles (the right to a state pension, to welfare, or to national health care) has been one of the most egregious of all policies of dispossession pursued in the name of neo-liberal orthodoxy" (Harvey, 2017, p. 74-75).

These processes also highlight how ethnicity becomes an integral part of the justification of gentrification and social banishment. The transformation of social housing is a complex system by which state and private actors operate against the best interest of vulnerable populations to impose social control, influence behaviors, increase cultural assimilation, and extract excess capital. Its impacts are felt across an intersectionality of class, ethnicity, migration status, and more factors. For Denmark's Ghetto Laws and Mjølnerparken, these racialized systems of neoliberalization and social control are especially relevant as the state attempts to eradicate a perceived 'parallel society' and turn their non-profit housing into market assets.

iii.i.iii The Right to Citizen Participation

These processes are further justified by maintaining an image of civic participation in the planning and development of urban renewal projects. Via this participatory element,

governments claim to offer local democracy and shared responsibility in how things are decided, designed, and ultimately built, but how often is this promise genuinely delivered?

Through an in-depth study on citizen participation programs offered in cities around the world, Hillary Silver et al. argue that civic participation is often used to "offload public responsibilities, cut expenditure and legitimate the hegemonic status quo" (2010, p. 461). By providing a forum for 'ordinary' citizens, stakeholders can create a narrative of social responsibility while simultaneously diffusing protest and redirecting contestation towards citizen organizations. Because of this, most citizen participants are often highly skeptical of these processes, generating conditions in which honest attempts at creating democratic debate are not only nullified but never even initiated. Further, Goetz notes that in his experience with social housing transformations, the flip side of this arrangement can be even more frustrating. When the participatory process meets the standards of adequately empowering citizen voices, "residents may make demands that officials find unwelcome…The commitment to tenant participation seems very thin in most places and evaporates altogether when residents begin to voice a perspective not endorsed by the state actors" (Goetz, 2016, p. 3).

This is due to the inability of consensus democracy to address problems of inequality or representation adequately. "Deliberative speech aims to persuade some people to change their minds and reach unity, consensus or the common good…Despite the pretense of neutrality, these hegemonic aspects of deliberative discourse — both in language and styles of speech — create a cultural bias towards those with the best skills at rational argument. They privilege calm 'reasonable' speech. Deliberation devalues the usual styles of expression of women, minorities, and the working class or poor, thereby marginalizing and excluding alternative voices." (Silver et al., 2010, p. 460). Participatory processes often enhance social inequalities between groups rather than minimize them. They use voluntary self-selection and are often scheduled to accommodate traditional 9-to-5 working structures that make it hard for disadvantaged residents to get involved. These processes orient themselves toward more homogeneous participants, usually skewed toward highly educated, white, upper-middle-class citizens (Silver et al., 2010). In order to achieve social equity among distinct social groups, actors must meet each citizen's diverse and specific needs. Merely taking a 'one 7 pm Wednesday night town hall meeting fits all' approach is both profoundly counterproductive and problematic.

Given this landscape of neoliberal urbanism, what might a genuine participatory process entail? What core tenants would allow egalitarian involvement and produce redistributive outcomes? A Right to the City analysis of participatory planning includes an understanding that "participation should be approached "as a right, not just the means," and engage participants in a mutual learning experience." (Kębłowski and Van Criekingen, 2014, p. 5). It should allow the right to refuse participation, provide access points at each stage of the development process, and involve diverse actors, including social movements and activist organizations. Most importantly, participatory planning spaces should be political and agonistic in nature, encouraging deliberation without forcing consensus. "At stake here is the capacity for city-dwellers involved in the participatory scheme to challenge the existing configurations of power directing the production of urban space. Hence, participatory schemes should not be created for, but directly co-created with and by city-

dwellers (Malewski, 2012) – regardless of their legal, economic or social status" (Kębłowski and Van Criekingen, 2014, p. 5).

iii.i.iv Neoliberal Conclusions: False Choice Urbanism

Within this section, we have seen how neoliberalization processes exploit rent gaps, accumulate excess capital, create racialized stigma, and shift responsibility onto citizens via false promises of participation. These concepts offer a robust theoretical framework to analyze the simultaneous conditions of Superkilen, the 'inclusive park,' and Mjølnerparken, the 'tough ghetto.' Going back to my hypothesis, to what extent can these two spaces be seen as a contradiction?

To answer this, a dialectical materialist interpretation of gentrification is required. Why can some areas profitably develop while others remain derelict and unprofitable? Tom Slater argues that these tensions are not choices in urban development but a logical part and parcel of the system of capitalist accumulation he calls "False Choice Urbanism" (2014). Uneven spatial development is not a chance encounter or ethical conundrum but a system of simultaneous investment and disinvestment in the urban fabric.

> *"To situate gentrification in a more helpful political and analytical register, we must blast open this tenacious and constrictive dualism of 'prosperity' (gentrification) or 'blight' (disinvestment) by showing how the two are fundamentally intertwined in a wider process of capitalist urbanization and uneven development that creates profit and class privilege for some whilst stripping many of the human need of shelter. No viable alternatives to class segregation and poverty will be found unless we ask why there are neighborhoods of astounding affluence and of grinding poverty, why there are 'new arrivals' and an 'Old Guard,' why there are renovations and evictions; in short, why there is inequality" (Slater, 2014, p. 519).*

Capitalist urban development necessitates uneven spatial investment as it moves through the city's topography, constantly finding new frontiers of speculation to create spatial and financial "fixes" for the accumulation of excess capital. Harvey argues, "Uneven geographical development serves to move capital's systemic failings around from place to place. Those failings are a perpetually moving target…Capital survives not only through a series of spatiotemporal fixes that absorb the capital surpluses in productive and constructive ways but also through the devaluation and destruction administered as corrective medicine to those who fail to keep up and who fail to pay off their debts" (2014, p. 161-162). Through a constant colonization of space for capitalist extraction, neoliberalism not only exploits socio-spatial inequalities but continuously produces them. The conceptualizations of neoliberal processes offer an in-depth view of the predominant and relative literature on the retrenchment of welfare states, the exploitation of rent gaps, and the eviction of incumbent residents via intersectional discriminatory practices. Together, they form an analytical framework for assessing how and to what extent we can consider the simultaneous narratives of ghettoization and inclusivity present in modern Nørrebro.

III.ii The Promise of Public Space: Contestation & Democracy

Figure 17 *– Iraqi swings in the Red Square of Superkilen, Source: Author*

Testing my hypothesis on neoliberalism in Nørrebro brings up exceptions and conflicts. The socio-spatial realities of Superkilen and Mjølnerparken are more nuanced and complex than neoliberalism and xenophobia can explain alone. In addition to these processes, I want to know what resistances and challenges push back against neoliberal narratives and manifestations. How could space be organized or used in other ways? What efforts are made at the neighborhood level to provide socially motivated alternatives to eviction, neoliberalism, and welfare retrenchment?

This section outlines an expanse of literature on the radical, post-colonial, and anarchist ideals based on 'the right to the city.' My basis begins with a powerful Lefebvrian framework on pragmatic leftism called transduction. It seeks out emergent democratic elements within capitalist society and attempts to foster them into further existence. Then, I will develop Lefebvre's 'right to the city' as a horizon to strive toward—a process of continually becoming democratic rather than a state of being. Finally, I will translate these principles into urban public space by analyzing critical literature on emancipatory politics, direct democracy, and critical placemaking. These practices highlight the importance of public space as a site of contestation, of coming together, and of forming an agonistic democratic community. These processes challenge hegemonic narratives that mask inequalities and help understand how spatial uses, identity formation, and resistance to neoliberalization can occur in contemporary Nørrebro.

iii.ii.i Transduction: Pragmatic Leftist Optimism

Imagining new democratic practices to be forged by radical contestation and placemaking is not a simple conceptual process. One might feel just as easily carried into a dream of radical redistributions as they might the dreadful tug of neoliberal anxiety. How do we keep an optimistic perspective of what radical society could become while operating within a pragmatic and operational lens? What is possible in the spaces of contemporary Nørrebro? This is the power of transduction.

First proposed by Henri Lefebvre and detailed by Mark Purcell, transduction is a way of recognizing the emergent components in a capitalist society that can be expanded, convinced, and theoretically developed into openings for the future. Lefebvre defined it as "an urban practice in the process of formation...this practice is currently veiled and disjointed...it possesses only fragments of a reality and a science that are still in the future. It is our job to demonstrate that such an approach has an outcome; that there are solutions to the current problem (2003b, 17)" (Purcell, 2013, p. 319). For Lefebvre, it is vital to recognize the failures of capitalist development and social organization while simultaneously organizing ourselves around the small elements of urban society that offer potential for genuine cohesion and radical democracy.

The process of transduction rejects the hard pragmatism of managerial urban governance while also situating itself in a very real and localized present: "It is a way that we can both ground ourselves in the realities of the current society and yet still refuse to accept the existing boundaries of that society" (Purcell, 2013, p. 320). Transduction is a useful methodology for those on the political left, as it does not rely on the major political revolutions of nation-states but focuses on the present and local context. It finds ways to navigate the failures of a social structure by teasing out the emergent components within urban society, first realizing them as a potential development, then politically convincing them into existence.

Figure 18 *– Bike path through Superkilen, Source: Author*

I argue that a realistically radical reorganization of society away from liberal, consensus democracy must rely on the two essential strengths of transduction. First, it must be rooted in the present, local context it wishes to change, understanding its history, politics, and people intimately. Second, we must follow transduction's optimistic approach to imagination, transformation, and political intervention. "Through transduction, we see all sorts of popular actions that resonate with the right to the city and with urban society. When we decide to seek out that activity, we find people everywhere struggling to become active and to manage their own affairs for themselves" (Purcell, 2013, p. 320).

Committing ourselves to observing neoliberal urban processes is important but can also depressingly undermine our enthusiasm for actively challenging and revolutionizing our socio-political reality. Transduction is a way of engaging the hopeful elements in society and rallying to make them better in the face of exploitation and dispossession. Transduction sets the stage for us to play upon as we think critically about what sort of urban society we should strive for and how we can make it ourselves.

iii.ii.ii Anarchist Ideals: The Right to the City as a Horizon

Since Lefebvre's development of The Right to the City in 1968, the concept has been operationalized by thinkers across scholarly fields and practical ambitions. While there are many approaches, each of these developments emphasizes an ideal of urban social justice in the face of capitalist development and inequality. It highlights the working class struggle in the urban context, critiquing capitalist obsessions with exchange values over use values––as in Smith's rent gap theory—as well as the widespread commodification of urban resources to drive inequality and fragmentation in the urban realm (Kębłowski and Van Criekingen, 2014).

However, the right to the city is more than an analytical framework for researchers to assess the processes of neoliberalization and resistance against it. Citizens, governments, and other organizations can also use the right to the city to engage, highlight, and privilege the voices of the working class and make a more equitable urban society. To more easily transmute it across different institutional and social actors, Kębłowski and Van Criekingen have broken it down into four constitutive components: "(1) enabling the appropriation and production of urban space by inhabitants, (2) challenging existing configurations of power, (3) considering all aspects regarding the urban environment, and (4) building an 'urgent utopia,' that is, a city/society beyond" (2014, p. 4).

For Purcell, the right to the city is mobilized as a framework to engage the polis toward more radical and equitable democratic organizations. Because of the failures of modern consensus democracy, it is not sufficient to merely further participatory processes or promote community members into positions of political power. Purcell argues that modern Amero-European political discourses wrongly equate 'democracy' with 'liberal democracy.' "In truth, the liberal democratic state is an institution in which a relatively few people are selected, separated out from the population, and designated to govern the whole. It is, therefore, a governing structure in which the few rule the rest. This arrangement is more properly understood as an oligarchy rather than a democracy" (Purcell, 2013, p. 313). Liberal democracy legitimizes hegemony by maintaining control through state and private institutions. Governance is narrativized to work for people despite privileging capital instead. "Moreover, government does not merely get out of the way of capital by taking a *laissez-faire* approach, it also actively intervenes on behalf of capital, taking what has been called an *aidez-faire* approach to urban policy" (Purcell, 2013, p. 312).

With governance structures extensively prioritizing profits over people, we must go beyond institutional political reforms and rethink the very tenets of democratic rights and structures.

Both Purcell and Lefebvre emphasize the role of the working class in the capacity to re-organize urban society via agonistic democratic practice. Unlike antagonistic relations,

agonism operates under the idea that difference and contestation are essential and positive components of democracy. Geographer Simon Springer further argues that liberal democracy is an enemy of autogestion (self-governance) and radical democracy. Liberal democracy is based on antagonistic relations that force differences to be negotiated into a consensus, often privileging the ideas and voices of the dominating classes and silencing the most marginalized citizens. In contrast, agonism values the recognition of hierarchical and oppressive power relations in society and is organized around the confrontations between different social actors. In this way, radical democracy fights to create democratic space independently rather than encouraging a state to provide it for them. "Radical democracy accordingly has the potential to repeal the violence that archies engender by dispersing power more evenly across the entire social body. This occurs when "politics" conceived as an *ends*-oriented project of consensus and/or utopianism is replaced with the perpetual *means* of democratic process through "the political" and its acknowledgment of agonism" (Springer, 2011, p. 552).

Democracy imagined in this way is both necessarily site-specific and impossible to manifest into a final, settled form. Radical democracy is a continuous struggle to govern oneself actively. Thus, radical democracy is an ongoing process of perpetual becoming rather than being.

> *"We can think of democracy as a horizon that we can travel towards but that we never reach, because a horizon always recedes. At the same time, a horizon is something that proposes a distinct direction for us to move in. Seeing democracy as a horizon thus involves setting ourselves on a path toward a not-entirely-distinct destination that we will never reach." (Purcell, 2013, p. 314).*

This struggle is a commitment to self-organization that reshapes social structures and disassembles problematic institutions of power. It organizes in real and imagined spaces, often at small, directly democratic scales, where the distance between the governed and the government is increasingly shrunken. Using a transductive approach, radical democratic organizations continue to pursue collective organization for the betterment of the polis rather than that of capital. It grounds us in our social contexts while refusing to accept the boundaries of that society. In sum: "The right to the city is thus revolutionary without ever achieving a revolution. It is a perpetual struggle that can have no final victory" (Purcell, 2013, p. 324).

iii.ii.iii Public Space as Radical Space: Agonism & Contestation

Public space is the most crucial arena of agonism and contestation in the urban fabric. Departing from top-down participatory planning as a mechanism for including resident voices in urban developments, Springer sees the controversies of public space as a meaningful stage in which the most profound social issues come to the fore. "Public space is understood as the battlefield on which the conflicting interests of the rich and poor are set," […] "An examination of the controversy of public space allows for an understanding of the ongoing struggle for a more radical democracy as fundamentally a clash between the machinations of global capitalism, and the attempts of the poor and marginalized to insert their voices into the development policies and practices that adversely affect their lives" (Springer, 2011, p. 526-527).

This is an important consideration for Lefebvre as well, as contemporary urban revolutions must also produce new kinds of spaces he calls “differential space,” which, in contrast to “abstract space,” accentuates rather than eliminates the differences in society (1991). The production of space is an important tool for both domination as well as struggles against hegemonic powers and must be understood as a principal ambition of any class struggle. “A revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential; indeed, it has failed in that it has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses. A social transformation, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language, and on space” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 54). The upgrading of ideological, cultural, or symbolic aspects of peoples’ lives without enhancing their material conditions only suits the dominant capitalist class by opening new spatial frontiers to neoliberal fixes. In contrast, public space has become the stage of democratic becoming because of its capacity to allow people to come together and actively contest the narratives and material realities produced by hegemonic neoliberalism.

Figure 19 *– Parents talk on the Black Square, Source: Author*

This requires a shift from performative to radical inclusivity and recognition of subjectivity. Inclusive spaces require a physical and occupying presence that allows individuals from a wide set of social groups to come together and become political. “To demand inclusion in a space often means forcibly occupying the space of exclusion, reinforcing the idea that public space has never been guaranteed, and by its very definition must be contested. In this sense, an agonistic approach to the political becomes an essential condition for conceiving a more inclusive public space that accepts and celebrates difference” (Springer, 2011, p. 542). This epitomizes the reconceptualization of urban society towards the horizon of democracy. Urban space must be ruled “by inhabitants who appropriate space, make it their own, and use it to meet their needs…These encounters build a shared sense of common purpose and solidarity among inhabitants. But the encounters also make inhabitants aware of the substantive differences among them, and they are forced to confront and manage these differences together” (Purcell, 2013, p. 318).

iii.ii.iv Subverting Dominant Narratives: Placemaking as Praxis

From the principles of new spatial organizations and social democracy, we move towards more practical considerations of how new space is created towards a democratic urban future: critical placemaking. Defined by Erin Toolis, placemaking "is a bottom-up, asset-based, person-centered process that emphasizes collaboration and community participation in order to improve the livability of towns and cities" (2017, p. 3). Placemaking is a radical coming together in physical space that helps engage diverse social groups in worldviews different from their own. It pluralizes the lived experiences of urban citizens and helps to reveal inequalities and injustices by "cultivating a sense of interdependence and facilitating more control over the resources and settings that affect their lives; critical placemaking is theorized as a way to infuse everyday activity with an awareness of injustice and possibility, thereby increasing opportunities for civic action" (Toolis, 2017, p. 190). In this conceptualization of democracy, public space becomes a multi-valent social space that citizens shape by constructing narratives. These narratives are tools used for various social functions, operationalized both by dominant and democratic actors:

> *"The process of narrative construction is inherently political. The public realm is fundamentally plural and contested, filled with multiple competing discourses that are never neutral in terms of their political and historical power. Although a community is polyphonic (composed of many voices), the ruling class attempts to create a single hegemonic story to maintain the status quo. This monologic story can be thought of as a* ***master narrative****: a dominant discourse that portrays itself as natural, unanimous, and eternal, working to silence alternative narratives" […] "Narratives are powerful symbolic resources with the ability to oppress or liberate. By framing certain groups as outsiders, out of place, or not full members of the public, these setting narratives can serve as the basis for exclusion, delegitimization, and dehumanization. On the other hand, by revealing the polyphonic and relational nature of the public and constructing a more inclusive story, setting narratives can disrupt master narratives and work to reclaim public space for public use" (Toolis, 2017, p. 187-188, emphasis mine).*

Placemaking thus provides an impressive framework for locating and challenging master narratives that seek to mask inherent social inequalities. In Nørrebro, these master narratives ghettoize Mjølnerparken residents while supposing a fake sense of inclusivity and multiculturalism next door. Placemaking can actively push back against this by constructing new narratives grounded in agonistic and deliberative democracy based in physical public space. Placemaking "is the assertion that the knowledge, experiences, and contributions of everyday people matter; by cultivating a sense of place identity and attachment, building bridges among community members through reclaimed public space for public use, and creating places that expand the community's capacity to act and access resources, critical placemaking can act as a pathway for empowerment" (Toolis, 2017, p. 193). Resistance in this way not only occurs in public space but demands public space–as both a material and imagined forum in which tensions and inequalities are redressed.

By taking a radical constructivist approach to urban contestation based on the right to the city, informality, placemaking, and agonism can uncover how harmful and productive narratives of urban development are formed and mobilized to fit diverse actors' needs in

Nørrebro. Resistance to neoliberal processes in a society that brands itself as a social-democratic safe haven requires carefully examining macro narratives and their material viability. Just like the Danish state, Superkilen is full of contradictions. Perhaps it has done well to avoid the antagonistic vibe expressed in so many other gentrifying public spaces around the world, but does it truly offer the *agonistic* inclusivity its narrative promotes? Placemaking offers a transductive tool for challenging master narratives and creating new forms of socio-political organization under hegemonic capitalism. Can we use it to find emergent democratic conditions in Nørrebro, or have we arrived at the scene too late?

Figure 20 *– Bike Rack in the Red Square, Source: Author*

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

Figure 21 *– The Black Square of Superkilen, Source: Author*

IV.i Guiding Frameworks

iv.i.i Research Paradigm - Social Constructivism

This thesis operates from a relativist ontology, which argues against forms of objective truth and believes that there is more than one way to describe the realities present in the world. However, relativism does not suggest that social structures are not present in shaping individuals' lived experiences and subjectivities in society or society itself. Relativism argues that the multiple manifestations of these social structures rely on the subjective position and perception of the individuals who make up the society.

Further, my research takes on constructivist epistemology. Social constructivism is a theory that knowledge is built up from human experiences and encounters that are "temporary, nonobjective, internally constructed, developmental, and socially and culturally mediated" (Yilmaz, 2008, p. 162). Constructivism is oriented around structures and affects, operating between major social institutions and every lived experience. "This approach centers on the ways in which power, the economy, [and] political and social factors affect the ways in which groups of people form understandings and formal knowledge about their world" (Yilmaz, 2008, p. 163). Further, it is essential to note that "these bodies of knowledge are not considered to be objective representations of the external world," but an embodied perception of a kind of subjective knowledge and way of knowing (Yilmaz, 2008, p. 163).

iv.i.ii Research Nature - Going Deeper than the Narrative

My research is deeply critical and political by nature. I aim to understand and reveal the mechanisms with which a state with such a strong welfare regime and narratives of inclusivity not only authorizes but supports the gentrification and eviction of its most vulnerable residents. I see an important role in unraveling the contradictions between the celebrations of welfare regimes and the fallout of their shortcomings.

I come from the United States, where socio-spatial inequalities are on full display, where racists march in the streets, and our leaders openly exploit conveniently racist narratives for their political gains. However, in Denmark and many other European countries, inequality and exploitation are much harder to spot. It is much less straightforward, honest, or open. I find it important to shed light on inequalities and injustices occurring in places with much better hidden histories and narratives of exploitation, like Denmark. This is essential research as many European capitals currently house large concentrations of ethnic minorities that they would like to integrate or "socially mix" into their societies. Vienna has Favoriten, Brussels has Molenbeek, Copenhagen has Mjølnerparken. Wanting to integrate others into a host society is not an inherently bad thing, but doing so via ghettoization, neoliberalization, and eviction is not a reasonable or just solution. Political in nature, investigative in action, and reflexive in analysis, I hope to provide as good an understanding of the modern realities of Nørrebro as I possibly can.

iv.i.iii Research Type & Reasoning - A Deductive Approach

My research follows deductive reasoning, in which I have started with a hypothesis and sought to test it. Using a constructivist epistemology, this hypothesis has been constructed over several years of visiting, living in, and actively studying Copenhagen and its socio-political processes. This is complemented by an intentional reading of policy documents, academic articles, and journalistic reports, all of which I have used to develop the historical context expressed in my case history and further referenced in my discussion.

After first developing my hypothesis, I test it using ethnographic methods that emphasize personal interpretations, experiences, and subjectivity. I further corroborate these findings with other studies on the relevant components of my research to situate the findings in the ongoing academic conversation around Denmark's Ghetto Laws and their urban manifestations. This approach integrates primary and secondary data to investigate and test my hypothesis and answer any further research questions in my case study.

iv.i.iv Theoretical Framework - Neoliberalism & The Right to the City

My theoretical framework is divided into two major sections. The first is a critical conceptualization of neoliberalization employing concepts such as Neil Smith's 'rent gap theory' (1979), David Harvey's 'accumulation by dispossession' (2017), and Ananya Roy's 'racial banishment' (2019). These theories, among others, provide an understanding of how neoliberal processes occur, including the retrenchment of the welfare state, the stigmatization of vulnerable populations, and the speculative "aidez-faire" state practices.

The second section then mobilizes democratic and leftist theories in order to observe emergent practices in capitalist society. This is done through "transduction," first coined by Lefebvre and further developed by Mark Purcell (2013). Transduction is a process in which

we begin by “closely examining actual-but-inchoate practices that are currently taking place in the city…that shows us what kind of world they would produce if they were allowed to flourish and pervade the city” (Purcell, 2013, p. 319). This process is bolstered by theories including Henri Lefebvre’s “The Right to the City” (1968), Simon Springer’s conceptualization of public space as emancipation (2011), and Erin Toolis’s theory on placemaking (2017).

IV.ii Methodology - Ethnographic Case Study

This research exemplifies what Sue Walters calls an ‘Ethnographic Case Study,’ blending elements from case study analysis and ethnographic methods (2006). As shown in Figure 1, the ethnographic case study combines the study of a social system with the case, highlighting the former as more than just context and focusing on the latter as an important subject within the larger system. This allows researchers to shift between broader social structures and individual specificity to understand the interplay between various actants, constructing knowledge in a holistic yet focused manner.

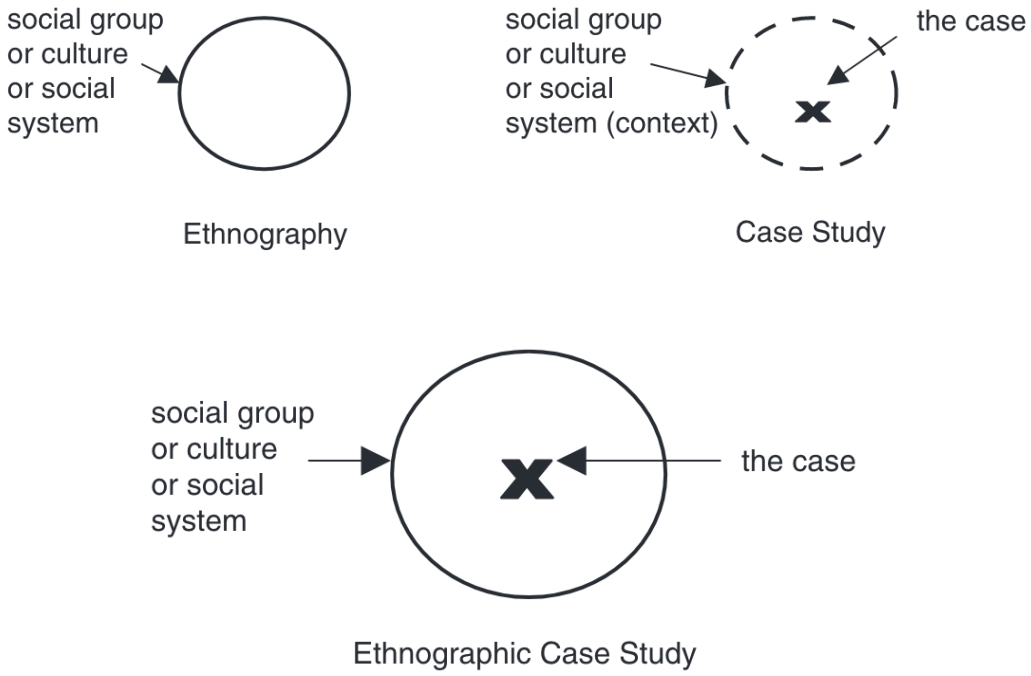

Figure 22 *- Graphic explaining Ethnographic Case Study as a methodology (Walters, 2006)*

One of the critical advantages of ethnographic case studies is the unbounded nature of their construction. In addition to offering epistemological flexibility, ethnographic case studies also allow methodological versatility in the field.

iv.ii.i Data Collection Methods - A Qualitative Approach

I conducted nine unstructured, in-depth Interviews, which I recorded with the subjects’ permission and transcribed. I accessed these participants via personal relationships, mutual connections, and approaching strangers in Superkilen. I preferred the unstructured and more conversational approach to my interviews as it helps to build trust with participants by making them feel comfortable as quickly as possible. This also allows

continuous follow-up questions, giving space for their nuanced perspectives to come through. When possible, I conducted interviews in person in Superkilen, walking back and forth through the park and allowing participants to reflect on the space. Those who were not available to meet me while I was in Copenhagen were interviewed over video chat instead.

Below is the list of subjects I interviewed with relevant information on their demographics, experiences, or positionality. Aside from Troels Glismann, who agreed to use his full name, participants' names have been altered for anonymity. Interview quotes in the results and discussion section have been slightly edited for length and clarity, with full, unabridged transcripts available via the link in the appendix.

- **Midas** (mid-20s) is a lifelong resident of Nørrebro and a landscape architecture student. Midas grew up in the building directly next to the Red Square of Superkilen. They now own their apartment in the same building. I accessed them via a mutual contact on 25/10/23.
- **Jannis** (early 30s) is a German who moved to Copenhagen for his master's and has stayed for approximately six years. He has lived in northwestern Copenhagen for over five years and regularly skateboards in Superkilen. I accessed him via a personal relationship on 09/06/24.
- **Ahmed** (mid-50s) is originally from Pakistan and moved to Denmark over thirty years ago. He and his family are now Danish citizens and live 25 miles outside of Copenhagen in Taastrup. He comes to Nørrebro roughly twice a month to have a meal and visit his friends who live nearby. I accessed him by simply approaching him in Superkilen on 09/06/24.
- **Juan** (mid-30s) is from Colombia and immigrated to Copenhagen after marrying his Danish girlfriend and receiving a spousal visa roughly five years ago. He is a photographer and designer living in Frederiksberg who routinely comes to Superkilen and the Nørrebro library next door. I accessed him by simply approaching him in Superkilen on 10/06/24.
- **Mila** (mid-20s) grew up 90 minutes north of Copenhagen and has lived in Copenhagen for over five years. They live in a communally squatted house in Nørrebro, only 10 minutes from Superkilen, and have been an activist in several movements based in the area, including the movement against the Mjølnerparken evictions in 2022 and the ongoing Free Palestine movement. I accessed them via a mutual contact on 11/06/24.
- **Lukas** works at the Nørrebrohallen community sports center directly next to Superkilen. I accessed him via Nørrebrohallen on 12/06/24.
- **Troels Glismann** has lived in Nørrebro for over thirty years and is the chairman of the residents' committee of A/B Lersøgaard, a housing association directly next to Superkilen. He also serves on the Nørrebro Lokaludvalg (local committee) and was the only citizen on the committee that selected the BIG project for Superkilen. I contacted him through his housing association on 13/06/24.
- **Anna** works for the Nørrebro Lokaludvalg (Local Committee), which proposes urban plans for Nørrebro and acts as a liaison between the residents and the Copenhagen municipality. I accessed her through the Nørrebro Lokaludvalg on 21/06/24.
- **Emily** is an architect and activist from the United States who remained in Copenhagen after finishing her studies. She has written about the social responsibility of architecture regarding the Ghetto Laws and Mjølnerparken and

volunteers with the activist organization Almen Modstand, which has fought against evictions in Mjølnerparken. I accessed her through Almen Modstand on 25/06/24.

In addition to my interviews, I also employed the method of participant observation as a user/visitor of Superkilen and wrote down field notes and interpretations throughout. Across the Fall semester of 2023, I spent many days in Superkilen, both actively and passively observing behaviors, habits, and uses of the park and its users. In addition, I spent a week in the park in June of 2024 observing, writing impressions, taking photographs, and talking to participants. This formal and informal data helps me construct a body of knowledge that complements my transcribed and coded interviews for further analysis in the results and discussion section.

iv.ii.ii Data Analysis Methods

Recorded interviews were transcribed and coded using MAXQDA coding program. Each interview was manually coded using descriptive codes that help to organize the data into topics and take inventory of their relevance to different themes. Through direct interpretation, analysis was carried out via my reflections and then synthesized into thematic groups. This is a common approach in ethnographic case studies, in which description and interpretation are the basis of evaluating a set of research questions or, in my case, a hypothesis. These interpretations coalesce and create meaning out of behaviors, contexts, and perceptions. This analysis is further corroborated by other studies into Mjølnerparken and Superkilen employing different critical frameworks (i.e., “crimmigration” in Lundsteen 2023 or “border theory” in Turan 2021). These studies provide a crucial amalgamation of primary and secondary sources that support and situate my research on this ongoing topic of both academic and journalistic interest.

IV.iii Research Positionality - Leftism & Documentary

My intention is to write each section with a political color that I feel is easy to acknowledge and understand. However, there are some definite political identities I would like to explicitly state. My initial academic background is as a cultural anthropologist and historian. I was trained to think in terms of stories and narratives, with research throughout my bachelor’s degree focused on these elements. After my bachelor's, I worked as a documentary filmmaker and producer and learned even more about how to find and develop non-fiction stories. However, the world of documentary is not as scientifically rigorous as academia, and I have had to adapt my methods and approach to fit the requirements of academic standards for this thesis.

The pursuit of stories remains my chief instinct. As a constructivist, I do not believe in universal truths but organize both my films and my thesis around a pursuit of knowing a form of truth that both suits my story and convinces my audience of a particular political position. This must be thoughtfully managed in academia, and I have done my best to be fair and honest at every stage of this research. That being said, my politics as a radical leftist influence how I view the world and what kinds of social organizations I work to celebrate. After witnessing state-led consensus democracy continually fail to provide for the populations at home, I came to this program hoping to find cities as venues for radical democracy. I am deeply critical of systems of power, and it is important to me to use this opportunity to reflect on the injustices in the world and their narrative justifications.

IV.iv Limitations

Figure 23 *– The Red Square during a rainstorm, Source: Author*

Of course, there are important limitations to this research. Time, money, resources, access, and language all played a limiting role. Language was rarely a barrier for me as most Danes speak impeccable English. However, accessing Danes (a population notorious for their social coldness) was sometimes a bit more difficult. Contacting volunteer activists also proved to be very difficult at times; representatives at Almen Modstand were very hard to contact as they prepare for a major September legal battle in Luxembourg. Instead of speaking with them directly, they turned me to a volunteer who has worked with Mjølnerparken in the past.

Additionally, two important participants initially agreed to do an interview but then stopped answering calls and emails. One was Mohammad Aslam, the president of the Mjølnerparken Housing Association and an active member of the Nørrebro Lokaludvalg. The other was the Copenhagen Municipality Office of Parks, Cemeteries and Cleaning. I spoke to Aslam on the phone and went to his apartment to schedule an interview, but when our agreed time came, he did not pick up the phone and stopped taking my calls and texts altogether. The municipality office initially agreed to answer questions via email but never responded to my list of questions or multiple follow-up emails. This is unfortunate as both perspectives, especially that of Mohammad Aslam, would have been incredibly important in this research. While I was not able to personally interview Mr. Aslam, his perspectives on problems in Mjølnerparken regarding the Ghetto Laws have been published in several newspaper articles and were further expressed in part by his colleague, Troels Glismann, with whom I had a lengthy conversation. While I wish I had access to these participants, I still feel I have collected sufficient primary and secondary data from a wide range of sources to test my hypothesis and answer further research questions.

Figure 24 *– An artifact of Superkilen, Source: Author*

Figure 25 *– The Black Square, Source: Author*

Time, both in amount of time and time of year, was also a major limitation for this research. With an initial ambition to carry out a long-term study into the impacts of the Ghetto Laws on public space, I realized these impacts would take more time than I had. Additionally, my time in Denmark was limited to cold, dark months (September through December), which made studying life in public outdoor spaces difficult. Even my time in summer was limited to a week of uncooperative weather, with low temperatures and scattered rainstorms often forcing people inside.

This thesis has also transformed since it was first imagined in February 2023. While Superkilen has always been a focus, my initial intentions were to compare it with a park in Brooklyn, NY, by analyzing their abilities to resist gentrification in their neighborhoods. However, my research yielded few examples of resistance, and when I returned to Copenhagen to look into Superkilen, I found a similar problem: there were no explicit and direct acts of resistance in the physical space.

At this same time, I learned about the Ghetto Laws and the evictions at Mjølnerparken and was compelled to understand how they were constructed and implemented more deeply. I focused solely on the Danish context, removing Brooklyn from my thesis. These transformations represent a focal shift from studying resistance to the processes of gentrification itself.

V. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Figure 26 – *The Green Park and Mjølnerparken under Construction, Source: Alexander Krause*

I have combined my results and discussion into one section and divided it into five parts. Unlike my case history, I do not divide Superkilen and Mjølnerparken into two sections but often consider them together based on relevant themes from my theoretical framework and data analysis. First, I investigate rent gap governance in the case of the Danish Ghetto Laws, concluding that they should be considered as a form of state-led gentrification. I then introduce intersectional racial theories into these findings, tying them to neo-colonial discourses on social mix and urban diversity in Danish political society. Third, I analyze how the punitive and controlling mechanisms of the Ghetto Laws can be seen as a form of racial banishment and question who urban regeneration practices in Nørrebro truly work for. Section four directly investigates the colonial gaze and the role of Superkilen as a powerful marketing tool that helps open rent gaps while narrativizing a participatory project with an inclusive character.

Then, I turn to the emergent elements present in Nørrebro to be acknowledged and nurtured into further being. Here, I highlight everyday interactions, placemaking, and bottom-up political organizations currently at work in the neighborhood. Finally, I conclude with remarks on the need for further research and investigation into this situation as the urban fabric continues to change under the influence of the Ghetto Laws.

V.i Rent Gap Governance: State-Led Gentrification

As we have seen in the literature, the rent gap is a useful tool for analyzing the way in which urban governance practices help exploit opportunities in the urban fabric for capital accumulation. In Mjølnerparken, the workings of the Danish state are essential considerations in both the development and assurance of a viable rent gap. Importantly, the "neoliberalization of this welfare state has meant that welfare provision and governance increasingly rely on the movement of capital and also that processes like gentrification are sometimes instrumentalized by the state without this movement as its (sole) aim" (Risager, 2022, p. 200). A state reliance on capital accumulation and reinvestment (or 'fixes' as Harvey would put it) showcases the reliance on the formations and subsequent closures of rent gaps in urban development.

With privatization as a key mechanism employed by 'Hard Ghetto Areas' (HGAs) to meet the criteria set by the Ghetto Laws (6 of 15 HGAs are selling units), the state has effectively used stigmatization and social control to guarantee rent gaps for private investors, thus securing the neoliberal future of HGAs. Stigma creates the requisite justification for gentrification by securing the economic objective. In a move I'd like to categorize as 'cleverly evil,' the territorial stigmatization inherent in the Ghetto Laws that "justified privatization in the first place translates to devalorization contributing to rent gap formation' (Risager, 2022, p. 205). More stigma means a bigger rent gap and more chance for profit.

Figure 27 *– Mjølnerparken under construction, Source: Author*

Figure 28 *- Mjølnerparken under construction, Source: Author*

Mjølnerparken is a special case in the context of the Ghetto Package. It is arguably the most centrally located and well-connected in the country and has the highest estimated sales price of any HGA (Risager, 2022). At first glance, high sales prices indicate that the potential rent gap might not be sufficient to cover the amount of up-front capital necessary to finance such an acquisition. However, in the case of Mjølnerparken, the state has helped to secure this gap's formation. In my interview with Troels Glismann, he described that Bo-Vita (the non-profit housing association that owns Mjølnerparken) was required to renovate the blocks before selling them to NREP (a private real estate company). This was funded by Bo-Vita and the state, who, in essence, provided a subsidized rent gap through the renovation at their own expense. Moreover, urban renewal programs like the construction of Superkilen and Mimersparken have helped to ensure the highest potential ground rent once the units are sold. By ensuring a low enough sale price, a high material value, and a highly attractive setting, these processes guarantee a wide rent gap for potential buyers. This is an indirect manifestation of accumulation by dispossession that funnels investment towards capital growth instead of social resources: "By making these areas more attractive and preparing land and housing for sale with demolition or renovations, the [non-profit housing] sector is subsidizing the formation and closure of a rent gap profitable to private investors where there might not otherwise have been one" (Risager, 2022, p. 208).

This has led to higher rents in and around Mjølnerparken, making it a dominant concern for local officials, activists, and residents I interviewed. Anna, an administrator of the Nørrebro Lokaludvalg (local committee), told me that the chief concern in their new urban development plan is the loss of cheap rental apartments both in Mjølnerparken and elsewhere in the neighborhood. Glismann, an elected representative of the Lokaludvalg who lives next door to Mjølnerparken, said that the sale of roughly half of the units in Mjølnerparken to the private market is changing the demographic character of the area, making it more exclusive to people with higher budgets. Average rents in Mjølnerparken used to be two-thirds that of greater Nørrebro. Now, initial documents from NREP show at least double the rent for the same-sized units after renovations, meaning "it can't be the same people are moving in" (Troels Glismann, interview, 13/06/24). This sentiment of exclusionary displacement was also echoed by Emily, an architect who has worked with the activist group Almen Modstand (translated Common Resistance) and has conducted research on Mjølnerparken in the past. When I asked her if she would consider the new prices as a form of state-led gentrification, she replied:

> *"That's tricky. In Mjølnerparken, it definitely looks that way because it's a very popular area. Financially, it has high value. It's drastically increased from the cost of what it was before. That has a demographic change. That means that only people who can afford it can move in. It's basically opening up housing for wealthier residents. In that case, it's accelerating gentrification" (Emily, interview, 25/06/24).*

Conceptualizing the Ghetto Laws as state-led gentrification provides a foundational framework for recognizing the processes of both direct and indirect accumulation by dispossession enacted by the Danish state. Now, I turn more towards the dispossession component of this process by critically engaging with the discursive arguments that justify it while analyzing its impacts on ethnic minorities.

V.ii Intersectional Racism: Social Mix, Neo-Colonialism, & Stigma

v.ii.i Social Mix & Urban Diversity

In Copenhagen, diversity has been narrativized as a powerful asset that helps the city thrive, transforming it into a socially sustainable metropolis of the future. It even declared the goal of becoming the most inclusive metropolis in Europe by 2015" (Andersen et al., 2014, p. 4). Copenhagen's discourses on diversity differ from national ones, often employing the language of 'inclusion' as opposed to 'integration' or 'assimilation,' as we have seen in most of the initial marketing of Superkilen, a municipal project. This is not to say that Copenhagen's narratives are bereft of capitalist narratives, as they often mention urban diversity as "crucial for securing the competitiveness of Copenhagen in attracting foreign labor, international businesses, and tourists" (Andersen et al., 2014, p. 27).

In order to profit from diversity, Copenhagen and Denmark have used the practice of social mixing across their geographic areas. This is done through a multitude of processes that regulate the construction of new housing and the allocation of social benefits to certain groups. These include municipal authorities to seize available housing stock for arriving refugees during a crisis and zoning regulations specifying the proportion of affordable units in new buildings. While the concept of social mixing is not always a neoliberal one, with the Ghetto Laws and their rent-gap governance, we can observe social mixing as an inherently exploitative and xenophobic way of achieving 'urban diversity.'

The Ghetto Laws claim to enhance the living conditions of the areas the state deems to be socio-economically deprived. They assert that they promote urban regeneration, improve housing conditions, and expand social services. However, many of their initiatives target socioeconomic developments for the area's inhabitants, namely employment. In the context of the Ghetto Laws, the targeting of socioeconomically deprived groups intersects with ethnic minority concentrations. By seeking to increase the economic diversity of the 'Hard Ghetto Areas' and increasing the number of middle-class Danes in the

Figure 29 *– Mjølnerparken under construction, Source: Author*

area, these processes only lead to further gentrification (Barberis et al., 2019). Further, the development of new high-quality housing in renewed urban areas is increasingly unaffordable, forcing rents even higher and pricing out incumbent residents entirely.

> *"In this way, diversity can be converted into a policy vehicle justifying gentrification as a consequence of mixing policies. The neighborhood initiatives are coupled with social and employment-related initiatives, aiming to ensure the basis for socio-economically good living conditions for all Copenhageners. However, it remains unclear whether there will still be room in Copenhagen as a whole and in the regenerated areas specifically for those who cannot be lifted socio-economically" […] "This begs the question: is there a limit to room for diversity?" (Andersen et al., 2014, p. 28).*

This critique of social mixing policies emerged in several interviews I carried out with those involved in activist and political networks around Nørrebro. One activist claimed that the term diversity is often used to mask ethnocentric approaches to urban democracy, questioning:

> *"What is diversity? It's just having different people just for the sake of having different people; it doesn't say anything about how good you are at actually centering minorities or creating a space that's accessible and nice for other than the white majority. (Mila, interview, 11/06/24).*

When discussing the process of displacement as an effect of "social mix" policies like the Ghetto Laws, another activist argued:

> *"It's valid to desire social cohesion, but it's not valid when it takes someone's right away to practice their own religion or to live next to their neighbor who they've lived next to for the last 30 years. Those boundaries need to be renegotiated instead of just pushing people out and pushing the problem away" (Emily, interview, 25/06/24).*

Social mix will never translate to social cohesion by displacing vulnerable groups, manufacturing rent gaps, or targeting underemployment as the chief concern of urban renewal. Urban diversity is a real-life social asset that must be nourished through an in-depth awareness of everyday lived experiences of a diverse set of residents. In contrast, Denmark has established diversity as a shallow goal for masking colonial tensions and capitalizing on its decidedly neoliberal approach to achieving it.

v.ii.ii Nuancing Neo-Colonial Discourses in Denmark

Racism in Denmark is a deeply complicated social topic due to the fact that it is almost never earnestly discussed. A Colombian immigrant who lived in Australia and the U.S. before moving to Copenhagen described it:

> *"In other places, they say it out loud, and there is some courage in it. I don't share it, but at least you are being upfront about what you believe. Now, I don't share the same opinion, but here, what I think is disgusting is how everyone is: 'Don't talk about it.' And, of course, it's not everyone, but it is there. People just don't say it. And that I hate that; say it if you are [racist], and that's it. But don't, don't*

do that shit. Don't talk about people like that behind their backs" (Juan, interview, 10/06/24).

Denmark, a country with no formal colonies in the global south during the age of empire, has more effectively masked their colonial histories than England or France. Turan writes that this way of thinking about colonial Denmark makes it challenging to enter conversations about racist ideologies and discourses in Denmark:

> *"Encountering 'Denmark' and 'coloniality' in the same sentence might be puzzling to those outside Scandinavia and annoying to those from Denmark's ethnic majority. Indeed, the contemporary nation-building myths behind Denmark's image and border regime are based on sidetracking the state's colonial past and contemporary colonial/neocolonial existence in favor of an alternative narrative, one that justifies the dominant ethnic core's sense of entitlement and superiority over the state's territory, while also claiming its innocence—or even its humanism and virtues—in the face of increasing injustices at the global scale due to colonialism" (Turan, 2021, p. 58).*

In reality, Denmark still claims Greenland as a colony and was a major transporter of hundreds of thousands of enslaved people across the Atlantic Ocean—a history rarely told. By virtue-signaling humanist and inclusive virtues with projects like Superkilen, Denmark masks their colonial histories. However, the Ghetto Laws mark a shift in this discourse by directly addressing ethnic minorities as the source of social issues. An activist from the U.S. describes her surprise at the explicit language used in the laws while echoing the differentiation of Danish racism to that more common in North America:

> *"This law is very explicit in its discrimination, and that I was surprised by. I was expecting something more indirect or maybe just a little hidden under the language, but it's quite direct. It used to be called the ghetto list, literally. Seeing that language in official politics was really surprising to me. I think when I describe it to people outside of the country, they are generally surprised that this is coming from Denmark because it does, as you said, present itself and have an image of being a utopia of a sort…In Denmark, I think racism and Islamophobia are also really highly interconnected in a different way than in the U.S. I think racism is... I almost want another word because it's race and its ethnicity, but they're also associating that with Islam, which there seems to be a fear of" (Emily, interview, 25/06/24).*

This sentiment was further echoed by non-Danes and more critical Danes I interviewed, but public discourses on Danish colonial history and neo-colonial manifestations of Islamophobia and ethnocentrism remain relatively hidden from plain sight, even since the passing of the 2018 Ghetto Package. Many participants suggested this is due to the high levels of trust between social groups and public institutions in Denmark that are ensured by the (albeit weakening) welfare state, which helps to reproduce the image of Denmark as an egalitarian and tolerant society. However, cracks in the welfare apparatus are already present. Social mix and cohesion are forced from the top down, and urban spaces are actively othered and controlled. Will these narratives hold up as we move closer to the 2030 goal of a 'Denmark without parallel societies'?

v.ii.iii Parallel Societies or Colonial Anxieties?

These colonial narratives lead us to beg the question, are parallel societies even real or just a manifestation of colonial mental gymnastics? A study that sought to simulate conditions the state cites as drivers for alternative societies conducted by Secchi and Herath revealed that social housing did not affect the formation of parallel societies (2021). Furthermore, they found that "due to the harsh treatment, eliminating these areas may push former residents onto a set of values that are antagonistic to those policymakers wish to pursue and promote. Hence, this policy decision could lead to support de-facto the formation of new "alternative" (parallel) value areas. Far from being a solution, the elimination policy may well go against the goal it has been designed for" (Secchi and Herath, 2021, p. 156).

Assuming that social housing is the primary driver of 'parallel values' reifies a top-down managerial approach to thinking about social cohesion and proves to be not only ineffective but actively problematic. So, let us look, then, from the perspective of the subaltern. I contend that the 'parallel societies' narrative is created not because of socially housed concentrations of poor people but is created by the racial othering and stigmatization of the people who live there. However, the practice of concentrating and then stigmatizing are mutually constitutive processes in Denmark, as Glismann explains:

> *"The municipality said we have a lot of refugees coming in, so we have the right to put 25% of people in the flats that are available. So, they put all the problems in. Where else should they put them? They can put them here. They put them in Mjølnerparken. And then they say, 'oh, this is a ghetto. We put all the Palestinians there. Now it's a ghetto'. I mean, it's ludicrous. They're blaming them that they live there" (Troels Glismann, interview, 13/06/24).*

Figure 30 *– Mjølnerparken under Construction, Source: Author*

This passage highlights an important part of this situation: many of the people in 'Hard Ghetto Areas' were placed there by the state as part of their asylum arrangement and have no opportunity to move elsewhere. Even those who move to Denmark with other forms of visas are geographically controlled by where they can live. Juan, the Colombian immigrant to Denmark, came via a martial visa after marrying his

Danish girlfriend and told me that his visa bars him from living in areas marked as ‘vulnerable,’ ghetto,’ or ‘hard ghetto areas.’ In addition, the couple must be registered in an apartment of a certain size in order to meet the conditions of what the state deems a reasonable-sized space for a couple to share. This limits his access to affordable areas and further controls the spatial distribution of non-Danes throughout the city.

Further, Juan expressed an intense difficulty befriending Danes and feeling welcomed into Danish social groups despite speaking both English and Danish fluently. Ex-pats and immigrants in Denmark have famously echoed this, and it is something I can further testify to having lived in Denmark twice and visited another half dozen times. Thus, social isolation can be seen in two ways. The first is a state-mandated top-down socio-spatial management of the social mix and distribution of non-Danes, which concentrates migrants in distinct areas away from mainstream Danish society. The second is a discursive stigmatization that levies the blame on the other for not being able to penetrate the same mainstream Danish society from which they have been spatially excluded. The Ghetto Laws are a personification of these concurrent processes that take advantage of the myth of the ghetto to banish the other.

V.iii Racial Banishment: Urban Regeneration as Domination

Figure 31 *– A map of Mjølnerparken in the construction site, Source: Author*

v.iii.i Open the Ghetto or Cut Them off

The Ghetto Laws perpetuate this banishment by forcibly opening Mjølnerparken to the neighborhood around them, removing social programs from HGAs, and over-policing residents. The laws work to physically and socially open ghetto areas like Mjølnerparken to “allow for a higher penetration of Danish middle-class presence” (Lundsteen, 2023, p. 278). Before 2018, Mjølnerparken resisted these changes, ratifying its own urban redevelopment plan in 2015 that sought to lift the area off the ghetto list. According to Glismann, who meets monthly with the Mjølnerparken resident association president, Mohammad Aslam, the Mjølnerparken association fought the opening of the estate’s fences to thru-traffic and attempted to keep municipally drafted plans for the estate at arm’s length.

The state then put pressure on Mjølnerparken by increasing policing and cutting social work programs up until the codification of the area under the 2018 Ghetto Laws. This pressure reflects a neoliberal tendency “to use urban interventions and specifically gentrification via the idea of social mix to handle and control migration and Otherness

where one cannot explicitly do this. (Lundsteen, 2023, p. 276). In Mjølnerparken, this is done via the displacement of long-standing community initiatives. For example, Glismann noted:

> *“There was an elderly collective in Mjølnerparken. They were also thrown out. It's the oldest elderly collective [in the city]. They had some common ground and places where they could meet and do things, and so forth. It was actually the first one in Copenhagen where you had this, and they were all thrown out” (Troels Glismann, interview, 13/06/24).*

The erosion of social programs has had a tangible impact on community support systems. One interviewee noted the loss of social workers in Mjølnerparken who worked with at-risk youth: "Actually, they used to be a really great bunch of workers in Mjølnerparken that did social work also for kids, but they all got cut or fired many years ago" (Anna, interview, 21/06/24). Similarly, there has been a reduction of language support services at the Nørrebro Library, which has further marginalized non-Danish-speaking residents:

> *“We had a person hired here in the library who got fired because they had to decrease the number of people working here. He talked to a lot of people about the permission to stay in Denmark and work permits, and he spoke Arabic. He was the last Arabic-speaking person here at the library. And it's really sad that he's not here anymore and that they cannot prioritize this advising he had going on because there are so many people, especially from Mjølnerparken, coming here that don't speak Danish. I mean, 25 a day, I think, came in here who wouldn't come to the library otherwise. That's a big loss, I think” (Anna, Interview, 21/06/24).*

v.iii.ii Punishment and Control: Paternal Welfare as Racial Banishment

By using a state monopoly on violence, I argue that the paternal welfare system and its ability to almost universally regulate the distribution and integration of ‘non-Western’ populations can be seen as a form of racial banishment. This approach, which combines welfare policies with punitive measures, aligns with Roy's (2017) description of racial banishment as a process that uses the language of law and order to justify the expulsion of racialized populations. Roy argues that these punitive techniques are used to “limit the mobility and rights of those whose principal ‘offense’ consists of being poor, homeless, and/or of color” (2017, p. 8). In Mjølnerparken, this is evident in the intensified policing and harsher sentencing for residents involved in criminal activities:

> *“There were a lot of people who made unrest in Mjølnerparken, who, you know, dealt [drugs], were in gangs or whatever. They are not there anymore. They are to some extent, but a lot of them went to prison, and a lot of them have been moved out, and they're not coming back. They made sure that they were not coming back. If you're a gang member and you get caught in gang activity, you get double punishment. And if you're carrying weapons, double punishment. So, they've really sharpened the knife towards Mjølnerparken and people living there” (Troels Glismann, interview, 13/06/24).*

Furthermore, the criteria for designating ‘ghetto’ areas in Denmark explicitly target ethnic-majority neighborhoods, directly aligning with Roy's concept of racial banishment, as it creates a legal framework for identifying and targeting racialized spaces:

> *“When your prerequisite is no greater than 50% ‘non-Western’ residents, you can't be more explicit than that. Then you see your list of ‘non-Western’ countries, and you're like, ‘Where did that even come from? You're just listing countries with a majority nonwhite population’” (Emily, interview, 25/06/24).*

This bureaucratic racialization illustrates the ability of the state to demonize ethnic minorities and weaponize their stigma in order to justify the exclusion, displacement, and banishment of an othered population while narrativizing it as a product of a benevolent welfare system.

v.iii.iii Kicking down – Urban Regeneration for Who?

Figure 32 *– An abandoned apartment in Mjølnerparken, Source: Author*

Figure 33 *– Mjølnerparken under renovation, Source: Author*

These discourses blame residents for their othering, punish them for their difference, and banish them from their communities and homes. The logic of urban renewal and regeneration is based on the discourse of a perforated Danish state that challenges the socially democratic value of a unified and ethnocentric welfare system. “It is essential to call into question the stigmatizing, insulting terms of ‘regeneration’ and ‘revitalization’; to target for ‘regeneration’ a place and its people is to imply that they must be degenerate, and ‘revitalizing’ a place suggests that it is full of devitalized individuals, or people not vital to a city” (Slater, 2014, p. 523). Glismann agrees:

“I think that it's a change where you kick down. You're kicking down on social group five, hacking on them. They don't try to really lift them up. They think that the whip is better than the carrot” (Troels Glismann, interview, 13/06/24).

However, regenerative social policies and urban betterment didn’t have to come with this exclusionary displacement. All my participants who were deeply familiar with the Ghetto Laws and the evictions at Mjølnerparken saw other solutions:

“All of these things they say about opening up Mjølnerparken and connecting it to the city, all of that could have been done without selling the two buildings, without evicting people. They could have all stayed there. If the issue itself was the location or the qualities of the space, then they knew how to improve that, or at least they could try to improve that. But when you just completely demolish the community that's living there and break people up, it makes it really difficult for these changes, in my opinion, to have a good impact because you've basically started completely over instead of trying to enhance something that's already there” (Emily, interview, 25/06/24).

“They could easily have moved them, you know. Okay, now we move you over here, then you renovate this, and then you can move back, or whatever. But Jan Hyttel, the chairman of Bo-Vita…his perspective is not democracy. It's something else. I won't guess about it, but it's not bottom-up” (Troels Glismann, interview, 13/06/24)

“It's strange because it was a really attractive place to live for a lot of people. There was a super long waitlist to get an apartment, and I think there was a lot of hope for the area with the renovation projects. And then, almost from one day to another, they tore down the house. As you can see, there are some new things being built now” (Midas, interview, 25/10/23).

With the Ghetto Laws, Denmark has produced their most explicitly xenophobic discourse to date. In Mjølnerparken, the state has exercised its monopoly on violence to dispossess vulnerable residents of their homes while making them the scapegoats of their own exploitation. A critical analysis of the discourses that made this possible requires an intersectional critique of racialized narratives and practices of stigmatization and banishment. I leave this section with a reply from the architect-activist, Emily, when I asked her whether she interpreted the Ghetto Laws more as a form of state-led gentrification or state-led racism:

“It can definitely be both. I don't really know what their primary motivation is. We can read into politicians' speeches, which tend to talk about culture and ethnicity. They don't really talk about money so much. But that doesn't mean that's what their real motivation is. They can use that to gain support and say, ‘Aren't you afraid of your neighbors who keep meeting in groups?’ ‘Your Danish culture is being threatened.’ That could just be a political tactic that they use, but they're not talking about money so much when they talk about the Parallel Society's law. They talk about the black hole on the map of Denmark. They talk about how young kids lack role models in their communities. If it were just about money, there wouldn't be a language test required for five-year-olds to prove that they're

Danish enough. There wouldn't be these penalties for children visiting their home countries. None of those aspects would be a part of it if it were purely financially motivated" (Emily, interview, 25/06/24).

V.iv Superkilen is no Savior

v.iv.i The Art of Raising Rents

Coming back to Harvey's 'Art of the Rent,' we can observe Superkilen as a strategic development in the urban regeneration and gentrification in Nørrebro. Copenhagen, now seeing "that investing in urban public space was not just about pleasing its citizens but also about general attractiveness and global competitiveness among cities," sought to develop the space into its modern iteration in 2012 (Skovgaard Nielsen, 2019, p. 45). The development of it and Mimersparken, as well as the renovation of the Nørrebrohallen, correlated with increased land rent and housing sales prices in the neighborhood. As we have seen in previous sections, this is an implicit condition tied to neoliberal and neo-colonial practices. However, we can also observe it as an explicit objective of the park's construction. Glismann notes that rising prices was an express goal of Realdania's when they offered 50 million Danish Kroner for the project:

"The reason why they wanted to do Superkilen was to make it better for everyone, but also, to raise prices on housing in Nørrebro. That was expressed directly in the document behind why Realdania wanted to give the money. It was actually expressed. They said they wanted to raise the feeling and the value of the area" (Troels Glismann, interview, 13/06/24).

Glismann further noted that Superkilen was then actively marketed by a team of four public relations agents hired by BIG, which included the publication of a massive manuscript about the participatory research and design of the park. This has led to Superkilen achieving international recognition from architecture awards and Instagram influencers. Even residents I interviewed who were not so active in local politics as Glismann tied the park's construction to rising rents:

"I'm a bit worried about the gentrification and the rents getting too high. The apartments are getting too expensive for normal people to stay here. So, it's going to be more gentrified. And I think it would be very sad for Nørrebro. And, of course, we're getting new public spaces like Superkilen and other places as well. Sure, it looks nice" (Lukas, interview, 1206/24).

Further, an activist familiar with the situation tied this process directly to the evictions at Mjølnerparken, linking the two distinct socio-spatial expressions under one neoliberal script:

"I guess you could argue that Superkilen has also been a part of that, right? It's a double-edged sword because renovating and making the city nicer is like, if you look at it on a surface level, it's a good thing. It's nice that people have nice houses to live in and a nice park like Superkilen to be in. But the way it's done and the way that the renovations are used to restrict access and to cater to a very specific demography, it's very clear that it's actively harming the people that live here and have their lives here" (Mila, interview, 11/06/24).

This highlights a critique of urban upgrading employed by Roy (2017), Goetz (2016), and Anguelovski and Connolly (2023). Displacement and banishment are the only ways in which most marginalized residents experience the processes of urban renewal or greening. As in the development of most new public spaces, Superkilen brought something new and exciting into the urban fabric that made the space more enjoyable and attractive than before. This is not an inherently neoliberal process. However, the use of this attractiveness to manufacture and close rent gaps while simultaneously stigmatizing and evicting non-white residents next door shows how dangerous neoliberal and colonial narratives have co-opted the space for capital extraction.

v.iv.ii The False Promise of Participation

Figure 34 *– The Black Square of Superkilen, Source: Author*

Now, I want to unpack the true nature of Superkilen's participatory design process and test BIG's claim that it was a 'participatory park extreme!' While there is limited published material about the participatory process from anyone except the developers and designers themselves, I sat down with the only resident included on the Superkilen selection committee, Troels Glismann. The only citizen representative on a committee otherwise made up of architects, planners, Realdania, and the municipality, Glismann advocated for a different, greener design called *Nørrewood* on behalf of his neighbors. Decisively, the committee said 'no:'

> *"That was Realdania. Realdania said we want BIG to be one of the architects. They were really pushing it. We wanted something different. That was what I was representing. I said to them, 'Okay, if you want that, I have to give detergency, saying that I want something else.' And they said that's not an option. The chief of the municipal economic department said to me, 'Well, you can also have*

nothing. You don't want this? You can also have nothing.' And then I said, 'Well, that's not an option.' I didn't dare, but maybe I should have" (Troels Glismann, interview, 13/06/24).

Glismann remarks that he was constantly pushed out of decisions and shut down when he openly challenged Realdania, Bjarke Ingels, and the municipality. The sole representative from the community, Glismann went to bat with the committee over many aspects of the design, including the black square's fountain, the over-use of concrete, the construction of a ramp in the Red Square, and the seating at the top of the Green Park's 'volcano.' He remembers the frustrations he felt arguing his case against the architects and planners over an argument about a seat placement in the Green Park:

"In the end, I won the argument, but it took me at least 2 hours to get him to accept that we should do it. He pulled the card: 'It's against our design.' Every time we had a discussion like this, he said, 'Well, that's against our design. We can't accept that. That is not our project.' How do you contest that argument?" (Troels Glismann, interview, 13/06/24).

Even further, Glismann's sole ally on the committee, a municipal advisor who sided with many of his ideas, was barred from attending the final meeting on the park's design. Glismann concedes that it's difficult to make everyone happy, but the narratives of participatory design and inclusive planning fall insultingly far from what truly happened. Rather than a process that integrated community members from the diverse social groups the park claims to represent, Realdania and BIG consulted a single resident on the park's design who was routinely shut down and excluded from decision-making processes.

And again, I must remind you that investigations revealed that *only five of the 108* objects from the community's diverse 'homelands' were genuinely suggested or sourced by local residents. This fake narrative of inclusivity is not only profoundly dishonest but actively harmful. Superkilen is a prime example of how states use narratives of participation to shift blame and offload social responsibilities. Meanwhile, behind the veil, they do whatever they want, rendering the notion of political participation something "entirely appropriate to the neoliberal age" (Pearce, 2010, p. 14). I must admit that I admire Glismann, who, a dozen years later, sees his experience with a critical sense of humor. Even more politically engaged in his community today, he reflects on his time in the committee:

"You know, this is the trouble when you let BIG go crazy. It's incredible what he has gotten away with. Many of his ideas are funny and crazy. When you look at them and you say, 'Oh, this is spectacular.' Sure it is. But does it test reality? Does it really work? Is it a good house? Is it just, you know, an architectural expression, or is it something that benefits people's lives? I doubt it's the last thing" (Troels Glismann, interview, 13/06/24).

Critiques over the inclusion of the community's needs have been expressed outside the walls of the committee as well. Most participants suggested a demand for more greenery in the space and a critique of materials unsuitable for harsh Danish winters. Not only did BIG's design exclude many new trees or green areas, but the construction of the Red Square killed two existing old-growth trees beloved by the neighbors:

“There used to be a big tree down here. And, after a bunch of people complained that they were going to cut it down, they agreed not to do it, but then they fucked up the root system anyway so that they had to replant new ones. It's weird small things like that that make people angry. But it kind of shows their attitude towards the project” (Midas, interview, 25/10/23).

v.iv.iii Symbolic Inclusivity: Creating Neo-Colonial Space

Further, the artifacts don’t really resonate with many of the area's inhabitants, producing a kind of symbolic inclusivity rather than political representation. Previous studies on the capacity of the objects to create social cohesion have concluded that the notion of artifacts as drivers of social integration is laughable (Werner and Evensmo, 2022), with “the designers’ stylized idea of immigration is more celebrated than the actual presence of immigrant residents” (Stanfield and Van Riemsdijk, 2019, p. 1356). A local resident who has lived next to the Red Square their whole life said:

“I mean, I think it's a fun idea. It's clear that they had this idea that we need to speak into this urban environment and such, and, but it seems kind of like virtue signaling to me that they're not really making space for the people. I think it's fun but also a bit ridiculous. Just for a minute, it's cool to look at, but it just has a… it doesn't really speak to the people who live here and use it” (Midas, interview, 25/10/23).

Further interviews have echoed the conclusions of the previous studies by Werner and Evensmo and Stanfield and Van Riemsdijk that have compared Superkilen to a colonial museum or English landscape garden replete with pillaged foreign artifacts. Both immigrants and Danes I spoke to reported no attachment to objects from their home countries present in the park. Taken from their contextual meaning and placed in some urban showcase on the other side of the world, the objects create no critical reflection on the realities of its surrounding urban environment: “There's no friction in the park because it's just object, object, object, object, object” (Emily, interview, 2506/24). More precisely, a first-year landscape architecture student critiqued the space’s inability to represent the lives of the community, instead privileging Bjarke Ingels’s vision:

“I think it’s a very classic, academic way of making spaces for people because you think you're, like, telling a story through this small aspect, but in reality, people are not going to walk around and think, ‘oh, I wonder where these benches are from.’ People are just going to sit on it. I think it's great to have someone who has big visions, but it's also just a very toxic, masculine way of doing things. And I think [Ingels] forgot that architecture isn't just art; it's also designed for people’s regular life. And because he's kind of a patriarch, it's just his vision that comes through, not other people's needs. I think it's kind of inhumane. You don't really know how to place yourself [in the space], and you feel kind of alienated; at least I do” (Midas, interview, 25/10/23).

These perceptions reflect on what can be considered a neo-colonial space, where representations are detached from their contexts and reduced to mere abstractions. I turn to Burcu Yigit Turan's critique, which exposes how design can perpetuate colonial

ideologies under the guise of inclusivity. She argues, "The reanimation of colonialist ideologies through design is never revealed. Thus, injustices are implicitly normalized" (2021, p. 71). This normalization occurs through a combination of social justice rhetoric and cultural tokenism, creating what Turan calls "a perfect colonial, racist, and capitalist soft-war border technology" (2021, p. 72). The design reinforces a paradoxical national narrative where Denmark presents itself as "an anti-colonial humanistic global superpower" while simultaneously implying that it "is not a homeland for people who are not 'true Danes'" (Turan, 2021, p. 72). This allows Denmark to maintain a progressive image while reinforcing exclusionary practices, ultimately revealing how design can become a tool for systemic inequality when wielded with a neoliberal and colonial gaze. The park's eccentric design masks the underlying narratives employed by the state, Realdania, politicians, and landowners by creating a remarkably loud false narrative of humanistic inclusivity and conviviality:

> *"I guess it's funny, and it's quirky, and it's something different, but it's also super, I don't know. It gives weird vibes, right? This whole multicultural trope that I feel also very much fits into how some people would maybe talk about Nørrebro as a neighborhood. It is super off, especially when you think about what's going on with the Ghetto Laws and the evictions. We want nice multicultural spaces when they look nice and when they're a part of this architectural space and are for people to look at and feel good. But then when it actually comes down to who is this neighborhood for and who gets access to live here and have a community here, it's very different than who is maybe trying to be represented in Superkilen" (Mila, interview, 11/06/24).*

V.v Encounters, Placemaking, & a Danish Sense of Optimism

v.v.i 'Everything is Better than a Pile of Shit:' Superkilen Can Be Cool

After sharing a laugh, a playful Glismann and I look out over the Black Square from his office window. I ask him how he sees the park a dozen years since its 2012 construction:

> *"What we've got now is, of course, better than what was. No discussions. There's no argument against it. Of course it's better, you know, everything is better than a pile of shit" (Troels Glismann interview, 13/06/24).*

Glismann's dry humor marks an important concession. While many of the objects and artifacts around Superkilen don't offer a genuine representation of their 'diverse homelands' as the designers suggest, some do create opportunities for interactions in a space that is free to inhabit and easy to access. Many people I interviewed remarked that they would consider it as more of an 'activities park' rather than a 'hangout park,' unlike nearby grassy Nørrebroparken. In many ways, the artifacts encourage a playfulness that invites a diverse set of users in ways that normal parks don't:

> *"I feel like it's a space where there's actually a lot of different elements, and that's great. For example, 13- and 14-year-old girls just sit somewhere and have a look at people, and they would not go to a normal square with a bench. I think, in that way, it still works. A lot of my friends think Superkilen is fake inclusion, and that's*

fine. I totally respect that view of it, but I'm just pleased to see the different types of people that actually hang out there. Even some *of the youth from Mjølnerparken like hanging out at the elements at the Superkilen" (Anna, interview, 21/06/24).*

There were also many impressions of Superkilen as a democratic space that offered the opportunity for forming political demonstrations open to the community at large:

"Yeah, the Red Square is a very political place because they always make these demonstrations here. It's a very common starting point for demonstrations. During the Gaza conflict, they were protesting every weekend. They were meeting up here. Maybe they also had community food. So, it's a very political place" (Jannis, interview, 09/06/24).

Den Rode Plads (the Red Square) is very much used as the starting place for a lot of demos. It's very common that when you do a demo in Nørrebro, you start at Den Rode Plads, and a lot of the Palestine demos have started from here, and different anti-racist demos, and some of the Mjølnerparken demos. It's closed off from traffic on both sides, so it's easy to gather a lot of people without disturbing the traffic. I guess it's like the town square of Nørrebro in some way" (Mila, interview, 11/06/24).

This spatial openness and flexibility offer an opportunity for interaction between social groups, a prerequisite for 'becoming' in agonistic democracy and critical placemaking. While many participants noted that they usually spend time in their own social groups when they hang out in the park, events like political demonstrations, community kitchens, and festivals were cited as common opportunities to meet strangers from different backgrounds. When asked about whether they seek out these events in the park, participants responded:

"Not intentionally. Not like I looked, there was an event, and then I'm like, 'Oh, I need to be there.' More randomly; maybe I am here, and then I get involved or participate" (Juan, interview, 10/06/24).

"It's mostly the Nørrebro people here. But you also have some people who will start a demonstration here. They have a little wagon and meet up once a week, like left-wing people, with some food. And you could jam with them too; I play with them sometimes" (Jannis, interview, 09/06/24).

While these emergent social ties are fairly loose and rarely lead to long-term relationships, their presence reveals a potential groundwork to build upon and nurture. While the value of loose social ties in creating social cohesion has been hotly contested in the social mix literature, I contend that these interactions are the basis of Toolis's concept of critical placemaking. Placemaking highlights the ideal that "providing a space for community members occupying different social positions and perspectives to encounter one another affords opportunities to develop more inclusive community narratives held in common by a group of people to remind them of their identity, values, and beliefs" […] "In doing so, placemaking links personal narratives to collective narratives, thereby creating bridging capital, contributing to a stronger civic fabric and more resilient communities,

serving as the basis for collective mobilization" (2017, p. 188). While Superkilen has not delivered its outlandish goal of formulating new types of social cohesion, it certainly is better than the dusty, unused brownfield site that it was before. In all honesty, Superkilen itself is totally fine; it's the narratives and actors behind it that are the true problem. In conclusion:

> *"In many ways, it has worked. Bottom line. It has worked. It's really not a bad park" (Troels Glismann, interview, 13/06/24).*

v.vi.ii A Locus of Encounter

***Figure 35** – The Black Square, Source: Author*

These placemaking practices and loose social ties are important considerations in the optimistic ideal of a public space. Let us imagine 'place' as a democratic, continuously created, and affective urban space. Simonsen and Koefoed define is as "a locus of encounters, constructed as specific articulations of different social practices, narratives, meanings and materialities" (2015, p. 527). Seeing Superkilen as a locus of encounters for taking space and making place offers us an adaptable conceptualization of the park, allowing us to observe the multiplicity of urban social life and project our visions of urban society upon it. This imbibes the place with a political identity created by residents rather than by designers and emphasizes an active sense of placemaking:

> *"I think mostly they're separate groups, but that's the same all over the city. I think when they mix together in a square, the possibility of doing something together or talking to each other or just having a look at what they are doing is bigger when it's in an open public space like this. I'm really happy about the way it's getting used; so many different groups are using it. I think it works quite well" (Lukas, interview, 12/06/24).*

Non-commercial, open, and accessible, Superkilen provides a space that works well for many different groups and creates an attachment and sense of belonging that is important to recognize:

“Sometimes I meet with the local high school or elementary school students, and I do this quiz with them every time. ‘Do you know what the big hill on the Black Square is built of?’ And they are all so pleased to hear that it's actually dirt and earth from Palestine. It means a lot to some of the young people with Palestinian roots. I really like the area. I really like the red square and the black square. I think a lot of people, different types of people, are coming here. When you look at other squares, I think they are more segregated. I like how people find one element and hang out there” (Anna, interview, 21/06/24).

With these impressions, I do not mean to substantiate the claims of the designers and developers. The way they have marketed the project illustrates a deeply problematic narrative based on the colonial gaze and neoliberal rent gap speculation. However, some of these representations can profoundly impact the affective sense of being at the neighborhood level: “The situation is like this in Denmark, that if you are Muslim, you can’t really be Danish. Because that’s what you’re told. . . So, you can’t say, ‘I’m from Denmark.’ But you can say ‘I’m from Nørrebro’” (Interview quote from Stanfield and Van Riemsdijk, 2019, p. 1369).

v.vi.iii Active Involvement: The Red Square Skatepark

While we have illustrated that many of Superkilen’s 108 objects fail to foster social cohesion or, often, even interaction, some of the park’s elements have been co-opted by residents and attract many users and encounters. The grills, chess boards, and playgrounds all help to provide these opportunities for appropriation, but my favorite example is the skating area in front of Nørrebrohallen in the Red Square. Originally constructed out of a smooth, soft material, the Red Square was later repaved with dark red bricks due to issues around durability and slipperiness during Danish winter conditions. However, the skaters who frequently enjoyed the space requested that some of the original surface, which was excellent for skating, remain in place. The city obliged, leaving them a rectangular skate spot with the smoother surface. The spot’s popularity grew, becoming internationally recognizable for its makeshift ramps and obstacles, often confiscated by the city. Tensions over the DIY obstacles led to the municipality offering a group of skaters some money to install permanent skating equipment. A skater I interviewed tells the story:

“We used to put trash ramps. We just put any obstacle in this spot. Maybe there is a table one day, or a chair or piece of furniture, or just a trash can to jump over. Random things or people used to build a curb together and then put it here, and the city would take it away. Then they decided to make a plan with the city to make some real ramps that can stay and don't break. They built these granite obstacles, like one year or two years ago. [The city] gave some money, and one of the skaters who was also an architect planned the skate park” (Jannis, interview, 09/06/24).

This led to the spot becoming an internationally iconic skate locale featured in magazines and skate videos distributed worldwide. Despite containing only a few small ramps and ledges, it is much more popular than the larger skate parks nearby. When asked about why the Red Square always seems to have so many more skaters than Friheden—a

skate park only 250 meters away with a dozen more bowls, ramps, ledges, and rails—Jannis replied:

> *“The vibe is much better here. And it's much warmer here. This is the hottest square, I think, in Copenhagen. Everybody knows it all over the world. If there's some skater coming to Copenhagen, he will come here 100%” (Jannis, interview, 09/06/24).*

Further, a sports organizer at Nørrebrohallen noted that skateboarding is an embraced activity for young people in Superkilen as it has a low barrier to entry and an inclusive character:

> *“Skateboarding is very easy for young people just to join into; this subculture, it's open like that. It's quite easy to read how to do it like everybody else is and just go to skate” (Lukas, interview, 12/06/24).*

During my fieldwork in Superkilen, skateboarding facilitated countless interactions across ages and social groups. Despite having a clearly marked set of subcultural norms, skaters often interacted with the widest range of other people. Several times, I saw children roughly seven to twelve years old of many different ethnic backgrounds borrow the boards of skaters in their 20s and 30s and attempt to skate around. The skaters watched and laughed as the kids played on makeshift and permanent ramps and ledges. These are some of the important social interactions that can create a natural space of conviviality that cannot be designed from the top down but must be nurtured through communal acts of kindness and openness.

Figure 36 *– The Red Square skate spot: Source: Author*

v.vi.iv Encouraging Bottom-Up Political Associations

Figure 37 *– An anti-imperialist banner on the construction site at Mjølnerparken, Source: Author*

Figure 38 *– Palestinian flag on the balcony of a newly renovated Mjølnerparken building, Source: Author*

A final component we can look to for transductive inspiration comes from local bottom-up political and activist organizations actively functioning in the area. One of these is the Nørrebro Lokaludvalg (local committee), to which both Troels Glismann and Mohammad Aslam have been elected for decades. The Lokaludvalg is a committee including elected volunteers from housing associations around Nørrebro that dialogues between politicians, the government, and local citizens. They don't have the authority to make final decisions but try to influence urban plans on behalf of their neighborhood by writing letters to government officials and developing a five-year urban development plan with their constituents. Despite his miserable experiences with participatory practices in the past, Glismann is optimistic about this year's prospective plan:

> *"This year, we have a big plan, and we have put a lot of things into it. We made a prospective development plan for Vingen, which is on the other side of Tagansvej. And it seems like it has had a great impact because everybody's talking about the area, and they are trying to pick up on our ideas on how to plan and develop it. So, we are really looking forward to how much will go into what's being built in the long run" (Troels Glismann, interview, 13/06/24).*

However, formal organizations in local governance are not the only democratic practices manifesting in Nørrebro. Contrasting dominant narratives of ghettoization and isolation, activist groups and residents are reimaging the possibilities of their neighborhood: "Almen Modstand (Common Resistance), activists and residents have seen the public space in Nørrebro as an agonistic public sphere, which can lead to autonomous landscape

subjectivities and insurgent citizenships that resist conforming with gendered, racialized, and classed citizenship definitions from above. They have a capacity to struggle to oppose the power structure" (Turan, 2021, p. 70).

When evictions began at Mjølnerparken, Almen Modstand helped to mobilize a bottom-up resistance to the police and politicians who came to displace residents. An activist familiar with the struggle against the evictions confirmed that the resistance was entirely bottom-up, led by Mjølnerparken's residents, and supported by a broader coalition of left-wing activists from around the city:

> *"The first part [of the resistance] was showing how nice of a local community there was to counter the very racist narrative that was going around in Danish media about Mjølnerparken. I think if you're from Jutland and you come to Copenhagen, you think that you can't walk there without feeling unsafe or whatever. It couldn't be further from that. There were some renovation efforts going into the common house in Mjølnerparken, trying to make that space really nice to show that this is a space where we can meet and be together as a community. There was also some more illegalized activism, like squatting, but that wasn't the main tactic at all. I think the community part was way stronger. But as you know, now they went through with the eviction that they were going to go through with, and they're tearing down the buildings. Or they have torn down the buildings and are doing a new building now" (Mila, interview, 11/06/24).*

These organizations represent only two of many activist-oriented groups that strive for more direct forms of democracy and accountability in the local community. I struggled to reach more activists, as many countered that they were too busy preparing for upcoming court cases or felt burnt out after months of organizing for the Free Palestine movement. But this lack truly comes down to nothing more than bad timing. There are continuous protests, demonstrations, and community mobilizations happening in Nørrebro and Superkilen organized by a vast diversity of social groups, including the residents of Mjølnerparken, making it one of the most politically active neighborhoods in all of Denmark.

V.vi Conclusions: Exposing Narratives & Becoming Present

The evidence provided in this section has shown how neoliberal processes in Nørrebro manifest via simultaneous yet contradictory narratives of ghettoization and inclusivity. These neoliberal processes are essentially aided by the discursive stigmatization and banishment of the racialized other, opening new gaps for spatial fixes to invest and extract excess capital. These nefarious processes are skillfully masked behind the narratives of an inclusive and humanistic Denmark, represented in the design of Superkilen. However, we have seen that these narratives are not only dishonest but reflect a colonial gaze that strips the subjects of their context and reduces them to abstract representations. The result is a society that distinguishes between 'real' and 'not-real Danes,' further stigmatizing ethnic minorities while banishing them to the socio-spatial peripheries. If, as Edward Goetz suggests, social housing transformation is representative of larger debates "about poverty and what can/should be done about it," then the Ghetto Laws have provided an answer (2016, p. 2). Neoliberal and colonial policies have sacrificed vulnerable

residents in order to reclaim one of Denmark's most attractive and valuable neighborhoods for further ethnocentric capitalist development.

However, challenges to these processes are present and should be further nurtured into a broader existence. The narratives that turn Superkilen into a fake promise of participatory excellence are challenged daily through public encounters and the formation of place identity and attachment outside of dominant narratives. Real-lived experiences make it a space onto which we can project our vision of urban society and an asset to materially and discursively organize around.

> *"We can have a nice park and have cheap affordable housing for everyone. It's not necessarily your park's fault that the state is tearing down people's homes. We could have both at the same time" (Mila, interview, 11/06/24).*

Let us expose the dangerous narratives of stigmatization and ghettoization by finding these emergent elements and working towards these visions of an urban future we want to *become* a part of. Without our active resistance, the state—yes, even that famously inclusive Danish welfare state—and its monopoly on violence will only continue to further the economic and social exploitation of the vulnerable in the pursuit of capital.

v.vi.i The Political Need for Future Research

Tracing these complex impacts requires further research into the evolutions of stigmatized discourses and their effects on the material fabric of the city. A long-term study at the University of Aalborg–Copenhagen is being conducted by a team of social scientists to trace these effects through the Ghetto Laws' target year of 2030. I talked with the anthropologist in charge of studying Mjølnerparken in December of 2023 about her group's research, and I am very grateful that a team of dedicated researchers is already helping to fill this gap and continue the pursuit of exposing the fallout from this Ghetto Package.

Furthermore, a group of Mjølnerparken residents backed by human rights and activist organizations (including Almen Modstand) have sued the Danish Ministry for Transport and Housing. They claim the Ghetto Laws break both EU law and the European Convention of Human Rights concerning racial discrimination in housing. The case will be heard at the Court of Justice of the European Union in Luxembourg on September 30, 2024. This further complicated my ability to contact core members of Almen Modstand and Mjølnerparken, who told me they were too busy preparing for the trial to participate in this study. However, a volunteer with Almen Modstand familiar with the trial expressed great concern over the horizons of change following the trial:

> *"I think it's good to have international attention on these policies. I really hope that there's an acknowledgment of the discrimination in the law. At the same time, I am afraid that it will just lead to more a hidden racism, a little bit more nuanced. I don't know how to call it. When you call a law the ghetto list, then that raises attention in the word itself.*
>
> *But I think its outcome has more of an impact on the future than it does on this actual law right now. Because most of the damage has already been done by this law, especially in areas like Mjølnerparken. There are not really that many residents remaining here; there are some areas with just one resident remaining.*

That damage is done. It can't really be undone. *(Emily, interview, 25/06/24, emphasis mine).*

Unfortunately, it truly is too late for hundreds of Mjølnerparken residents who have already seen their homes torn down or resold to private investors, but perhaps the outcome can set the tone that this is not an acceptable way to create an inclusive or integrated city. Again, social cohesion is not an inherently evil or uncommon urban goal to strive for. But, we must reject the ways in which the Danish state has carried out the practices of stigmatization and eviction to achieve this end. We have to remain politically critical of dominant narratives and expose the discourses that attempt to mask the inner workings of neoliberal, racist urban practices. We have to find the emergent elements in our capitalist world and nurture them into being through transduction, placemaking, and radical forms of direct democratic deliberation. We have to harness our power to affect these changes every day and make the world we wish to inhabit for all members of our urban society.

Figure 39 *- The hill of the Green Park and the Black Square, Source: Author*

VI. CONCLUSION

Figure 40 *– Mjølnerparken under construction, Source: Author*

This thesis has attempted to understand the true reality behind what could initially be seen as a paradox of Danish urban development. How can we comprehend the starkly different yet geographically proximal realities of an inclusive, participatory park built to foster social cohesion and a tough, menacing ghetto that threatens to dismantle the very tenets of the welfare apparatus? My hypothesis claims that these processes, while narratively paradoxical, are, in practice, mutually constitutive contradictions inherent in the dialectical nature of capitalist growth and accumulation. They are two scenes of the same over-arching neoliberal script, which seeks to exploit rent gaps and privatize state resources. This is operationalized via a plethora of legal, financial, and social mechanisms explored in this research, both confirming and further nuancing my initial hypothesis.

One significant emergent theme in this research is the role of racial stigmatization and subsequent banishment inherent in this neoliberal process. We have seen how the racial stigmatization of ghetto areas has helped to open rent gaps for investment and privatization. These racialized narratives pushed from above represent a Danish brand of colonial anxieties about the other and position vulnerable residents on the socio-spatial periphery. These residents not only face housing displacements but racialized banishment from mainstream urban society, isolating them further. This process only works to reify the social stratification the Ghetto Laws explicitly attempt to resolve. Further, narratives around inclusivity, conviviality, and participatory planning are insultingly waved in their faces and mask the underlying colonial tensions behind these socio-spatial practices. The resultant conditions represent the power of racial discourses in facilitating neoliberal processes and

must be incorporated as an essential element in understanding the Danish brand of gentrification.

However, this is not to say there are no positive elements currently active or being fostered in Copenhagen. I concede that there are many positive aspects inherent in the Danish welfare system that has provided services and resources to millions of people. Denmark is one of the most socio-economically equal countries in the world, and its inhabitants have access to robust healthcare, education, and, yes, even housing resources managed by the state. These qualities cannot be understated and should be appreciated. However, it is the local level that brings about the most optimism for the future emergence of radical and direct levels of democracy. Here, we see genuine forms of participation and direct relationships with those with the authority to govern, as with the Nørrebro Lokaludvalg. Nørrebro itself has a profound political history of resistance, which has been mobilized to challenge evictions at Mjølnerparken in the past and the occupation of Gaza in the present. What might be possible for the future?

Finally, in Superkilen, we find an imperfect space: one that does not necessarily fulfill its designers' lofty claims but offers something productive to the world it inhabits. The people of Nørrebro turn this into a place for gathering, demonstrating, interacting, and enjoying, ascribing a sort of attachment to it that can have a meaningful impact. Claiming to design a public space that in and of itself fosters social cohesion is the rhetoric of architects, not social scientists. These narratives have a dangerous potential and should be challenged and reconstructed actively. In turn, we should celebrate Superkilen for what it actually offers us: a free, open space upon which we can project our visions of urban society. This is in and of itself a political act of claiming, making, and being.

VI.i A Final Reflection on Euro-Centricity

This research–and the master's in general–has highlighted the necessity for non-Eurocentric approaches to democratic urbanism in the 21st century. The notion that social democratic welfare states propped up by the exploitation of vulnerable populations should be considered a viable model to strive for is, at best, ridiculous and, at worst, dangerous. The chauvinistic nature of racist welfare states that attempt to create narratives of humanism and conviviality must be challenged both discursively and actively. This thesis is an attempt to do at least the former.

Moreover, I plan to continue cultivating a perspective that privileges the perspectives of bottom-up organizations and informal developments from outside of the Amero-European context. Paulo Freire, Ananya Roy, Gayatri Spivak, Kidlat Tahimik, and many more post-colonial scholars, educators, and artists can show us new ways of seeing the world and fighting its dangerous power structures. In my next pursuit, whatever it may be, I hope to surround myself with their epistemologies and perspectives.

For now, we in Europe must be mindful of those emergent democratic manifestations that present themselves to us in our own societies. We must nurture them into existence and share them with our communities. We must fight against exploitative power structures on every front wholeheartedly. We must remind ourselves that we have the power to influence something in the world through our intentions and our actions. We must find new ways of governing ourselves while supporting those around us and nurturing our

relationships into a social reality that works for equity, care, and social prosperity. Let us make the world we dream to live in. And let us never forget the potent political message left behind by David Graeber:

> *"The ultimate, hidden truth of the world is that it is something that we make, and could just as easily make differently" (2015, p. 89).*

***Figure 41** – Inside the construction site at Mjølnerparken, Source: Author*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, thank you to all the participants in this thesis for your insights, thoughts, and perceptions. Of course, this thesis would be impossible without your input, and I hope this experience has encouraged you to participate in more studies and research like this to create a better future together.

Thanks to Mathieu van Criekingen for both your excellent course in Brussels, which set the theoretical and political tone for the development of this thesis, as well as your insightful and witty guidance throughout this thesis process. Having never undertaken a research project of this caliber or size, your advice helped me see connections and gaps while keeping humor and enthusiasm for this work. Comprehending gentrification's processes, mechanisms, and narratives was a primary reason I joined this program. Through your course and this thesis, I have come away with a deep and powerful understanding of how gentrification occurs and strategies for combatting its processes. I am immensely grateful for this understanding and will take it with me as I move forward both in and out of the academy.

Thank you to Kristin Veel, who also helped me develop my thesis from a critical Danish perspective and helped me access other relevant scholars in Copenhagen. Thank you to my second reader, Yvonne Franz. Thank you to the 4 Cities staff for the last two years of a truly unparalleled experience traveling and learning all around Europe. Thanks especially to those who organize and operate the back end of this ceaselessly complex bureaucracy: Stefan de Corte, Elena Solonina, Bas Van Huer, and Josh Grigsby. Thank you to my fellow cohort student representatives, Katie, Dhruv, and Divine, for working together as a team to handle the complicated—and at times miserable—task of representing the views of our colleagues each semester. Thank you, Stefan and Josh, for listening to me in a dedicated and personal manner.

Thank you to the entire 4 Cities Cohort 14, especially my dearest friends, Dennis, Bea, Odessa, Gabby, and Robin, for two full years of traveling, cooking, talking, and general traipsing about. I learned so much from you all, and you always remind me why I am in this program, why I wrote this thesis, and why I care about urban life and experiences. Our ultimate thesis residency in Italy sprinkled abundant entertainment and joy into this otherwise trying process of 90-page knowledge creation. Thank you to Lena & Martin, whose generosity offered me the closest thing to a home in the last two years, a base for setting off into emotional and intellectual unknowns and renewed friendships.

Thank you to Isabel, a political ally, an intellectual springboard, and a dear lover. I am so grateful for all the insightful conversations about our dreams, theses, and power to make meaningful changes in our communities around the world. Your way of seeing the world has taught me so much and inspired me to challenge myself every day.

And lastly, thank you so much to my mom and dad, who have supported me and my pursuits in and out of academia my whole life in more ways than I could possibly list here. You have taught me a passion for knowledge and education from a very young age and have always unquestionably supported my interests in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. Thank you for all your love and support ❤️

APPENDIX

The following link contains transcriptions from each interview conducted as a part of this thesis research as well as a copy of the consent form I had each participant read and sign: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1gwdGFH99lX9Z3M264Ktn4e_3ENxA3OjA?usp=sharing

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