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Shaping Strict Migrant Policies through Housing Strategies in Denmark

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Abstract

In Denmark, approximately one million people reside in public housing. This sector encompasses over half of all “immigrants and their descendants from non-Western countries “. Educational attainment and employment rates among public housing residents are notably lower than the national average, and a significant proportion rely on transfer income (Landsbyggefonden, 2022). In 2020, the Housing and Planning Authority designated 25 public housing areas as 'disadvantaged residential areas.' According to the Ministry of Housing, these areas are beset by several challenges, including higher unemployment rates, lower educational levels, increased criminal activity, a predominance of residents with only basic education, and substantially lower incomes compared to the broader population (Bolig- og Planstyrelsen, 2020).

The political strategy for addressing these disadvantaged areas has significantly changed in recent years. Since 2018, the Danish parliament, supported by a broad majority, has implemented the Parallel Society Agreement (PSA). Key elements of the PSA include mandatory childcare from age one for children in these areas, a prohibition on individuals receiving transfer incomes from relocating to the most severely affected 'ghetto areas,' language assessments for children beginning in kindergarten, and a cap of no more than 40% public housing in these areas. This is to be achieved by demolishing existing public housing and developing new private properties (PSA, 2018).

These regulations, unique to areas predominantly inhabited by ethnic minorities, prompt questions about whether this represents a singular approach to housing policy or a continuation of practices that have been evolving since the 1980s with the increase in labor and refugee migration.

This article will demonstrate, through policy document analysis and three case studies in Denmark, how politicians and the media construct a narrative that ethnic minorities in disadvantaged housing areas, often labeled as ghetto areas, lack the desire for cultural interaction and integration with the wider Danish society. This perception paves the way for legal and administrative practices that systematically

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discriminate against ethnic minorities, illustrating how housing policy is intricately connected to migration policy in Denmark.

Keywords: Housing Policy; Parallel Societies; Ghetto Areas; Ethnic Minorities; Ethnic Discrimination; Inte-gration Discourse; Denmark

Introduction

In Denmark, public housing has historically been designed to cater to the needs of individuals with lower incomes or those facing social challenges. These units are state-supported and managed by housing organizations or associations, offering rents typically below market rates. Currently, approximately one million people reside in public housing, with about 29% of the occupants being of ethnic minority background (Landsbyggefonden 2022). Individuals living in public housing are more likely to rely on social welfare benefits and generally have lower educational attainment and employment rates compared to the national average.

Since 2010, the approach to addressing disadvantaged residential areas in Denmark has seen significant transformations. In 2018, the Danish parliament adopted the Parallel Society Agreement (PSA) with broad support, addressing concerns over “parallel societies” within certain residential areas. These societies were described as comprising residents who are physically or socially isolated, adhering to their ethnic norms and rules, and lacking interaction with the surrounding Danish society. The PSA posits that such conditions threaten social cohesion (PSA, 2018). Known as the “ghetto package,” the agreement includes measures like housing demolitions, ethnic quotas, and specific mandates for ethnic minority parents.

The proportion of ethnic minorities in public housing, who generally have lower educational *levels* and employment rates, suggests disparities that extend beyond the simple existence of parallel societies. Alternative narratives from housing-related social initiatives (Fallov, 2017) and research findings (Kjeldsen, 2020) challenge the prevailing views, highlighting issues like poverty, territorial stigmatization, cultural diversity, and community engagement in these areas.

The identification of markers for parallel societies has thus shaped a political discourse that significantly alters living conditions and imposes unique regulations on ethnic minorities. The “ghetto packages” are manifestations of a restrictive integration policy that leans more towards assimilation or even the stigmatization of ethnic minorities, rather than fostering genuine social integration. This approach not only contributes to exclusion but also risks reinforcing the very parallel societies it aims to dismantle, undermining principles of equality and citizen rights².

The labels “parallel societies” and “ghettos” serve as political constructs with profound social consequences. Instead of debating the validity of these terms or the criteria for ghettos, it is crucial to examine how politicians have portrayed ethnic minorities as a homogeneous group,

² When it comes to ethnic discrimination, Denmark is not unique. In several EU countries, there is observable ethnic discrimination, particularly in the job market and employment sectors, which disproportionately affects women. This practice has been emerging for decades, as highlighted in the report “Migrants, Minorities, and Employment,” prepared by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD, 2003).



disconnected from mainstream society and clinging to regressive norms, while simultaneously relying on public social services.

In the subsequent sections, I will use three illustrative cases—the Ishøj case, the City Committee, and the Parallel Society Agreement—to show how the concept of 'integration' has evolved and become intertwined with housing policy. This policy serves as a restrictive integration mechanism that legitimizes ethnically discriminatory practices. Following Flyvbjerg's (2010) approach, I treat a case as a specific and detailed unit of study, such as an individual, group, organization, or society, selected to deeply understand complex phenomena within their natural contexts. Case studies are invaluable, providing detailed insights essential for developing a nuanced understanding of reality. They capture the complex dynamics and subtleties of human behavior, enriching our understanding of reality's multiple layers.

These cases are pivotal for dissecting the interplay between integration policy and housing policy, and this article critiques the Parallel Society Agreement and other government initiatives that serve as tools for implementing ethnically discriminatory practices.

A Brief Overview of Migration to Denmark and the Discourse on Immigrants and Descendants from Non-Western Countries³

As of January 1, 2023, Denmark was home to 910,898 “immigrants and descendants,” constituting 15.4% of the total population. Of these, 579,457 originate from non-Western countries, primarily located in the Middle East and Africa. This demographic has garnered significant attention in the realms of politics, public administration, and public discourse.

The mid-1960s marked a period of substantial economic growth that reshaped the Danish labor market. From 1960 to 1973, unemployment significantly declined due to major expansions in the construction and manufacturing sectors, coupled with a rapid increase in public sector employment (Henriksen, 2006). The demand for labor-initiated migration surges, partly through guest worker programs that brought laborers from the former Yugoslavia, Turkey, and Pakistan to Denmark (Pedersen, 2000). However, the oil crisis of 1973 prompted Denmark to halt the recruitment of guest workers amid rising unemployment, shifting the migration pattern towards family reunifications.

Immigration was relatively subdued from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s but saw a significant increase from the mid-1980s onward. The arrival of a substantial group of Bosnian refugees in 1995, and significant cohorts from the European Union, particularly Romania and Poland in 2015, coincided with the influx of 31,000 Syrian refugees (Bendixen, 2022).

Despite some years of high refugee intake, Denmark has consistently hosted fewer asylum seekers compared to many other European countries (Eurostat, 2022). The free movement of labor across the German border was suspended in 2016, leading to a marked decline in asylum applications, exacerbated by stricter border controls across Europe and the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, most asylum applications were from Ukrainians, Afghans, Syrians,

³ "Non-Western countries," which are also MENAP countries, encompass Syria, Kuwait, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Somalia, Iraq, Qatar, Sudan, Bahrain, Djibouti, Jordan, Algeria, United Arab Emirates, Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Iran, Yemen, Mauritania, Oman, Afghanistan, Palestine, Gaza, West Bank, East Jerusalem, Pakistan, and Turkey.

Eritreans, and Belarusians (Bendixen, 2022). In the first half of 2022 alone, nearly 24,000 Ukrainians entered Denmark (Danmarks Statistik, 2022).

Denmark's migration history is shaped by changing economic conditions and political decisions. Notably, immigration from non-Western countries has significantly influenced the public discourse on immigration and integration, portraying a complex narrative.

Contrary to the problematic views often presented politically, immigrants and descendants from non-Western countries have increasingly integrated into Danish society. Many are actively pursuing education, securing employment, launching businesses, acquiring property, and even gaining Danish citizenship. However, despite these positive trends, this demographic remains disproportionately represented in statistics related to crime, unemployment, and poverty. Various studies have endeavored to understand and explain this pronounced overrepresentation, with the concept of “integration” emerging as a focal point.

The dialogue on integration and the acknowledgment of foreigners as permanent residents in Denmark gained traction post-1980s, predominantly driven by concerns over rising public expenditure attributed to immigration. During this period, right-wing populist parties highlighted challenges posed by migrant workers from Muslim backgrounds, citing potential threats to Danish values (Jensen et al., 2017; Østergaard, 2007). However, the 1990s saw a significant shift in the public and political discourse, marked by job outsourcing, increased mobility, and global migration. Discussions increasingly framed cultural differences as barriers to integration, encompassing issues such as attire, dietary habits, marriage choices, and settlement patterns in “ghettos.”

The portrayal of foreign cultures as threats to Danish values intensified, especially as several European countries experienced terrorist attacks by self-proclaimed Islamist groups in the 2000s, reshaping the discourse on integration with a focus on the African and Muslim populations.

Since 2001, the discourse has centered around the discussion of values, quickly transitioning from basic democratic principles to specifically Danish values, encapsulating universally recognized ideals like equality, democracy, and freedom of expression (Olwig & Pærregaard, 2011). The Danish government emphasized freedom of expression as a core Danish democratic value during the global Mohammed crisis in 2005.

This narrative has become so dominant that it now legitimizes political actions aimed at addressing perceived threats to social cohesion (Jensen et al., 2017; Olwig & Pærregaard, 2011). Post-September 11, the public sphere has been dominated by a discourse linking Islam with terrorism and radicalization (Tireli, 2022).

While the negative portrayal of ethnic minorities dates to the 1970s and 1980s, the end of the 20th century saw a drastic shift in Danish politics, with the rise of far-right parties painting ethnic minorities as threats to Danish culture and burdens on the welfare system. This narrative has been embraced by the social democrat party over recent decades.

Amidst this increasingly polarized rhetoric, Denmark's immigration policy has become markedly more restrictive, drawing significant criticism from the United Nations and human rights groups (ECRI, 2017) for its impact on asylum seekers and refugees. The shift towards temporary statuses has severely undermined refugee protections, a model unique to Denmark



but potentially inspiring similar reforms elsewhere. These restrictive and hostile policies are supported by nationalist narratives from both the political left and right.

In stark contrast, Denmark's response to Ukrainian refugees, who benefit from a streamlined online application process and receive a highly positive welcome, underscores a clear racial hierarchy in the treatment of refugees. This reality mirrors broader European trends (Aycart-Piquer and Bailey-Morley, 2022).

The key question is how Denmark, with its distinctive welfare model, openness, and social-democratic principles of equality, often finds itself at odds with universal principles of non-discrimination and equal treatment. This paradox is explored through three case studies that illuminate different facets of this issue and the political complexities, including the blurring of lines between the right and left ends of the political spectrum in the “us versus them” narrative.

The Ishøj Incident: The Earliest Municipal Critique of “Immigrant Integration”

Ishøj is a municipality in the Copenhagen region and serves as an intriguing case in our context. It illustrates how housing policy can be strategically employed to advance a restrictive integration agenda and achieve communicative success in establishing a problem-oriented discourse, as previously described in the introduction of this article.

The narrative began with an urban development plan for the Køge Bay area, comprising several villages located 40 km from the center of Copenhagen. In the 1960s, it was decided to expand this region with single-family homes, apartment buildings, schools, institutions, sports facilities, and more, coinciding with the extension of the S-train line to Køge. Ishøj Municipality was included in the Køge Bay Plan, and at that time, Ishøj had approximately 2,500 residents, with projections indicating that the population would grow to around 21,000. Extensive housing construction commenced to accommodate the influx of families expected to relocate to Ishøj.

Despite the availability of new housing in various sizes in Ishøj Municipality, few people were interested in relocating to Ishøj, situated on the outskirts of the Copenhagen area. This prestigious project, marked by numerous vacant apartments, thus posed a significant challenge for the Social Democratic mayor, Per Madsen. He initiated a campaign to attract newcomers by reducing the housing deposit from 12,000 to 1,000 DKK. With warm enthusiasm, Per Madsen publicly characterized guest workers as model citizens and saw them as potential residents. *“They don't sit in pubs and misbehave. They send their children to school, clean and neatly dressed every day. They take care of their affairs, and they pay their rent on time. They have things in order,”* (Per Madsen, 1976, as quoted in Schierup, 1993).

Per Madsen's proactive engagement with guest workers coincided with the impending family reunification process, which included strict requirements for “suitable housing,” a criterion readily met by the family apartments in Ishøj. The consequence of these developments triggered a domino effect. By 1980, the local population had burgeoned to 20,000 residents, of which guest workers comprised approximately 11%. This demographic surge also triggered increased municipal expenditures across various sectors, including childcare, mother tongue instruction, interpreter services, and social welfare disbursements, all exacerbated by a concomitant downturn in the local tax base. This situation was partly attributed to high

unemployment rates, especially among women who had recently completed the family reunification process.

Notably, the municipality's significant financial commitments related to interest and repayment obligations stemming from ambitious public infrastructure projects undertaken during Ishøj's rapid expansion phase (Ufer, 1988). Nevertheless, Per Madsen's attention remained steadfastly focused on the guest worker issue. He formed a dedicated working group to meticulously map the economic and social implications of guest workers in Ishøj. This group, in its findings, advocated for the development of a comprehensive national immigration policy and suggested revisions to existing block grant regulations to enhance financial support for municipalities dealing with substantial immigrant populations. Moreover, the workgroup expressed concerns about the potential emergence of segregated enclaves, commonly referred to as ghettos, emphasizing the need to limit the proportion of immigrants residing within residential areas in Ishøj, proposing a maximum of 10% (Ishøj Kommune, 1981).

Per Madsen endorsed these “findings” and emerged as a leading proponent of a problem-oriented discourse aimed at influencing parliamentary policymakers. In 1987, he articulated his perspective, asserting, *“We feel that a substantial portion of the annual cost, roughly 30,000 to 35,000 kr. for each immigrant child, is misspent. The patriarchal structure within immigrant families obstructs integration into Danish society and effectively inhibits any form of progress... When they undergo religious naming ceremonies, they often receive foreign names. When it comes to marriage, spouses are often brought in from their home countries, and as these men approach middle age, they no longer feel obliged to participate in the labor market,”* (Per Madsen, 1987, as cited in Schierup, 1993).

Simultaneously, the Mayor of Ishøj initiated correspondence with all housing associations within the municipality, providing them with explicit instructions regarding *“the 10% rule,”* which he justified as being *“in the interest of securing optimal conditions for both Danes and immigrants”* (Transcript from the Eastern High Court's case docket, 1991). The housing associations duly adhered to his directives and emphasized that *“an excessive number of immigrants within a local community would engender insecurity and conflict”* (Transcript from the Eastern High Court's case docket, 1991).

The case unfolds as the Ombudsman intervenes, recognizing the practice as conflicting with the Prohibition of Discrimination on the Grounds of Race, etc. Act (LOV nr 289 af 09/06/1971, 1971). The Ombudsman forwards the case to the Municipal Oversight Authority, which reviews it and concludes that *“... no further action should be taken, as other integration efforts are being pursued in the municipality”* (as cited in Schierup, 1993).

Subsequently, the Ombudsman refers the case to the Director of Public Prosecutions, who acknowledges the unlawfulness of the situation under the Prohibition of Discrimination on the Grounds of Race, etc. Act. However, it is stated that *“since the overarching objective, in accordance with Article 1 of the Convention, is to counter such discrimination, the recommendation cannot be deemed illegal”* (ibid). Discrimination is thus recognized but accepted in pursuit of “integration” goals.

At this point, the case concludes, as the Director of Public Prosecutions is the final authority responsible for initiating public proceedings. Nonetheless, in 1989, the Ishøj Committee against Xenophobia initiates a complaint against the municipality and housing associations. In 1991, the Eastern High Court renders judgment in the case, deeming the practice unlawful and stating, *“It is not considered to make any difference that the municipality's stated overarching objective*



has been to promote the reasonable integration of non-Danish-speaking newcomers and to address increasing economic issues faced by housing associations” (Transcript from the Eastern High Court's case docket, 1991).

The Ishøj case is of particular interest as it illustrates that contemporary political considerations regarding ethnic minorities are neither a recent development instigated by the current government nor proportionate to the demographic composition of ethnic minorities in Denmark. Instead, it reveals the existence of a dichotomous framework that categorizes individuals as newcomers and established residents (us versus them), accompanied by associated privileges and imbalanced power dynamics. Per Madsen's prominent statements have played a pivotal role in shaping a political discourse and an ethnically discriminatory practice that has subsequently diffused to other municipalities with a specific number of ethnic minorities. The construction of foreigners as a segregated Muslim immigrant community positioned in opposition to the majority society, along with the ensuing discriminatory treatment, has, as I will demonstrate in the following, served as a template for national integration policies. Housing policies, among other instruments, have been consistently employed, notably within the Municipal Council, which elevates local matters in Ishøj Municipality to a national concern.

The City Committee: The Genesis of Political Cynicism

The City Committee, an inter-ministerial body established in 1993, was tasked with developing new cross-sector initiatives for disadvantaged housing areas. It began its operations by conducting a questionnaire survey across specific municipalities to identify 'challenges and issues in public housing and disadvantaged residential areas.' The survey revealed numerous issues in several areas, including 'high rents, high turnover rates, many unemployed and welfare recipients, extensive building deterioration, substance abuse problems, violence, vandalism, etc. It is also characteristic that a large percentage of ethnic minorities and refugees, who often only have access to this limited part of the housing market,' (Indenrigsministeren, 1994:1).

In 1994, alongside the survey findings, a 30-point action plan was published. Half of this plan was dedicated to enhancing the integration of immigrants and refugees. Thus, the initiatives spearheaded by the City Committee were perceived as both housing policy measures and integration efforts based on the 'connection between obligations and rights' (ibid.). The concept of 'obligations and rights' is rooted in the political assumption that 'foreigners' benefit from their rights but often fail to fulfill their obligations to contribute to the economic and cultural reproduction of society, including paying taxes and internalizing 'Danish' values and norms.

Like the Ishøj Municipality, the Committee aimed to alter the composition of residents based on ethnic criteria. It mandated requirements for Danish language instruction and education in Danish culture and society for adult immigrants, along with stipulations for financial support when reuniting families. The Committee stressed that young children should attend daycare facilities and that there should not be an excessive concentration of refugee and immigrant children in the same educational institutions and schools. Therefore, it was not left to the parents to decide when and which childcare institution their child should attend, unlike with 'native' Danes; instead, these decisions were made by the state. Social authorities were instructed to monitor if children missed educational periods, such as during vacations in their

parents' home countries. The Committee also proposed that child and family benefits should be contingent on parents residing in the country, introducing a package of restrictions that has since been tightened and expanded by successive governments.

The City Committee's recommendations for refugees and immigrants encompassed two distinct logics: on one hand, an integration logic that included initiatives like Danish language instruction for adults, homework assistance for bilingual students, and social activities for adults and children in residential areas. On the other hand, a dispersion logic perceived the concentration of ethnic minority families in public housing, schools, and institutions as both an economic and cultural challenge. These dual logics were influenced by broader socio-political and party-political dynamics.

Following the Ishøj case, a surge in the number of refugees and family-reunified immigrants led to an intense debate about 'the foreigners,' culminating in the emergence of a nationalist discourse. This discourse portrayed refugees as fundamentalist, culturally inferior, and oppressive towards women, identifying them distinctly from Danes. Proponents of this discourse claimed to represent the silent majority, arguing that this constituted a Mohammedan invasion. They criticized politicians for transforming homes into hostels, which they believed would lead to racial tensions (Jensen, 2000).

The public discourse was heavily laden with discussions on the family dynamics, religious and cultural values, settlement patterns, and conflicts involving 'the foreigners.' A central theme was whether these individuals represented an economic burden to the nation and local municipalities (Jensen, 2000).

Several social-democratic mayors from Copenhagen's suburbs, as well as Aarhus and Odense, echoed Per Madsen's critical stance on immigration policy. They described ghetto-like conditions in their municipalities, characterized by a high number of welfare recipients, children struggling with the Danish language, forced marriages, and religious extremism. These mayors advocated for stricter immigration policies. For instance, Mayor Anders Bak (Social Democrat) of Høje-Taastrup Municipality and Britta Christensen (Social Democrat) of Hvidovre Municipality publicly discussed their initiatives to set quotas for refugees and immigrants in publicly owned housing, actions that contravened anti-discrimination laws. Britta Christensen even declared she was willing 'to pay out of my own pocket to raise awareness among the politicians in the Danish Parliament,' indicating her readiness to personally cover any fines resulting from her actions to highlight the importance of her stance.

In the political landscape, there was a pronounced awareness of discriminatory practices and human rights violations. However, these continued cynically under the guise of a supposedly higher goal - that of 'integration.' The Social Democratic leadership, with Chairman Svend Auken, did not align with the views of Per Madsen and other mayors who made extreme statements about immigrants. The party leadership, perceived by the mayors as an academic elite, was accused of discussing tolerance and openness without providing practical solutions to integration issues facing municipalities.

The Social Democratic Party was divided on immigration, with several party leaders distancing themselves from quotas and other discriminatory special rules, advocating for a progressive refugee and immigrant policy. Factional disputes were evident within the party. Poul Nyrup Rasmussen assumed party leadership in 1992 and adopted a more centrist approach to integration policy. As Prime Minister, he established The City Committee in 1993, tasked with



addressing the challenges in the social housing sector and stating that 'in Denmark in recent decades, a number of housing areas have developed significant problems' (Indenrigsministeren, 1994).

The City Committee served as a reconciliation effort between the Social Democratic mayors and the party leadership, aiming to bridge the gap between the 'realists' and 'idealists,' as described by former integration and political researcher, Würtz Sørensen (1989). The inter-ministerial body united factions within Social Democracy by accommodating two opposing stances on immigration policy: coercion and strict control versus integration and peaceful coexistence. In 1998, it laid the foundation for the Integration Act, which legitimized both differential treatment and integration principles. This was reflected in the 'introduction program' for newcomers, focusing on Danish language education and employment, and the 'introduction allowance,' which was lower than regular cash benefits. The shift also impacted the placement of refugees in housing, binding them to assigned locations.

The City Committee significantly influenced Danish integration policy through its 30 action proposals, which contributed to the creation of the Integration Act of 1998. This legislation reflected a prevailing narrative that portrayed refugees and immigrants primarily as economic and cultural burdens, leading to policies that enforced their dispersion across various municipalities. These policies, aimed at preventing the formation of immigrant concentrations in specific areas, also inadvertently supported the idea of managing immigrants rather than integrating them as individuals with full rights.

This approach raises ethical and legal concerns, as it aligns with broader socio-political trends that favor control and assimilation over genuine integration and multicultural understanding. By implementing quotas and managing where immigrants live and learn, the act may have reinforced stereotypes, perpetuated segregation, and compromised principles of equality and non-discrimination upheld by international human rights conventions.

Moreover, such legislative measures can be seen as an overreach of state power, conflicting with democratic values of personal freedom and self-determination. This perspective overlooks the need for empowering immigrants and facilitating their voluntary integration into society.

Parallel Society Agreement: Navigating Integration Challenges

In 2001, Denmark experienced a political shift as the Liberal and Conservative parties came into power, introducing a stricter stance on immigration characterized by the frequent use of the term "immigrant ghettos". Subsequently, the government implemented a series of measures to combat ghettoization, leading to various policies aimed at addressing this issue. A significant milestone was reached in 2010 when the first official list of ghettos was unveiled, identifying specific residential areas based on at least two out of three predefined criteria: employment, education, criminality, and ethnicity (Bolig & Planstyrelsen, 2020).

The initial ghetto list included 29 residential areas. Over time, this categorization evolved into three distinct lists: the first compiled *disadvantaged* residential areas meeting a minimum of two out of four criteria, including employment, criminality, income, and education. The second was defined as comprising *ghetto* areas, characterized by a predominance of residents with immigrant or non-Western backgrounds exceeding 50%. The third list cataloged *severe* ghetto

areas, signifying residential areas that had maintained their ghetto designation for a minimum of four consecutive years (Bolit & Planstyrelsen, 2020).

The Parallel Society Agreement focuses on the political strategy devised to address the issue of severe ghetto areas. This accord conveys a sense of political commitment towards the dissolution of what is perceived as a “parallel society.” It underscores the potential for state intervention should local municipalities prove inadequate in managing this formidable challenge independently. Importantly, the agreement prescribes specific guidelines for achieving a distinct demographic composition within these areas. While it maintains a focus on non-Western refugees and immigrants, this emphasis is now more explicit and unequivocal in its objectives.

Crucially, the Parallel Society Agreement seeks to substantiate the existence of a tangible parallel society through empirical evidence. It cites financial data from the Ministry of Finance, demonstrating that immigrants and descendants of non-Western backgrounds imposed an economic cost of 36 billion Danish kroner on Denmark in the year 2015. Additionally, the text references a survey conducted by the Ministry of Immigration and Integration, revealing that nearly 40% of individuals with non-Western backgrounds perceive the male figure as the natural head of the family, indicating cultural views on gender roles. Furthermore, it alludes to an analysis conducted by the Ministry of Economics and the Interior, indicating that approximately 28,000 families with non-Western backgrounds can be categorized as residing within parallel societies (Parallelsamfundsaftalen, pp. 5-7).

The Parallel Society Agreement draws upon the same elements and underlying principles that have been cultivated within the political discourse over the past two decades. This is expressed in the following manner: *“We have gained a group of citizens who do not fully embrace Danish norms and values. Where women are sometimes considered of lesser worth than men. Where social control and gender inequality sometimes place narrow constraints on individual freedoms”* (Parallelsamfundsaftalen, p. 5). The implication here is that Denmark has adopted a laissez-faire perspective toward the immigration and integration of non-Western individuals: *“For far too many years, we have held insufficient expectations for refugees and immigrants... We have not imposed sufficiently robust demands related to employment and self-sufficiency”* (ibid., p. 5). This sentiment has persisted since the era of Per Madsen in Ishøj during the 1980s.

The agreement also underscores the challenges faced by children of non-Western parents in disadvantaged residential areas. These children perform less favorably academically than Danish children residing outside these areas. They “rarely engage with Danish children and youths, thus failing to become fully acquainted with the norms and values underpinning Danish society, and only partially acquiring proficiency in the Danish language” (Parallelsamfundsaftalen, p. 24). Parents are once again accused of exhibiting inadequate parenting skills and of “leaving their children to fend for themselves” (ibid.). Furthermore, the agreement points out that resourceful residents are being displaced from these residential areas, while gang-related criminal activities continue to thrive (ibid., pp. 22-23).

The Parallel Society Agreement encapsulates a policy framework rooted in deeply ingrained beliefs and conceptions that have evolved in the political arena over the past twenty years. It reflects an evolving narrative that critiques the integration process of non-Western immigrants and raises concerns about the erosion of traditional Danish norms and values within these communities. This discourse asserts that Denmark has, for too long, taken a passive approach



toward non-Western immigration and has not sufficiently enforced employment and self-sufficiency requirements. The agreement also highlights the multifaceted challenges within disadvantaged residential areas, encompassing educational disparities, social isolation, and allegations of inadequate parenting. It further contends that a parallel society has emerged within these areas, characterized by cultural and social practices that are deemed incompatible with Danish values. Consequently, the agreement suggests the need for a comprehensive policy response to address these perceived issues.

The Parallel Society Agreement also introduces several “solutions.” These include tightening previously adopted measures concerning the rejection of housing applicants with an ethnic minority background, as well as policies of dispersion and distribution within residential areas, schools, and childcare facilities. The agreement includes financial penalties for parents who do not enroll their children in childcare, along with flexible leasing options to attract 'Danish' residents. Additionally, it extends the existing practice of demolishing buildings in ghetto areas and establishes *double penalty zones* as a supplement to the previously introduced “visitation zones”. In these double penalty zones, individuals convicted of crimes are subjected to harsher penalties, up to double the standard punishment, if the offense was committed within an area designated as a penalty zone.

Conclusion: Legalized Discriminatory Practices at the Intersection of Integration and Housing Policies

The three cases vividly illustrate how the dominant political discourse in Denmark since the 1980s has consistently aimed to delineate clear boundaries between 'the Danish' and 'the non-Danish' in response to increasing ethnic and cultural diversity. This division has become particularly pronounced in political initiatives and rhetoric directed at 'the foreigners' as both a cultural and economic challenge, especially within educational institutions, public organizations, and residential areas. 'The foreigners' have been portrayed as a group that isolates itself from Danish society and clings to its own norms and values, purportedly undermining individual freedom and societal cohesion.

Key concepts such as integration, ghettos, and parallel societies have remained central in political discourses and integration policies. This sustained focus has led to the implementation of exclusionary practices, which can be summarized through the following main elements:

1. **Housing Policy as Integration Policy:** Although it considers social indicators such as unemployment and crime, housing policy effectively functions as an integration policy that primarily targets residents with an ethnic minority background. This is achieved through an unclear understanding of the integration concept and an alleged existence of parallel societies, resulting in unequal treatment and the restriction of rights for these residents, in contravention of the principles of ethnic equality.
2. **Restriction of Parental Self-Determination:** The discourse on integration and ghettos is used to curtail the self-determination of ethnic minority parents by preventing them from choosing schools or daycare institutions for their children.

3. Implementation of Penalty Zones: Penalty zones are introduced where common principles of body searches and sentencing are suspended in specific areas of the city.
4. Collective Punishment: Collective punishment is legitimized as a response to individually committed criminal acts. This means that entire families can lose their apartments if one family member commits a criminal act or vandalism in the residential area.

It is worth noting that other discriminatory practices, such as those within education, the labor market, leisure activities, residence permits, and social legislation, have not been addressed in this article. Housing policy as a discriminatory practice is the result of political discourse that paints a negative picture of public housing areas with a certain concentration of residents with an ethnic minority background. This discourse legitimizes coercive measures and discrimination with relatively limited resistance from the broader population.

While these discriminatory practices have been largely legitimized under the guise of integration and anti-ghetto discourses, it is crucial to recognize that they contradict the principles of ethnic equality and individual rights. Furthermore, this approach neglects the broader context of discrimination faced by ethnic minorities in other aspects of life, such as education and the labor market, which warrants further examination.

Considering these findings, there is a pressing need for a more coherent and inclusive approach to both housing and integration policies in Denmark. This approach should prioritize social justice, equality, and the protection of individual rights, regardless of one's ethnic or cultural background. By addressing the root causes of social disparities and discrimination, Denmark can work towards a more just and equitable society for all its residents.

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