



# THE "GHETTO PLAN" FROM ETHNIC DANES' PERSPECTIVE: DE-LINKING "GHETTOS" FROM THE EPISTEMIC COLONIALITY

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## Abstract

This study explores the consequences of coloniality on the perception and thus attitudes among the ethnic Danes towards the 2019 governmental programme "Ghetto plan–No parallel societies in Denmark by 2030." This is, according to the Danish official narrative, legislation to fend off the intimidation posed by the population of the officially so-called "non-Westerns." Basically, as the study shows, they are of MENAPT origins and Muslims. This research recognizes that the Danish government's mechanism within the "ghetto plan" seems to mobilize the colonial legacies. It shows how the monolithic knowledge represented in the official narrative on the "ghettos" and their colonial discourses hides its negative perspectives and produces unliteral knowledge that justifies its racist practices and exploitation. In this light, this research looks at the positions of the ethnic Danes from the perspective of the decolonial option and decoloniality. That is, de-linking from the unilateral knowledge of coloniality and liberating knowledge from the colonial discourse and the impact of the racial representative regime of the "other."

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# Introduction

This study explores the consequences of coloniality on the perception and thus attitudes among the ethnic Danes towards the 2019 governmental programme "ghetto plan—No parallel societies in Denmark by 2030." <sup>1</sup> Which is, according to the Danish government narrative, legislation to fend off the intimidation posed by the population of the officially so-called "non-Westerns."<sup>2</sup> Basically, as I will show, they are of MENAPT<sup>3</sup> origins and Muslims.

The Danish government defines "ghettos" as residential areas with a population of at least 1000 inhabitants, in which the percentage of "non-western" immigrants and their descendants exceeds 50%, and at least two of the criteria related to the education rate, the employment rate, crime rates and the average income rate apply to it.<sup>4</sup> However, what makes this classification more controversial is that although the government has set these specific standards it has literally stated that any neighbourhood that has "*many residents with non-western backgrounds*" is a "ghetto."<sup>5</sup>

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1 The Brussels Times, 'Danish Ghettos: Can Integration Be Achieved by Evictions?', 31 May 2020, Accessed 6 June 2021, <https://www.brusselstimes.com/news/world-all-news/114434/danish-ghettos-can-integration-be-achieved-by-evictions/>; The Local Denmark, 'Danish Parliament Passes Contentious "Ghetto Plan"', *The Local Denmark*, 23 November 2018. Accessed 6 June, 2021 <https://www.thelocal.dk/20181123/danish-parliament-passes-contentious-ghetto-plan/>; Trine Nørgaard, 'Bredt flertal laver ghettoaftale [The vast majority make ghetto agreements]', DR, 9 May 2018. Accessed 6 June 2021, <https://www.dr.dk/ligetil/bredt-flertal-laver-ghettoaftale>.

2 Jamila Versi, 'Denmark's "Ghetto Plan" and the Communities It Targets', Al Jazeera, 15 January 2020. Accessed 6 June 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/01/15/denmarks-ghetto-plan-and-the-communities-it-targets/>.

3 MENAPT countries: Middle East, North Africa, Pakistan, and Turkey

4 The government's criteria (latest version of 2018). Transportministret [Ministry of Transport], 'Ny ghettoliste [New ghetto list]', 1 December 2018, <http://www.trm.dk/nyheder/2018/ny-ghettoliste/>.

•The proportion of residents aged 30-59 who only have a basic education exceeds 60 per cent.

•The residents' proportion aged 18-64 who are not connected to the labor market or education exceeds 40%.

•The proportion of residents convicted of violating the Penal Code, the Firearms Act or the Narcotic Drugs Act is at least 3 times the national average.

•The average gross income for taxpayers aged 15-64 in the area (excluding education seekers) is less than 55 per cent of the average gross income for the same group in the region.

5 Transportministret [Ministry of Transport].

According to the new legislation, as long as a neighbourhood is classified as "ghetto" its inhabitants are subject to punitive rules: double penalties for perpetrators of crimes in those neighbourhoods, forcing parents to send their children from the age of one for 25 hours a week to state kindergartens in order to learn Danish values, and slashing the number of ghettos' public housing (non-profit sector) to no more than 40%.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the last punitive measure leads to the removal of the targeted "non-Westerns" from their homes.<sup>7</sup>

Former Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, in a press conference the day the decision was issued in March 2018, addressed the necessity of these measures against the threat posed by ghettoization and unsuccessful integration to the values, welfare and security of Denmark.<sup>8</sup> In the 2019 elections, which led to the formation of a new government led by the Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen from the Social Democrat Party (Danish: Socialdemokraterne), apparently, 80% voted in favour of the parties supporting the "ghetto plan."<sup>9</sup>

This research recognizes that the Danish government's mechanism within the "ghetto plan" and the "ghettoization" discourse seems to mobilize the colonial legacies. It benefits, reproduces, and regenerates, the colonial and post-colonial discourses within the Danish setting. The Danish government(s) benefits from the ongoing constructive process of the racial representation regime that has its origins in colonial and post-colonial discourses. By doing so, the Danish elites use colonial techniques to mobilize an anti-immigrant discourse on the so-called "ghettos".

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6 Versi, 'Denmark's "Ghetto Plan" and the Communities It Targets'.

7 Versi; Anton Ösgård and Jonas Algers, 'Denmark's Shameful Ghetto Plan', *JACOBIN*, 22 December 2019, accessed 6 June 2021, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/12/denmark-ghetto-plan-social-democrats-mette-frederiksen>; The Brussels Times, 'Danish Ghettos'; The Guardian, 'How Denmark's "ghetto List" Is Ripping Apart Migrant Communities', *The Guardian*, 11 March 2020, sec. World news, accessed 6 June 2021, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/11/how-denmarks-ghetto-list-is-ripping-apart-migrant-communities>.

8 Lars Løkke Rasmussen, 'Pressemøde den 1. marts 2018 [Press conference on 1 March 2018]', Statsministeriet [The prime ministry], 1 March 2018, accessed 6 June 2021, <https://www.stm.dk/presse/pressemoedearkiv/pressemoede-den-1-marts-2018/>.

9 Sahar Zand, 'Migrant Ghettos in Denmark', 4 October 2019, accessed 6 June 2021, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWsELvvjEJg&ab\\_channel=SaharZand](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWsELvvjEJg&ab_channel=SaharZand).

This research questions the official narrative of the "ghetto plan". It shows how the monolithic knowledge represented in the official narrative on the "ghettos" and their colonial discourses hide its negative aspects and produces unliteral knowledge that justifies its racist practices and exploitation. Through this structural process of discourse, an identity of Danish society, as will be highlighted, is formed in contrast to immigrants and Muslims. In this light, this research looks at the positions of the ethnic Danes from the perspective of the decolonial option and decoloniality. That is, de-linking from the unilateral knowledge of coloniality and liberating knowledge from the colonial discourse and the impact of the racial representative regime of the other.

Hence, this study explores the following question under consideration: To what variable extent ethnic Danes (living in and outside the ghetto) are able to epistemically disconnect from the "ghetto plan" and the associated coloniality of power with its racialized narratives? Some are stuck in, or trapped by, the coloniality of knowledge and thus very supportive of the government on this issue. Others manage to at least somewhat escape from its hold and offer critical perspectives on some of the aspects of the plan or some of the government reasons offered to justify the plan.

For this purpose, this research presents and examines two concepts. The first, Walter Mignolo's concept of "Epistemic Disobedience"<sup>10</sup>, which applies the de-colonial option in epistemology and politics and questions the control of knowledge in the colonial/modern world. The second, is Gloria Wekker's concept of "Innocence"<sup>11</sup>, which explains the self-representation of society under the colonial discourse.

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10 Walter D. Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom', *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 7–8 (December 2009): 159–81, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409349275>; Walter D. Mignolo, 'Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (de)Coloniality, Border Thinking and Epistemic Disobedience', *Postcolonial Studies* 14, no. 3 (September 2011): 273–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2011.613105>; Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, and Praxis*, On Decoloniality (Durham London: Duke University Press, 2018).

11 Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham London: Duke University Press, 2016).



In the content of this research there are two chapters. The first chapter is entitled “Coloniality and the ‘ghetto plan’.” It starts off with a discussion of the concept of coloniality of knowledge/power and then shows that the "ghetto plan" is a manifestation of this coloniality. First, it focuses on linking "ghetto plan" with Orientalist discourse and colonial practices in the construction of stereotypes and the production of the hegemonic culture and the unilateral knowledge of modern/colonial world. It uses for this purpose mainly literature of Said (1978),<sup>12</sup> Loomba (2005),<sup>13</sup> Mignolo (2009, 2011, 2018),<sup>14</sup> Wekker (2016).<sup>15</sup>

Then, it moves on to demonstrate how the discourse on the "ghetto plan" and "ghettoization" in the Danish setting is constructed and has its extension in the colonial legacies. It relies on empirical data from newspapers, political statements, and government data, in addition to literature, mainly, Wren (2001),<sup>16</sup> and Hervik (2006).<sup>17</sup> Through this, I demonstrate how the discursive, epistemological and racist constructions that is, hostile to the ‘other,’ takes place. Thus, how body politics and geopolitical knowledge affect the perception of immigrants' correlated issues, their cultures, their ways of living, doing, and existence. Third, it moves on to highlight some other aspects of the Danish "ghetto plan" that could rather contribute to a different perception of it from the official narrative.

The second chapter starts off by presenting two concepts. The first is Walter D. Mignolo's concept of "Epistemic Disobedience," which applies the de-colonial option in epistemology and politics and questions the control of knowledge in the colonial/modern world. The second concept is Gloria Wekker's "Innocence," which explains the self-representation of

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12 Edward Said, *Orientalism*, First edition (Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1978).

13 Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2005).

14 Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*; Mignolo, ‘Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing’; Mignolo, ‘Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom’.

15 Wekker, *White Innocence*.

16 Karen Wren, ‘Cultural Racism: Something Rotten in the State of Denmark?’, *Social & Cultural Geography* 2, no. 2 (January 2001): 141–62, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649360120047788>.

17 Peter Hervik, *Neo-Nationalism in Europe and Beyond: Perspectives from Social Anthropology* (Berghahn Books, 2006).

society under the colonial discourse. My use of Wekker's concept differs slightly in that I apply it mainly through the ethnic Danes' view of their government when it comes to issues related to immigrants.

Then, it moves on to the analysis of the ethnic Danes' attitudes to the “ghetto plan.” In it, I present my analysis of five interviews conducted with ethnic Danes at the beginning of this year, 2021, in Copenhagen in Denmark. The selected interviewees who work in a range of professions were recruited through my network created in the period I lived in Denmark. In my analysis, I mainly examine the two concepts, “Epistemic Disobedience,” and “Innocence,” with the interviewees’ position and perception of the “ghetto plan.” Finally, it comes to the last section of this paper, where I display the results and outcomes of this research.

The results of my research present a prominent challenge for most of the interviewees perceiving the “ghetto plan” separately from the impressions of the negative representative discourse of immigrants from MENAPT countries and Muslims, the so-called “non-Westerns” by the Danish government. Although the interviewees can generally be categorized as non-anti-immigrant or at least not prejudiced against immigrants, my research findings show a tendency among some towards “epistemic disobedience” and a critique of the government narrative on the “ghetto plan.” However, internalizing the colonial discourse and unilateral colonial epistemology appears in most of the opinions, through which I determine the powerful effects of this discourse.

# Chapter 1 - Coloniality and the “ghetto plan”

This chapter consists of three titles in which I present a set of aspects that show the connection of the Danish "ghetto plan" to the colonial legacies. The first title is “‘Ghetto plan’: Link to the colonial legacies.” It starts off with a discussion of the concept of coloniality of knowledge and power. I base my discussion on a set of literature on Orientalism and the colonial/postcolonial discourse. The second is entitled “‘Ghettos’ in the Danish setting.” It shows how the “ghetto plan” is a manifestation of this coloniality. It demonstrates how the anti-immigrant discourse in the Danish context, coloniality, and postcolonial discourse led to the establishment of the constituent elements of the official narrative on the "ghetto plan." The third title is “Different perspective of the ‘ghetto plan—No parallel societies in Denmark by 2030’.” It highlights some other aspects of the Danish "ghetto plan" that differ from the official narrative.

## 1.1 “Ghetto plan”: Link to the colonial legacies

The government narrative of the "ghetto plan" and the discourse about the "ghettos," seem to mobilize the colonial legacies and benefit from the postcolonial discourse. This mobilization is represented in the Western-non-Western divisions, in racist and discriminatory practices on religious (against Muslims), ethnic and cultural grounds. In addition, it appears in the use and creation of negative stereotypes of the so-called by the Danish government "non-Westerners," and, as well, producing unilateral knowledge to get approval of the “ghetto plan,” which is a process that I will demonstrate in this section.

The western-non-western divisions contained in the government narrative of the "ghetto plan" and the discourse that depicts Danish identity in opposition to the so-called "non-

Westerners," have a resonance in the Orientalist discourse. Edward Said explains that Orientalism identifies Europe as the West in contrast to the East (Orient).<sup>18</sup> This representative system of the East (Orient) is related to the European colonial period of the East, more specifically France and Britain.<sup>19</sup> Orientalism began to increase intensively by European colonialism since the nineteenth century and early- the twentieth century until World War II.<sup>20</sup> In this regard, Edward Said distinguishes between pure knowledge and political knowledge. Referring that Orientalism does not represent reality but rather it is the set of images and ideas that the West constructs about the "Orient" in contrast to Europe "or the West."<sup>21</sup> It (Orientalism) reflected the European's hegemony, superiority, domination, sovereignty over the East, and their contribution to the East.<sup>22</sup>

The European colonial period in the eighteenth and nineteenth century was characterized by racist practices in Europe and its colonies based mainly on religion and race.<sup>23</sup> In this sense, Ania Loomba examines different ethnic discourses in her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*.<sup>24</sup> She explains that in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Christian identity started to be built in contradiction to other religions (Islam, Judaism, and paganism), and then linking these religious differences with ethnic differences. For instance, the term Moors, which first refers to Arab Muslims, since not all Arabs are dark-skinned the term over time predominately became associated with blackness and created the term "blackamoors". As an expression of the "religious and cultural prejudice against both

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18 Said, *Orientalism*, 1.

19 Said, 2.

20 Said, 2–4.

21 Said, 1.

22 Said, 3–4–12.

23 Wren, 'Cultural Racism', 142–43.

24 Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*.

blackness and Islam each of which was seen to be the handiwork of the Devil, intensified the connection between them".<sup>25</sup>

Loomba refers to many stereotypes created by colonialism, 'barbarous Turk', 'black rapist' etc., and due to various colonial policies. For example, Shona and the Ndebele peoples in South Africa were stereotyped as "drunk uncontrollable" as soon as they started competing with the Whites in the markets, crafts, and transportation.<sup>26</sup> Ania Loomba explains, drawing on other scholars as well, that the strategies of representation, knowledge production, and economic plunder in any colonial context were interconnected and depend on each other.<sup>27</sup> Hence, the representations of social, cultural, and ethnic differences are necessary for control.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, European colonial thought depended on establishing stereotypes of the colonized "Other" as backward and inferior.<sup>29</sup>

This "repertoire" of negative colonial representations of the other, images and discourses, has been capitalized by the United States after World War II in what Said calls "American Orientalism".<sup>30</sup> Orientalism has become a system and network of thoughts that are invested and exported to the whole world and into the Western consciousness.<sup>31</sup> It produces a discourse of an unequal interchange with different kinds of power, political, cultural, and intellectual.<sup>32</sup> This kind of Oriental product is overwhelming almost everywhere, in schools, institutions, libraries, foreign services, passages of Oriental literature, and so on, which grants it power.<sup>33</sup> It employs modern technology, films, media, and multiple means to support the process of Orientalism in order to emphasize the cultural stereotype and increase the acquisition

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25 Loomba, 93.

26 Loomba, 85.

27 Loomba, 85.

28 Loomba, 85.

29 Loomba, 93.

30 Said, *Orientalism*, 2-4-19.

31 Said, 5-6.

32 Said, 12

33 Said, 20

of the academic horizon.<sup>34</sup> It has produced a web of racism, cultural, and ideological stereotypes that dehumanize Others.<sup>35</sup> These representational ideologies strongly target Arabs and Muslims.<sup>36</sup> For example, Jack Shaheen in his book (2006) shows more than 900 Hollywood movies in which Arabs are portrayed negatively. He demonstrates, for instance, how viewers are led to believe that all Arabs are Muslims, and all Muslims are Arabs.<sup>37</sup>

This racial system that produces knowledge and meanings that invent “the other” through the discourse, which created Orientalism, can be included under Aníbal Quijano's concept "colonial matrix of power" (*patrón colonial de poder*)<sup>38</sup>, or “coloniality.”<sup>39</sup> Quijano's concept differentiates between colonization and coloniality. The former refers to the practices in the past carried out by the colonizer against the colonized. While coloniality applies to the patterns of the dominant power that remained after the decolonization and that produced the contemporary knowledge, culture, and the economy.<sup>40</sup>

This sequence of the racial representational system in the modern world reveals how the politicization of the body endures and how knowledge-making in the modern world is subject to power relations. In this regard, Mignolo (2009) explains that within the geo-politically and geo-economically divisions of the modern/colonial world under the role of the United States coincides with geo-epistemology.<sup>41</sup> In other words, the knowledge-making has become subject to the new economic political map represented in the first, second and third worlds during the

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34 Said, 26

35 Said, 27

36 Said, 27

37 Jack G. Shaheen, ‘Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People’, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 588 (2003): 171.

38 Mignolo, ‘Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom’, 161.

39 Adetty Pérez Miles, ‘Unbound Philosophies and Histories: Epistemic Disobedience in Contemporary Latin American Art’, in *The International Encyclopedia of Art and Design Education*, ed. Richard Hickman et al. (Hoboken, NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2018), 3, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118978061.ead039>.

40 Miles, 3.

41 Mignolo, ‘Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom’, 166.

Cold War.<sup>42</sup> In this light, epistemology becomes subject to this geopolitical division and to the power of the first world, preventing knowledge that differs with their interests.<sup>43</sup> It maintains unilateral knowledge of what Santiago Castro-Gómez terms as the "hubris of the zero point".<sup>44</sup> Consequently, issues, events, plans, legislation, etc. are viewed from the perspective of the hegemonic culture and knowledge of the so-called "the first world".<sup>45</sup>

Likewise, the United States has benefited from the Orientalist repertoire of Britain and France, some in Europe (such in Denmark), benefit, in return, from the ongoing constructive process of the racial representation regime, creating an anti-immigrant discourse.<sup>46</sup> Many have pointed out that the colonial methods applied to non-Europeans were applied within Europe to dominate and annihilate the Jews.<sup>47</sup> This illustrates as Mignolo indicates "the fact that the colonies were not a secondary and marginal event in the history of Europe but, on the contrary, colonial history is the non-acknowledged center in the making of modern Europe."<sup>48</sup>

Through the colonial technique, the Danish elites generate an anti-immigrant discourse and negative discourse on the so-called "ghettos". They have post-constructed these negative images, utilize, reproduce, and regenerate them, in which they interact with the social, economic, political, and historical structure of their society. Through this structural process of discourse, an identity of Danish society is formed in contrast to immigrants and Muslims, as I indicated in the previous section. During this process, meaning(s), from a Foucauldian point of view, is produced through a system of representation that consists of language and practice

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42 Mignolo, 161.

43 Miles, 'Unbound Philosophies and Histories', 4; Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom', 164–67.

44 Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom', 160.

45 Mignolo, 'Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing', 276; Miles, 'Unbound Philosophies and Histories', 4.

46 Jef Huysmans, 'The European Union and the Securitization of Migration', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 38, no. 5 (December 2000): 751–77, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00263>.

47 Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom', 174.

48 Mignolo, 174.

(discourse) that influence the behavior and actions of a community.<sup>49</sup> This produced knowledge associated with power is capable of making itself true, in which “nothing has any meaning outside of discourse”.<sup>50</sup>

In light of this racial representational system, Gloria Wekker (2016) touches on the impact of this system on the Dutch scene. The case of the Netherlands I find interesting since it shares with Denmark being a small European country, a white ethnicity, and an imperial past. Wekker points out that the majority of Dutch people refuse to be identified with emigrants.<sup>51</sup> The predominant Dutch representation is to be white and Christian.<sup>52</sup> It, as in the Danish case, emphasizes that this is ‘othering’, that “Westerners” by implication are therefore largely from the first world, white, and Christians. Thus, these meanings and stereotypes are produced and consumed in exclusionary and racist processes against the target groups.

In this reasoning, and under such strong influence stemming from the powerful-constructed racist representative system, there is no longer any need to make a great effort to prove that immigrants are the devils in any case. It has become easy to gain public approval for plans and legislation that discriminate against immigrants. People's interpretation of a matter within a particular frame is relying on meanings and knowledge that is socially and culturally constructed.<sup>53</sup> In this sense, plans, laws, legislations with an effective frame (such as to integrate immigrants or to prevent parallel societies, etc.) do not need very supportive arguments to stimulate people to think about such issues in a certain way.<sup>54</sup>

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49 Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, 2nd edition (Milton Keynes, U.K.: Sage Publications, 2013), 73–76.

50 Hall, 73–76.

51 Wekker, *White Innocence*, 6.

52 Wekker, 8.

53 David Tewksbury and Dietram A. Scheufele, ‘News Framing Theory and Research’, in *Media Effects*, ed. Mary Beth Oliver, Arthur A. Raney, and Jennings Bryant, 4th ed. (Fourth edition. | New York, NY: Routledge, 2020. |: Routledge, 2019), 23, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429491146-4>.

54 Tewksbury and Scheufele, 19.



In the next section I will show how discourse on the "ghetto plan" and "ghettoization" led to the establishment of the constituent elements of the official narrative on the "ghetto plan" and show how this discourse is a manifestation of coloniality and postcolonial discourse.

## 1.2 “Ghettos” in the Danish setting

In March 2018, the Danish government, the right-wing Danish People's Party, the Social Democrats and the Socialist People's Party from the opposition entered into an agreement on Denmark's officially so-called "ghettos." The plan was approved later in September 2019 after the Social Democratic Party took power in the 2019 elections.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps the most striking thing in the official government narrative about the “ghetto plan” is the title "ghetto Plan - No Parallel Societies in Denmark by 2030." It explicitly describes how the Danish government views these neighborhoods, parallel societies, meaning that they are not part of Danish society and a counter-representation of the identity that the government lists about Danish society and Danish identity.

The discourse on "ghettos" officially began eight years before the "ghetto plan" was announced. In 2010, the Danish government published a document entitled 'Return of the Ghetto to Society. Taking Action Against Parallel Societies in Denmark.'<sup>56</sup> The document claims that there are 29 neighborhoods that do not carry Danish values, but higher rates of crime, gangs, and unemployment. Adding that the reason is that they contain many residents of "non-Western" origins, still more closely to their country of origin and to the culture they or their parents come from.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The Brussels Times, 'Danish Ghettos'.

<sup>56</sup> The government. *Return of the Ghetto to Society. Taking Action Against Parallel Societies in Denmark*. [original title: *Ghettoen tilbage til samfundet. Et opgør med parallelsamfund i Danmark*]. 2010. Accessed 18 September 2020, [https://www.regeringen.dk/media/1215/ghettoen\\_tilbage\\_til\\_samfundet.pdf](https://www.regeringen.dk/media/1215/ghettoen_tilbage_til_samfundet.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> The government

This statement refers to the mechanism by which the Danish government has started establishing the discourse around "ghettos" and "ghettoization", as places inhabited by what it calls people of "non-Western" origins, criminals, unemployed, and uneducated. In this narrative, the "ghetto" discourse is clearly associated with the immigrant discourse that has begun to take an anti-immigrant trend since the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>58</sup> In this anti-immigrant discourse, a kind of racism has been developed through the redefinition of the Danish identity in contrast to the so-called "non-Western" immigrants and in particular Muslims.<sup>59</sup> In which the Danish media and far-right politicians have had an important role in creating negative interpretations of the latter and in seeing Denmark as a monolithic Christian nation-state on the basis of cultural racism.<sup>60</sup>

In this regard, this thesis argues that the Danish anti-immigrant discourse consists of small units that have been constructed for more than two decades. Meanings, in this perspective, have been formed through discourse and exclusionary racist practices against immigrants, especially Muslims, and their successive generations.<sup>61</sup> Wren (2001) explains that the second and third generations in Denmark are called "de fremmede" (The strangers), which is a designation for everyone who seems so different from them.<sup>62</sup> These visible biological differences have become standards that operate in "various forms of institutional discrimination."<sup>63</sup>

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58 Karen Wren, 'Cultural Racism: Something Rotten in the State of Denmark?', *Social & Cultural Geography* 2, no. 2 (January 2001): 141–62, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649360120047788>; Jørgen Andersen, 'Immigration and the Legitimacy of the Scandinavian Welfare State: Some Preliminary Danish Findings', *AMID – Akademiet for Migrationsstudier i Danmark*, 1 January 2006; Per Mouritsen and Tore Vincents Olsen, 'Denmark between Liberalism and Nationalism', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 4 (April 2013): 691–710, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2011.598233>; Peter Hervik, *Neo-Nationalism in Europe and Beyond: Perspectives from Social Anthropology* (Berghahn Books, 2006); Jens Rydgren, 'Radical Right-Wing Populism in Denmark and Sweden: Explaining Party System Change and Stability', *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 30, no. 1 (2010): 57–71, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sais.0.0070>.

59 Hervik, *Neo-Nationalism in Europe and Beyond*, 93–104.

60 Wren, 'Cultural Racism', 152–56.

61 Wren, 147.

62 Wren, 147.

63 Wren, 147.

In that time, Wren points out that Muslims were portrayed as persecuting women and their existence constituting an "Muslim invasion."<sup>64</sup> During that period, racist practices took various forms, in employment, in housing quotas, and in the mandatory dispersal of refugees.<sup>65</sup> Racist slurs became common, and the law tolerated them.<sup>66</sup> "Cultural racism and the problematization of ethnic minorities in Denmark have been associated with the strengthening in the public imagination of the concept of a homogeneous Danish culture, perceived as a historically rooted set of traditions now under threat from globalization, the EU, and from 'alien' cultures".<sup>67</sup>

In this concern, the Danish term "non-Westerners", which is a clear negation of "Western" has been rhetorically constructed. The term "Western", however, is a non-scientific political term that differs from one source to another, and it includes/excludes countries according to each definition,<sup>68</sup> for example, in the World Population Review site, Brazil and Mexico are Western countries, while according to the official Danish statistics,<sup>69</sup> they are not. However, according to a report of 2019 about the Islamophobia in Denmark *"There is an implicit - and sometimes explicit - racialization of Muslims as non-Western in Danish public consciousness"*.<sup>70</sup> This realization of meaning through the discourse rather than the individual word "non-Westerners", is evident by the Danish immigration and integration minister Mattias Tesfaye's statement: *"we in Denmark don't really have problems with people from Latin*

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<sup>64</sup> Wren, 147–48.

<sup>65</sup> Wren, 146–47.

<sup>66</sup> Wren, 146.

<sup>67</sup> Wren, 149.

<sup>68</sup> Politically, the term "Western" refers to the "first world countries" that emerged during the Cold War with the Soviet.

'Western Countries 2021', accessed 25 May 2021, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/western-countries>.

<sup>69</sup> According to 'Denmark Statistics' (Official Website), "Western countries" are the EU member states (including the UK), Australia, New Zealand, Andorra, Liechtenstein, Iceland, Norway, Monaco, Vatican City, San Marino, Switzerland, the USA, and Canada. The Local Denmark, 'Denmark to Classify Immigrants from Muslim Countries Separately in Crime Statistics - The Local', 2020, <https://www.thelocal.dk/20201214/denmark-to-classify-muslim-countries-separately-in-official-statistics/>.

<sup>70</sup> Amani Hassani, 'DENMARK ISLAMOPHOBIA IN NATIONAL REPORT 2019', 2019, 343.

*America and the Far East. We have problems with people from the Middle East and North Africa”.*<sup>71</sup>

It is, therefore, apparent through the discourse and through many other examples that the term "non-Westerners" in the Danish context is an expression of Muslims and the immigrants from MENAPT countries.<sup>72</sup> To make matters worse, the representation of these groups in the Danish context began in recent years to take a more radical form. For illustration, in 2018, a video was published on the Danish government's plan to send foreign criminals to a remote island.<sup>73</sup> In the video, the criminal figure is portrayed through the stereotype of Muslims and people from MENAPT countries (see Photo 1). Clear evidence of the stigmatization.

Moreover, the danger lies also in the fact that the Danish governments use the term "non-Westerners" in official statistics, political statements, and most importantly within laws, legislation, and in the “ghetto plan”. For instance, the classifications of immigrants "Western / Non-Western” are exported to municipalities and Job Centers through the CPR (citizen identification data). Thus, ethnic profiling greatly affects the job offers and the kind of jobs offered to the so-called "non-Westerns”.<sup>74</sup> This ethnic classification also contravenes European Union law.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, the Danish government uses this term "non-Westerners" in statistics about unemployment rate to prove that neighborhoods that it classifies as “ghettos” meet the criteria that have been set by the government itself.

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71 The Local Denmark, ‘Denmark to Classify Immigrants from Muslim Countries Separately in Crime Statistics - The Local’.

72 Mads. B Broberg, ‘DF Vil Have Muslimer Frem i Lyset: Nye Statsborgeres Religion Skal Stå i Lov [The Danish People’s Party Wants Muslims in the Spotlight: The Religion of New Citizens Must Be in Law]’, Jyllands-Posten, 26 February 2021, <https://jyllands-posten.dk/politik/ECE12783914/dansk-folkeparti-vil-have-muslimer-frem-i-lyset-nye-statsborgeres-religion-skal-staa-i-lov/>.

73 Sheetal Sukhija, ‘Denmark to Send Convicted Foreign Criminals to Remote Island’, *Macau News*, 4 December 2018, <https://www.macaunews.net/news/258485361/denmark-to-send-convicted-foreign-criminals-to-remote-island>.

74 Hassani, ‘DENMARK ISLAMOPHOBIA IN NATIONAL REPORT 2019’, 234.

75 Hassani, 235.



Photo (1). Source: Macau News.Net

Indeed, in the last few years, the Danish anti-immigrant discourse has been escalated dramatically. One of the biggest parties, the Social Democrat Party (Danish: Socialdemokraterne), has turned to support anti-immigrant policies.<sup>76</sup> The exclusionary practices of immigrants have become more and more institutionalized. In the new version of the criteria that define what is “ghetto” related to the percentages of education, crime, and job, the government published statistics on the proportion of the uneducated people in the so-called “ghettos” to prove that it is a high level. However, it has been found out later that the metric used in this statistic excludes qualifications achieved outside Denmark or held by people under 30.<sup>77</sup>

Finally, the meaning of the state discourse against immigrants and their descendants, as I have been able to define so far in this paper, has been constructed intensively and repeatedly via media, political statements, laws, and the like. This appears through the official narrative of

<sup>76</sup> Zand, ‘Migrant Ghettos in Denmark’.

<sup>77</sup> The Guardian, ‘How Denmark’s “ghetto List” Is Ripping Apart Migrant Communities’.

the “ghetto plan” and the discourse about “ghettos” and “ghettoization”. That is, in turn, seems to mobilize colonial legacies, and resonates with the postcolonial discourse and colonality that I discussed in the previous section.

Notwithstanding, the “ghetto plan”, if viewed from other perspectives separately from the Danish government's official narrative, could, perhaps, provide another recognition. In the next section, I will highlight some of these aspects, relying on some of them on my own observation during the period in which I lived in Denmark, as well as from the data that I was able to collect from interviews with the ethnic Danes during this research.

### **1.3 Different perspective of the "ghetto plan—No parallel societies in Denmark by 2030”**

“Ghettos” in the Danish setting are neither really slums nor luxurious. The government's classification of neighborhoods as "ghettos" as in the official government narrative is racially based. The Danish government has literally stated that regardless of the criteria that define what is “ghetto”, any neighbourhood of 1,000 inhabitants has “*many residents with non-western backgrounds*” is a "ghetto".<sup>78</sup> A clear evidence of the use of abstract laws that do not adopt a precise reference point, but rather personal assessments. This gives the government room to exert repression and exclusion. For illustration, assuming there are in a residential neighbourhood 20% inhabitants from the Far East, 20% from South America, and 20% Muslims and MENAPT countries, the Danish government can reduce the number of "non-Westerners" by only displacing Muslims and MENAPT immigrants from the neighbourhood and keeping immigrants from the other two "non-Westerners" groups.

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<sup>78</sup> Transportministret [Ministry of Transport], ‘Ny ghettoliste [New ghetto list]’.

However, looking at other aspects of this plan, starting first with the title. Specifically, the danger of parallel societies in Denmark, and we look at it from a numerical perspective. The Danish government has designated 29 neighborhoods as "ghettos", equivalent to approximately 29,000 residents. If we supposed that the "many residents with non-western backgrounds" can reach 50% or more of the residents of these neighborhoods, the number of what the government classifies as "non-Western" would be approximately 15,000, distributed over 29 neighborhoods, not only in Copenhagen but all over Denmark. This number distributed over all those areas does not indicate that the so-called "non-Westerners" would be able (even if they wanted to) to form their own societies or, as the Danish government calls it, "parallel societies."

Second, the new legislation includes slashing the number of ghettos' public housing (non-profit sector) to no more than 40% from its original number. One can ask what is the relationship between "parallel societies" and the process of undermining public housing (non-profit sector)? Looking to this aspect, fifth of Copenhagen's residents, for instance, live in public housing and a third of all of them live in cooperatives.<sup>79</sup> Has privatization become a protection for the citizen (Danish, ethnic or non-ethnic)? The "ghetto plan" can be seen as a mean of privatizing public housing, in which racism constitutes an effective force to help privatization and not protect housing from market forces.<sup>80</sup> This potential could be supported, especially if one considers the way in which a neighbourhood is classified as a ghetto "many residents with non-western backgrounds."<sup>81</sup> The point is that there is no official classification for "non-Westerners", and the word "many" does not denote a specific number or percentage. Moreover, the government is the one that carries out the assessment and also conducts the population inventory.

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<sup>79</sup> Ösgård and Algers, 'Denmark's Shameful Ghetto Plan'.

<sup>80</sup> Ösgård and Algers.

<sup>81</sup> Transportministret [Ministry of Transport], 'Ny ghettoliste [New ghetto list]'.

Third, the most significant concern, asking what if the so-called "non-Westerners" form their own societies. Where does the problem really lie? Why should it be imposed how people should live, think, believe integrate, and so on, or should be there monoculture, one way of life, and one thought? This imperial way of thinking, as Mignolo points out<sup>82</sup>, leads me to the decolonial option. In this respect, I will introduce in the next section of the theoretical framework Mignolo's concept of "Epistemic Disobedience" and Wekker's concept of "Innocence." These two concepts are adopted mainly in the last chapter on the analysis of the ethnic Danes' positions on the "ghetto plan".

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82 Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom', 176.



# Chapter 2 - Epistemic Disobedience, Innocence, and Ethnic Danes

## 2.1 Epistemic Disobedience, Innocence

My research discusses the “ghetto plan” from a decolonial perspective. Two basic concepts are used for this purpose: In this section I will introduce two concepts, the first is Walter D Mignolo's concept of "Epistemic Disobedience" and Gloria Wekker's concept of “Innocence.” These two concepts will be the main basis of the analysis of the ethnic Danes perception and attitudes of the “ghetto plan” in the last chapter of this research.

### 2.1.1 Epistemic Disobedience

Epistemic Disobedience is a concept invented by Walter D Mignolo.<sup>83</sup> It applies the decolonial option in epistemology and politics.<sup>84</sup> That is, de-linking from the unilateral knowledge or as Santiago Castro-Gómez heads "hubris of the zero point", of coloniality (the "colonial matrix of power").<sup>85</sup> Mignolo points out that the Anthropos (the other) does not exist “ontologically” but has been invented discursively.<sup>86</sup> This invention has a negative impact on people from the Middle East, Bolivia, Ghana, China, etc., on non-Europeans and non-Americans.<sup>87</sup> Mignolo illustrates that the Anthropos discovered that they have been invented

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83 Mignolo, ‘Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom’; Mignolo, ‘Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing’; Miles, ‘Unbound Philosophies and Histories’; Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*.

84 Mignolo, ‘Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom’, 165.

85 Mignolo, ‘Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing’, 165.

86 Mignolo, 275–76.

87 Mignolo, 275–76.

and hence he emphasizes that they are necessitated to think in the "epistemic and ontological borders" of the colonial/modern world, "not borders of nation-states."<sup>88</sup>

In this sense, Mignolo argues that "border epistemology," that is to think outside the boundaries of colonial knowledge in the modern world and contributes to de-westernization and decoloniality.<sup>89</sup> However, Epistemic Disobedience does not mean rejecting Western knowledge, but rather separating its contributions from the effects of the colonial discourse.<sup>90</sup> By doing that, is to analyze the transformations and constitution of coloniality, and formulate a creative means that leads to legitimizing decolonial forms of living, thinking and doing.<sup>91</sup> In other words, this is how they should live and integrate. Decoloniality, hence, is "the exercise of power within the colonial matrix to undermine the mechanism that keeps it in place requiring obeisance."<sup>92</sup> Accordingly, decoloniality demands epistemic disobedience, and that is to think "in the spaces and time that the self-narrative of modernity invented as its outside to legitimize its own logic of coloniality."<sup>93</sup>

Epistemic Disobedience question the control of knowledge.<sup>94</sup> It moves from the enunciated (the structure of the sings itself in the spoken discourse) to the enunciation, to the subject manipulating words and signs.<sup>95</sup> Thus, decoloniality is to liberate knowledge from enunciated and the enunciation.<sup>96</sup> Subsequently, for instance, when investigating the "ghetto plan," one must ask what a "ghetto" is in the context in which it is being researched (for illustration, in Denmark a "ghetto" is not a slum). Too, when, for instance, describing the

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88 Mignolo, 275–76.

89 Mignolo, 281.

90 Miles, 'Unbound Philosophies and Histories', 4.

91 Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 145–46.

92 Mignolo and Walsh, 114.

93 Mignolo, 'Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing', 282.

94 Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom', 162.

95 Mignolo, 163.

96 Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 146.

"ghetto plan" as responding to parallel societies, one must question, on what basis this consideration has been taken, and it is "parallel" to whom, the elite?

In this comprehending, "Epistemic Disobedience," as I read it, is thinking on subjects and issues in detachment from the hegemonic colonial knowledge that defines and classifies "Others" and views from the unilateral perspective. In this insight, knowledge always emerges from particular places and bodies; it is always geopolitics and body politics; it is always a particular perspective.

### 2.1.2 “Innocence”

Gloria Wekker in her book (2016) uses the term “Innocence,” claiming that in the Dutch self-description the concept of “Innocence” greatly resonates.<sup>97</sup> She explains that "innocence" in Dutch society is linked to the claim that they are pacifist, irenic, and do not betray others. Innocence is associated with being a small country that needs protection like a little child. It places them in a safe position that allows them to utter racist phrases. Finally, innocence is associated with feminine connotations, that is, they are harmless and more tender.<sup>98</sup>

Nevertheless, Wekker refers that on the one hand, innocence is not-knowing and refusal to know, which in the Dutch context it merges with a denial of racism and a disavowal that they are benefiting from the privileges and entitlements they obtain without others.<sup>99</sup> On the other hand, loss of innocence means knowing and acknowledgment but does not mean that it will automatically lead to a sense of responsibility, but rather that it can lead to "racist violence, and often results in the continued cover-up of structural racism."<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Wekker, *White Innocence*, 17.

<sup>98</sup> Wekker, 17.

<sup>99</sup> Wekker, 18.

<sup>100</sup> Wekker, 18.

Wekker's concept of “Innocence” has a great resonance in the Danish context, as I have observed, and through the data, I have collected from the interviews I conducted during this research. However, my use of the concept of “Innocence” in analyzing this data includes not only the ethnic Danes' view of themselves as innocent but also the opposite, guilt, when the reference point is immigrants. The Danes are innocent when it comes to unemployment and other problems – then it is the fault of the government – while in the case of immigrants it's the other way round.

The dualities of citizen-government and immigrant-government constitute a dichotomy in the self-description of the ethnic Danes. In the citizen-government relation, the government is often viewed as responsible for shortcomings in employment opportunities, social and economic problems, and so on. Citizens do not view themselves as responsible only their governments. Nevertheless, the paradox lies when the relationship shifts to 'immigrant-government', the immigrants become guilty and blameworthy. They are interpreted as responsible and blamed for the lack of job opportunities, for social and economic problems, and so on.

With this dichotomy of the society's view of themselves and when it comes to immigrants, the government's actions against immigrants are justified. Society's view to its collective punishment to immigrants viewed as for the immigrants' sake and for the purpose of their integration. The generalization and stigmatization of minorities with criminals become freedom of expression. Discrimination based on ethnicity, culture, and religion is not racism.

During this research and in the next analysis, I evaluate the “ghetto plan” and the attitudes, perceptions, of the ethnic Danes about it based on the concept of “Epistemic Disobedience” “decoloniality” and the "Innocence". Hence, my assessment looks at it from the outside, from the borders of colonial thinking, and apart from the discourse that justifies racism and oppression against individuals, and that portrays immigrants and minorities as criminals,

uneducated, and so on, as well as excuses generalization and stigmatization against them. And, as I will show, ignore, or do not see, the "ghetto plan" from a perspective detached from coloniality.

## 2.2 Examining the concepts - Analysis of the interviews' findings

At the beginning of 2021, in Copenhagen, I conducted several interviews with ethnic Danes on the subject of the "ghetto plan". Each of them lasted more than an hour. During the interviews, I followed the type of "The Responsive Interview" following Rubin and Rubin (2012). It is characterized by a flexible questioning pattern, using a kind tone with the interviewees with a friendly little confrontation.<sup>101</sup> The network of social contacts that I built while living in Denmark for several years helped me organize the interviews much easier.

The interviewees represented in this paper are educated and most of them work in range of professions, in politics, education, music, and journalism. Their positions in general, as I regarded during the interviews, not anti-immigrant, or at least not in favour of radical stances against immigrants. Indeed, this aspect helped me examine another aspect that I found most interesting, which is exploring the power of the anti-immigrant rhetoric in Denmark by exploring the stances of who are not anti-immigrants. That is, who, supposedly, are seeking to empower their argument that differs from that of the negative official representation.

In this section I present my analysis of the interviewees' opinions and stances on the "ghetto plan" through two parts. The first is entitled 'Denying, Othering, and Innocence'. The second is entitled 'Repudiating the colonial account'. Throughout those parts and during my analysis, I examine the two following concepts. The first, "Innocence," which I will apply to analyze the interviewees' narratives that try to deny racism through the self-description as

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101 Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 5. ed. (Los Angeles, Calif.: SAGE, 2011), 666–69.

“innocence”. The second, the concept of "Epistemic Disobedience" among the interviewees' perception of the "ghetto plan," which I will apply to examine to what extent the interviewees delink themselves from the colonial knowledge. I will base my analysis also on my positionality as an immigrant who arrived in Denmark in 2015 coming from Syria and having to live in Søgengen, perhaps, one of the richest areas in Denmark. Not a "ghetto."

### 2.2.1 Denying, Othering, and “Innocence”

All the interviewees, who support or oppose the "ghetto plan", point out that what the government calls "non-Westerners" are mainly immigrants from the Middle East and Muslims. Interestingly, although all of the interviewees are not anti-immigrants, not all of them are against the "ghetto plan". Clara and Charlotte support the government's plan but for different reasons. On January 7, 2021, I interviewed Clara. She is in her mid-twenties; she is a council member of the Social Democrats and a member of the committee responsible for children and youth policies in Copenhagen Municipality.

During the interview, Clara explained how she knows about why the so-called “ghettos” were built: *"... the government decided a long time ago to make those neighborhoods, a good example is Tingbjerg, the ghetto I'm talking about. Tingbjerg was 30 years ago an area where young families moved into. The government wanted to make a part of Copenhagen affordable for young families, but then they put all the refugees there, and I don't know how that happened. Nowadays, I think, 30 or 50 percent of the inhabitants there are of ethnicities other than Danish."*

Clara supports the “ghetto plan” although she demonstrates during the interview lack of knowledge of other aspects of it such as the punitive measures in the details of the plan or the way the government defines a neighborhood as a “ghetto.” Furthermore, she neither questions the official narrative of the "ghetto plan" nor the government's intentions. However, Clara

censures the racist side of the “ghetto plan,” and the negative political discourse of representing immigrants and Muslims. Yet, this is for a purpose, as I will show it in the following.

Clara justifies her support of the “ghetto plan” on the basis that the demographic change of the immigrant communities will help them integrate into the Danish society. She justifies, *“when people do crimes, for most of them it’s a desperation of being live in a poor region so they cannot have a good childhood. Then, when you remove them and trying to give them a better childhood by putting them in a good school, in a mixed one, then in the future they will not join a gang. Also, I think if you give them another place to live, it’s okay to say you have to move, but it should not be on an ethnic basis.”*

When Clara puts it that way, it appears, somehow, to be criticizing the racist aspect of the “ghetto plan.” Yet, as I see, she is not. On the contrary, Clara covers up racism. She internalizes and reproduces the government narrative of the “ghetto plan,” and later, she gives her recommendation to the government on that basis. *“When they move refugees out to integrate them, they should not move them to the parts of town where there are already not integrated people, who speak another language, who has a hard time coming into the Danish society, they should mix them up.”*

From decolonial critique, Clara reproduces the colonial knowledge that generalizes, stigmatizes, and portrays “the other” as inferior. Crime and gangs, as Clara depicts them, as in the government narrative, become associated only with immigrants. Getting rid of “crime” becomes linked to being with more ethnic Danes. Ironically, you know, ethnic Danes do not commit crimes, they are innocent.

Clara, explains the position of the Danes in support of the plan on this basis, and from the same perspective of “innocence.” She says, *“they want to have a ghetto plan because they are afraid of the people who are living in the ghettos, they have never met Muslims, they just*

*see Muslims at the media as the mean people that the prime minister says that they're making noise in the trains.... and they heard about the gangs and the violence in Copenhagen."*

In other words, the invented "other- the non-Western," become in contrast to the ethnic Danes as Clara, apparently, sees them. Accordingly, the ethnic Danes become idealistic, there is no one, even, among them who makes a noise on the train, thus, they are surprised by these behaviors. They are innocent, afraid of the bad, the "non-Westerners."

The cover-up of structural racism, as in Clara's case, is even more apparent in Charlotte's. Charlotte tried to deny the racial aspect in the "ghetto plan" outright, stating that "*they just renovate apartments, it doesn't matter who you're.*" For a moment I didn't know what to say. Then, I gave Charlotte some clear government statements targeting "non-Westerners" in the legislation of the "ghetto plan."

Charlotte is another interviewee who supports the "ghetto plan." She in her late thirties and works as teacher at a primary school. She owns her apartment in Copenhagen, Nørrebro, in a neighborhood a block away from another one classified as a "ghetto." Charlotte possesses more knowledge about life in the "ghettos," and it seems that this made her perception of the "ghetto plan" different from that of Clara. During the interview, Charlotte, explains that social problems such as the presence of gangs are not limited to people of immigrant background but also ethnic Danes. She says,

*" We have in Nørrebro gangs with mostly Danish people, it's called 'Hells Angels', it's like a big international gang deals with drugs and they have a big house there when you go back to the street, and we also have gang with people from the Middle East called LTF 'Loyal to Familia', and we also have gang called 'Brothers'."*

The self-description of Danish society through "innocence" in Charlotte's interview is different from that of Clara. Charlotte, as it shows above, portrays the ethnic Danes living in and among the "ghettos" differently, as neither really idealistic, nor, as she asserts in the



following, afraid because they know. *"In general people are not afraid of it because when you live here you know that nothing happens. You know, maybe once every three months something crazy or crime happens, but you are not afraid of it. Yet, if you asked people who don't live here, they are afraid because they see it through the media, they say oh it is Nørrebro again, and again, but Nørrebro is 100,000 people living here."*

Charlotte seems to disarticulate the official "ghetto" discourse and link her approval of the "ghetto plan" to a reading that sees it as a kind of urban renewal. She realizes the plan as a reform that the government aims to renovate the buildings and improve the area in order to attract more ethnic Danes to live in. Therefore, she rationalizes the government's targeting of inhabitants of "non-Westerners" origins in those neighborhoods, as she links the improvement of the area as well to the increase in the number of ethnic Danes. From this perspective, Charlotte demonstrates that the government is acting due to the Danes' concerns about the presence of residents of "non-Western" origins. Otherwise, *"They cannot attract average Danish people if there are too many non-Westerns, because a lot of Danish people don't want to live in those areas because they hear it is a ghetto and there are crimes and I don't know, I'm not saying it's true."*

In fact, Charlotte justifies racism as Clara does, but for different reasons. Clara for the purpose of integrating "non-Westerners" and Charlotte for urban renewal. In both cases the ethnic Danes outside the "ghettos" are portrayed from the perspective of "innocence," afraid. Nevertheless, in both Clara and Charlotte's cases, there does not appear to be any suffering they share with the target "non-Western." Perhaps, as I see it, this might constitute an influential agent in shaping the perception on matters related to "the other." In the case of Sofie, this aspect appears somewhat, as I shall show in the beginning of the next section.

## 2.2.2 Repudiating the colonial account

The rest of the interviewees' positions, as will be shown in this section, oppose the "ghetto plan" but also, as in the case of the interviewees in the previous section, for various reasons. For Sofie, a journalist who lives in central Copenhagen, a thirty-minute walk from Nørrebro. I interviewed Sofie on 9 January 2021. Sofie, unlike Clara and Charlotte in the previous section, does not agree on the "ghetto plan." The party she voted to (The Alternative), which got only 3.0% of votes in the 2019 election, does not agree on the "ghetto plan" as well.

Sofie's position on the "ghetto plan" stems from her objection to the government's mechanism in dealing with social problems in those neighborhoods that it classifies as "ghettos." She expresses, *"that's not constructive, that is just symbolic politics because it seems like we will tear down this area and put people to live in new places so they can be probably more integrated. This may look very efficient to the people from outside but in reality, it's very simple to do research on what would help to do better integration."*

When I asked Sofie about the problems in those neighborhoods, she said, *"the problem that people can be stopped from proper integration, because instead of having them involved in the rest of society there is a risk that they will build up their own society because a lot of people who lives in those areas are people with no education or at least not very long education, maybe they don't have high-income jobs, so there are not a lot of opportunities for social mobility, and that way you risk not be able to move and meet other parts of the society, instead, you have to try to do an effort to create more social mobility otherwise in a number of years you will have the same issues."*

Here, apparently, Sofie does not object to the government account. on the purpose of creating the "ghetto plan" with the aim of integration. Her objection is the government's mechanism in implementing this order, or as she also says, "they just have the wrong approach." Indeed, Sofie's argument could be seen to make sense and could be taken as logical. Yet, not

from the de-colonial perspective. Of course, Sofie's thought on doing research to address social problems, secure job opportunities, and improve people's conditions is proper, and indeed, this is the duty of the state and institutions in any region. Yet, it is not in return for telling people how to think, what to do, what to feel, how to integrate, and where to live or with who. Simply, those are their decisions.

From the decolonial attitude, I do not see immigrants living together as a problem or risk (not to mention again that from a numerical perspective, the so-called “non-westerns” are not able to form their own societies, as I have explained above, on page 20). The decolonial viewpoint sees them as only humans. They are free, gather, disperse, emigrate, these are their choices, not mine. My argument is that it should be looking at what suits them, not what suits me, or what I think is good for them.

Sophie, as I mentioned before, shares with "the other-non-Western" what intersects with the "ghetto plan." That is the problem with housing and rents. This sharing, despite its limitations, has an impact, as I see it, on Sophie's attitude of the "ghetto plan." This is proven by her recommendation which appears to include this sharing, as can be seen in her quote below.

*“The government has to do an effort to create social mobility and there are different parameters to do this, such as to make sure that rent for example in Copenhagen is cheaper in general so people with low income will be able to live next to people with high income then you can mix people. So, you have to make a law about rent regulations. Indeed, I myself have a case against a housing company.”*

Intersecting with the immigrants' experience/suffering, the last aspect I refers to in Sofie's interview is more evident in Patrick's experience. On 16 January 2021 I interviewed Patrick. He is a musician, lived in a in *Lundtoftegade* which was classified as a “ghetto” and later got out of the “ghetto list.” Patrick, like Charlotte (the first interviewee), shows in the interview more knowledge about life in the so-called "ghettos," which stems from his

experience there. However, Patrick's attitude of the "ghetto plan" is different from that of Charlotte. He does not agree on the "ghetto plan."

In *Lundtoftegade*, Patrick lived through some of the events that formed his perception of the "ghetto plan." He illustrates, *"ghetto neighbourhoods are not distinguished by the design of buildings or streets but from being on the list. Also, the difference is that there are gangs in the ghettos, Lundtoftegade is home to one of the gangs in Nørrebro, it's called LTF and there is a Danish gang, it's called 'Hells Angels' and they live in huge houses. Yet, I really felt safe there. We hosted many parties, and no one bothered us."*

Patrick as Charlotte does not describe the ethnic Danes living in the "ghettos" through the "innocence." He mentions the presence of gangs on both sides. In other words, this is not limited to a class, culture, or religion. Notwithstanding, Patrick does not see that the "ghetto plan" was issued because of the gangs. In his opinion it is *"because of the racism, because it has to be a certain amount of what the government calls it non-Westerns. When it comes to the people from the Middle East live in a place, they don't like it."*

Patrick illustrates, *"at first, the government said there should be a certain level of education, then almost every ghetto raised the level and said to the government, look, we did what we could to educate our children, but then the government raised standards again, and so on. The only thing that has not been changed in the criteria from the start is the targeting of residents of non-Western origins."*

Patrick's perception is held by his knowledge while living in one of the "ghettos," and the changes made by the government(s) regarding the criteria that define a neighbourhood as a "ghetto." Nonetheless, Patrick's perception on the "ghettos" has been shaped by more than that knowledge. Patrick has dark hair and beard. This trait contributed to the formation of a different view of society based on his experience. Patrick explains what that does mean,

*"I have actually experienced going down to the street, like a lot of times people yell racial slur after me, racial slur about Muslim people. They think I am Muslim, look like someone who is a Muslim, and say things like go back to your country. Also, at the borders when I come back to my country, it goes to a really extensive passport checking of me, but for my friends, they just walk by. If I experience this, I can imagine what other people experience."*

Patrick experiences the negative impact of body politics that has been shaped by the negative colonial representations and knowledge. Racism influences Patrick's self-view and perception of the Danish society and of the "ghettos." He, because of that, knows better and holds different knowledge. Indeed, this leads me to question, what if Patrick shares more adjectives from the other's representations? More identifiers, name, religion, culture, or origin. Each of these traits has a negative impact under this colonial representation. The more rooted in a society it is, the greater its impact.

However, delinking from the colonial representation and the monistic knowledge is not conditional, as I see it, on specific physical attributes or culture (despite their contributions to one's perception). This is shown in the position of Trine, the last interviewee in this analysis. Trine studies Social Science at Copenhagen University, in her mid-twenties. Trine, although she shares her objection with Sofie about the "ghetto plan", unlike Sofie, views the "ghetto plan" as an exclusionary and racist legislation as in the case of Patrick. Trine says,

*"For many reasons I think first of all it's really racist, it's discriminatory. It's not true that there is dominant culture there, and I don't see that's a problem really. I don't know what a Danish culture is, of course there are something Danish, but I don't think that's a problem that people have different cultures and different ways of living."*

Trine, as it is obvious above in her statement, doesn't regenerate the government's account on the "ghettos." Her criticism stems from her interaction with the elements promoted by the government such as different cultures, building their own community (ghettoization),

attempting to integrate them into the Danish society, and fear for the Danish culture. For Trine, these elements were sufficient to form a counter position to the government narrative. She says,

*“When we talk about the ‘ghetto list’ we talk about parallel societies! you don’t have really any research proves that you have parallel societies, and I don’t really know what a parallel society means. A lot of studies say that if you’re coming to a new country, it helps you to become part of the society and integrate better if you can live together with some people who are a kind from the same region.”*

Trina is, like Patrick, closest to the "epistemic disobedience" and de-linking from colonial knowledge. She does not internalize the geopolitical knowledge and does not quote it. Trine does not see integration in parting immigrants from each other or in controlling their places of living. She does not view a danger in their presence. In her opinion, with which I will end this chapter, *“it is brutal to forcing people to move and if you want really to address the problems that might be in an area. When it comes to social inequality or crime or education you would make initiatives in that area and would ask people who actually living there what they need.”*

## Conclusion

The transformations in Danish politics in recent years reveal a significant escalation against immigrants, especially Muslims and those with origin from MENAPT countries and their descendants. In this context, the Danish government launched what it calls the "ghetto plan." This research shows how the discourse on "ghettos" in the Danish setting associates with the anti-immigrant discourse and how it has its roots in the colonial and post-colonial discourse. The focus of this study is on the production of unilateral colonial knowledge, and the representative racist system that has been resulted from it. That is entrenched in the discourse on "ghettos" in the Danish case. This narrative influences the perception and thus attitudes of ethnic Danes to the "ghetto plan," the subject matter of this research.

The ethnic Danes' ability to epistemically disconnect from the "ghetto plan" and the associated coloniality of power with its racialized narratives is influenced by various reasons. The effect of personal experience, especially in the experiences that cause them suffering and which intersect with aspects of the "ghetto plan." Sharing attributes with other's representation in colonial knowledge. That is, the body politics resulting from colonial epistemology that contributes to the formation of a different perception, the self-description of society, and to the rejection of the "ghetto plan." Yet, it is not conditional to these reasons only.

Most of the interviewees that repudiate the "ghetto plan" tend to reject the colonial representative system. However, the opponents' opinions emerge either through opposition to the official mechanism or through irritation to the racist government narrative. Therefore, their attitudes come only through the narrative on the plan. Thus, they manage to at least somewhat escape from its hold and offer critical perspectives on some of the aspects of the plan or some of the government reasons offered to justify the plan.

Yet, those who agree to the "ghetto plan" are more inclined, albeit to different degrees, to formulate their positions through the perspective of "innocence", which includes in some aspect denial of the racist aspect of the "ghetto plan." Hence, they are thus very supportive of the government on this issue. Nevertheless, the great influence of unilateral colonial knowledge appears in the perception of all the interviewees. For example, no one mentioned other aspects of the "ghetto plan", such as collective punishment or targeting the public sector. This indicates the powerful impact of coloniality.

Finally, this research looks at the "ghetto plan" as a product of this colonial world, which makes it easy to target the "other". The coloniality makes use of the monolithic discourse and the prevailing knowledge that it has produced. This research looks at the "ghetto plan" as a result of a culture that uses the "other" as a means to pass on its colonial projects. Therefore, it marks and criticizes the issue of the "ghetto plan" from the outlook of equality and justice that delinks this knowledge and its negative representation that interiorizes the "other." Hence, this research reaches a final conclusion, which is that decolonial choice and "epistemic disobedience" are the medians for the beginning of change.



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