



Erasing Communities Reclaiming Narratives

Racial Banishment and Belonging in Denmark's 'Ghetto Laws'

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STRUCTURAL ISLAMOPHOBIA AS URBAN GOVERNANCE

Ghetto policies:

- *Public housing estates as “ghettos” if >50% of residents are “non-Western” – a proxy for Muslim.*
- *Non-Western is an imposed state category, not self-defined.*
- ***Racism** is embedded within the concept of the West vs the Rest*

The state governs Muslims through **racialised surveillance, spatial restructuring, and moral discourses of deviance.**

Ét Danmark uden parallelsamfund

Ingen ghettoer i 2030

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The government envisions a cohesive Denmark. A Denmark built **on democratic values** such as **freedom** and **the rule of law**. **Equality and open-mindedness. Tolerance and gender equality.** A Denmark where everyone actively participates.

Over the past nearly 40 years, Denmark's ethnic composition has changed significantly. In 1980, there were 5.1 million people in Denmark. Today, we are close to 5.8 million. The population growth comes from abroad—both immigrants and their descendants. **The majority of the new Danes have a non-Western background.** (Government, 2018: 4)



Great Replacement-conspiracy in
policy framework

DENMARK AS A RACIAL WELFARE STATE



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- Myth of universal egalitarianism masks a history of exclusion.
 - Racial regimes predate welfare: rooted in Denmark's colonial involvement in Greenland, the Caribbean, West Africa, and India.
 - Welfare extended to "us" (ethnic Danes), not "them" (racialised migrants and Muslims).
- **The welfare state is built on colonial entanglements**

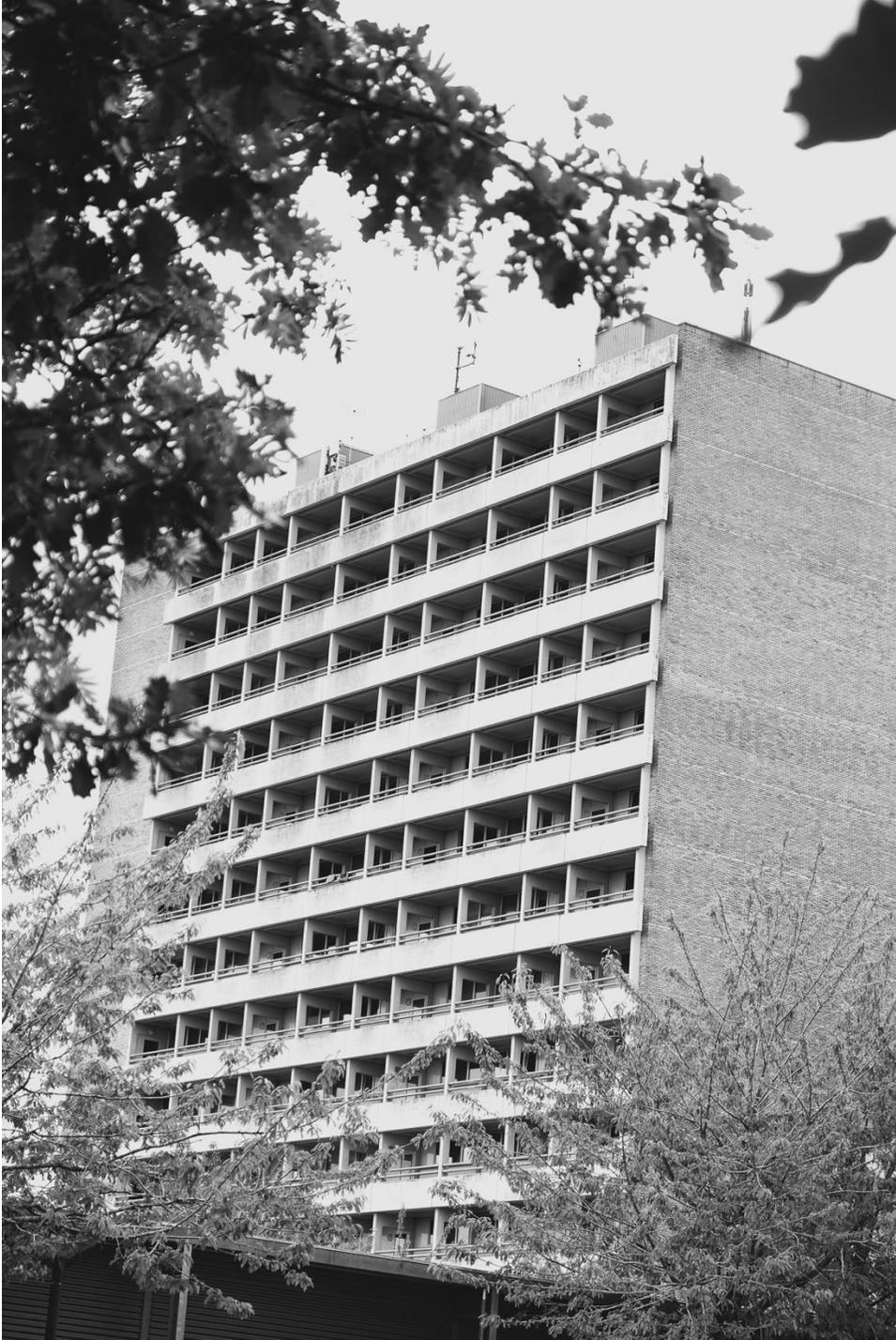
"ALL THAT REMAINS" BY BANAN AL-NASSER
—ART AS INSPIRATION FOR COMMUNITY CENTERED
ETHNOGRAPHY



THE MORAL PANIC OF THE MUSLIM OTHER

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- Migrant labour (1960s–70s) essential to capitalist growth but later deemed disposable.
 - Public housing became concentrated sites of racialised precarity—not self-segregation, but **symptoms of structural marginality**.
 - 1990s–2000s: Muslim populations reframed as threats—economically burdensome, culturally deviant.





THE 2018 GHETTO POLICIES, FIVE KEY COMPONENTS

- **Demolitions and regeneration** – forced displacement
- **Control over housing allocation** – restricting access for racialised residents
- **Double sentencing zones** – punitive spatial policing
- **Child surveillance and cultural policing** – nurseries as ideological tools
- **Government representatives** – enforcement of integration metrics
→ Policies aim to **erase Muslim neighbourhoods** under the guise of “cohesion.”

CARCERality IN THE WELFARE STATE

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- Public institutions are turned into carceral agents:
 - **Schools/nurseries surveil families**
 - **Police monitor spaces**
 - **Housing law regulates demography**
 - Welfare is no longer a tool of redistribution—it's a **racialising disciplinary regime**.

RACIAL CAPITALISM, CARCERAL WELFARE AND THE SPATIALISATION OF RACE

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- **Racial Capitalism:** racial hierarchies as foundational to economic governance.
 - **Carceral Welfare :** welfare as surveillance and punishment.
 - Public housing becomes a key site where **racialisation meets spatialisation.**



UNDERSTANDING MUSLIM ERASURE FROM URBAN SPACES

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- The ghetto policies do not just surveil—they enact **spatial and historical erasure**. Muslim residents are treated as temporary, unwelcome, and incompatible with urban space.
 - This is a **colonial logic**: to civilise, manage, and ultimately displace.
 - Carceral logic permeates (social) policing, education, welfare services
- Muslims' communal, social and cultural presence is as a threat to Danish values and social cohesion, and thus banished through law

COMMUNITY FOCUS: CARE ON THE MARGINS

But also this thing about how, even though people come from different places and countries, with different histories and different experiences of fleeing—some just, well, walked in, so to speak—there was still a sense of community. Like, there was still this understanding that, well, we all have something in common: **we all started over in Denmark**. And in a way, that created a **shared bond**. You had an understanding for one another, even if you didn't understand each other linguistically or culturally.

But there was still an understanding, and **there was a kind of compassion**, which I really remember—or I can recall it now, looking back. The way people approached one another, the way they spoke to each other, was careful. People were careful with one another. They were... well, they tried to be there for each other, even if they didn't make a deliberate effort. It was just about the way you approached others—it was very vulnerable.

There was this sense of understanding, like: **we're actually all in the same boat**. And sharing experiences, being there for one another, and making sure everyone knew if there was a tip or a trick—some kind of **hack for how to live in this new country**. You know, those were the kinds of things people shared with one another.

(Dina, interview, 2023, author's translation)



RECLAIMING MARGINAL SPACE

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- **Informal care networks:** invisibilised in policy, yet remain as political acts
 - Migrants support one another through hostile bureaucracy: “How to survive in a new country”
 - Resisting erasure by **anchoring themselves in place**, asserting belonging despite the state’s denial



CONCLUSION — WELFARE AS A CARCERAL TOOL

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- The Danish welfare state an increasingly explicitly **racial carceral state**.
 - The ghetto policies:
 - **Police the presence** of Muslims,
 - **Control their use of public services**
 - **Erase their spatial memory**
 - Communities endure (so far) –solidarity in the ruins of state erasure.

