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Constructing the Parallel Society

Political Discourse, Spatial Governance, and Racialized Exclusion in Denmark

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Abstract

This thesis offers a critical investigation into how Danish political discourse constructs immigrant communities as cultural outsiders and spatial threats, with a particular focus on the "Ghetto Package" of 2018 and its subsequent discursive reframing in the 2021 "Parallel Society Agreement". While officially aimed at promoting integration and social cohesion, these policies disproportionately target racialized urban areas through mechanisms such as forced relocation, ethnic quotas, and spatial reclassification. Rather than assessing policy efficacy, this study interrogates how language operates as a tool of governance, producing and legitimizing structural exclusion under the guise of neutrality and pragmatism.

Grounded in Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), the thesis draws on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model and Teun van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to examine the interplay between text, discursive practice, and social structure. By analyzing a comprehensive empirical dataset that includes political speeches, policy documents, party platforms, and parliamentary debates, the thesis uncovers how dominant narratives about "ghettos", "parallel societies", and "non-Western immigrants" mobilize civilizational binaries, moralized belonging, and racialized spatial imaginaries. These discursive strategies contribute to a broader ideological project that redefines national identity in exclusionary terms, aligning integration with cultural conformity and ideological loyalty.

To enhance the explanatory power of CDS, the study incorporates theoretical insights from postcolonial theory (Said, Bhabha), urban sociology (Wacquant), and critical race studies (Bonilla-Silva). This interdisciplinary framework foregrounds the racialized and colonial dimensions of Danish integration discourse, revealing how systemic discrimination is naturalized through bureaucratic language, statistical classifications, and spatial metaphors. The thesis also engages the 2025 legal opinion of Advocate General Tamara Ćapeta in case C-417/23, which declared key aspects of Denmark's housing legislation to constitute direct ethnic discrimination. This intervention underscores the urgent need to critically examine how policy language constructs categories of deviance and belonging, and how such constructions acquire legal and institutional force.

Ultimately, the study shows how political discourse functions as both a mirror and a mechanism of structural power, shaping not only how immigrant communities are perceived but also how they are governed. By revealing the ideological work performed by concepts like "parallel societies", the thesis contributes to scholarly and public debates about race, democracy, and the role of language in contemporary welfare states. Beyond the Danish context, it offers insights into broader European dynamics where integration has become a battleground for competing visions of nationhood, belonging, and pluralism.

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Introduction

In recent years, Denmark has drawn increasing international controversy for its progressively restrictive stance on migration, integration, and public housing policy. At the heart of this transformation lies the 2018 political agreement known as the "Ghetto Package", officially titled *One Denmark Without Parallel Societies*. This legislative framework introduced a comprehensive set of policies aimed at eliminating so-called "ghettos", targeting areas predominantly inhabited by "non-Western immigrants and their descendants". These policies include forced relocation, the demolition of social housing, the implementation of ethnic quotas, and stricter educational and welfare requirements (Regeringen 2018).

The controversy sparked by the "Ghetto Package" interestingly revealed that policy making is not simply informed by data or pragmatic governance objectives; rather, they are imbued with meaning and shaped by ideological assumptions about belonging, threat, and legitimacy. In this sense, the "Ghetto Package" is not only a material intervention – it is also a discursive one. Reflecting this, the Danish state in 2021 introduced a revised policy titled *Mixed Neighborhoods – The Next Step in the Fight Against Parallel Societies* – which deliberately removed terms such as "ghettos" to foreground the significance of language in policy formulation.

Despite these efforts, the employed terminology continued to shape public debates about inclusion and exclusion, culminating in recent legal developments. In February 2025, Advocate General Tamara Ćapeta of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) issued a legal opinion in the case C-417/23, challenging the legality of Denmark's public housing legislation. Ćapeta declares that the legislation constitutes direct discrimination based on ethnic origin. It is emphasized that the laws rely on socially constructed perceptions of cultural and ethnic difference, effectively perpetuating prejudices and stigmatization (Ćapeta 2025, 17). Her conclusion prompted us to examine how discourse operates to construct something as "common-sense", while an Advocate General characterizes it as "direct discrimination". In other words, how can language become a tool of power that legitimizes state interventions.

It is important to clarify that this thesis does not seek to assess whether the "ghetto" initiatives are practically effective, nor does it ask whether it achieves its stated aims of integration or cohesion.

Instead, it offers a critical investigation of how "immigrant" communities are represented in political and legal texts, and how these representations justify spatial governance and legitimize structural forms of discrimination. It proceeds from the premise that policies are not simply tools of administration but are embedded in ideological and historical narratives that give them meaning and force.

Research Aim and Problem Formulation

This thesis seeks to critically examine how Danish political discourse represent immigrant communities in relation to the concepts of "ghetto" and "parallel societies", and how these representations are mobilized in the formulation and justification of integration and urban policies. It examines how political actors construct meaning around national identity, social cohesion, and cultural difference, and how such constructions influence or are shaped by institutional practices and policy frameworks.

Guided by an interdisciplinary approach grounded in Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), the investigation is situated within broader theoretical concerns about race, state power, and the role of language in liberal democracies. It interrogates the relationship between discourse, ideology, and power, with attention to how language shapes perceptions, legitimize interventions, and potentially contribute to broader patterns of social regulation.

Specifically, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How are immigrant and ethnic minority communities discursively constructed in Danish political and policy discourse on "ghetto" and "parallel societies"?
2. In what ways do these discursive constructions interact with or reinforce institutional approaches to integration and spatial governance?
3. How are notions of national identity, cultural difference, and social belonging articulated and contested in the discourse?

By analyzing the discursive dimensions of policy texts, speeches and parliamentary debates, the study aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of how political language operates within the broader dynamics of governance, identity formation, and spatial regulation in Denmark.

The analysis is grounded in Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), informed by Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model and Teun van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach. Fairclough's model allows for an investigation at three interrelated levels: text, discursive practice, and social practice. This enables the examination of how political language simultaneously constructs meaning, reflects institutional structures, and reinforces social inequalities. Furthermore, van Dijk's perspectives add a cognitive dimension, focusing on how discourse shapes mental models, stereotypes, and shared assumptions among the public and political elites. In this way, we establish an interrelated theoretical foundation for exploring the interplay between structure and cognition.

To address the racialized and colonial dimensions of Danish political discourse on integration, the study integrates insights from postcolonial theory, particularly the work of Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, together with political and urban studies informed by Benedict Anderson and Loïc Wacquant. These insights are combined with critical race contributions of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding how the racialization of immigrants is discursively accomplished without direct reference to race, and how notions of cultural deviance serve to uphold systemic inequalities. Taken together, this interdisciplinary approach enables a comprehensive examination of how power operates through language.

In doing so, this thesis contributes to scholarly debates on the intersections of language, power, and racial governance in contemporary welfare states. By focusing on the discursive mechanisms through which immigrant communities are constructed as "parallel societies", the study provides new insights into how exclusion is institutionalized and naturalized through state language. In highlighting the role of policy discourse in producing social hierarchies, the research complements existing literature on territorial stigmatization, integration politics, and structural racism in Denmark.

The timeliness of the study is underscored by the 2025 opinion by the Advocate General, which elevates questions of policy language from ethical concern to matters of legal principle. As such, the thesis not only offers an academic analysis but also contributes to public and legal debates about discrimination, inclusion, and the role of the state in shaping societal norms. Beyond the Danish case, the findings resonate with broader European dynamics, where integration policies increasingly reflect civilizational anxieties and nationalist imaginaries. In this way, the thesis

speaks to wider issues of democracy, pluralism, and belonging in an era of tightening borders and rising ethnonationalism.

Literature Review

This literature review critically engages with key academic scholarship on Danish integration policy, racialized urban governance, and the discursive construction of immigrant communities. It situates the thesis within an interdisciplinary field that spans urban studies, sociology, and political science, focusing specifically on how political language, policy frameworks, and spatial interventions reproduce social hierarchies and cultural exclusion. The review foregrounds recent scholarship in order to trace the evolution of the "ghetto" as both a discursive and institutional tool, unpacking how it operates within broader dynamics of nationalist, territorial stigmatization, and power.

To provide a structured and comprehensive overview of the existing scholarship, this review is organized around two interrelated thematic focal points that illuminate central dimensions of the discursive and structural marginalization of ethnic minority communities in Denmark.

The first segment survey scholarship engaged with how the category of the "ghetto" has been constructed, institutionalized in Danish urban and integration policy. It draws on conceptual frameworks such as territorial stigmatization and racialized governance to explore the spatial and symbolic functions of "ghetto" politics. The second segment turns to the role of political discourse in shaping national identity and justifying exclusionary policies. Drawing on Danish scholarship, it highlights how nationalism, affective politics, and cultural binaries underpin the racialization of integration in Denmark. Together, these sections provide the conceptual grounding for the thesis's critical analysis of political texts.

Ghettoization and Territorial Stigmatization in Denmark

This section explores how Danish policy frameworks on integration and public housing construct and govern stigmatized neighborhoods through processes of ghettoization and territorial stigmatization. Drawing on critical urban studies and sociology research, the literature highlights how the "ghetto" operates not as a neutral descriptor but as a powerful political and ideological

category that reshapes urban space, racializes socio-economic circumstances, and legitimizes punitive interventions. The following sections trace how the label is constructed discursively and implemented institutionally, with profound implications for spatial justice and social inclusion.

The Construction of the "Ghetto" Label

In recent decades, the concept of the "ghetto" has become a central yet controversial feature of Danish integration and public housing policy. A growing body of scholarship highlights the Danish use of the "ghetto" label as a politically and discursively constructed category that serves to stigmatize racialized urban spaces and their residents. Rather than describing objective or empirical social conditions, the label functions as a symbolic and ideological device that transforms socio-economic and ethnic diversity into perceived threats to national cohesion.

Drawing on Wacquant's (2008) concept of *territorial stigmatization,* Larsen (2011) contends that the term lacks analytical coherence in the Danish context and instead proposes "neglected housing areas" as a more accurate descriptor of spaces marked by political neglect and urban planning failures. His analysis challenges the appropriateness of adopting the term "ghetto" from the context of the United States without considering the distinct historical and social trajectories of Danish public housing. Larsen (2014) further demonstrates how territorial stigmatization is produced and reproduced through state-led urban renewal policies and media narratives. These interventions, he shows, have transformed areas once associated with working-class solidarity and pride into zones of advanced marginality, coded as culturally deficient and economically burdensome.

This process of discursive construction is echoed by Jensen (2021), who traces how marginalized neighborhoods have been redefined in policy discourse, from representations of social vulnerability to depictions of cultural deviance. Such representations facilitate the deployment of racialized and punitive governance mechanisms, including demolition, forced relocation, and the restructuring of public housing. Frandsen and Hansen (2020) further demonstrate how the "ghetto" label emerged through racialized reconstruction of inequality, in which social problems were increasingly attributed to ethnic and cultural differences rather than structural deprivation. This shift aligns housing governance with broader neoliberal agendas that transform welfare from a mechanism of support to one of discipline and containment.

Delica (2011) underscores the symbolic violence embedded in the "ghetto" label, arguing that it pathologizes poor, racialized communities while legitimizing punitive forms of state control. He positions the label as a tool of neoliberal urban management that targets stigmatized populations through discourses of fear, disorder, and deviance. In this way, the label serves to justify increased surveillance and spatial interventions under the pretext of integration. As Jensen and Söderberg (2021) argue, the "ghetto" acts not as a neutral or technical categorization, but as a powerful discursive tool of othering, deeply embedded in myths of national sameness and normative citizenship. Importantly, this process does not go uncontested. Söderberg (2024) demonstrates through ethnographic research in a designated "ghetto" area, residents actively resist the label, re-negotiating neighborhood narratives and asserting alternative understandings of place belonging and dignity in the face of stigmatization.

The symbolic construction of the "ghetto" as a site of deviance and threat has not remained confined to discourse alone. Rather, it has been institutionalized through administrative classifications and legislative frameworks that translate discursive stigmatization into material consequences. The following section examines how the "ghetto" label has become embedded in policy frameworks, producing new forms of spatial governance and structural exclusion.

The Institutionalization of "Ghetto" Policies

The "ghetto" label has not remained a matter of discourse alone, but has been institutionalized through housing legislation, administrative classifications, and urban governance mechanisms that produce tangible effects on the everyday lives of residents.

Larsen (2011) traces this development beginning with the state's implementation of official "ghetto lists" in the 2010s. Here, the label was bureaucratized into a classification system with far-reaching consequences for these areas. These lists, updated annually, applied reductive indicators to label neighborhoods as "ghettos" and subsequently as "hard ghettos", triggering exceptional policy measures.

Tireli (2024) highlights the 2018 "Ghetto Package" as a major turning point in the entrenchment of "ghetto" policies, codifying a series of invasive and disciplinary interventions into law. These included forced relocations, ethnic quotas, housing demolition, restrictions on residency for

welfare recipients, mandatory daycare, and language assessments. While these measures were publicly presented as efforts to promote integration and social cohesion, he argues that they disproportionately target neighborhoods inhabited by ethnic minorities, revealing a deeply racialized logic underlying their formulation and implementation. Tireli (2024) further argues that these policies operate as mechanisms for managing perceived cultural deviance, embedding assimilationist and exclusionary logics into the physical and legal fabric of these spaces. In this way, he situates the "ghetto" label within a broader regime of restrictive integration policy, where housing becomes a vehicle for regulating difference and enforcing conformity to dominant cultural norms.

Christensen (2020) critiques the "Ghetto Package" for relying on politically constructed criteria that lack empirical grounding and risk reinforcing social inequality rather than rectifying it. According to Christensen (2020), it may reduce spatial segregation in a narrow sense but fails to address, and may in fact exacerbate, underlying structural inequalities. Similarly, Frandsen and Hansen (2020) argue that the "Ghetto Package" institutionalized a form of governance in which ethnic minority-dense neighborhoods are constructed as threats to national cohesion. Framed through the lens of cultural deviation and social incompatibility, these areas are subject to exceptional governance measures aimed at normalizing space and population. Essentially, they argue that the term "parallel society" became synonymous with "non-Western" immigrants, despite no empirical evidence proving their isolation.

While the literature contends that the "ghetto" policies are embedded in a racialized regime of governance, recent research also points to emerging forms of resistance and contestation. Research confirms how residents of stigmatized neighborhoods are not merely passive recipients of policy but engage in active redefinitions of place, belonging, and rights. The final part of this section explores how ethnographic and activist perspectives challenge dominant constructions and foreground alternative visions of community and citizenship.

Spatial Governance and Territorial Stigmatization

Territorial stigmatization has become a central mechanism through which Danish housing policy reinforces racialized hierarchies and exclusionary governance. The "ghetto" designation imposes symbolic and material boundaries on specific neighborhoods, casting them as spaces of disorder,

deviance, and cultural deficiency. This discursive framing not only devalues these areas but also justifies intensified state interventions, embedding structural discrimination into the built environment.

Delica (2011) demonstrates how such policies are shaped by broader political and economic transformations, yet are persistently framed in cultural terms that individualize and pathologize residents. By focusing on perceived cultural deficits rather than structural causes of inequality, these narratives obscure state responsibility and normalize racialized exclusion. Moreover, Larsen (2011) critiques the legitimizing function of the "ghetto" label, arguing that these neighborhoods are not the result of organic segregation but of deliberate urban planning and state decisions. He warns that stigmatizing representations risk becoming self-fulfilling prophecies, where negative public perception leads to disinvestment, deteriorating conditions, and further marginalization.

Expanding on this, Jensen (2021) analyzes how racialized classifications, such as "non-Western", have redirected political focus from socio-economic inequality to cultural deviance. The 2018 "Ghetto Package" institutionalized this racial logic by imposing stricter surveillance, mandatory daycare, and increased policing in designated areas. These policies reinforce the expectation that immigrants must assimilate into dominant norms to gain social acceptance, thereby transforming integration into a project of cultural correction.

While much of the literature focuses on the production and enforcement of stigmatizing policies, recent scholarship has begun to illuminate how residents resist the imposed identity of the "ghetto". Through ethnographic research in Mjølnerparken (a designated "ghetto"), Söderberg (2024) explores how residents engage in everyday acts of resistance that reassert pride, belonging, and dignity. Bernhardt and Schwiertz (2025) extend this perspective by theorizing the concept of "tenant citizenship", showing how grassroots movements resist the logics of displacement and privatization embedded in "ghetto" legislation. Their work reframes housing activism not simply as opposition to state policy, but as a form of community-based citizenship that reclaims rights to space and belonging beyond state-defined norms. Together, these studies challenge the portrayal of public housing residents as passive victims and highlight their political agency in contesting spatial injustice.

This body of research reveals a paradigmatic shift in Danish integration and public housing policy, transformed from redistributive welfare to disciplinary spatial control. It contends that "ghetto" policies are not neutral responses to urban inequality, but part of a broader system of racialized governance. Through political discourse, legal frameworks, and spatial interventions, stigmatized neighborhoods are transformed into sites of exclusion, surveillance, and displacement. The "ghetto" label itself functions as a tool that legitimizes structural inequality by attributing social problems to racialized cultural difference.

Nationalism, Political Discourse, and Power Structures

Political discourse in Denmark plays a pivotal role in shaping integration policies, constructing national identity, and influencing public perceptions of minority communities. Contemporary scholarship demonstrates that Danish national identity is often articulated in exclusive terms, grounded in narratives of cultural homogeneity, secularism, and historical continuity. These narratives not only reflect prevailing social attitudes but also shape institutional practices that marginalize "non-Western" immigrants, particularly Muslims, through both symbolic representations and material policy.

This section explores scholarship on Danish nationalist imaginaries, political rhetoric, and institutional power, and how these concepts serve to produce and sustain exclusionary policies.

Constructing "Danishness": National Identity and the Racialized "Other"

National identity in Denmark is not simply a reflection of shared values and traditions, it is a powerful discursive construct that plays a central role in shaping public attitudes, institutional practices, and policy frameworks. Contemporary scholarship has shown that the boundaries of "Danishness" are often drawn in exclusionary terms, marginalizing immigrants, particularly those racialized as "non-Western", through narratives of cultural incompatibility.

Danish national identity is frequently articulated through ideals of cultural sameness, emphasizing shared traditions, secular values, and a cohesive social fabric. Wren (2001) was among the early scholars to argue that this cultural framing contributes to a form of cultural racism, wherein Muslim immigrants are depicted as fundamentally incompatible with Danish values. Discourses of cultural

dilution, commonly invoked in both far-right and mainstream political discourse, cast Islam as a threat to liberal democracy, gender equality, and social trust (Wren 2001).

The question of national identity is central to understanding how exclusion is both rationalized and enforced through policy. Larsen (2022) offers a sociological critique of the "parallel society" concept, arguing that it serves more as a discursive tool than an empirical category. He contends that the concept's vagueness and ideological flexibility enable it to circulate broadly across political contexts, reinforcing exclusionary narratives without explicit racial language. This supports a broader nationalist project that equates cultural sameness with social stability, positioning immigrants as threats by default.

The exclusionary construction of national identity is deeply intertwined with how integration is framed in policy discourse. Rather than being understood as a process of mutual adaptation, integration in Denmark has increasingly come to signify cultural conformity and ideological alignment with dominant norms. The next section draws on scholarship examining how this culturalization of integration reinforces racialized logics of governance and justifies coercive state interventions in immigrant-dense neighborhoods.

Culturalization of Integration

Political discourse in Denmark has shifted from focusing on socio-economic integration to emphasizing cultural conformity. This culturalization of integration frames immigrant-dense neighborhoods as threats, thereby justifying coercive state interventions. Rytter (2019) critiques the concept of "integration" itself, arguing that it has shaped Danish political discourse for over three decades in ways that reinforce asymmetrical power relations.

He identifies three prevailing narratives that structure Danish integration discourse:

1. Welfare reciprocity, where immigrants must contribute to society before they can gain access to welfare benefits, is often framed as proving loyalty and contribution before inclusion.
2. The host-guest relationship, where immigrants are considered "guests" in Danish society. They are expected to fully assimilate to be accepted; failure to conform is seen as a rejection of Danish values.

3. Danes are imagined as culturally homogenous and indigenous, rendering those with immigrant backgrounds as permanent outsiders.

These narratives collectively racialize access to social rights, embedding exclusion within the welfare state itself. Integration, then, becomes less about inclusion and more about enforcing conformity, leaving little room for genuine belonging or pluralism (Rytter 2019, 678-686).

Building on this idea, Jensen et al. (2010) note that Denmark's approach to integration has historically emphasized assimilation over multiculturalism, prioritizing economic participation and adherence to dominant cultural norms over pluralistic inclusion. Media portrayals often depict immigrants as burdens on the welfare state or as resistant to "Danish values". Jensen and Söderberg (2021) argue that Danish integration and housing policies are shaped by myths of national sameness, wherein "non-Western" populations are rendered as racialized outsiders whose presence must be managed, transformed, or removed to preserve the national self. Hervik (2019) situates this within a broader Nordic context of affective nationalism, where emotions such as fear and moral panic around Islam and migration sustain dominant perceptions of whiteness as normative and under threat.

Furthermore, Mouritsen and Olsen (2013) highlight the paradox inherent in Danish liberal tolerance. While Danish liberal democracy promotes universal values such as freedom, equality, and individual rights, these values are selectively applied, particularly in relation to religious and cultural diversity. Muslim practices that fall outside secular norms are often framed as incompatible with Danish identity, leading to policies that prioritize assimilation over genuine multicultural inclusion. This has contributed to a policy landscape increasingly hostile to religious expression. This essentialist conception of "Danishness" is especially pronounced in right-wing discourse. Marker (2020) shows how Danish populist parties construct an image of "the people" as ethnically Danish, whose identity and values are threatened by immigrant existence. Although the idea of "Danishness" remains deliberately vague, it is still enforced as something that must be protected from external threats. This discourse reinforces ethnic and cultural exclusion, portraying "non-Western" immigrants as unable to uphold gender equality, democracy, and secularism, as core tenets of Danish national identity. In the same manner, Jensen (2021) argues that policies like

the 2018 “Ghetto Package” are not merely housing initiatives, but a nation-building project that decides who belongs, and who does not, based on adherence to Danish cultural norms.

Taken together, Danish national identity is not a neutral or inclusive concept but a discursively constructed boundary that defines who belongs and who does not. Immigrants, particularly those racialized as “non-Western”, are positioned as perpetual outsiders. This discursive framing of immigrants as culturally incompatible does not operate in isolation but is institutionalized through legal frameworks and administrative practices. The final section of this review explores how these power structures function to regulate immigrant life and maintain the boundaries of national belonging.

Power Structures and the Institutionalization of Exclusion

The discursive construction of immigrants as culturally incompatible is deeply embedded in Denmark’s institutional structures of governance. Integration policies do not operate as neutral administrative measures; rather, they function as disciplinary mechanisms that manage, contain, and regulate racialized populations. As Hervik (2019) emphasizes, power operates through media, bureaucracy, and law, naturalizing “whiteness” as the unmarked norm and rendering racialized governance appear both commonsensical and necessary.

This institutionalization of exclusion is further reinforced by dominant discourses that deny the existence of structural discrimination. Skadegård (2023) argues that racism in Denmark is often reduced to overt individual acts, while systemic inequalities are ignored. This “denial of discrimination” supports a colorblind nationalism that conceals the racialized outcomes of policy, enabling punitive measures to be framed as neutral or pragmatic rather than as forms of targeted exclusion. This dynamic is echoed in Frandsen and Hansen’s (2020) analysis of Danish urban policy as a disciplinary regime. Ethnic minority-dense neighborhoods are subject to exceptional legal frameworks, surveillance, and spatial controls. Instruments like forced relocation and housing quotas operate as tools of population management, grounded in racialized assumptions about threat and difference.

Larsen (2014) similarly argues that territorial stigmatization is not an unintended consequence but a deliberate outcome of policy and discourse. It functions as a justification for punitive state

interventions, reinforcing spatial hierarchies. Building on this, Jensen (2021) further reveals how municipal authorities are drawn into these power structures, compelled to meet ethnic composition targets or risk state intervention and financial penalties. These mechanisms are deeply intertwined with right-wing populist narratives. Marker (2020) shows how political discourses around crime, cultural incompatibility, and social unrest legitimize exclusionary policies. In this framework, nationalism, institutional practice, and racial discourse converge to reinforce boundaries around who can be fully accepted as part of the Danish nation.

This body of scholarship reveals how Danish integration policy operates not as a pathway to inclusion but as a system of governance that reaffirms racial hierarchies, constrains immigrant agency, and institutionalizes social exclusion. It demonstrates that Danish integration and urban policy must be understood within a broader framework of racialized nationalism and institutional power.

Taken together, these perspectives reveal how Danish integration and housing policies are shaped by intersecting logics of nationalism, territorial stigmatization, and institutionalized exclusion. We find the correlation of this literature essential for understanding how cultural meanings, discourse, and institutional structures intersect to shape and sustain systems of racialized governance and exclusion.

By engaging with these strands of literature, this review builds the critical and contextual foundation for the thesis, as it enables a deeper understanding of how political discourse and state practice operate in tandem to racialize space, construct the immigrant Other, and reproduce social hierarchies. However, there remains a need for more detailed analyses of how exclusionary discourses are reproduced, adapted, and contested in political texts themselves. The following section will elaborate on how this thesis addresses that gap by examining the discursive strategies and ideological constructions that underpin recent political discourse around the “ghetto” and “parallel societies”, drawing on a corpus of speeches, policy documents, and counter-discourses to trace the shifting boundaries of national belonging.

Gaps in the Literature and Justification for this Study

Despite an increasingly rich body of scholarship on Danish "ghetto" policies, racialized governance, and the discursive construction of stigmatized communities, several critical gaps remain that this thesis seeks to address. Existing literature has powerfully demonstrated how political discourse and institutional frameworks converge to produce exclusionary and racialized forms of governance (Larsen 2011; Jensen 2021; Frandsen & Hansen 2020). Yet, these studies often treat discourse and structure as analytically distinct: political language is analyzed in relation to ideology and public sentiment, while policy frameworks are examined for their institutional and legal impacts. What remains insufficiently explored is the co-constitutive relationship between discourse and structure, where political language not only mirrors institutional realities but also actively shapes them, while institutional frameworks simultaneously reinforce and reproduce discursive logics. This thesis bridges that gap by empirically tracing the interplay between language and discrimination in Danish political discourse, demonstrating the mutual reinforcement of discursive strategies and structural governance.

While scholars such as Rytter (2019) and Skadegård (2023) have highlighted the ideological dimensions of integration policy and the denial of structural discrimination, few have systematically examined how exclusionary discourses are operationalized through policy language and how they legitimize the transformation of legal norms and spatial practices. This study contributes to that missing link by analyzing the textual and rhetorical construction of the "ghetto" and "parallel society" labels, not only as symbolic devices but as instruments of policy legitimation.

Moreover, while much of the current research has illuminated the stigmatizing effects of policies like the 2018 "Ghetto Package" (Tireli 2024; Christensen 2020), there is limited attention to the evolving discursive strategies deployed by political actors across the ideological spectrum to normalize these policies. In this way, a particularly significant gap lies in the dynamic and adaptive nature of political discourse, which remains underexplored in current scholarship. While existing studies have convincingly demonstrated the exclusionary and racialized logic embedded in Danish integration and housing policy, they often present these discourses as static. What remains insufficiently studied is how these discourses evolve over time, how they are strategically reshaped

in response to legal challenges, resident resistance, or shifting political alliances. Political actors do not merely reproduce ideological scripts; they actively recalibrate their language to maintain legitimacy, broaden appeal, and reinforce exclusionary logics under the guise of neutrality or pragmatism.

Grounded in an extensive and diverse dataset, this study addresses this gap by advancing a purpose-specific analytical framework, developed to critically examine how key narratives of national identity, cultural threat, and conditional belonging are not only constructed but also recontextualized and redeployed across different political moments and rhetorical contexts. In doing so, it reveals how the discursive framework of racialized governance is both stable and flexible, anchored in enduring nationalist imaginaries yet continuously adapted to respond to evolving legal, social, and political pressures. This dynamic perspective moves beyond static textual analysis to foreground the performative and legitimizing functions of political language within broader structures of power and governance.

The urgency of such investigation is underscored by the recent opinion of the Advocate General at the European Court of Justice, which held that ethnic quotas in Denmark's "ghetto legislation" constitute direct discrimination (Ćapeta 2025). This legal development highlights not only the material consequences of racialized policy but also the ethical imperative of critically examining how state discourse constructs ethnic categories, legitimizes coercive interventions, and constructs ethnic minority communities as societal threats requiring regulation. This study engages directly with this context by interrogating the rhetorical strategies through which such interventions are justified and the deeper ideological narratives they mobilize.

Essentially, this thesis responds to a critical gap in the literature by bridging theoretical insights on discourse and structural power with an empirical investigation of how these forces interact and evolve in the Danish political landscape. By focusing on the co-constitutive relationship between language and institutional discrimination, the study challenges the prevailing tendency to treat discourse and policy as separate analytical domains. Instead, it demonstrates how political language not only reflects but actively shapes institutional realities, while policies in turn reify and normalize exclusionary discourses. This reciprocal relationship enables a deeper understanding of how racialized governance is produced, maintained, and adapted over time. By grounding this

analysis in contemporary political developments and drawing on a rich empirical dataset, the study not only advances existing scholarship but also offers a novel lens for examining the performative power of discourse in shaping structural inequality. In doing so, it creates space for reimagining integration beyond coercive conformity, toward more inclusive and pluralistic models of national belonging.

Conceptual Clarification and Terminological Positioning

The language used to describe urban areas in Denmark is not merely descriptive; it is deeply political. Terms like “ghetto”, “parallel society”, and “non-Western” carry historical connotations and are embedded in contemporary strategies of governance, shaping how certain communities are perceived, managed, and marginalized. Based on the insights from our literature review, we find it necessary to clarify these terms from the outset to establish a consistent vocabulary and avoid reproducing the assumptions and implications they carry. Further discussion of how these concepts operate in practice will be unpacked in the analysis section.

Throughout this thesis, we refer to the major policy initiatives using their common-speech titles in scare quotes. For instance, the 2010 “Ghetto Plan”, the 2018 “Ghetto Package” and the 2021 “Parallel Society Agreement”. Table 1 below illustrates the common terminology found in institutional documents:

Year	Official Title (in English)	Common Terminology
2005	*Strategy Against Ghettoization*	· Ghettoization Strategy
2010	*Ghetto Back to Society*	· Ghetto Plan
2018	*One Denmark Without Parallel Societies – No Ghettos in 2030*	· Ghetto Package · Ghetto Plan · Ghetto Proposal
2021	*Mixed Housing Areas – The Next Step in the Fight Against Parallel Societies*	· Parallel Society Agreement · Parallel Society Package

Table 1: Common Terminology of "Ghetto" Policies (Holm 2020; Christensen et al. 2010; Jensen, Olesen, and Rasmussen 2018; Social- og Boligministeriet 2021)

This choice serves a dual purpose. First, it ensures consistency with the terminology widely used in public discourse by journalists, politicians, and institutions, thereby reflecting the language through which these policies have been legitimized and circulated. Second, by enclosing these terms in quotation marks, we signal critical distance from the ideologically charged vocabulary embedded in the official rhetoric, allowing us to highlight the evolving classification across time. More broadly, we use terms "ghetto policies", drawing from common parlance, to refer collectively to Denmark's urban, integration, and housing interventions targeting so-called "non-Western immigrant-dense neighborhoods". This broader use captures the structural logic uniting these initiatives despite shifts in naming conventions.

We do not believe that avoiding such language altogether would serve a critical agenda, nor do we believe in reproducing it uncritically. Rather than erasing the terminology that shapes the discourse, we retain it to expose and examine the power structures and ideological assumptions embedded within it. The quotation marks function as a critical device, allowing us to reflect on the issues at hand while maintaining analytical distance from their normative implications.

While this lexical evolution may suggest a move toward a more neutral or inclusive language, it has not been accompanied by substantial changes in the underlying governance structures or policy objectives. For this reason, our own use of such politically charged terms requires careful reflection. In what follows, we clarify our terminology approach, including how and why we reproduce specific labels while maintaining critical distance.

From "Ghetto" to "Parallel Society"

Historically, the term "ghetto" referred to urban quarters in which Jews were legally required to live. In its contemporary usage, it has extended to denote urban areas predominantly inhabited by specific social or ethnic groups, often under socio-economic conditions and associated with poverty, segregation, and social exclusion (Oxford English Dictionary).

In Denmark, the term was adopted from international discourse but has since acquired a distinct national meaning. According to *The Danish Dictionary,* a "ghetto" is defined as a "(poor and isolated) neighborhood with a homogeneous population, often of a certain ethnic background or from a certain social class" (Den Danske Ordbog). The term "parallel society" is similarly defined

as “communities that exist alongside the majority community and have different religious, social, or cultural norms” (Den Danske Ordbog).

The “ghetto” label has played a central role in Danish policy making since the early 2000s. In recent years, however, the term “parallel society” has increasingly supplanted “ghetto” in political discourse. In 2021, the Danish government formally replaced the categories “ghetto” and “tough ghetto” with “parallel society” and “transformation area”, acknowledging the stigmatizing nature of the former terminology. Yet this shift in terminology did not entail any fundamental change in the content or direction of the policies (Regeringen 2021). Figure 1 visualizes the official criteria for categorizing marginalized housing areas in Denmark as of 2024 (The National Board of Social Services and Housing 2024)

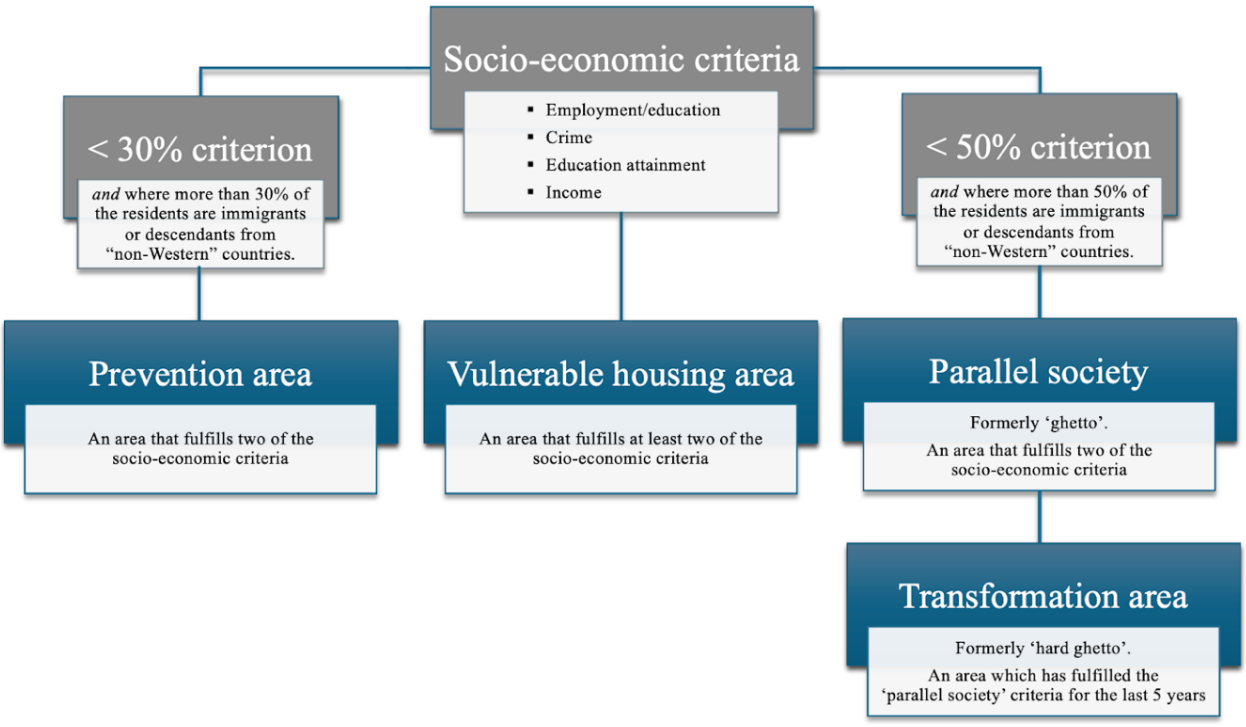

Figure 1: Criteria for Vulnerable Housing Areas and Parallel Societies[1]

[1] Socio-economic criteria:
Employment/Education: Over 40% of residents (18-64) are not in work or education (2-year average).
Crime: Crime rate is at least 3 times the national average (2-year average).
Education attainment: Over 60% of residents (30-59) have only basic education.
Income: Average income is below 55% of the regional average (15-64, excluding students).

Scholars broadly agree that both "ghetto" and "parallel society" are politically charged and ideologically loaded. These terms contribute to the stigmatization and racialization of specific urban areas and their residents (Tireli 2024; Söderberg 2024). As Larsen (2022) points out, "parallel society" is often mobilized to signal cultural deviance and non-belonging. Its ambiguity allows it to circulate widely in political and legal rhetoric, functioning as a mechanism of exclusion without explicitly referencing race or ethnicity.

Given these critical insights, we approach the use of "ghetto" and "parallel society" with caution, treating them as discursive constructions that contribute to the racialization of space. For analytical purposes, we adopt the more neutral term *stigmatized areas* to more accurately describe the urban neighborhoods targeted by such policies and discourse. In cases where it is necessary to use the terms "ghetto" or "parallel society" for coherence or to reflect primary sources, they will appear in scare quotes to indicate critical distance and skepticism. As the Oxford English Dictionary explains, scare quotes are "quotation marks used to foreground a particular word or phrase, esp. with the intention of disassociating the user from the expression or from some implied connotation it carries" (Oxford English Dictionary).

Problematizing "Non-Western"

The term "non-Western immigrants and descendants" is a cornerstone of Danish urban and integration policy and central to the logic underpinning "ghetto" classification. Scholars have pointed out that this categorization functions less as a neutral demographic label and more as a proxy for racial, ethnic, and religious difference, particularly in relation to Muslim populations (Jensen 2021; Hervik 2019). The term collapses highly diverse communities into a single category of perceived cultural deviance and political concern.

According to Statistics Denmark (2017), the classification is determined by geography and formal citizenship relations:

- *Immigrants* are individuals born abroad whose parents are either both foreign-born or do not both hold Danish citizenship.
- *Descendants* are individuals born in Denmark, but with at least one parent who is either foreign-born or does not hold Danish citizenship.

- *Persons of Danish origin* are those for whom at least one parent was born in Denmark and holds Danish citizenship.

Additionally, "non-Western"[2] refers to countries "that are not part of the European or North American cultural area" (Den Danske Ordbog).

Building on this, we choose not to speculate on, categorize, or assign value to the ethnic or cultural backgrounds of individuals living in stigmatized areas. We do not find it meaningful or ethically appropriate to differentiate among residents based on assumed identity, heritage, or perceived cultural difference. Nor are we able, or willing to, determine an individual's civic status or personal experience based on generalized demographic labels.

What we can do is suggest more suitable and ethically responsible terminology. Instead of reproducing the administratively imposed terms "non-Western" or "non-Western immigrants", we adopt alternative terminology that emphasizes the social and political construction of difference. Depending on the context, we refer to affected groups as *stigmatized communities/residents*, or if necessary for essence, *racialized minorities* or *ethnic minority residents*. These alternatives more accurately reflect our interpretation of the dynamics at play. As with other politically loaded terms, if it is necessary to reference "non-Western immigrants" in order to reflect source material, we will use scare quotes to signal our critical distance.

This section has outlined the rationale for our terminological choice and the critical perspectives we apply to established political language. Rather than accepting labels such as "ghetto", "parallel society", or "non-Western" at face value, we remain conscious of their implications. Our terminological choices reflect a commitment to analytical precision, ethical responsibility, and discursive reflexivity. By critically engaging with the language of the policies we study, we aim not only to describe them more accurately but also to challenge the assumptions and power relations they seek to naturalize.

[2] According to Denmark Statistics (2017) "non-Western" countries exclude the European Union, USA, UK, Andorra, Australia, Canada, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, New Zealand, Norway, San Marino, Switzerland, and Vatican City.

Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework builds on Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) to investigate how political discourse constructs, legitimizes, and naturalizes racialized forms of governance in the Danish context. While CDS provides a powerful foundation for analyzing the relationship between discourse, power, and ideology, we extend its analytical reach by integrating perspectives from political science, urban theory, postcolonial studies, and critical race theory. This interdisciplinary approach allows us to foreground race, space, and colonial legacies as central dimensions of discourse, particularly in contexts where exclusion is articulated through seemingly neutral or culture-coded language.

Our framework is structured around four interconnected thematic clusters:

1. Discursive Mechanisms of Power and Ideological Reproduction (Fairclough and van Dijk)
2. Nationhood and Spatial Exclusion (Anderson and Wacquant)
3. Postcolonial Insights (Said and Bhabha)
4. Systemic Racism (Bonilla-Silva)

Together, these clusters provide a layered analytical lens that connects the ideological, spatial, symbolic, and structural dimensions of discourse. By combining CDS with interdisciplinary theoretical insights, we are able to investigate how national identity is imagined, how racial difference is constructed and governed, and how exclusionary policies are discursively legitimized.

The following sections outlines the conceptual tools that guide our analysis of Danish political discourse and supports a more comprehensive critique of how racialized “Others” are produced, managed, and contained through language and policy.

Discursive Mechanisms of Power and Ideological Reproduction

From our perspective, language is never neutral, it is a powerful tool through which societies define who belongs and who does not. In political discourse, especially within the Danish context, language often operates under the guise of neutrality while subtly reinforcing social hierarchies and legitimizing dominant ideologies. To explore these dynamics, we draw on the theoretical

foundation of Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk, two key figures in *Critical Discourse Studies (CDS)*, whose complementary perspectives help us unpack the relationship between language, power, and ideology.

While the term Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is commonly used, we find it important to clarify our choice of terminology. In line with van Dijk (2008), we adopt the term Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) to emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of our approach. Unlike CDA, which is often associated with a specific set of methods, CDS reflects a broader and more flexible research tradition, drawing on diverse theoretical perspectives from across the humanities and social sciences. By using the term CDS, we signal our intention to move beyond a singular theoretical lens and instead develop a comprehensive, cross-disciplinary framework that remains rooted in critical discourse studies while integrating a wider range of concepts relevant to our study.

Both Fairclough and van Dijk offer powerful but distinct contributions to this field. Fairclough (1989; 1992) argues that language does not simply reflect reality; it actively shapes it, influencing public perceptions, policies, and institutional practices. His work provides a systematic method for analyzing how language is embedded within and contributes to broader social structures and ideological formations. Van Dijk (2006; 2008), in contrast, introduces a socio-cognitive approach that focuses on how discourse is mentally processed, interpreted, and reproduced. He shows that political discourse plays a crucial role in shaping collective beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies, especially among elites who control public narratives. His approach highlights how discourse becomes internalized as “common sense”, thereby sustaining hegemonic ideologies and justifying exclusionary practices.

Together, Fairclough and van Dijk offer a complementary framework for understanding how discourse functions as a mechanism of power. Fairclough enables us to examine the structural and institutional dimensions of discourse, while van Dijk allows us to investigate how these narratives are cognitively processed by individuals and embedded in shared mental models. This dual perspective is essential for understanding how racialized discourses not only circulate within political and media systems but also become entrenched in public consciousness.

In what follows, we focus on two key components of their respective contributions: Fairclough's three-dimensional model and van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach. These frameworks form the core of our theoretical framework, which investigates how political discourse both reflects and reproduces structures of power and inequality in Denmark.

Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

Fairclough's three-dimensional model offers a multi-layered theoretical framework for understanding how texts (1) are constructed linguistically, (2) are produced and interpreted within particular institutional settings, and (3) function within broader social and ideological structures (Fairclough 1992, 72). This model emphasizes that discourse is not only about what is said, but also how discourse is circulated and legitimized, and what social effects it produces.

Central to this approach is the idea, in our context, that the language used to form the 2018 "Ghetto Package" is shaped by, and contributes to, broader political discourse. Hence, Fairclough's theoretical insights become vital in understanding how texts are produced, interpreted, and reproduced by political actors and institutions, and how they contribute to the normalization of racialized policy logics.

A key theoretical insight in Fairclough's framework is the conceptualization of *intertextuality*, which traces how past discourses resurface and are recontextualized to serve contemporary political aims (Fairclough 1992, 8-9). This positions discourse as historically situated and ideologically driven, allowing an examination of how earlier meanings are recontextualized to legitimize contemporary political objectives. In the context of Danish "ghetto" policies, this conceptualization enables an exploration of how long-standing discursive constructions around immigration, integration, and national identity shape, and are shaped by, current political strategies. Hence, Fairclough's (1992) model provides a critical lens for interrogating how political language contributes to the naturalization of racialized logics, not simply through isolated texts, but through a multi-layered critical framework.

In the sections that follow, we examine each of Fairclough's three dimensions, which together underpin our theoretical approach to investigate the production and reproduction of the 2018 "Ghetto Package".

Text

At the textual level, Fairclough's model engages with the formal linguistic features of texts, including vocabulary, grammar, and rhetorical strategies. According to Fairclough (1989; 1992), texts are not neutral representations; rather, they are embedded with ideological meanings reflecting and reinforcing broader power structures. Fairclough's (1989) distinction between three types of textual values – *experiential, relational,* and *expressive* – offers a theoretical lens for understanding how language encodes ideology through grammar and lexical choices. These value categories highlight how texts construct social reality, making them particularly relevant for exploring the discursive formulation of policies such as the Danish "Ghetto Package".

Values of features	Dimensions of meaning	Structural effects
Experiential	Contents	Knowledge/belief
Relational	Relations	Social relations
Expressive	Subjects	Social identities

Table 2: Formal Features (Fairclough 1989,94)

Experiential value pertains to how language represents the speaker's experience of the world, revealing underlying ideologies and assumptions. For instance, the designation of an area as "ghetto" rather than a "neighborhood" draws on specific classification schemes, constructing space and social identity. These values are examined through features such as nominalization, the use of positive or negative sentence structures, and the selection of specific verbs and nouns. Expressive values relate to the speaker's attitudes and evaluations conveyed through lexical choices such as metaphors, adjectives, intensifiers, or evaluative language. This includes examining expressive modality, affective lexical choices, and the use of logical connectors that shape argumentative flow and stance (Fairclough 1989, 92-93).

Together, these textual features provide insight into how language contributes to the construction and legitimization of particular understandings, making them highly relevant for the aims of our research.

Discursive Practice

At this level, the focal point is on how the discourse of texts is produced, circulated, and interpreted. Fairclough (1992) introduces the concepts of *intertextuality* and *interdiscursivity* to explore how discourse is shaped by broader discursive histories and institutional contexts.

Intertextuality illuminates the importance of understanding texts in relation to other texts rather than as isolated instances of discourse. Texts are shaped by prior discourses and are articulated in ways that respond to evolving social and institutional contexts. As Fairclough argues, the boundaries between discourse practices, within and across institutions, shift in line with broader social changes (Fairclough 1992, 9).

Closely related to intertextuality is the concept of *interdiscursivity,* which Fairclough theorizes as the process by which texts mix and recontextualize elements from different discourses within a communicative event (Fairclough 1992, 85-86). In this perspective, the discursive construction of "ghetto" or "parallel society" may appropriate elements from other discourses, such as those on integration, social cohesion, criminality, and national identity. This conceptualization allows us to trace how political actors and elites can construct stigmatized areas as deviant, threatening, or in need of regulation by weaving together preexisting discourses. In essence, interdiscursivity offers a critical tool for understanding how legitimacy is discursively constructed, especially in contexts of exceptional policy measures under the guise of neutral spatial governance.

Social Practice

The level of social practice situates discourse within broader ideological, institutional, and political structures, revealing how language is embedded in and contributes to power relations. In the context of this study, political discourse on concepts such as "parallel society" functions not merely as rhetoric but as a discursive tool that can legitimize state interventions and disciplinary governance targeting minority communities.

Drawing on Gramsci's theory, Fairclough (1989) theorizes discourse as a site where hegemony is produced and contested. Hegemony illuminates how dominant ideologies are sustained not solely through coercion, but through the production of consent, often realized through language. Discursive hegemony refers to the process by which particular meanings and worldviews become

normalized and taken for granted, appearing as "common sense" rather than ideological. For example, the idea that "parallel societies" inherently threaten social cohesion gains hegemonic status through repetitive framing. Here, Fairclough's notion of *naturalization* is central, as it explains how such discourses, through repetition, come to appear neutral, objective, or inevitable (Fairclough 1989, 76-77; 1992, 90-93). This is crucial for understanding how policies are framed as rational and necessary responses to perceived social problems, thereby obscuring their role in reproducing hegemonic structures.

This process occurs within what Fairclough terms *orders of discourse*, which are structured configurations of discursive practices within institutions. Political actors operate within, reinforce, and selectively rearticulate these orders of discourse, contributing to the reproduction of dominant ideologies while also constraining what can be said, by whom, and in what ways. However, discourse is also a site of struggle, where meanings are contested and hegemonic formations can be challenged (Fairclough 1989, 24-26).

This thesis engages with such discursive struggle by critically examining how Danish political elites construct and mobilize discourse around integration and spatial governance. By interrogating these discursive formations, we aim to expose the underlying ideological assumptions and power structures embedded within the policy frameworks they inform, particularly as they intersect with postcolonial legacies and racialized state practices. Essentially, Fairclough's framework provides a multidimensional lens for understanding how discourse operates at the textual, discursive, and social levels, revealing how language both reflects and reproduces broader structures of power and inequality.

Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach

To further unpack how these discursive structures are internalized and sustained, we turn to van Dijk's *socio-cognitive approach*, which complements and extends Fairclough's work. While Fairclough emphasizes discourse as a site of ideological struggle embedded in institutional and social practices, van Dijk (2006; 2008) foregrounds the mental dimensions of discourse, focusing on how individuals cognitively process, store, and reproduce dominant discourses. His theory helps explain how ideological meanings become embedded in shared mental models, shaping group attitudes and everyday understanding. In this way, van Dijk enables a deeper exploration of

how hegemonic discourse is not only produced and circulated socially but also sustained at the level of thought and belief.

To deepen our understanding of how discourse is not only socially embedded but also cognitively sustained, we incorporate van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, which conceptualizes cognition as the mediating link between discourse and social structures. While Fairclough's theoretical framework provides a critical lens for examining the structural aspects of discourse, van Dijk (2006) extends this by focusing on how individuals mentally process, store, and reproduce discourse. In this way, this approach bridges structural and individual levels of analysis, enabling us to investigate how dominant ideologies are internalized and enacted through language use.

Central to van Dijk's theory is the concept of *mental models*, which are subjective cognitive representations of situations or groups that are constructed and stored in long-term memory. These models guide discourse production and comprehension, shaping how individuals interpret communicative situations based on their personal experiences, group ideologies, and broader societal narratives (van Dijk 2006, 169). For example, when political discourse consistently frames ethnic minority communities as culturally incompatible, these representations can become internalized through mental models. Over time, such models shape not only public attitudes but also policy rulings, reinforcing exclusionary perceptions and legitimizing restrictive policy responses. Mental models thus help explain how discourse contributes to the reproduction of systemic inequalities at a cognitive level.

A specific type of mental model, *context models* refer to the mental representations individuals form about the communicative situation itself: who is speaking, to whom, for what purpose, and in which institutional setting. These models guide discourse production and reception, influencing topic selection, lexical choices, and rhetorical strategies (van Dijk 2006, 170-172). In political discourse, for example, a politician's context model may activate ideological assumptions about national identity, social cohesion, or perceived threats. These assumptions shape how issues like "ghettos" or "parallel societies" are framed, often in ways that reinforce binary distinctions between a normative "us" and a problematic "them".

While Fairclough's (1989) model enables us to explore how discourse is structured across text, discursive practice, and social practice, van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive perspective adds an

important dimension by addressing how discourse is cognitively processed, internalized, and reproduced by individuals, particularly political elites. This combined approach strengthens our capacity to critically examine not only what is said and how it circulates, but also how discourse becomes sedimented in elite thinking and decision-making. In the context of this study, this is especially relevant to understanding how Danish political actors construct and sustain dominant narratives around integration, territorial governance, and national belonging.

To fully grasp how these discourses reinforce racialized state practices, we must further explore van Dijk's insights into the relationship between cognition, politics, and racism. The following section expands on how elite cognitive models not only reflect but also actively reproduce systemic racism and social exclusion, shaping public perceptions and institutional responses to marginalized communities.

Cognition, Politics, and the Discursive Reproduction of Racism

To further develop van Dijk's socio-cognitive perspectives, we find it necessary to explore his concept of *political cognition,* which refers to the mental models individuals construct about politics and ideologies. These models are shaped, sustained, and circulated through discourse, and they function as a bridge between the micro-level of individual discourse processing and the macro-level of institutional and ideological structures (van Dijk 2008, 155-156). In this way, political cognition explains how personal beliefs, such as attitudes toward ethnic minorities, are embedded within broader systems of meaning that reflect and reinforce societal power relations.

These ideological frameworks play a central role in how political actors conceptualize and communicate terms such as "parallel society". In the Danish context, for instance, partisan positions on integration policies are shaped by broader ideological orientations, with left- and right-wing parties generally adopting divergent discursive strategies. Such positions are deeply rooted in their ideological framework, which guides how politicians frame issues for public consumption. Political cognition thus informs both the content and form of discourse, allowing elites to frame particular groups or spaces as problematic while simultaneously legitimizing targeted interventions.

As van Dijk emphasizes, political elites wield disproportionate discursive power. Their access to influential platforms enables them to control how issues are defined and understood in the public sphere (van Dijk 2008, 8). Through strategic language use, political actors can frame exclusionary policies as rational, necessary, or even benevolent, thereby masking their discriminatory effects. These discursive strategies normalize racialized representations and embed them into public consciousness, making elite interpretations appear as "common sense" knowledge. In doing so, elites not only reflect but actively shape public perceptions of marginalized communities, reinforcing the ideological rationale behind measures like the "ghetto" policies (van Dijk 2008, 160-164).

Van Dijk further develops this argument by presenting racism as a systematic and multidimensional phenomenon, operating across both structural and cognitive domains. Racism, in this framework, is not limited to individual prejudice; it constitutes a deeply embedded social structure that reproduces ethnic or racial hierarchies through discourse and institutional power. He distinguishes between two interrelated dimensions: *the social subsystem* and *the cognitive subsystem* (van Dijk 2008, 101-103):

The social subsystem consists of observable discriminatory practices that occur at both the macro and micro levels of society, where dominant institutions such as the state and political elites shape and control discourse. In the context of Danish "ghetto" policies, macro-level practices include targeted housing restrictions, surveillance measures, and punitive social interventions, all legitimized through political discourse that frames certain neighborhoods as inherently problematic. On a micro-level, these discourses influence how individuals from these areas are treated in everyday life, including in education, employment, and housing. Thus, discourse functions not only as a reflection of social power but as a mechanism that sustains social divisions.

The cognitive subsystem consists of the mental representations, stereotypes, and ideologies that underpin discriminatory practices. Even in the absence of explicit discrimination, dominant discourse often relies on implicit framing that reinforces binaries such as "us" (in-group) versus "them" (out-group). Van Dijk highlights how discriminatory ideologies are often reproduced through implicit political discourse, where exclusionary rhetoric avoids explicitly racist language while still reinforcing social hierarchies. He identifies prominent discourse structures that

contribute to this process, including *lexicon, syntactic manipulation, and schemata*. Lexicon encompasses the selection of specific words and phrases that carry negative connotations about "Them" while positive connotations about "Us". Syntactic manipulation refers to the strategic use of sentence structure, such as active versus passive constructions, to shift responsibility, emphasize or downplay agency, and subtly reinforce ideological hierarchies (van Dijk 2008, 104-106). Similarly, schemata refers to the use, or omission, of conventional structural categories to highlight "Our Good things and Their Bad things" (van Dijk 2008, 105). In this way, cognitive framing plays a critical role in the normalization of systemic racism.

Synthesizing Critical Discourse Studies

Having now outlined the key components of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), we conclude this section by synthesizing the central insights from Fairclough and van Dijk and clarifying how their combined frameworks shape our theoretical approach. At the core of our rationale for applying CDS lies its critical capacity to interrogate how power is exercised, legitimized, and internalized through discourse, particularly how Danish political elites construct knowledge about stigmatized communities and legitimize exclusionary "ghetto" policies.

Fairclough's three-dimensional model offers a systematic approach to this inquiry by enabling us to examine discourse at the level of (1) how language is used to construct particular realities, (2) how discourse is produced, circulated, and interpreted within elite institutions, and (3) how discourse contributes to the reproduction of structural inequalities and dominant ideologies.

To deepen this framework, van Dijk's socio-cognitive perspectives enrich each of Fairclough's dimensions by introducing the cognitive mechanisms through which discourse is interpreted and sustained. The figure below illustrates how we integrate van Dijk's perspectives with Fairclough's three-dimensional framework.

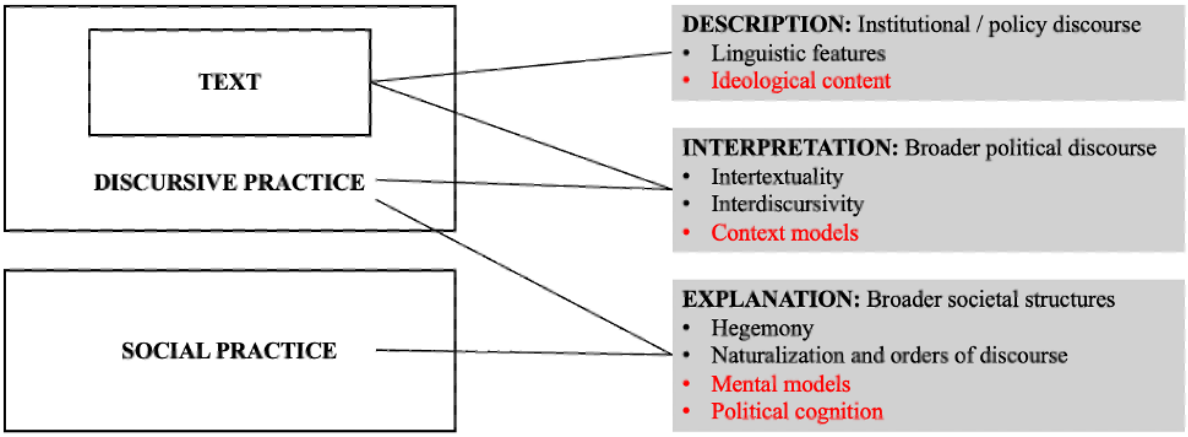

Figure 2: Visual Discourse Framework

At the textual level (description), van Dijk's (2006; 2008) attention to discourse structures helps reveal how ideological content is subtly encoded in elite rhetoric. These linguistic choices are not arbitrary; they form the building blocks of meaning that shape how policies and social groups are represented. Moving to the level of discursive practice (interpretation), van Dijk's (2006) concept of context models offers insight into how these textual choices are shaped by, and adapted to, institutional settings and communicative goals. Here, political actors strategically construct discourse to align with dominant narratives, often reinforcing in-group/out-group distinctions. At the level of social practice (explanation), this discourse, circulated and normalized by the elites, becomes embedded in shared mental models that inform public understanding and political decision-making. Van Dijk's (2008) theory of political cognition thus shows how these representations support and sustain social hierarchies, enabling exclusionary policy frameworks to be perceived as legitimate, necessary, or even benevolent.

By combining Fairclough's (1992) multilayered model with van Dijk's (2006; 2008) cognitive framework, we establish a solid theoretical foundation for critically exploring how political discourse both reflects and reproduces hegemonic narratives. This integrated perspective enables us to examine not only the content and circulation of discourse and its alignment with institutional power, but also how such discourse is internalized by both elites and the public, shaping perceptions and legitimizing racialized governance. The synthesis of these approaches highlights the interdisciplinary nature of racialized political discourse, merging structural, ideological, and cognitive dimensions to offer a nuanced analysis that bridges macro-level structures and micro-

level meaning-making. This integration is especially crucial for our thesis, as it supports a comprehensive inquiry into how political discourse may alienate ethnic minorities and sustain systemic inequalities within Danish policy.

Before concluding our rationale for applying CDS, it is important to acknowledge its limits. While CDS provides a powerful lens for analyzing discourse and power, we find that it does not, on its own, fully capture the complexities of racialization and structural inequality inherent in the Danish political discourse on integration and spatial governance. Specifically, its limited engagement with race as a central theoretical category makes it necessary to broaden our theoretical scope. The following section, therefore, expands on our CDS foundation by introducing additional theoretical perspectives that complement and enhance our approach. These perspectives help illuminate the deeper intersections between discourse, race, and power, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of how political discourse constructs, legitimizes, and sustains racialized governance. In doing so, we conclude our elaboration of CDS by explaining why integrating insights from other scholars is essential for critically engaging with the discursive dynamics of this thesis.

Expanding the Critical Lens: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework

Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) offers powerful tools for analyzing how discourse operates across textual, discursive, and social levels. Its attention to ideology, power, and the reproduction of social structures has been invaluable for unpacking the mechanics of meaning-making in political discourse. Traditionally, however, CDS has emphasized class and ideology as its primary analytical anchors. While this focus remains deeply important, it has at times underemphasized the role of race, particularly in national contexts like Denmark, where racialized governance often operates through implicit cultural codes, normative values, and bureaucratic euphemism rather than through overtly racist discourse.

The framework we develop draws on the foundational contributions of Fairclough and van Dijk, whose work provides essential theoretical insights for interrogating power, intertextuality, and the internalization of dominant discourse. At the same time, we find it necessary to broaden the theoretical scope of CDS to more directly engage with the racialized and postcolonial dimensions

of political discourse. Our intention is not to depart from CDS but to enhance its critical capacity by integrating insights from complementary disciplines. This is also why we refer to our approach as CDS rather than CDA, signaling our commitment to a more interdisciplinary and theoretically expansive tradition.

To this end, we incorporate perspectives from political science, urban sociology, postcolonial theory, and the sociology of race. These perspectives foreground race, colonial legacies, and structural exclusion as central axes in the operation of discourse, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of how racialized governance is discursively legitimized in the Danish context. The following sections introduce the core theoretical components that supplement and enrich our CDS-based approach:

1. Nationhood and Spatial Exclusion: Imagined Communities and Territorial Stigmatization
2. Post Colonial Insights: Orientalism and Unhomed, Hybridity, and Mimicry
3. Systemic Racism

By integrating these conceptual tools, we aim to construct a streamlined yet robust framework that remains grounded in CDS while explicitly addressing race, structural inequality, and postcolonial power formations. This interdisciplinary synthesis enhances the reach of CDS, allowing us to critically examine how Danish political discourse constructs the figure of the "Other" and legitimizes exclusionary policy measures.

This section applies a theoretical lens that progressively scales outward, moving from symbolic and spatial practices of exclusion to broader mechanisms of systemic racism. Together, these perspectives illuminate how racial exclusion is embedded both in the micro-level of everyday discourse and in the macro-structures of state power. In doing so, they contribute to an expanded CDS capable of interrogating the cultural, institutional, and structural dimensions of racism. We will conclude by synthesizing these theoretical contributions and demonstrating how they enhance and apply to the core commitments of Critical Discourse Studies, enabling a more robust analysis of racialized political discourse in the Danish context.

Nationhood and Spatial Exclusion: Anderson and Wacquant

This section explores how national identity is constructed, maintained, and mobilized through symbolic representations and material practices of spatial exclusion. Benedict Anderson and Loïc Wacquant offer complementary insights into how national identity is discursively and materially constructed. Anderson's concept of *imagined communities* reveals how nations are socially produced through shared narratives, linguistic practices, and institutional mechanisms that define who belongs. National identity, in this view, is less a matter of empirical reality than of symbolic cohesion. Wacquant expands this lens by theorizing *territorial stigmatization* – the process through which spatialized marginalization reinforces symbolic exclusion. His analysis of the "ghetto" as a socio-spatial boundary highlights how state power operates not only through discourse but also through the management of space, racializing certain areas and populations as deviant. Together, Anderson and Wacquant help illuminate how the nation is constructed through the interplay of symbolic narratives and spatial governance.

Imagining National Identity

Drawing on Benedict Anderson's (1991) concept of *imagined communities,* we understand the nation not as a natural or objective entity, but as a socially and discursively constructed narrative. Nations, in this view, are imagined through shared cultural references and institutional practices, sustained by language, media, education, and state mechanisms. He emphasizes that nations should be viewed as "imagined political communities" because their members will never personally meet most of their fellow citizens, yet they maintain a deep sense of collective identity (Anderson 1991, 6). This imaginative process defines the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, shaping perceptions of who belongs and who does not.

In the Danish context, this construction frequently positions "non-Western" immigrants outside the symbolic parameters of the national "we", reinforcing a hierarchical notion of "Danishness" tied to ethnicity, culture, and language. These insights help us see how national identity is forged through everyday cultural markers, particularly language, which function as tools of symbolic inclusion and exclusion. The belief that speaking Danish equates to being Danish reflects how linguistic competence becomes a powerful gatekeeping device for national belonging.

Anderson's analysis of the lexicographic revolution, the historical processes through which languages were standardized and codified, illustrates how language came to be tied to national identity. This belief continues to influence contemporary debates on integration and citizenship. Language proficiency, cultural familiarity, and alignment with perceived "Danish values" often operate as prerequisites for inclusion, while those who do not meet these criteria are implicitly cast as culturally deficient or socially incompatible (Anderson 1991, 84).

Moreover, Anderson draws attention to how nationalism has long been tied to state power. Initially developed as a tool of imperial governance, nationalism enabled ruling elites to assert control over diverse populations by appealing to a shared, though selectively constructed, sense of identity (Anderson 1991, 86). In modern contexts, this logic endures through cultural and bureaucratic mechanisms that delineate the boundaries of belonging. He argues that "[...] nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time" (Anderson 1991, 3), and that national identity is reinforced through institutions such as the census, map, and museum, play critical roles in shaping national identity by organizing, categorizing, and narrating the population and its history (Anderson 1991, 163-164). These tools are not neutral; they legitimize dominant conceptions of the nation while rendering others invisible or illegitimate. In doing so, they help codify which histories and groups are central to the nation's self-image and which are peripheral or problematic (Anderson 1991, 12).

These processes also operate discursively through political discourse that establishes a coherent, though constructed, narrative of national unity. In this narrative, deviations from dominant cultural norms may be coded as signs of non-belonging. Thus, the construction of Danish national identity does not merely involve defining who belongs, but also actively imagining who does not. Anderson's (1991) concept offers a valuable lens for understanding how imagined belonging operates across institutional and cultural spheres, including its reproduction through everyday discourse and elite rhetoric.

Mapping Marginality: The Spatial Logic of Territorial Governance

Loïc Wacquant (2008; 2015) complements Anderson's theory by showing how symbolic boundaries of national identity are inscribed onto physical space. Wacquant offers a critical conceptual framework for understanding how state institutions construct and govern marginalized

urban populations through spatial strategies such as *territorial stigmatization, advanced marginality,* and *urban relegation*. These concepts help explain how inequality is not only maintained but actively produced through spatialized forms of control.

A central contribution is Wacquant's theory of *territorial stigmatization,* which refers to the symbolic and institutional branding of certain urban areas as dangerous, deficient, or culturally deviant. This stigma attaches not only to the space itself but also to its residents, shaping how they are perceived by others and by themselves. Importantly, Wacquant argues that this stigmatization is not an organic social process. Rather, it is strategically produced and circulated through political discourse, media narratives, and bureaucratic labeling, legitimizing intrusive state interventions and exceptional governance (Wacquant 2008, 173; 2015, 1077).

This concept is crucial for understanding how labels like "ghetto" and "parallel society" reproduce territorial stigmatization in the Danish context. These terms allow the state to shift attention from individuals to targeting entire areas, treating them as "problem zones". This form of spatial governance depersonalizes control while simultaneously reinforcing racialized boundaries. Although language used in policy documents often avoids explicit reference to race, these spatial labels become proxies for indirect racialized governance, particularly when associated with immigrant populations (Wacquant 2008, 41; 2015, 1080).

Advanced Marginality and Spatialized Inequality

Wacquant develops the concept of *advanced marginality* to capture the transformation of urban poverty under late capitalism. Unlike traditional forms of economic deprivation, advanced marginality is characterized by the socio-spatial isolation of disadvantaged groups, their disconnection from labor markets and institutions, and their regulation through punitive rather than supportive state mechanisms (Wacquant 2008, 198-199). Importantly, this marginality is not only structural but also moralized. Residents of stigmatized areas are often portrayed as culturally deficient or personally responsible for their circumstances. This narrative supports policy interventions focused on discipline, transformation, and displacement rather than inclusion or care (Wacquant 2008, 163).

Contrary to neoliberal accounts that emphasize state failure or retreat, Wacquant emphasizes the active role of the state in producing and managing marginality. Rather than redistributing resources, it manages inequality through regulation and punitive measures. This involves heightened surveillance, spatial containment, and symbolic degradation (Wacquant 2008, 41). This shift reflects a broader logic of *spatial governmentality*, where governance operates through the management of places rather than individuals. Political actors construct narratives of crisis and disorder to justify exceptional policies targeting urban "problem areas". These interventions are framed as technical or neutral but in fact serve to racialize and exclude through spatial proxies (Wacquant 2015, 1077-1080).

In more recent work, Wacquant (2015) introduces the concept of *urban relegation* to describe the layered processes through which certain populations are pushed into marginal urban spaces. Relegation is not limited to economic disadvantage, it also involves political neglect and symbolic degradation. It reflects how states use space as a mechanism to assign individuals or groups to inferior conditions and stigmatized positions within the social hierarchy (Wacquant 2015, 1077). To capture the specific condition of many ethnically diverse neighborhoods in Europe, Wacquant proposes the idea of the *anti-ghetto*. Unlike the historical American "ghetto", which possesses some degree of internal cohesion and cultural identity, the anti-ghetto is fragmented and externally managed. These spaces lack collective solidarity and are governed primarily through surveillance, control, and symbolic exclusion, rather than by collective identity (Wacquant 2015, 1080).

Wacquant's concept of relegation helps us understand how Danish integration and housing policies embed racialized governance into urban space. Policies such as forced relocation, demolition of public housing, and conditional integration requirements enact spatial control while cloaking these actions in the language of security, cultural compatibility, and societal cohesion. These practices illustrate how the state governs through space, managing perceived threats not through inclusion but through moralized displacement and symbolic devaluation.

In sum, Wacquant's theoretical contributions provide a powerful lens for analyzing how racialized and spatialized exclusion is actively produced and legitimized through contemporary urban policy. Through territorial stigmatization, advanced marginality, and urban relegation, the state emerges not as a passive actor but as a central architect of inequality. These insights are particularly useful

for understanding how Danish "ghetto" policies construct certain populations as both socially deviant and politically illegitimate, thereby justifying intensified surveillance, regulation, and displacement.

Together, Anderson (1991) and Wacquant (2008; 2015) offer a framework for understanding how national identity is shaped both discursively imagined and materially enforced. The notion of the "ghetto" operates not only as a metaphor for cultural difference or social dysfunction but as a spatial boundary that defines the imagined limits of national belonging. Their work highlights how political discourse and policy mutually reinforce the conditional nature of exclusion, contingent on cultural conformity and enforced through spatial exclusion.

Building on this, the following section turns to postcolonial perspectives of Edward Said and Homi Bhabha to further unpack how these boundaries are discursively racialized through Orientalist logics and cultural hierarchies, revealing the deeper ideological logic that underpins contemporary narratives of integration and otherness. Orientalist discourses may appear in political language, depicting certain groups as threats to national cohesion, democratic values, or cultural unity. These representations do not operate in isolation but intersect with symbolic and spatial forms of exclusion. Said's (1978) work thus complements Anderson's (1991) and Wacquant's (2008; 2015) theories by showing how ideological narratives about cultural difference become embedded in the everyday language of policy making and public discourse.

Othering and Ambivalence: Post Colonial Insights

Edward Said and Homi Bhabha offer critical tools for understanding how dominant discourses construct and contest national identity through practices of othering. Said's (1978) theory of *Orientalism* exposes how Western representations define the "Other" as irrational, backward, and incompatible, producing a racialized boundary that secures the cultural coherence of the national "Self". Bhabha (1994) complicates this binary logic through his concepts of *hybridity*, *mimicry*, and the *unhomed*, which foreground the fluid, negotiated nature of identity. His work reveals how marginalized subjects simultaneously resist and inhabit dominant norms, exposing the instability and ambivalence of national identity. Together, Said (1978) and Bhabha (1994) provide a postcolonial framework for analyzing how inclusion is conditioned on cultural conformity and how dominant narratives are both reproduced and disrupted at the margins.

Orientalism and the Discursive Construction of the "Other"

This section explores how national identity is constructed through processes of othering, where symbolic boundaries between "us" and "them" help define the configurations of belonging. Drawing on Edward Said's (1978) concept of *Orientalism*, we are able to examine how dominant discourse may portray ethnic minorities as culturally incompatible with national values, thereby reinforcing binaries between the familiar and the foreign. Orientalism provides a lens through which we can critically investigate how discursive constructions of difference become central to national imaginaries, especially in contexts where national identity is tied to cultural homogeneity and normative citizenship ideals.

Said conceptualizes Orientalism as a discourse of Western power that defines the East, the "Orient", as its inferior and exotic counterpart. This binary opposition constructs the West (or the "Occident") as rational, modern, and enlightened, while casting the East as irrational, backward, and threatening. Orientalism, thus, operates as a representational system in which the "Self" of the West is formed through contrast with a racialized "Other" (Said 1978, 43). Importantly, Said (1978) emphasizes that this is not simply a cultural misunderstanding but a structure of domination, where discourse plays an active role in organizing and legitimizing global and domestic hierarchies of power.

Inspired by Foucault's notion of discourse, Said defines Orientalism as a system of knowledge and representation that enables the West to dominate the East by controlling how it is depicted and understood (Said 1978, 3). This perspective is essential for understanding how dominant discourse categorizes ethnic minorities in ways that legitimize exclusionary policies. Just as Orientalist representations historically served colonial expansion, contemporary forms of othering may function to legitimize forms of political control and social marginalization.

Beyond its representational function, Orientalism is also a mechanism of *cultural hegemony*. Said explains that Orientalist discourse enabled European powers to assert moral and civilizational superiority, sustaining their self-image by subordinating those deemed different. Literature, art, and academic knowledge were central to this project, constructing the Orient as a site of danger, disorder, and deficiency (Said 1978, 5-7). This logic of constructing the "Other" to define the "Self" remains relevant in national contexts where identity is articulated through exclusion. Said's

(1978) insights help us interrogate how dominant discourses may construct national identity in opposition to groups framed as culturally or morally incompatible with dominant norms.

Said further highlights how these representations are not benign; they are politically charged and serve to justify material forms of control. By depicting the "Orient" as a threat that must be contained or reformed, these portrayals enable the West to assert dominance while maintaining a sense of moral legitimacy. As Said notes, the "Orient" is "[…] stamped with an otherness, of an essentialist character" (Said 1978, 97). This strategy constructs the "Other" as fundamentally different and inherently threatening, reinforcing power not merely through force, but through the production of knowledge that makes inequality appear inevitable or justified.

Said's (1978) contribution offers critical tools for examining how discourse may participate in the symbolic construction of ethnic minorities as cultural outsiders. His work enables us to analyze how dominant narratives reproduce social hierarchies by normalizing oppositional binaries and framing differences as deviance. These mechanisms of othering may not always be explicit; they often operate through seemingly neutral language that conceals the ideological work being performed. Understanding this is crucial for examining how exclusion is embedded in representations that shape who is imagined as belonging to the nation.

While Said's theory of Orientalism offers critical insight into how dominant discourse constructs the "Other" as a fixed, essential threat to national identity, it is equally important to examine how these categories are not always stable. To extend this understanding, we turn to Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) work on identity and cultural hybridity. Bhabha (1994) complicates the binary logic of othering by illustrating how the "Other" is not simply excluded but occupies a liminal position, both within and outside the nation. His theory shifts attention to the performative and negotiable nature of identity, revealing the instability of national identity and the constant negotiation of belonging. While Said (1978) illuminates how discourse constructs fixed categories of the "Self" and "Other", Bhabha shows how these categories are challenged and reconfigured through the lived experiences of those who exist at the margins. These insights expose the contradictions within dominant narratives and highlight the fluid, contested nature of identity in postcolonial and multicultural societies.

Bhabha and the Ambivalence of National Identity

Building on the discussion of othering, this section expands on Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) contribution to postcolonial theory, focusing on how identity is shaped through negotiation, ambivalence, and continuous cultural interaction. While Said's Orientalism highlights how the "Other" is constructed in binary opposition to the national "Self", Bhabha (1994) moves beyond this oppositional logic by emphasizing the fluidity, multiplicity, and instability of identity. His key concepts, *unhomed*, *hybridity*, and *mimicry*, disrupt static representations of ethnic minorities, offering a more nuanced understanding of belonging and difference in postcolonial, multicultural societies. These concepts provide critical insights into how national identity is not merely protected through exclusion but also negotiated through everyday acts of cultural translation and resistance.

Bhabha argues that identity is not a fixed or essential trait but a performative and contingent process, shaped by historical conditions, political structures, and discursive formations. He critiques the reductive nature of dominant political discourses that position individuals within rigid categories, such as "non-Western immigrants", and challenges the notion that culture can be neatly classified or contained. Instead, Bhabha insists that identity must be understood as an ongoing negotiation, produced through moments of cultural contact, conflict, and transformation (Bhabha 1994, 2-3). This dynamic view of identity has specific relevance for contemporary policy discourse, where the simplistic division of populations into "Western" and "non-Western" groups often obscures the diverse and intersecting experiences of migrants and minority communities. Importantly, Bhabha (1994) situated his critique within the broader legacies of colonialism, arguing that modern constructions of identity and nationhood are still deeply shaped by colonial systems of representation and governance. Like Said, he underscores how dominant groups seek to manage minority populations through discursive control. However, Bhabha (1994) complicates this picture by foregrounding the agency of the marginalized, illustrating how subaltern subjects do not simply absorb imposed identities but engage with, reshape, and at times subtly resist them. In this way, Bhabha introduces a productive tension between domination and resistance, showing how power operates not just through exclusion, but also through the ambivalent incorporation of the "Other".

Unhomed, Hybridity, and Mimicry

One of Bhabha's foundational concepts, the *unhomed*, captures the feeling of dislocation and cultural displacement experienced by individuals who find themselves caught between multiple cultural affiliations. The unhomed subject does not fully belong to either their culture of origin or the dominant culture they inhabit. This in-between state is not simply one of alienation, but of transformation and possibility, where identity is re-formed through the convergence and friction of different cultural influences (Bhabha 1994, 13). In contemporary discussions of integration and national belonging, this concept challenges assumptions that identity is a matter of linear assimilation or fixed loyalty. Rather than framing integration as the abandonment of cultural heritage in favor of dominant norms, the unhomed framework insists on the legitimacy of hybrid and layered identities.

Closely tied to this is Bhabha's notion of *hybridity*, which refers to the space in which cultural identities blend, overlap, and give rise to new forms. Hybridity contests the perceived purity of national and cultural categories by exposing their constructed and performative nature. Rather than seeing cultural exchange as a one-sided process of absorption, hybridity emphasizes reciprocity and transformation, suggesting that both minority and majority cultures are changed through contact. In Bhabha's view, hybridity emerges as a third space that disrupts the binary logic of "us" and "them", enabling the formation of identities that are negotiated and contingent (Bhabha 1994, 159-161). This theoretical move is particularly relevant for policy frameworks that frame integration as a unidirectional movement toward conformity, rather than a reciprocal process.

Further enriching this perspective, Bhabha introduces the concept of *mimicry*, which draws attention to the paradoxes of identity formation under conditions of cultural hegemony. Mimicry involves the adoption of dominant cultural norms by the marginalized subject, but always in a way that retains a sense of difference. It is the condition of being "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 1994, 86). Mimicry is not a form of full assimilation but a strategic form of resemblance that subtly undermines the authority of the dominant culture. In national contexts, mimicry highlights how ethnic minorities may adopt outward markers of belonging, language, or civic participation, while still being perceived as perpetually different or "not quite Danish". This

reveals the fragility of national identity and the limits of inclusion, emphasizing that belonging is always conditional and contested.

These three concepts, unhomed, hybridity, and mimicry, together allow for a critical rethinking of how national belonging is constructed and maintained. They underscore how the illusion of cultural homogeneity is preserved through both the exclusion of difference and the conditional inclusion of those who approximate national norms. Bhabha's theory reveals how minority subjects are often caught in a double bind: they are required to conform to dominant cultural codes while simultaneously being marked as insufficiently integrated. These dynamics expose the ambivalence at the heart of national identity, where the nation constructs its unity by continuously managing the presence and visibility of difference. Building on this, he argues that stereotypes are not simply false representations, but powerful tools for fixing identity into narrow and reductive frames. These representations rely on repetition and excess to construct the illusion of knowledge and control, and they function to justify social hierarchies by rendering the "Other" predictable and manageable (Bhabha 1994, 94-107). In contexts where ethnic minorities are consistently portrayed as threats to social cohesion or as culturally deviant, stereotypes perform a similar function, limiting the space for alternative representations and reinforcing exclusionary policies.

By incorporating Bhabha's theoretical lens, we are equipped to analyze whether contemporary political discourse constructs belonging as conditional, contingent, and never fully attainable. His concepts allow us to question whether political discourse offers genuine inclusion or merely demands conformity while maintaining symbolic distance. This understanding lays the groundwork for exploring how expectations of assimilation may mask deeper power structures that prevent full societal participation for those marked as different.

Nation, Space, and the Racialized "Other": Synthesizing Reflections

The concepts presented by Anderson, Wacquant, Said, and Bhabha offer a layered and interconnected understanding of how national identity is constructed, enforced, and contested.

Anderson's (1991) theory of imagined communities highlights the symbolic and institutional production of national belonging, where cultural markers like language and historical narratives define who is included in the national "we". This symbolic construction is materially reinforced

through what Wacquant terms territorial stigmatization, whereby marginalized urban spaces are cast as deviant zones requiring state control, thus making exclusion spatially visible and politically actionable.

Said's (1978) Orientalism deepens this analysis by exposing the ideological underpinnings of such practices, demonstrating how dominant discourse constructs the "Other" as culturally inferior and threatening, thereby legitimizing both symbolic and spatial forms of exclusion. Bhabha (1994) extends this framework by revealing the ambivalent and performative nature of identity. Through his concepts of the unhomed, hybridity, and mimicry, he shows how minority subjects navigate and sometimes subvert dominant norms, thereby unsettling the fixity of national identity from within.

Together, these perspectives illustrate how national unity is not only imagined and policed but also actively negotiated and resisted at the margins. This synthesis of discursive, spatial, and postcolonial insights sets the stage for a deeper examination of how these patterns are all embedded in what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2021) theorizes as systemic racism: a structural formation that normalizes racial inequality not through overt prejudice, but through everyday institutional practices and colorblind discourses that sustain white dominance.

Systemic Racism: When Power Disguises Itself as Policy

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's conceptualization of systemic racism (SR) offers a foundational lens for understanding how racial inequality is embedded not in individual prejudice but in the social fabric of institutions, policies, and everyday practices. Drawing inspiration from Marxist structural theory, Bonilla-Silva argues that SR is not merely an abstract or academic construct but a lived, routinized condition that permeates all aspects of social life (Bonilla-Silva 2021, 514). He insists that theories of race must not remain detached from the world they seek to describe and change. To that end, language itself becomes a political tool, and how we speak about racism directly shapes how we address or deny its existence.

A central component of Bonilla-Silva's framework is the rejection of individualist understandings of racism. Rather than locating racism in the intentions of "bad" individuals, he asserts that most racial actions in contemporary society are perceived as normal, neutral, or even progressive.

Bonilla-Silva urges researchers to move beyond a binary understanding of conscious versus unconscious racism. He emphasizes that most racial actions are a blend of deliberate choices, implicit attitudes, and systemic conditioning. Thus, the question is not whether an actor is racist, but how their behavior participates in and reproduces racial structures. He cites Memmi to illustrate the complexity of racial thought: "In almost every person there is a tendency toward a racist mode of thinking that is unconscious, or perhaps partly conscious, or not unconscious at all" (Memmi 1982, as cited in Bonilla-Silva 2021, 525). This perspective underscores the need to understand racism as a structural disposition rather than a personal defect. Racism, in this view, is less about explicit hate and more about implicit participation in a system of racial domination. He therefore avoids using the term "racist" to describe people and instead refers to them as racialized actors operating within a racialized system. This framework highlights how people internalize and reproduce racial meanings, often unconsciously, through participation in what appears to be race-neutral behavior (Bonilla-Silva 2021, 514).

Informed by this, this study does not seek to determine whether Denmark's "ghetto" policies or its policymakers are overtly racist. Instead, we investigate how such policies are shaped by and reinforce existing racial structures. This contributes to what Bonilla-Silva calls *normative racialized behavior*, where decisions and actions are made within systems that are already racialized, often without explicit racist intent. The notion of *racialization*, in his sense, refers to the historical and ongoing process of assigning racial meaning to bodies, behaviors, and spaces. Importantly, this is not a symmetrical process, because whites, as the dominant racial group, have historically functioned as the principal racializers producing and sustaining racial hierarchies through institutional power and cultural dominance (Bonilla-Silva 2021, 514).

Essentially, SR operates through routine and institutionalized practices rather than through exceptional or overtly malicious acts. This insight undercuts the common "bad apple" explanation of racism, revealing how power reproduces itself quietly and efficiently through law, policy, discourse, and practice. Bonilla-Silva emphasizes that dominant racial groups are primarily invested in maintaining their social advantages, often defending the status quo even in the absence of conscious prejudice. This defense is achieved through racial ideologies that normalize inequality, rendering the racial order seemingly natural or inevitable. The core mechanism for challenging this order, he argues, lies in racial contestation, the collective struggle of racialized

groups to redefine their position within social, political, economic, and cultural systems (Bonilla-Silva 2021, 516-517). From this perspective, SR describes societies in which rewards, such as access to housing, education, political influence, and social recognition, are allocated along racial lines, often without explicitly mentioning race. This understanding of SR as structural requires attention to the institutional and everyday mechanisms that maintain racial power.

These dynamics manifest across time in different forms, from slavery and colonialism to segregation and the more subtle mechanisms of what Bonilla-Silva terms new racism. In new racism, exclusionary practices are cloaked in race-neutral language and legitimized through appeals to culture, integration, or national values (Bonilla-Silva 2021, 519). Such processes are not only reflected in formal policies like the Danish "ghetto" legislation but also in everyday behaviors that reinforce racial norms. Over time, these behaviors shape racially exclusive systems that further insulate dominant groups from difference, reinforcing their perception of the world as racially neutral. Bonilla-Silva (2021) underscores that this everyday racial isolation not only sustains inequality but also limits the possibility for empathy, understanding, or solidarity across racial lines. In doing so, it protects whiteness as a normative center, rendering any deviation from it as problematic or requiring justification.

In sum, Bonilla-Silva's (2021) theory of systemic racism compels a shift from viewing racism as an aberration to recognizing it as a normalized and institutionalized feature of modern society. By revealing how policies, discourses, and everyday actions function within and reproduce racial hierarchies, his framework exposes the deep entanglement of power and race. Applied to the Danish context, this perspective invites us to interrogate the racialized logics embedded in ostensibly integrationist frameworks like the "ghetto" policies, not by asking whether they are explicitly racist, but by examining how they sustain racial dominance through spatial governance, moral regulation, and ideological framing. Ultimately, understanding systemic racism as a structural and enduring feature of society demands that we attend not only to the content of policy but to the racialized systems of meaning, authority, and legitimacy in which such policies are embedded.

Mapping the Dimensions of Racialized Spatial Governance

This study is grounded in the premise that systemic racism must be understood as a structural condition embedded in institutions, policies, and cultural imaginaries. By positioning Bonilla-Silva's (2021) conception of systemic racism as the theoretical anchor, we establish a multidimensional framework for examining how Danish "ghetto" policies and the discourses that surround them operate within and reinforce broader patterns of racial exclusion. Bonilla Silva's approach allows us to move beyond surface-level accounts of prejudice or intent, focusing instead on how racial hierarchies are embedded in institutional practices, normalized through policy discourse, and sustained through interactions that appear race-neutral.

To fully grasp the multiple dimensions through which racial domination is enacted, we draw on an interdisciplinary constellation of critical theorists, each offering distinct insights into how inequality is produced and sustained across different dimensions. Figure 3 visualizes this synthesis, with systemic racism serving as the epistemic umbrella under which four interrelated dimensions are mapped, showing how it manifests both spatially and individually, each informed by our key theorists.

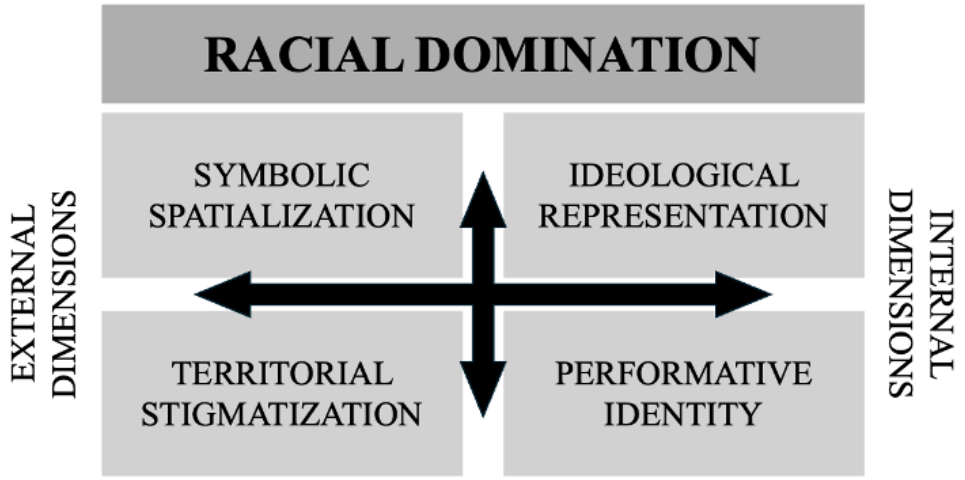

Figure 3: Multidimensional Framework of Racial Domination

Organized around the conception of systemic racism as a structural and normalized system of racial domination, the figure illustrates the intersections of external and internal dimensions. The external

dimensions operate at the level of space and structure: *symbolic spatialization* (informed by Anderson) captures the imagined boundaries of national belonging, while *territorial stigmatization* (drawing on Wacquant) reflects the spatial stigmatization and management of racialized populations. The internal dimensions operate at the level of subjectivity and representation: *ideological representation* (inspired by Said) addresses how racialized groups are discursively constructed through orientalist and civilizational narratives, while *performative identity* (based on Bhabha) explores how individuals navigate and negotiate their identities within these racialized regimes.

Together, these perspectives illuminate how systemic racism operates across both material and discursive registers, shaping not only institutional outcomes but also the social and symbolic conditions that make those outcomes possible. This theoretical framework enables us to examine racial domination as a multi-scalar process that is spatially enforced, discursively legitimized, and subjectively experienced. In doing so, it provides the critical foundation for analyzing how Danish urban and integration policies do not merely manage populations; they constitute a racialized project of national ordering, sustained through the interplay of policy, language, space, and identity.

Methodological Framework

In this chapter, we will account for the methodological framework guiding our study. Firstly, we will discuss our (1) philosophical standpoint and how it influences our approach to the topic. Next, we will articulate how this research aligns with (2) qualitative research and the implications of this association. Moving on, we will explore (3) reflexivity and positionality to provide transparency regarding our perspective before delving into our (4) data. We will then address how our data will be (5) analytically handled to extract the necessary meanings for our interpretations. Finally, we will conclude with (6) a summary of the methodological framework presented in this chapter.

Philosophy of Science

This section outlines our philosophical stance, which consists of two key components: ontology and epistemology. (1) Ontology addresses the nature of reality, while (2) epistemology accounts

for how knowledge about that reality is obtained. Together, they shape the assumptions that underpin our research approach and guide how we interpret our data.

Our research adopts a social constructivist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology, enriched by a critical orientation. To clarify our philosophical stance, we first outline the core principle of our ontology position before accounting for our epistemological orientation.

Ontology

Ontology refers to what constitutes reality. As James Scotland (2012) articulates, it is "[…] the study of being. Ontological assumptions are concerned with what constitutes reality, in other words what is." (Scotland 2012, 9). Our research adopts a social constructivist ontology, which emphasizes that reality is not objectively given but constructed through language, discourse, and social interactions. As social constructivists, we argue, inspired by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967), that society originates in human thought and action, and is continuously maintained and reproduced through these processes (Berger & Luckmann 1967, 33).

From this perspective, "ghettos" are not naturally occurring spaces but social constructs shaped by political, historical, and ideological forces. Constructing certain urban areas as "ghettos" is part of an ongoing process of meaning-making driven by discourse, policies, and societal perceptions. For instance, the 2018 "Ghetto Package" in Denmark institutionalized specific criteria, such as education, ethnic composition, and income level, to define and regulate ghetto areas. This classification is never neutral; it actively shapes public perceptions and justifies targeted interventions, reinforcing the constructed nature of "ghettos". The meaning ascribed to these neighborhoods varies across cultural and historical contexts and within different political discourses. In Denmark, these meanings are deeply embedded in political agendas and societal values, constructing a specific social reality for these spaces. This underscores the importance of examining "ghettos" in a context-specific way, as meanings are constructed differently depending on time, place, and the social forces at play.

Epistemology

Epistemology represents the nature and scope of knowledge. Scotland defines it as concerned "[…] with the nature and forms of knowledge. Epistemological assumptions are concerned with how knowledge can be created, acquired and communicated, in other words what it means to know." (Scotland 2012, 9). In our thesis, our epistemological stance is interpretivist, centering on the meanings that are ascribed to social phenomena.

Interpretivism is premised on the understanding that human beings, unlike physical phenomena, actively construct meaning from their experiences. As Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill argue, "[...] different people of different cultural backgrounds, under different circumstances and at different times make different meanings, and so create and experience different social realities." (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill 2016,140). This notion is particularly relevant to the concepts of "ghettos", where meaning is influenced by interpretive frameworks rooted in specific political and cultural contexts.

The Interpretivism epistemology is informed by Max Weber's concept of *Verstehen*, which emphasizes the need for an "[...] interpretive understanding of social action in order to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects." (Bryman 2012, 29). Verstehen illuminates that understanding must be grounded in subjective perspectives of individuals (Tucker 1965, 157-159). It is through these perspectives that we can explore how the Danish political discourse constructs and regulates "ghettos".

Interpretivist research involves what is often referred to as a *double hermeneutic*: we interpret the interpretations of others (Bryman 2012, 30-31). As such, our analysis not only describes meaning but also reflects our own situated interpretation of how political discourse constructs and legitimizes the concept of "ghettos". These interpretations are shaped by our academic backgrounds, social positions, and critical awareness.

Moreover, our epistemological stance includes a critical dimension, recognizing the dialectic relationship between subjective meaning and social structures. Demonstrating that meanings are both shaped by and help shape the institutional and ideological contexts in which they surface. This integration of interpretivism and critical inquiry allows us to move beyond surface-level

understandings and reveal the deeper power relations embedded in Danish political discourse (Pozzebon 2004, 277-279). By connecting our interpretations to our theoretical framework, we seek to examine the ideological underpinnings and structural conditions that maintain the social reality of "ghettos" and the policies that regulate them.

Qualitative Research

This research employs a qualitative design to examine "ghetto" policies and political discourse. A qualitative approach is particularly suited for investigating the complex nature of policy documents affecting ethnic minorities in Denmark, allowing for an in-depth examination of themes and patterns within these documents and the political statements surrounding them.

Unlike quantitative research, which depends on statistical analysis, qualitative research focuses on language, meanings, experiences, and social processes. Given that our research aims to uncover how discourse constructs, reinforces, and challenges racialized narratives within "ghetto" policies, a qualitative research design is crucial. Statistical methods, as applied in quantitative research, would not capture the complexity of political rhetoric, implicit (or explicit) bias, and ideological positioning within policy documents. Qualitative research, through the analysis of language, power structures, and rhetorical strategies, provides a deeper grasp of how "ghetto" policies may contribute to structural racism in Denmark. Due to the adaptable methodological nature of qualitative research, researchers often place a strong emphasis on context and nuance, allowing them to engage deeply with the study's subject matter while remaining adaptable to emerging themes and findings (Bryman 2012, 403-404).

Moreover, qualitative research emphasizes reflexivity and methodological transparency, acknowledging the researcher's role in shaping both the research process and the interpretation of data. Critics often articulate these elements, illuminating that qualitative research is subjective and lacks reliability and generalizability (Bryman 2012, 389-390). Nevertheless, these elements are inherent in qualitative research, as it prioritizes interpretive analysis and the examination of diverse perspectives. To mitigate this, qualitative researchers must critically reflect on their own biases, assumptions, and preconceptions, acknowledging that their subjective understanding of the world inevitably shapes the research process and outcomes. In this research, we address potential bias by

applying multiple theoretical perspectives to cross-examine findings, reducing the risk of researcher subjectivity influencing interpretations. We will draw on our theoretical framework guided by Said (1978), Bhabha (1994), Anderson (1991), Waqcuant (2008; 2015) Bonilla-Silva (2021), Fairclough (1989; 1992), and van Dijk (2006; 2008), to critically analyze how colonial legacies inform contemporary "ghetto" policies and political discourse surrounding these policies. Additionally, we will adopt a reflexive stance, which will enhance the credibility of our findings, a point we will return to later in this chapter (Bryman 2012, 394).

Building on the exploratory nature of qualitative research, this thesis adopts an abductive approach to investigate the mechanisms of systemic racism that may be embedded in the policy documents and political documents under investigation (i.e., "ghetto" policies). As abductive researchers, we do not enter the forthcoming analysis with a completely open mind, instead, our theoretical framework sets the initial parameters for what we are analyzing. This ensures that the analysis stays relevant and grounded in our problem formulation, rather than disconnected or abstract. Nevertheless, it is crucial to articulate that we are not committed to confirming our theoretical framework through a process of deductive testing. Rather, we seek to identify the most plausible and insightful explanation for the phenomena we are researching. Abduction enables us to move iteratively between theory and data, giving equal weight to both. Consequently, we might encounter moments in our analysis where the data challenges or differs from our initial theoretical expectations. In essence, we occupy a methodological middle ground, situated between inductive and deductive reasoning (Thompson 2022, 1411).

Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality

This section engages critically with our reflexive positionality as researchers working on racialized governance and integration discourse in Denmark. As Turnbull (1973) notes, "The reader is entitled to know something of the aims, expectations, hopes, and attitudes that the writer brought to the field with him, for these will surely influence not only how he sees things but even what he sees" (Turnbull 1973, 13). In that spirit, we foreground our positionality not as a disclaimer but as a critical component of our knowledge production. Reflexivity, in this context, is not a peripheral action but a central methodological and ethical commitment. It guides how we interrogate

dominant discourses, how we account for our own participation in them, and how we resist reproducing the exclusions we seek to expose.

In critically engaging with Danish political and policy discourse on stigmatized communities and integration, particularly the construction of stigmatized communities as "parallel societies" and the racialized spatial governance of so-called "ghettos", we are acutely aware that our research is not conducted from a neutral standpoint. Rather, it is a co-constructed process shaped by our positionality as ethnic minority researchers, our theoretical commitments, and our methodological decisions. Following Shaw et al. (2020), we recognize that research involving structurally marginalized communities demands a reflexive awareness of the power relations embedded in knowledge production, especially due to the potential power imbalances between the researchers and the subjects (Shaw et al. 2020, 279).

We reject the assumption that such academic inquiry can be "objective" in the positivist sense. Instead, we perceive knowledge production as situated and partial. Our lived experiences as ethnic minority researchers navigating Danish society, both as researchers and as subjects of the very discursive practices we examine, inform and sensitize our analytical lens (Canty & Kantrowitz, 2024, p. 454). As our research engages with spatial and racialized governance, as a process often shaped by marginalization, discrimination, vulnerability, and systemic violence, reflexivity becomes essential. Consequently, we are committed to critically reflecting on how our subjectivities are embedded in and shape the research process (Moralli 2024, 754).

This dual positionality situates us (researchers) both within and against dominant discursive formations. It also grants us a deeper investment in unmasking the normative logics and racialized hierarchies underpinning integration policy. This section reflects on our positionality, particularly as we navigate a dual role: operating within academic institutions that risk perpetuating epistemic violence, while also drawing on our lived experiences as members of a marginalized ethnic minority. Reflexivity, understood as an ongoing practice of self-interrogation and awareness of the relational dynamics between researcher and the subject, is central to our project. It enables a sustained critical engagement with ways our positionality influences the production of knowledge (Bourke 2014, 1-2).

Central to our reflexive practice is our engagement with Gayatri Spivak's seminal essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988). Spivak critiques how even well-intentioned, critical researchers can inadvertently reproduce dominant epistemic structures in attempts to represent marginalized voices (Spivak 1988, 280). Her concept of epistemic violence, in which the systemic silencing of subaltern voices by dominant forms of knowledge production, forces us to confront the uncomfortable possibility that, in our effort to "give voice" to marginalized communities, we risk speaking *for* them rather than *with* them.

Spivak (1988) warns that postcolonial scholarship often perpetuates the figure of the ethnocentric Subject – namely, the Western intellectual who selectively defines the "Other" rather than genuinely engaging with their perspective. Her critique is not aimed at the intentions of researchers, but at the inherent embeddedness of all scholarly work within dominant discursive frameworks that sustain inequality. She underscores that academic engagement is shaped by the power-laden systems through which knowledge is produced. In particular, Spivak highlights how Western intellectuals have historically engaged in politics of recognition through assimilation, incorporating the "Other" into familiar conceptual categories rather than engaging with their perspectives on their own terms (Spivak 1988, 292-294). This process, she argues, silences subaltern voices by forcing them to speak through dominant frameworks, rather than allowing them to articulate their positions independently.

Her provocative claim that "the subaltern cannot speak" (Spivak 1988, 307) does not deny the existence of subaltern voices. Rather, it underscores how those voices are routinely erased, overwritten, or rendered illegible within dominant epistemic frameworks. Spivak's examination of the subaltern woman, whose subjectivity is erased first by colonial discourse and later by nationalist and patriarchal structures, illustrates how deeply embedded these silencing mechanisms are. Representation, she argues, is never a neutral act; it is always mediated by power and shaped by discourse (Spivak 1988, 308).

This critique holds particular relevance for our research. As researchers with ethnic minority backgrounds, we are not outside these discourses. We are both implicated in and shaped by the structures we critique. While our perspectives differ from those of traditional Western intellectuals, Spivak's warning applies universally: all researchers risk reconstructing the "Other" through the

very act of analysis. Our positionality does not exempt us from this risk, it demands even greater reflexivity. We position ourselves somewhere in between, where this endeavor is neither activism nor detached scholarship. It is an academic contribution grounded in critical thinking and a commitment to epistemic accountability.

Accordingly, we define reflexivity as a continuous and critical engagement with how our social positions, institutional affiliations, and epistemological frameworks impact the research process, rather than a one-time declaration of identity. Our aim is not simply to diagnose marginalization, but to interrogate the discursive and systemic logics that sustain it. To guide this commitment, we draw on Russell Walsh's (2003) four dimensions of reflexive research: personal, interpersonal, methodological, and contextual (Walsh 2003, 55-56):

1. Personal

   We acknowledge that our lived experience as ethnic minority researchers informs how we interpret political narratives and how we relate to the policy logics we critique.
2. Interpersonal

   We remain critically aware of the power imbalance inherent in knowledge production, and of the ways academic discourse itself can enact epistemic violence. We reflect on how these dynamics shape our interpretation of Danish political discourse.
3. Methodological

   We are transparent about the theoretical framework, analytical tools, and data selections that structure our inquiry. Here, reflexivity is enacted through transparency: we explicitly describe each step of our knowledge production in the theoretical and methodological chapters.
4. Contextual

   We recognize that our research is embedded within broader societal systems, acknowledging that research does not occur in a vacuum but within systems that determine which voices are legitimized and which are silenced.

In essence, Walsh's four dimensions ensure ongoing, critical engagement with our positionality throughout our research process.

Reflexivity, as we perceive and practice it, is an ongoing and necessary interrogation of the conditions under which we produce knowledge about racialized policies and spatial governance in Denmark. It requires us to remain critically aware of how our own positionality both informs and limits our analysis. Ultimately, this reflexive stance enables us to remain accountable to the communities implicated in our research, to the integrity of critical inquiry, and to the broader ethical project of challenging racialized structures of power.

Empirical Foundation and Dataset Design

This study is grounded in a purposefully constructed dataset developed to support a critical analysis of how Danish political discourse constructs, legitimizes, and situates the concept of the "parallel society". The material included forms the empirical foundation for the study's forthcoming analysis and was selected with attention to institutional relevance, ideological diversity, and discursive variation.

Central to the dataset are official political documents, which were selected not only for their thematic relevance but for their epistemic authority. As Mackieson et al. (2019) note, government documents offer a uniquely rigorous and trustworthy data source in qualitative research due to their official provenance and standardized production processes, which enhance both the credibility and replicability of the analysis. Parliamentary debates, in particular, are rich sites of meaning-making that reflect "the nub of contemporaneous discourse" on pressing social issues (Mackieson et al. 2019, 970).

The following sections detail the rationale guiding the sampling strategy, the data collection method employed, and the categorization process. Particular emphasis is placed on transparency in source selection and metadata structuring, ensuring the dataset facilitates both diachronic analysis and critical comparison across political actors, institutional settings, and textual genres.

Sampling Strategy

In order to capture the variety of discursive constructs and perceptions around the concept of the "parallel society" in Danish urban and integration policy, a purposive sampling strategy has been adopted. For this inquiry, purposive sampling is a suitable approach because it enables us to select

data that are particularly relevant to our research focus. Since the aim is to gain deep, nuanced insights into discursive patterns, it is essential to include cases that are particularly "information rich", with the potential to provide valuable data related to our research goal. To do so, our sampling strategy is tailored to identify data that can most effectively illuminate the dynamics of the discourse we are analyzing (Schreier 2018, 8-9). Because our research is grounded in the foundational understanding that discourse operates simultaneously as a site of meaning and an instrument of power. As such, the dataset must reflect the asymmetrical distribution of discursive authority while creating space for voices that resist, critique, or reframe dominant ideologies.

The sampling design is, thus, based on the goal of capturing texts that offer significant analytical value for studying the construction of the discourse of "parallel society" in the Danish political sphere, as well as understanding how this discourse moves across institutional and ideological contexts. Specifically, the strategy draws on both criterion-based and variation-oriented principles.

Criterion sampling ensured that all selected documents met predefined inclusion parameters, while maximum variation sampling enhanced empirical richness by incorporating both dominant and marginal perspectives, allowing the study to trace shared discursive logics and ideological divergence across social and institutional sites. This strategy is particularly appropriate for our study because it allows us to deliberately select texts, political actors, or data sources that meet predefined characteristics directly relevant to the phenomenon we are examining.

By establishing clear inclusion criteria based on factors such as political affiliation, institutional position, or involvement in key political discussions, we ensure that the data we analyze is directly connected to the research scope. This strategy ensures depth and relevance by focusing on those who possess the authority, experience, or discursive influence necessary to provide insights to the issues under investigation (Schreier 2018, 14-15). Moreover, this approach enhances the credibility and quality of our data, since it is drawn from actors with direct and meaningful engagement with the topic (Nyimbili & Nyimbili 2024, 97).

At the same time, we integrate elements of maximum variation sampling to enhance empirical richness and avoid analytical closure. While all the selected texts share relevance to the Danish integration discourse, we intentionally include a broad spectrum of political actors and institutional

voices, ranging from dominant governmental parties to opposition groups, NGO's, and resident responses. This allows us to trace shared discursive logics as well as ideological divergence across different social and institutional contexts (Nyimbili & Nyimbili 2024, 95). By capturing both central and marginal positions, this variation strengthens the study's capacity to identify not only dominant rhetorical patterns but also discursive contestation and alternative framings. It allows us to analyze how the same phenomenon, such as integration, immigrant communities, or "parallel societies", is constructed differently across diverse ideological, institutional, and positional standpoints, while still maintaining coherence through the shared criterion of relevance to the policy field. Together, criterion sampling ensures analytical precision, while maximum variation sampling expands the interpretive horizon, enabling a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how integration discourse is mobilized, challenged, and reproduced in the Danish context.

Core Sampling Principles

Drawing from qualitative sampling theory (Schreier 2018; Devers & Frankel 2000; Rapley and Rees 2018), the criteria is oriented toward both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives, to construct a dataset that is analytically rigorous, ideologically heterogeneous, and representative of the key political, institutional, and oppositional dynamics shaping Danish integration discourse.

Inclusion criteria were structured around three core dimensions: *authenticity*, *meaning*, and *representativeness* (Rapley & Rees 2018).

Authenticity was ensured by limiting the dataset to primary sources with political or institutional authorship, texts produced or endorsed by political parties, ministries, parliamentary actors, public officials, or formal critiques from civil society actors such as NGOs and resident associations.

The dimension of meaning involved selecting documents with clear thematic relevance to "ghetto" policies, including discourse on "parallel society", immigrants, integration, and urban housing. Especially those containing explicit or implicit representations of ethnic minority communities in relation to Danish values, identity, social cohesion, or governance.

Representativeness was considered both temporally and ideologically: the dataset spans the period from 2005 to 2025, with an emphasis on key policy moments, and includes texts categorized as either typical or atypical cases. This design, following Devers and Frankel (2000), facilitates the identification of recurring rhetorical strategies, ideological tensions, and grounds of contention across the Danish political spectrum and institutional frame. Typical cases reflect the mainstream or "average" representations, which include documents authored by dominant political actors or governing parties at the time of key reforms, while atypical cases encompass deviant or disconfirming cases that challenge, complicate, or stand apart from dominant patterns. Simultaneously, efforts were made to identify contradicting or evolving positions, filling sampling gaps, and tracking shifts in political rhetoric over time.

Finally, the sampling process was guided by the principle of *thematic saturation*, in which data collection continued until no significantly new discursive patterns we observed. Saturation was treated as a flexible guideline rather than a fixed rule, recognizing that it is a relative and context-dependent judgment rather than a rigid threshold. In deciding on sample size, we considered the degree of variation within the phenomenon under investigation. Since the study explores a complex and potentially wide-ranging set of discursive practices, the sample needed to be diverse enough to capture key differences, yet focused enough to allow for in-depth analysis aligned with our research goals (Schreier 2018, 11; Rapley & Rees 2018).

To operationalize this approach, the sample frame is organized into four primary document categories as shown in Table 3: Document Sampling Frame:

Document Categories	Typical Cases (Dominant Discourse)	Deviant or Disconfirming Cases (Counter-Discourse)
Legal and policy texts	Official strategies, legislative proposals, and policy reports by state actors	Legal opinions, independent evaluations, or rights-based policy assessments
Political speeches, party platforms, and programs	Speeches and party documents from governing or major opposition parties	Statements or texts from opposition parties expressing alternative viewpoints
Parliamentary materials	Parliamentary debates, questions, and ministerial replies from mainstream actors	Parliamentary contributions questioning or opposing dominant policy directions
Counter-discourses and civil society responses	Not applicable – this category centers on counter-discourses	Texts from NGOs, legal experts, activists, or residents offering critical perspectives

Table 3: Document Sampling Frame

The sample frame is designed to include a wide range of documents that reflect both dominant political perspectives and critical oppositional viewpoints. Each category (excluding counter-discourse and civil society responses) deliberately includes two types of cases:

- Typical cases represent mainstream or dominant voices in Danish politics. These are texts produced by government actors or major political parties that reflect widely accepted ideas about immigration, integration, and national identity.
- Deviant or disconfirming cases provide alternative or oppositional perspectives. These texts challenge the mainstream view, offering different ways of addressing integration, social cohesion, and the role of immigrant communities.

The aim is to achieve a balanced distribution between dominant discourse and counter-discourse, with a slight emphasis on typical cases. This intentional weighting reflects the empirical reality that institutional voices hold greater influence in shaping the dominant discourse.

By including texts from diverse institutional levels, genres, and ideological perspectives, the study maintains alignment with its critical epistemological foundation while remaining firmly situated within the broader social and political landscape. This inclusive approach enables the dataset to

reflect how integration policy is legitimized, contested, and resisted across various institutional and political contexts, ensuring that the analysis remains balanced, contextually grounded, and attentive to the complexity of real-world political discourse.

In sum, this strategic and theoretically informed sampling design enables a rich, nuanced, and critical examination of the discursive construction, normalization, and contestation of immigrant communities within Danish political discourse. By balancing dominant institutional perspectives with oppositional and marginalized voices, the study is positioned to reveal the ideological underpinnings of integration policy and the ways in which discourse functions as a form of symbolic governance.

Method of Data Collection

This thesis builds its analysis on a purposefully constructed dataset compiled through a targeted online and archival search strategy. Datasets were sourced from publicly accessible databases, including governmental and parliamentary archives, political websites, and NGO platforms. This approach ensured systematic access to a broad spectrum of institutional and oppositional discourses.

Political speeches, government documents, and parliamentary materials were retrieved from authoritative platforms such as the Danish Parliament's website (ft.dk), the Prime Minister's Office (stm.dk), government portals (Regeringen.dk), and the Danish speech archive *dansketaler.dk*. While party platforms were located and retrieved using keyword-based searches (such as "ghetto", "parallel society", "immigrants", "integration") across party websites. Civil society texts, legal opinions, and reports were gathered through structured keyword searches on Google, filtered by temporal parameters.

Each document was logged in a structured spreadsheet containing metadata variables (see *Appendix D* for the full dataset). Table 4 below outlines the metadata structure and variable definitions used to ensure systematic traceability across document types, actors, and ideological positions. This framework enables both cross-sectional and diachronic analysis of discursive patterns.

Variable	Description
Reference	In-text citation for internal tracking
Type	The category of the document
Title	The translated title of the text or its descriptive label
Year	Indicates the year the document was published, delivered, or made public
Speaker(s) and Role/Institution	The speaker(s) responsible for the text, along with their role or institutional affiliation at the time
Political affiliation(s)	Political alignment of the speaker or institution
Summary	A concise summary of the content and key discursive features or policy proposals.
Relevance	Analytical relevance, i.e., how the document contributes to identifying or problematizing key discursive patterns
Codes	Thematic and analytical codes assigned to the document

Table 4: Metadata Structure and Variable Definitions

Data Description

The dataset consists of a curated selection of 56 political and policy-related texts that engage with the discourse on "immigrant communities" and the concept of "parallel society" in Denmark. It includes texts from both institutional and oppositional actors, offering a broad empirical foundation for our study. The data is categorized into four document types, based on the sample frame (see *Table 3: Document Sampling Frame*):

Legal and Policy texts

This category includes official government policy documents and legal opinions that define the institutional framework for integration and urban policy in Denmark. The dominant texts articulate a clear concern with "parallel societies", depicting ethnic minority-dense neighborhoods as threats to national cohesion, public order, and democratic values, often legitimize coercive state interventions under the premise of integration.

In contrast, a set of counter-discursive legal texts critiques these approaches, particularly from human rights and anti-discrimination perspectives. These include legal opinions and institutional assessments that challenge the proportionality, legality, and racialized logic of the policies in question. They emphasize concerns about ethnic categorization, structural inequality, and the undermining of international norms. Together, these sources reveal a discursive field marked by tensions between assimilationist governance and rights-based critique.

Political Speeches, Party Platforms, and Policy Programs

This is the largest category in the dataset and includes formal political speeches, manifestos, and party platforms that reveal how integration and urban diversity are framed across the political spectrum. These documents reflect the ideological positions and long-term strategies of Denmark's major political parties.

The dominant discourse tends to emphasize the need for cultural alignment, civic responsibility, and economic contribution. Integration is often linked to national identity, framed as a conditional process in which acceptance into the welfare state depends on demonstrating loyalty to shared norms and values.

Simultaneously, counter-discursive political materials provide alternative visions that emphasize social justice, urban inclusion, and democratic inclusion. These texts often challenge the ethnicized framing of "ghetto" areas and advocate for more inclusive, structurally aware policies. This category reveals how political discourse is not monolithic but rather contested, with competing narratives about identity, belonging, and the role of the state in managing diversity.

Parliamentary Materials

Parliamentary questions, debate transcripts, and ministerial replies constitute a third layer of the dataset, reflecting how discourses are enacted, legitimized, and normalized within formal legislative settings. The dominant materials in this category tend to reinforce integration as a problem of cultural compatibility and social control. They often employ administrative and statistical language to justify spatial interventions, heightened oversight, and values enforcement.

A smaller set of parliamentary critiques and internal reflections push back against these trends by raising concerns about legal equality, proportionality, and evidence-based policymaking. These interventions reveal moments of friction within the policy process, where dominant logics are questioned on ethical, legal, or procedural grounds. This category highlights the performative and institutional dimensions of discourse, showing how ideological positions are stabilized or contested in everyday governance.

Counter-Discourses and Civil Society Responses

The final category encompasses civil society reports, resident testimonies, media commentaries, and NGO advocacy that collectively articulate a field of resistance to dominant narratives. These texts offer firsthand accounts of how state policies affect individuals and communities, with particular attention to displacement, stigmatization, and the erosion of democratic rights. Often grounded in lived experience, they present integration not as a question of individual failure, but as a structurally conditioned and politically constructed field. This category is essential for understanding how dominant integration discourses are not only produced from above but also actively contested from below.

Document Categories	Typical Cases (Dominant Discourse)	Deviant or Disconfirming Cases (Counter-Discourse)
Legal and policy texts	4 documents	4 documents
Political speeches, party platforms, and programs	19 documents	9 documents
Parliamentary materials	9 documents	3 documents
Counter-discourses and civil society responses	*Not applicable*	8 documents
	32 typical cases total	***24 deviant or disconfirming cases total***

Table 5: Sample Composition Overview

The sample is designed to ensure roughly equal distribution across types; however, as *Table 5: Sample Composition Overview* illustrates, the sample includes a slight emphasis on typical cases, reflecting the empirical reality that institutional voices dominate the production and circulation of public discourse. This asymmetry is analytically useful, as it allows the study to critically engage with the mechanisms of discursive power while simultaneously elevating marginalized perspectives.

Reflection on Scope, Representation, and Ethical Responsibility

The dataset constructed for this study is shaped by both analytical priorities and ethical commitments, reflecting a deliberate effort to capture the complexity of how the notion of the "parallel society" is constructed, legitimized, and contested within Danish political discourse. Spanning twenty years (2005-2025), the dataset supports diachronic analysis of how discourses around immigrant communities and so-called "parallel societies" have developed and shifted over time. Particular attention is given to key discursive flashpoints and policy shifts, specifically around the 2010 and 2018 policy framework, and the legal developments leading up to the 2025

Advocate General's opinion. These moments mark significant rhetorical consolidation, contestation, and change. In this way, the dataset is structured to support both diachronic exploration of evolving discursive patterns and synchronic comparison across political affiliations, institutional contexts, and discursive genres.

A particular strength of the dataset lies in its focus on institutional discourse. Official documents, particularly policy documents, parliamentary debates, and party statements, are valuable for their high validity and epistemic authority (Mackieson et al. 2019). These texts offer insight into the discursive consolidation of policy and reflect the dominant framing of social issues at the moment of their political articulation. As such, institutional texts offer a critical entry point for understanding how state narratives become embedded in law, policy, and public consciousness.

To address representational imbalances inherent in the political discourse, the dataset also incorporates counter-discursive materials from NGOs, activists, and residents in stigmatized housing areas. These texts are not treated as marginal or secondary, but are recognized as essential contributions to the ideological landscape. They offer critical perspectives for challenging hegemonic constructions and exposing the ideological limits of mainstream discourse (Nyimbili & Nyimbili 2024). Notably, the category of *counter-discourse and civil society responses* consists exclusively of deviant or disconfirming cases, selected to illuminate points of discursive friction and challenge hegemonic framings.

Drawing on purposive and criterion-based sampling, the dataset is strategically constructed around institutional relevance, ideological breadth, and discursive variation. While statistical generalization is not the goal of qualitative research, the sampling design follows the logic of analytical generalization, allowing for theory-informed insights into the symbolic and ideological functions of political discourse (Rapley & Rees 2018; Schreier 2018). A key strength of purposive sampling is its focus on information-rich cases that are most relevant to the research question and theoretical aims.

To arrive at plausible claims about the identified recurring discursive patterns used to construct "parallel societies", and how these constructions legitimizes state interventions, we deliberately assembled a relatively large and diverse dataset encompassing a broad spectrum of political texts, that relate to our research scope. The inclusion of both institutional and counter-discursive texts

enabled us not only to unpack hegemonic discourses, but also to identify instances of discursive struggle. Within the parameters of our critical framework, this approach facilitated a nuanced investigation of how hegemonic ideologies are sustained, negotiated, or contested within political discourse.

While our dataset has proven incredibly valuable in deepening our understanding of this discourse, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. One notable constraint is our reliance on keyword-based searches, which – while effective in targeting core terms like "ghetto", "immigrant", "parallel society", and "integration" – may have excluded relevant texts that employ alternative framings or vocabulary. As a result, some expression of counter-discourse or differently articulated references to stigmatized areas and their residents may not be captured. Nevertheless, this method allowed us to strategically assemble a focused and coherent dataset that aligns closely with the central aims of our research.

Like any methodological approach, purposive sampling comes with its limitations. Because it is non-random, it may introduce researcher bias, and it does not support statistical inference. However, rather than undermining the study's validity, this selectivity enhances its relevance: by intentionally targeting texts with high discursive and ideological significance, the sampling strategy privileges depth and theoretical contribution over breadth or representativeness in a statistical sense. Concerns about subjectivity are addressed through a transparent and systematic sampling logic structured around authenticity, meaning, and representativeness, which guided both document inclusion and categorization (Rapley & Rees 2018).

Additionally, the study recognizes the importance of researcher positionality. Interpretation in discourse studies is inherently shaped by the social, political, and academic standpoint of the analyst. To mitigate the risk of interpretive bias, reflexivity was practiced throughout the research process, from data selection and translation to coding and theme development (Schreier 2018). All documents were publicly available and ethically sourced, and when Danish texts were translated into English, special care was taken to preserve tone, rhetorical nuance, and cultural meaning. Translations were cross-checked and interpreted in context, in line with best practices in qualitative discourse analysis.

In terms of representational balance, the dataset centers on institutional discourse, while deliberately incorporating counter-discourses. Although some smaller or newly established political parties are underrepresented due to limited data availability, this reflects a conscious focus on the actors most influential in shaping "ghetto" policy during key legislative periods. This intentional asymmetry is analytically productive as it allows the study to engage critically with dominant narratives while highlighting the discursive boundaries within which resistance must operate.

The endpoint of data collection was guided by the principle of thematic saturation. Sampling continued until no substantially new discursive strategies or thematic patterns were identified. However, consistent with critiques outlined by Schreier (2018), saturation was treated as a flexible and context-sensitive guideline, acknowledging that some variation may always remain undiscovered.

One acknowledged limitation of the study is the absence of a systematic media analysis. While the media plays a key role in amplifying, translating, and contesting political discourse, its exclusion was a deliberate scope decision to maintain analytic focus on institutional and policy discourse. Media discourse remains an important avenue for future research, particularly in relation to intertextuality and public reception.

Ultimately, by foregrounding discursive variation, ideological asymmetry, and marginalized perspectives, this dataset embodies the critical and ethical aims of the project. It enables a rigorous interrogation not only of what is said in political discourse, but of who is authorized to speak, how meaning is legitimized, and whose visions of society are recognized, contested, or excluded from the political imagination.

Analytical Framework

To analyze patterns of marginalization in Danish "ghetto" policies and the political discourse surrounding "ghetto", "parallel society", "immigrants", and "integration", we begin with traditional thematic analysis to systematically map recurring patterns and subsequently employ critical thematic analysis to interrogate how these patterns function ideologically and structurally. Our framework is informed by the analytical insights of Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2013) and

Lawless and Chen's (2019). This section begins with an exploration of thematic analysis, followed by a critique of its limitations, and concludes with a justification for incorporating critical thematic analysis.

Critical Thematic Analysis

To map our dataset, we draw on thematic analysis (TA), a qualitative analytical method well-suited for identifying patterns and themes within empirical material (Bryman 2012, 578). TA offers a systematic framework for theme extraction, making it particularly useful for mapping our data. This mapping is foregrounded through TA's ability to highlight recurring themes in a dataset (Braun & Clarke 2006, 78-79). To guide this process, we adopt Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach. In practice, we are primarily inspired by the first three phases: *familiarization with the data*, *coding*, and *searching for themes*, although the latter was applied to focus on assessing relevance. Moreover, elements of phase 4 (i.e., "reviewing themes") are incorporated to distinguish "typical cases" from "deviant or disconfirming cases" patterns (Braun & Clarke 2013, 3). This extended mapping process allows us to classify documents based on their discursive function, specifically, whether they reflect hegemonic discourse or contribute to discursive struggle. This process is visualized in Figure 4.

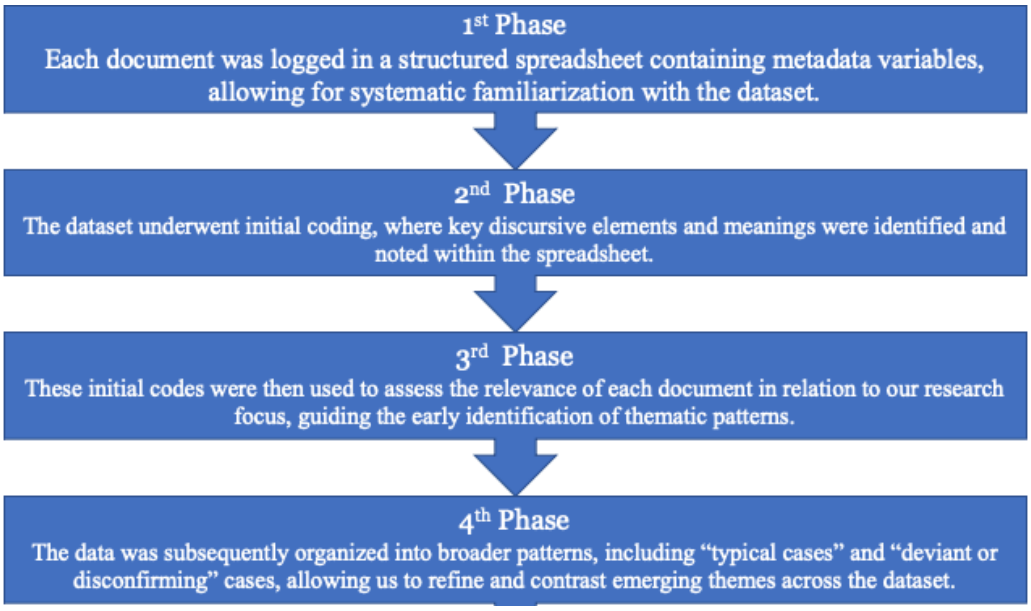

Figure 4: Visual Process of Critical Thematic Analysis

It should be noted that Braun and Clarke articulate that these phases are not linear but function as a flexible guide. However, Nowell et al. (2017) illuminate that applying this approach as a structured guide, even partially, will enhance transparency, credibility, and rigor in the analytical process, enabling valid interpretations. Thus, Figure 4 serves to systematically illustrate each phase, securing qualitative best practice (Nowell et al. 2017, 3).

Despite TA's effectiveness in thematic identification, the methodological approach has faced criticism. Bryman describes TA as "[...] a rather diffuse approach with few generally agreed principles for defining core themes in data" (Bryman 2012, 717). Lawless and Chen extend this critique by emphasizing that TA lacks a critical dimension. They highlight that TA postpones critical engagement until the discussion stage, specifically criticizing Braun and Clarke for being "[...] limited in its critical specificity in connecting everyday discourse with larger social and cultural practices nested in unequal power" (Lawless & Chen 2019, 93). This critique is particularly relevant to our study, which centers on power imbalances between ethnic majorities and minorities. In response to this, we utilize TA primarily as a mapping tool. Thus, we treat the first four TA phases as a mapping tool (*See Appendix D*), while the final two phases are conducted through a critical lens informed by a more critically informed analytical method.

While Braun and Clarke's method is widely used for identifying themes in qualitative data, Lawless and Chen emphasize that its limitations do not stem from methodological inadequacy but from a lack of theoretical development. Consequently, they argue that critical researchers should not dismiss TA, but instead extend it into a more critically engaged framework: *Critical Thematic Analysis* (CTA). Grounded in CDS, our research seeks to explore how power operates in discourse to construct social hierarchies and reinforce dominant nationalistic narratives. TA provides a systematic structure for mapping our data, but on its own, it does not examine how these themes relate to broader systems of power. By adopting CTA, we move beyond descriptive interpretations to critically interpreting how discourse (re) produces "taken for granted" social practices, aligning with our epistemological aim to unpack underlying ideologies in political discourse (Lawless & Chen 2019, 94; 96-97).

Lawless and Chen argue that the critical dimension of CTA lies in its ability to "tease out intersecting macro factors that enable and constrain everyday discourse" (Lawless & Chen 2019,

94). In our research, CTA will be applied to identify intersecting factors of systemic racism within policies affecting ethnic minority groups in Denmark. To deepen our critical engagement, we structure our interpretation of themes using Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model of discourse, aligning the interpretative stage of our analysis, what Braun and Clarke call the "writing-up" phase, with his framework (Braun & Clarke 2006, 79).

To expand TA into the critical approach CTA, we follow three key steps when investigating our data: (a) recurrence, (b) repetition, and (c) forcefulness. The first two focus on analyzing whether meanings are repeated, either through synonymous expressions or recurring ideas, while the latter focus on the strategic reappearance of specific lexical items. Operationally, this critical stage of our analysis applies CTA through the lens of Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model to interrogate whether consistent meanings are conveyed across our dataset. In doing so, we contextualize our theoretical framework to examine how Danish political discourse constructs the racialized figure of the "ghetto" resident. To determine the forcefulness of political discourse, we analyze whether specific words, phrases, and/or ideologies are strategically repeated to shape public perceptions of "ghetto" in Denmark and its residents. This critical expansion of TA centers on how identified themes relate to broader social ideologies by linking frequency and forcefulness to the influence of hegemonic discourse. CTA encourages us to be aware of how political discourse is linked to historical and political contexts, as well as social and hegemonic structures, institutional power, and ideological impact (Lawless & Chen 2019, 94-96). To foster this awareness, our interpretations will be grounded in our theoretical framework, which provides the necessary insights to analyze the mechanisms embedded in systemic racism.

The scholars emphasize that CTA aims to answer key questions, such as: "How are everyday discourses enabled and constrained by social systems, dominant ideologies, and power relations? How do macro- and micro-level discourses, practices, and systems intersect and reproduce dominations and oppressions? How can individual subjects become aware of dominant ideologies and work toward challenging them and promoting social justice?" (Lawless & Chen 2019, 97). To address these questions, we will follow two analytical steps: (1) open coding and (2) closed coding.

Coding phase	Open-coding	Closed-coding
Findings/interpretations	What narratives were repeated, recurrent, and forceful in the political discourse E.g., Social cohesion, Threat to democracy, Integration problems	What ideologies, positions of power, or social hierarchies are recurrent, repeated, and forceful in the political discourse E.g., Othering, Danishness, Racialized belonging, Assimilationism

Table 6: Coding Process

Open Coding

In this phase of the analysis, we remain close to the text(s), identifying patterns of repetition, recurrence, and forcefulness, and specific linguistic features like metaphors, evaluative language, and high modality etc. (Lawless & Chen 2019, 98). This phase corresponds to Fairclough's first dimension, textual analysis, where we investigate how linguistic choices contribute to hegemonic discourses, for example, how repeated references to "social cohesion" operate as legitimation for "ghetto" policies, or how high-modality expressions assert ideological certainty (Fairclough 1992, 72).

Closed Coding

In this phase of the analysis, we analyze not only what is explicitly stated but also what is implicitly stated, aligning with Fairclough's second and third dimensions: discursive practice and social practice. We interpret how language draws on broader ideological frameworks, such as nationalism or othering, and contributes to the reinforcement of racialized hierarchies. By contextualizing our closed-coding within our theoretical framework, we uncover how contemporary political discourse may reconstruct dominant racialized narratives, positioning marginalized residential areas as problems to be governed, and ultimately unpacks how linguistic patterns are embedded in and shaped by broader long-standing societal practices (Lawless & Chen 2019, 98; Fairclough 1992, 72).

In the final phase of our analysis, we present our themes and subthemes and contextualize them using data extracts. Since each theme is supported by multiple data items, it is our role as researchers to identify which extracts best exemplify the arguments within each theme. These data extracts are not random but purposively selected to provide vivid, compelling, and representative evidence, grounded in our research field (Byrne 2021, 1407; Mandal 2018, 592).

The selected extracts reflect recurring patterns in our dataset and include quotes from across the political spectrum. Nevertheless, we highlight that data extracts function as evidence for our interpretations rather than arguments in themselves, as they are embedded in our analytical narrative. We use data extracts as *integrated extracts*, embedded within our sentences. While we acknowledge that this format grants us rhetorical control that may influence interpretations, all quotes are included in their original form to maintain transparency and avoid misrepresentation (Lingard & Watling 2021, 36; 39; 41). In essence, the data extracts presented are those that will add depth and richness to our analysis. Given that the qualitative data is not evaluated by standards of reliability or generalizability (Mandal 2018, 592), we will apply the following criteria, guided by Mandal (2018), when selecting extracts:

1. *Clarity*: Data extracts must clearly illustrate a theme, subtheme, and/or discursive pattern, such as metaphors, high modality, or legitimizing strategies.

2. *Credibility*: Data extracts should plausibly represent broader patterns in the dataset and support a rigorous, well-argued interpretation.

3. *Communicative value*: Data extracts should help the reader understand how discourse constructs meaning and reinforces or challenges social practices.

4. *Contribution*: Data extracts should deepen our understanding of how discourse (de)constructs and/or sustains systemic racism, national belonging, or other forms of racialized domination, in alignment with the critical aims of the analysis.

As we conclude our Methodological Framework chapter, we find it essential to provide a concluding remark by providing Figure 5, which summarizes the key points outlined in this chapter. The figure illustrates how we intend to operationalize our methodological choices. We have adopted our figure from Mackieson et al. (2019) and modified it to fit our framework.

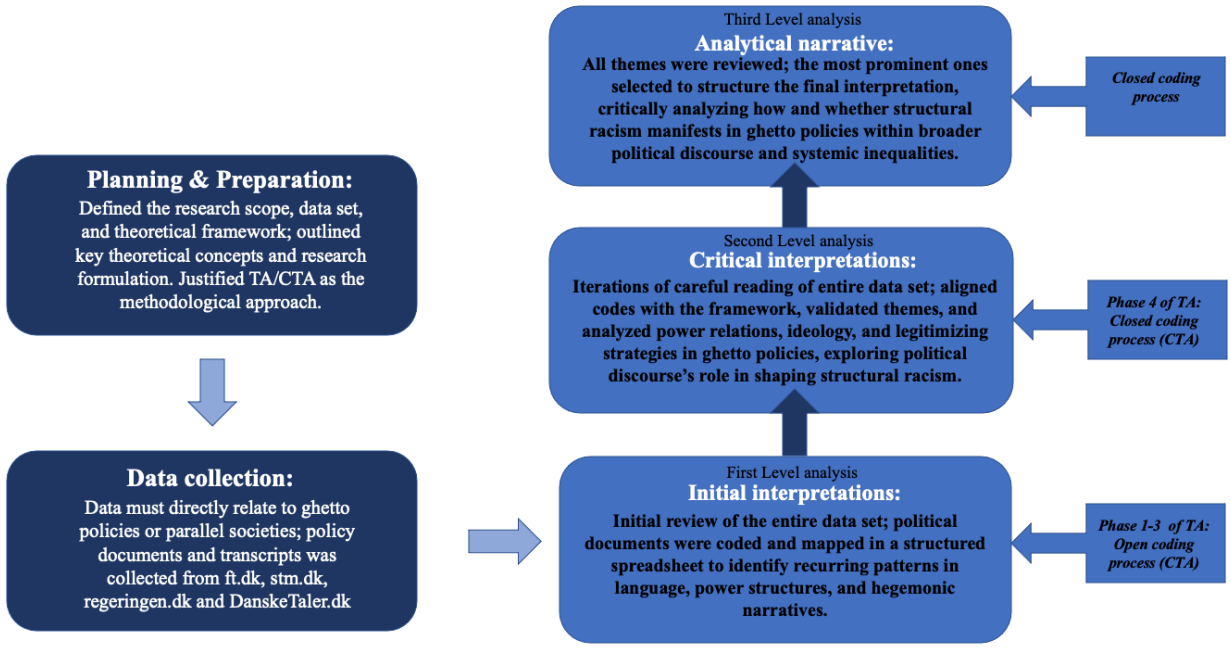

Figure 5: Methodological Process

Figure 5 visualizes our methodological process, from planning and data collection to the three-tiered structure of our analysis. In the forthcoming analysis, we move from open coding to a more focused closed coding process, culminating in an analytical narrative grounded in CTA. At each analytical level, we clarify how meanings were systematically constructed and critically interpret. This is supported by a visualization at the end of each main theme, illustrating our progression from open to closed coding. This approach helps us ensure adherence to qualitative best practices (Nowell et al. 2017, 3).

In addition to summarizing our process, Figure 5 contributes to the trustworthiness of our research, guided by Lucy Yardley's (2000) four core principles: (1) sensitivity to context, (2) commitment and rigor, (3) transparency and coherence, and (4) impact and importance. The figure enhances transparency by making our process accessible to the reader, while demonstrating methodological

rigor and sensitivity to our context-specific framework. In doing so, it supports the overall coherence and relevance of our critical interpretations (Yardley 2000, 219).

Having accounted for and illustrated our methodological framework, we are well positioned to turn to the (historical) context of our research, which offers the necessary grounding for the critical interpretations that will be presented in the analysis.

Contextual Background

This section provides the contextual background necessary to understand the discursive and political conditions under which Denmark's contemporary "ghetto" policies have emerged. As Miller and Dingwall (1997) note, qualitative researchers analyzing institutional texts must attend to the historical trajectories shaping such texts. These texts are typically well-established by the time it is analyzed, and they are typically constructed within broader frameworks of power and governance (Miller and Dingwall, 1997). Anchored in this perspective, this section outlines the political and historical conditions in which this thesis is situated.

Our study is grounded in the context of the Danish welfare state, where national belonging is discursively tied to shared democratic and social values (Siim and Meret 2016, 109-112). Specifically, we examine how the Danish government discursively legitimizes policy frameworks that draw sharp boundaries between "us" and "them". Rather than treating the 2018 "Ghetto Package" as an isolated policy, we explore how ethnic minorities have been Othered in Danish political discourse and how this othering has legitimized increasingly racialized forms of spatial governance. Our analysis seeks to deconstruct these discursive mechanisms in order to understand how such interventions have come to be framed as commonsensical and necessary.

To contextualize this inquiry, we present a brief political-historical account of how the construction of the "Other" has evolved in Danish political discourse over the past six decades. Figure 6 illustrates the shift in how ethnic minorities have been discursively positioned, from contributors to the welfare state to perceived threats against it, both discursively and spatially.

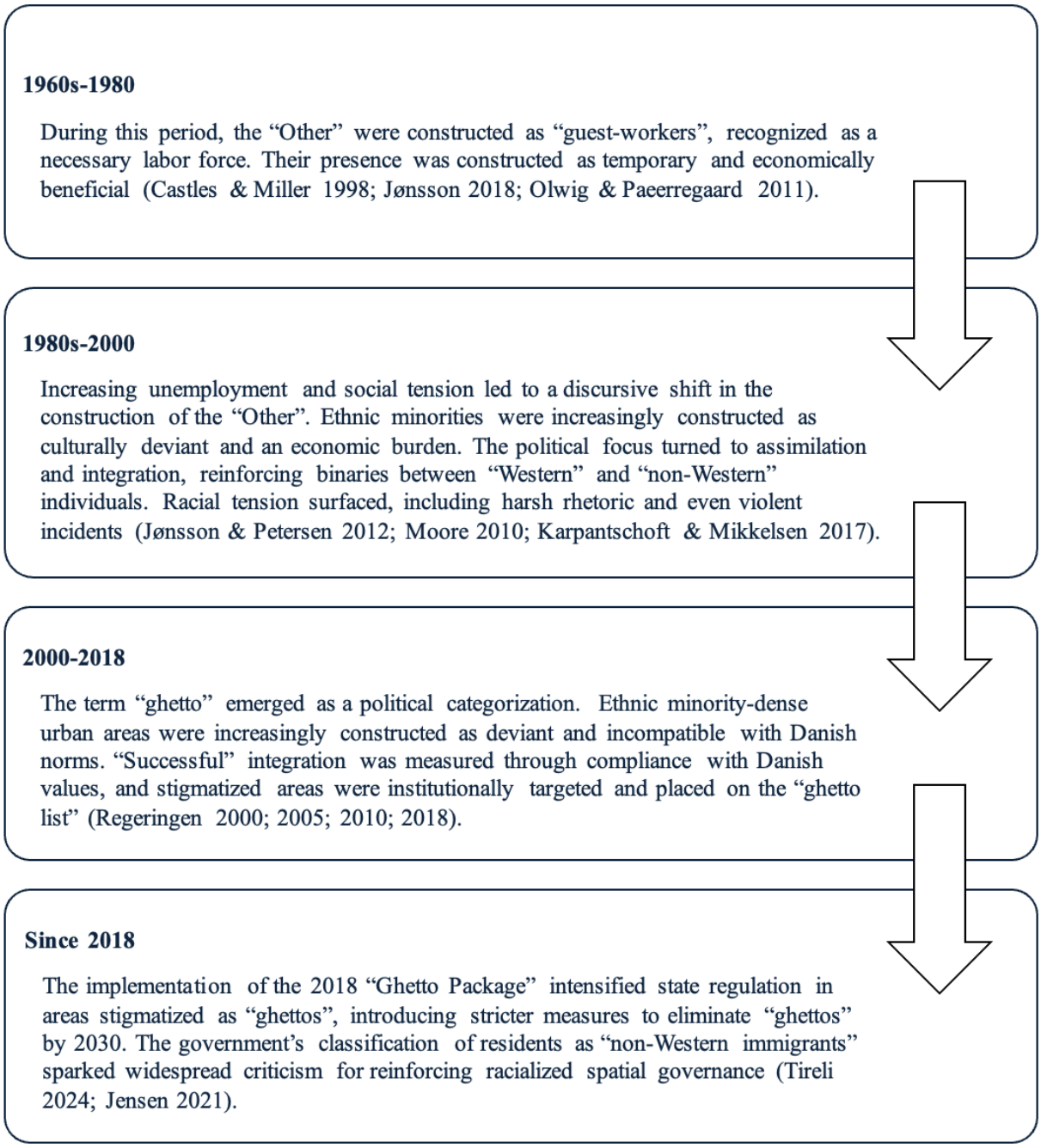

Figure 6: Contextual Timeline of the "Other" in Danish Political Discourse

This historical account illuminates how political discourse in Denmark has increasingly come to construct, spatialize, and marginalize the "Other". Over time, this process has become institutionalized and naturalized within public policy and political rhetoric. Understanding this trajectory is crucial to our analysis, as it enables us to trace how political elites, through discourse,

produce powerful portrayals of ethnic minorities that shape the everyday realities of residents in stigmatized areas.

By analyzing the discursive practices through which these constructions circulate, we seek to challenge hegemonic assumptions and offer a critical reinterpretation of how Danish political discourse legitimizes racialized spatial governance.

Analysis: Discourse, Power, and the Racialized Governance of the "Ghetto" policies

This analysis advances the thesis's core objective: to critically explore how Danish political discourse constructs ethnic minority communities as "parallel societies" and how these constructions are reproduced and mobilized to legitimize "ghetto" policies. It examines how discourse functions not merely as reflection of social reality, but as a tool of governance. Grounded in our extensive theoretical framework, it examines how culturalist narratives, bureaucratic classifications, and legal terminology intersect to define national belonging and underpin the logic of spatial governance. Rather than treating the 2018 "Ghetto Package" in isolation, we situate it within a broader intertextual field that includes earlier frameworks from 2005, 2010 and the 2021 revision. This expanded temporal and discursive scope allows us to trace how bureaucratic classifications and exceptional policy logics are reproduced, intensified, or contested across time.

Drawing on Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional framework, the analysis distinguishes between textual features, discursive practices, and broader social practices, allowing us to examine how meanings are constructed, circulated, and embedded within structures of power. At the level of textual analysis, we identify recurring rhetorical strategies that constitute the building blocks of exclusionary meaning-making. These patterns are then examined in terms of their circulation through broader discursive practices, revealing how policy language is recontextualized across the political spectrum and deployed to articulate shifting boundaries of belonging.

The structure of the analysis is organized thematically, with each theme focusing on a dominant discursive strategy and its function in the production of racialized governance. These themes reflect our first level of analysis, the textual dimension. This involves close analysis of language

use, rhetorical features, and discursive constructions within "ghetto" policies. In turn, each theme is followed by a set of subthemes, which are analyzed at the level of discursive practice. These subthemes trace how the textual patterns identified in the policies are recontextualized, reproduced, or contested in broader political discourse.

The structure of the analysis is as follows (*See Figure 7: Visual Analysis Structure)*:

1. Constructing National Identity Through Binary Oppositions
2. Demanding Danishness: Modality and Moral Obligations
3. Racialized Lexicon
4. Imagining Boundaries Through Metaphors
5. Social Practice: Racialized Spatial Governance as Ideological Rule

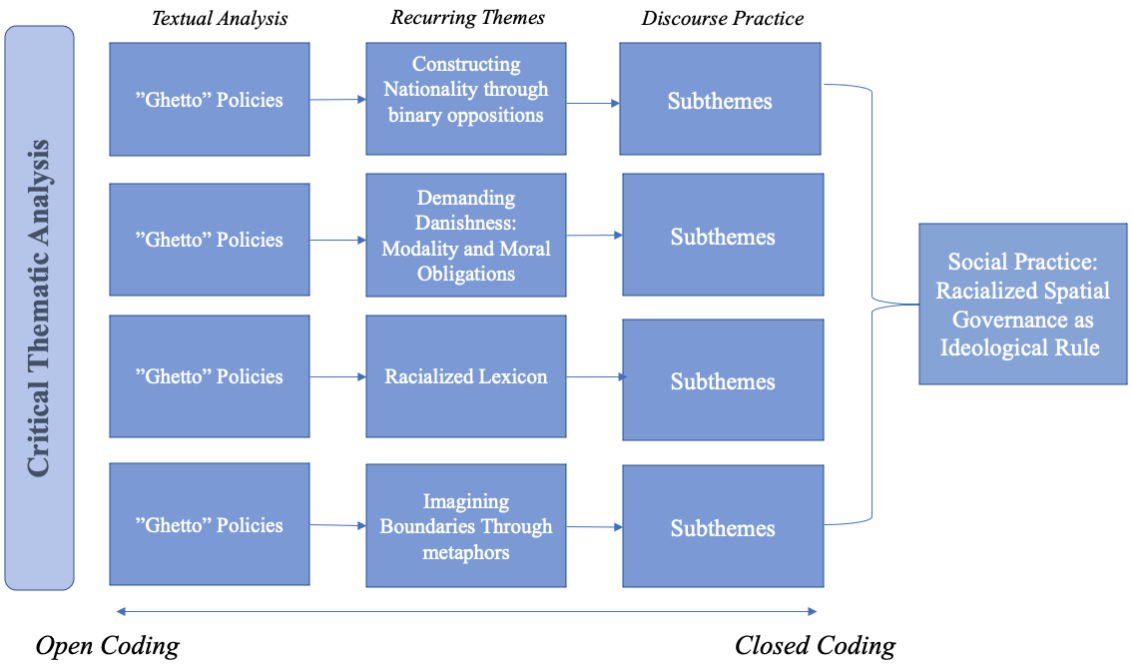

Figure 7: Visual Analysis Structure

This layered approach allows us to examine how the ideological content of the policies circulate through, and is shaped by, the wider discursive field. The analysis concludes with an interpretation of how these discursive formations found throughout the themes and subthemes, contribute to and reflect broader hegemonic social practices.

Constructing National Identity Through Binary Oppositions

This theme examines how Danish "ghetto" policies construct national identity and belonging through language. By tracing the recurrent, repeated, and forceful lexical choices in the "ghetto" policies, we seek to reveal how the Danish state defines who belongs.

Once we have unpacked how policies linguistically construct belonging, we turn our attention to how these constructions circulate within broader political discourse. This will be explored through our subthemes, which focus on discursive practices to explore how the "ghetto" policies both shape and are shaped by pre-existing discourses.

Textual Construction of National Identity and Belonging

In Danish "ghetto" policies, we identified a recurrent textual pattern in which national identity and belonging are constructed through the forceful use of binaries. Stark contrasts such as "contributors" versus "burdens", "integration" versus "isolation", and "us" versus "them" were repeated throughout the analyzed "ghetto" policies. These binaries repeatedly position stigmatized communities as the cultural and moral antithesis of the idealized Danish society.

Drawing on Fairclough's (1989) concept of *relational textual value*, which refers to how texts form and sustain social relationships, binary oppositions are used to establish asymmetrical power relations. These binaries encode a moral hierarchy that, as Said (1978) emphasizes, positions the state and majority society as culturally and morally authoritative, while residents of stigmatized communities are constructed as deviant, deficient, and in need of transformation.

Policy texts rely on dichotomies such as "contributors" versus "burdens", where citizens in stigmatized communities are constructed as needing to be turned into "contributing members of society - economically as well as humanly" (Regeringen 2018, 7), while simultaneously being depicted as "a major burden on social cohesion" (Regeringen 2018, 5). This textually recurring pattern of binary oppositions is further evident in oppositions like "integration" versus "isolation" and "us" versus "them", suggesting that those who do not embrace "freedom, democracy, equality, and tolerance" threaten the values that underpin Danish society (Regeringen 2018, 5).

We identified four recurring binary oppositions in the policy texts: (1) contributors vs. burdens, (2) integration vs. isolation, (3) us vs. them, and (4) deficiency vs. societal norm (*See Table 7: Binray Oppositions*). These binaries are often repeated in synonymous or closely related phrases that collectively construct the figure of the "fellow citizen" in contrast to the "counter-citizen".

Binary Opposition	Illustrative Quote	Source
Contributors vs. Burdens	"Citizens in parallel societies must be turned into contributing members of society – economically as well as humanly"	(Regeringen 2018, 7)
	"Parallel societies are a major burden on social cohesion"	(Regeringen 2018, 5)
Integration vs. Isolation	"[...] failure to integrate into society"	(Regeringen 2005, 4)
	"[...] children grow up isolated from Danish society"	(Regeringen 2010, 21)
Us vs. Them	"It is a threat to our modern society when freedom, democracy, equality, and tolerance are not accepted as fundamental values"	(Regeringen 2018, 5)
	"We have a group of citizens who do not embrace Danish norms and values"	(Regeringen 2018. 5)
Deficiency vs. Societal Norm	"[...] development of parallel societies with completely different norms than those that apply in the rest of Danish society"	(Regeringen 2005, 4)
	[…] religious and cultural parallel societies emerge"	(Regeringen 2021, 7)

Table 7: Binary Oppositions

These binaries not only simplify reality; they inscribe cultural hierarchies into policy language, reinforcing a moralized national identity. Here, van Dijk's (2006) theory of elite discourse and mental models is helpful: such binaries function as cognitive schemas that justify exclusion. "Others" are not merely constructed as different but as threats to societal values, collapsing individual variance into collective suspicion. As the illustrative quotes demonstrate, binary oppositions in the policy texts are repeatedly constructed as moral and cultural value polarizations,

such as “democracy” and “equality”, rather than being explicitly racialized in the way described in Said’s (1978) Orientalism.

Nevertheless, these value-laden binaries often function as proxies for racialized othering: “We have a group of citizens who do not embrace Danish norms and values. Where women are considered less valuable than men. Where social control and lack of equality impose strict limits on individual freedom” (Regeringen 2018, 5).

On the surface, this extract articulates support for gender equality and individual liberty, seemingly positive ideals. Nevertheless, its underlying function is to draw a boundary between an imagined “we” and a deviant “they”. The values being rejected, equality, freedom, and gender parity, are cast as the essence of “Danishness”.

As Said (1978) would argue, these values operate as part of a representational system in which the Danish “Self” is constructed through contrast with a racialized “Other”, constructed as culturally incompatible with the national moral order. Building on Bhabha’s (1994) notion of the unhomely, this constructs a “counter-citizen”, an individual who formally belongs but is symbolically dislocated. Through such binaries, policy language constructs exclusionary frameworks that position certain citizen groups as “isolated” from the imagined national community. In essence, these oppositions do not merely differentiate, they produce politically charged categories of citizens: one ideal, the other deviant. This provides fertile ground for exclusion and reasserts social hierarchies by casting some groups as threats, sources of disorder, and culturally deficient, fundamentally incompatible with the national core.

These recurrent, politically charged categories are distributed throughout broader political discourse, where they work to reproduce forceful categorical boundaries. Such binaries, therefore, become part of a coherent discursive strategy aimed at positioning ethnic minorities outside the national “we”. By analyzing the distribution of this language across discursive practices, we can unpack the relationship between text and social practice. In this context, political discourse operates as a bridge between specific recurring lexical patterns in “ghetto” policies and the broader social practice they help shape. As Fairclough (1992) argues, the discursive practices that circulate and reinforce this binary logic should be understood as instances of interdiscursivity, in which elements of different discourses are combined and recontextualized.

To better understand how this logic is recontextualized through political discursive practices, we break it down into three interdiscursive subthemes, each illustrating how binary constructions are employed to produce cultural hierarchies and symbolic inclusion:

1. Anchoring Belonging in Civilizational Heritage
2. The “Fellow Citizen” and the “Counter-Citizen”
3. The “Dangerous” Muslim

Anchoring Belonging in Civilizational Heritage

This sub theme explores how belonging is anchored in the imagined civilizational identity of the “Christian Dane”, where traditions, values, and religion are constructed as defining features of “Danishness”.

A central discursive strategy through which the binary of “deficiency vs. societal norm” is rearticulated involves exclusive civilizational traits, positioning those categorized as “cultural outsiders” as inherently incompatible with the national community. This binary is predominantly propagated by conservative political actors, who recontextualize recurring elements from the policy texts into subject positions that delineate who truly belongs. Specifically, this strategy involves the elevation of Christianity as the cultural foundation of “Danishness”.

We begin by illustrating this logic through a quote from the 2024 platform of the Conservative People’s Party (KF), which anchors Danish identity in Christian tradition, family values, monarchy, and the local community. The platform asserts that: “Changing these basic structures would also change essential Danish traditions and the continuity that our form of government represents” (Det Konservative Folkeparti 2024, 17). In this formulation, Christianity is constructed not as a private matter but as a structural pillar of Danish society. This implication is clear: deviation from this religious-cultural foundation is destabilizing to the nation itself. Christianity thus becomes the national infrastructure, and divergence from it is cast as a threat to societal continuity.

MP Marcus Knuth (KF) reinforces this civilizational vision, stating: “Our way of thinking, our culture, and our view of freedom is rooted in the Christian tradition” (Kjærsgaard et al. 2021, 99).

Here, even ostensibly secular values like freedom and democracy are redefined as Christian legacies. This rhetorical move constructs a symbolic boundary between those who belong (the Christian "cultural insiders") and those who do not (the religious or cultural "Others"). Belonging, in this discourse, is not tied to civic participation but to religious-cultural ancestry.

The Danish People's Party (DF) further solidifies this binary in their 2024 platform, by explicitly listing "Christianity, myths, stories, literature", "traditions", "social customs", "values, attitudes, and norms", as the cultural foundations of "Danishness" (Dansk Folkeparti 2024, 8). This represents a more overt and intensified articulation of the binary logic already embedded in the "ghetto" policies. While the policies refrain from explicitly linking societal norms to Christianity, political actors build on their discursive foundations to position non-Christians as existing outside the national "we".

In sum, the distinction of "deficiency vs. societal norm" is rearticulated here to construct "Danishness" as fundamentally rooted in cultural homogeneity and a Eurocentric Christian heritage. This process reflects what Fairclough (1989) and van Dijk (2008) describe as the reproduction of "common-sense" assumptions, in which representations are naturalized through repetition and interdiscursive circulation. As Anderson (1991) argues, the nation is an imagined political community whose boundaries must be continuously reaffirmed through symbolic and institutional practices. In this instance, those boundaries are drawn around Christianity, framing it as the cultural infrastructure of national identity.

This subtheme has illustrated how symbolic boundaries of belonging are constructed through the elevation of Christian heritage as a normative baseline, rendering cultural "Others" inherently incompatible. Yet this discursive distinction expands further than religious and cultural framing, it is also enacted through the positioning of individuals within morally charged subject categories. This logic is further developed in the next subtheme, which examines how binary constructions are reproduced through the subject positions of "us" versus "them".

The "Fellow Citizen" and the "Counter-Citizen"

This subtheme further develops the binary logic of belonging by examining how it is circulated through the specific subject positions, most notably the dichotomy between "us" and "them", or,

as we conceptualize it, the "fellow citizen" versus the "counter-citizen". While the "fellow citizen" is positioned as ideologically aligned with "Danish values", the "counter-citizen" emerges as a symbolic outsider. By tracing how this binary is mobilized across the political spectrum, we demonstrate how symbolic hierarchies of citizenship are sustained not merely through legal distinctions but through everyday processes of discursive othering.

This logic is particularly evident in a political speech by Green Left party leader Pia Olsen Dyhr (SF), which draws a stark line between civic desirability and cultural deviance in addressing "new citizens" in Denmark: "they [must] have a desire to contribute positively, and not entrench themselves in parallel societies or perpetuate cultural or religious patterns that are fundamentally at odds with the values of liberal, secular democracy. We need fellow citizens - not counter-citizens" (Dyhr 2024, 48). This quote suggests "parallel societies" as being "fundamentally at odds" with values imagined as Danish. These cultural markers are invoked as threats to "secular democracy", and by extension, to the national body. Dyhr's distinction between "fellow citizens" and "counter-citizens" constructs a binary within the same category: citizens. The explicit use of this binary acknowledges shared citizenship but implies a hierarchy of belonging, where some are positioned closer to the national core than others. Hence, cultural and religious differences become not only grounds for suspicion, but also for civil disqualification.

This rearticulates the binary logic by constructing subject positions in which the ethnic minority is no longer viewed as a potential "fellow citizen" but rather as a symbolic adversary whose presence must be regulated. The foundational logic of the "fellow citizen" versus "counter-citizen" binary is underpinned by civilizational assumptions: modern/backward, secular/religious, democratic/authoritarian, gender-equal/patriarchal. These oppositions frame the Danish "Self" ("fellow citizen") as morally superior and the "Other" ("counter-citizen") as its civilizational antithesis. Importantly, this rearticulation illustrates that the binary logic of the "ghetto" policies is not confined to conservative discourse; it permeates most of the political spectrum. For instance, in a joint parliamentary motion by the Social Democrats, Liberals, Moderates, and Green Left, it is asserted that: *"*True integration is not only achieved through employment, education, and Danish language skills, but through a full commitment to Danish values*"* (Nielsen 2024, 6) The emphasis on "true" and "full commitment" intensifies the logic presented in Dyhr's binary, establishing ideological benchmarks for belonging, suggesting that "true integration" demands not just civic

participation but complete affective and ideological alignment with the homogenized set of "Danish values".

This marks a broader moralization of national identity, where civic status is no longer a matter of legal inclusion but of symbolic loyalty. Anchored in Bhabha (1994), this exemplifies the process of mimicry, where marginalized subjects must adopt dominant cultural norms, but only in a way that reveals their deviance. In this context, even when ethnic minorities participate fully in society, they remain marked as culturally insufficient. Consequently, mimicry does not move the subject closer to the national core; instead, it reinforces their exclusion from the imagined national "we", confining them to a state of permanent partial inclusion. The figure of the "counter-citizen" thereby emerges not from a refusal to integrate, but from the structural impossibility of ever being fully recognized as the same.

This moralized logic is further articulated through a statement by Søren Pape Poulsen (KF): "We need to start making demands if we are ever going to get integration going. [...] Get a job. Speak Danish. Take responsibility" (Poulsen 2020, 18). The repetition of imperatives "get a job", "speak Danish", and "take responsibility" constructs a seemingly simple checklist for achieving integration. However, a critical investigation of discursive practice must also attend to what remains unsaid. Notably, the criteria for what constitutes "responsibility" remain undefined. In doing so, the status of "fellow citizen" is portrayed as conditionally attainable, yet the path to attaining it is obscured by vague and shifting expectations. Rather than offering concrete benchmarks, political authority is exercised through generalized moral demands that lack precise definition. This ambiguity enables continuous escalation of what is required, positioning ethnic minorities as conditional citizens, always obligated to demonstrate worth, yet never guaranteed recognition. As such, they remain perpetually at risk of slipping into the category of the "counter-citizen". In this way, symbolic hierarchies of belonging are reinforced, and the boundaries of "Danishness" are safeguarded by an implicit, unspoken standard of what it truly means to "take responsibility".

In sum, this subtheme has shown how the binary logic embedded in the "ghetto" policies is extended and circulated across the political spectrum, functioning as a politically charged hierarchy of belonging, in which civic status is rendered conditional and precarious. Ethnic

minority citizens are positioned in a state of symbolic suspension, always needing to demonstrate their loyalty, yet never fully recognized as part of the national "we".

This logic is further intensified in the following subtheme: *The "Dangerous" Muslim*, which examines how the figure of the "counter-citizen" becomes racialized and securitized. Here, the subject is not only marked as culturally deviant but also constructed as a threat to the nation's security, values, and social cohesion.

The "Dangerous" Muslim

This subtheme examines how political discourse employs binary oppositions to construct Muslims as threats to the imagined Danish community. By exploring how Islam is depicted as incompatible with "Danish values", we reveal how these binaries become racialized, transforming religious and cultural difference into a civilizational antagonism.

This logic is articulated explicitly in a statement by Pernille Vermund, then leader of the national-conservative party New Right (NB): "It is the Islamic culture and way of life that is incompatible with the Danish, and it is the political part of Islam that is in opposition to our democracy and freedom [...] The more influence Islam gains in our society, the more our freedom, the values that make us Danish, are weakened (Vermund in Kjærsgaard et al. 2021, 105). Here, Islam is not merely constructed as different but as ideologically and politically detrimental. This discourse rearticulates the previously discussed threat to "Danish values" by constructing subject positions in which "Islamic culture" is cast as a civilizational opponent. This logic reflects Said's (1978) notion of Orientalism, in which the "East" is depicted as a cultural and moral opposite of the "West". Political actors like Vermund and Kjærsgaard (2021) assume the role of Western authorities, defining the "East" as inferior and dangerous. These binary oppositions sustain an orientalist representational system, where the "Self" is constructed through contrast with a racialized "Other".

This value-based polarization is further reinforced by former Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, who states: "When Denmark is an option - something you choose - we can demand that you really choose it. Putting secular laws above religious [...] Then we must speak out clearly against those who limit the freedom of others" (Rasmussen 2019, 12). Here, secularism is no longer a neutral legal framework, it is redefined as a moral imperative, operating as a test for belonging.

It becomes a justification for the disciplining and surveillance of religious practices, particularly those associated with Islam. Pluralism is thus replaced with cultural uniformity, presented as necessary for the protection of national freedom.

Within this framing, the Muslim subject is positioned as a threat to the freedom of the "fellow citizen" and, by extension, to the Danish national core. This polarization is further echoed in the Danish People's Party's 2024 program, asserting that "Danish culture is being replaced by Islamic culture in many places" (Dansk Folkeparti 2024, 7). Here, Islam is constructed as a colonizing cultural force, posing an existential threat to Danish identity. This narrative is amplified by former Conservative party leader Søren Pape Poulsen, who claims: "Pretending that there is no conflict between Danish and Middle Eastern culture is no solution. There can be, and there often is." (Poulsen 2018, 13). This statement constructs cultural conflict as inevitable and natural, rather than socially produced or historically contingent. In doing so, it forecloses the possibility of coexistence or cultural hybridity. This reflects Anderson's (1991) observation that nationalism functions through the regular rearticulation of symbolic boundaries, allowing elites to assert control over diverse populations by invoking a shared, yet selectively constructed, sense of identity. Here, that identity is built in opposition to a racialized Middle Eastern "Other". As Bhabha (1994) argues, such constructions deny the hybridity of identity by asserting that one cannot simultaneously embody multiple cultural positions. The result is a logic in which the possibility of dual belonging is erased.

This cultural polarization is further reinforced by Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen (S), who articulates that "the younger Muslims born and raised in Denmark, are in some cases more extreme than their parents [...] they [i.e. the parents] cannot understand that their children and grandchildren are not grateful to live in the best country in the world" (Frederiksen in, Bjørn et al. 2025, 4). In this formulation, the "Dangerous" Muslim is not an outsider by origin, but a native-born subject who remains suspect. In this distribution, emotional loyalty becomes the ultimate test of belonging, and gratitude becomes the moral currency required for inclusion. Even Muslims "born and raised" in Denmark are symbolically excluded unless they perform deference and appreciation. The national community is cast as a gift, and failure to express gratitude is interpreted as a sign of extremism. This reflects a regime of moral surveillance, where racialized minorities are not only expected to conform behaviorally but also to internalize and express appropriate emotions of

humility, respect, and thankfulness. When such performances are absent, the right to belong is revoked. Ultimately, these interdiscursive extensions of the politically charged binaries established in the "ghetto" policies are sustained through epistemic ambiguity.

Terms such as "Danish traditions", "loyalty", and "gratitude" are never clearly defined, and their meaning shifts across contexts, ensuring that full acceptance remains perpetually out of reach. This discursive vagueness allows political actors to make claims to inclusivity while simultaneously moving the boundaries of belonging. As such, *integration* functions as a flexible signifier, constantly invoked, yet never concretely defined. Within this discursive landscape, the categories of the "fellow citizen" and "counter-citizen" are constructed through homogenized and exclusionary characteristics that are implicitly understood. But rarely made explicit.

Coding phase	**Open-coding**	**Closed-coding**
Findings/interpretations	What was repeated, recurrent, and forceful in the policies? ➢ Binaries e.g., fellow citizen vs. counter-citizen	What ideologies, positions of power, or social hierarchies are recurrent, repeated, and forceful in the policies? ➢ Official nationalism ➢ Othering ➢ Racialized social systems

Table 8: Process of Open to Closed Coding Applied to this Theme

The significance of identifying these discursive mechanisms becomes clearer when understood through the lens of *mental models*. As van Dijk (2006) argues, elite discourse shapes socially shared mental models, which are internalized representations that influence how social groups are perceived and how policies are formulated in response. When political actors depict ethnic minorities as morally deviant or culturally deficient, these representations become embedded in collective cognition, naturalizing exclusionary practices as common sense. These cognitive structures are deeply rooted in what Said (1978) terms *Orientalist thought*, in which the "Other" is framed as inherently dangerous and fundamentally incompatible with the dominant cultural order.

Within this framework, even when integration is performed, it fails to produce full recognition. The racialized subjects remain incomplete, marginal, and perpetually at risk of symbolic or

material exclusion. As Bonilla-Silva (2021) contends, this is precisely how racialized social systems operate: through everyday discursive practices that naturalize inequality as rational governance, cultural inferiority as social fact, and control as political necessity.

Demanding Danishness: Modality and Moral Obligations

This theme traces how Danish "ghetto" policies naturalize demands on ethnic minorities through language. Building on previous analyses of binary constructions of belonging, we now turn to how modality functions as the linguistic mechanism that transforms national values into normative obligations. First, we examine how modality operates within the policy texts themselves. This is followed by an exploration of a subtheme that demonstrates how these linguistic strategies are distributed and rearticulated within broader political discourse.

Modality and the Linguistic Construction of Obligations

Having demonstrated how "ghetto" policies establish binaries, we now focus on the role of modality in encoding what Fairclough (1989) calls *expressive values,* which are linguistic features that position the speaker with authority and define moral expectations. Following Anderson (1991), language use reinforces the importance of maintaining the "imagined political community", a community whose members may never meet, but where sustaining a shared national identity functions as the national glue. Within this imagined community, the "counter-citizen" functions as a symbolic boundary of the national "we". Therefore, as Fairclough (1989) argues, modality carries expressive values through which national identity is linguistically constructed.

Once binaries establish who belongs and who must be regulated, modality becomes the linguistic mechanism that transforms national values into obligations. Through modal expressions of necessity, obligation, and certainty, national values are presented not as ideals but as compulsory conditions for inclusion. National belonging, particularly for those racialized as "counter-citizens", is constructed as a status that must be earned by adhering to the normative expectations of "Danishness". These expectations are articulated through high-modality expressions such as "must", which carry a prescriptive force that redefines values as duties. Such linguistic construction is exemplified in a key formulation from the 2018 "Ghetto Package" stating that:

“Denmark must remain Denmark. In places where parallel societies have emerged, Denmark must become Denmark again” (Regeringen 2018, 6). This demonstrates a circular and essentialist nationalism, where “Denmark” functions both as an unchanging essence and as a project under threat. The repetition of high-modality imperatives (“must remain”, “must become”) constructs “Danishness” as a fragile ideal that must be protected, restored, and policed. As Fairclough (1992) notes, such assertive discourse and construct belonging as a moral imperative. Simultaneously, this formulation also reflects Said’s (1978) Orientalist framework, wherein internal spaces associated with ethnic minorities are framed as civilizational threats to the national core.

Furthermore, language itself becomes a criterion for inclusion when the use of modality shifts from cultural morality to communicative norms. Rather than treating language as a medium of dialogue, policy texts frame it as a test of belonging. It is presented both as a normative standard and a symbolic gatekeeping mechanism, evident in repeated high-modality statements such as: ”Speaking Danish must be the norm” (Regeringen 2010, 15) and “Children must learn to speak the Danish language properly” (Regeringen 2018, 8). These statements utilize modality (“must”) and normative adverbs (“properly”) to assert a monolingual national standard that linguistically devalues dialect, accents, and multilingual practices. Drawing on Anderson’s (1991) concept of *imagined communities*, this emphasis on linguistic homogeneity becomes a proxy through which the national community is both imagined and policed. In the statements, speaking Danish “properly” becomes synonymous with being Danish.

The intertextual recurrence of “must” in relation to the Danish language reflects a discursive intensification between the 2010 and 2018 policies. In 2010, Danish is presented as a normative ideal, abstractly constructed as a societal “norm”. By 2018, this demand becomes concretized and targeted, recontextualized onto racialized children, marking them as key sites of state interventions. This rhetorical shift, from abstract norm to specific pedagogical imperative, constructs an escalation of textual power. The child is constructed as both a symbol of (“failed”) integration and an object of control, anchoring the government’s future vision of “Danishness” in linguistic discipline. The use of a normative adverb further moralized this demand: not merely to speak Danish, but to speak it “properly”, reinforcing a lexicographic evaluation, in which linguistic difference serves to exclude the “counter-citizen” and their “children” from the collective national identity.

This intertextual intensification of modality is further evident in how the "ghetto" policies evolve from identifying moral deficiency to declaring spatial detachment. The 2010 "Ghetto Plan" asserts that "We must change the areas where Danish values are not fully grounded" (Regeringen 2010, 5), constructing certain urban areas as lacking a proper "grounding" in "Danish values". In comparison, the 2018 "Ghetto Package" contends that "In places where parallel societies have emerged, Denmark must become Denmark again" (Regeringen 2018, 6), suggesting spatial rupture. Here, high-modality imperatives ("must") are not only repeated but intensified, shifting from the aim of value-based reform to suggest that certain urban areas have ceased to be part of Denmark altogether. This shift in the use of "must" marks a rhetorical escalation, from areas in need of "transformation" to areas imagined as symbolically foreign, even within national borders. These spatial references are not neutral; they assign ideological meaning to physical locations, constructing a cartography in which stigmatized areas are depicted as deficient spaces in need of state-led correction. The lexical items essentialize national identity as both fixed and perpetually under threat, thereby justifying state interventions.

Additionally, these statements enact what Fairclough (1989) terms *relational textual values*, establishing a hierarchical relationship between the national "we" (represented by the state) and the deviant "Other" (residents of stigmatized areas). Through the repeated use of high-modality verbs, the policies establish an authoritative voice of the state that assumes the right to define, diagnose, and intervene. The state is thus positioning itself as the guardian of national integrity, tasked with protecting "Danishness" from internal threats. Even when ethnic minorities are portrayed positively, their recognition remains conditional and revocable. Consider the statement: "Fortunately, many immigrants are doing well [...] They must continue to do so" (Regeringen 2018, 4). Here, the modal verb *must* subtly reframe praise as an obligation. Success is not acknowledged as an endpoint but is instead policed as a temporary and monitored status. "Immigrants" must continuously perform "Danishness" to remain within the bounds of belonging. Bhabha's (1994) concept of mimicry is instructive here: the "immigrant" is always "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 1994, 86), reinforcing a colonial power hierarchy in which the "immigrant" is placed as a space of perpetual ambivalence. Their inclusion is never unconditional; it is monitored, measured, and morally charged.

In essence, the analysis of binaries and modality reveals how "ghetto" policies construct oppositional categories that delineate who is excluded from the imagined national "we", a process that is fundamentally rooted in discursive Othering. Once this exclusionary boundary is established, the policies consistently deploy high-modality verbs to articulate normative obligations aimed at preserving the national core. Statements such as "Denmark must remain Denmark" (Regeringen 2018, 6) exemplify how such linguistic choices render exclusion a moral necessity. Anchored in Anderson's (1991) insights, this construction of belonging frames collective Danish identity both as an aspirational ideal and as a fragile entity that "must" be protected from internal threats.

The following section shifts focus to examine how this portrayal of "Danishness" as vulnerable and conditional is reproduced beyond policy texts. Here, we explore how the high-modality language identified in "ghetto" policies is rearticulated in broader political discourse as performance-based expectations placed on ethnic minorities.

Expectational Integration

Drawing on Fairclough's (1992) second dimension of discourse, discursive practice, this section unpacks how the repeated and forceful use of modality identified in "ghetto" policies is rearticulated and circulated within broader political discourse. It demonstrates how the meanings embedded in modality are recontextualized through what we term *expectational integration discourse*.

Where modality in the "ghetto" policies functions as explicit state demands directed at residents of stigmatized areas, broader political discourse reframes these as expectations for "successful" integration. However, this does not represent a discursive shift; rather, the concept of stigmatized areas continues to operate as a spatial proxy for "failed" integration, symbolically designating these spaces as inhabited by culturally incompatible "Others". The underlying logic of expectation remains intact, now rearticulated through a broader discursive field.

This evidence of discursive practice primarily unfolds through parliamentary debates, party platforms, and political speech, where modality is transformed into a subject position that encodes normative expectations that ethnic minorities must continuously meet. It demonstrates how

political actors actively reformulate these high-modality imperatives from policy texts into broader cultural and moral expectations.

This practice is particularly evident in the rhetoric of the Liberal Party, the Conservative People's Party, and the Social Democratic Party, whose statements reveal how modality continues to govern the terms of conditional belonging. In a 2018 parliamentary debate, then Minister for Immigration and Integration, Inger Støjberg (V), exemplified the expectational logic at the heart of this discourse, asserting that "The goal must be that as long as you are in Denmark, you embrace Denmark and our way of life" (Krarup & Støjberg 2018, 2). The possessive phrase "our way of life" reinforces a symbolic distinction between the Danish "Self" and the culturally "Othered". Integration is framed not as mutual adaptation but as unidirectional assimilation. The verb "embrace" implies emotional acceptance and internalization, suggesting that mere legal citizenship is insufficient; one must fully embody "Danish values" to be considered part of the national community.

Støjberg further moralizes economic participation by asserting: "[...] if you actually support yourself. And I also believe that you must (Krarup & Støjberg 2018, 3). Here, the use of the modal verb *must* signal a non-negotiable obligation. As in policy texts, work and economic self-reliance are constructed not as shared societal goals, but as moral expectations imposed specifically on ethnic minorities. This depiction connects civic worth with labor market participation, reducing human value to economic productivity. Structural factors such as unemployment, discrimination, or unequal access to education are erased from the narrative, recasting inequality as a matter of individual failure.

Building in Bonilla-Silva (2021), this use of modality demonstrates how language becomes a political tool: the way inequality is spoken about determines whether it is recognized as systemic or dismissed as personal. By presenting integration as a one-sided obligation and self-reliance as a test of moral character, responsibility for inclusion is displaced onto ethnic minorities. Meanwhile, majority society and societal structures is absolved of its role in shaping these conditions, rendering inequality as both depoliticized and morally justified. This logic is further encapsulated in Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen's (S) 2019 party congress speech, maintaining "A clear expectation for all you new Danes, you must contribute" (Frederiksen 2019a, 25). Echoing

Støjberg's rhetoric, Frederiksen moralizes integration by erasing historical and structural inequalities in favor of emphasizing personal responsibility. Rather than acknowledging, as Wacquant (2008) argues, the racialized and socio-economic marginalization experienced by many ethnic minorities, particularly those residing in stigmatized areas, such circumstances are reframed as evidence of individual underperformance. The term "new Danes" implies provisional belonging, while the high-modality phrase turns integration into a transactional obligation. Recognition is no longer grounded in citizenship or shared humanity, but must be earned through productivity, loyalty and cultural conformity. This aligns with broader patterns of naturalized inequality, in which structural disparities are reframed as failures of personal character. Ethnic minorities are not only expected to adapt, but to exhibit gratitude for their conditional inclusion.

Belonging, in this framework, is a privilege granted only when certain behavioral and ideological expectations are met. Building on Said (1978), it becomes apparent that the repeated use of high-modality phrases to articulate expectations for ethnic minorities produce internal "Others". The figure of the "new Dane" becomes a symbolic representation of disorder within the nation – a subject whose belonging must always be proven but never fully secured. This logic is concretized in the Conservative People's Party's 2024 platform asserting that: "Danish traditions are the culture into which immigrants must integrate or assimilate. Therefore, it is not enough to simply comply with Danish law if you want to become part of Danish society. [...] Denmark is - and must continue to be - a cohesive cultural community." (Det Konservative Folkeparti 2024, 38). Here, cultural assimilation is positioned as a prerequisite for "successful" integration. "Danish traditions" are repeatedly invoked as the foundation of national identity, yet, like other references to national values, they remain undefined. Anchored in Anderson's (1991), concept of *official nationalism,* this discourse functions as a mechanism of power, determining who may be included within the imagined national community. Under the guise of promoting social cohesion, these vague cultural references operate as symbolic filters for inclusion. As Wacquant (2008) argues, such symbolic filters reinforce spatial and social divides. Stigmatized areas are portrayed as the physical manifestation of failed integration, marking a visible separation between the normative national subject and the deviant "Other". This is an example of bureaucratic governance through culture, where undefined national traditions serve to regulate who may be recognized as legitimately Danish. The syntactic structure "must continue to be" reflects Fairclough's (1992) notion of

naturalization, in which a particular ideological position is presented as "common-sense", rendering exclusionary cultural expectations indisputable.

The following excerpt from Frederiksen's 2019 parliamentary speech further illustrates this moralizing discourse: "When you come to Denmark. Get the chance to live in a country with free access to education. Free medical care. The opportunity to work. And live in peace. Then it gives you an obligation to use those opportunities. If you do not. Then it is a breach of trust" (Frederiksen 2019b, 11). This statement discloses the moral economy underpinning the discourse of expectational integration. Rights and welfare provisions are reframed not as entitlements of citizenship but as gifts to be repaid through compliant behavior. The sequential structure "if... then" and the evaluative phrase "breach of trust" present integration failure as a personal betrayal, rather than the result of systemic exclusion. The implication is that ethnic minorities owe loyalty and gratitude for their inclusion, and failure to demonstrate this debt justifies their marginalization.

Through this logic, belonging becomes a conditional and revocable status. Civic entitlement is replaced by a constant audition for worthiness, in which ethnic minorities must continuously perform gratitude, responsibility, and cultural conformity to maintain their place within the national "we". Ultimately, it reveals how modality is central to expectational integration discourse, where integration is no longer defined as access or inclusion, but as the performance of normatively defined behaviors. Failure to meet these expectations does not merely mark one as unsuccessful, it positions the subject as untrustworthy, disloyal, and undeserving of inclusion.

Coding phase	**Open-coding**	**Closed-coding**
Findings/interpretations	What was repeated, recurrent, and forceful in the policies? ➢ Modality verbs e.g., shall and must	What ideologies, positions of power, or social hierarchies are recurrent, repeated, and forceful in the policies? ➢ Racial status que

Table 9: Process of Open to Closed Coding Applied to this Theme

As these expectations are reiterated across party lines and institutional texts, they become depoliticized, naturalized, and embedded within public consciousness. Integration is redefined as a process of internal conformity, wherein citizenship is never fully secured but remains conditional

upon one's acceptance of, and submission to, dominant cultural norms. These norms extend beyond formal legal obligations to encompass unspoken cultural expectations, affective alignment, and ideological allegiance, forming a matrix of compliance against which racialized minorities are continually measured.

As theorized by Said (1978), Bhabha (1994), Bonilla-Silva (2021), and van Dijk (2008), this discursive process reflects a deeper social architecture, transforming cultural difference into perceived danger and governance into disciplinary control. What appears as integration discourse is, in effect, a mode of social regulation that maintains racialized hierarchies under the guise of inclusion. In sum, integration becomes not a bridge, but a checkpoint; not a promise of equality, but a demand for obedience. It ceases to function as a collective or reciprocating project and instead operates as a unilateral contract, perpetually monitored, inherently asymmetrical, and structurally unequal.

Racialized Lexicon

We have demonstrated that even in the absence of explicit racial expression, binary oppositions and modality function as textual strategies that contribute to the racialization of marginalized populations. These strategies circulate across political discourse, revealing how "ghetto" policies are both formulated by and help formulate already existing discursive practices, and how they are distributed in ways that sustain the power embedded within these policies. We now turn to one of the most persistent and forceful elements within this discursive formation: the racialized lexicons.

Drawing on van Dijk's (2008) theory of elite discourse, racialized lexicons refer to the repeated selection of specific terms that carry negative connotations when applied to racialized populations (the "counter-citizen"), while promoting positive associations around the national in-group (the "fellow citizen"). These lexical choices often mirror binary logics, but differ in that they rely on specific, intertextual terms that build a cognitive repertoire of meaning. These lexicons operate through an implicit schema of "Our Good things" and "Their Bad things" (van Dijk 2008, 105), serving as a rhetorical strategy grounded in ideological contrast.

A key component of our analysis involves tracing the intertextual use of four recurring labels applied in "ghetto" policies: (1) "immigrants" and "non-Western immigrants"; and (2) "ghettos"

and “parallel societies”. These terms appear consistently across multiple policy frameworks, functioning not merely as ethnic or spatial descriptors, but as racialized identifiers that stigmatize targeted groups. Through repetition and intertextual circulation, these terms become ideologically loaded categories, reinforcing dominant narratives of threat deficiency and exclusion.

Following Fairclough’s (1992) three-dimensional model, we begin by analyzing the textual features embedded in policy documents, focusing on how lexical choices are used to categorize, and are embedded within a broader racialized logic. We then shift to the level of discursive practice, examining how these labels circulate beyond the policy texts, where they are recontextualized, intensified, and deployed to support broader ideological constructions of deviance and non-belonging. This two-tiered analysis allows us to display how the racialized lexicon functions not only as a textual feature but as a key discursive mechanism within the politics of exclusion.

“Immigrants” and “non-Western Immigrants”

The intertextual reference to residents of stigmatized areas intensifies significantly between the 2005 and 2010 policy frameworks. While the 2005 “Ghettoization Strategy” employs abstract phrasing such as “regulation of resident composition” (Regeringen 2005, 5), the 2010 “Ghetto Plan” introduces more explicit racialized classification: “immigrants and descendants from non-Western countries” (Regeringen 2010, 15). This shift reflects a move from general population management to overt racial categorization. Consequently, our analysis focuses on the 2010, 2018, and 2021 policies, where this racialized lexicon becomes increasingly intensified and institutionalized. Interestingly, each of these policy texts opens with highly evaluative portrayals of Danish society:

- ”A safe, rich and free society [...] Freedom of diversity. Equal opportunities for men and women. Responsibility for the common good. Democracy. Respect for the laws of society.” (Regeringen 2010, 5).

- ”Freedom and legal certainty. Equality and liberality. Tolerance and equality. A Denmark where everyone participates actively” (Regeringen 2018, 4).

- “[...] a strong welfare society that provides equal opportunities for all Danes, regardless of where they grow up” (Regeringen 2021, 7)

These opening statements construct an idealized and cohesive vision of national identity rooted in shared values, civic participation, and moral integrity. In articulating Denmark’s “good things”, the texts prepare the discursive ground for identifying “bad things” associated with racialized “Others, particularly “immigrants” and “non-Western immigrants”. The contrast becomes stark in subsequent passages: ”Too many immigrants and descendants [...] without education. Without jobs. And without knowing sufficient Danish” (Regeringen 2018, 4). Here, structural barriers such as discrimination or unequal access to resources are rendered invisible. Social marginality is reframed as cultural pathology. These representations reflect van Dijk’s (2008) notion of *ideological schemata*, embedding long-standing narratives of deviance and incompatibility into policy language. “Immigrants” are no longer framed as potential “fellow citizens”, but as permanent “counter-citizens” who embody the antithesis of the ideal Danish subject.

In the 2010 “Ghetto Plan”, areas with high concentrations of “non-Western immigrants” are explicitly constructed as undesirable. The assertion: “No area should have a predominance of immigrants and descendants from non-Western countries” (Regeringen 2010, 15), defines cultural and demographic thresholds as unacceptable, thereby legitimating state intervention. Areas that surpass this threshold are subjected to structural measures such as forced relocations and tenure conversions, framed as efforts to restore “normal Danish urban areas” (Regeringen 2010, 6). To illustrate this perceived demographic “overflow”, the policy identifies 29 “ghetto areas” where “immigrants and descendants” exceeded 50 percent of the population (Regeringen 2010, 40). As Bonilla-Silva (2021) and van Dijk (2008) argue, this is a form of statistical racialization, through which racial governance is enacted under the guise of neutral data. Numbers, however, do not erase race; they make it manageable and governable.

This exclusionary filtering is further institutionalized through increasingly specific bureaucratic categories. By 2018, the term “immigrants and descendants”, is refined into the bureaucratic criterion “non-Western immigrants and descendants” (Regeringen 2018, 11). This classification narrows the focus to groups implicitly marked by racial, cultural, and religious differences. The discursive logic is reinforced through cultural diagnoses. For instance: ”Most citizens with non-

Western backgrounds come from societies that are built on a distinctly different set of values" (Regeringen 2018, 7). Such statements do not merely assert cultural difference; they presume it as an uncontested fact. Drawing on van Dijk's (2008) ideological schemata, this language constructs fixed categories of identity and transforms ideological assumptions into background knowledge that resists contestation. Cultural incompatibility is no longer argued; it is naturalized.

This same logic is rearticulated in the 2021 policy, where demographic concentration is presented as a self-evident barrier to integration, claiming: "When non-Western immigrants are concentrated in certain residential areas [...] it hinders integration" (Regeringen 2021, 7). Such statements appear as objective truths, despite being ideologically loaded and racially coded. It renders integration "failure" as a demographic inevitability, rather than a structural challenge. Following Fairclough (1989; 1992), it becomes apparent that over the span of more than a decade, the figure of the "non-Western immigrant" has been intertextually constructed and sedimented into policy discourse as a taken-for-granted threat.

By tracing this intertextual chain, we demonstrate how meaning is embedded in a dense network of references that constitute the racialized lexicon of the "ghetto" policies. This lexicon operates as a powerful discursive formation that requires deconstruction to expose its force and function.

Expanding on this, we now turn to the spatial counterpart of this racializing logic: the intertextual construction of "ghettos" and "parallel societies", which manifest the same symbolic exclusions in geographic terms.

"Ghettos" and "Parallel Societies"

This section analyzes how spatialized racialization is discursively constructed through the intertextual use of the terms "ghetto" and "parallel society" in Danish policy discourse.

In the 2005 "Ghettoization Strategy", the government explicitly avoids the term "ghetto", acknowledging in a footnote the "stigmatization associated with the word" (Regeringen 2005, 8). Instead, it introduces the term "parallel societies", explaining it as a process of "ghettoization". This logic is illustrated in the following statement: "[...] parallel societies with completely different norms than those that apply in the rest of Danish society." (Regeringen 2005, 4). Here, the

racialized figure of the "non-Western immigrant" is recontextualized into spatial form, in which the "parallel society" becomes a metaphorical and physical zone of cultural deviance. These stigmatized areas are imagined as physical manifestations of cultural deviance, where undesirable, deviating norms are thriving.

This lexicon is intensified in the 2010 "Ghetto Plan", where "parallel societies" were constructed as a phenomenon "we should not accept" (Regeringen 2010, 5). Crucially, this policy marked a shift in rhetorical repertoire by reintroducing the stigmatized term "ghetto", despite the earlier recognition of its harmful effect. The term is no longer avoided, but prominently featured in the title *Ghetto Back to Society* (Regeringen 2010).

This shift mirrors the lexical shift from "immigrants" to "non-Western immigrants", indicating an increasing reliance on racialized policy language. In this framing, the "ghetto" is constructed as a space symbolically detached from Danish society, requiring correction or reintegration to preserve national cohesion. This logic is further reinforced in the 2018 policy's assertion that "They have been allowed to clump together in ghetto areas with no contact with the surrounding society." (Regeringen 2018, 5). Here, the use of the pronoun "they" delineates a clear boundary between the national "we" and those positioned outside of it. Residents of so-called "ghetto areas" are depicted as self-isolating outsiders who have claimed territories within the nation, thus justifying state-led corrective measures. "Ghettos", in this discourse, are rendered threats to "our modern society" because they are seen as lacking foundational values such as "democracy, equality, and tolerance" (Regeringen 2018, 5). This confirms van Dijk's (2008) argument that lexicons operate as rhetorical tools: constructing negative connotations around "counter-citizens" while simultaneously promoting positive associations with the "fellow citizen".

By 2021, the ambivalence surrounding the term "ghetto" resurfaces. The policy acknowledges that the term is "stigmatizing and stands in the way of a lasting transformation of the vulnerable residential areas" (Regeringen 2021, 15). It even proposes replacing it with a label that more directly identifies these areas as a "problem" and a "threat to social cohesion" (Regeringen 2021, 15). Despite this recognition, the policy continues to reproduce the term "ghetto" repeatedly throughout the document, thereby contributing to the very stigmatization it claims to resist. Ultimately, what may initially appear as neutral categories are, in reality, part of a forceful

and racialized lexicon when considered in the context of their intertextual usage. The analyzed lexical choices only surface when the aim is to construct ethnic minorities in a negative light. Consequently, the four recurring labels serve as symbolic markers of the intra-national "Other", encapsulating everything that the "fellow citizen" is positioned to reject.

This analysis reveals how a shared discursive logic underpins the intertextual chain surrounding the terms "immigrants", "non-Western immigrants", "ghettos", and "parallel societies". These terms function as racialized signifiers, consistently mobilized to define deviation from the national norm. To trace how these meanings circulate beyond policy texts and become embedded in broader political discourse, we now turn to Fairclough's (1992) second dimension of discursive practice. This is unpacked through two interdiscursive subthemes that illustrate how racialized lexicons are reproduced, normalized, and intensified in mainstream political speech.

Moral Contrasts

This subtheme examines how ethnic minorities, particularly those categorized as "non-Western immigrants", are constructed in political discourse as both symbols of deviation and tools for affirming the moral superiority of the national "we". Building on van Dijk's (2006) *mental models,* these representations are not transient; they are stored in long-term memory and shape how residents of stigmatized areas are evaluated across time. Through the intertextual use of the racialized lexicon found in the "ghetto" policies, "non-Western immigrants" become cognitively linked to suspicion and conditionality. This logic is not confined to policy texts; it circulates widely across political discourse, reinforcing its ideological power. Regardless of individual achievements, "non-Western immigrants" remain discursively positioned as people who must continuously disprove entrenched negative assumptions, what van Dijk calls "their bad things", thereby affirming "our good things".

Pia Olsen Dyhr (SF) reinforces this logic in her claim: "Integration is hard [...] And education and work are not the only parameters we should use to evaluate good integration. It is also about support for democracy, for freedom of speech, for equality, for the fact that in Denmark secularism is above religion" (Dyhr 2024, 50). Here, concepts such as secularism, gender equality, and freedom of expression are recontextualized as polarizing values. These values become discursive tools for constructing a narrative in which "non-Western immigrants" are presumed to lack. As

such, the burden of integration shifts from structural inclusion to ideological and affective alignment. These oppositions, “our freedoms” versus “their repression”, construct a moral order in which minorities are constantly required to prove their worth through alignment with hegemonic ideals.

This discursive extension of the racialized lexicon is repeated across party lines, exemplifying what Fairclough (1992) describes as *intertextual hegemony*: a mechanism through which ideological positions become depoliticized by appearing universally agreed upon. The supposed failure of “non-Western immigrants” to adopt these values can no longer be understood as the stance of a particular party; rather, it has become a naturalized assumption across the political spectrum. Such repetition across party boundaries reinforces a forceful ideological narrative, distributing political exclusion beneath an appearance of homogenized understanding, that “non-Western immigrants” simply do not possess these values. This logic is recontextualized by Frederik Vad Nielsen (S), stating “If you embrace this society [...] you should not face discrimination [...] but we do not want a culture of honor, collective freedom, or people [...] undermining Denmark from within” (Nielsen 2024, 5). This reproduces the racialized lexicon by associating ethnic minorities with negatively coded values, while implying that “this society” embodies positive ones. Here, inclusion is made explicitly conditional. The use of “but” reframes the promise of non-discrimination as dependent on ideological and cultural conformity. The vague invocation of threats “from within” allows suspicion to be cast broadly, justifying surveillance and exclusion without specifying wrongdoing. Drawing on van Dijk (2008), this illustrates a cognitive strategy of legitimation, where exclusion is framed as a rational response to perceived cultural deviance. The responsibility to prevent exclusion, in this framing, falls squarely on the minority subject.

This logic also mirrors Bhabha’s (1994) concept of mimicry, where the colonized subject is compelled to resemble the dominant culture, yet always remains “non-Western”. The racialized lexicon attached to the figure of the “non-Western immigrant” renders them perpetually incomplete, always evaluated, and never fully accepted. Even full institutional integration, such as employment, education, and citizenship, is insufficient without effective and ideological demonstration of gratitude and allegiance. Such logic is evident in Støjberg’s framing of gender equality, asserting that “You have also come to a country where there is complete gender equality” (Krarup & Støjberg 2018a, 2). This assertion frames gender equality as a civilizational benchmark,

casting Muslim cultures as patriarchal and incompatible. The framing suggests that cultural difference is not only unwelcome but morally regressive.

This gendered logic is extended when Kaare Dybvad Bek (S) states that for some "non-Western families, women staying home is a status symbol" (Bek in Bjørn et al. 2025, 16). Here, cultural difference is not only essentialized but pathologized, rendered regressive. Mette Frederiksen echoes this in critiques of non-Western women's domestic roles contending that "if we continue to accept that so many people, especially women, from non-Western backgrounds stay at home [...] The integration problems will continue" (Frederiksen 2019a, 24). Here, structural barriers to labor market participation (such as discrimination or lack of childcare) are erased in favor of a culturalist explanation. "Non-Western women" are simultaneously depicted as victims of oppressive traditions and as obstacles to societal cohesion. This dual positioning, both in need of rescue and responsible for failure, reflects a *gendered* form of Orientalism (Said 1978), in which women's bodies and behaviors serve as markers of civilizational difference. The political deployment of gender equality becomes a tool for drawing moral boundaries between "us" and "them". Gender equality is not depicted as a universal aspiration, but rather as a contrast between the "civilized" and the supposedly backward "non-Western women". These women are constructed as subject positions that demonstrate their incompatibility with "Western" gender norms, and are therefore viewed as culturally deviant. In this context, gender equality operates not as a shared social objective but as a disciplinary demand, a site where deviance is made visible and punished.

In essence, this subtheme demonstrates how racialized and gendered "Others" are discursively constructed through moral contrasts. "Their bad things" are used to validate "our good things", creating a logic of conditional inclusion that demands ideological conformity and moral performance while leaving structural inequalities untouched. However, this ideological filtering is circulated further than the level of individual subjectivity. The racialized lexicon also operates spatially, mapping perceived cultural deviance onto specific physical areas, which will be unpacked in the following subtheme.

Territorializing Otherness

This subtheme explores how the racialized lexicon surrounding "parallel societies" and "ghettos" is recontextualized and circulated across mainstream political discourse. It illustrates how specific

spaces become symbolic markers of cultural deviance, enabling political actors to territorialize ethnic minorities. By connecting geographic areas to imagined cultural incompatibility, these terms create spatial boundaries that distinguish the national "we" from the imagined "Other".

This logic extends beyond national political discourse and is actively reproduced at the local level, where the racialized lexicon of "parallel societies" is mobilized to construct ethnic minorities as threats to social cohesion. Bridging Anderson (1991) and Wacquant (2008), we see how what is imagined at the macro level through official nationalism is operationalized locally with concrete implications for racialized communities. The Conservative's municipal program *An Aarhus without parallel societies* (2021) exemplifies how racialized governance is both localized and intensified. The program explicitly demands that "non-Western" residents conform to the locals' "expectations of each other" (Konservative i Aarhus 2021, 1). Here, the racialized lexicon surrounding "non-Western immigrants" is so entrenched that their presence is constructed as inherently incompatible with the local community. The stated aim of eliminating "parallel societies" in Aarhus reflects a spatialized desire for ethnocultural purification.

In this context, "parallel societies" operate as racialized categories, rearticulated through the cognitive framing laid out in earlier "ghetto" policies. Consequently, stigmatized communities become the physical manifestations of cultural deviance, sites where non-belonging is made spatially visible and politically actionable. This becomes particularly apparent in the claim that: "It is not a balanced society that has large ghetto areas or parallel societies where a negative social heritage is reinforced and large groups are marginalized or reinforce their own marginalization" (Konservative i Aarhus 2021, 1). Here, the phrase "balanced society" functions as a euphemism for cultural homogeneity, while the assertion that communities "reinforce their own marginalization" reflects a logic of cultural essentialism. Marginalization is reframed not as the result of structural inequality but as a self-inflicted failure. This aligns with patterns of presupposition and cultural deficit framing, where exclusion is presented as a rational response to perceived deviance (van Dijk 2008). Through repeated references to "ghettos" and "parallel societies", local political discourse constructs mental representations in which ethnic minorities are made responsible for their own marginalization. Spatial classification thus becomes not just a tool of urban planning, but a technology of moral cartography: a way of organizing space along ideological lines, dividing the city into areas of normality and deviance. These geographic

categories serve both administrative and symbolic functions, embedding exclusion into the physical and moral architecture of the welfare state.

The ideological function of this territorial stigmatization is, as Wacquant (2015) describes through the concept of *spatial governmentality*, to maintain the visual and material boundaries of national identity by confining the "Other" within tightly regulated and symbolically charged zones. This form of governance operates not only through physical interventions but also through the moral mapping of space, where neighborhoods are discursively produced as either part of or apart from the imagined national community. A 2018 joint handout from the Social Democrats and the Green Left offers a clear example of this logic: "We will not accept parallel societies and ghettos where democratic values and Danish culture do not apply" (Socialdemokraterne and Socialistisk Folkeparti 2018, 1) The rejection of such spaces is not linked to specific metrics or behaviors, but to an imagined absence of national values. These areas are thus constructed as zones of exception, where democracy, citizenship, and cultural coherence are presumed to break down. In doing so, stigmatized neighborhoods become spatial filters that sort, monitor, and symbolically exclude. The invocation of "democratic values" and "Danish culture" serves to legitimize this boundary-making, naturalizing the containment of racialized populations as a matter of civic necessity. Following Wacquant (2008) concept of *advanced marginality*, "ghettos" function as sites of socio-spatial isolation, where the racialized populations are not only governed and contained, but symbolically positioned as permanently external to the imagined national community. Their presence is treated as a disruption to the moral order of the nation, and their neighborhoods are marked as zones of deviance requiring discipline. This spatial logic aligns with Orientalist tropes, which position "the non-Western" as inherently incompatible with the cultural and moral fabric of the nation (Said 1978).

In this context, the "ghetto" becomes both the alleged evidence of "failed" integration and the rationale for ever more intrusive assimilationist measures. Territorial stigmatization, deployed through political discourse, serves as a key mechanism for drawing the symbolic and material boundaries of national belonging. By designating certain neighborhoods as "problematic", the state discursively and materially maps the borders of inclusion and exclusion along the lines of race, class, and cultural difference.

Coding phase	Open-coding	Closed-coding
Findings/interpretations	What was repeated, recurrent, and forceful in the policies? ➢ Immigrants, non-Western immigrants, ghettos, parallel societies	What ideologies, positions of power, or social hierarchies are recurrent, repeated, and forceful in the policies? ➢ Ideological Schemata ➢ Intertextual hegemony

Table 10: Process of Open to Closed Coding Applied to this Theme

Crucially, this racialized lexicon does not remain at the level of symbolic control, it is materialized through policy instruments such as the "ghetto list", where bureaucratic categorization becomes the basis for punitive spatial interventions. Here, differences are mapped onto neighborhoods, schools, and housing blocks. Following Wacquant's (2015) concept of *urban relegation*, territorial stigmatization legitimizes the material restructuring of urban space, where demolition, displacement, and intensified surveillance are justified by the claim that these areas harbor deviance. Residents become suspect not through individual actions, but by mere association with marked spaces. These interventions are often cloaked in bureaucratic euphemisms, quantitative indicators, and administrative rationality, which depoliticize and normalize coercive governance. These discursive practices reflect Bonilla-Silva's (2021) notion of "racism without racists", in which racialized exclusion is sustained not through overt hostility but through abstract categories, coded language, and administrative rationality. In this framework, racial governance is neither acknowledged nor contested; as such, it is made to appear as "common-sense" management of social order.

In sum, this subtheme demonstrates how racialized terms like "ghettos" and "parallel societies" function as ideological tools that link ethnicity, culture, and space. Circulating across political discourse, they act as spatial filters that define belonging through presumed cultural compatibility. This logic turns symbolic boundaries into material exclusion, as seen in policies like the "ghetto list", which normalize racialized control through bureaucratic means. Ultimately, territorial stigmatization becomes a key mechanism for preserving national identity and legitimizing structural inequality.

Imagining Boundaries Through Metaphors

Building on our analysis revealing the forceful role of binaries, modality, and racialized lexicon, we now trace how territorial metaphors function as powerful rhetorical devices that reinforce exclusionary imaginaries of national belonging. This theme investigates how boundaries are discursively constructed through metaphorical language in the "ghetto" policies and expands on this, examining their broader political circulation.

Constructing Territorial Metaphors

At the level of textual analysis, this section examines how the "ghetto" policies deploy figurative language, specifically territorial metaphors, to construct symbolic boundaries of national belonging. These metaphors are recurring textual features that frame social and cultural issues through spatial concepts such as territory, rupture, containment, and cohesion.

We define *territorial metaphors* as figurative expressions that link physical space to moral, cultural, or national integrity. In the "ghetto" policies, they function to symbolically transform stigmatized areas into markers of deviance, disorder, or threat. Consequently, the geographic space becomes a proxy for cultural incompatibility and racialized exclusion. One of the most striking examples of territorial metaphors appears in the 2018 "Ghetto Package", which asserts: "Holes have been punched in the map of Denmark" (Regeringen 2018, 5). In this formulation, stigmatized neighborhoods are not simply portrayed as problematic; they are portrayed as absences, voids in the symbolic integrity of the nation. This metaphor does not just locate deviance, it constructs these areas as ruptures in the spatial and moral fabric of Denmark itself.

Such imagery leverages Fairclough's (1989) notion of *expressive textual values*, where metaphors convey political attitudes and reinforce normative judgments. Through metaphorical language, the policy expresses moral judgment: the "holes" are not just physical but ideological, signifying a failure of cultural cohesion. As such, territorial metaphors function as affective lexical choices that shape the argumentative structure and reinforce exclusionary logics.

This logic is echoed in earlier texts. The 2005 "Ghettoization Strategy" warns that: "these areas contain the seeds of both poverty traps and the development of parallel societies" (Regeringen

2005, 4). The metaphor of "seeds" implies that danger is latent and self-generating, planted within these neighborhoods and destined to grow unless uprooted. It frames stigmatized communities not as the outcome of structural inequalities, but as inherently predisposed to deviance and decline. Importantly, the metaphor displaces responsibility from political and economic structures onto the communities themselves, depicting them as the source of future social problems. This pathologizing imagery aligns with Orientalist logics, where cultural "Others" are portrayed as harboring internal, hidden threats to societal cohesion (Said 1978).

This path continues in the 2010 "Ghetto Plan", which asserts: "The binding agent has been and still is our values" (Regeringen 2010, 5). Here, the nation is metaphorically imagined as a coherent whole, held together by shared values. Areas perceived as lacking this adhesive are constructed as incompatible with the imagined national community. The metaphor of "binding agents" establishes a dichotomy between "us" (value-aligned citizens) and "them" (value-deficient outsiders), turning geographic space into a proxy for national belonging.

Such figurative language intensifies in the 2018 policy, which states: "The strong population growth of citizens of non-Western origin has given breeding grounds for parallel societies" (Regeringen 2018, 7). The metaphor "breeding grounds" naturalizes deviance as something that grows organically within racialized communities. This reflects Said's (1978) Orientalism, which constructs the cultural "Other" as inherently threatening and self-replicating. Here, the use of metaphor transforms structural inequality into a seemingly biological inevitability, as if stigmatized areas naturally produce cultural failure.

Finally, the 2021 "Parallel Society Agreement" reinforces this logic through figurative language that depicts stigmatized areas as underdeveloped: "vulnerable residential areas still have a long way to go before they are attractive to a wide range of people" (Regeringen 2021, 9). Such language imagines these areas as backward or incomplete, distant from the national ideal. They must metaphorically "improve" to achieve normative attractiveness and reintegration. This constructs "vulnerable housing areas" as spaces so far removed from the national core that they have a "long way" to go before becoming "attractive" to the "fellow citizen".

In essence, this analysis reveals an intensification of metaphorical language from 2005 to 2021, reflecting how territorial metaphors evolve intertextually to reinforce an increasingly exclusionary

logic. In 2005, stigmatized areas were described as “seeds” of poverty and deviance, suggesting latent danger. By 2010, the metaphor shifted to the “binding agent” of national values, implying that those outside dominant norms threaten social cohesion. In 2018, areas became “breeding grounds” for parallel societies; an organic metaphor that naturalizes the reproduction of deviance within racialized communities. Finally, in 2021, such neighborhoods are framed as so distant from the national core that they must travel a “long way” to become attractive to the “fellow citizen”.

This metaphorical trajectory is not isolated, it constitutes an intertextual chain that accumulates semantic weight over time. As each policy document draws on and recontextualizes the metaphors of its predecessors, it amplifies a shared discursive logic: stigmatized areas are not merely underdeveloped but fundamentally out of place. This discursive progression transforms metaphor into ideology, where metaphors no longer just describe deviance; they substantiate it. In sum, territorial metaphors are employed to position ethnic minorities not simply as outside societal norms, but as external to the imagined national geography. They align with the broader “ghetto” discourse, in which ethnic minority communities are framed as foreign enclaves within the nation, cultural and moral borderlands in need of correction. Belonging becomes a matter of spatial and symbolic alignment with dominant norms, reinforcing the notion that some groups are inherently “out of place”.

This ideological framing does not remain confined to policy language. It is actively reproduced and circulated within broader political discourse, where these metaphors are rearticulated by political actors to legitimate exclusionary narratives and interventions. In the following section, we turn to the second dimension of analysis: discourse practice, to trace how territorial metaphors are recontextualized beyond policy texts and circulated through broader political discourse. In doing so, we illustrate how these metaphors gain ideological traction, shaping collective understandings of space, deviance, and national belonging.

The Metaphorical Construction of the “Intra-Other”

Building on the conceptualization of territorial metaphors, where stigmatized neighborhoods are discursively cast as ruptures in the national map, this subtheme shifts to the level of discourse practice to examine how political actors recontextualize and circulate metaphors to construct ethnic minorities as what we term the *intra-Other*: individuals who reside within the territorial

bounds of the nation but are symbolically positioned as external to it. While territorial metaphors spatialize exclusion at the level of neighborhoods and urban zones, the metaphorical construction of the intra-Other targets the people within those spaces, rendering them incompatible with the imagined moral, cultural, and civic core of Danish society.

Through metaphorical language that frames racialized populations as culturally deviant or morally deficient, ethnic minorities are constructed simultaneously inside the nation geographically and outside it symbolically. These figurative constructions circulate most prominently in conservative political discourse, where they function as rhetorical strategies for asserting normative Danish identity through the strategic identification and containment of internal Others. In this sense, the shift from territorial metaphors to the metaphorical intra-Other represents a discursive narrowing, from neighborhoods as foreign zones to individuals as incompatible bodies.

A notable example comes from then Minister for Children and Social Affairs, Mai Mercado (KF), who stated: *"*We must dare to set the course for the direction in which we want to move our society*"* (Mercado 2018b). The metaphor, "set the course", euphemizes social engineering by presenting experimental governance as visionary leadership. It masks the absence of empirical grounding by framing the intervention into racialized communities as a bold, forward-looking act. In doing so, such language redefines citizens in stigmatized areas not as holders of rights, but as subjects of ideological testing. This becomes the culmination of intertextual reinforcement of the racialized lexicon and moral vocabulary that converge to produce a discursive regime in which exception becomes expectation.

The metaphorical construction of the intra-Other is reinforced by biologized and pathologized representations of cultural difference. Inger Støjberg's (V) invocation of "mental parallel societies" (Brodersen & Støjberg 2017, 4) exemplifies this logic, suggesting not merely behavioral difference but deep-seated, pathological incompatibility. Here, cultural deviance is metaphorically transformed into a mental condition, legitimizing spatial and moral control. These metaphors reinforce the image of stigmatized communities as sealed epistemological spaces that are irrational, insular, and outside normative cultural frameworks. Anchored in Said (1978) and Wacquant (2008), stigmatized areas become intra-othered spaces, internal others that enable the Danish state to assert moral and civilizational superiority. The invocation of "parallel societies"

becomes a euphemistic proxy for race, but the discursive target is its people, not just the space. This encapsulates a recurrent tendency in the political discourse, where the portrayal of certain communities within Denmark as so culturally distant that they are imagined as mentally foreign. The discursive strategy thus centers on circulating the idea that "they are not like us", a pattern that recurs throughout our analysis in different articulations.

Søren Pape Poulsen (KF) further extends this metaphorical logic in a statement that exemplifies both gendered and racialized exclusion: *"*When half of non-Western immigrant women are not working [...] Then it is not a safety net. Then we are talking about a hammock" (Poulsen 2020, 17). The metaphor of the "hammock" trivializes economic hardship and recasts the welfare state as something being exploited rather than accessed. This further reflects a *gendered form of orientalism*, in which the bodies of "non-Western immigrant women" are positioned as subjects of unacceptable exploitation by the Danish welfare state. Consequently, ethnic minority women are not only portrayed as economically inactive but also culturally regressive, used as symbolic figures to represent community-wide failure. As argued by Bonilla-Silva (2021), this reflects a logic of "new racism", where exclusion is justified through culturally coded narratives of shortcomings, rather than through cultural difference and institutional barriers.

Former Danish People's Party leader Kristian Thulesen Dahl intensifies the metaphorical and spatial othering in the statement: "We want ghettos cleared of an immigrant environment that has made areas of our country look more like areas in the Middle East" (Dahl 2019, 14). Here, territorial metaphors are mobilized to construct stigmatized communities as symbolic extensions of the "East", positioning them as culturally and spatially foreign within the Danish nation-state. By evoking the image of domestic neighborhoods transformed into a threatening, external geography, Dahl frames their removal as a necessary act of national self-defense.

This rhetoric exemplifies how figurative language contributes to the construction of the intra-Other. Through spatial and cultural association, ethnic minority communities, while territorially inside the nation, are metaphorically expelled from it, rendered as incompatible with the presumed moral and civilizational order of the West. Dahl's framing draws on Orientalist binaries equating national decline with cultural proximity to the Middle East, reasserting Denmark's imagined Western superiority through the exclusion of internal "Others" (Said 1978).

Coding phase	Open-coding	Closed-coding
Findings/interpretations	What was repeated, recurrent, and forceful in the policies? ➢ Metaphors	What ideologies, positions of power, or social hierarchies are recurrent, repeated, and forceful in the policies? ➢ Intra-Other ➢ Spatially governmentality

Table 11: Process of Open to Closed Coding Applied to this Theme

Ultimately, this analysis affirms Wacquant's (2008) argument that stigmatization is not an organic social outcome, but a strategically produced and politically circulated process. In the Danish case, metaphors serve as key rhetorical devices through which racialized communities are discursively repositioned as no longer part of the nation. This further reflects Wacquant's (2015) term *spatial governmentality,* where governance operates by managing places rather than individuals. Within this logic, both policy documents and political actors deploy territorial metaphors to cast certain neighborhoods as inherently "problematic", to the extent that they are treated as separate "holes", excluded from the national map.

By tracing the recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness of discursive patterns across our four interrelated themes, we have illustrated how racialized governance is linguistically constructed and ideologically sustained. It reveals how binaries, modality, lexical choices, and metaphors as discursive strategies function as powerful tools for producing and legitimizing exclusion. Through recurring references to "democracy", "equality", "freedom", and "civic responsibility", "Danish values" are not merely described but prescribed. This reflects a process of textual moralization, in which belonging is defined through implicit moral judgements about behavior, culture, and lifestyle. Such moralizing discourse constructs dominant cultural norms as universal and desirable, while simultaneously positioning deviation as deficiency or threat. In doing so, these policies and their associated political discourse become mechanisms through which exclusion is further legitimized and national identity is narrowly defined.

To conclude this analysis, we now turn to the third dimension, social practice, to examine how these discourses function not only at the textual and interdiscursive level, but as hegemonic ideological practices, that is, as practices that reproduce structural power and normalize racialized governance within Danish society.

Racialized Spatial Governance as Ideological Rule

At its core, the "ghetto" policy regime is not only a matter of governance but a manifestation of ideological rule. Throughout our analysis, we have examined how language, metaphor, and discursive repetition construct racialized "Others" and spatialize exclusion. In this final section of our analysis, we shift focus to the level of social practice to examine how these discourses are embedded within and reproduce broader structures of power, ideology, and hegemony in Danish society.

Building on our analytical findings, we contend that the "ghetto" policies function as discursive instruments of racialized governance, operating under the guise of neutrality, integration, and civic responsibility. These policies are not isolated technical interventions but part of a wider hegemonic formation that sustains structural inequality through the normalization of exclusionary logic.

Drawing on Fairclough's (1992) concept of *ideological hegemony*, we show how racialized logics are institutionalized through state policy and public discourse, making exclusion appear not only justified but commonsensical. Yet hegemony is never absolute. As Fairclough (1989) reminds us, it is always marked by friction and contestation. We therefore conclude by identifying points of discursive resistance that challenge the dominant frameworks and expose the ideological framework behind the policies. These moments of hegemonic struggle are crucial to understanding how social practices are not only shaped by discourse but can also be reshaped through it.

Discursive Reproduction of Hegemony

In line with Fairclough's (1992) third dimension of discourse, this section situates our interpretations within broader ideological, institutional, and political structures, unpacking how language is embedded in and contributes to power relations. Fairclough's (1992) use of Gramsci's concept of *hegemony* clarifies how dominant ideologies are not imposed by force, but sustained through repeated representations, institutionalized policies, and intertextual reinforcement. Thus, the "ghetto" policies, mobilized through discursive strategies such as *binary oppositions, expectational language, racialized lexicon,* and *figurative euphemization*, become part of a larger mechanism that defines who may claim full membership in the national community, and under what conditions.

As demonstrated, the discursive strategies identified in policy and legal texts do not remain confined to the bureaucratic realm of policy. Rather, these linguistic and ideological frameworks are taken up, recontextualized, and emotionally amplified by political actors across the spectrum. Through processes of interdiscursivity and intertextuality, political discourse appropriates the authority of institutional policy language while mobilizing it into moralizing narratives, affective appeals, and symbolic binaries designed to resonate with public sentiment and reproduce dominant ideological positions. This recontextualization is not incidental. It is part of a broader interdiscursive chain that connects institutional discourse with the performative realm of political rhetoric. The patterns observed in policy texts are persistently circulated and intensified in political speeches, party platforms, and parliamentary debates.

The Four Pillars of Racialized Discourse

Through our four analytical themes, we traced elements of the "ghetto" policies that are not merely reproduced but intensified in political discourse. These discursive formations work to uphold and legitimize the policies by masking their structural origins. Rather than addressing systemic inequality, responsibility is shifted onto the racialized subject, constructed as a "counter-citizen" in contrast to the majority "fellow citizen". This aligns with Bonilla-Silva's (2021) concept of systemic racism, in which social stratification is maintained not through overt exclusion but through normalized standards of civic virtue that are unevenly applied. In this logic, racialized minorities are required to demonstrate constant ideological compliance and emotional allegiance, even when meeting formal legal and economic criteria. Their position remains conditional, governed by hegemonic discourses that define who belongs and who remains perpetually on trial.

The following sections unpack four dominant discursive formations that sustain this logic of conditional belonging: (1) *national belonging*, (2) *"failed" integration*, (3) *cultural essentialism,* and (4) *bureaucratic euphemization.* Together, these hegemonic discourses obscure the workings of systemic racism by presenting exclusion as a matter of individual failure or cultural incompatibility. Neutral-sounding values like "integration" or "Danishness" become vehicles for legitimizing racialized governance, where spatial exclusion, surveillance, and punitive interventions are framed as necessary responses to the presence of the "dangerous Other".

National Belonging and the Boundaries of "Danishness"

At the level of social practice, the discourse of national belonging, particularly as articulated in the 2018 "Ghetto Package" and surrounding political rhetoric, reveals itself as a key ideological mechanism for sustaining racialized structures of power. This section situates the discursive patterns identified in preceding analyses within the broader social and institutional logics that normalize them. Drawing on Fairclough's (1992) notion that discourse both reflects and constitutes social reality, we maintain that the policies and political construction of "ghettos" are part of a hegemonic project: one that legitimizes exclusion by naturalizing a narrow, ethnocultural understanding of the nation.

The discourse of national belonging in Denmark is not merely descriptive, it is deeply ideological. It operates within a hegemonic framework that equates social cohesion and democratic stability with cultural homogeneity, historical continuity, and a Eurocentric, Christian heritage. Within this imaginary, the figure of the "parallel society" becomes the symbolic antithesis of the Danish "we", justifying disciplinary governance and spatial control. As Fairclough (1992) notes, hegemonic discourse functions by embedding itself in what appears as "common sense". Repetition across intertextual and interdiscursive networks naturalizes these framings, making exclusion seem both necessary and self-evident.

For instance, the frequent portrayal of ethnic minority communities as "a major burden on social cohesion" (Regeringen 2018, 5), is not a neutral observation, but a racializing move that reassigns the source of inequality from structural factors to cultural deviation. This aligns with Bonilla-Silva's (2021) framework of systemic racism, in which social arrangements that privilege majority groups and disadvantage racialized minorities, even in the absence of overt racist intent. In this sense, the discourse constitutes a racial regime wherein the maintenance of whiteness as the unmarked norm is secured through state policies framed as neutral strategies "to get integration going" (Poulsen 2020, 18). Its ideological weight is obscured through repetition and institutional reproduction. As Fairclough (1992) notes, repetition breeds normalization; what is repeatedly stated becomes unstated, its premises buried within what appears self-evident. In this way, civilizational binaries and moralized tropes of "non-Western" deviance operate as silent platforms for policy agendas, shaping public perception and constraining the political imagination of

“Islamic culture and way of life” as “incompatible with the Danish” (Vermund in Kjærsgaard et al. 2021, 105).

National identity in this framework is constructed as both bounded and fragile, dependent on constant ideological and material policing of its borders. As Anderson (1991) argues, the nation is an imagined political community, and its boundaries must be regularly reaffirmed through institutional practices. This is evident in the spatial mapping of the nation through territorial stigmatization. Stigmatized areas become not only sites of material exclusion but as symbolic ruptures, where “completely different norms” (Regeringen 2005, 4) are said to prevail. Such framings render these areas incompatible with the nation’s imagined moral geography.

Policies targeting stigmatized areas are not merely regulatory; they are performative acts of nation-making, wherein the othering of the racialized resident legitimizes the racial contract underpinning Danish nationhood. The symbolic and spatial boundaries of “Danishness” are thus co-constituted. Through Said’s (1978) insights, we see how the figure of the “Muslim” or “non-Western immigrant” functions as the internal “Other”, an embodiment of the “conflict between Danish and Middle Eastern culture” (Poulsen 2018, 13). These figures are rendered incompatible with imagined Danish values, even as they may engage in mimicry and hybridity in efforts to gain inclusion. Yet, as Bhabha (1994) reminds us, such mimicry is always a condition that traps racialized subjects in a liminal space of conditional belonging. Integration, then, becomes not a pathway to citizenship but a test of cultural conformity, where failure is presumed and success is never fully granted.

In sum, the hegemonic discourse of national belonging functions through both symbolic and spatial boundaries. It draws on Orientalist tropes to define “Danishness” not through inclusion but exclusion, reinforcing systemic inequality under the guise of cultural preservation. By embedding these logics in everyday policy language and political speech, the discourse obscures its racial foundations while preserving whiteness, Christianity, and normative cultural behavior as the implicit criteria for full belonging. Understanding this ideological infrastructure is essential for grasping how exclusionary policies are not deviations from liberal democracy, but expressions of its racialized underpinnings.

"Failed" Integration and Affective Surveillance

The discourse of "failed" integration operates as a central ideological mechanism in the broader racialized governance of ethnic minorities in Denmark. Emerging from the hegemonic discourse of national belonging, this discourse frames integration not as mutual inclusion but as a disciplinary project that continually tests, evaluates, and regulates the racialized "Other". Rather than reflecting an objective policy failure, "failed" integration is a discursively produced construct, legitimized through narratives of cultural threat, moral deficiency, and the imperative to preserve "Danishness", as encapsulated in the mantra that "Denmark must remain Denmark" (Regeringen 2018, 6). This construction rests on the presumption that the racialized subject is always ideologically incomplete: they must not only act correctly but feel correctly, speak correctly, and internalize "Danish values" in ways that are affectively clear. As a result, conformity becomes a moving target, what Bhabha (1994) calls the paradox of mimicry, where the subject must resemble the norm but never fully become it. As a result, inclusion is perpetually deferred. Even full legal, economic, or behavioral compliance does not secure belonging, because the markers of "successful" integration are constantly redefined.

Discursively, this logic transforms citizenship from a legal status into a conditional privilege. As Said (1978) and Bhabha (1994) both show, racialized subjects are never simply excluded; they are included on terms that maintain their marginality: The good "fellow citizen" must perform gratitude, obedience, and cultural loyalty. Deviations, be they dissent, critique, or cultural pride, are read not as expressions of autonomy but as signs of ingratitude or latent deviance. As seen in Mette Frederiksen's 2019 remark questioning why Danish-born Muslims are "not grateful to live in the best country in the world" (Frederiksen in Bjørn et al. 2025, 4), this exemplifies emotional surveillance. Here, failure to perform the correct affect is interpreted as civic failure, justifying further exclusion. This discursive logic expands the scope of control from external behaviors to internal emotions. Political discourse no longer merely demands economic contribution or legal compliance; it demands internalization of dominant norms and emotional alignment with the majority. Integration is thus transformed into a totalizing demand for ideological and affective conformity. Parenting, religion, and everyday cultural expression become subject to scrutiny, as deviations from normative "Danishness" are interpreted as evidence of "failure" and civilizational non-belonging.

Such expectations are enforced through repeated discursive framings across domains, converging on a moralized model of integration where culture explains inequality, welfare demands gratitude, and non-conformity justifies coercion. As Fairclough (1992) emphasizes, repetition leads to discursive sedimentation, where ideological positions become "common sense". In this context, the discourse of "failed" integration becomes institutionalized as a taken-for-granted explanation for social inequality, erasing the structural and historical dimensions of marginalization.

Ultimately, this hegemonic discourse secures the legitimacy of the Danish state by externalizing the causes of inequality. Structural exclusion is reframed as the result of cultural incompatibility. The figure of the "non-Western immigrant" becomes central, not to a pluralistic democracy, but to a regime of racialized governance where inclusion is never complete, and exclusion is presented as responsible statecraft.

Cultural Essentialism as a Tool of Blame and Discipline

At the core of the "ghetto" policies and surrounding discourse lies a deeply entrenched ideology of cultural essentialism, in which the belief that cultural traits are fixed, homogeneous, and determinative of social behavior. Within this logic, racialized minorities are constructed not as complex social actors shaped by structural conditions, but as bearers of inherently incompatible values. Culture is not treated as dynamic or relational, but as static and pathological, serving as the go-to explanation for social disparities. In Danish political discourse, this assumption is rarely questioned; instead, it is embedded in presuppositions that travel across policy fields, party lines, and institutional texts.

This essentialist reasoning allows structural barriers to be redefined as cultural failings. When Mette Frederiksen claims that too many "non-Western women are unemployed" (Frederiksen 2019a, 24), the issue is not interrogated in relation to systemic exclusion. Rather, it is read as evidence of cultural resistance to gender equality and labor market participation. The suggestion that cultural norms prevent women from working implies that the responsibility lies with them, not with labor market discrimination, not with inadequate public childcare, and not with gendered economic structures. In this way, culture becomes both the problem and the solution; an object to be disciplined, corrected, and surveilled. This rhetorical displacement of structural inequality onto cultural difference operates as what Bonilla-Silva (2021) terms new racism, where a mode of

governance sustains racial hierarchies through seemingly neutral or moralized discourse. Cultural essentialism becomes a shortcut to blame, locating the burden of transformation solely on the racialized subject, who are perceived as "reinforcing their own marginalization" (Konservative i Aarhus 2021, 1).

This logic saturates political speech, particularly when ethnic minority communities are framed not as socio-economically vulnerable but as creating deviant moral territories where Danish norms are presumed to have collapsed. As such, the demand for cultural conformity extends to space. This discourse extends spatially through what Wacquant (2015) terms *urban relegation*, where state interventions enact racialized spatial control by displacing marginalized groups under the guise of cultural and social cohesion, thereby embedding governance through urban exclusion. The "ghetto list", and associated tools of urban policy, do not merely target poor areas, they construct entire neighborhoods as morally contaminated spaces requiring disciplinary governance. These spaces are not just poor; they are framed as culturally regressive, dangerous, and fundamentally un-Danish. As a result, the inhabitants of these areas become collectively suspect, not based on individual behavior, but through their spatial and cultural association.

Bureaucratic Euphemization and the Rhetoric of Neutrality

This ideology of cultural essentialism is reinforced and rationalized through bureaucratic euphemisms and quantification. Technical terms like "targeted intervention", "activation requirements", or "enhanced self-reliance efforts", and "mandatory daycare" obscure the coercive and exclusionary nature of policies that restrict welfare access, enforce behavioral compliance, and disproportionately target racialized populations (Regeringen 2005, 2010; 2018). Cloaked in the rhetoric of pragmatism and evidence-based governance, punitive welfare measures, residential displacement, and exceptional legal regimes are reframed as neutral, data-driven solutions. These policies operate within a statistical framework that produce categories such as "non-Western background", "integration benefit recipients", and "parallel societies". These are not merely bureaucratic descriptors but racialized proxies that legitimize intensified state surveillance and control.

Quantitative indicators such as employment rates, educational attainment, or benefit dependency, are mobilized not to diagnose inequality but to justify a logic of moral governance (Regeringen

2018, 11). These indicators are shaped by institutional racism and historical exclusion, yet once quantified, they are wielded as objective evidence to support narratives of failed integration and to legitimize stricter policies. Political actors draw on them to support claims that "integration is failing" and that stricter policies are needed, or that certain groups are overrepresented among those who do not contribute. Mette Frederiksen's repeated assertion that "you must contribute before you can receive" (Frederiksen in Kjærsgaard et al. 2021, 130) encapsulates this logic. It implies welfare benefits not as a social right, but as a conditional reward for proper conduct, encoding a policy ethos where social safety nets become contingent upon ideological and cultural conformity. This reflects Fairclough's (1992) argument that bureaucratic language is never neutral. It constructs a discursive reality in which cultural essentialism is rendered as rational analysis, and structural inequality is recoded as individual or group failure. Welfare statistics are mobilized not to highlight inequality but to justify activation programs, residency restrictions, or neighborhood renewal plans. These are not benign tools of administration, but discursive technologies of governance that obscure systemic racism under the veil of impartial expertise.

Policies like the 2018 "Ghetto Package" do not represent a break from past approaches, but rather a continuation and intensification of existing policy frameworks, as demonstrated throughout our analysis. This continuity takes place within what Fairclough (1989) terms *orders of discourse*, which is organized patterns of language use that are both shaped by and help to shape institutional practices. Political actors engage with these discursive structures by drawing on established rhetorical conventions, thereby reinforcing dominant ideologies while adapting them to evolving political conditions. In doing so, they participate in a process of *discursive sedimentation*, where meanings become stabilized over time. Through repeated use across different contexts and over time, ideological concepts become internalized as bureaucratic "common sense". Phrases like "balanced resident composition", "non-Western", and "parallel society" do not merely describe social realities, they function as powerful rhetorical tools that enable racialized forms of governance without naming race explicitly. Once embedded in institutional discourse, such terms allow the state to regulate racial difference under the guise of objectivity and administrative neutrality, effectively translating ideology into policy.

Legal exceptionalism further entrenches this order. Laws targeting neighborhoods with high concentrations of residents from "non-Western backgrounds" effectively suspend principles of

legal equality, subjecting these areas to experimental forms of governance. This reflects Wacquant's (2008) insights, wherein racialized spaces are framed as morally deviant zones requiring intensive state management. Here legal customs are selectively applied and the rule of law becomes contingent on geography and demography. The "ghetto list" exemplifies this logic: designated areas face exceptional legal measures, including heightened penalties, forced evictions, and housing regulations mandating demolition or displacement, justified not as punitive, but as necessary for restoring "social balance" and ensuring integration. This apparatus operates through a pervasive moral economy in which racialized subjects are not simply marked as different, but as morally deficient. Echoing Said (1978) these subjects are cast as threats to societal cohesion and as objects in need of reform. Integration thus becomes a continuous test of loyalty and worthiness, and less a pathway to belonging than a mechanism of exclusion.

Ultimately, racialized governance in Denmark is not an aberration but a contemporary institutional logic. It fuses legal authority, administrative power, and moral aspiration to render exclusion legitimate. Through spatial regulation, intertextual policy coherence, and the bureaucratic language of neutrality, the state sustains a racial regime that redefines citizenship as conditional, belonging as provisional, and integration as perpetual evaluation. What emerges is not simply a flawed policy framework but a reordered social reality in which race is governed through its denial. Democracy becomes a conditional promise; inequality is naturalized; and the racialized subject is no longer becoming a "fellow citizen", but remains a figure of suspicion, a policy object, and the constitutive "Other" against which the nation continuously defines itself.

In sum, this analysis has demonstrated how the "Ghetto Package" (2018) operates as an intertextual extension of earlier policies, embedding longstanding ideas that are both shaped by and help to sustain broader political discourse. These ideas circulate through four central hegemonic formations: *national belonging*, *failed integration*, *cultural essentialism*, and *bureaucratic euphemization* each of which serves to legitimize and normalize racialized governance. Drawing on Fairclough's concept of ideological hegemony, we have shown how repeated discursive patterns solidify into "common sense", rendering racialized logics seemingly neutral, natural, and inevitable.

Yet, as Fairclough (1989) emphasizes, hegemony is never total. Dominant discourses not only sustain power, they also generate the conditions for discursive struggle, where meaning is contested, challenged, and potentially redefined. It is within this space of contestation that counter-discourses emerge. Such counter-discourses expose the political choices masked by bureaucratic language. They reframe integration as a process of mutual transformation, welfare as a right rather than a privilege, and inequality as the product of political structures. These critical voices illuminate the ideological and racialized architecture of Danish "ghetto" policy and remind us that discourse is a site of struggle over the very meanings of justice, equality, and democracy.

In the following section, we turn to the voices that resist the moralized construction of welfare and integration – voices that confront the ideological underpinnings of racialized governance in Denmark.

Discursive Resistance to Hegemony

Even in the shadow of dominant political narratives, resistance speaks, and it speaks with force. Against the grain of hegemonic discourse that normalizes racialized governance under the guise of neutrality, a growing chorus of political actors, activists, and scholars challenges the moral and legal legitimacy of Denmark's "ghetto" policies. These counter-discourses do not merely oppose dominant framings; they recode the debate, shifting the terrain from cultural compliance and behavioral failure to rights, dignity, and structural injustice.

Lexical strategies shift the semantic center from behavioral diagnoses to critiques of systemic injustice, often employing terms such as "structural discrimination", "institutional racism", and "equal protection under the law". This shift in narrative operates ideologically by displacing individual blame and introducing a transformed social paradigm rooted in collectivity, legality, and moral accountability. The counter-discourses are intertextually linked to broader legal and normative vocabularies drawn from constitutional law, international human rights, and anti-racist practices. Rather than conforming to the technocratic neutrality of policy documents, they adopt a passionate, morally invested tone that accuses the state of betraying democratic ideals (Open Society Justice Initiative 2021; 2024).

Within the broader socio-political field that sustains Denmark's racialized governance framework, counter-discourses function not merely as rhetorical expressions but as embedded social practices that actively intervene in and seek to transform dominant institutional logics. Drawing on Fairclough's (1992) third dimension of social practice, this section analyzes how resistance is enacted through political engagement, legal advocacy, civic mobilization, and everyday acts of opposition that confront and destabilize the structural normalization of racialized exclusion.

Political and Legal Interventions: Naming and Challenging the Architecture of Exclusion

Despite the entrenched dominance of racialized classifications and moralizing integration narratives, a range of oppositional actors engage in sustained and organized forms of contestation. Political parties such as the Red-Green Alliance (EL) and the Social Liberal Party (RV) have actively distanced themselves from hegemonic narratives, articulating critiques through parliamentary debates, policy platforms, public communications, and legislative proposals. These interventions go beyond opposing individual policy measures; they aim to challenge and transform the underlying discursive architecture that constructs integration as conditional belonging. By questioning the legitimacy of ethnic categorization in welfare and housing governance, these actors seek to reorient public discourse toward principles of equality, social justice, and democratic inclusion.

For example, Red-Green Alliance's 2019 housing policy document explicitly calls for dismantling the legal and rhetorical apparatus surrounding the "ghetto" designation, framing it as a form of institutional racism that undermines democratic values. Social Liberal's 2021 party program similarly frames the 2018 "Ghetto Package" as a breach of constitutional commitments to equality before the law. These are not merely critiques at the level of discourse but institutional practices that attempt to realign national policymaking with pluralistic legal and normative frameworks. Although both parties remain on the political margins in terms of legislative influence, their contributions represent significant efforts to rearticulate the symbolic and normative boundaries of the Danish political field.

Parallel to these parliamentary efforts, civil society organizations enact counter-hegemonic social practices by embedding critique into legal strategies, documentation regimes, and international advocacy. Institutions such as the Danish Institute for Human Rights (IMR) and international

NGOs like the Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI) play a vital role in producing knowledge, mobilizing legal norms, and translating local resistance into globally intelligible frameworks. These actors leverage international human rights instruments as platforms for exerting normative pressure on the Danish state.

A paradigmatic example of this strategy is the OSJI's 2021 submission to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). The submission argues that the 2018 "Ghetto Package" constitute a "significant and persistent pattern of racial discrimination", by using the racialized category of "non-Western background" as a decisive factor for extraordinary legal measures that disproportionately target racial and ethnic minorities, particularly Muslims (Open Society Justice Initiative 2021, 6). The OSJI frames this a part of a broader systemic issue, noting that the "ghetto" policies are part of a wider trend of discriminatory policies in Denmark, including excessive surveillance of Muslim schools, differentiated welfare laws, and rhetorical framing that casts ethnic minorities as incompatible with "Danishness". This legal intervention functions simultaneously as a critique and a practice of institutional accountability, reframing state policy within a broader international legal discourse and challenging the legitimacy of racialized governance.

Through such interventions, these texts not only critique domestic policy but situate it within a broader field of international human rights accountability, thereby invoking alternative centers of normative authority.

Community-Based Resistance: Reclaiming Space and Voice

Resistance to the "ghetto" policies is not confined to institutional arenas, it is also practiced at the community level, where residents of designated "ghetto" areas such as Mjølnerparken engage in embodied, place-based forms of opposition. These include public protest, local organizing, narrative refusal, and legal mobilization (Math 2024; Open Society Justice Initiative 2020). Grounded in lived experience and local knowledge, such actions contest how state power materializes in everyday life and reclaim agency in the face of spatial and symbolic exclusion.

Community resistance is often facilitated by grassroots coalitions like Almen Modstand and advocacy organizations such as the Centre for Muslims' Rights in Denmark. These actors not only

amplify the voices of marginalized residents but also provide legal support and cultivate broader public engagement. Their interventions mark a shift from passive endurance to active re-signification, where stigmatized neighborhoods are not internalized as zones of failure but reframed as sites of resilience, solidarity, and contestation (Math 2024).

This dynamic directly challenges Wacquant's (2008) claim that territorial stigmatization inevitably shapes residents' self-perception. Rather than accepting marginality, residents resist it by rearticulating spatial identity through protest, storytelling, and legal action (Open Society Justice Initiative 2020; Amin 2017). Their refusal to be positioned as "problems" disrupts dominant narratives and reclaims the moral and political legitimacy of their communities.

Bhabha's (1994) theory of hybridity is instructive here. Residents of these stigmatized zones navigate between multiple cultural frameworks, performing hybrid identities that subvert essentialist representations. This undermines the dominant "parallel society" discourse, which treats cultural difference as a threat to national coherence. Instead, hybrid belonging unsettles the boundaries of the national imaginary, illustrating that cultural difference need not be erased for integration to occur.

A defining moment in this continuum of resistance was the legal challenge brought before the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), targeting the racialized restructuring of public housing in Mjølnerparken. This litigation, driven by years of grassroots protest and legal consciousness-raising, exemplifies how community resistance can scale from the local to the transnational (Open Society Justice Initiative 2024). Importantly, it also discredits Wacquant's (2015) notion of the *anti-ghetto* as a space devoid of collective solidarity. On the contrary, Mjølnerparken became a site of coordinated, multilevel resistance with tangible legal outcomes.

In a key development, the 2025 Advocate General's Opinion in Case C-417/23 acknowledged the structural discrimination embedded in Denmark's use of demographic proxies like "non-Western background". The opinion explicitly questioned the legality of categorizing populations based on place of birth, nationality, or descent as stand-ins for racial origin, highlighting how these proxies function as instruments of racialized governance (Ćapeta 2025, 13). Crucially, Advocate General Ćapeta reframed the "ghetto" policies not as neutral governance mechanisms, but as violations of fundamental rights. The opinion critiques not only the content of the policies, but their discursive

form of euphemistic language, statistical indicators, and operational criteria that enable racial sorting under the guise of integration. In doing so, the legal opinion functions as both a judicial intervention and a discursive disruption.

By validating the critiques articulated by residents and activists, the opinion broadens the horizon of resistance. It demonstrates how supranational legal mechanisms can act as counterweights to national policies, and affirms the epistemic authority of marginalized communities to generate legally significant knowledge. Moreover, it situate Danish policy within a wider European anti-discrimination framework, challenging narratives of Danish exceptionalism and reaffirming the normative power of international human rights law.

In sum, community-based resistance, whether through local organizing, narrative reclamation, or legal activism, disrupts dominant discourses of deviance and exclusion. It not only reclaims space and voice but also challenges the ideological foundations of racialized governance. As such, it plays a crucial role in destabilizing the hegemonic logics embedded in the "ghetto" policies, and in articulating alternative imaginaries of justice, belonging, and democracy.

Interlinked Practices of Resistance: Reimagining Belonging

Resistance to Denmark's racialized integration regime takes multiple, interconnected forms, from parliamentary, legal, civic, and grassroots. These practices do not follow a unified strategy or singular ideology, but they converge in their commitment to exposing, contesting, and transforming the structural conditions that sustain racialized governance. Together, they form a dispersed yet coherent network of counter-hegemonic social practices, mobilizing alternative imaginaries of integration centered on equality, recognition, and solidarity, rather than conformity, surveillance, and conditional belonging.

Operating across discursive fields, these practices draw on legal, political, and ethical vocabularies to challenge the dominant logics of Danish integration policy. They intervene in interdiscursive spaces to reshape how belonging, justice, and citizenship are imagined. Their contestation extends beyond reactive opposition; it is generative, producing alternative epistemologies and political visions. At the institutional level, oppositional actors within parliament and civil society articulate inclusive visions of national identity and shared citizenship. Yet their influence remains

structurally constrained by hegemonic narratives that securitize cultural difference and moralize inequality. Despite this, their presence affirms that Danish democracy is not ideologically settled, it is the site of ongoing discursive struggle over the normative foundations of the national community.

Legal resistance, particularly strategic appeals to EU courts and international human rights mechanisms, illustrates how exclusion can be contested within the language of law itself. These interventions do not merely seek inclusion within existing frameworks; they expose the discriminatory architecture of policy. By challenging racialized categories such as "non-Western background" and highlighting their performative function in justifying exclusion, legal actors demonstrate that resistance can be institutional, not just oppositional. As such, law becomes both a tool of governance and a terrain of ideological contestation. Resistance also works to destabilize the symbolic economy of stigma. By re-narrating stigmatized neighborhoods and racialized communities as sites of creativity, value, and political agency, oppositional actors invert the deficit logic that underpins exclusionary policy. Inclusion is reframed not as benevolence, but as a democratic imperative. In doing so, these actors reject the premise that social cohesion depends on cultural homogeneity and instead advocate for a pluralistic, structurally inclusive model of citizenship.

What emerges from this discursive struggle is a layered, multi-scalar understanding of resistance. Rather than a singular oppositional bloc, resistance manifests as a heterogeneous field of discursive interventions. Across domains, actors challenge the "common-sense" assumptions that frame racialized communities as deviant, deficient, or incompatible with the nation. Through Fairclough's (1992) third dimension of social practice, we recognize these interventions as part of a broader struggle over ideological reproduction. They target the discursive structures in categories such as "ghetto", "non-Western", or "parallel society", that sustain racialized governance by masquerading as neutral administrative terms. In contesting these categories, resistance practices expose how language, statistics, and policy narratives reproduce structural inequality under the guise of objectivity.

Though structurally marginalized, these counter-hegemonic discourses perform essential democratic functions. They render visible what dominant discourse conceals, expand the

boundaries of political imagination, and cultivate a language of rights, justice, and shared belonging. Resistance, in this sense, is not only reactive, it is epistemic activism. It names injustice, constructs alternative futures, and insists on the unfinished project of democratic inclusion. In the context of Denmark's racialized "ghetto" discourse, these practices constitute a vital site of ideological contestation. They not only challenge dominant narratives but offer a pluralistic reimagining of nationhood in equality, co-existence, and mutual recognition.

Discussion: Synthesizing the Logics of Racialized Exclusion

This discussion chapter brings together the findings of our conducted analysis of Danish political discourse and policy frameworks constructing meaning around the concepts of "ghetto" and "parallel societies". We have explored the ways in which policy discourse and political actors construct and reproduce significance around national identity, cultural difference and social cohesion. This exploration enabled us to uncover how "ghetto" policies are justified, providing deeper insights into understanding how discourse operates as a mechanism of power.

Our analytical approach, grounded in Critical Thematic Analysis (CTA) and informed by both Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) enabled us to operationalize a critically informed identification of discursive themes, characterized by recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. We then connected these themes to our interdisciplinary theoretical framework to reveal how they function within a racialized social system. Specifically, our analysis revealed:

- National imaginaries serve as boundary-making tools that draw distinctions between Danish national identity, and "non-Western immigrants" residing in "parallels societies" as cultural others. These rhetorical constructions not only racialize the "immigrant Other", it also moralize belonging, framing integrations as a matter of cultural and ideological loyalty.
- Policy and political discourse distinctly position integration less as a reciprocal process and more as a disciplining mechanism. Integrations is rendered conditional upon assimilation into ambiguously defined Danish normativity, with political actors repeatedly emphasizing

obligations over rights and cultural sameness over democratic inclusion. This reasoning facilitates the reconfiguration of cultural difference into deviance, justifying coercive state interventions.

- The analysis illustrated how "ghetto" policies – ranging from urban interventions to welfare restrictions – operate through racialized and spatialized logics. Through bureaucratic terminology and classifications, policy language render racialized governance appear neutral and necessary. However, these practices systemically target stigmatized "ghetto" areas and their residents, reinforcing patterns of territorial stigmatization and institutional exclusion.

In this way, our analysis reveal the "common-sense" rationales underpinning the Danish "ghetto" policies, to trace how broader political discourse contributes to the social construction of "parallel societies" and the ideological assumptions that sustain them. Building on this, we contend that our analytical themes reveal what Lawless and Chen (2019) describe as an intertextual chain, demonstrating how the "Ghetto Package" is embedded within a broader network of references that must be made visible and critically examined to become fully understood. This discourse do not merely reflect policy frameworks but actively shape the ideological conditions under which exclusionary interventions are constructed as necessary, moral, and even inevitable. This approach reveals that the 2018 "Ghetto Package" is not an isolated policy but part of a broader symbolic order. This order is shaped by the rhetorical strategies of political elites that serve to maintain the racial status quo and uphold structures of systemic exclusion.

Through a comprehensive analysis of our dataset, we were able to develop an analytical generalization that brought to light the following discursive tendencies. Specifically, our findings point to the prevalence of (1) spatial comparatives, (2) colonial mental models, and (3) spatial filtering intertwined with racialized bureaucratic logics. These patterns reflect deeper structures of meaning and power within Danish "ghetto" discourse. In the following sections, we discuss the key findings in detail.

Spatial Comparatives

We develop the term *spatial comparatives* to describe how Danish political discourse and policy frameworks construct symbolic dichotomies between "fellow citizens" and "counter-citizens" as two homogenous yet oppositional entities. We define spatial comparatives as lexical and rhetorical contrasts that classify individuals (or communities) within the same national category, while simultaneously establishing hierarchical distinctions of belonging. These symbolic hierarchies are then projected onto physical space, reinforcing territorialized forms of inclusion and exclusion. Spatial comparatives are not explicitly allocated along racial lines, but rather based on their presumed degree of integration into society, an integration often mapped onto physical space (see Figure 8 for a visualization of spatial comparatives).

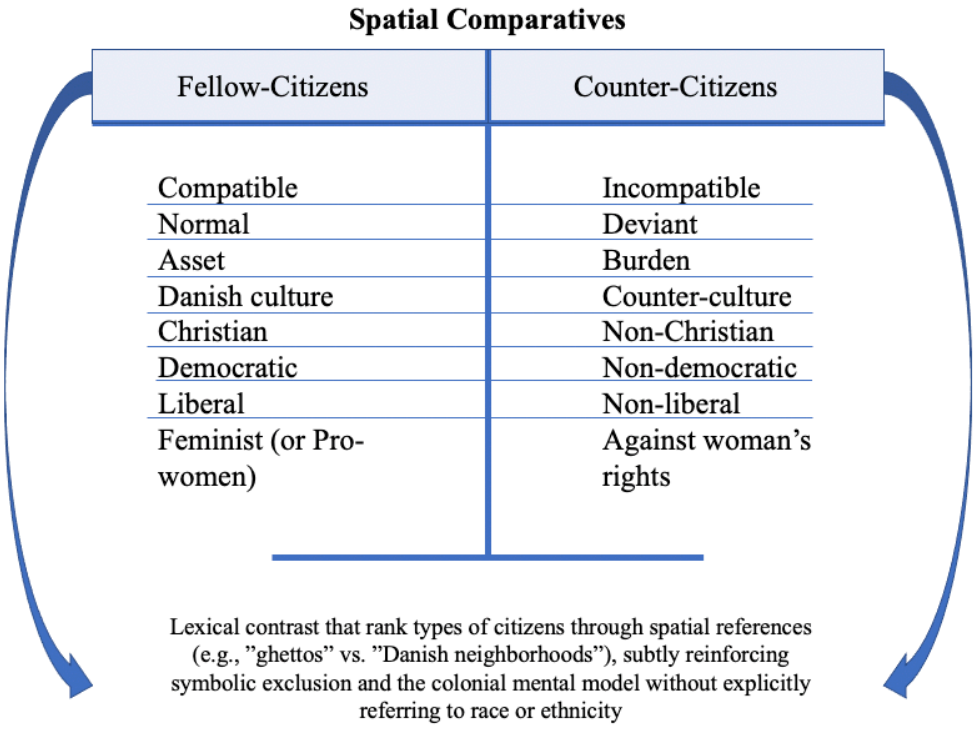

Figure 8: Spatial Comparatives

These comparatives function within the same category (i.e., the citizen), yet establish symbolic hierarchies of belonging. Rather than reproducing overt binaries such as the East versus the West, spatial comparatives function more subtly by constructing intra-national oppositions. The "fellow citizen" is arguably Danish-born and imagined as educated, employed, Danish-speaking, and

civically engaged, representing the imagined national identity. In contrast, the "counter-citizen" is presumably foreign-born (or a descendant) and imagined as dependent, culturally deviant, linguistically deficient, and unwilling to integrate, often linked to stigmatized spaces labeled as "ghettos" or "parallel societies". In essence, "fellow citizens" is a homogeneous group of ideal Danish citizens, while "counter-citizens" is homogenized as the internal threat.

Spatial comparatives are identified through recurring linguistic patterns that appear throughout our analysis, both explicitly and implicitly. An explicit example of this logic appears in the statement: "We need fellow citizens, not counter-citizens" (Dyhr 2024, 48). Such patterns construct "counter-citizens" as those with "weak Danish language skills, poor attachment to the labor market, and failing integration into society" (Regeringen 2005, 4), or as "people with no connection to ordinary Danish everyday life" (Krarup & Støjberg 2018, 3). In contrast, the "fellow citizen" is someone who will "get a job. speak Danish. take responsibility" (Poulsen 2020, 18) and be a "contributing members of society - economically as well as humanly" (Regeringen 2018, 7). These excerpts illustrate how spatial comparatives function as discursive mechanisms that collapse linguistic, cultural and socio-economic differences into symbolic hierarchies. In doing so, they regulate inclusion and exclusion within the category of citizenship itself, mapping these distinctions onto physical space and legitimize targeted interventions in stigmatized areas.

Anderson's (1991) theory of imagined communities helps clarify spatial comparatives. The construct of the "fellow citizen" functions as a symbol of shared cultural values that bind the imagined national community, even among people who will never meet. Hence, "fellow citizen" is constructed as their collective identity. In contrast, the "counter-citizen" embodies everything the "fellow citizen" is imagined to oppose. From this perspective, the construction of the "fellow citizen" serves to weaponize nationalism by defining national insiders and outsiders, thereby legitimizing the marginalization of those deemed "counter-citizens". Consequently, the concepts of the "fellow citizen" and the "counter-citizen" become lexical manifestations of official nationalism, employed as a mechanism of power that defines who belongs and who does not.

Importantly, these concepts are not merely linguistic but territorial. Anchored in Wacquant's (2008; 2015) perspectives on territorial stigmatization, we posit that neighborhoods with a high concentration of ethnic minorities are constructed as deviant and deficient spaces – symbolically

cast as “holes in the map of Denmark” (Regeringen 2018, 5). These stigmatized territories become sites onto which the figure of the “counter-citizen” is projected, positioned in spatial opposition to an imagined national core.

The use of terms such as “ghettos” and “parallel societies” reinforces the construction of certain urban areas as culturally and socially deviant. Dominant political discourse frequently portray residents in these areas as fundamentally disconnected from Danish society – for instance, by claiming that many do not speak the Danish language or fail to embody core democratic values and cultural norms (Regeringen 2010; 2018). These spaces are thus positioned as incompatible with national identity and values, warranting state intervention. As a result, so-called “ghettos” become targets of exceptional legislation, heightened surveillance, and coercive integration policies. In this context, “ghettos” are not merely urban areas but racialized constructs through which the state legitimizes and enacts marginalization under the rhetoric of integration.

Ultimately, spatial comparatives are not only symbolic or linguistic, they are embedded in physical spatial. They are institutionalized through spatial policies that normalize exclusion as a necessary practice to maintain the imagined cultural identity of the national community. In line with this, spatial comparatives reflect elements of othering as a logic of nationhood, as these comparisons are fundamentally layered within a colonial mental model.

While we are indeed inspired by Said’s (1978) Orientalism in formulating our conceptualization, our concept marks a distinct theoretical shift that rearticulates his insights within a different empirical and analytical context. Where Said discusses binary oppositions (e.g., West versus East) and defines the “Other” across global or civilizational lines, our concept encapsulates how internal “Others” are constructed within the nationhood through racialized representations of space. Hence, spatial comparatives operate only within the same national territory, constructing internal boundaries that create spaces of symbolic exclusion. Our concept illustrates how certain citizens are positioned as outside the national community, not because they are geographically foreign, but because they reside in designated areas that are racialized and symbolically marked as incompatible with dominant narratives of national identity.

The following section expand on these insights, exploring another central finding of our analysis: how state interventions are morally legitimized through a discursive framework rooted in *colonial mental models*.

Moral Legitimation through the Colonial Mental Model

Throughout our analysis, we identified a recurrent discursive pattern of *moral legitimation*. This strategy was repeatedly employed to legitimize spatial governance by positioning state interventions as morally necessary. Moral legitimation operates by distinguishing the "civilized" nation from its internal, morally deviant "Others", thereby justifying racialized policies under the guise of protection and responsibility. This finding is particularly noteworthy as it unpacks a partial consensus across the analyzed material in constructing the "Ghetto Package" as a moral obligation of the Danish state toward its "fellow citizens". We ground this finding in the recurring moral underpinnings that surface across the majority of our data. Each theme revealed a repeated use of moralizing narratives to justify racialized spatial governance. This demonstrates that the "Ghetto Package" is not an isolated policy initiative, but rather part of broader and longstanding discursive construction of the "Other" as morally deficient and Denmark as morally superior. Hence, moral legitimation functions as an ideological underpinning of the "ghetto package" and its surrounding discourse. By repeatedly positioning the "Other" as morally deviant, this discourse comes to appear as "common-sense" rather than as an ideological position.

In our discussion, we seek to deconstruct this supposed "common-sense", and, drawing on van Dijk (2006), illustrate how it reflects a mental model shaped by a colonial mindset. We argue that the ideological standpoints of political actors and policymakers reinforce a polarized distinction between a morally superior "us" and morally deviant "them". In essence, moral legitimation operates as both a structural mechanism for shaping public perception and a cognitive tool for reproducing dominant ideological positions, deeply rooted in a postcolonial mentality. To support the logic of how moral legitimation operates through colonial logic, we now turn to Said (1978) and Bhabha (1994).

Following Said's (1978) idea of Orientalism, moral legitimation functions as a tool for reinforcing politicians' self-image as morally superior to the "Other". Spatial governance is legitimized

through this moral positioning by positioning Denmark higher on the moral hierarchy, political discourse justifies the "ghetto package". Therefore, the construction of the "Other" is central for the discursive practice of moral legitimation. Building on Bhabha (1994), moral legitimation compromises the fluid and hybrid nature of ethnic minorities' identities, instead constructing them as a fixed and homogenous group to legitimize spatial governance. Consequently, it disregards the complex and evolving nature of identity and reinforces an orientalist understanding of ethnic minorities in Denmark. Consequently, we argue that moral legitimation serves as a contemporary reminder of how colonial legacies continue to shape policies and discourses. Bhabha's (1994) notion of mimicry highlights the ambivalence in colonial relationships: the colonized subject (i.e., "non-Western immigrants") adopts the moral norms of the colonizer, but always in a way that marks their difference. This incomplete adoption reveals their inescapable "Otherness", thereby preserving the conditions for ongoing moral legitimation. This is reflected in our analysis, which reveals that "non-Western immigrants" are repeatedly demanded to adopt the dominant moral norms. References such as "mental parallel societies" (Brodersen & Støjberg 2017, 4) exemplify this logic, suggesting not merely behavioral difference but deep-seated, pathological incompatibility. Moreover, statements like "Get a job. Speak Danish. Take responsibility" (Poulsen 2020, 18), emphasize that employment, education, and civic participation are the key markers of successful integration. However, even when these criteria are met, the discourse shifts: "it is a realization that work, education, housing, civic participation, and a clean criminal record are not enough" (Vad 2024, 2). This demonstrates the ambivalence Bhabha (1994) identifies, where the colonized subject may mimic the moral expectations of the majority, but is still framed as falling short. The language used in our dataset constructs "non-Western immigrants" as disconnected from "ordinary Danish life" (Krarup & Støjberg, 3), reinforcing the framing that ethnic minorities lack a "natural" affinity with Danish norms and values. Additionally, statements such as "far too few non-Western immigrants and descendants have education and work" (Regeringen 2018, 19), while claims like "education and work are not the only parameters" (Dyhr 2024, 50), demonstrate the notion that even meeting dominant norms is insufficient for full societal acceptance. Hence, moral legitimacy becomes a constantly moving target, constructed not to integrate but to sustain hierarchical distance. Reinforcing the idea that mimicry does not lead to belonging; rather, it reaffirms the moral superiority of the dominant racial actors and legitimizes

the need for territorial stigmatization through the "Ghetto Package". This ongoing deferral of exclusion exemplifies how the colonial mental model operates.

Drawing on van Dijk's (2006) idea of context models, we argue that cognitive representations of ethnic minorities as the "Other" are historically rooted in colonial imaginaries. Building on Said (1978), we contend that these representations continue to influence contemporary opinions and policymaking. These representations, deeply embedded in the context model of political actors create a colonial spiral of cognition. This spiral reinforces and reproduces ideologies rooted in colonial hierarchies, making it appear as "common-sense" to frame certain citizen groups as "counter-citizens". Consequently, the need for ethnic minorities to "assimilate" or regulate stigmatized populations in "ghetto" areas draws from inherent colonial logics that assume whiteness as the normative center. This results in the construction of a context model in which territorial stigmatization becomes a "natural" and justified response to perceived cultural or social deviance. Residents in neighborhoods designated as "ghettos" are therefore cognitively and symbolically regulated by positioning them outside the imagined Danish nation, influencing both micro-level interactions and macro-level policies. This cognitive subsystem, includes mental representations, stereotypes, and prejudices, that help explain how the Danish state are able to implement a "ghetto" legislation, that the Advocate General of the CJEU has characterized as "direct discrimination" (Ćapeta 2025, 13). Over time, lexical choices including those reflecting spatial comparatives have become so natural and embedded in political discourse that they obscure their colonial genealogy. Echoing Bonilla-Silva's (2021) argument about the enduring structures of racial power, this naturalization allows contemporary policies to perpetuate the legacy of colonial domination – whether unconsciously, partially consciously, or fully intentionally.

Spatial Filtering and Racialized Bureaucracy

Taken together, our key findings provide critical insight into the functioning of racialized bureaucracy. Synthesizing the preceding discussion, we conceptualize the justification of racialized bureaucracy as a three-level process, illustrated in Figure 9.

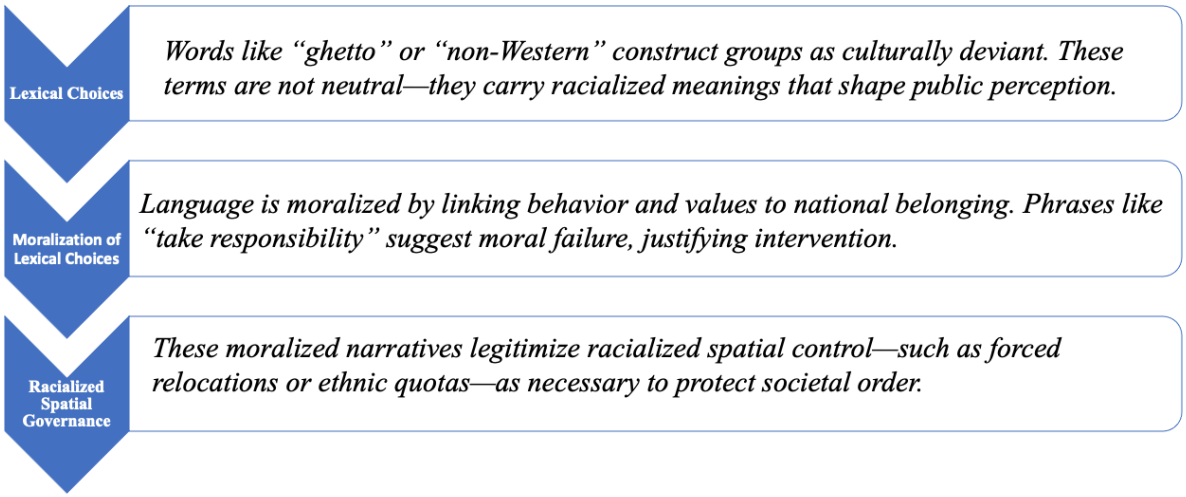

Figure 9: Spatial Filtering and Racialized Bureaucracy

This interconnected model illustrates how justification unfolds through an intertextual chain that constructs the underlying logic "Ghetto Package" as "common sense". First, lexical choices foster a discursive distance between residents in designated "ghetto" areas and the imagined norm of "Danishness". This intra-national Othering constructs a moral imperative to regulate the imagined threat posed by the dangerous "Other" to maintain a cohesive collective identity.

Essentially, this process serves to rationalizes racialized governance. Our finding substantiate Fairclough's (1989; 1992) model of discourse functioning across three interrelated levels, highlighting how language both reflects and reinforce structures of power. In this context, racialized bureaucracy – as revealed in our research – aligns with Bonilla-Silva's (2021) understanding of "racism without racists", where exclusion is enacted through rhetorical strategies, abstract categories (such as "fellow-citizens", "counter-citizens", or "non-Western immigrants"), and coded language anchored in moral legitimation.

This argument is based on our empirical findings, that racialized bureaucracy operates through race-neutral tools to target marginalized populations in Denmark. Throughout our analysis, we identified two recurring key policy framings applied as justification: balanced resident composition and management and regulation of resident composition (Regeringen 2005; 2010; 2018; 2021). These seemingly neutral phrases function as forceful rhetorical strategies for justifying racialized bureaucracy. Building on Lawless and Chen (2019), these forceful policy phrases gain their force not merely from what is said, but who says it, the Danish government, and

it is said: to frame the "otherness" of ethnic minorities in designated "ghetto" areas as a threat to Denmark's homogeneous cultural identity. In essence, this three-level process of racialized governance marks ethnic minority communities as psychically and symbolically distinct, constructing them as fundamentally incompatible with Danish society. In turn, justifies racialized spatial policies as a national necessity.

Having discussed our main findings and the analytical framework through which they were foregrounded, we now turn to the conclusion.

Conclusion

This thesis has critically examined how "non-Western immigrants" and stigmatized communities are discursively constructed in Danish political discourse and "ghetto" policy frameworks, with the 2018 "Ghetto Package" as our analytical point of departure. Central to this discourse is the racialized construction of "parallel societies", which are positioned as cultural deficient, moral deviant, and spatial threat. This construction is achieved through recurring discursive patterns (1) binary oppositions, (2) modal obligations to "become Danish", (3) racialized lexicon, and (4) territorial metaphors. These patterns are weaponized to construct certain communities as fundamentally deviating from the imagined moral and cultural core of the Danish nation.

By deconstructing the policies' intertextual chain, we foregrounded how racialized language intensifies with each successive policy iteration. This chain emerges as a discursive tool that symbolically positions stigmatized communities as outside the national imaginary, constructed as threating to the cohesion of Danish nation. Nevertheless, the language is not merely symbolic. It interacts with and reinforced institutional forms of spatial governance, demonstrating how discourse becomes materially manifested. This discursive-material line is most clearly operationalized through what we term spatial comparatives, the dominant discursive strategy that justifies exclusion and discrimination under the guise of "common-sense". Developed through our critical thematic analysis, this concept emerged from four interrelated themes. Spatial comparatives reveal how intra-national hierarchies are discursively produced, where "fellow citizens" are positioned more "at home" than "counter citizens" with in the same nation state. Although these racialized hierarchies are frequently constructed as pragmatic, they carry deeply

ideological meanings. In this way, our findings confirm van Dijk's and Fairclough's insights into how discourse functions to normalize exclusion and racialized domination, often subtle, bureaucratic, and moralizing ways.

In essence, this thesis illustrates how power, ideology, and language are co-constitutive forces in shaping not only public policy but also hegemonic political imagination of "Danishness". By unpacking the racialized constructions of "parallel societies" in ghetto discourse, we highlight how ethnic minority residents are strategically governed and symbolic excluded. Our research offers both an empirical and conceptual extensive framework for fostering a rich understanding of how the Danish nationalistic welfare state is increasingly structured along racialized symbolic lines, defining who belongs to the imagined political community, and who must be excluded in the name of national cohesion.

As we draw this thesis to a close, we wish to foreground a practitioner-oriented recommendation intended to support more inclusive and reflexive policy approaches. For practitioners, especially those in elite positions, our findings carry important implications by highlighting that language is not neutral. The elite's language, in particular, carries the power to both reinforce and challenge hegemonic discourse, and with that power comes responsibility. We suggest that our findings can serve as a diagnostic tool for identifying whether language used in 'policies is racialized and whether alternative language can be utilized to decenter whiteness and reduce structural exclusion. This enables practitioners to become more critically aware of how language reinforce racial hierarchies and to actively reflect on how their own lexical choices can either maintain or disrupt the racial status quo. In particular, our conceptualization of spatial comparatives can be applied to understand how intra-national comparisons subtly (re)construct hierarchies among citizens. Recognizing and challenging these spatial comparisons can be a first step toward more inclusive policies and political discourse. By being more intentional about the language they use, practitioners are able move beyond "common-sense" narratives and instead foreground discursive practices that actively resist exclusion. This opens the possibility for the political sphere to intervene in and disrupt the colonial spiral of thought.

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