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The Point of View of Stigmatised Young Girls: Managing Class, "Race" and Place in Polarising Copenhagen

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> "Because even though I come from Tingbjerg, that doesn't mean that I'll pull a knife and stab you. Come on, talk to me like a normal person, which is what I am." (Donika)

1 Introduction

For the past thirty years, Danish media, politicians and (to some extent) social scientists have deployed the term "ghetto" as a core symbol of urban decay and as a threat to national coherence and security. With furious rhetoric and stern emotions, various governments have launched political programmes to combat so-called "parallel societies" and "ghettoisation", and various bureaucracies have forged tools to "tear down the walls", "give these areas a lift", "create security" and "integrate" these designated areas into "mainstream society" (Simonsen 2016). Journalists have flocked to extraordinary events of car burnings, portraying images of veiled women and young gang members fleeing from the police (Stender 2018). And scholars have exposed the mechanisms of "ethnic" segregation (Andersen 2002). Taken together, these discourses focus on residential areas within the non-profit housing sector, merging imaginaries of crime, radicalisation, terrorism, youth delinquency, immigrant gangs and welfare beneficiaries with unemployment and immigration (Hansen 2021). In other words, "the ghetto" has become a territorial stigma fusing poverty and dishonour, a term which is attached to a specific place (Wacquant 2007). However, whereas public debate has painted dramatic pictures from the outside, voices from inside the residential neighbourhoods designated as ghettos have been harder to hear (Johansen & Jensen 2017).

In *La misère du monde* (1999 [1993]), Pierre Bourdieu and his colleagues strove to publish the voices of people in French society who had little or no public voice, and who attracted little or no political attention. Based on life history interviews focusing on recollections of past experiences and perspectives of uncertain futures, the authors analytically reconstructed the trajectories of people from vastly dominated positions who had been struck by the precarities of a changing contemporary French society. Thus, while focusing on the "small miseries" of individuals, Bourdieu and his co-workers highlighted the social conditions that affected entire collectives, showing how the root causes of individual misfortune were to be found in the overall transformation of work, housing, the school and the state. Inspired by *The Weight of the World*, Auyero et al. (2015) use individual life histories to investigate the precarities of the high-tech, service and increasingly unequal city of Austin, Texas. Arguing that the social sciences "are on less certain terrain when it comes to understanding the many ways in which individuals, alone or in groups, make sense of and cope with" inequalities of class, race and gender (Auyero et al. 2015: 5), they focus on the intersection of biography and history to understand how people engage with major economic, social and political forces.

In this article, we address the inequalities forming in the resurgent city of Copenhagen by presenting the point of view of racialised young girls living in a deprived neighbourhood in

Copenhagen. We draw on the notion of territorial stigmatisation to explore and expose the everyday difficulties and social conditions of suffering that form individual lives at the bottom of social, symbolic and physical hierarchies.

2 Territorial stigmatisation and young femininities

Research on territorial stigmatisation has grown considerably, especially since Loïc Wacquant's (2007) explication of the term (although he used the phrase from the early 1990s, see Wacquant 1993).

Wacquant (2008) analyses residential stigma as a core symbolic feature of a new regime of poverty (called advanced marginality) fostered by the transformations of the urban economy and wage labour, the (welfare) state and the city. He argues that increasing economic and labour restructuring, social inequality and spatial polarisation go hand in hand with the fixation of poverty in delimited areas of the city, which in turn become known as "urban hellholes".

Territorial stigmatisation addresses the social effects of such spatial taint and dishonour across spheres and institutions – from political agents and experts in public representation (scholars, journalists etc.) to state bureaucracies, civic organisations and urban developers (real estate agents, investors etc.) to the everyday life of the residents and surrounding denizens.

Studies of territorial stigmatisation focus on (the relations between) stigma production and stigma management, often characterised by rough illustrations as stigma imposition from outside and above and coping strategies from inside and below, even though many studies show the murky interrelations between these poles.[1] Thus, many studies show how territorial stigmatisation interconnects with wider urban dynamics, such as socioeconomic polarisation and spatial segregation, as cities move from industrial growth over deindustrialisation and decline to resurgent financial and creative service economies, redevelopment and gentrification (Kirkness & Tijé-Dra 2017; Paton 2018). In a Danish context, Larsen (2014) argues that the recomposition of the field of housing, the institutionalisation of an asymmetrical housing market and a dual urban policy converge to privilege private ownership and cast the social and non-profit housing sector in the defaming symbolism of "the ghetto".

Whereas such studies focus on the mechanisms of production and the (more or less deliberate) imposition of territorial stigma, others focus on stigma management against the backcloth of descriptions of media stories, public reputation and official policies categorising a given territory in degrading ways (Jensen & Christensen 2012). Studies of everyday negotiations of territorial stigma show that residents apply a wide array of coping strategies, from submission to resistance (Wacquant et al. 2014). These include shame, the hiding or obscuring of one's address, the denial of neighbourhood belonging, the retreat to the private sphere and the reduction of public involvement and political demands (Auyero 1999; Slater & Anderson 2012; Pereira & Queirós 2014). Furthermore, they show that blaming one's neighbours or demonised others is a widespread and common strategy of disidentification and diversion (Hastings 2004; Watt 2006). Other studies also show that residents often have different

[1] Whereas most studies focus on the effects of territorial stigmatisation, few studies explicate the structural causes of stigma production and the interconnected effects of a performative symbolism of degraded and dishonoured neighbourhoods (Larsen & Delica 2019, Sisson 2020); or what Tyler & Slater (2018: 727) call 'deliberate stigma strategies', as they call for more studies of 'the social causes and political functions of stigma production'.

perceptions of their neighbourhood than the dominant representations, and that they actively struggle to produce counter-representations that are able to stick and have local empowering effects and political consequences (Kirkness 2014; Kallin & Slater 2014; Sisson 2020).

Research on territorial stigmatisation professes that representations of place intersect with other social properties and urban characteristics such as symbolic boundaries and social divisions (Contreras 2017). Wacquant, Slater & Pereira (2014) propose that the form and content of stigma management "depend[s] on position and trajectory in social and physical space" and "vary significantly with class, age and lifecycle stage, housing tenure, seniority in the neighbourhood, and ethnicity" (Wacquant et al.: 1276). Consequently, we believe it is fruitful to focus specifically on one particular group which is often overlooked: teenage girls.

Auyero (1999) and Wacquant (1993; 2008) argue that the main principle of vision and division evolves around the opposition between young people and the rest rather than the contrast between racialised and nationalised subjects (which is what the media tend to focus on). Residents, as well as the broader public, define young people as the source of the problems and reputation of the territory in which they live. "For youths from these projects, personal characteristics override 'ethnic' membership and they often use humour to deflect the derogatory denotation of racist insults" (Wacquant 1993: 377).

In this article, we draw on 2½ months of fieldwork among a small group of girls living in Tingbjerg, a neighbourhood with a poor reputation on the northern perimeter of the municipality of Copenhagen.[2] While race/ethnicity has been subjected to intense focus in Scandinavian studies of youth, marginality and identity (Koefoed & Simonsen 2009; Prieur 2004; Gilliam 2021), ethnographies of girls in neglected urban neighbourhoods are rare. Youth studies tend to focus on issues of place, space, locality and territory, but the perspective of racialised young women occupying dominated positions in social space has not been scrutinised substantially (Strand & Kindt 2019). The research focuses predominantly on masculinity (Jensen 2010; Kalkan 2021; Mørck 2021; Petersen 2017, 2019), "female problem categories" or "female criminality" (Henriksen 2013, 2017a; Grundetjern & Sandberg 2012; Ness 2010), or specific youth institutions such as schools (Sernhede 2011; Johansson & Hammarén 2011; Johansson & Olofsson 2011), leisure activities or youth clubs (Petersen 2021).

Even though the Nordic countries have an international reputation for being equal societies, several studies document that there are still prevalently gendered, racialised and class inequalities in this region (Rastas 2005). In a study of marginalised young girls, Henriksen (2017b) shows the fluidity of the gendered ethnicities of girls as they navigate the street (see also Prieur 2002). In street-based peer groups dominated by ethnic minority males, the girls learn to use different body markers to position themselves in terms of ethnicity, religion and sexuality, expressing hypermasculinity, violence and toughness while maintaining proper femininity to deter sexual objectification and express independence and high morality. As these girls grow older, this fluid performativity becomes more congruent as they develop narratives of Muslim identity which also serve as an escape route from the street.

[2] Here we use the collective 'we' for reasons of textual clarity. However, it was Maia and Edita who carried out the fieldwork, under the supervision of Christian.

Keskinen (2018) shows how young minority women from a stigmatised suburb in Finland challenge gendered double standards and the stereotype of the oppressed Muslim girl (see also Jaffe-Walter 2013; Roth & Stuedahl 2019). Using humorous strategies such as ridiculing and carnivalising – a strategy also noted by Wacquant (1993: 377) – the girls aim to 'turn around power relations and disturb dominant ideas' (Keskinen 2018: 244). Another strategy noted by Keskinen (2018) is to avoid "those with bad habits" and focus on "school achievement". Furthermore, the study shows that the maintenance of respectability and a good reputation does not relate exclusively to sexual relations, but also to friendship more broadly. However, Keskinen also shows that the young people become angry and disappointed about the ways in which the media and politicians portray their neighbourhood. Rosten & Smette (2021) also notice that the emotional reaction of being pissed off is common among girls who strive in other respects to vacillate between pragmatic and pious ways of managing social control and conflicting sexual norms. Eriksen (2019) also explores such emotions in the production of tough femininities and aggressive school opposition among ethnic minority girls in Norway.

As in the studies of residential responses to territorial stigma, youth studies of urban femininities show how "girls talk back": they rebrand their territory, rescript their place and develop alternative narratives (Cairns 2018; Nayak 2019; Taylor & Addison 2009) as they vacillate between peer groups, friendships, school demands and promises and parental restrictions, striving to achieve a sense of belonging and respectability in deprived territories.

Whereas social research generally stresses what we might call "extraordinary cases", we focus on the ordinary aspects of everyday life among racialised girls from the lower ends of the social, symbolic and physical hierarchies. We aim to make the subaltern speak by analytical reconstruction and sociological understanding of the point of view of the teenage girls from Tingbjerg. Following Bourdieu, the notion of point of view captures "the intricate relation between objective structures and subjective constructions". The understanding of the world that a given agent or group of agents have, their perspective, is adopted from "a point located in the social space", a perspective "defined by its objective position" (Bourdieu 1991: 637). While Bourdieu concedes that "the social world, with its divisions, is something that social agents have to do", he also maintains that "these constructions still do not take a social void" as "the position occupied in social space… commands the representations of this space and the 'positions' in the struggles to conserve or transform it" (Bourdieu 1991: 637). By extension, "to situate oneself in the place the interviewees occupy in the social space in order to understand them as necessarily what they are," Bourdieu writes, "is to give oneself a generic and genetic comprehension of who these individuals are" (Bourdieu et al. 1999: 613). Understanding a specific point of view, then, is to grasp a necessity, that is, "to grasp the circumstances of life and the social mechanisms that affect the entire category to which any individual belongs and the conditions associated with a given position and trajectory in social space" (Bourdieu et al. 1999: 613).

In other words, in order to understand the "voice" of four teenage girls from Tingbjerg, we must grasp the social conditions that have produced these individuals; that define their position, shape their dispositions, and structure their trajectory. In the following, we therefore describe the neighbourhood of Tingbjerg and the girls in the context of the polarising capital of Denmark, Copenhagen.

3 Exploring girls in a stigmatised neighbourhood in Copenhagen

Tingbjerg is one of the neighbourhoods that is stigmatised as what Wacquant would refer to as an "urban hellhole" in the context of an otherwise resurgent Copenhagen. While Copenhagen has experienced a cultural and economic upswing in the wake of the fiscal crisis of the late 1980s and early 1990s, Tingbjerg is a place of concentrated poverty and dishonoured categories that occupies a dominated position in physical, social and symbolic space.

Like so many industrialised cities, Copenhagen became deindustrialised and depopulated in the decades following WWII. In the late 1980s, studies declared the capital to be a fundamentally unhealthy city, and politicians problematised its population as a "weak tax base" (Andersen & Winther 2010). During the 1990s, the city became a target of new investments as the Social Democratic city council started focusing on new urban governance strategies, leading to repopulation and polarisation (Andersen & Larsen 2004, Larsen & Hansen 2008). Hand-in-hand with this "revitalisation of the tax base" and its accompanying processes of gentrification and symbolic celebrations of "creative entrepreneurs", certain neighbourhoods in the city were classified in denigrating terms as ghettos (Andersen 2002; Bayliss 2007). While the debate regarding the use of the term "ghetto" has continued since the late 1980s, it took a turn in 2004 when a national political plan to combat parallel societies was forged; and it developed again in 2010, when government lists named specific neighbourhoods as "holes in society" and "parallel societies" (Hansen 2021; Simonsen 2016; Slater 2021:169-172). Tingbjerg is one such place of economic dereliction and symbolic stigmatisation.

The prominent architect Steen Eiler Rasmussen, who envisioned a green and modern environment to replace the dark slums of the inner city, constructed Tingbjerg as a coherent neighbourhood in the 1950s in collaboration with the non-profit housing association FSB (Boligselskaberne & FSB 2009: 18). Rasmussen designed Tingbjerg as a social programme that aimed to create a living environment with a high level of wellbeing among people of different social classes (Rasmussen 1963: 3). However, during the boom of the 1960s, when detached single-family houses became available in the outer municipalities of Greater Copenhagen, non-profit housing in Copenhagen became social housing for the nether regions of social space (Larsen 2009; 2012; 2014a). While Tingbjerg is located next to the attractive green zone of Utterslev Marsh, it consists of low-rise flats designed to accentuate the light, and about 80% of these flats have a floor area of between 60 and 99 square metres (by comparison, 24% of the flats in Copenhagen as a whole have these dimensions)[3]. However, in the context of a dualised and asymmetrical housing market, the fact that Tingbjerg consists of almost 100% public housing located on the perimeter of Copenhagen, and the fact that there are no train stations nearby, place the neighbourhood at the bottom of the physical hierarchy.

The people of Copenhagen have known the neighbourhood as a deprived working-class area since the 1980s, but the ghetto discourse has classified Tingbjerg in racialised terms as a container of high rates of unemployment (about 33%), "non-Danes" (about 70%) and convicts[4] (about 2%), and low rates of income (about 50% below the regional average) and few people holding educational diplomas above primary and lower secondary school (about

[3] However, only 6% of the flats in Tingbjerg have a floor area of 100 square metres or more, compared with about 24% of the flats in Copenhagen as a whole.

[4] Residents convicted for offences against the penal code, the gun law, or the law on euphoriants.

66%).[5] In short, it is the area of Copenhagen with the lowest average income, maintaining a low Gini coefficient of 22.6 in 2020 (compared with 34.4 in Copenhagen as a whole and 48.2 in the more affluent Østerbro North).

Aisha, Donika, Irem and Zarah are four 16-17 year-old girls, childhood friends, born and raised in Tingbjerg, whom we met during our fieldwork.[6] All four girls have different migration histories, and none of their parents were born in Denmark: Aisha and Zarah's parents are from Somalia, Donika's from Albania, and Irem's from Turkey.

The girls' families all moved to Tingbjerg in the late 1990s. Donika and Irem's grandfathers immigrated to Denmark just like many other men with other ethnic minority backgrounds due to the labour shortage in Danish industry, bringing their families with them and living in rented accommodation, for instance in Tingbjerg. Aisha and Zarah's families are refugees from the civil war in Somalia in the 1990s and lived in asylum centres before they moved to Tingbjerg. The four girls come from low-income families, struggling to make ends meet, and they all have at least one parent who has been unemployed for a long time. While Zarah's parents hold degrees from Somalia, they are unaccepted in the Danish labour market, so her father works as a janitor while her mother receives public income support. Aisha, Donika and Irem's parents have no secondary education and receive income support or do unskilled jobs in the service sector.

For all the girls, appearance is important. Aisha and Zarah started wearing a headscarf at the age of 7-8, replacing it with a jilbab when they became teenagers, just like their mothers and other women in their family. They downplay their looks and conform to a strict upbringing. By contrast, Irem and Donika wear jeans, sneakers and small, body-tight tops, they style their hair, and use make-up, heavy perfume, long nails and lashes (although Irem does this less than Donika "because among Turks, if you behave like an Albanian, you're seen as a hoe"), and they wear jewellery (i.e., necklaces with the letter TNG for Tingbjerg).

Both Aisha and Zarah attend high school (in the less prestigious two-year HF track), and Irem and Donika plan to do the same. All the girls recognise the importance of education for future prosperity and have parents who encourage them to do well so they have more opportunities than they had themselves, as well as good job prospects and stable finances. However, Aisha, Irem and Donika struggle with school, seeing it as something they want to finish as soon as possible, making the minimum effort and finding it stressful. School makes them feel insecure about their accomplishments – they feel stupid, and they feel like failures. They express uncertain ideas about their future. Aisha says, "I don't know really" and "I don't understand how people can stand school"; but a school counsellor and Zarah are helping her to continue. Irem expresses the idea of studying to be a social worker, "to help vulnerable families" and "make a difference", but she is insecure about her professional skills: "That social worker

[5] We use the ghetto-list statistics (an average from 2010-2018), with the proviso that they are constructions of bureaucratic logic.

[6] To protect the anonymity of the girls, we use pseudonyms, and we have altered some details. The fieldwork lasted two and a half months in the spring of 2020. The girls were recruited through a public leisure project for young people in which they participated. The four girls frequently visit this place, and we were able to establish a close relationship with them that allowed us to follow them in their everyday lives as well as carrying out in-depth interviews (to collect biographical information). Field access and the development of a close relationship with the girls were made easier because the girls regarded one of the interviewers (Edita) as a "non-Dane" (see Ademi & Hauch 2020 for further details).

course is supposed to be pretty hard, with lots of books. I don't know if it's my thing, really. Perhaps I'll become a nail technician". Donika explains that her father "really wants me to take a real education, get a university degree like my sister", but that she herself is more inclined to become an eyelash technician or a makeup artist and "work in beauty". Zarah, however, is doing well at school and has a firm plan to study medicine, she uses homework aid and gets help from her parents, and she gets good grades:

> When I tell people that I want to study medicine, they're, like, wow, can she do that?, because they all have their prejudices and so on. But you know, if they only knew how many perker girls study medicine… My parents are so proud from the heart, you know, when I tell them about my good grades. They know it takes a good grade average to study medicine. It's not the easiest thing in Somalia either, even though some people probably think so.

In the following, we analyse the voice of these four girls, remaining close to the words and expressions they use to navigate their surroundings. The analysis is selective, emphasising first the distinction between "the Danes" and themselves, perkerne, and second their management of territorial stigma. In the closing discussion, we highlight how this subaltern speak helps us to understand young femininities and the effects of territorial stigma.

4 Fucking Danes and perker girls

During Ramadan on a hot spring evening in May, we sit at a picnic table and bench set close to Aisha's home and chat about fasting and the Eid celebration. The girls slide in and out of the conversation, keeping a close eye on their phones, alternating between texting and talking. The conversation quickly turns to their experiences of being misunderstood or even criticised by what they refer to as "the Danes". They talk fast and laugh loudly at each other's stories, especially when Aisha asks "how many times have you been asked that [question] by a Dane, 'aren't you even allowed to drink a sip of water?'" She quickly replies herself, "*Wallah*, are you kidding me!?" The other girls nod, recognising the experience and give high fives while bursting into laughter. Zarah says that "Danes" can never understand "us", even if "you" explain to "them" the difference between Ramadan and Eid repeatedly, but "they" expect "us" to know everything about Christmas and to sing "their" Christmas carols. The conversation leads the girls to start singing a Christmas song while Irem films them on Snapchat, adding the text " *perkere* play Danes".

The word *perker* is a contraction of Persian and Turkish – like *Paki* or *wog* in English. It is a derogatory word used broadly in urban slang about people who are identified as being of immigrant background owing to their darker skin and hair in particular. The girls use *perker* in reference to ethnic backgrounds such as Arab, Somali, Kurdish, Albanian or Moroccan, or as a signifier of Muslim religiosity. They use the category to describe themselves as a group in opposition to Danes, striving to circumvent its negative connotations and give it a more positive value. "The difference between a *perker* and a Dane", the girls explain, is "practically everything", "the complete opposite of a *perker* is a Dane".

This opposition between *perkere* and *Danes* intertwines with racial, gendered and class dimensions.

In general, the girls understand themselves as *perkere* in the sense that they experience widespread xenophobic condemnation as foreigners or immigrants by Danes and Danish society. "I'm so sick of those fools who think Islam is the same as terrorism and the forced

use of scarfs. They don't know shit. They're just judgmental", Zarah says, "the Danes don't want us in their country". However, the girls often enwrap this experience of discrimination in a moral boundary between the "strong communities" inherent in most ethnic groups, or among non-Danes, and the "weak traditions" of Danes, whom they perceive as having strange and cold relationships with their family members. From the point of view of the girls, Danes do not value family as highly as they do, they do not have a strong culture, and they do not cherish their traditional values (apart from Christmas).

Two symbolic boundaries are essential in the girls' perception of the division between *perkere* and *Danes*, namely gender and class.

The girls perceive Danish girls as "dirty", "cheap", and "naïve", whereas they perceive themselves as "good" and "decent". Despite the fact that Donika and Irem have secret boyfriends and do a great deal to look attractive in the eyes of these boyfriends, they do not see themselves as promiscuous as Danish girls, and they draw a symbolic boundary between good and bad girls.

Whereas the girls disassociate themselves from ("immigrant") gangster boys, they perceive "Danish girls" as willing and easy sexual targets of bad boys because Danish girls let themselves be used, radiate sexuality, and often change partners without necessarily ending the previous relationship. They feel that Danish girls prefer to sleep around rather than getting married, they have "friends with benefits" (meaning casual sexual partners), and if they do get married, eventually they will get a divorce. In stark contrast, Donika, Irem, Aisha and Zarah all understand intimate relationships with boys as a straight pathway to marriage (with a man of the same ethnicity/culture), and they regard marriage as a state of unconditional love in which they will be a good wife. "You know", says Donika, "we're all Muslims, we have to marry". "That thing about fucking around, that's a Danish thing", Zarah says. And Donika adds:

> I'm going to have a big giant Albanian wedding. Nothing like those dry Danish weddings. They are just dry, there are only like 20 guests and they give long speeches. Us Albanians, we go crazy with Albanian music and 400 guests at least. With us it's a party with *valle* [dancing]… Honestly, hand on heart, they are fucking boring those Danes. They are better at a funeral than a wedding.

In particular, Irem and Donika explain that outsiders often associate them with gangster girls, "If I say I'm Turkish and from Tingbjerg, people think I'm a gangster girl" (Irem). For the four girls, a gangster girl is a quick-mouthed "immigrant girl" or "a non-Dane", wearing a thick jacket with a fur hood and not afraid to fight if provoked. Although it comforts them to know that they can *toughen up or put on a hard attitude* if needed ("*wallah*, I'm gonna slit your throat if…", "*yallah*, leave me alone will you"), they mostly regard this view of them as a condescending prejudice and an accusation. In fact, they actively strive to be good girls and strongly disassociate themselves from crime, drugs and violence.

The gendered dimension of the distinction between *Danes* and *perkere* also shows the girls' classed perception of Danish youth as having a more privileged upbringing.

> There are just some types. Girls in particular, they have it all, clothes, jewellery, *Louis bags*, and I say to my mother, I don't want to look like a bum, just because we don't have as much money as those girls have, like their parents -. You know. Those Danish girls get everything. They aren't like us. (Irem)

The four girls all think they have a stricter upbringing than Danish girls. For instance, Aisha says that her brothers "call her home" when it starts getting dark; and Irem talks about the necessity of keeping boyfriends secret from her parents and avoiding "public eyes" that might see her with a non-Turkish boyfriend ("the other Turks will rat on me unless it's a Turkish boy, but if it's a Turkish boy I can behave more like the Danes") in order to comply with the expectations of the adults.

Whereas Aisha and Zarah are comfortable about avoiding alcohol, Irem experiences the more sexual-gendered constraints as a burden which Danish girls do not have to carry:

> Danish girls don't have to worry about being 'bad girls' and bringing shame on their family… Danes can bring their boyfriends home. If I brought my guy home, *shahata*, I'd get a flying sandal in the face… If I get a Danish boyfriend, my father will kill me.

The firm judgment that Danes are privileged is also revealed by the girls' belief that Danes are wealthy:

> One afternoon, when we go to hang out with Aisha, Donika, Irem and Zarah in the youth club kitchen bar, they're laughing loudly. "What's so funny", we ask, and Irem tells Aisha to re-tell the story. Although she is interrupted by the giggles and laughter of the group, she tells a story from their day at school: their teacher did not believe that Aisha shared a room with her sister, and that her family of seven shared a flat of only 76 square metres. She explains that her teacher thought she was pulling his leg, because he had never heard of seven people living in a four-room flat. As she finishes the story, the girls laugh at the teacher's confusion and agree that no Danes can comprehend this. "It's normal for all *perker* families", Aisha adds. Donika comments, "Every Danish family has a large house, and they all have their own room, and often they have more rooms in the house than people in the family". "Yes", says Zarah, "and typically the parents have an office, and the children have a playroom".

The girls believe that Danes support xenophobic politicians. Danes are privileged, they look down on non-Danes, but they are also morally inferior and should be ridiculed as ignorant, uptight and "dry".

5 Territorial stigma management

One Friday evening, we walk with the girls to what they refer to as their "smoking hangout", in a basement which is hidden from the public eye, and Donika tells us the following story about territorial stigmatisation.

> When I was on a high-school visit, I was alone without my friends in a class full of Danes. You know, Danes who live in Hellerup [an affluent neighbourhood north of Copenhagen]. You know, far away from Tingbjerg. And I didn't really know where to sit, they didn't even make room for me anywhere, so I sat on, you know, in the windowsill, because there were no spare seats.
>
> And then, in the break, I sort of had to talk to them, because for some reason we weren't allowed to leave or go out, and I was just, 'shit, you gotta be kiddin me'. But then we talked a bit and when I told them I was a Muslim, an Albanian from Macedonia, and that I was from Tingbjerg, then, then they looked at me so strangely. They didn't know really if they dared ask any questions, but then I got some sarcastic comments or questions, like whether I was going to be forced into marriage, and why I didn't wear a

> scarf, and why I didn't pray, and how I could believe in God and all kinds of silly and strange questions that made no sense at all.
>
> *Wow*
>
> Oh yeah, then they also asked how I dare to live in Tingbjerg and whether there are any shootings when I walk outside the door and if I had heard any shootings. In my head I just thought, 'are you crazy some fucking Danes'.
>
> *How did you feel, when they asked you all that?*
>
> I really felt attacked in some sort of way. First I thought, 'fuck them too, who the fuck are they to talk of me that way', but then again, I didn't have any friends with me who could jump them. So it was more like, I just answered normally. I was just shocked, you know, that people think that of me because I'm from Tingbjerg and I'm a Muslim, right. You have to remember that I've always gone to school in Tingbjerg, from when I was little, so I haven't met so many Danes outside of Tingbjerg, really. You know, I've passed some in the street and so on, but I haven't really had a conversation with them. So I was really shocked that those Danes are like that. (…) Honestly, right, from the bottom of my heart, I turned really red in the face. I thought, 'are they joking with me'. Honestly, I just felt so estranged, because I had to answer those questions, who I am as a person. It was like I had to answer why my name is Donika and not some Danish name, like ehm, Laura.
>
> *Wow, I can understand that. That's a weird experience. What did you answer, and did they say anything else?*
>
> Well, they said, because I just answered normally, they said that if all immigrants from the ghettos were like me, there would be no prejudices against *perkere*. Then I said to them, if all Danes are like you, we're in big fucking trouble.
>
> *Okay, how did they reply?*
>
> They just got a little insulted and didn't really talk to me after that, and that's really strange. Just because I said that, they wouldn't speak to me again, but when they asked me all those humiliating questions, I just answered normally and was all normal, but they wouldn't anymore. But fuck them too. I just know that I'll never go to such a Dane school.

On several occasions, the girls talk about experiences in which they have felt uncomfortable, hurt or humiliated in face-to-face encounters with "the Danes outside of their neighbourhood", who do not understand or recognise their residential area and/or cultural background (or who actually look down upon it).

> One classmate asked me, *how can you live in Tingbjerg?* And I was just, oh no, here's that question again. Why, I asked her? And she said, she isn't allowed to come to Tingbjerg, because she's been told there are dangerous people and stuff. And my brain was just, relax will you! (Aisha)

Even though the girls experience negative judgments, they still uphold a positive view of their neighbourhood: "we're proud of living in Tingbjerg". Despite recognising and vividly experiencing the harmful view that outsiders *(Danes)* have of their district, they struggle to reverse the racial-territorial stigma by stating proudly: "We are perker girls", "perkere from

Tingbjerg". In the same way as they define themselves as "perker girls who can defend themselves if provoked", the girls strive to fend off the threats of outsiders by categorising Tingbjerg as a place of home and community.

> What makes Tingbjerg -. What sets Tingbjerg apart from any other district is the community we have, which no-one else has. We all know each other, and we all stick up for each other. It's like family or like friendly, we all know who we are and no other district has the community" (Donika)

> I love living in Tingbjerg. Many people talk shit about Tingbjerg. You know, you hear a lot about Tingbjerg, that people are getting shot here and there, and *perker* girls are jumping each other and that kind of thing, ehm, you know. Well, there might be shootings and the police come here, but I love this community we have here. It's just right for us" (Irem)

Thus, the primary strategy the girls use in managing the territorial stigma seems to involve downplaying its negative impact and emphasising its positive traits. They defy the stigma by telling positive stories of Tingbjerg and by mutual confirmation of its qualities: "I don't spend my time thinking about it [the ghetto list]", "as if there are shootings all the time", "there's nothing wrong with living in Tingbjerg", "people need to relax", "I respect Tingbjerg", "everybody is happy in Tingbjerg", "everybody helps each other", "there is room for all sorts of different people". Using humour and ridiculing outsiders as ignorants, as in the example with the teacher, the girls laugh off outsiders as someone who does not understand their reality.

Instead, the girls describe Tingbjerg as a place where they feel at home, "in safe hands", because they know every person and corner and feel appreciated and positively valued. Whereas research on territorial stigmatisation highlights in-territory retreat to the private sphere, the four girls all take part in communal activities and make no effort to avoid areas or people because they feel safe everywhere: "if you're from Tingbjerg, nothing's dangerous here" (Aisha). For the four girls from Tingbjerg, the territorial stigma management strategies of avoidance or retreat concern places and people outside of Tingbjerg. Donika, for instance, says that all of her friends are from Tingbjerg, and she tries to avoid outsiders because "we [people from Tingbjerg] understand each other on another level… we grow up with the same Muslim values that are different from Danish culture, and you don't have to argue for the things you do and don't do".

Besides expressive sentiments of belonging, the girls also grow angry when they hear "trash talk" about their neighbourhood and talk about the continuing feeling of being looked down upon by outsiders. "I get angry all the way to my bones", Zarah says when speaking of how some politicians say, "those ghettos like Mjølnerparken and Tingbjerg are very vulnerable, with criminals, and many people who don't know Danish and this and that. If it's not being from Tingbjerg, then it's my scarf" (Zarah).

The girls are vividly aware of the territorial stigma – from the official ghetto list to the common rhetoric of public discourse and face-to-face encounters with prejudice, ignorance, accusation or condescension. However, while the girls do not engage in a collaborative soiling of their neighbourhood or express shame of their residential area, they still aspire to a future life elsewhere. They talk about their dreams of "living in luxury houses and having a lot of luxury cars on *Strandvejen* [the Beach Road, the rich coastal line north of Copenhagen]" and of "making a lot of money in the future". When referring to making it,

they talk about either "winning the lottery" (Irem, Donika, Aisha), or "making good in school" (Zarah). With a smile on their lips, loud laughter or a humorous tone of voice, the girls speak of moving to "a new and richer place" or to "a big house like the ones the Danes have".

One final stigma management strategy is the more gendered caring-distancing from the "troubled boys". The girls acknowledge that criminal activities such as drug dealing take place in Tingbjerg, helping to reinforce the stigma of the territory and its residents, and they exclusively associate this with young boys and gangs: "Yes, Tingbjerg is called a ghetto, and I think it has a lot to do with those idiots smoking and selling *juu* down there. They are ruining everything for the rest of us" (Zarah). However, as Irem says, while the police only come because of the idiots, the gangster boys, these boys only become gangsters because of parental neglect.

> They are just kids who've had hard times. As I say, the parents don't have any control over them, and then they get into things, like gang-related or crime here in Tingbjerg. And -. When you let the kids do what they want, they automatically get into such things. I think they need help to know that they don't have to do that to be acknowledged. (Irem)

We can understand this strategy as a gendered form of lateral denigration or mutual distancing (Wacquant 2008); but rather than demonising these boys, it is through a caring embrace and worry that the girls distance themselves from the "gangster boys" who smoke and sell *juu*. The girls see the young boys as people who have been left alone by their parents, and they blame the older generation for failing to supervise and discipline these boys, leaving them to the street and the gangs. The lateral denigration performed by the girls thus takes a gendered as well as a generational dimension, which also leads the girls to keep an eye on their baby brothers so they stay out of trouble and troublesome relations.

6 Understanding subaltern speak

To understand the point of view of these young girls from Tingbjerg, it is necessary to consider the way in which they struggle to conquer a position in a social, symbolic and geographical space which is stamped by increasing inequality and intensified racialised denigration in the form of territorial stigmatisation. By contrast with the spontaneous interpretation that the girls distance themselves from "the Danes" inside a single "immigrant culture", it is necessary to consider the intersection between biography and society and the girls' active ways of negotiating their stigmas and managing the contradictions of inheritance (Bourdieu et al. 1999: 507). As trajectories emerging from a socially, symbolically and geographically dominated position, they are united by dispossession and dishonour caused by rising inequality and the spatial concentration of poverty in the resurgent city along with national stigmatisation of immigrants and ghettos, racialised and rendered dangerous as symbolically and physically polluted, harmful parallel societies and no-go areas. Like the sly effect of symbolic domination that leads people to "refuse what is anyway denied" (Bourdieu 1990: 54), Tingbjerg provides the girls with a sense of belonging; a place to feel at ease from the hurtful gaze of outsiders, protected from the emotional tension produced by contact with the dominant category. As in Wacquant's sociological specification of the ghetto, Tingbjerg seems to become "a protective and integrative device insofar as it relieves its members from constant contact with the dominant and fosters consociation and community-building within the constricted sphere of intercourse it creates. Enforced isolation from the outside leads to the intensification of social exchange and cultural sharing inside." (Wacquant 2012: 10).

To understand the point of view of these girls as a generic category, we extend Wacquant's analysis of distinction and stigma. First, the primary strategy of stigma management applied by the young girls seems to be mutual reinforcement of the positive qualities of the area, defined in opposition to "the Danes", who are ridiculed as rich, uptight, promiscuous or 'loose' about sex and alcohol, and ignorant of the social conditions and cultural specifics of "non-Danes", *perkere*. Second, we highlight the gendered boundaries within the group of young people in the territory. It is not young people versus others, but young men versus young girls (modulated by the subdivision of good versus bad young people) that forms the dominant distinction of everyday life in the neighbourhood. In accordance with the structures of masculine domination,[7] this antagonism seems to lead the girls towards aspirations of "luck", "marriage" and (more importantly) school performance rather than towards the street. Third, as a (historically produced) principle of vision and division, race turns out to be an important dimension as the continuing official categorisations of (especially Muslim, or so-called "non-Western") immigrants spawn homogenisation within the stigmatised category to which these girls belong. In other words, while the biographies (and national trajectories) of these four girls are heterogeneous, and even though they experience and express the specificities of various cultural and religious practices, such as the norms of upbringing to which they are subjected, the effect of territorial stigmatisation nevertheless makes them see and feel united. Thus, Irem's experienced expression, "those Danish girls get everything. They aren't like us", encapsulates the gendered, class and racialised dimensions of a socially and historically produced point turned into a view, a point of view.

Like other youth studies, this study shows that young girls actively navigate and negotiate their physical and cultural terrains – such as parental disciplining, school demands and bodily styles – as they struggle for a place to belong in the social world. Like studies on territorial stigma management, we argue that the continuing production of spatial and symbolic taint has injurious effects. The girls may struggle to defend their neighbourhood from the officialised harmfulness of the views from the outside, warding off the stigma by claiming neighbourhood virtues and a sense of belonging. However, as they enter the "struggle for the legitimate perception of the social world" (Bourdieu 2022: 22), their means are scarce, the mutual gendered and generational distancing complicates mobilisation, and behind their territorial pride and disarming humour, they experience and express shame and humiliation.

The girls of Tingbjerg actively comprehend their cultural, social and spatial surroundings, striving to create identities as respectable *perker* girls and to defend their neighbourhood as an inclusive community. However, the socioeconomic and symbolic conditions that surround them, comprehend them and restrain their perspective, making life a game of chance, seem to limit their point of view to a fixed place on the one hand, while opening their aspirations endlessly to the illusions of the powerless on the other.

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[7] Men are to women as the private is to the public, the street to the house (Bourdieu 2000).

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