

A bulletproof vest and a pair of tactical gloves: an exploration of the materiality of 'the ghetto' within a Danish kindergarten

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On the outskirts of Copenhagen, bordering a social housing area politically defined as 'migrant ghetto' lies a public kindergarten caring for children between the ages of 3-6. On Thursday afternoons, all children are sent out to play while the majority of the pedagogical staff assemble in the arts and crafts room to discuss emerging issues related to the children in their care. Pouring himself a cup of coffee, Erik brings up the recurrent issue of Ayub whose father sometimes picks him up wearing a bulletproof vest and a pair of tactical gloves. What is more, Ayub has an inclination towards playing "gangster"; something that Erik strongly feels should not be endorsed within the boundaries of the kindergarten. "He can play this at home in 'the street'", Erik says with reference to Ayub's home in the social housing area.

In this paper, I set out to explore the (sometimes subtle) ways in which 'the ghetto' and 'the street' – the margin of the state (Das and Poole, 2004; Johansen and Jensen, 2017) – materialize within the kindergarten as a Danish welfare institution, blurring the boundaries between institution and locality and influencing the everyday pedagogical practices (cf. Petersen, 2015; Jensen et al., 2012). Based on ethnographic fieldwork and inspired by phenomenological approaches and core concepts around intersubjectivity and place (Desjarlais and Throop, 2011; Jackson, 2008; Casey, 2001), I consider how material objects – such as a bulletproof vest – manifest the presence of 'the ghetto' as well as how values considered by the pedagogues to belong to the margins of the state are experienced to seep into the institution and materialize in particular (almost textured) atmospheres (cf. Gammeltoft, 2017) that come to suffuse everyday life. Through a focus on the blurring of boundaries between institution and 'the ghetto', the paper inscribes itself within larger debates around the role of the Danish day care institution in working with matters of integration and social mobility.

Keywords: Ethnography, Social housing, Integration, Day care institution, Locality