



On-Line Papers – Copyright

This online paper may be cited or briefly quoted in line with the usual academic conventions. You may also download them for your own personal use. This paper must not be published elsewhere (e.g. to mailing lists, bulletin boards etc.) without the author's explicit permission.

Please note that if you copy this paper you must:

- include this copyright note
- not use the paper for commercial purposes or gain in any way
- you should observe the conventions of academic citation in a version of the following form:
Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen, 'Enjoy your fight! – "Fight Club" as a symptom of the Network Society',
published by the Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, Lancaster LA1 4YL, UK
at <http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/papers/Diken-Laustsen-Enjoy-Your-Fight.pdf>

Publication Details

This web page was last revised on 13th November, 2003; the paper was previously published at <http://comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/soc080bd.html>.

Introduction: Strangers, Ambivalence and Social Theory

Bülent Diken

Coming to "Wonderful Copenhagen", one cannot avoid seeing the glittering signs of the Tivoli Gardens just across from the central train station. As a symbol of Denmark and Danishness, Tivoli has become one of the fortresses of the Danish tourist and leisure industry, and thus one of the first stops on the tourist path. Perhaps ironically, Tivoli is the place where the foreign element, the Orient, first appeared so explicitly and visibly in Denmark.

Georg Carstensen, who grew up in Algeria as a diplomat's son, created with Tivoli (established in 1843) and later with Alhambra (established in 1857) a Danish department of the Orient, a realization of *1001 Nights*. In Tivoli's bazaar, with onion-shaped domes and a facade decorated with lamps, every visitor could feel like Aladdin, experiencing an almost systematic sublimation of all distances and borders. (Zerlang 1994: 6; my translation)

According to Martin Zerlang, Orientalist forms were popular in architecture, painting and furniture design in Denmark in the 1840s, but Tivoli was the spatial centre of this form. As such, Tivoli was also the symbolic centre of Danish modernity. The Danish writer, Jørgen Bonde Jensen, characterized Georg Carstensen as "the first modern man" in Denmark. He was the first modern man at a time when Denmark was only one of those "damned peasant countries", according to Engels, and in a city "the claustrophobia and provincialism" of which Kierkegaard satirically criticized (Zerlang 1995: 2, 5, 20).



Given Tivoli and the idea that Danish modernity began with it, one could say that the symbolic or imagined "Danishness" of Tivoli, or of Danish modern urban geography in general, has been largely dependent upon the internalization of an "alien" element, upon hybridization. Today, this is often concealed by a forgetfulness, which deeply characterizes contemporary discussions of Danish culture in the context of immigration.

Approximately 120 years after Tivoli was built, the cultural element of the Orient was once more brought to Denmark, but this time in the form of the immigrant. They did not come as tourists, to gaze upon Tivoli's architecture, nor as persons, but as a category ("alien worker") or, perhaps more aptly, as a commodity, that is, labour power. In contrast to the easy assimilation of the Orient in Tivoli, the assimilation of these immigrants has been ambivalent. Although invited and assimilated as labour in the earlier phases of immigration, immigrants during later phases were gradually pushed outside the reach of systematic and social integration. In the 1990s, immigrants have often been perceived as "outsiders". Today, the discourse of immigration operates with homogeneous, hierarchical identities, positioned from the centre outwards: "Danes", "Turks", "immigrants", "refugees", etc.

The in-between reality experienced by the immigrant is negatively reflected also in more general social phenomena. As Saskia Sassen points out:

the city concentrates diversity. Its spaces are inscribed with the dominant corporate culture but also with a multiplicity of other cultures and identities, notably through immigration. The slippage is evident: the dominant culture can encompass only part of the city. And while corporate power inscribes noncorporate cultures and identities with "otherness", thereby devaluing them, they are present everywhere. (Sassen 1994: 122)

According to Sassen "the city of the immigrant" and immigrant communities are actually a part of our urban geography, and the invisibility and devaluation of these communities are "a good part of the colonial history", which is increasingly in need of being redefined and rewritten (see Sassen 1994b).

In the context of immigration, this socio-political problem of "under-representation", which will be dwelled on at length in this study, coincides with another problem, "over-representation". Immigration is a popular issue that many people are concerned with and have an opinion about. Much research is carried out on this topic, which is constantly problematized, and in the Danish mass media, immigration is one of the most popular subjects. Consequently, cultures of immigrants are "over-represented". Thus, immigrant culture(s) and their "ghettos" can be regarded as sites of representations, within which immigrants, their lives and cultures increasingly become subjects of the discourse of immigration. This discourse determines who is in the position to talk about "them" and in which ways. Accordingly, one could say, immigrant cultures are defined, to the extent they are seen and shown, by the metaphors of the discourse of immigration.

The field of immigration is thoroughly saturated with an already existing body of knowledge. In this preconstructed world, "reality offers itself to you. The given gives itself.... This is one of the reasons that the given is so dangerous" (Bourdieu 1992: 44). It can be argued that, in the context of immigration, "familiarity" is "the staunchest enemy of inquisitiveness and criticism" for sociological thinking (Bauman 1990: 15). Confronted with this common sense familiarity, which constantly reasserts the given and unquestioned assumptions in the field, the task of sociology, as it is defined by Bauman, is to act "as a meddling and often irritating stranger". Hence, one of the ambitions of this study is to "defamiliarize" the familiar and what is taken for granted in the field of immigration. I have adapted a deconstructivist position, which mainly builds upon Foucault's, Derrida's, Game's and Bauman's works. My main purpose in this has been to show the fictitious and constructed character of the identities that are normally presupposed and taken for granted. I attempted this by letting the "immigrant" speak through interviews. Seeing him or her as a subject rather than as an object of the discourse was illuminating because it showed that much of what is ascribed to the "immigrant" or the "truth" in the field is indeed a fiction. But what was expressed by those interviewed indicated even more: as Borges says, "if the characters of a fictional work can be readers or spectators, we, its readers or spectators, can be fictitious" (quoted in Game 1991:



3). In other words, a deconstruction of the images about "them" also cracks the images of ourselves, or "us". This study explicitly suggests that we cannot consider immigrants as objects of an isolated research field without referring to and reflecting upon "us".

Related to my interest in the discourse of immigration, which plays an important role regarding both over- and under-representation of immigrants in different contexts, this study focuses on how this discourse is associated with power, that is, the practical question of winners and losers. In this context, the study dwells on local and central state policies and planning. This requires a merger of social theory with research on immigration as well as (social and physical) planning. I aim at doing this in the Danish context. A central question here regards the degree and the way in which planning and urban politics are oriented toward immigrants. Planning in Denmark *either* is not oriented toward immigrants (especially because of a distance between the apparatus of planning and immigrants' daily lives), *or*, when it is oriented toward immigrants, is often used as a disciplinary instrument. Both, in turn, directly affect immigrants' life-chances in Denmark.

This double interest, in the discourse and politics of immigration, is necessary in order to come to terms with the ambiguity of the "discipline". As Foucault has shown, the concept of discipline means both to order, to classify, to make the other obey *and* the knowledge that is accumulated in a distinct field (see especially Foucault 1991). This study aims, then, at showing that these two meanings of the concept are also integrally entwined in practice: for instance, planning physical and the social framework of daily life of citizens and denizens, or conducting research on a distinct group of people, also have a direct effect on their condition.

While the focus is on how the discourse and politics of immigration function to disciplinary ends, it is also important to illuminate how these are accepted, neglected, translated, escaped from, ridiculed, or manipulated in the daily lives of immigrants. Thus, together with an interest in political and discursive "strategies", the "tactics" used by immigrants in coping with these strategies are focused on at length.

The empirical part of my analyses is based on a case study, which focuses on the situation of Turkish immigrants in the second largest city in Denmark: Aarhus. The aim here is to start with clear conflict situations. Aarhus is interesting because the largest Danish "ghetto", Gellerup, is located within its borders. Gellerup is a public housing area, where immigrants are densely concentrated.

Why the Turks? The Turkish minority is chosen because it is one of the largest immigrant groups in Europe and the largest one in Denmark. It is also the largest "ghettoized" immigrant group in Denmark, as it is in several other European countries, such as Germany, the Netherlands, Austria and Sweden. Concomitantly, Turks in Denmark are that segment of the population with the highest unemployment rate. Furthermore, it seems that, more than any other group in the Danish social space, the Turks arouse sentiments of cultural and social fear related to strangerhood. Thus, to measure how assimilated any other group of immigrants is, the picture of Turks is often used as a counter- example: "they are not like Turks" becomes a compliment addressed to these other groups. Not surprisingly, immigration research in Denmark has focused primarily on Turks and has contributed to the state of affairs in several ways, which will be discussed later.

Why Denmark? Denmark is a "cosy" country on the European periphery and is often held up as a distinctively democratic country with social policies that reflect this democracy. Especially when its social policies are compared with those of many other countries, this seems to be true, at least at first. Yet cosy Denmark has another side, and this is illustrated by its problem with the way it has tackled immigration and with its fear of "strangers". Denmark remains one of the most culturally homogeneous countries in Europe and thus experiences social and cultural heterogeneity rather traumatically. Hence, we find the immigrant ghetto on the margin of this rather peripheral society at a time in which globalization is greatest.

How are the processes of globalization, processes in which immigration plays an important role, seen from the margin? The margin will be understood both as a position of exclusion and as a position of power and critique (see Shields 1991: 277). Furthermore, as Soja writes, marginality will be understood as "a space of radical openness, a context from which to build communities of resistance and renewal that cross the boundaries and double-cross the



binaries of race, gender, class, and all oppressively Othering categories" (Soja 1996: 84; see also hooks 1990).

The main message proliferating from this study is three-fold. Firstly, it is useful to begin research (and other forms of the debate) on immigration by deconstructing the political, scientific and popular hidden assumptions. Most of what is taken for granted in the debate is seriously problematical. Secondly, this field is severely in need of multi-dimensional perspectives and in-depth analyses that can avoid oversimplified and hasty syntheses. Lastly, theorizing in the field must build on an active perspectivism and a dialogical "both/and" thinking, which does not take theoretical positions for granted, and which does not seek to establish a hierarchical relationship between the empirical material and theories that are employed.

The plan of the book

Chapter 1 is about the politics of immigration. It focuses on Aarhus and on the ghetto. It looks at what the central and local state politicians and the technocrats are saying and doing. Thus, it can be read as an introduction to and a discussion of problems related to immigration as defined by mainstream politics. Issues, such as social and cultural discrimination, exclusion from the economic system, and the increasing political problematization of immigrants are some of the topics mentioned here. The aim of this chapter is to introduce the general framework, themes, concepts, promises, false dichotomies and illusions of the politics of immigration. This chapter is important in that it contextualizes phenomena that are often discussed in de-contextual terms. Concomitantly, it focuses not only on ideas, intentions and formal politics, but also on political practice. It not only studies the "plans" made, but also how the "realities" are constructed and how the plans are implemented. Given this background, Chapter 1 becomes a polemical intervention aimed at "unmasking" what lies behind major current policies.

The discussions in succeeding chapters deconstruct and reconstruct the mainstream framework introduced in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 focuses on the theme of deconstruction. Rather than "unmasking", or "debunking", to show the "reality" behind what is said, Chapter 2 will open up for further interpretation some unspoken and hidden assumptions of the discourse and politics of immigration. The focus will be on what the politics of immigration, as discussed in Chapter 1, does *not* address, that is, what the politics of immigration takes for granted, assumes, remains silent on and thus hides.

In general, a substantial amount of accumulated knowledge on immigrants is already available. In the debate, ways of speaking, possible subject positions and the "pre-constructed" primarily consist of conceptual dichotomies and political polarizations. Chapter 2 tries to dig beneath these by showing what they share in common, despite dispersion and dissemination. Furthermore, the constructed character of social identities and the processes of "estrangement" in terms of "us" and "them" will be dwelled on. Here I will also focus on how mainstream research relates to the main assumptions of the discourse of immigration. I will argue that much mainstream research perpetuates the discourse of immigration, which constructs immigrants as outsiders.

In the 1990s, both the discourse on and the politics of immigration has increasingly focused on spatial issues and thus the "ghetto". Therefore, Chapter 3 will focus on the ghetto in general, and Gellerup in specific. Here the central argument will be that the physical environment of the Danish ghetto is, above all, an expression of a "fear of touching", which, as Richard Sennett has shown, characterizes modern urban life in general and modernist urban planning specifically with its emphasis on social and spatial segregation. Gellerup is physically an isolated area, and what is done in the context of present urban policies, like urban renovation work, which still continues, does not break this isolation, but rather contributes to it by focusing on its centre rather than on its limits, where interaction with other social groups and urban areas could take place.

The "fear of touching" related to physical space leads to the issue of social space in Chapter 4. Here, by building on Bourdieu's concepts like "capital", I look at the social space of immigration and illuminate how the "immigrants' place" is positioned in its hierarchically



differentiated structure. In this respect, we will dwell on some anomalies and ambivalences related to social space and immigration. For example, in a Danish context, Turkish immigrants might be characterized as members of an "underclass", while in a Turkish context, their positions and concomitantly their dispositions can be quite different. What do these anomalies mean in our context? This discussion will take us to broader issues.

To look at the social space in terms of these anomalies, the phenomenon of globalization is focused on in Chapter 5. Globalization diverts the perspectives adapted in the preceding chapters to such phenomena as fragmentation and hybridization and to the concept of "the stranger". These issues add significant, new dimensions to the problem at hand, dimensions which transgress the imagination and the static boundaries of Danish politics and the discourse of immigration. Thus, the questions which proliferate in the preceding chapters also take new forms. Most significantly, what is taken to be ordered and pure in the politics of immigration, like social identities, begin to seem increasingly hybrid, ambivalent and kaleidoscopic in this chapter.

How should the issue of ambivalence be dealt with? Chapter 6 takes the first explicit step toward answering this question by taking a position against modernity understood as an ordering project. The context in which this discussion is undertaken is the quite commonly used dichotomy between tradition and modernity made when discussing Danish immigration research and politics. In Chapter 6, it will be argued that it is more productive to look at both tradition and modernity in the context of postmodernity instead of focusing on immigrant cultures as "tradition" and looking at them in the context of modernity. To argue against these dichotomies, the concepts of tradition, modernity and postmodernity will be discussed not as realities but as perspectives. In this context, the theories of detraditionalization and reflexive modernization, especially Giddens' version, will be critically analyzed. Here the main argument will be that much dichotomous theorizing about tradition and (post)modernity, as if they were some monolithic entities walled off from each other, is based on the notion of chronological time. Instead, building on literature related to the sociology of time, on the one hand, and Bauman's work, on the other, it will be argued that each of these concepts can be discussed in relation to order and ambivalence, which will help in using these concepts in more relaxed and productive ways.

Where the focus in Chapter 6 is on what is ambivalent, without the ambition of ordering it, Chapter 7 focuses on what is ordered in the *longue durée* of contemporary Western societies and how. Here I make use of Luhmann's system theory and Lash and Urry's theory of "economies of signs and space" in the context of immigration. The focus is on understanding the systems which set the structural framework of immigration. This chapter can also be read as a reaction to culturalism, the dominant tendency in the immigration debate. That is, issues like unemployment, exclusion and discrimination will be explained with respect to changing social structures rather than in cultural terms.

Then, by undertaking an extended discussion of the new forms social theoretical inquiry should take, and by addressing a wider audience, Chapter 8 collects the different threads developed in preceding chapters. It discusses firstly that, in the context of immigration, a more "ambivalent" social theory is needed. Here "ambivalent" social theory is defined as a social theory that can concurrently "settle" on systemic issues (stable social orders as Luhmann's systems or Bourdieu's habitus), on unstable power relations and hybridized orders (such as actor-networks), and on ambivalence related to sociality and what Bauman has called "habitat". Secondly, it discusses some of the major possible trajectories of such a social theory. Furthermore, it is argued that an ambivalent social theory must be content with "dialogic" relations between these different perspectives instead of seeking only "dialectic" totalities. Subsequent to the exploration in preceding chapters of how social theory contributes to the understanding of immigration, the chapter looks at if the converse relationship holds.

Chapter 9 discusses ambivalent social theory and planning together. Just as an ambivalent social theory is offered as an alternative to the existing research framework in the field of immigration, a corresponding method of planning is offered here. It is generally held that, for example, "postmodern planning" is a contradiction in terms because while planning needs "reason", postmodernism attacks it (see, for example, Rosenau 1992: 131). But I argue that



things are more complex, and that what is needed is a new form of planning that builds on a new form of professional expertise. This new form of expertise will be called "heterogeneous reflexivity" (Albertsen & Diken 1997). Above all, heterogeneous reflexivity seeks to combine cognitive, aesthetic and hermeneutic reflexivity with each other in the context of planning, and it is argued that such an understanding of planning is necessary to move beyond the reductionist versions of functionalist, participatory, corporative and aesthetic planning, which have characterized the last decades of Danish and European planning.

Chapter 10, the last chapter, summarizes the most important concepts used in the study. Instead of formulating a clear-cut "conclusion" or a final word regarding the topics at hand, it underlines the importance of further interpretation in the form of a horizontal "flow".