**Ambiguity in urban belonging: Pakistani Copenhagen narratives.**

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**Abstract**

Being a ‘stranger’ has become increasingly difficult on the European continent during the latest decades. Populist racism and anti-immigration attitudes have made life difficult, and Denmark has taken the position as one of the iconic cases of this development. But how is that reflected in the cities? Does the character of the city as ‘a world of strangers’ open up special possibilities of co-existence? These are the questions addressed in this paper using material from an interpretative analysis conducted among Copenhagen citizens of Pakistani origin. The analysis aims to construe an affective mapping of the life as an ethnic minority in the city. It revolves around three issues. First, it focuses on the narrators’ experiences of exclusions and blockages in everyday life. This is followed by a focus on urban belonging emphasizing its differential character. Finally the ambiguity of experiences is discussed, including the paradox that the experiences of estrangement apparently have only marginal influence on the possibility of belonging. The narrators simultaneously express strong emotions around exclusions and construe different creative ways of belonging to the city.

Key words: ethnic minorities, urban everyday life, Otherness, belonging.

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**Introduction**

In many ways understandings of the city as what Lofland (1973) designated a ‘world of strangers’ have achieved iconic status in urban literature. The city is seen as a spatial formation populated with people who are personally unknown (or even strange) to each other, in this way making encountering ‘the stranger’ an inevitable condition of urban life. Within European modernity the seminal work on this issue is Simmel’s essay on *Metropolis and mental life* (1950a/1903), where he discusses how the countless meetings, impressions and interactions of the city are translated into a state of mind. He talks about a blasé, intellectualising attitude to others as a strategy of self-protection. This attitude partially expresses *indifference*, but it also reflects a *reserve* developed to contain the latent aversion easily created in the bodily closeness of urban life. These attitudes might appear as dissociation, Simmel argues, but they are in fact a basic form of urban ‘sociation’, one that allows people to co-exist with all these largely unknown others. This form of sociation also connects to the other mental phenomena of the metropolis; the one of individuation and *freedom*. Metropolitan human beings, Simmel says, have become genuinely ‘free’ in the sense of ‘freedom of mobility and the elimination of prejudices and petty philistinism’. Another classic reference is Benjamin’s archetypal *flanêur* strolling through the arcades and enjoying the spectacle of the streets (see e.g. Buck-Morss 1989, Buse et al 2005). Later authors in a more micro-sociological sense talk about capacities to cope with urban encounters, involving ways of moving or control of gestures (Lofland 1973), or about *civil inattention* (Goffman 1963). At the same time configurations of the city from the Chicago school onwards have provided cultural and ethnic categorisations of people and urban spaces and dealt with the cities as multicultural spatial formations. Cities are products of migration – this is not a new phenomenon. What is new, in particular in European contexts, is that this migration has occurred over longer distances and the negotiation of difference occurs between ‘strangers’, which is ‘more distant’ from each other. This development has given rise to descriptions and spatial categorizations – of streets, ethnic quarters, *banlieue*, ‘ghettos’ etc. – that have infiltrated public discourse as stigmatizing geographical imaginations. But also a growing literature pursuing issues of integration and living with diversity has appeared (see e.g. Amin 2007, 2012, Matejskova and Leitner 2011, Valentine 2008).

This paper approaches the city from the point of view of an ethnic minority. We are interested in the experiences and practices of people designated as ‘strangers’: what are *their* experiences and *their* feelings in the signifying encounters? What are the possibilities of identification and belonging offered to them by the city? What we are presenting, then, is a theoretical-empirical exploration of urban everyday experiences and belongings. Our basic theoretical starting point is a phenomenological inspired theory of practice employed in connection with strands of postcolonial thinking (see also Simonsen 2007, Koefoed and Simonsen 2010). Empirically, the analysis is based on a project conducted in Copenhagen amongst citizens of Pakistani origin (see also Koefoed and Simonsen 2011). We chose this group for two reasons. First, with a history dating back to the 1960s it is a well-established immigrant group in Copenhagen. Secondly, as Muslims, the group has increasingly, not least after 9/11 2001, experienced a signification as ‘strangers’, in this way providing a critical case in relation to questions of belonging. The method employed was narrative interviews, and the analysis is developed through extracts from these interviews.

On this background the paper will be structured as follows. First we show the experiences amongst our respondents concerning some of the obstacles they meet in everyday life: on the streets, in their work and in their residential career. This is theorised and presented under the headline of ‘a phenomenology of being stopped’. This is followed by three sections each treating one specific aspect of the construction of urban belonging. This shows the differential character of their identifications. Finally, we sum up and discuss the ambiguity of experiences but also the paradox that the experiences of exclusions apparently have only a marginal influence on the possibilities of belonging.

**A Phenomenology of being stopped**

In accordance with Fanon’s (1967) extension of Merleau-Ponty’s bodily phenomenology, the phenomenology of being stopped can be described in terms of the bodily and social experiences of restrictions, uncertainty and blockage. Some bodies are blocked in their mobility and access places more than others who can freely pass and extend their physical mobility into social mobility (Ahmed 2000, Fekete 2004)

*Blockings in nightlife*

When I started going out with friends from high school or my workplace it was very, very obvious. Without exaggerating I would say that 95 times out of 100 I was rejected. It was like just getting slapped in the face all the time. No, you can’t enter. Not that I was standing there with ten black people. I have tried in all kinds of ways. Many times I was stopped while I was with Danish girls and boys from my high school class. And finally, it was like I said, ok, I get rejected. Can you please tell me why? Is it something with my appearance? Is it my hair? Or is it my clothes? I just want to know. (Hanif, 27)

In this case Hanif meets the racist technology of blocking of passage. He describes the experience of frequently being rejected and stopped at the door when trying to enter into a café or a night club. It is not the exception but the rule, he explains. It is something that happens over and over again.

Discrimination is experienced in the moment Hanif tries to enter the place. When rejected he is produced as a *body suspect* recognized as a stranger and stopped at the door. He is made strange through what Ahmed (2000) characterizes as a technique of reading the bodies of others and telling the diﬀerence between what is familiar and what is strange. People with darker skin experience, more often than others, that they are stopped, rejected and excluded from places in the urban nightlife. This may happen as direct discrimination where people, on the basis of bodily appearance, are stopped and excluded from a place or in line with quota systems for how many ‘foreigners’ the place will let in (Nørregaard-Nielsen and Rosenmeier, 2007). The example illustrates how the technology of racism operates and incorporates discourses of ‘stranger danger’ in the bodily encounter. The ‘other’ is stopped because he/she is imagined to be the origin of danger, related to trouble or imagined to steel ‘our’ enjoyment and ruin the party (cf. Zizek, 1993: 201). Hanif is not the stranger in the sense that he is unknown; he is already recognized as such in the moment in which he is faced.

The example illustrates how the respondent suddenly finds himself slowed down and stopped in his passage. When stopped, he is produced as a ﬁgure *out of place*. Being stopped is not an experience of a simple delay; it immediately shifts the attention back towards the body and creates emotions such as anger, humiliation and frustration. To be blocked is felt like *violence* – ‘Just getting slapped in the face all the time’. This and similar experiences about being stopped while walking in the city, crossing the national border or trying to enter into a place occur both in meetings with diﬀerent kinds of authorities and in everyday life in the city.

*To be stopped in everyday activities (including restrictions on residence)*

I am one of those who have been hit by 24-year rule... I married the girl I fell in love with when I lived in Pakistan. I did not manage to get her to Denmark. It was just around the time when the 24-year rule took effect. So we moved to Malmö. I was very angry. I thought; ‘what the hell is this all about? Why should I move to get my wife here’? I do not think I have completely calmed down. Probably it is because my job, my friends and my family live here in Copenhagen. My wife might say something else because she has a life in Sweden. And my children - I have twins and they live both here and there (Abbas, 38).

As Abbas explains, he suffers from ‘the 24-year rule of marriage’ (included into the law on foreign subjects 2002) by which Danish citizens marrying someone from outside EU and the Nordic countries are not granted residence permit in Denmark until both partners are 24 years old (see also Fair, 2010). Therefore, he has moved to Malmö in Sweden with his wife, from where he commutes every day to Copenhagen. As many others struggling with this problem, Abbas has been *forced* to settle in Sweden because of the new strict immigration rules. He explains that Malmö is not a place where he feels at home. His everyday life is in Copenhagen and he feels he belongs here. Here he has family and friends and a job in a small laundry. Abbas’ story is about being denied a fundamental *right* freely to settle where you want. This detention is based on authorities in the form of a law that is directed towards all citizens, but it is based on stereotypes on forced marriages among people with immigrant background.

For Abbas the restrictions complicate his everyday life and daily mobility. He has to commute between Malmö and Copenhagen to maintain his job, friends and family network. The *blocking of settlement* is experienced as a concrete *mobility-burden* and what we, with inspiration from Cindy Katz (2001), will call a *time-space expansion*. This means that the relative distance is expanding, opposed to the shrinking of distance that follows from globalisation and time-space compression. Finally another layer of ambiguity becomes incorporated into his experienced otherness. What Abbas experiences is that he becomes a Dane in Sweden and Pakistani in Denmark. This is expressed as a split between two places – his wife and children live their lives in Sweden, and he has to cope with job and social networks in Copenhagen.

Another respondent who at some stage moved to Sweden temporarily for other reasons explains how he was often stopped in his everyday mobility when driving in his car:

When I lived in Sweden I was stopped in my car by the police several times. It was really as if they followed me for a long time. And then they asked: ‘where do you live and things like that’. ‘Can you describe your home? And do you sleep in your own bed’? That is really such a ridiculous question. Well, where are you going? Then I said: ‘why does it matter’? ‘I'm going home’. ‘Well’, the police responded, ‘have you forgotten the way to Sweden it is not the road you are on now’. Then I said: ‘Yes’, ‘sorry, ‘what's the problem’? ‘Is it illegal to drive in Denmark or what’? ‘Well’, so they checked and searched. And then after this 20-minute harassment, I would call it so, they said: ‘Well, have a nice trip home’. And then on the next corner there's a new police car after me, and they stop: ‘Yes’, ‘where are you going’? ‘Can we see some ID’? Then I said: ‘No, I have had enough. I have just been stopped by your colleagues, it is not more than five minutes ago’! ‘Well, well, well’, and then they checked the car anyway, just like that and continued like ‘Where are you going’? (Hanif, 27)

For some, the car is something that extends the mobility and it is related to the feeling of freedom, flow and the possibility to move anytime you want. For others it is turned into something suspicious. Hanif found himself blocked in his mobility several times while driving. In the encounter with the authorities he is policed and under a kind of surveillance. He is followed and suspected to be out of place, in the wrong direction and in the wrong place. The blocking is part of a *differential economy of stopping*. With residence in Sweden, Danish citizenship and Pakistani background he is made a *suspicious body* that has to be held up in order to be checked. He is produced as a *body suspect* that has to be checked also by being asked questions like ‘where do you live’, ‘where are you going’ ‘who are you’ (ID). These questions become a kind of a stopping device that slows him down. It is not only a simple twenty minutes delay; the ‘stop and search’ is a part of an *uneven political economy* that produces him as a stranger.

*Bodily encounter*

Once I worked in my younger brother's bakery. I stood behind the counter and suddenly a lady said: ‘well, we really hate scarves’. I responded ‘can I just ask you. What have I done? What have I done wrong’? She said, ‘you have not done anything wrong we just don’t like scarves’. It seemed very pointless to me. So I said ‘get out of here. Don’t visit the bakery if you don’t like it’. She went out but returned every day and she complained a lot about my scarf. (Kanta, 41)

Kanta’s narrative is an example on how stereotyped representations of the other and social discourses of aggression become incorporated into everyday bodily encounters. With expressions like ‘we really hate scarves’, negative emotions become part of the face to face meeting and contact. But it is not only a meeting between two faces. The small unnoticed word ‘we’ addresses and calls upon the nation – it is ‘we’ the imagined community who hate scarves, the women implicitly says. The encounter thereby mediates the imagined community and its impossible dream of assimilation – a dream of a space that is free from the disturbing presence of Muslim women wearing scarves. Kanta is not only recognised as a stranger, it is her concrete bodily appearance that challenges the power between ‘us’ and ‘them’. In this example Kanta’s reaction is not accept of being estranged, instead she reacts with *resistance*. By asking the lady to leave the bakery, she refuses to submit to both the face to face domination and the social exclusion. In the following we will see, how she actually constructs her surroundings.

**Constructions of place**

Some configurations of the city represent it as *a collage of places* (Simonsen 2005). It happens in a process where we, even in the most limited situations, in practice and narrative shape our surroundings in accordance with our orientations and dispositions, but always in collaboration or conflict with our fellow creatures.

When I got my flat and told my friends that I was going to move to Vesterbro [a former working class neighbourhood housing many minorities], they said: ‘Don’t do that. It is not a good place; it is not good for children.’ I don’t agree. My children are grown up here, and I have good children, and I have raised them as good as I can ... There is a feeling of community here because there is so many clubs. And that is good. What was missing when I moved in was a women’s club, so I managed to start one here. And it works very well. The women come here, have a nice time and talk about their problems ... When I walk the streets here, 100 persons say hello, and they say ‘hi, how are you’ – and they know me, the people I pass. And the children are afraid of me! Afraid that I’ll ask them: ‘What are you doing here? Why are you in the street? You should go home, not just stand in the street.’... It is because they are my children – all Vesterbro’s children are my children, I shall not only care about my own ones. (Kanta, 41)

Obviously, what Kanta construes is a narrative of *local community*. Vesterbro is her *home*; she belongs here and feels that she knows (and is known by) ‘everybody’, and she feels a stranger in other parts of the city. Kanta’s attachment to the place is connected to two elements of her own practice; participation in the construction of communities and responsibility for her social environment. She has contributed to the community by participation in school boards and by initiating a women’s club, and she feels responsibility for the children trying to send them home if they hang out in the streets. Kanta does not idealise the neighbourhood; she does not want the children to hang out and get into trouble, and she has reservations in relation to the prostitution in some of the streets. Rather, she in a Heideggerian sense is dwelling in the place by attending to and caring for her surroundings, in her case the co-inhabitants.

It is important to notice that the places so constructed are not mono-ethnic communities; one of our respondents for example talks about the presence of 35 ‘nationalities’ in his neighbourhood. This underlines the inadequacy of an understanding of urban places as local communities (see e.g. Massey 1994, 2005). The conception cannot grasp the complexity of urban life. Another way of thinking about place is as loci of encounters, constructed as specific articulations of different social practices, narratives, meanings and materialities (Massey 1994, Simonsen 2008b). Adopting such an understanding means accepting that places cannot be ‘purified’. As Bauman puts it, ‘the question is no longer how to get rid of the strangers and the strange, but how to live with them - daily and permanently’ (2000:55). Probably therefore, the figure of community does not stand alone in the construction of places in the city:

I have had 10-12 addresses in eight years, or something like that. Crazy! I have been a little gipsyish, you see… I know exactly what I like about Østerbro, and exactly what I like about Nørrebro and Vesterbro. In Østerbro I like the silence, as when I lived up there where all the ‘writer-houses’ are placed, and then in the summertime the closeness to the water. I have used that a lot. And Nørrebro, that is sort of *my* Copenhagen. Nørrebro was *totally* different. Actually, I think that if Nørrebro had not been there, there wouldn’t have been the same pulse in Copenhagen. The pulse and the spirit and the heart there are in Copenhagen, it is placed in Nørrebro. And it is with row as well as without row… I have had an office there and also lived there, and I have been going about there in many years. Also now, I feel at home there. My networks are all over now, in all parts of the city. But we use Nørrebro, itse art milieus and design milieus, in a specific way. (Ayoub, 31)

The construction of place that we find with Ayoub (and many others) expresses how in modern mobile cities people’s lives are decentred or rather poly-centred (Dürrschmidt 1997). Their biographical and daily practices connect a plurality of ‘significant places’, each having their own qualities but all in different ways being part of the persons’ horizons of meaning. We can talk about the city being experienced as a *collage of places* interconnected by people’s practices, narratives and spatial trajectories (cf de Certeau 1984). Ayoub has lived in different places in the city and uses his biographical experiences in his construction of the urban collage. He talks about different atmospheres in different parts of the city. Ayoub experiences the different quarters through the perception of the intensity of the surroundings. He talks about sound, creative activities and ‘row’ in his description. He uses metaphors such as ‘pulse’ and ‘heart’ to describe the intensity – all issues that relate both to phenomenology and to Lefebvre’s rhythm-analysis (1992) analysing urban life as an articulation of different time-space rhythms formed by flows of people, different lifestyles, traffic and political and economic activity.

*Place as childhood memories*

There are places that you recognize, where you feel safe because you have gone about there as a child… I remember this milieu in the yard where all children were outside until late evening. We were one big group who played, cycled, played cricket and things like that. Both Danish and ethnic immigrant children. It was a milieu where the small children looked up to and followed the older ones. ‘What are they doing now?’ We had a Turkish friend whose mother baked big pancakes. Every evening at seven we stood in a long line waiting to get one pancake each… I also think that the fact that the buildings formed a closed space meant a lot. It was safe; the parents could just look out the window and see what the children were doing. (Yasmeen, 26)

What this story – chosen amongst many other ones – reveals is a place construction based on the urban childhood, here in a culturally very mixed neighbourhood. It is the image of the city from the perspective of the born and bred Copenhagener; a story about the familiar on the one hand ‘re-seen’ through the eyes of the child and on the other hand represented through a reflexive reconstruction. The stories hold common features. First they are constructed with a double focus on public space and social cohesion. Public space and material environment are important frameworks in the construction of place – as here the yards of the working class neighbourhood. However, the focus is more socio-material than purely material – concerning conditions of possibility given by the material environment. Secondly, emphasis is on bodily practices; the play in the open areas, cricket and football, common food experiences, music, singing, dancing and so on. The embodiment also includes the construction of the environment as home: ‘home-feeling’, ‘places you recognize’, ‘where you have gone about as a child’ and feel ‘safe’.

Then, what are at stake in these narratives are *memories* as performative speech acts where agents simultaneously construe places in the city and become interpreters of their own formation. The memories are personal but intersubjective and part of an inscription of character to the place. Memories make possible an appropriation of space through recall and recognition. They might be fragmentary and covering up conflicts and injustice, but they are important parts of the habitability of places.

*Place as local participation*

We have already met Kanta who saw participation as part of her belonging to Vesterbro. For others this is even a more dominant factor:

We live 38 nationalities here – personally, I find it difficult to understand when some politicians refer to Mjølnerparken as a *ghetto*. They label all of us, don’t they? ... I have to admit that when we moved in here, I didn’t involve myself in any residential democracy. It was about six years ago that we had some discussions in the family about moving out because we felt that the development was very bad. But we have always lived in Copenhagen, have our everyday life here and now also the children’s school. So we decided to stay. And then I showed up at a residential meeting for the first time. And, as you know, the ones who grumble get the joy! I came into the board and eventually also as chairman. And we tried to start a process to see if we could reverse the development... I think it has taken too long. It could have been done faster. But we *believe* in it, that we can reverse the development. (Mansoor, 42)

Mansoor personifies the ultimate local participation and identification with his neighbourhood. In his frustration over what he and his family saw as a ‘bad’ development in their neighbourhood and over the public representation of it as a ‘ghetto’, he engaged himself in the formal residential democracy (in a system prescribed in all social housing in Denmark). He took the long way through the system, a way with many impediments being the only one in the system with ‘dark skin and dark hair and so on’. He talks about that it was ‘one’s head against a brick wall’ and ‘like speaking to deaf ears’. But he managed to start up a neighbourhood improvement process and he still works at initiating new activities, carried by a strong belief that it is possible. Mansoor, then, inscribes himself into processes of *empowerment* or development of capacities for action (Freire 1974, Andersen and Votel 2003). In his case developed through practice and learning by experience which in the same process has resulted in a strong identification with the place.

As a first approximation to the understanding of urban belonging, then, we can identify different modes of construction of place and identification with specific places in the city.

**Copenhagener all over**

I can’t get away from that. It is with a big C. I can’t define it as anything but it is my hometown, it is sort of there I belong. (Tariq, 37)

I am such a *real* Copenhagener. I really feel that it is *my* city! I also know the city like the back of my hand. (Ayoub, 31)

Copenhagen is like my pocket; there I know where I am. (Abbas, 38)

Identification with the city for many is about the city as a whole and it is expressed in many different ways of which the above ones are just a few. It is much about feeling at home; about the constitution of home as emotional and material practice: ‘it is *my* city’, it is where ‘I belong’. It is also a question of familiarity as we see it in the metaphors ‘the back of my hand’ or ‘my pocket’. It can however also be a general city identity based in the possibility of going about unnoticed in public space; about the feeling of invisibility and the freedom it provides. Identification with the city, then, takes different forms dependent of the frames of meaning of the body subjects involved. Two forms were particularly conspicuous in our material:

*The city as experience*

I love Copenhagen, I don’t know why... It is an experience every day. Driving in the bus – even if most days I walk from the Main Station. And then I feel that there is such an atmosphere. Now I understand when people are talking about the pulse of the city. There is life. I like it, it is a heartening atmosphere. I am enjoying it more now because I have more time and also a little more money. I was not used to go into cafés earlier. But now I have started also to spoil myself – a little egoism, I’m afraid. But I do so. And Copenhagen, it is just beautiful. I love old buildings. I soak it up. I soak up the city. The Main Station is swarming with people and I like that... I didn’t know that I love Copenhagen, but I do. I think it is because I feel free – I just feel so. I enjoy it. It can elevate my mind – it is pure joy. (Shahda, 38)

As we saw in connection to the construction of specific places in the city, this narrative of the city as experience involves concepts such as ‘pulse’ and ‘atmosphere’ – another respondent talks about ‘vibrating areas’. As the concept *atmosphere* suggests, it is about emotions as a contextual meaning of the surroundings: ‘it is a heartening atmosphere’, ‘I feel free’. It can be emotions that are difficult to substantiate: ‘I don’t know why’, ‘I just feel so’. What is at stake is bodily sensation of the surroundings such as Shahda describes when she is saying: ‘I soak up the city’ and ‘’it is pure joy’. These experiences come close to what Bloch (2001) calls a ‘flow-experience’. It is a mood including joy, happiness or excitement permeating the emotional state at specific time-spaces.

Living the city as an experience comes close to Simmel’s and Benjamin’s figures that feel at home in the intensity of the city, but it is in a less visual and more practical way. The city is experienced both as ambience and intensity and as a place where one can do many things. It is important to these people to use the facilities of the city. The experiences can be understood as a relationship to the city as an *affective space* – as a space where you are emotionally affected, an emotional openness to the surrounding world (Simonsen 2007). We can talk about a harmony with surroundings – a kind of *phenomenology of the atmosphere.* This understanding also connects to the now well-known German philosopher of architecture Gerhardt Böhme (1995) who theorises atmosphere as localised neither in the subject or the object, but in the inter-space or the interaction between them. While his theorization mostly concerns the relationship to the material surroundings, our empirical material might suggest a conception of atmosphere with more emphasis on social life.

*The city as the multicultural*

This image of urban life suggests that living in the city involves a capability to cope with multiple everyday encounters with strangers – an issue that the above cited narratives have in common with much urban literature. But it gets a particular twist in relation to the conditions of living in the city as an ethnic minority:

I think it is great because, opposite the representation in the media, you can actually feel that both Danish and non-Danish have accepted the fact that we have this mixed composition. And they think it is normal. It is not abnormal to them to live in this way. The way we are told that it is so strange having these different cultures. I don’t feel I can recognise that picture when I go about in the city. It seems to come naturally to people ... I think it eventually characterise Nørrebro and Vesterbro [former working class now culturally very mixed neighbourhoods] and the inner city as well. I think it is good that you can get away from all that talk about problems and conflicts. For us ethnic minorities, who are born and bred in Denmark, it is no problem, we can handle the mixture. And for most young Danish people I don’t think it is neither, at least not for those who grew up together with them, in particular in Copenhagen ... It is very small things. In the streets you have a common culture, you have a common language where you integrate Arab or Asian expressions, and then it becomes part of the Danish language. And you develop common norms. I think it is good that it happens – and about time too! (Yasmeen, 26)

For Yasmeen, as for many other respondents, the city is definitely a world of strangers. They are grown up in the Diasporas, and they identify with the city exactly because they see it as a multicultural place. Yasmeen opposes this to the representation in the media and the inflamed public debate on minorities in Denmark. On a banal, practical level she connects what Keith (2005) calls a ‘cosmopolitan hope’ to the life in (parts of) the city. It is connected to what we earlier have called a *lived multiculturalism* (Simonsen 2008a), primarily based on transcultural relations performed in everyday situations. Van Leeuwen (2008) in a similar way talks about an everyday multiculturalism as the affective-dynamic aspects of living with cultural diversity. Both concepts are about attitudes and emotions generated in encounters occurring in everyday contexts. They can of course take many forms, as also implicitly suggested by Yasmeen when she says that it is ‘about time it happens’ or connects her hope to the generation grown up together in the city. But here they are given meaning as mutual accept and understanding. But it is more than that. Yasmeen connects the attitudes to the common adolescence in the city between ‘ethnic minorities like us’ and ‘young Danish people’ and a resulting creation of elements of ‘common culture’, ‘common language’ and ‘common norms’. It is about ‘small things’, for example mutuality in banal language use (cf. Billig 1995). We can talk about a ‘dialogical identity’, about a kind of adaption where the ‘strange other’ slowly changes to a ‘familiar other’ and becomes part of the social milieu. However, these processes do not change the fact that the (multicultural) city will always maintain an element of strangeness which (as the theories say) is a basic condition of urban life.

**The city as social mobility**

Copenhagen represents the university, the life I had, and my career. I identify very strongly with Copenhagen. For me it was a kind of social travel. First it was a move from Hvidovre [surburb] to Copenhagen and then to the university. And in that sense you could say that I have been transformed from being Hvidovre citizen to a Copenhager, right? But it also has something to do with upbringing, educational institutions, and how that part of Copenhagen is viewed by the Danish population. It influence the way you think. There is the pressure from your parents to improve your lot in life. And you sometimes feel you need to prove something before being accepted in the Danish society. In that sense Copenhagen is important. That you say: ‘well, this is a part of Copenhagen where I really want to belong. (Jamal, 31)

Jamal is very aware of how his childhood suburb is stigmatised socially and culturally in public representations. As he explains, in his youth he was under the double influence from his parents, who wanted him to improve his lot in life, and from his own awareness of others’ view on this part of Copenhagen. When he was in high school, he tells, he was influenced by literature on social heritage and he wanted to get away. He got the opportunity to settle in Copenhagen at a place he now strongly identifies with and feels that he belongs to. He describes his identity project as a social travel and a spatial movement that transformed him from being a Hvidovre citizen to a Copenhagener. His city is the central part of Copenhagen and it is not so much the city life in the form of cafes, museums and cultural life that he identifies with. The affiliation to Copenhagen has more to do with social practice, like what he is doing in the city, the places that meant something to him and the people he has met and connected with in various locations. His place attachment then is more socially determined. The identity project and the belonging to the city become synonymous with social ascent and a quest for recognition. It is not only a story about attachment to Copenhagen, but also about a fight for liberation from the social and spatial representation as a stranger, out of place and excluded from the imagined community.

**Conclusion**

As one significant experience of living in the city as an ethnic minority, we analysed what we have called *the phenomenology of being stopped* – that is, how our respondents experience their otherness in their everyday encounters both with authorities and fellow citizens. To be stopped is to be blocked in one’s free movement. It involves many aspects: to be stopped and checked on the street, at national borders or at the door, to be blocked in one’s residential mobility, to be hindered in ones work activities etc. It is a mode of power but it is also an address to the *body*, to a body that cannot be recruited, that is ‘out of place’. *Stopping* is a political economy that is unevenly distributed as well as an emotional economy that is affecting the bodies subject to its address (Ahmed 2004). The experience amongst our respondents are that their skin colour, their dress and their habits often give rise to exclusion from the inter-corporeal space, either through literal blocking, staring gazes or verbal comments – experiences that raise feelings of both sorrow and anger.

The other side of the narratives tells about relationships to the city as a habitable space and the possibility for identification it opens. First, it involves an understanding of the city as ‘a world of strangers’, a spatial formation populated with people who are personally unknown (or even appear strange) to each other. It is an understanding of the city speaking about doubleness between overstimulation, repulsion and/or indifference on the one hand and freedom and emancipation on the other. Secondly, the focus on encounters raises questions about of identification and ‘home’ and about the construction of place in the city. It can be in the form of more or less bounded local communities. Or it can be in a considerably more open form, where places become ‘meeting places’ in which different social practices constitute configurations under continuous transformation and negotiation. All these dimensions of urban life exist in the narratives, but they also assume specific forms taking varying significance of the doubleness involved in the identity simultaneously as native Copenhagener and ethnic minority.

First, the narratives oppose one-sided imaginations of migration and mobility as something that lead to dissolution of place, rootlesness and lacking place identity – maybe also because many of the respondents has grown up in the city. A significant part of the construction of place relates to the urban childhood/adolescence. It is the story of the city from the perspective of the native or naturalized Copenhagener, where memories attach them to place and open to appropriation of space through recognition and recall. Mobility then does not mean a disconnection from place but rather a poly-centred construction of meaning involving a multiplicity of ‘significant places’. A construction of the city as such a *collage of places* was prominent in the material.

Secondly, the emotional aspect of the urban identity should be noticed. The city in different ways takes the meaning of an *affective space.* In particular two forms of emotion are in play in the narratives. The first one is the ‘feeling of home’ – a feeling of belonging that connects to home as an emotional and material practice. Emotions such as familiarity, safety and (individual or collective) memories are involved here. The other important emotion connects to atmosphere or intensity of the city or its different quarters. It refers to situations where the (social or material) surroundings intrude the senses and install moods such as harmony or joy.

The co-existence of the doubleness of experiences between estrangement and belonging constitutes an ambiguity in urban belonging but it also reveals a *paradox* in the attitudes to life in the city. The narratives show an extensive identification with the city and the experienced otherness, even if it comes about in urban space, does not significantly change that expression. The respondents react to the experiences of estrangement but they do not blame the city. It is generally constructed as a spatial formation providing opportunity for identification and socialisation. It is *their* city.

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