

Territorial stigmatisation and the negotiation of place

Tainted locations in Danish television documentary

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Abstract

The article addresses the negotiated meaning of notorious places through a consideration of a recent tendency in Danish TV documentaries where marginalized, often peripheral, places are portrayed and debated. Based partly on sociological research about territorial stigmatisation, partly on location studies as a method, the article stresses that inhabitants often contest and contradict the mediated stigmatization of their towns from an ambivalent position. On the one hand, participants in the programs are aware of the stigmatizing gaze of others, but on the other they also express a degree of local pride. The ambivalence of place meaning established through TV representation and the participants' attitude towards their 'real' places reflect a mediated doubling of place, where the inhabitants are in "the event-as-broadcast" and in "the event in-situ" simultaneously. As a result, such 'tainted locations' may be contested directly from within documentary representation.

Keywords: Territorial stigmatisation, TV documentary, tainted locations, contesting representation, negotiation of place

During the past decade, we have seen an increased attention towards ways in which media production may enhance, augment, negotiate and praise real places in a specifically positive sense (Reijnders 2011; Waade 2013). This includes hard effects such as media tourism, attraction of workforce and establishing a local creative industry as well as soft effects such as creating local identity and coherence and representing regional identities in public service broadcasting (PSB) (Christensen and Hansen 2016). Particularly, scholarship on these matters frequently uses fictional film and television as case material. On the other hand, in sociology and ethnography we have, in the same period, seen an intensified attention towards 'notorious places' and 'territorial stigmata' (Kirkness and Tijé-Dra 2017; Wacquant 1996, 2007). Recently, we have documented that the first positive sense of place branding may be employed to avoid negative geographical reputation and debunk myths of problematic peripherality (Hansen and Christensen 2017; Hansen and Christensen 2018). In this sense, a constant negotiation of place and the meaning of place is taking place, and here mediated representations of real places play a decisive role in establishing, negotiating and contesting the 'collective imagery' of ill-reputed local neighbourhoods.

The doubling of place

This article employs a phenomenological approach to focus on the apparent schism between the different perceptions of these 'notorious places' subjected to 'territorial stigmata' through mediatisation. The article addresses questions about the 'reality' of a place when it is experienced by its inhabitants and at the same time mediated. This mediation we limit to TV documentaries, and our cases belong to this genre. Our approach has as its point of departure Scannell's TV phenomenological idea *spanned* spatiality (2014, 63) as it is augmented by Moores' concept of the doubling of place (Moores 2012, 13-16). Moores suggests this as a critique of the theory of placeless culture seen as a consequence of modern media and broadcast (Meyrowitz 1985, 8), and he employs Dayan and Katz's media events (1992) and Scannell's proposition (Scannell 1996, 91) that ra-

dio and television can afford their audiences with a feeling of being at two places simultaneously, their own physical place and the place of the broadcast. Moores has the reservation that “there are significant differences between being physically present at an eventful occasion and ‘being involved’ or ‘caught up’ in an occasion as a television viewer” (15-16), or in Scannell’s words being in “the event in-situ” and “the event-as-broadcast” (79).

The distinction between “the event-in-situ” and “the event-as-broadcast” and the idea of doubling of place are more complex than originally conceived by Scannell and Moores, as “in-situ” designates the local inhabitants’ placed reception of their area as a thematised media location when watching a documentary about it. These two conceptions of a place become negotiable when the inhabitants of a place see themselves and their place as mediated. As a contrast, the national broadcast audience’s conception of the place is solely a televised place or an “event-as-broadcast”. These two distinct modes of reception will reappear later in this article, when the local reception of a TV documentary, which may contain stigmatising material that influence the nation audience, may feed a motivation to contest the stigmatisation. In some cases, this contestation may be mediated, as in for instance as in the case of *Vi elsker Randers* [We love Randers], a TV documentary, which includes and comments on the local inhabitants own mediated conception of themselves and their town, or the local inhabitants may turn to social media, as in the case of contestation of *På røven i Nakskov* [Down and out in Nakskov] with the Facebook group *Lolland-Falster Lovestorm*.

This contestation of marginalized places in TV documentaries suggests that inhabitants do indeed have an ambivalent, sometimes resisting, attitude towards representation, and has its counterpart in results of sociological research. From qualitative interview data, Jensen and Christensen conclude about urban marginality that local residents have “an either positive or ambivalent view of the area and most of them are content to live there” (Jensen and Christensen 2012, 74). Jensen and Christensen address the question of mediated marginalization, and they supplement Wacquant’s Bourdieu-inspired mechanisms of territorial stigmatization (i.e. “the deployment of space as a product and medium of power” (Wacquant 2010, 165), which may have the consequence of an internalization of the

characterization of insignificance) with an “awareness that others see one as being less worth” (77). Such ‘others’ may be national audiences in the reception of the TV documentaries. However, they continue nuancing Wacquant’s conception of stigmatization of places with the argument that this only produces an ambivalence in the residents, as they are well aware of the degrading gaze of others, yet also fully forsaking to internalize this degrading gaze, and the result is ambivalence towards their conception of their neighborhood.

Based on this theoretical position, we suggest that the local inhabitants’ fused position of being in “the event-as-broadcast” as well as in “the event in-situ” facilitates their contestation of stigmatised, mediated place. This is not far from Wacquant’s question whether a sense of stigmatisation is “an artefact of distant observation or [...] a deeply felt reality” (1996, 129). We now address ways in which a range of recent Danish television documentaries displays a complex negotiation of real places and the representation of geographically or cognitively peripheral places. This examination includes observations of the documentaries and of their rhetorical mechanisms, and we aim at illustrating how such complex modes of place representation and their reception work together with ‘contested stigmatisation’. Our main examples are produced by the two broadcasters DR and TV 2. Both have public service obligations, yet there is the difference that TV 2 has had a so-called regional responsibility since the break of public service monopoly in 1988 to cover all regions in Denmark, and it has set up eight regional TV-stations with mostly journalistic ambitions to cover all of Denmark. However, both have obligations to cover the broad perspectives of the nation.

The documentaries

The two documentary series *Drenge fra kanten* [Boys on the edge] (DR3, 2016) and *På røven i Nakskov* (TV 2, 2017) both take place at the southern Danish island Lolland and engage deeply in a discussion of the island’s marginality within the nation. However, in TV documentary this sense of territorial stigmatisation does not only portray territorial stigmata in a geographically peripheral area such as Lolland. The documentary series *Prinsesser fra Blokken* [Princesses from the block] (DR3, 2016) and *Vi elsker...* [We love...] (DR, 2017) likewise display specific senses of locality and cognitive pe-

ripherality, although the series (except two episodes of *Vi elsker...*) take place in and around Copenhagen or in Randers, the sixth largest city in Denmark. The four episodes of *Vi elsker...* take place in four different places in Denmark: the city of Randers (1), the regional area Thy (2), Falster, the neighbouring island of Lolland (3), and Brøndby, part of the so-called Copenhagen Western Area (4), in which the series *Prinsesser fra Blokken* also takes place. In other words, many of the episodes in these television programs encircle the same Danish notorious places and, in this sense, the documentaries become part of the collective imagery and perception of these marginal localities. However, while the programs exhibit what Wacquant (2007) has called 'territorial stigmatisation' or 'problem neighbourhoods', at the same time the stories told establish key counter-narratives and what Jensen and Christensen, in an analysis of another Danish stigmatised territory (Aalborg East), have referred to as "pride and dignity of place" (Jensen and Christensen 2012, 88). To explain the spatial complexities of these documentaries, we distinguish between geographical and cognitive marginality and explain ways in which participants (with)in such TV documentaries may even contest the programs' own discourses of disempowerment and territorial stigmata.

Tainted locations and territorial stigmata

In sociology, urban studies and ethnography, questions of marginality play an important role in uncovering and debating images and reputations of specific peripheral areas (Jensen and Christensen 2012). According to Kearns et al., however, mediated representations of such discussions are "relatively neglected issues of meaning and process" regarding what they term 'notorious places' (2013, 585). Notorious places are locations and areas that are not directly stigmatised, but marked by "negative area reputations", held both by outsiders as an "external image" and often insiders as an "internal image" (ibid, 579). Such places may be suburban areas in larger cities while it is just as often rural, peripheral areas and smaller towns with a range of social issues such as higher crime rates, lower employability rates and health concerns. Negative reputational spirals of place are most often referred to as stigmatised territories, while Kirkness and Tijé-Dra (2017), similar to Kearns et al., moderately refer to such areas as 'tainted spaces'. For Wacquant, stigmati-

sation is part of what he refers to as “advanced marginality”, more precisely “penalized places” or “social purgatories” marked by internal “guilt and shame” and an “acute sense of social indignity”, but according to Wacquant Scandinavian countries are among the societies “that have best resisted the rise of advanced marginality” (Wacquant 2007, 66-68). Nevertheless, Scandinavian societies are affected by similar phenomena, but not to an extent seen elsewhere, and for that reason it would perhaps be more appropriate to consult the areas visited in this articles’ documentary material as notorious places (more specific areas) or tainted spaces (larger living areas or towns). In film studies, specific production sites or shooting sites are normally referred to as ‘locations’, and as a result we reuse these sociological concepts as analytical categories to be used in analyses of film and television. When film and television, both fictitious and documentary material, debate such potentially negative socio-spatial issues, we refer to these places as ‘tainted locations’. What is particularly interesting about ‘tainted spaces’ and ‘tainted locations’ is that the reputation is negotiable, and according to Permentier et al. (2011), loyalty as a “psychological sense of community” may give “voice” to contestation of area-reputation, or even turn a vicious circle into a virtuous one (Kearns et al. 2013, 584). Working with an ill-reputed Danish area, Jensen and Christensen find “little support for a theory of clear-cut internalization of territorial stigma” (Jensen and Christensen 2012, 88). For them as well as Kearns et al., such negotiations of reputation may take place in mediated representations, and this article shows how such contestation also takes place ‘from within’ documentary representations of marginal areas in Denmark.

As indicated above, marginality may be both a geographical and a cognitive image, and often a reputed area or location may be both at the same time. However, territorial stigmatization is referred to as an urban phenomenon, and in fact Wacquant refers to such areas as “urban hellholes” (Wacquant 2007, 67). In a Danish context, the notion of ‘peripheral Denmark’ (Udkantsdanmark) is one of the most pervasive ideas of marginality during the past decade, and peripheral Denmark has since become a normal reference to a place in Denmark that is at once geographically and cognitively marginal (Nielsen and Christensen 2013). As a concept, marginality and peripherality transect into the perception of specific areas or larger

geographical regions as 'provincial', and in general such images and expressions are mostly marked by negative reputation and a downward spiral of place dissolution. However, marginality may also be a merely cognitive category that refers to spatial alienation within a larger urban area, since such cognitive marginality is probably an integral part of most larger urban areas. This means that whole towns close to metropolises (e.g. Randers) and larger city areas in the periphery of metropolises such as Copenhagen (e.g. Brøndby) may also be regarded as marginal in a cognitive rather than geographical sense.

Scholarly work on media representations of notorious places frequently distinguish between attitudes towards the represented area. Kearns et al. distinguish between four categories (positive, mixed, negative and neutral), Christensen and Jensen between three (positive, negative and neutral), while Jensen and Christensen also hold a distinction between three (positive, negative and neutral), but interestingly they subdivide the negative coverage of places into two different representational categories. The one is the 'unambiguously negative stories', very much in line with the above mentioned negative stories, but the other is the 'paradoxical stories' with very much in common with the notion of 'mixed articles'; paradoxical stories "are often positive in their overall approach, but entail an implicit negative description of the area" (Jensen and Christensen 2012, 80), and as noted by Kearns et al., positive stories are difficult to generate "due to press repetition of problems that need tackling" (Kearns et al. 2007, 594). In other words, positive representations of reputed areas also confirm the negative stories, even though they give voice to counter-narratives of place. For Kearns et al., such reputations are hard to turn around and they keep appearing as "real", because they are traceable in popular imagery about the places and in mediated coverage. However, we also need to distinguish between 'voice' (the program participants' internalised self-image) and 'representation' (the editorial level of the programs) in order to see how, for instance, there is a decisive difference between the presented marginality of 'the boys' and the editorial framing of marginality in *Drengene på kanten*. This is specifically the reason why documentaries such as these may give voice to a much more ambivalent sense of place and attachment.

Geographical and cognitive marginality in media

Like similar TV documentaries, such as *Drengene på kanten*, *Vi elsker Falster* [We love Falster] and *Vi elsker Thy* [We love Thy], *På røven i Nakskov* takes place in a geographically marginal place in Denmark. The dramaturgical prelude and presentation phase of the program illustrate how narrative mechanisms of disparaging a locality are intertwined with local contestation so that the story becomes mixed or paradoxical as described above. In the prelude to the program, gloomy underscoring music for a panoramic shot of Nakskov supplements a voice-over: "Welcome to Nakskov and a year with us: the families on the edge of society". During a montage of brief, but crucial episodes from the lives of local people, the voice-over continues: "We are more ill than you, our teeth are poorer, and we are only rarely permanently employed, we live under the threat that our children will be taken from us, and we die far too early." This last statement is anchored by images of a coffin carried out of a church by mourners. These are depressing social statistics turned into a voice-over with direct speech and local identification ("we"), addressing the nationwide audience. This voice-over changes its tone and the montage and underscoring music becomes faster, and the people shown are smiling: "Ordinary families that fall into underclass. We are at the end of our tether, but we are more than that. We fight for our families and dreams. Welcome to what you call periphery, but what we call home."

It is significant in this exposition that its authorial voice speaks on behalf of the local population using the pronoun "we", even though it is obvious from its professional diction and its lack of the local dialect (used consistently in the documentary by the inhabitants) that it is external. Similarly, the juxtaposition of the initial presentation with a stigmatising and miserable picture of Nakskov with the defiant statements about fighting for families and dreams with "pride and dignity of place" is more complex in its perception of the locality, where the local population is ambivalent and poised between cognitive and geographical marginality. This attitude was later repeated in an almost affective form in the Facebook group *Lolland-Falster Lovestorm*.

DR2's documentary *Vi elsker Randers* is situated in a larger urban area, which is presented not as geographically, but rather cognitively marginal: "This program is about Randers. This city has for

decades been known in the media as the city of violence and a place without culture where youngsters only drink Mokai, drive scooters and dress cheaply. Gitte and Søren seek to find the nuances and draw a more real portrait of the place and the people living there." In the initial speak of the program, one of the two investigating reporters states that "perhaps there is more need now than ever to pay tribute to the differences in our country." Yet, early in this program the reporter confronts the mayor with the city's informercial video (Randers Kommune 2016), produced in 2016 to help the city grow after a number of closures of its large businesses. The video has a poetical form with the title *A Hymn to Randers*, and the reporter leans back with a derisive laughter when viewing it with the mayor. This situation is clearly embarrassing for the mayor, but for our purpose it is interesting as it demonstrates how local mediated "pride and dignity of place" is embedded in another media production with a nationwide audience. Yet, despite the stated intention of *Vi elsker Randers*, the actual attitude in the program towards the local population's mediated local pride and place contestation is met with a degree of disrespect. In the next sequence in *Vi elsker Randers*, the other reporter, who is also a well-known master chef, visits a local cafeteria and kitchen whose trademark is traditional food. The master chef is kind, and the local cook answers his questions about more advanced culinary initiatives without being offended by what could be perceived as condescending. Indirectly, the culinary propensities of Randers continue in the following sequence about how difficult it is being young in Randers. First clips from a YouTube rap-video satire of Randers are shown, and then a young student is interviewed about the prejudice. This student is not presented at her studies, but the location chosen is the hot dog stand where she also works. Even in a sequence about prejudices, there seems to be no way to escape them. Similar to the voice-over in the TV documentary about Nakskov, there is a contradiction between content and form, i.e. here between a stated objective of neutralizing prejudices and the choice of location to do so, a location emblematic of low life taste in Randers. A brief quotation from Pachucki (2016): "hot dog consumption (the items less-educated individuals ate more of)" may illustrate this contradiction inherent in a Randers student working in a hot dog stand. As such, here voice is basically very different than the editorial representation of place.

Broadcasting channel and modes of representation

Lastly, it is suggestive of a general documentary tendency if we broaden our focus to include the different documentaries and the broadcasting channels. Even though the interest in notorious places and place negotiation is widespread in TV documentary, and even though Danish PSBs have produced all the above-mentioned examples, there are significant differences depending on the specific broadcasting channel.

Though the editorially selected material in *På røven i Nakskov* may not be representative of Nakskov or the island Lolland, the mode of representation is discreetly ethnographic towards the portrayal of people with various social, economic or psychological complications, intentionally rendered an immanent part of “us”. This continues in the follow-up program *Stadig på røven?* [Still down and out?] produced a year later than the first season. The documentary style, positioned somewhere between Nichols’ observatory and expository modes (Nichols 1991), includes a combination of close vernacular depictions and a slightly distanced voice-over as well as a visual mixture of local decay and panoramic beauty. The intention of these two programs adheres to the public service obligations and regional commitments of TV 2, the broadcaster, with a geographically and demographically broad target audience. The programs are, then, both public enlightenment and candidly entertaining at the same time. These programs stand in the starkest contrast to the series *Vi elsker...* in the way that this program uses both local experts and a highly expository mode of representation, which links the programs to the target audiences of the DR2, the broadcaster. These are highly educated citizens with high cultural capital, and this is also, as touched upon above, both directly and indirectly represented in the series. For instance, three out of four programs in *Vi elsker...* include a linguist, who comments on the local dialect, however, when the program visits Brøndby close to Copenhagen the linguist is *not* included (even though the place is marked by multilingual citizens, which in itself is a noteworthy linguistic phenomenon). This means that the programs actually often end up consenting to the notorious myths rather debunking them, as was the intention.

The two programs *Prinsesser fra blokken* and *Drengene på kanten*, both produced for DR’s youth channel DR3, are very different from

the TV2 and DR2 programs. The ethnographic and specifically gender-oriented fascination of youth cultures in the Copenhagen Western Area (female) and on the island Lolland (male) are, especially in *Drengene på kanten*, heavily stylized (just like the participants themselves) with obvious references to contemporary music video aesthetics and a conspicuous intertextual consciousness among the represented youngsters. In both series, the participants clearly contest the mediated territorial stigmata and shows a distinct pride of place, straightforwardly translated into the styles of the programs representing the media cultures of the target audiences.

Conclusion: contesting media or contesting the real?

This article does not fully service the complexities of the programs, and much more could be said about the different programs mentioned here and others not mentioned. E.g., the humorous stand-up approach to geographical and cognitive marginality in the DR1-series *Gintberg på kanten* [Gintberg on the edge], almost a documentary version of *Seinfeld* in its combination of documentary and stand-up, is also interesting in its unswerving ridicule of local mythology. The TV 2 sportsdoc *På toppen i Nykøbing* [Nykøbing in top form] takes place on Falster, but it rather tells the success story of a local women handball team and, in this way, it may work as the broadcaster's own contestation of stigmata in *På røven i Nakskov* (though it was produced for the commercial channel TV 2 Sport).

This article clearly indicates, however, that mediated geographical and cognitive marginality are manifest in the TV documentaries addressed in this article. So is contestation of stigmatisation and tainting of the towns, areas and especially their inhabitants. In some cases, the contestation is internal in the documentaries and in some external. Though inhabitants have become characters in programs broadcast on national television with a potential productional and distributional stigmatising effect, we have seen a strong counter-tendency to respond to and contradict such stigmata. Yet, we have also seen from sociological studies that inhabitants are poised in an ambivalent position with regard to their attitudes to their neighbourhoods and areas. On the one hand, they are aware of the stigmatizing gaze of others, and on the other they show a degree of local pride. This double awareness corresponds to the question of whether the TV documentaries represent a perceived rather than

experienced reality. Our answer to this question is that it is the ambivalence of the local inhabitants' fused position of being in "the event-as-broadcast" as in "the event in-situ" that makes it possible for them to negotiate their position so that they can contest the mediated stigmatization of their real places.

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