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The settlement utopia: brotherly love, discipline, and social critique

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ABSTRACT

The Settlement movement, which originated in late nineteenth-century England, was a pioneer in bettering the conditions of the working poor. It pursued the utopian project of locating 'settlements' within poverty-ridden neighbourhoods where respectable students should meet slum dwellers on equal terms. This article explores the trajectory of the comparatively under-researched Danish offspring of the movement. It demonstrates the tempering and compromise that occurred when utopian ideals of 'brotherly love', 'God's Kingdom', and 'radical social change' were realized in concrete social arrangements. Contradictions and ambiguities arose when utopian ideas were confronted with what could be done. The Settlement became a highly ambiguous space, a 'heterotopia'. The roots of the contradictions cannot simply be identified in the external pressure of legal requirements and funding criteria represented by public welfare agencies. The contradictions can also be excavated from the Settlement's own ideological doctrines and its historical development.

KEYWORDS

The settlement; Christian philanthropy; utopia; heterotopia; social welfare

Differences between voluntary sector rationality and welfare bureaucracy have been the subject of long-standing debate. Sometimes these differences have been articulated as an opposition between 'utopian' values of unconditional care and radical social change versus the mundane, legal, and bureaucratic stipulations of professionally organized welfare. The issue is highly pertinent to the relationship between Christian-inspired philanthropy and modern welfare arrangements.

In 2010, Johs Bertelsen, leader of the voluntary organization in Copenhagen, the Settlement, asked himself: 'Am I a spokesman for the marginalized or an inspector who serves the administration?' He was organizing employment projects for long-term unemployed under the auspices of the Settlement, a voluntary organization which, during more than a century, has carried out social projects in the old working-class neighbourhood Vesterbro in Copenhagen. The dilemma that Bertelsen faced was one between acting as a social critic and acting as a rule-following administrator. In the first case, he would defend civil rights and more tolerance of different ways of living; in the second case, he would administer programmes that discipline

marginalized people to fit labour market demands. In the Settlement, Bertelsen was carrying out radical social work in a context where the official welfare policy and public authorities had placed employment at centre stage. To be eligible for public funding, voluntary social organizations were required to pursue this employment agenda by emphasizing preparatory training or 'discipline' of individuals at the borderline of society. Schematically, we may speak of a contradiction between utopian ideals of fundamental social change versus disciplinary normalization.

The Settlement has organized social projects at Vesterbro since the early twentieth century and received quite a lot of attention because of its innovative work in the former working-class neighbourhood. The organization has Christian roots, reflected in the original name, The Christian Student Settlement (hereafter the Settlement), and it is perhaps surprising to see such an organization acting as the centre of experimental social work. However, the initial ideal behind the Settlement movement, of which the Copenhagen-based organization was an off-shot, was to 'settle' and interact directly with inhabitants in overcrowded working-class neighbourhoods. This idea was adopted from the first 'student settlement', Toynbee Hall, established in 1884, in London. In 1889, the first American Settlement, the Hull House, was founded in a poor immigrant neighbourhood in Chicago. During the following years, the Settlements in London and Chicago extended their initial goal of establishing 'hearty friendship' between the classes by undertaking social research and policy advocacy. In this regard, the Hull House project became particularly influential, and residents began to speak of themselves not as philanthropists, but as social scientists. Jane Addams, prominent leader of the Hull House, emphasized that philanthropic dogmatism was shifting towards knowledge production and influencing social legislation (1910, p. 72). At the same time, the American and English Settlements maintained the initial goal of sharing the residents' higher culture with the underprivileged slum dwellers.

The Danish Christian Student Settlement was established in 1911 by Christian academics with the objective of reconciling the enormous divide between the social classes of rapidly industrializing society. From the start, the project of locating Christian students inside the working-class neighbourhood seemed very difficult, one that Bertelsen described as 'an impossible idea' (2011, p. 4). Indeed, there was something impossible or utopian about the project. The Settlement was from its inception pervaded by a series of fundamental contradictions: The goal was to better the conditions of the working poor, but the means were not conceived as relief or charity but as a 'friendly encounter' between equals. There was the assumption that the culture of students from the better background could 'lift up' the working poor, but it was emphasized that there was no hierarchical relationship between superior givers and subordinated receivers. The key notions were 'meetings' and 'friendship' as opposed to 'teaching' or 'moralizing'. The founders were guided by Christian values, including notions of salvation in the afterworld, but the activities were not oriented around conversion, since they emphasized practical aims of securing education, childcare, and better housing. Hence, the value base contained a reference to the transcendent, the divine spirit, but their activities tended to eschew transcendent references. Finally, there was a strong emphasis on 'meeting' and respecting the working poor 'as they were', and yet the Settlement discourse was replete with generalizing ideas about the poor, their depraved morality, their irrationality, and

their lack of self-control, all of which would be transformed within the confines of Student Settlements.

In brief, there was a contradiction between the ideal of meeting the poor as particular beings and the aspiration to foster certain inherently human capacities in each and every one. This was evident in the frequent assertions about human and social potential in the working poor. Pointing out these contradictions is not the same as saying that the Settlement project was self-defeating from the start. To the contrary, one might say that these inherent contradictions spurred significant creativity throughout the Settlement's historical development, including a broad range of social projects. As we shall see, contradictions and logical paradoxes need not necessarily stifle and paralyze an organization, but may incite ongoing discursive and practical inventiveness.

The Settlement movement, and the specific Danish variant, is an interesting case in regard to the issue of how Christian philanthropy was connected with state welfare. The experiment at Vesterbro indeed constitutes a space where social citizenship for the most marginalized groups can be practised. The Settlement also acts as a centre of critique of the social order and of official policies. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Settlement demonstrated the possibility of organizing 'other spaces' of youth work, community revitalization, alternative employment, local business activity, and, more recently, integration of immigrants. From the beginning, the Settlement founders wished to create a space of social change by situating themselves inside poor neighbourhoods. In more recent years, the Settlement has established alternative forms of job training, employment, and integration, while negotiating the contradictory role of receiving public funding and criticizing welfare policies. As consequence, a 'different space' of social citizenship emerged, criss-crossed by conflicting rationalities: Simultaneously a site of fundamental social critique and interlinked with the legal and 'disciplinary' requirements of public welfare.

The Settlement became a site of blending of religious, political, and scientific ideas in which utopian and pragmatic thinking coexisted in a conflicting relationship. These different elements reflected developments and tensions inherent to the Protestant culture as it developed in the decades surrounding the start of the twentieth century. It encompassed religious ideas and scientific knowledge, individual conversion and social reform, and utopian and pragmatic standpoints. Schematically speaking, the Settlement experienced over time a movement from the first pole to the second in this set of dualities. This development will be traced in the following analysis.

In voluntary sector studies, a central concern has been how collaboration and funding from public organizations put voluntary organizations' autonomy under pressure. However, studies of the Danish Settlement have challenged this thesis regarding bureaucratic encroachment upon voluntary autonomy. They observe that historically Christian charitable organizations never constituted an isolated sector. Instead, they developed and modernized in tandem with the emerging welfare state. Henriksen and Bundesen (2004) argue for approaching the dynamics between state and voluntary organizations from a 'relational perspective' (see also Bundesen, Henriksen, and Jørgensen, 2001; Villadsen, 2007). The adaptability to collaboration with public institutions demonstrated by Christian charitable organizations may result from a certain 'theological elasticity', making these organizations 'adaptive rather than reactive and nostalgic' (Borioni, 2014, p. 148). On this account, a key challenge for Christian voluntary organizations was to

sustain their religious identity while they adapted themselves to the emerging, secular welfare state and professional services.

The contradictions of Christian-based charity are a key concern of this article too, but we will not identify public authorities, or the welfare state, as the ultimate source of these contradictions. Instead, we start from the premise that organizational contradictions can be caused by both internal and external forces, including pressure from other sectors. Centring on the notion of ‘hybridity’, Seibel (2015) presents such a dual perspective that recognizes both the specific organizational context and sectoral influences and constraints: ‘One the one hand, the study of hybrids should not be restricted to formal cross-sectoral arrangements ... On the other hand, the “sectors” have to be taken seriously since they represent legally binding institutional arrangements’ (Seibel, 2015, p. 1765).

In this study, I highlight how contradictions and ambiguities arise at the Settlement as a result of tensions between utopian ideals and ‘worldly’ practices and arrangements. Inspired by both the ‘relational perspective’ and the idea of organizational ‘hybridity’, I assume that such contradictions may be rooted in the Settlement itself, just as they may be generated from or intensified by collaborating with public authorities. In order to take such an open-ended approach, I draw upon Michel Foucault’s notion of ‘heterotopia’ which highlights ‘other spaces’ where contradictions and ambiguities are particularly intensely experienced.

Heterotopic space

Foucault’s brief comments on heterotopia have given rise to a range of diverse interpretations, perhaps because he was experimenting with the concept rather than defining it stringently. In advancing the concept, Foucault suggested that there are sites in our culture which are distinct in their capacity to incite reflection, contestation, and transgression. They are ‘other places’ in relation to the existing order, not because they stand in opposition to it, but because they are places at which elements of existence that are otherwise unconnected coexist. Foucault said that heterotopias are ‘something like counter-sites ... in which all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted’ (Foucault, 1986, p. 23). The heterotopia has a fundamentally hybrid character in that it brings together a series of components that are conceived as foreign to each other: ‘The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible’ (Foucault, 1986, p. 25). In brief, heterotopias are reflective of the ambiguities of the society in which they exist by juxtaposing several incompatible spaces simultaneously.

According to Foucault, recognizable sites from our culture are not simply represented at the heterotopia, but are ‘contested’ and ‘inverted’. This means that heterotopias display in a particularly intense way contradictions, arbitrary divisions, and paradoxes that are entrenched in our culture. Foucault explained that the spaces he was interested in ‘have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect’. These spaces are, he says, linked with all the other sites, which they however contradict (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). This means that the heterotopia is a purely relational concept, insofar as it articulates, via juxtapositions, the heterogeneous character of the external space.

Foucault mentions two kinds of spaces where juxtapositions and contradictions are extensively experienced. The first kind is 'the utopia', which is a space of pure imagination, a society in its most perfect and idealized version. One key function of utopias is to compensate for the present state of affairs with all its messiness and imperfection. Utopias take the shape of fantasies, dreams, and critiques of existing conditions, and as such they have the capacity to provoke the desire for social transformation (Johnson, 2006, p. 82). Foucault contrasts utopia with heterotopia, emphasizing that they both relate to other sites by simultaneously representing and inverting them; but unlike utopias, heterotopias are real sites. They constitute 'a kind of effectively enacted utopia' (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). Heterotopias harbour a potential for contestation and undermining in regard to utopias, since this kind of analysis 'reveals that heterotopia not only contrasts with utopia, but actually undermines or unsettles it' (Johnson, 2006, p. 82). To take a concrete example, the Christian philanthropic utopia of universal, brotherly Love is unsettled or undermined when philanthropists begin to subject the poor to divisions and discipline.

Heterotopias push the limits of language, making it more difficult to use received concepts, and thus hold potential for moving beyond the given. Foucault emphasized this in *The Order of Things*: 'Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter and tangle common names' (Foucault, 1971, p. xviii). Notably, it is not merely language but the heterotopia's combination of the textual, aural, and visual which disturbs our conceptions. It contests boundaries and received distinctions and may thus create moments of transgression. The opening of such transgression is not a matter of invoking the transcendental or some post-revolutionary world. When we look at a heterotopia, we see the culture in which we are placed, like one discovers oneself in a distorted mirror: 'Although Foucault describes heterotopia as "actually existing utopia", the conception is not tied to a space that promotes any promise, any hope or any primary form of resistance or liberation' (Johnson, 2006, p. 84). By way of their unexpected constellation of incompatible elements, heterotopias display possibilities of minor transgressions or lines of flight from existing orders.

Finally, analysing heterotopias is to adopt a particular lens or perspective, not a matter of pinning down places that are by themselves 'inherently' heterotopic. Foucault points towards this when he says that 'perhaps no one absolutely universal form of heterotopia would be found' (1986, p. 24). If there is no pure heterotopia, the analysis is as much about applying a particular reading glass as about revealing definite heterotopic places.

The textual sources employed in this study were collected at the historical archive at the Royal Danish Library, where an almost complete collection of Christian Student Settlement's Annual Reports from 1909 to the present is available. I examined this collection and selected for closer study reports that contained particularly pertinent debates on the Settlement's values, Christian doctrines, the need for pragmatism, and the risks involved in collaborating with public authorities. The examination of primary sources was complemented with careful readings of the most significant contributions in the secondary literature (e.g. Bundesen et al., 2001; Henriksen & Bundesen, 2004; Laneth, 2011). The broader study by Borioni (2014) provided important information of the Lutheran influence on Danish welfare policy. On 23 May 2013, I visited the Settlement's café, its social counselling unit, and its language classes for immigrant women, where I interviewed the leaders of these activities.

Foucault's approach to writing history abandons the requirement of absolute objectivity and the quest for a total reconstruction of the past. The starting point is a specific 'problematization' which guides the reading of the past (Castel, 1994). The historical description does not necessarily unfold chronologically, since following particular problems or themes may take preference over strict chronology. While the requirement of exhaustivity and chronology is tempered in the Foucauldian approach, this does not exempt the researcher from reflecting on the criteria for choice of source materials (Castel, 1994, p. 242). My study is admittedly guided by a particular problematization: In what way does the analysis provide a different framework of interpretation than the explanations that see contradictions of voluntary agencies as produced by pressures from the bureaucracy and the market? This problematization shaped my selection of sources from the archive, my focus points in the textual sources, and the narration of the findings. The study does not merely seek to reconstruct the past, but attempts to produce a 'problematization' of a prevalent model of thought by way of historical description. The analysis below at times departs from chronology to follow a topological form. It wishes to be evaluated in terms of its capacity to problematize over the ideal of exhaustive historical reconstruction.

The breeding ground for settlements

In Denmark, the decades around 1900 were marked by growing class division, debates about how to handle 'the social evils', and concerns about the relationship between the Church and the growing socialist movement. There was also a questioning of traditional practices of alms-giving and charitable poor relief which had been voiced increasingly during the nineteenth century, and which towards the end of that century opened up for new ideas about poor relief. Key in this discussion among representatives of the Church and Christian philanthropy was the theme of what a 'Christian spirit' towards the working poor should consist of in practice. These are the key components in the historical breeding ground from which the Settlement movement emerged.

During the nineteenth century, rapid mass migration and industrialization created unprecedented, large working-class neighbourhoods, particularly in Copenhagen. The rising urban poverty and the signs of 'moral decay' created fear among the privileged. They feared for the social cohesion of society, the spreading of moral and physical diseases, and the increasing violent unrest. Observers from the 'respectable' classes cautioned that a new class of destitute, working poor had emerged in the large cities. These working poor consisted of people uprooted from the agrarian community, the family, and the church, and they now 'drifted loose' without moralizing authorities that would give them an ethical compass. Some journals published reports from expeditions into 'the dark continent of the poor', that is, the dark and decayed neighbourhoods where alien norms and language allegedly reigned. The readers from the better classes would shudder with fear and disgust when confronted with these travel reports (Villadsen, 2011, p. 1065). This fear created an urgent need for mediation and representation with regard to the masses of urban poor.

The last decades of the nineteenth century also witnessed debates on how to practise poor relief. Central to the debates was the critique of indiscriminate alms-giving and the notion of the giver-receiver relationship, which was raised in Denmark and across Western Europe (Donzelot, 1979, p. 66). The deed of simply giving alms was questioned

since it considered neither long-term consequences nor the motives behind the beneficiary's demand. A key element in the push for rationalizing poor relief, then, was the requirement to distinguish more carefully between different kinds of poor. One needed to differentiate the able-bodied from the sick, children from adults, the morally decayed from the morally upright, and so on. Yet, apart from differentiation, there was little consensus on how to tackle the 'social evils'.

Christian philanthropy sought a middle ground between the main adversaries across the political spectrum. On the one hand, the emerging socialist movement demanded a state-guaranteed right to work for the poor and collectivization of industries. Libertarians and conservatives, on the other hand, maintained that the poverty problem could only be solved through the benevolence of private charity, never through forced taxes. Christian philanthropists criticized the consequences of industrial-capitalist society, but they did not side with the socialists in demanding revolutionary changes in the social order. They gave more emphasis to the need for moral and material uplifting of the poor than to legal rights (Villadsen, 2011, pp. 1067–1070). Charity should remain the key means for solving urgent problems of the time, that is, bridging the growing class antagonism and securing social cohesion. This central aspect of charity was given a particular variant by the Settlement in its notion of 'friendship between the classes'.

Cultural spearhead or meeting forum?

The Settlement was one of several associational outcomes of the Danish Inner Mission (short for the Churchly Association for the Inner Mission), which defended a pietistic and puritan version of Lutheranism. The Inner Mission was the largest revival movement within the Danish National Church and emphasized domestic missions among Christian Danes, as opposed to missions to convert pagans in foreign countries. In 1911, Richard Heinrich Thomsen, who had just graduated in theology, established the Settlement with inspiration from the English predecessor Toynbee Hall in London. Thomsen had his spiritual roots in the Inner Mission movement, while politically he was a declared social democrat. He served as leader of the Settlement in Copenhagen during six years (Lindhardt, 1979). At its inception and in its early phase, the organization was tightly connected to the Danish State Church and theological circles. The majority of its members and contributors were students of theology, parish priests, or university theologians (Bundesen et al., 2001, p. 226). Not surprising, then, inspiration from Christian doctrines was evident during the Settlement's first decades.

The anxiety caused by urban working-class decay continued to be a key motive during the early phase of the Settlement. Richard Thomsen thus wrote in 1916: 'When you walk along Vesterbrogade, the liveliest and most elegant street in our city, you have no idea about what is hidden in the side-streets. But just walk down Saxogade, and at once you're in another world' (Thomsen quoted in Laneth, 2011, p. 14). Descriptions of the decay of the poor neighbourhoods often made references to explorers and missionaries' reports from distant places in the world: 'The fields of the heathens', marked by the lower races' ungodliness and need for salvation. Like Stanley Livingstone one must have both faith and will power to dare enter the wilderness of the urban poor: 'The wilderness in Copenhagen is darker and more difficult to penetrate than the wilderness in Africa. But it is possible to overcome it, if one goes to the task in the right spirit' (Vedde, 1916).

Evident here is an unmistakably missionary tone characteristic of the Danish Inner Mission which signalled aspirations of establishing 'missionary stations' which could bring Christian morality, culture, or civilization to the continent of the poor. However, the Settlement founders placed emphasis on the idea of 'respectful meetings' with poor workers, something which distinguished the Settlement from other charitable associations at that time.

The Settlement was based on the fundamental idea of students locating themselves in the heart of working-class neighbourhoods to enable a direct exchange with the inhabitants. The words used to describe this encounter were decidedly not 'mission' or 'conversion', but 'meeting', 'friendship', and 'mutual exchange'. One might say that the missionary goal of individual spiritual rebirth was reconfigured into a notion of spiritual rebirth of the community, or neighbourhood, through the medium of Settlements. It must be noted, however, that this rebirth tended to rely upon a quite specific value base. The Settlement and its activities could be said to be pervaded by the values of the respectable classes: Order, useful pursuits, literary studies, enlightened debate, exposure to culture, and learning the virtues of marriage. The role envisioned for the poor was not the traditional recipient of charity; instead, they were conceived as 'guests' invited to share the benefits of respectable home life. In this sense, the Settlement constituted a 'middleclass outpost' in a harmful environment (Rousmaniere, 1970, pp. 65–66).

Insofar as the Settlement strived to be as orderly, clean, and civilized as the surroundings were disorderly, dirty, and barbaric, it was a 'heterotopia of compensation', to use Foucault's term: '[T]heir role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation' (Foucault, 1986, p. 27). The challenges of establishing something like a hybrid between a missionary outpost and a forum of cultural exchange are indicated by the recurrent complaints about the character of those working poor whom the theology students met. Especially the children were reported to have difficulties in adjusting to the norms of proper behaviour promoted in the Settlement's evening clubs. The working-class children were considered to be unruly, noisy, and almost impervious to the educational efforts expended by the well-intended students (Laneth, 2011, p. 50). How to remain gentle, kind, unselfish, and helpful in the contact with these children was a permanent challenge. In summary, the Settlement founders' meeting with their neighbours was based on the values of respect, instructive entertainment, and the defence of spiritual virtue.

Spirit in action

The decades before the establishment of the Settlement were marked by discussions of how the Christian spirit was best put into practice. Disagreements revolved around whether individual conversion should remain the key strategy, or if more pragmatic approaches were called for in times of urban mass poverty and moral decay. This debate also resonated within the Danish Inner Mission. Pastor Vilhelm Beck, the main leader of the movement during 1881–1901, stated that the emphasis should be on 'the Word and salvation of sinners—the Word in order to make people gather around Jesus. All the rest is minor things, although they may be important minor things' (Beck quoted in Borioni, 2014, p. 135). Opposing this view, Harald Stein, leader of the

Copenhagen Inner Mission during 1879–1886, favoured more active, charitable activity. The disagreement between the two positions was principally one between the priority granted to spiritual conversion or ‘redemption’, and active care for parish members more akin to social work.

The question whether the mere proclamation of the Word was sufficient in the poverty-ridden neighbourhoods was a subject of heated debate. Some questioned if a spiritual awakening could take place under extreme material poverty, or if material living conditions needed to be addressed. This issue became more urgent with the rising socialist movement that proved more appealing to the working class than the Church did. In fact, a growing number of the working class scorned the Church, seeing priests as parasites who charged for weddings and funerals in order to finance their own comfortable living. The social democratic party largely portrayed priests as the capitalists’ footmen. This development spurred Stein to initiate a battle against atheism and socialism by organizing Christian-based care work among the poor at Vesterbro in an attempt to create a bulwark against the alluring ‘socialist devils’ (Laneth, 2011, p. 23). There was a widespread sense that Christianity was pushed into the background by the tangible demands of solidarity raised by the socialists.

In the Settlement’s newsletter one finds articles that asserted the necessity of realizing God’s Kingdom in this world by way of concrete actions among the poor. In 1928, one contributor made the distinction between an old Christianity centred on after-worldly salvation versus a new Christianity which carries the message of salvation in this world, the coming of God’s Kingdom:

Your Kingdom shall come!’ We have asked for it – we still ask – but it has not come. It has hesitated so long that many think that it’ll never come. This is a crucial point by which what we usually call Christianity distinguishes itself so strongly from the Christianity that conquered the old world ... We have got accustomed to believing that the Kingdom of God is not meant for this world – that this in reality is the devil’s world, and that the Kingdom of God is placed in another sphere, in which God will admit good people when they die. (Wille, 1928, p. 10)

The assertion was that, behind this incomprehensible and cruel world, there is an eternal, loving God. This God calls upon each and every one to work for the good and to combat the forces of evil. Despite our experience of misery, human cruelty, and immorality, we must maintain the image, if not yet visible, of a world freed from the devil’s grip. This is the utopian message of realizing the Kingdom of God in this world through concrete interventions:

But for the one who realizes that it may come for that person who recognizes that he is also called upon to assist in its coming, there is, even if he never sees it, enormous reward in the feeling that he ... accomplishes something in alliance with the good Force noticeable in the universe, achieves something to wrest this world loose from the devil’s claws and turn it into a Kingdom of justice. (Wille, 1928, p. 11)

The developments in Copenhagen seemed to prove that merely preaching the Word was not enough in poor neighbourhoods where the working poor displayed an increasing indifference to preaching. Among Christian philanthropists, the view gained support that in order to effectively compete with the socialist approach to social problems, preaching needed to be combined with other measures to combat social evils and establish a

better rapport with the urban poor (Borioni, 2014, p. 137). This new focus on activity in the face of urban poverty was paralleled by arguments that directed blame for misery away from the individual and towards non-personal, social conditions.

Such a displacement of emphasis had already been asserted by members of the Settlement movement in England and the USA (Deegan, 1990). The same analysis began to be voiced in Copenhagen, as for instance by Richard Thomsen: 'In a poor neighbourhood many evil forces are at play. Not because the poor are worse than others, but they simply cannot protect themselves against the powers of evil' (Thomsen quoted in Laneth, 2011, p. 16). Members of the Settlement asserted that Copenhagen was the unhealthiest place of all places to live, both physically and spiritually. The majority of the harmful mores and attitudes were said to originate from the city that had become way too big. In light of this materialist-social analysis, the conventional Christian quest for individual, spiritual redemption seemed illogical. Accordingly, from its start, the Settlement refrained from direct preaching aimed at conversion and established, instead, an atmosphere imbued with Christian convictions and attitudes. This was to be the weapon against the two main threats—primitive class war and consumerist materialism.

Social critique and individual transformation

The Settlement movement combined an emphasis on fostering broadly defined Christian values with social critique. In the English and American settlements, there was an emphasis on generating factual knowledge of social problems to influence social legislation (Deegan, 1990). Parallel to advocating broad-scale social reforms, the Settlements emphasized the need for fostering what Jane Addams termed 'social ethics'. Hence, there was a dual strategy of policy advocacy and awakening of individual responsibility. In the Danish Settlement, however, there was little activity in terms of social research in its early days, though later some surveys of housing conditions were done at Vesterbro. When the Danish Settlers voiced demands for social equality, they occasionally did so with reference to Jesus's teaching on equality between all Christians.

This emphasis on securing material equality was an attempt to respond to the advancing socialist movement in Copenhagen. However, it was a response that found a basis in Lutheran reformed Christianity and the notion of 'care for the created world' (Borioni, 2014, p. 144). The Settlement's commitment to Christian values did not so much proclaim the coming of God's Kingdom, since its promoters viewed this commitment as a source of social critique. This social critique targeted workers' deplorable living conditions and hence converged in fundamental ways with the socialist party and the labour movement. The latter had achieved an important victory with the 1899 famous compromise between the employers' associations and the labour movement (this compromise is in Danish termed 'Septemberforliget'). However, Church officials and proponents of Christian philanthropy argued that an alternative was needed to the violent struggle for material equality, which they felt lacked spiritual substance. For their part, the socialists criticized philanthropy for acting as a 'lightning rod' for the poor's justified outrage over the misery generated by industrial capitalism (Laneth, 2011, p. 34). It was in this heated ideological battlefield that the Settlement needed to navigate.

Like the American and English Settlements, the Copenhagen settlers stressed that their goal was not merely to fulfil material demand. In its emphasis on shaping the content of

people's demands, the Settlement's ideology clearly opposed a liberal position. Members of the Settlement expressed regrets that so many people displayed a completely materialistic attitude instead of choosing spiritual development. In contrast to the materialist, they proclaimed, a true Christian believes in the spirit, not the body! Their complaints about the encroachments of materialism made references to the sanctity of the family, spiritual nourishment, duty over pleasure, and the need for moderating desire. In the Settlement's newsletter, this emphasis on spiritual nourishment was condensed in the view that even if the external world were made perfect, nothing would be achieved without a change of faulty human hearts:

If one asks oneself where misery has its cause, one always returns to the fact that the faults originate from the inside, from the spirit which reigns in people's minds ... For even if all the external things were changed, as if by magic, to become completely fair and good – if human hearts not were changed as well, we would return to misery in a few years. (Nielsen, 1928, pp. 1–2)

Any betterment of the affairs of this world needed to be accompanied by efforts at bettering the human spirit. By choosing this pathway, the Settlement echoed the general strategy of philanthropists for navigating the political battlefield of late nineteenth-century Denmark. Eschewing socialism and laissez-faire liberalism, philanthropy offered a doctrine of intervention in social problems which revolved around 'the moral cohesion of society'. The Settlement displayed the same ideal in its attempt at nurturing a community where a set of collective moral standards and obligations would tie uprooted individuals together (Villadsen, 2011, p. 1069). While demands were raised about material equality and the rights of the working poor to decent living conditions—which would involve formal obligations of the state towards the poor—the emphasis leaned towards moral-spiritual nourishment through exposure to culture, instructive entertainment, and meeting with the members from the privileged class. The report on the first 10 years of activity said:

The recent years of materialism and looseness in moral affairs have proven us right in our principle that it is education and spiritual development which is needed. The turmoil of the time thus only animates us to exert further efforts to develop an efficient religious, moral and cultural work. (Christian Student Settlement, Annual Report, 1919, p. 4)

The idea that the space of the Settlement would exert an 'uplifting' influence upon both the students and the working class was fundamental. Hence, the project rested on the idea of establishing a civilizing-educating-stimulating space, a space of transformation. Later on, in 1936, the Settlement acquired a countryside house to where small excursions were made, and in 1955 a larger property was acquired with economic support from the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Copenhagen municipality suitable for longer stays during summer. Reports told how the removal from the big city, the fresh air, outdoor activities, and generous food completely changed the children who reluctantly returned to Copenhagen. The Settlement and its adjacent spaces represented a site of passage, real as well as imaginary, and hence resonate with one of Foucault's definitions of the heterotopia, namely that it may take the ambiguous form of both 'rigorous division and absolute passage' (Johnson, 2006, p. 80).

Considering the value of transforming people, it is notable that the Settlement has throughout its existence given emphasis to creating activities for one particular group,

namely children. The emphasis on the work with children can be explained both from this ideal of transformation and from practical circumstances. In the first explanation, transformation theology led the Settlement workers towards people who they could transform, placing children at centre stage. Of course, traditionally, personal transformation through conversion was a sign of religious success, and this ideal was now reconceived. Children's clubs reflected well the objective of transformation through exposure to healthy cultural and recreational activities, since they replaced the depravity of the street with a homely atmosphere and constructive entertainment. In the second explanation, a more pragmatic reason for the Settlement's prioritizing of children was that it was the only group that would secure permanent economic funding from public authorities (Bundesen et al., 2001, p. 238).

Utopian experiment or welfare institution?

The Settlement was at its birth a novel, hybrid structure which displayed utopian aspirations. Unlike preceding charitable institutions, the Settlement was an 'outpost' in the middle of the urban wilderness. It was not philanthropy but a meeting forum. It should not offer charitable assistance but bridge an essential class antagonism. It should be a home as well as a public space (Rousmaniere, 1970, p. 47). At first glance, it seems utopian to merge these divergent functions within the same space. Adding to this, another impossible duality was intensified during the historical development of the Settlement, that is, the role of acting both as a radical critic and as a welfare institution.

In the period from the 1950s to the 1990s, the Settlement increasingly became an explicit socially critical organization. Their analysis targeted modern society with its assembly line production that was causing social misery: Lack of housing, loneliness, family problems, stress, and unemployment. At the same time, the references to Christianity receded, and the arguments became more secular. The key problem was said to be a deleterious economic system that could only be transformed through collective action:

Many of the social problems that we confront on a daily basis are created by a society which places economic interests higher than concerns for humans. We see it as a key pedagogical task to inform the youngsters about these societal failures that they are subjected to, and which cannot be solved at an individual level, but only if a sufficient number of people decide to act upon the state of affairs. (Christian Student Settlement, Annual Report, 1974/1975, p. 9)

Harsh analyses of the harmful effects of market-based society and its production of social problems became more prevalent and frequent. At times socialism was mentioned sympathetically as a 'natural reaction' to a harmful society, but the Settlement never chose a defined political position (Bundesen et al., 2001, p. 228). The balancing act of maintaining higher, utopian goals in the pursuit of the possible, by way of minor improvements, continued in a new variant. On the one hand, the Settlement articulated social critique, demanding fundamental transformations of industrial-capitalist society. On the other hand, the organization established an increasing attachment to public authorities and their rationalities. Its activities for children, the unemployed, and, more recently, immigrants became gradually interlinked with the law-based system of state-regulated welfare and its criteria and divisions.

Let us briefly look at the development of public grants to the Settlement. From 1921 onwards, support from the state and from the municipality began to appear in the Settlement's budget. This public funding was granted for the support of 'preventive child care'. The proportion of public funding of the organization's expenses gradually increased to reach 38% in 1931 (Bundesen et al., 2001, p. 232). However, the collaboration with public authorities became more systematic after the social reform of 1933 (Borioni, 2014, p. 138). The Settlement established a childcare facility in 1939 which received a significant proportion of children from the public child welfare service, and another group was paid for by the City Magistrate (Bundesen et al., 2001, p. 235). Close links were thus established between the Settlement and public authorities around the work with children. But initiatives aimed at other groups were sustained alongside. In 1950, the Settlement established a counselling office which offered visits with a doctor or a social worker once a week. The key functions of this service were to assist users in their contact with social authorities, have someone accompanying them in court, or secure help with household matters. In these cases, the Settlement was taking up the role of 'mediators' between people on the verge of exclusion and social authorities with discretionary power over service provision. This role would become still more important in the 1990s and onwards.

In 2010, the Settlement was asked by the Ministry of Social Affairs to organize a project to prepare young, long-term unemployed for jobs. The project was accepted by the Settlement because it was first conceived as a way to expand the border lines of the labour market by creating more tolerant, alternative forms of employment, but the Settlement leader quickly realized the administrative constraints that accompanied the project. The leader, Johs Bertelsen, had aspirations to create a 'third labour market' where people not easily integrated in regular employment could develop qualifications and self-worth through alternative activities. The idea was not simply to turn the participants into a labour force, since it was considered just as important to develop their 'life-force' (Bertelsen quoted in Laneth, 2011, p. 221). Bertelsen had previously, in the years around 1994, formulated a set of principles in connection with the 'Side Street Project' (Sidegaden) initiated in 1986 during times of recession and high unemployment. The project was unique in that it combined several efforts at the local level in streets marked by years of decay, closed shops, and youth crime. Sidegaden can be described as a mixture of urban revitalization, outreach community work with marginalized persons, crime prevention, and attempts to create spaces of alternative forms of social existence and activity.

A key idea behind the project was that full employment is illusory and that alternative forms of work should be established within social work, ecology, culture, and recycling. Training of the unemployed should not be disciplinary, but should allow them to make meaningful contributions to the development of society such as community revitalization. Society should prioritize projects that function like 'social laboratories' at the local level where experimentation can unfold around integrating the needs of everyday life and work life (Laneth, 2011, p. 223). Yet, in 2010 Bertelsen had to realize that if the Settlement organized training projects for unemployed sponsored by the municipality, it could not ignore the overwhelming focus on employment. It would have to act like a public authority in relation to the users and could not adopt a position of solidarity with them. Insofar as the Settlement wished to carry out social work supported by public funding, it had to subscribe to the employment agenda and then focus on the positive aspects of it.

What we witness is how radical ideas, or utopias, become tempered by legal stipulations and funding criteria inherent to the welfare system. Or, putting it in Foucault's terms, once a utopia is enacted it becomes a heterotopia. The Settlement projects become at the same time enclosures for experimentation and generation of critical, collective awareness and places for moulding deviant groups according to standards of 'normality'. Schematically speaking, in the early phases of the Settlement's trajectory, it was the message of universal, 'brotherly love' found in Christianity that was tempered by 'worldly' encounters with the working poor. From around the middle of the twentieth century, voices within the Settlement increasingly criticized that the radical demands of fundamental social change were compromised by the bureaucratic requirements of the modern welfare state. In both cases, we may speak of a heterotopic coexistence of divergent elements which are 'simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted' (Foucault, 1986, p. 23).

As a site of juxtaposition, the heterotopia puts language and received notions under pressure. Insofar as heterotopias are impossible or highly ambiguous spaces, they reveal the limits of our language, making it tremble and splinter (Foucault, 1971). Perhaps the recurrent difficulties of agreeing on the right name for the Settlement can be understood in this light. First, in 1911, it was The Christian Student Settlement; then, in 1975, it was shortened to The Student Settlement; and later, the name was changed to the Settlement at Vesterbro. Throughout its existence, the Settlement has challenged and reconstructed entrenched divisions in the modern welfare state culture between the religious and the secular, between public and private space, between leisure and work, and between the normal and the deviant. This is certainly one of the reasons why the Settlement has inspired, moved, or provoked its surroundings. Consider Foucault's emphasis on the heterotopia's violation of culturally entrenched oppositions, 'for example between private space and public space, between family space and social space, between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure and that of work' (1986, p. 22).

In situations where the language would seem to be pressed to its limits, the Settlement's members sometimes made creative discursive inventions. Terms such as 'spirit in action', 'the third labour market', or 'co-vision with the user' offered ways of redescribing what could not be contained within conventional distinctions. It must also be noted that from the early 1970s onwards, an increasing share of workers at the Settlement and its projects consisted of professionals such as social workers, nurses, and language teachers. Notions of Christian spirit or brotherly love were clearly not suited as a way to construct collective identity in an organization populated by volunteers and various, secular professions. At a visit that I undertook with a group of researchers at the Settlement's social counselling unit and language classes for immigrant women, one word was repeated to designate the unifying value of the work: 'Hope'. When working with severely marginalized users who struggle with psychiatric disease, drug abuse, or a collapsed economy, the Settlement workers were united, they said, in 'keeping up hope'.

This would seem like a very open or vaguely defined notion, but this vagueness might be its strength. According to the discourse theory advanced by Ernesto Laclau, such 'empty' signifiers, like the ones above, play a unifying function by rallying agents around a particular project, for instance, the Settlement. An empty signifier is a signifier which assumes its unifying function by cancelling out its specific content, hereby allowing diverse actors or groups to identify with it (Laclau, 2000, pp. 70–71). Its function depends, then, on its capacity to simultaneously represent other signifiers. In our case, these could

include ‘friendly meetings’, ‘community revitalization’, ‘working with—not for—the users’, and ‘doing the impossible’. We can hypothesize that loosely defined notions of ‘the Christian spirit’ served as a means of uniting members from diverse congregations during the Settlement’s early decades. It is furthermore tempting to conclude that in the absence of any transcendental reference, other, more ‘worldly’ signifiers must increasingly do the job of unifying the Settlement of the present day.

Conclusion

So far, much research on voluntary and philanthropic associations has emphasized the question of how such organizations can maintain their particular identity, while they adapt to the bureaucratic regulation of the welfare state. Applying the perspective of the heterotopia provides a slightly different emphasis. This study has illustrated the limitations of a simplified model that contrasts Christian charity based on morality, patronage, and compassion with universal welfare based on objectivity, formal rights, and science-based services. The Settlement’s development was certainly more complex. However, the analysis revealed that the contradictions of the Settlement were not solely created by the growing collaboration with the public sector.

Instead, the article has described certain contradictions that were inherent to the Settlement right from its inception and rooted in the attempt to unite a series of distinct elements: Philanthropy and cultural integration, home and public space, religion and social analysis, radical critique and welfare projects. The Settlement became a place in which the Christian message, social critique, and social work coexisted. However, since its establishment, the Christian value base was significantly rearticulated in the organization’s internal debates. Already from the early years, there was a shift in emphasis from the revivalist belief in personal conversion to a vision of a world redeemed through social transformation. The eschatological hopes for the coming kingdom on earth were gradually replaced by more pragmatic strategies for influencing and collaborating with secular policy actors. Gradual social improvements became the route to achieve a this-worldly utopia.

We noticed how radical and utopian ideas were continuously formulated in different guises throughout the whole period. At the same time, the Settlement workers maintained that it was important to achieve something on a small scale even if the overall social conditions were constraining. The increasing collaboration with public authorities around childcare and projects for the unemployed meant that the Settlement needed to pay attention to the regulations and professional codes of the welfare system. One simple reason for this was that the people who sought help from the Settlement often needed to be referred to public welfare services and hence needed to be represented in appropriate and acceptable ways. They might be in need of social benefits, medical treatment, psychiatric counselling, or representation in the legal system.

The Settlement case illustrates the unavoidable tempering and compromise that occur when utopian ideals of ‘unconditional care’ or ‘radical change’ are institutionalized and become embodied in social practices and institutional arrangements. While acknowledging that such ideals are compromised or tempered through various political and structural controls of the welfare hegemony, it does not mean that they cannot have transformative effects. On the one hand, the Settlement glows and glitters in its

incongruous variety, illuminating passages for the imagination of alternatives. On the other hand, we witness the presence of defined needs, regulation, and training to fit the requirements of ‘normal society’ and the labour market. In fact, debates within the Settlement highlighted the paradox that they prepared marginalized users for inclusion in the very society which was the target of fundamental critique.

The principles of brotherly love, ‘co-vision’, and ‘working with the users’ stand in an uneasy relationship with requirements of categorizing users for eligibility, abiding by regulations, and normalizing whenever possible—in short, welfare discipline. Clearly, the space of the Settlement did not constitute an enclosure but was pervaded by the heterogeneity of outer space. It reflected—and continues to reflect—long-standing welfare state paradoxes. The most fundamental one is the contradiction between formal universality and the specific needs of particular individuals. The Settlement does not escape the need to mediate between the legal-political discourse and individualizing care, the two deep-seated poles of the modern welfare state. Despite all radicalism, the organization had to face the problem of representing the particular person in objectifying and juridical categories.

The Settlement has promised simultaneously the possible and the impossible. It displayed the juxtapositions and contradictions that emerge when the spirit was put into action. We have seen that these incongruences did not freeze up or paralyze the Settlement project, but have spurred a continuous social innovation. Whether we emphasize the utopian dreams or the messy and contradictory realities is an analytical choice, insofar as the heterotopic perspective encompasses both. The Settlement is a place where what can be dreamed up intersects with what can be done.

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