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Representations of the refugee crisis in Denmark: deterrence policies and refugee strategies

When (then) Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen gave his New Year's Address on 1 January 2016 he focused particularly on the high number of refugees and asylum seekers who came to Europe and Denmark in 2015.[1] The number both pressed and challenged Denmark, he said and then continued:

> Let us be honest with each other – we are challenged: it challenges our economy when we have to spend many more billions on asylum seekers and refugees. Money that could otherwise go to health, education and several private jobs. … It challenges our cohesion when many come from very different cultures. Strangers to the unwritten rules and norms that are so obvious to us. Because we have grown up in a tradition of freedom and equality. … And it basically challenges our values and image of who we really are. (Statsministeriet, 2016)[2]

These statements offer a particular framing of the encounter between the Danish state and the refugees arriving at the Danish borders. There are different themes at stake here. The encounter is framed as having both economic, cultural, and democratic implications. It even becomes a challenge to Danish self-identity as the Prime Minister claimed.

Prem Kumar Rajaram (2015) argued that the refugee crisis must be understood as a representation: 'The refugee crisis in Europe is fabricated'. When we seek to understand the crisis and its particular consequences, we need to investigate the crisis as a particular framing that works to construct an idea of the refugee. This framing can be compared and contrasted with one which has outward aims, a framing which reduces the complexities of the situation to an abstracted understanding, allowing policy-makers and commentators to treat it as an exceptional condition. The first aim of this chapter is to investigate how the crisis was represented and framed in the case of Denmark. The refugee crisis arrived in Denmark the first Sunday of September 2015. Before that particular day, the crisis was understood as

taking place on Greek islands, in Eastern Europe or at German train stations. It had little to do with Denmark. That perception changed abruptly during the early days of September. During the following week, 1,500 refugees entered the country. The second aim of this chapter is to provide an analysis of the deterrence policies set up by Danish authorities from 2015 and to investigate the rationale behind them. The third aim is to illustrate how civil society and refugees reacted to the deterrence policies. This third part provides short examples of civil society responses as well as examples of strategies used by refugees individually and collectively to cope with the (policy) regime.[3] In these analyses, I focus on three main concepts, which I unpack in the different parts of the chapter: deterrence policies, institutional uncertainty, and deportable populations.

The main findings of this chapter are as follows. The refugee crisis legitimised an even more restrictive policy shift than experienced during the previous decades. The new approach, termed as a paradigmatic shift, has the support of both the previous government and the present Social Democratic government. Besides creating extreme institutional uncertainty caused by continuous policy changes, it also extended the category of deportable populations to a degree where integration from both a policy perspective and from the perspective of the refugees becomes pointless, as the refugee is, with the recent policy change, always at risk of being forced to leave the country. The paradigmatic shift in this way becomes an example of bureaucratic violence legitimised through the refugee crisis (see also the Introduction of this volume).

The method used in this chapter is based on a mix of participant observation, informal interviews, desk research, and textual analysis. The material used in the third section is part of broader ethnographic fieldwork. I have been working with asylum seekers both as an activist and as a militant researcher (Jørgensen, 2019; Lindberg et al., 2018). Militant research connects to Nancy Scheper-Hughes' (1995) call for a militant anthropology and the primacy of the ethical, and for anthropologists to become morally and politically engaged. My own approach and work draw on this normative point of departure. Here, I mainly use it to provide short examples of responses to the Danish policy regime and the strategies used by refugees to navigate these policies. Moreover, some observations stem from the ongoing data collection for a project on migrants' digital practices (the DIGINAUTS project), where we focus particularly on anti-deportation and return strategies among migrants in Denmark and Germany.[4]

Framing the crisis – encounters

What made politicians, policy-makers, and, to some degree, academics construct what has since been called the refugee crisis in 2015? Migrants

had been crossing the Mediterranean for years with grave humanitarian consequences. Manuela Bojadžijev and Sandro Mezzadra (2015) claim that the 'geography of the current crisis is significantly different' from the years before. Three events in 2015 can be said to inaugurate what has since been described as the refugee crisis (Agustin and Jørgensen, 2019b). The first happened on 19 April 2015, when a ship transporting over eight hundred migrants and refugees capsized *en route* from Tripoli to Italy and all but twenty-seven persons drowned or went missing (Bonomolo and Kirchgaessner, 2015). The second incident was the image of the drowned Syrian child Alan Kurdi, whose body was washed ashore on 3 September near Bodrum in Turkey, after his family's failed attempt to reach the Greek island of Kos. The third event, which gave way to the narrative of the refugee crisis, happened the day after that on 4 September. Thousands of migrants and refugees had been encamped at the Budapest Keleti railway station, and Hungarian police had started denying them access to the trains and were beginning to reroute them towards detention camps outside the city (De Genova, 2016a). More than a thousand migrants and refugees then self-mobilised and started chanting 'freedom!' and soon took to the road, heading towards Vienna in what was soon called 'the March of Hope'. The Hungarian authorities changed tactics and with opportunistic motivations assisted the marchers towards Austria and Germany who then declared their borders to be open (Agustin and Jørgensen, 2019b).

However, the crisis narrative is not only situated fluidly in time but also spatially constructed. For instance, for South Eastern and Central Eastern European countries, a triggering event was the closure of the Hungarian border on 15 September 2015. In Italy, the shipwreck outside Sicily on 19 April 2015 was another triggering event. In Greece, a critical event was the closure of the Balkan route on 18 February 2016 and the debate over excluding Greece from Schengen. All these examples are given by Triandafyllidou (2017, p. 199), who argues that 'there is an interactive relationship between specific events that take place and their coverage and de-/re-construction through media and political discourse. In other words there is an interactive link between factual events and related representations and speech events'. We can continue from this premise and argue that a particular framing and coverage of an event (or encounter) can and will have material effects beyond the representation and speech event as it informs policy-making and political initiatives, as we shall see from the Danish case.

In terms of policy developments, the refugee crisis caused a domino effect when the migrant and refugee flows advanced from the southern and south-eastern part of Europe towards Central and Northern Europe. Within a very short time, most of the EU member states claimed that they were unable to cope with the situation and found themselves in a state of emergency, which called for – and also allowed for – exceptional measures. In reality, these exceptional measures breached the principle of free mobility

for citizens and legally tolerated non-citizens within most of the EU according to the Schengen Agreement. This free mobility was de facto cancelled, at least in the south-to-north direction. Tensions arose around specific internal borders within the EU where border controls were re-installed, such as between France and Germany, Germany and Austria, Slovenia and Austria, Germany and Denmark, and Denmark and Sweden (Agustin and Jørgensen, 2019b).

The refugee crisis in Denmark

As mentioned above, the refugee crisis came to Denmark the first Sunday of September 2015. The Sunday encounter had its own timeline and spurred different reactions from both the public and the authorities. That afternoon, the first large group of refugees and migrants arrived at the small town of Rødby on the island of Lolland some 150 kilometres south of Copenhagen. They came by ferry from Germany, but fled beyond the nearby fields at Rødby Ferry Station for fear of being registered and forced to apply for asylum in Denmark. A larger group started to walk on the E47 motorway towards Sweden (Agustin and Jørgensen, 2019b). Five hundred refugees crossed the border within twenty hours and the situation was described as chaotic and out of control (Róin, 2016). The long summer of migration had come to Denmark. In the media, the group of pedestrians were termed both migrants and refugees (e.g. TV2, 13 September 2015).

The following Wednesday night, the police gave up detaining the hundreds of refugees who refused to cooperate or be registered. As some refugees had blocked trains, the Danish police gave safe passage to all the refugees who stayed in the towns of Padborg and Rødby, both close to the German border. They were allowed to move onwards to Sweden, which was, as mentioned, the initial destination for the vast majority of them. Interestingly, this decision was praised by both the (then) Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice (at the time). While the number of asylum applications Denmark received over the course of 2015 was much lower than in Sweden,[5] the increase in asylum applications – over 40 per cent higher than the preceding year – was noticeable (Agustin and Jørgensen, 2019b). During the peak of the 'crisis' in November 2015, Danish police[6] estimated that between 7,500 and 11,000 people were crossing into Denmark from Germany each week (Jørgensen, 2016).

The decision of many refugees to use Denmark mainly as a transit-country rather than a destination paradoxically caused mixed feelings among the Danish public. In a way, this should not come as a surprise. Only months before, the Danish Ministry of Immigration and Integration had paid for an advert in four Lebanese newspapers informing readers

about the conditions of asylum seekers in Denmark and restrictions in terms of family reunification, halving of social benefits, and so on. The advert begins: 'Denmark has decided to tighten the regulations concerning refugees in a number of areas' (BBC, 2015). Although the adverts must be seen as also being a highly symbolic act, as it is difficult to assess if any of the incoming refugees had heard of these particular restrictions, the Danish authorities were claiming it to be a success when refugees chose not to apply for asylum in Denmark. Some of the reasons given by refugees crossing through Denmark for moving on to Sweden have to do with the restrictive Danish policy regime. Many refugees stated that temporary residence permits, the negative rhetoric about refugees, and especially the restrictions for family reunification (in Denmark a minimum one year of waiting before reunification, compared to a few months in Sweden and Finland at the time) made them travel onwards (Christensen and Bolvinkel, 2015). Likewise, existing networks and the lowering of social benefits targeting asylum seekers played a role in deciding where to go and where to apply for asylum (Christensen and Bolvinkel, 2015). Among the public this caused reactions. Some people thought the refugees were ungrateful. Although many did not want them to apply for asylum in Denmark, the fact that they did not wish to was also seen as a problem (Jyllands-Posten, 11 September 2015). Some of the political opponents of the then Minister of Integration, Inger Støjberg, blamed her for having given Denmark a bad name (Politiken, 8 September 2015). Others were upset that Denmark did very little to actively help solve the refugee crisis and claimed that the Danish authorities should accept many more refugees than they had done at the time (DR, 2015). The decision to offer the Sweden-bound refugees safe-conduct to pass through the country led to criticism from other EU member states. The Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven (from the Social Democrats) was heavily critical of the Danish response, and the chairperson of the Swedish Left Party (*Vänsterpartiet*) termed Denmark 'Hungary Light' (Expressen, 10 September 2015).

Policy encounters – deterrence over welcoming

In outlining the ways the refugee crisis has been framed and how the Danish state encountered the 'crisis' once people started crossing the borders, my argument is that a particular framing has particular implications and consequences for how policy initiatives are developed to solve the alleged problems. The response of the Danish state can be analysed as comprising a number of different actions: re-bordering practices, the strengthening of deterrence policies, motivating enhancement measures to make (rejected) asylum seekers leave the country, and increasing bureaucratisation (see also the Introduction of this volume). The crisis was framed as something

out of control, something creating insecurity for the Danish population (as in discussions of the growth of terrorism or terrorists hiding among refugees) and something that would mean a blow to the Danish welfare state. The refugee crisis was thus framed as challenging Danish security. The efforts introduced would be means to maintaining security, order and welfare.

Border control: re-bordering practices

The Danish government followed the path set by other European countries when it strengthened border controls on 4 January 2016, due to an 'exceptional' situation which allowed for suspending the Schengen Agreement on freedom of movement (Agustin and Jørgensen, 2019b). The decision was made the same day as Sweden announced that it would introduce strengthened (*förstärkta*) border controls in the direction from Denmark to Sweden. However, already before this, six other countries (Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Malta and Norway) had implemented similar forms of border controls. According to the Danish Prime Minister, in early January 2016, 91,000 refugees entered Denmark. Thirteen thousand of those applied for asylum, while the rest were expected to have entered Norway or Sweden (Kofoed, 2016). When most of the incoming refugees were only passing through Denmark, the situation was perceived as less grave, but with the de facto border closures directed against unwanted migrants on their way to the neighbouring Nordic countries, the perception changed.

Since then, the temporary border controls have been extended several times with the approval of the EU due to the alleged state of emergency. Across the Danish political landscape – with the exception of the most leftist parties, the social liberals, and *Alternativet* (a party resembling Green parties in other countries) – there has been a consensus on the need to limit the number of asylum applicants. Numerous political actors inside and outside the government welcomed the legislative changes with reference to the state of emergency the country was believed to be in (Jørgensen, 2016). Most political parties deemed the new measures to be fair and appropriate, considering the exceptional circumstances. A framing of the 'crisis' as being a challenge to security and welfare unfolded, which legitimised exclusivist, restrictive practices and policies. In October 2018, the government managed to get the border controls extended for another six months. The EU Parliament was against this development and, in the spring of 2018, a majority within the EU parliament issued a report stating that the border controls were damaging the EU in terms of the economy and mutual trust between member states. However, the Minister of Integration at the time, Inger Støjberg, and the rest of the Danish government showed no intention of changing the extended control and prioritised what they believed to be the interest of Denmark.

Deterrence policies

Alongside the physical control at the external borders and the re-bordering practices, we also find more implicit measures, which had the purpose of deterring people by decreasing the alleged attractiveness of Denmark as a destination for asylum seekers. The former government implemented a number of initiatives aimed to decrease the number of arriving refugees and thereby the number of people being granted asylum in Denmark. I have already mentioned highly symbolic acts such as the adverts in Lebanese newspapers as one example of what we can term deterrence policies. While some were overt measures to reduce flows, such as of temporary controls at the border with Germany, others, as mentioned, were intended instead to decrease the attractiveness of Denmark. The most contentious of these has been labelled the Jewellery Law (see also chapter 2), which was adopted in January 2016. This bill introduced additional limitations on access to permanent residency, extended waiting periods for family reunification, and legalised the confiscation of valuables worth more than DKK 10,000 (approximately EUR 1,300) from arriving refugees.

While different governments have, since the turn of the century, made it more difficult to obtain permanent residence, these conditions were further restricted as a response to the refugee crisis. Previously, refugees who had been in the country for eight years and shown what is described as a will to integrate, but not yet met specific goals pertaining to what is perceived as active citizenship, level of income, higher level of Danish proficiency, and employment (which are taken to signify integration and commonly referred to as integration criteria) could get easier access to permanent residency. This possibility was removed in the wake of the proclaimed crisis. Instead, a combination of residency duration and so-called integration criteria is currently required to obtain permanent residency. This follows a long list of attempts by different governments to restrict immigrants' rights to welfare citizenship since 2001 (see also chapters 5 and 12).

Deterrence has clearly been a primary motivation behind these and other initiatives. Across the political landscape – with the exception of the most leftist parties, the social liberals, and *Alternativet* – there has been a consensus on the need to limit the number of refugees applying for asylum. As highlighted above, numerous political actors inside and outside the government have welcomed the legislative changes with reference to the state of emergency the country is claimed to be in. Most political parties deemed the new measures to be fair and appropriate, considering the circumstances. For instance, the Social Democrats' spokesperson for Integration at the time, Nicolai Wammen, stated that 'We are in an extraordinary situation where up to 200 asylum seekers arrive on a daily level to Denmark and that calls for extraordinary decisions' (quoted in Drachmann, 2015).

The cornerstone of the government's reforms in 2015 was the reintroduction of the integration benefit.[7] This is an allowance given to newly arrived refugees that is purposefully low, as it is intended to encourage integration by incentivising work, but according to the Minister of Integration at the time, Inger Støjberg, it also has an outspoken deterrence goal. When introducing the regulations, she stated, 'We must tighten up, so we can control the inflow of asylum seekers coming to Denmark … This is the first in a line of restrictions which the government will implement to get the foreigners issue [*fremmedesagen*] under control again' (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2015). The lowering of the social benefit was thus meant to reduce the number of people being interested in applying for asylum in Denmark. However, it is difficult to assess if the integration benefit had the direct effect the government was hoping for, as the numbers of asylum seekers entering other European member states also dropped after 2016. Other countries implemented different forms of deterrence policies. Nevertheless, we can also see that the number of asylum seekers entering Denmark is historically low. New statistics from February 2019 shows that only 5 out of 1,000 asylum seekers entering Europe apply for asylum in Denmark. During the last twenty years the rate was between 10 and 15 out of 1,000 (Andersen and Larsen, 2019).

Despite the acclaimed success of the restrictions mentioned above and the very few people actually applying for asylum in Denmark, the Conservative government, supported by the Danish People's Party, used the Finance Bill in 2019 to introduce a number of further restrictions targeting refugees having obtained asylum: 'Now, the immigration policy is being further expanded with a number of significant initiatives to ensure that the temporary protection in Denmark does not become permanent when the need for protection ceases' (Finansministeriet, 2019, p. 25). Moreover, 'rules and practices need to be adapted so that an asylum permit no longer has to be considered as an admission ticket to live in Denmark when you no longer have a need for protection' (Finansministeriet, 2019, p. 26). In concrete terms, this entailed reducing welfare benefits even more. NGOs already point to the damaging effects of the previous benefit level and foresee increased and protracted levels of poverty. The lowering of the allowance is meant both to have a deterrence effect, making it less favourable to apply for asylum in Denmark, as well as sending a signal of a hard demand for self-sufficiency to the people already living in Denmark. The lowering of the benefit is only one among a number of new restrictions. They are part of a paradigmatic shift in immigration policy. The Social Democrats support this shift, which makes change difficult (Agustin and Jørgensen, 2019a). As emphasised in the quotation above from the Finance Bill, this shift entails a focus on return and deportation. The integration benefit, for instance, was renamed as the return benefit (*hjemrejseydelse*), which sends an unmistakable message to the recipient about their stay being temporary. Other

policy measures include further restrictions on access to permanent residency and access to family reunification. In sum, the new restrictions make temporariness the central concern in the policy framework. Refugees, regardless of their achievements and time of residency in Denmark, are expected to leave. Consequently, integration (as it is portrayed in the Finance Bill) is basically not possible, and refugees remain deportable populations. Nicholas De Genova (2016, p. 2) argues that 'within any given regime of immigration-related conditionalities … and contingencies, migrants always remain more or less deportable' and describes this as an "economy" of deportability: even if all non-citizens are potentially subject to deportation, not everyone is deported, and not everyone is subject to deportation to the same degree' (2016, p. 2).

Another set of measures are the 'motivation enhancement measures', which target rejected asylum seekers who cannot be deported, as well as immigrants living in Denmark on tolerated stay (that is, immigrants with a criminal record and/or a deportation order which cannot be executed because their country of origin is not safe or will not receive them (see Freedom of Movement Research Collective, 2018). The conditions in the deportation centres Kærshovedgaard and Sjælsmark, where these people on tolerated stay live, are extremely harsh and offer little possibility of an autonomous everyday life. The immigrants living there receive only a minimal allowance, are not allowed to cook for themselves, and have to register their whereabouts (e.g. Canning, 2019; see also chapter 12). These provisions seem to have had the desired effect for the government. New numbers show that 328 out of 447 people placed at Kærshovedgaard have disappeared without the authorities knowing where they are (Ibfelt and Skov-Jensen, 2019). While such disappearances may pose a security threat or be taken as a sign that the government is unable to achieve the desired control of the unwanted population, they have been used to explain the government's ultimate desire, which is to expel refugees without breaking the Geneva Convention. When interrogated about the disappearances, Inger Støjberg responded: 'The idea is of course that they have to go home to the country they came from. But I have always been aware that some are trying [to get asylum] in other countries'. The Danish People's Party's spokesperson on integration gave a similar response: 'This is a small success. Understood in the sense that they leave and travel to another European country and stay there rather than stay in Denmark. So in this way it is of course good' (Ibfelt and Skov-Jensen, 2019).

Extreme bureaucratic and legal uncertainty

Since June 2015, the Ministry of Foreigners and Integration introduced more than 100 restrictions pertaining to non-citizens. Of these, more than half relate directly to asylum seekers. With the change of government and

the appointment of a new minister, this development could change but it is too early to tell if this will be the case. The more or less constant changes in immigration policy make it very difficult to navigate the system. Refugees, especially, experience a system that can change overnight and where the procedure is never set. A new report by the Danish Refugee Council shows that people with a refugee background experience stress, dissatisfaction, depression, and anxiety because of the constant legal changes (Dansk Flygtningehjælp, 2019).

In her work on irregular migrants, Bridget Anderson (2010, p. 300) claims that the methodical making of 'institutional uncertainty' helps 'produce "precarious workers" over whom employers and labour users have particular mechanisms of control'. In this context, immigration controls function both as 'a tap regulating the flow of labour' and as 'a mould shaping certain forms of labour' (2010, p. 301). There is an inter-play of entrant categories, employment relations and construction of institutionalised uncertainty steered by immigration controls to form particular types of labour and relations to employers and the labour market (2010, p. 301). The legal status of the migrant is produced by immigration control, which at the same time produces other types of illegality.

There is a parallel between Anderson's analysis and the situation for refugees in the Danish context. Even when people with refugee status have found employment or education, they are never safe from deportation, as the principle of temporariness trumps other concerns. With the newest restrictions, 25,000 people who have recognised refugee statuses are at risk of being deported if the situations in their home countries are deemed to be safe, which illustrates how deportable populations are constructed within the policy framework. Of these, 8,700 people are now in paid employment and do what is expected of them in terms of integrating into the labour market (Andersen and Larsen, 2019). The decision to declare a country safe can seem quite arbitrary, as it results more from bilateral agreements with economic gains than a genuine assessment of security risks. As an example, Somalia is now considered a safe country by the Danish authorities despite the ironic fact that Danish civil servants from the Foreigners' Service who negotiated the return agreement with the Somali government never dared to leave the airport in Mogadishu as it was not deemed safe enough for them (Ottesen, 2017). The Danish civil servants trusted the assessment of the Institute for Economics and Peace that the country is not considered a dangerous place despite its ranking as the fifth most dangerous country in the world.[8] As a result of the agreement, hundreds of Somalis with refugee statuses living in Denmark now face deportation.

At the same time as the new restrictions were launched, existing practices such as family reunification were subjected to increased bureaucratisation. A lack of transparency (for example, rights being conditional on other policy measures such as the strategy against 'parallel societies' in social housing schemes or the discretionary power of civil servants assessing

the applications) indirectly serves as an exclusionary mechanism and as a deterrence measure. It can be argued that the Danish state is establishing an extreme version of bureaucratic and legal uncertainty for both asylum seekers and people with refugee statuses. In addition, despite the many public concerns for refugees' lack of integration, the current restrictive policies (emphasised also by the Finance Bill) seem to make integration pointless or impossible.

Civil society and refugees responding to the politics of deterrence and uncertainty

In this section, I provide some examples of how civil society and refugees (individually and collectively) have reacted to the Danish policy developments.

Welcoming over deterrence

The visibility of the crisis generated a myriad of solidarity initiatives and created/reactivated networks seeking to help and assist refugees. Thousands of people became involved in solidarity work within a very short period. Many people acted in civil disobedience and became criminalised 'humanitarian smugglers' by offering transportation to refugees wanting to go to Sweden. Some sailed groups of refugees over the Öresund to Sweden, whereas others crossed the bridge with refugees hidden in their cars (Agustin and Jørgensen, 2019b). These acts presented a dilemma to the government. On the one hand, the people in solidarity solved a problem for the state by moving an unwanted population away from Denmark; on the other hand, the authorities were also concerned that such acts in themselves could be an incentive for refugees to come to Denmark. It is in this political landscape that *Venligboerne* (literally friendly neighbours) emerged. The network dates back longer than 2015, though. The movement was not originally aimed at doing solidarity work with refugees, but was developed as an initiative in a social centre in Northern Jutland. The *Venligboerne* groups have a number of shared aims, such as: providing legal aid, practical help, medical support, language training, job-seeking assistance and everyday donations; creating broad alliances including both experienced activists and people new to solidarity work; setting up social centres; making the problems of the asylum process and integration into Danish society visible; practising a humanitarian approach different from the exclusivist and restrictivist approach characterising the state; and articulating the commonalities between people, refugees, and Danes alike (Jørgensen and Olsen, 2020). *Venligboerne* is one of the groups welcoming refugees which were active during the 'long summer of migration' and after (Jørgensen and Olsen, 2020). With the arrival of a large number of refugees, the *Venligboerne*

initiative grew rapidly when it was introduced as an alternative way of meeting refugees. From here, the initiative spread across Denmark (and even outside the country) and received increasing attention as a way to counter the state's deterrence policies (Jørgensen and Olsen, 2020). The refugee crisis is, without doubt, a defining moment in explaining the strengthening and spread of civic solidarity, but it also links in with previous solidarity networks (Agustin and Jørgensen, 2019b). *Venligboerne* provide many roles in the encounter between civil society and migrants. The local groups have been vital in creating a space of inclusion where newcomers are received as peers. The power of *Venligboerne* lies firstly in its ability to forge alliances between different civil society organisations, networks, and refugee groups, and secondly in its flexibility and ability to adapt to the policy developments. When the government tightened aspects of the Foreigners' Law and regulations for asylum seekers, *Venligboerne* responded not only with a critique (of the asylum regime) but also with concrete actions.

While a strong welcoming culture may be important in the lives of individuals, it does not necessarily hold the power to change existing policies. *Venligboerne* has had an internal discussion regarding the politics it performs. Some members – including the original founder – regard it as a non-political organisation, whereas other members regard it as a non-formal political organisation (Agustin and Jørgensen, 2019b). Although *Venligboerne* has not been able to change the general political direction (towards increased restrictions and worsening conditions for refugees) it has been able to challenge the system by legal means. For instance, the government has made it more difficult to actually use refugees' right to family reunification. Even when all conditions for bringing one's family to Denmark are fulfilled, the criteria that the person applying for family reunification must bear all costs makes it de facto impossible. This is particularly the case for unaccompanied minors. To deal with this situation, *Venligboerne* created the group *Venligboerne samler ind til flygtninge* (friendly neighbours collect [donations] for refugees), which collects money to pay for these costs. The donations come from art shows, book sales and so on, and the organisation has created a very professional infrastructure to make the process efficient. In August 2018, the organisation had reunited more than 138 refugees and family members (BT, 2018). It has managed to uphold a high level of mobilisation and continuity. In 2018, three years after the initial mobilisation, the various *Venligboerne* chapters counted more than one hundred local groups and had more than 150,000 members (Fenger-Grøndahl, 2017).

Refugee activism and initiatives

One strategy used by refugees is empowerment through knowledge sharing. An example is *visAvis*, which is a publication put together by migrants.

visAvis describes itself as: 'a magazine on asylum and migration, the movement of people across borders and the challenges connected to this. We work to improve the debate on asylum and migration, among other things by publishing texts that people seeking asylum want to share' (*visAvis*, nd.). The description of the background for producing the magazine continues: '*visAvis* is produced by people with or without citizenship living in Denmark. From our point of view the policies regarding migration and asylum are repressive. People seeking refuge are made suspect and migrants are made illegal' and '[i]n this precarious situation we wish to raise the level of debate, enhance the quality of information, and create a space where it is possible for people seeking asylum to express what is on their mind' (*visAvis*, nd.). It represents a type of citizen journalism with the peculiar fact that it is produced (primarily) by non-citizens; that is, people excluded from the protectionist framework of citizenship. What we see here are people claiming a presence and a public voice. Engin Isin (2008) regards such events as constituting acts of citizenship. Investigating acts of citizenship entails 'focus[ing] on those moments when, regardless of status and substance, subjects constitute themselves as citizens – or, better still, as those to whom the rights to have rights is due' (Isin, 2008, p. 18). Reviving political conflict, here in problematising the authorities' handling of asylum seekers and treatment of rejected asylum seekers, is a mode for making asylum seekers visible as political subjects. Refugees are active agents in constructing and disseminating an intrinsic knowledge about conditions, struggles and political claims in Denmark.

Another strategy has been acts of disobedience. The conditions in the deportation centres Sjælsmark and Kærshovedgaard have spurred varying actions and confrontations. Right now, there is a network of actors protesting in different ways against children growing up at Sjælsmark (demonstrations, solidarity events, occupations, etc.). The network unites a very diverse range of actors and has received considerable attention. So far, the government and parts of the opposition (the Social Democrats) have not reacted, but there are small signs of a change in opinion as the media (both national and international) keep highlighting the conditions in Sjælsmark. The rejected asylum seekers living in Kærshovedgaard tried another tactic by initiating a hunger strike in 2017 (see Lindberg et al. 2018). The strike also drew the media's attention, and the parliamentary Ombudsman visited the facility. In the end, however, nothing changed and the people forced to live in Kærshovedgaard have to deal with worse conditions than before.

Rejected asylum seekers have started leaving Denmark but not returning to their home countries. For some, being able to stay in Denmark against all the odds has not seemed possible. From the refugees I have been in contact with at asylum centres and one deportation centre, life, especially in the deportation centre, causes anxiety, depression, and a profound sense of powerlessness. Families started leaving at night without the employees

of the centres knowing. Some people with the status of rejected asylum seekers have sought church asylum in Germany, which has turned out to be a second chance for some. German churches grant protection to refugees facing difficult situations, called hardship cases. The churches then present a request to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in Germany for further examination. *Venligboerne samler ind* has also supported these actions. The organisation, for instance, helped finance an Afghani family to reach Germany, where they sought church asylum and obtained the right to stay. People with Afghani background have travelled to France at times when the country started re-assessing the claims of Afghani asylum seekers (Ibfelt and Aaberg, 2019). However, the journeys are all towards the unknown, and some of my interlocutors are now living as irregular migrants in European countries with no chance of either returning to their home countries or obtaining asylum under the current regime(s). It is not only rejected asylum seekers, who for obvious reasons live in extremely precarious conditions facing forced deportation, but also asylum-seeking families and individuals staying on temporary residence permit who have started to leave Denmark.

Conclusion

What does the future look like for refugees in Denmark? The discussion in this chapter has firstly posed the question of how the Danish authorities framed the refugee crisis and, secondly, how a framing of the situation as a sustained and protracted emergency legitimised a long series of restrictions for both new asylum seekers and refugees (and migrants) already residing in the country. The previous government introduced a number of immediate policy measures to face the 'crisis'. This included reinstatement of border controls and, more importantly, the introduction of deterrence measures. The overall policy goal has been to create a migration regime deterring potential asylum seekers from applying for asylum in Denmark. However, the policy measures not only target potentially arriving refugees but also the ones who have been in Denmark for years. The refugee crisis was thus used to expand the category of deportable populations. Whereas this category previously included rejected asylum seekers and migrants residing in Denmark on 'tolerated stay' (see above), the category has been expanded to also include refugees who had their claim for asylum accepted, who were re-united with their families, and who are in paid employment, learning Danish and so on. The politicisation of the question of who can hold the right to stay in Denmark created enormous insecurity. The government described the new policy approach as a paradigmatic shift – basically seeking to solve the refugee issue outside the EU's (or at least Denmark's) external borders, and which stresses temporality as a main factor (Frelick, Kysel, and Podkul, 2018). This approach aligns with the discussions within

the EU of externalising the asylum procedures and establishing asylum application centres outside EU territories. The refugee crisis was used to legitimise this shift. As shown, it created extreme bureaucratic and legal uncertainty due to constant policy changes and to the expansion of the category of deportable populations. The approach bases itself on policy mechanisms and serves to make life unliveable in Denmark. A final consequence of the shift is that, in practice, it makes integration an impossible task, as having arrived as a refugee will always make you prone to deportation (see also De Genova, 2016b). In June 2019, Denmark inaugurated a new government when the Social Democrats won the election and, supported by the social liberal and the leftist parties, formed a minority government. It is too early to say if this will lead to any substantial policy changes, but everything seems to point away from a reversal of the restrictive policies. The Social Democrats support the paradigmatic shift and won the elections through promises of keeping the strict course on immigration (Agustin and Jørgensen, 2019a). However, the new Minister of Integration promised to improve conditions for children living at Sjælsmark, and recently suggested that it was time to slow down the restrictive policies, which could reduce the feeling of uncertainty to an extent. The government also opened up the possibility for allowing refugees to enrol in education, as was the case in the past. The main message is the same, however, and the foundation for restrictive policies continues to be the assumption that Denmark needs to be made less attractive to those wishing to re-establish their lives within its borders. For example, former Prime Minister Løkke Rasmussen explained that he understood the reasons Somalis prefer to live in a welfare state compared to life in Mogadishu and that he intends to follow existing rules.[9]

The restrictive policy regime has polarised Danish society. On the one hand, we see an organisation such as *Venligboerne* gaining popularity and being able to uphold a high level of mobilisation and engagement over time. On the other hand, we see continued support, not only for right-wing parties, but also for the restrictive position taken by the Social Democrats. Deterrence policies are likely to mark the future of the Danish political reality, and uncertainty may destroy the groundwork that strengthens the integration of migrants, including refugees. In the final part of this chapter, I have sketched out some of the nascent tendencies including the departure of the unwanted ones. In the end, people may decide not to stay in Denmark against all the odds.

Notes

1 When I mention government in this chapter I refer to the Liberal Party (*Venstre*)-led governments in power from June 2015 to June 2019. In June 2019 a Social Democratic government took power.
2 All translations from Danish to English are by the author.

3 In this chapter, I use both 'refugee' and 'migrant'. Although I prefer the term migrant to cover all mobile populations and thus underline their agency, several of the people I talked to during participant observation termed themselves refugees, so in order to respect this categorical self-identification I use both terms.
4 See www.en.cgs.aau.dk/research/projects/diginauts/. Accessed 12 February 2020.
5 Denmark received nearly 21,000 applications or 1.5 per cent of the EU total, while Sweden received approximately 160,000 or 11.7 per cent of the EU total.
6 'Skønsmæssig vurdering af indrejste udlændinge', Politi, published (last updated) 13 June 2016, www.politi.dk/da/aktuelt/nyheder/skoensmaessig_vurdering_af_indrejste_udlaendinge.htm. Accessed 12 February 2019.
7 The Liberal-Conservative governments from 2001–2011 implemented a lower social benefit, the 'Start Allowance', targeting newcomers who had lived in Denmark for the last seven out of eight years (i.e. including Danish citizens who had lived abroad). The Social Democratic-led government (2011–2015) abolished this benefit.
8 www.atlasandboots.com/most-dangerous-countries-in-the-world-ranked/. Accessed 12 February 2020.
9 *P1 Morgen*, DR, 7 August.

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