

RESEARCH

'ARE WE GOING TO STAY REFUGEES?' Hyper-precarious Processes in and Beyond the Danish Integration Programme

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The Danish welfare state is designed to protect and support people in need. However, refugees experience hyper-precarity related to a restrictive socio-legal regime connecting them to the state. Based on 4 months of ethnographic fieldwork in and around a local community organisation, including 35 qualitative interviews with refugees, social workers and volunteers, the article examines hyper-precarious processes constituted by a nexus of immigration and labour regimes. Theoretically, the article draws on the concepts of precarity and social navigation, which centre the analysis on the interface of agency and moving social forces, while advocating for an analysis sensitive to context-specific variations of everyday practice. By empirically exploring how refugees navigate complex state connections and expectations of self-reliance articulated in the Integration Programme, the article contributes to an understanding of hyper-precarity as ambiguous processes producing subjectivities of not only victimisation and despair but also fragile spaces of sociality, hope and resistance in rural contexts.

Keywords: refugees; integration programme; hyper-precarity; social navigation; work placement

I. Introduction

'The first thing I do in the morning is to check my phone to see if the Minister of Immigration and Integration has proposed any new restrictions to the laws'

This short extract illustrates the constant attunement of Rihanna, a Syrian woman living in a small rural town, to the socio-legal status of refugees in the state-funded Integration Programme. Like many other refugees from the Middle East and North Africa, Rihanna and her family have strived to learn Danish and become self-reliant in accordance with the Integration Act and active labour market policies of the Danish welfare state. However, laws are subject to change, not least when it comes to the legal regime governing the lives of

refugees. As exemplified by the case of Denmark, the most recent passing of the Finance Act in 2019 was the culmination of a long line of legal restrictions imposed on migrants and refugees, accentuated during the 'refugee crises' in 2015 (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Whyte 2011; Gammeltoft-Hansen 2016). Proclaiming a 'shift of paradigm', the Finance Act 2019 not only took further steps to reduce the 'integration benefit', enhancing the financial precarity of migrants, but also expelled the focus on 'integration' to 'repatriation', leaving little hope for people striving to build a sustainable future in Denmark. As a self-declared 'frontrunner' and thus potential 'inspiration' to other welfare states in 'tackling the refugee crisis', Denmark is a highly relevant case in the Nordic context, especially when it comes to studying the entangled governing mechanisms of immigration and labour regimes, as they are experienced and moulded in and through everyday lives of refugees targeted by restrictive socio-legal frameworks.

As previously examined by migration scholars, the Nordic welfare states have for decades been present in the daily lives of refugees, considering 'integration' a state project (Olwig 2011; Larsen 2011; Padovan-Özdemir & Moldenhawer 2017; Brännström et al. 2018). Although the Nordic welfare states differ in terms of immigration control and specific policies of citizenship, the idea of active labour market participation as the pathway to 'integration' is widely shared among the Nordic countries (Breidahl 2017; Fangen & Paasche 2012). However, 'integration' is not a straightforward concept (Rytter 2018), and as the Nordic welfare systems change over time, so does the meaning of 'integration'. From the dispersal policy imposed by the first Integration Act in 1999, aiming to prevent refugees from settling in urban multi-ethnic areas (Larsen 2011), to public debates on national identity epitomised by the political-ideological formulation of the Danish Cultural Canon in 2004 and the Canon of Denmark in 2016, the question of 'integration' has been increasingly tied to nationalistic and exclusionary notions of Danish values (Rytter 2018). In addition, broader developments from welfare to workfare seem to redefine not only state responsibilities but also those of the individual, putting even more pressure on refugees to reach the goal of self-reliance in compliance with Danish values, as spelled out in the preamble of the Integration Act of 2016. However, although state policies are governing the lives of refugees, everyday struggles and strategies to navigate the complex nexus of immigration and labour regimes cannot be grasped under the exclusionary heading of 'integration' (Larsen 2018; Rytter 2018). This calls for nuanced analysis exploring not only how refugees are moved by but also how they are moving in relation to social forces and legal structures, examining everyday experiences and social navigations of what we, inspired by Lewis and colleagues, conceptualise as hyper-precario processes (Lewis et al. 2015; Lewis, Dwyer & Hodkinson 2015).

In this article, we examine the complex workings of the intertwined immigration and labour regimes, as they are experienced and socially navigated by refugees participating in the municipal Integration Programme in rural Denmark, engaging both state and non-state actors in and around a local 'work integration project' of a civil society organisation with the pseudonym The Pathway. We depart from an outline of the political nexus of immigration and labour regimes, placing it within the theoretical framework of precarity (Jørgensen 2015; Strauss 2018) and hyper-precarity defined as layered insecurities and vulnerabilities related to forced displacement as well as restrictive immigration and labour regimes (Lewis et al. 2015; Lewis, Dwyer & Hodkinson 2015). To centre the analysis on the interface of agency and moving social forces, we draw on the concept of social navigation that coins the social actions of people struggling to manage and predict adverse situations of flux (Vigh 2009). Then we describe our methodological approach and empirical foundation, followed by an analysis emerging from a dialogue between our theoretical perspective and empirical readings. First, we examine the production of hyper-precarity by exploring the nexus of socio-legal

restrictions of immigration policies and a precarious labour market narrowly focusing on self-reliance. From what is described as a 'hyper-precarity trap' (Lewis et al. 2015; Waite et al. 2015; Waite 2017), we explore the importance of social relations and informal support structures, illuminating fragile spaces of possibilities also produced by hyper-precarious processes in practice. In conclusion, we discuss our main findings and further avenues of research.

II. Refugees in a changing welfare state: The nexus of immigration and labour regimes

The legal regime regulating the rights and duties of refugees in the Danish welfare state has been changed repeatedly during the last 30 years; some of the most prominent being the dispersal policy (*Spredningsloven*) in 1999 and the reduced introduction benefit (*Starthjælp*) in 2002 (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Whyte 2011; Larsen 2011). So, too, have labour market reforms aimed at increasing productivity, primarily targeting unemployed people. Social and political scientists, from various perspectives, have discussed this development with its all-encompassing focus on productivity, activation and employability as a shift from welfare to workfare, echoing Dean's (2010) description of the 'post-welfare society' (see also Blomberg 2011 for a specific Nordic perspective). In Denmark, the work-first paradigm has resulted in several major welfare reforms, such as the Municipal Reform in 2007 (*Kommunalreformen*) and the Social Security Reform in 2014 (*Kontanthjælpsreformen*), stressing active labour market policies in a context of global competition, producing new demarcation lines between citizens' rights to social welfare and their obligation to work (Pedersen 2011; van der Haar 2015). Accordingly, because of a lower degree of labour market participation, refugees are specifically targeted, a situation similar to other Nordic countries (NordForsk 2017; Brännström et al. 2018; Fernandes 2015).¹ Thus, the ideal of 'self-reliance through employment' articulated in the Danish Integration Act corresponds with overall changes in other welfare states, including the gradual transfer of social service provision from the public welfare system to private firms and civil society organisations (Gilbert 2002; Garrow & Hasenfeld 2014; Maroufi 2017). This development is shaping state-citizen relations 'on the ground', placing not only street level bureaucrats (Lipsky 1980) central to analysis but also non-state actors such as consultancies and community organisations hired as service providers to deliver the expected outcome of state policies. These organisations, which *The Pathway* is an example of, become important sites of investigation because they seem to embrace the ideological hegemony and institutional logic of the state apparatus and yet, concurrently constitute potential spaces of sociality, hope and resistance, as pointed out by Agustín, Jørgensen and colleagues in their work on power, migration and civil society (Agustín & Jørgensen 2016). As we show in this article, these spaces of sociality are ambiguous and fragile, produced through everyday practices of state representatives, non-state actors and refugees socially navigating an increasingly restrictive integration terrain.

Refugees, who have obtained protection status according to the Aliens Act in Denmark, are granted temporary residency under the Integration Act and enrolled in a 1–5-year-long Integration Programme, defined by the state and implemented by local municipalities (Larsen 2011; Whyte 2015; Careja 2018). Responding to the 'refugee crisis' of 2015, the Integration Act was reformed in 2016, installing self-reliance through employment as the unequivocal goal of the programme (*Change of the Integration Act 2016*). With the integration benefit, a welfare benefit below the minimum amount offered to the Danish residents and the contested

¹ Although 45% of the refugees who entered Denmark in 2015 had an ordinary job in 2018 (Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2018), a substantial number of people are still struggling to become self-reliant after 3–5 years in the country.

spatial dispersal policy of the first Integration Act 1999 (Larsen 2011), special measures were applied to refugees enrolled in the Integration Programme, which discriminate them from others 'only' subjected to the active labour market regime. Following this, the political 'shift of paradigm' expressed by the adoption of the Finance Act 2019 only added new layers of precarity, not just in financial terms by further reductions of the integration benefit but also by limiting access to permanent residency and accentuating repatriation which, we argue, are enhancing the process of hyper-precariation (Change of the Integration Act 2019). To achieve the proclaimed goal of self-reliance, participants in the Integration Programme are obliged to attend Danish language classes 3 days a week as well as participate in various short-term work placements and activation courses, provided by local authorities, job consultants or sub-contractors such as various non-state actors. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and focusing on everyday struggles 'betwixt and between' governing mechanisms of immigration and labour regimes, including the ambiguous connections and informal spaces produced in and beyond the Danish Integration Programme, this article contributes to a nuanced understanding of how people socially navigate everyday lives in rural contexts conditioned by hyper-precariation processes.

III. Theoretical Framework: Hyper-precariation processes and social navigation

Although uncertainty, understood as 'imperfect knowledge about the future', is a universal aspect of human life, Horst and Grabska (2015) have, among other migration scholars, highlighted uncertainty as a specific governing mechanism in lives uprooted by conflict-induced displacement (Whyte 2011; Brun 2015). Forced migration produces multiple concerns, both acute and protracted, with regard to safety, basic needs, mental health, relatives and future prospects. Uncertainty, thus, often represents the norm rather than the exception in the everyday lives of refugees globally (Horst & Grabska 2015). In welfare states, the insecurities related to the socio-legal regime of immigration are closely connected to unstable labour markets in the global economy (Lewis, Dwyer & Hodkinson 2015; Waite et al. 2015; Casas-Cortés 2017). Accordingly, living conditions of refugees in the Global North are increasingly shaped by neoliberal logics of the labour market, leading scholars concerned with the intersection of immigration and labour regimes to the concept of precarity, highlighting the profound connection between unstable employment, austerity and vulnerability (Nunn et al. 2017). From the seminal work of Bourdieu to the famous book of Standing on the precariat as a new 'dangerous class' (Standing 2011), discussions of precarity span a wide spectrum of disciplines, primarily focusing on precarious work as a generic component of global capitalism (Schierup & Jørgensen 2017; Strauss 2018). Based on scholarly concerns that the concept of precarity becoming an empty signifier, we draw on the analytical distinction between precarity as condition, precariat as identity formation and precariation as the processual aspects of precarity in practice (Jørgensen 2015: 3). Focusing on the latter, Jørgensen argues that examination of precarious processes is highly relevant in understanding the performative aspects of the socio-legal regime governing immigration, illuminating the everyday practices of insecure labour markets and retrenched social security (Jørgensen 2015; cf. Waite 2017). Following this, we unpack the entanglement of immigration and labour market regimes by examining the processual aspects of precarity in practice, reframing the question of what precarity *is* to an analysis of what precarity *does* (Jørgensen 2015). However, while the work of Jørgensen stems from an urban, activist setting, our analysis unfolds in a rural context already defined by the precarity of a declining population, job-scarcity, an unskilled labour force and low-paid, seasonal work opportunities, putting further strain on local inhabitants as well as on the municipalities responsible for implementing state policies.

As recent works have demonstrated migrants and especially refugees are particularly exposed to precarious processes, expanding from the labour market to most aspects of life (Lewis, Dwyer & Hodkinson 2015; Waite et al. 2015; Casas-Cortés 2017; Nunn et al. 2017; Schierup & Jørgensen 2017; Strauss 2018; Kooy & Bowman 2019). Given the layered insecurities and vulnerabilities produced by the entanglement of immigration and labour regimes, Lewis, Dwyer and Hodkinson (2015) suggest the multi-dimensional notion of 'hyper-precarity' as a relevant term concerning refugees, as it includes pre-migration as well as journeying experiences and future concerns. Hyper-precarity as a condition, as well as hyper-precarisation as a process, emerges 'from the ongoing interplay of neoliberal labor markets and highly restrictive immigration regimes' (Lewis, Dwyer & Hodkinson 2015: 582). Thus, hyper-precarity is a relevant concept in unpacking the complex nexus of immigration and labour regimes that produces several overlapping precarities; existential, socio-legal, spatial and financial, to name the most prominent, shaping all aspects of everyday life and future planning of refugees. However, in agreement with Strauss (2018), we suggest an approach to hyper-precarity sensitive to socio-cultural, situated and context-specific variations of everyday practice, because refugees and others exposed to severe socio-legal restrictions are not merely victims of hyper-precarious processes. The examination of hyper-precarity in practice enables an exploration of 'agency and contestation beyond the individual' (Jørgensen 2015: 3) and the simultaneous process of entrapment and transformation, potentially producing subjectivities of not only victimisation and despair but also participation and resistance (Jørgensen 2015; Casas-Cortés 2017; Trimikloniotis, Parsanoglou & Vassilis 2017). This calls for an analytical concept capable of grasping the interaction of agents, social forces and change, pointing us to the term social navigation developed by Vigh (2009) in his work on youth in war-torn Guinea-Bissau.

Social navigation coins the idea of 'motion within motion', focusing on how people are making sense, predicting and managing situations of flux (Vigh 2009). The concept thus designates motion in relation to changeable social forces, which enables an exploration of the interface between human actions and changing conditions. As Vigh (2009: 420) puts it: 'We act, adjust and attune our strategies and tactics in relation to the way we experience and imagine and anticipate the movement and influence of social forces'. With the analytical focus on constant attunement and adjustment to changing conditions directed towards a desired future, social navigation is defined as movement through the socially 'immediate' as well as the socially 'imagined', in which the temporal and aspirational aspects of human action are addressed (Vigh 2009: 425). This understanding of social navigation provides an analytical lens into how refugees are moved by and continually are moving in relation to hyper-precarious processes, connecting agency and the fluid nature of socio-legal structures, that both confine and provide possibilities for sustaining everyday life.

IV. Methodological Approach

To examine hyper-precarious processes in practice, we draw on an ethnographic approach that pays close attention to the practices and complexities of everyday life (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995). We generated the empirical material in autumn and winter 2018 during fieldwork conducted in a rural region of Denmark characterised by high unemployment rates, seasonal work and depopulation. We negotiated access during a pilot investigation 6 months prior to the main study, opening the doors to The Pathway, a local community organisation running a 'work integration project' funded by the municipality. The pilot study spurred our attention to the multi-layered practices intertwining the state connections of refugees, through legal authorities at state level and local bureaucrats at the municipal level,

and everyday aspirations of self-reliance in a rural infrastructure marked by few and mostly unskilled job opportunities, which are typical features of a precarious labour market.

We primarily conducted participant observation involving staff, volunteers and refugees in and around the project-related activities offered by The Pathway, entailing both in-house and outsourced training courses and work placements, centring on a weekly Folk Kitchen providing language as well as practical training by preparing meals sold to local residents. As a hybrid organisation (Doherty, Haugh & Lyon 2014) rooted in civil society, but financially dependent on temporary social service contracts with the local municipality, The Pathway is in itself an expression of a precarious labour market, ambiguously positioned between bureaucratic governance, economic concerns and everyday practices of sociality. In addition, we also participated in activities at a local language school, including the Danish classes and a counselling café provided by locals volunteering with a national NGO, expanding our research site beyond The Pathway. Furthermore, we conducted 35 qualitative, semi-structured interviews with one or two interlocutors at a time and 5 focus group interviews with 4–6 participants. Of our 63 interlocutors, 42 were refugees mainly from Syria and Eritrea but also from Afghanistan and Nigeria, living in Denmark for approximately 3–5 years, some married, some with children and others being single. Some had entered Denmark as asylum seekers and others through family unification; some held university degrees and others had not completed elementary school. Common among this heterogeneous group of interlocutors was the precarity inscribed in their relationship to the Danish state, marked by their legal status as refugees on temporary residence permits. We also interviewed 21 professionals and volunteers in different positions and institutional contexts, for example, managers, bureaucrats, caseworkers and volunteers, situating the processes of hyper-precarity in a broader, rural context. All interviews took place within the various institutional settings and private homes of refugees. Although we recruited many of our key interlocutors through The Pathway, we deliberately extended our relations via snowballing, establishing connections to refugees in other settings, for example, self-employed, young students, retired or enrolled in different employment programmes provided by other non-state actors. All interlocutors received a brief information letter in Danish about the study translated professionally into Arabic and Tigrinya, stressing the voluntariness of participation, the entitlement to withdraw and the confidentiality secured by the use of pseudonyms and obscuration of all sensitive information. We conducted about half of the interviews with refugees in cooperation with professional interpreters, whereas we conducted the remaining in Danish. Interviews and field notes were transcribed verbatim, and the study was registered in the institutional data protection scheme, following the European guidelines for Data Protection. Although ethical complexities are inherent in most research, studies involving refugees and other subjects in vulnerable positions are often highly complex, calling for careful attention to questions of consent and confidentiality (Mackenzie, McDowell & Pittaway 2007; Block, Riggs & Haslam 2013). In this study, we approached the question of informed consent as an iterative process (Mackenzie, McDowell & Pittaway 2007), implying continuous negotiations and multiple forms of communication to ensure participants' understanding of the scope and purpose of the research, including the voluntary character of participation. Similarly, we continuously negotiated our positionality as researchers in relation not only to our interlocutors but also to the asymmetric power relations inscribed in the intersecting discourses of integration and self-reliance. This called us to pay careful attention to the normative forces privileging the worldview of policymakers and local host communities, constructing the category of refugees as a 'problem' to be fixed (Bakewell 2008, McPherson 2010).

As analytical strategy, we jointly examined the empirical material through multiple readings of the many transcripts to identify and discuss recurrent themes. Although the analysis

is theoretically informed, the dialectic process of reading the empirical data in dialogue with scholarly debates and theoretical perspectives inspired our exploration of the entanglement of governing regimes, everyday practices and social navigation in and beyond the Integration Programme. This approach, based on a broad understanding of social practice research (Ortner 2006; Pink 2012) and critical psychological practice research (Højholt & Kousholt 2014), led to analytical themes crosscutting well-established categorisations of staff, clients, volunteers and public or private actors.

In the following analysis, we unfold central aspects of the nexus of immigration and labour regimes based on the lived experience of refugees enrolled in the Integration Programme, participating in educational training or holding unskilled jobs, as well as other actors involved. We examine, first, the process of hyper-precarisation related to the socio-legal regime of immigration and, second, the entanglement and implications of a precarious labour regime narrowly focusing on self-reliance, in practice experienced as exclusionary and exploitative, constituting a 'trap' of hyper-precarity (Lewis et al. 2015). However, as hyper-precarious processes are not uniform, we also encounter fragile sites of possibilities enacted through social relations and informal networks of support, highlighting the potential formation of new subjectivities also connected to hyper-precarious processes.

V. 'Are We Going to Stay Refugees?'

In the introduction, we got a glimpse of the daily concerns of the Syrian woman Rihanna, with regard to the frequent changes of the socio-legal regime that govern substantial aspects of the everyday life of refugees in Denmark. In this context, the Danish Finance Act 2019 only represents the latest example of continuous tightening, in which reduced access to permanent residency, focus on repatriation and entrenched rights to social benefit fundamentally shape the conditions of everyday life. The increasingly restrictive immigration laws shatter all hope of building a future in Denmark, as illustrated by Mina, another Syrian woman who in response to the proposal of the Finance Act 2019, said: 'There is no hope for us in Denmark. No hope'. During fieldwork, many interlocutors shared similar concerns related to their socio-legal status that affected their everyday life and future planning, epitomised by Meris, a Syrian father and student: 'They talk about our future here, that we don't... that we are going to stay refugees for the rest of our life and not become citizens or anything'. Meris stressed the crucial question of whether he and other refugees will ever be able to obtain a permanent connection to Denmark and earn the rights of full citizenship, or whether the restrictions will render him and many others to 'stay refugees' indefinitely. Some, like Mina, are disempowered and giving up hope, but the majority of our interlocutors, whether employed or not, single or married with children, vividly questioned the sustainability of their present and future plans, moving in new directions. Joram, another young Syrian man living in temporary housing, explained:

'I had made a plan. I would attend college and then go to university. However, when I heard about the Finance Act I thought; Ok, now we will be kicked out. I do not think about education now. I will find a job and make a little money, because I will be kicked out'.

As stated in this quote, Joram was navigating the legal changes by changing plans. This exemplifies the need to continuously adapt, revise and redefine actions in the present to manage insecure and unpredictable living conditions. Joram redirected his focus from pursuing the long-term goal of obtaining a university degree to the short-term goal of working and saving up 'a little money', which will prepare him for yet another migration journey. These insights

show how political proposals and legal changes such as the Finance Act are experienced as very stressful and fundamentally question the everyday pursuits of refugees, who are striving to rebuild their lives. For some, 'hopes are shattered', as articulated by Mina, but our empirical material also illuminates how many, in practice, were navigating the changing integration terrain through flexible and adaptive strategies, demonstrated by 58-year-old Malik. He attended extra Danish classes despite uncertainty, fatigue and distress in a constant aspirational struggle to provide for his family, including two traumatised children with disabilities. These examples echo the understanding of social navigation as 'making one's way through immediate difficulties as well as directing one's life positively into the future' (Vigh 2009: 423). The changing nature of the Danish immigration laws and the precarity produced by this unpredictable regime thus call for constant attunement to socio-legal restrictions and flexibility in the pursuit of directing one's actions of the present into the future.

To summarise, the socio-legal immigration regime constitutes a fundamental part of the hyper-precious process shaping everyday lives of refugees in Denmark, producing severe concerns, frustration and despair. Even though some were able to navigate in relation to the moving structural forces by 'finding a job and making a little money', it does not provide the prospect of a long-term plan, financial stability or the security of permanent residency. Rather, it reinforces a precarious position in a labour market characterised by low-paid, temporary and unskilled jobs, which, for many interlocutors, was either inaccessible or, for most, an inherent part of the hyper-precarity of everyday life. Caught in the complex nexus of unpredictable immigration and labour market regimes, reforms and regulations imposed by the activation policies of a welfare state embracing the work-first ideology, the local implementation of the Integration Programme constitutes a specific governing mechanism, which we now turn to.

'Why are we not Being Paid, like Everybody Else?'

Following Lewis et al. (2015), hyper-precarity is not solely produced by state-initiated changes in the socio-legal regime governing immigration but also by multiple regulations and demands stemming from labour market policies. As already mentioned, the Integration Act of 2016 not only defined the goal of integration as self-reliance but also reduced the integration benefit. In addition, the state-funded economic compensation offered to local municipalities implementing the rules and regulations of the programme was tightened, introducing new requirements and measurements of work placement, activation and job training schemes enhancing the daily pressure on local bureaucrats, service providers and social workers. Kristian, manager of The Pathway, reflected on his ambivalent experiences with a labour market regime based on the ideology of 'work first':

'It's all about legal frames, economic subsidy schemes and statistics, and with all this you lose sight of the individual. [...] It becomes a matter of providing work placements just in order to provide them, not in order for them to make any sense. [...] People are being taken advantage of, working long hours with no proper job in sight'.

Kristian described the work placements, an inherent part of the Integration Programme and thus a vital component of the 'work integration project' offered by The Pathway, as somewhat meaningless because they are implemented to fulfil the goal of the system, rather than of the individual. By pointing to the severe human consequences, not as random 'collateral damage', but as part of a precarious labour market regime, he questioned the unequivocal focus on self-reliance that governs the production of arbitrary work placements. This critique of a self-sustaining, bureaucratic jungle 'pushing people' into dubious internships and work

placements resonates with a general critique of the Danish activation scheme raised by actors within as well as researchers outside the employment system (Mik-Meyer & Villadsen 2012). However, refugees are subjected to particular socio-legal restrictions, such as the spatial dispersal policy, the integration benefit and other regulations imposed by the Aliens Act and the Integration Act. Substantiating this critique, Yunus, a private consultant, offering job training and mentoring to refugees, elaborated: 'The Integration benefit is not enough to live on. [...] Many give up. They have no idea what to do or how to survive in this society, this system. They completely drown everyday'.

The previous extracts not only question the unambiguous focus on self-reliance in the Integration Programme and the paradoxical position of non-state actors but also draw attention to the financial precarity and everyday struggles of refugees in Denmark (Larsen 2011; Shapiro 2017). Although socially navigating several overlapping bureaucratic regimes of the welfare state and worrying about the future and safety of relatives abroad, many of our interlocutors were led into desperation and despair. Enrolment in the Integration Programme with the obligation to participate in recurrent, short-term work placements without future job prospects seems to reinforce the process of hyper-precariation, for some leading to strong manifestations of emotional distress. In the following extract, six women from Syria and Afghanistan participating in the 'work integration project' of The Pathway share their experience and express their frustrations while they were preparing dinner for the Folk kitchen:

'This afternoon, the atmosphere in the kitchen is low. Rihanna is scheduled to start in a new work placement and explains how she cannot sleep at night, because she thinks about the 'zombie work placement' all the time: 'This is the biggest problem for all refugees. We only get work placement and never real jobs'. Everybody is nodding energetically and starts talking about three, four and five work placements that never led to a job. Zohan, an older woman from Afghanistan, says: 'Yes, it is only work placement, work placement, work placement, and always only "work placement" for us', leading Rihanna to question: 'Why work placement when we only want to work? When we work and are doing well, why are we not being paid, like everybody else?'

As reflected in this extract, taking part in arbitrary and endless 'zombie' work placements is a dominant experience among our interlocutors. Many thus feel rejected, discriminated and exploited, followed by disappointment and strong physical as well as psychological manifestations, as illustrated by Rihanna in the following:

'It is stressful and it hurts inside me. I throw up and think a lot when I do the work placement and I am tired. I work and I like to work. However, when they say "No, thank you" (...) it is not good for me. It stresses me. I think of my home country, I think of work. I think about studying and my children'

Hyper-precarius processes are thus enacted through intertwined experiences of bodily discomfort, exhaustion and existential concerns of the present as well as the future, including the fear of losing family members living in war zones (Shapiro & Montgomery 2020). Several months, sometimes even years, of short-term work placements enhance the experience of exploitation and discrimination so clearly expressed by our interlocutors (Lewis et al. 2015). This process is only reinforced by the mandatory status of the Integration Programme, obligating refugees to attend language classes, work placements and various 'integration courses' to receive the integration benefit. For most refugees, some placed in rural towns with limited social network because of the spatial dispersal policy (Larsen 2011; Shapiro 2017), making

ends meet is a serious challenge, and many question why they are not remunerated properly for the work they do or at least receive a financial benefit on par with unemployed Danish citizens.

During fieldwork at The Pathway, language school and different work placements, we met men and women who were struggling on a daily basis, tired from sleepless nights, in physical and psychological pain, worried and frustrated, while their children would call them on FaceTime because they were isolated at home. Similarly, when Avin received a WhatsApp message while preparing dinner at The Pathway, stating that her uncle and two cousins close family members had just disappeared in Syria, the fear of suffering more loss in transnational family life is evident. However, our interlocutors continued to get out of bed every morning, showing up for work placements and language classes, often without knowing what they will be doing the following week. When attending the 'work integration project' of The Pathway and doing physically demanding tasks such as moving heavy furniture, 58-year-old Malik often looked tired, resting on a chair whenever possible. When we shared our observation of fatigue, he said: 'Of course I am tired, but you cannot say that you are tired... What should I do? If you are late you are sanctioned and the sanction is that they take money from you'. Malik mentioned the risk of economic sanctions for not showing up for a work placement or a meeting at the municipality, addressing the forceful governing mechanism of the Integration Programme increasing the hyper-precarisation of everyday life. The consequences of 'being sanctioned' are severe because of the low rate of the integration benefit and the high costs of living in Denmark, producing poverty at a level unprecedented in a Nordic context (Institut for Menneskerettigheder 2018; Andersen, Dustmann & Landersø 2019).

In summing up, the experiences of coercion and exploitation that permeate many activities in the Integration Programme point to an understanding of the work placement scheme as 'unfree labour', understood as the opposite to 'free' labour characterised by agreement or a 'free' contractual relationship between employer and employee (Lewis, Dwyer & Hodgkinson 2015: 587). The low integration benefit and daily risk of further financial sanctions, inscribed in the mandatory Integration Programme, thus increase the susceptibility to further exploitation, as stressed by Waite et al. (2015). Additionally, the opaque bureaucracy seems to produce recurrent experiences of 'not knowing' about tomorrow, mirroring the intertwined precarities of the immigration and labour regimes, including the fear of being repatriated or losing relatives, amplifying the process of hyper-precarisation. Altogether, the multi-layered insecurities and vulnerabilities characterising the hyper-precarious lives of refugees in Denmark illustrated so far might in fact add up to what Lewis and colleagues have named 'a hyper-precarity trap' (Lewis et al. 2015: 175), leaving limited room for manoeuvring.

'We are going to the Parliament'

Although adaptation or resignation to the nexus of immigration and labour regimes seems indispensable, Malik and many other interlocutors did not merely 'comply' or 'give up'. They continuously attempted to socially navigate what appeared to be an inherently opaque and disempowering bureaucratic system. Some young, mostly single men from Eritrea and Syria succeed in finding unskilled jobs, often part-time and temporary or with irregular hours, making it difficult to follow language classes, school and other obligations. Many others, often parents and elderly with no jobs in sight, engaged in different social spaces. We observed multiple manifestations of not only a 'bureaucratic jungle' but also interlocutors constantly seeking new possibilities for work and social relations attuning to, sometimes even challenging, the multiple demands of the Integration Programme. As previously argued, refugees are not mere victims of hyper-precarious processes (Jørgensen 2015), even though the room for manoeuvring is restricted. Focusing on the situational and context-specific variations of

everyday practice illuminates the simultaneous process of entrapment and transformation, potentially enabling new subjectivities and fragile spaces of sociality, hope and resistance. Elaborating on this perspective, we highlight the importance and potential of existing or emerging social relations and connections enacted also through hyper-precarious processes in practice. Thus, in shifting the focus from the socio-legal and bureaucratic production of hyper-precarity to everyday attempts of creating a common ground for 'struggle, agency and contestation beyond the individual migrant' (Jørgensen 2015: 3), we explore the question of agency and resistance produced through social relations rather than an individual coping strategy or skill (Kooy & Bowman 2019).

During fieldwork, we spend many hours participating in the 'work integration project' at The Pathway, attending meetings, visiting external work placements and local small-scale entrepreneurs, preparing food for the weekly Folk Kitchen and engaging in small talk and everyday conversations with staff, volunteers and refugees enrolled in the project. The Folk Kitchen was a main activity and site for language training, skill development and work placement, primarily targeting refugees assessed by the local case workers as not 'ready' to take on ordinary jobs. During the planning and preparation of this recurrent event, participants discussed anything from the troubles of logging onto 'Job-net', the best place to purchase fresh milk, to the recent benefit reduction and latest political proposals with regard to temporary residency and repatriation. The Folk Kitchen became a site not only for what Lewis, Waite and colleagues (Lewis, Dwyer & Hodgkinson 2015; Waite et al. 2015) label 'unfree labour' but also for sharing, exchanging goods and 'sorting things out', involving the provision of painkillers, advice, hugs and care. Several interlocutors stressed the importance of this sociality or, to borrow a phrase from Gullestad (1984), 'kitchen table society', providing an important space for solidarity, exchanging and negotiating care, knowledge and sense-making.

With the analytic lens of social navigation, we capture, simultaneously, the fluid nature of socioeconomic structures that provide and limit possibilities for sustaining life as well as the potential sociality of local communities and informal connections enacted also by hyper-precarious processes in practice. Thus, the participants in the Folk Kitchen are not only managing through individualised coping strategies. Our interlocutors were engaging in hyper-precarious processes as part of their complex pursuit of socially navigating everyday life, relating and connecting to social workers, volunteers and other participants in and out of the Folk Kitchen. In the following field note, this sociality becomes vivid:

'Four women working in the kitchen are discussing the latest political proposal [the Finance Act], when Mina from Syria started crying and says: "There is no longer any hope for us, not in Denmark." In response, Rihanna pulls out her smartphone and signs into Facebook. She has posted a question on the page of a local right-wing politician, asking, "Why do you not believe that Muslims in Denmark are good and hard-working people?". [...] Then she proclaims that some of the participants in the Folk Kitchen are going to the Parliament to participate in a public demonstration against the proposed restrictions targeting refugees, convinced that a large number of people, refugees as well as Danish citizens, will show up. The women sitting at the kitchen table start discussing the particular proposal of sending rejected asylum seekers to the isolated island of Lindholm, soon renaming it the "Guantanamo of Denmark". Jokes are shared across the table, placing named politicians on the island to cook and cater for the women in the Folk Kitchen'

In this situation, we get a glimpse of the fragile space of hope and resistance produced in and through hyper-precarious processes, showing both the restraining forces that shape

everyday life and the creative attempts of contestation through the expression of frustration, humour and imagination. The analysis of hyper-precarious processes in practice stresses an understanding of precarity as a possible catalyst for transformation, as argued by Jørgensen (2015), enabling the potential formation of new subjectivities, for example, when the women depicted previously engage in public debates and political demonstrations.

Summarising our argumentation, hyper-precarious processes in practice not only produce hardship, resignation and despair but also fragile spaces of possibility, enabling new modes of participation and subjectivities. These are not unambiguous or uniform but rather tentative and temporary, shaped by the refugee position, local contexts, wider state connections and global power structures. By socially navigating in and beyond the Danish Integration Programme, refugees in rural Denmark are not 'merely surviving' but engaging in the social construction of hope and resistance, actively addressing the substantial concern of Meris who asked: 'So my concern is, are we going to stay refugees for the rest of our life?'. This finding is in line with a study by Kooy and Bowman (2019) who, in their work with asylum seekers in Australia, show how people in response to what they call 'manufactured precarity' develop strategies of coping and subtle forms of contestation. However, these strategies are described solemnly as individual and isolated coping in response to precarious circumstances, whereas, in our study, we found several cases of more collective constructions of sociality, hope and resistance, however fluid and fragile these may be.

VI. Conclusions

The aim of this article is to examine the hyper-precarious processes produced by the nexus of immigration and labour regimes in the everyday lives of refugees enrolled in the Danish Integration Programme. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in and around a local 'work integration project', extending to various sites and actors engaged on different scales, we provide nuanced insights into diverse practices and complexities of everyday life. By drawing on the concepts of hyper-precarity and social navigation as theoretical perspective and analytical tools, we explore the interface of agency and moving social forces. Empirically, the analysis unpacks the production of hyper-precarious processes, manifested as multi-layered insecurities and vulnerabilities, not only related to forced migration but also related to the powerful nexus of immigration and labour regimes, of which the dispersal law, the reduced integration benefit, limited access to permanent residency and expectations of self-reliance are central governing mechanisms.

According to the Danish Integration Act, language training, work placements and activation courses are primary tools in becoming 'self-reliant', but as the socio-legal regime enacted at the level of local municipalities and communities is constantly changing, they are often ambiguous, unstable and temporary arrangements. Local implementations of the Integration Act produce continuous misunderstandings, disappointments and insecurities on all sides, including refugees as well as social service providers. The analysis suggests that these disempowering mechanisms are not unfortunate 'mistakes' or 'side-effects' of specific policies but rather workings of a state-initiated production of austerity that push social service providers and street-level bureaucrats to create 'work placements' and activation courses with no or little prospect of securing paid or proper employment. Thus, the unequivocal focus on 'self-reliance' that governs the production of arbitrary and potentially exploitative work adds to the hyper-precarisation of everyday life, enhancing the physical and mental suffering of refugees. As such, the analysis unfolds the complex workings and human consequences of structural discrimination built into the Danish integration system.

However, by exploring hyper-precarious processes in practice, we find that hyper-precarity not only produces severe hardship, resignation and despair but also fragile, temporary spaces of sociality, hope and resistance. The social processes of refugees connecting and

participating in and across different local contexts suggest an understanding of hyper-precarity that is not based on a simple 'either-or' but rather an understanding encompassing 'both-and'. We find that hyper-precarious processes are complex and simultaneously produce fundamental uncertainties and exclusion as well as context-specific spaces of sociality, potentially countering the restrictive nexus of immigration and labour regimes. Still, these local spaces mediating the relationship between refugees and the state are themselves fluid and rather unpredictable because of the arbitrary and temporary nature of such social connections. Thus, our findings call for further exploration of the potential of collective agency in the production of new, political subjectivities as well as to enhance our knowledge of how to strengthen these fragile spaces in future studies.

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Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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