Of Refugees and Narratives: An Explanation and Analysis of Integration and Refugee Narratives in Contemporary Denmark

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Abstract

This bachelor thesis in social anthropology researches the subject of integration and refugee narratives in contemporary Danish society. It is firstly a study of what integration means in Danish culture and how integration is debated in the Danish public debate. Secondly it is a study of how the Danish public discourse reflects itself in the refugee narratives. Moreover, this thesis investigates the nature of refugee narratives and how they can be interpreted in context with the Danish asylum process. The fieldwork for this thesis was done with the Netnography method, meaning that all fieldwork done for the study was done online at specific internet pages. Then the information harvested from these internet pages has been used in the analysis alongside the relevant theory. The theory in this study has been focused around Marita Eastmond's (2007) theoretical insights about refugee narratives . It has also relied heavily on other anthropologists who are on the forefront of this research field, namely Mikkel Rytter (2019), Zachary Whyte (2011), Liisa Malkki (1992) and the collaborative work of Mathilde Skov Danstrøm & Zachary Whyte (2019). I argue throughout this thesis that the Danish public debate regarding integration does affect the refugees' way of telling their narratives. But I also argue that refugees' narratives are something that can be 'acted out' in a certain way depending on the intended audience. Hereby meant that a refugee will explain their narrative differently to an asylum committee than they would to a close personal friend. I moreover find that there is a form of cultural capital to be found in these refugee narratives, that I explain as 'refugee capital'.

Keywords: *social anthropology; refugees; integration; Denmark; narratives*

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Preface

We are people living in a Red Cross Center

Prøv lige at listen mens du står og venter

More than 100 mennesker here, don't you forget.

And they all have to go,

To the same toilet.

Danish people think we are stupid humankind

Watching German shit, blowing our mind

Sitting in the TV room wasting our time,

Nothing else to do, but to put yourself in to crime

Hvorfor kalder Danske folk mig for en perker?

Det er meget nemt, det er ikke dem der mærker

Hvad det da betyder når man sidder i et fremmed land og tænker på sit hjem,

Som sidst man så var i brand

I met a girl that wanted me, and then she called me up

I started talking English, and she told me "Hold dog op!"

"Jeg gider ikke snakke med dig, tag hjem hvor du er fra!"

What else was left to say?

Farvel, Au Revoir

- Rap written in Danglish by the Armenian refugee, Greg, when he lived at an asylum-center in Denmark after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Through the Looking Glass

Narratives are essential to social and cultural anthropology and play a crucial role in almost all other social sciences. But when speaking of stories, is there such a thing as one true story? Narratives are extremely intersubjective and only reflect the events through the eyes of the narrator, whose interpretation is wholly dependent on the narrator's cultural heritage and habitus. What this thesis seeks to investigate is refugee narratives in a contemporary Danish setting, how we might understand them, both from a classic anthropological perspective, but also in context of the current Danish public debate regarding refugees. This thesis will be split between two key points; firstly, that integration is heavily in focus in the Danish sociopolitical debate, and secondly, that this reflects itself in the narratives articulated by refugees living in Denmark.

- Purpose and thesis question:

The purpose of this study is to research refugee narratives, how they might be told, i.e. in what form, in contemporary society and how they relate to the present political debate in Denmark. In order to understand the nature of their narratives this study will investigate how refugees choose to tell their stories, what part of the story, and in which way. Moreover, the study will provide a thorough understanding of the migration-oriented history of Denmark as it is important to know the past in order to understand the present.

The main research question for this thesis is: How is the refugee narratives under scrutiny constructed, how do they relate to the current political debate in Denmark and how does said debate affect the narratives?

Working from a base in socially conscious narrative theory the study will also seek to answer:

- What is a refugee narrative and how do we define it?
- How might we interpret the chosen refugee narratives?
- How does the Danish political debate affect refugee narratives?

Theoretical Framework:

This study works from the touchstone of narrative theory. Especially the theoretical framework discussed and provided by Marita Eastmond in ”Stories as Lived Experience: Narratives in Forced Migration Research” from 2007. Firstly, we work from the basis that a narrative is a sociocultural form where activities are described and ascribed meaning. Also, a narrative will always be limited to the meaning and expression which an individual can ascribe to it (Eastmond 2007: 250). Secondly, we work from the assumption that the methodology behind narratives are that people use narratives as a way to negotiate and validate their stories, alongside using it as a retrospective tool to assess their next step. In this process people draw on their social relations and cultural repertoire which will always make narratives inherently intersubjective and culturally depending (Eastmond 2007: 250-251).

A narrative is, in layman's terms, a story unfolded. It is a series of events, told by the person who experienced it, as they lived it. It may or may not be relatable or truthful. Within anthropology, narratives hold a significant place and serve as an important tool in interpreting and understanding cultures and societies. The definition of a narrative is that of a form in which activities and events are described as having a meaningful and coherent order (Eastmond 2007: 250). Narratives impose on reality a unity which it does not really possess, hereby meaning that narratives only possess the expression an individual can give to the experience. Actually, narratives are not simply reflections of life, but a construct or interpretation of the past that is generated in the specific context of the present (Eastmond 2007: 250).

The function of narratives is, for individuals, to have a way to negotiate the meaning of the events that they experienced, evaluate the significance of it, and assess this in the context of their future decisions. When working through that process, the narrator will draw on social relations and their cultural repertoire to fully understand and convey their narrative. Thus, in the context of personal narratives, one might be tempted to conclude that there is no such thing as an objective narrative, that all narratives are entirely intersubjective and culturally dependent (Eastmond 2007: 250 – 251).

This negotiation of events that narratives represent serves both a retrospective and prospective function. They allow the narrator to analyze and interpret events of the past and how they might seek forward in life (Eastmond 2007: 251). Narratives also allow for a sense of continuity, especially for forced migrants, where narratives serve as link to another time and place. Oftentimes,

it can be difficult for refugees to keep a clear narrative of the past and present, when the future is entirely unknowable (Eastmond 2007: 254).

So why do refugees tell their narratives? It works as a way to negotiate their present and as a way to take control of a situation wherein they might otherwise be powerless. One might argue that humans have an inherent *need* for meaning, for remaining active rather than passive (Hall 1972). So, narratives present a way to keep *active* and *acting* when very few options are afforded to the refugees for control and development.

In narrative anthropological theory we have four main concepts. Firstly, *life as lived*; the different events that a person experiences in life. Secondly, *life as experienced;* how a specific individual distinguishes what happens to them, and how they attribute meaning to that event based on previous experiences and cultural heritage. Thirdly, *life as told;* how a narrative might be presented and told according to the specific sociocultural context and to the specific audience. As mentioned earlier a narrative is never a singular construct. It exists in context with what has previously been experienced and what meaning we ascribed to those experiences. Lastly, *life as text*; how the researcher or writer understands and construes the text. More so, what filters the narrative has to go through in accord to the researchers own cultural biases, and how the researcher choses to write it down (Eastmond 2007: 249).

So, we might understand that an experience or a narrative is never a separate thing. It is a process that goes from being experienced, to being understood (put in context), to being told to an audience, to then, potentially, being put into text.

When we put narratives in the context of, for example, asylum hearings where the audience might be more skeptical, they become more complex. Thus, narratives become more of a representation of oneself, rather than a documentation of living. When using narratives to represent oneself in front of a skeptical audience they become more of a method. A method for reflecting on oneself, how one acts in the world and how that might be understood. It allows for an inquiry between the self and the social world (Eastmond 2007: 250). More importantly, it allows, for example, for a refugee to translate his narrative into the cultural code of the receiving country.

Lastly, one might consider drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's concept rhizomes accompanied by the thinking of Liisa Malkki. Deleuze and Guattari explain being rhizomorphous as "to produce stems and filaments that seem to be root, or better yet connect them by penetrating the trunk, but put them to strange new uses" (Quoted from Malkki, 1992: 36, originally from Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 15). That is, the core (the trunk) of the tree, is one clear thing, but it will then sprout more branches that will grow from the trunk, and through the trunk. The branches will merge with the other branches and thus create new branches, consisting of the old ones. In the end the tree will be a much bigger, infinitely more complex being that is no longer just a simple tree trunk, but a mixture of the trunk and old and new branches. The tree is now a rhizomorphous being. Here, rhizomes will be used to describe the rooting of refugees and how multifaceted refugees and their experiences are. Malkki discusses rhizomes in context with her study on Hutu refugees living in Tanzania. The Hutu refugees found themselves altered through their time in exile that had changed situationally. Whilst they were still from Burundi, they weren't necessarily just "Hutu" or "refugees", or "Tanzanians" or "Burundi". They had become a combination of all these things. While they at first may just have had belonged to one of these categories, which then had existed as the trunk, the other categories had then sprouted roots from the trunk and then intertwined themselves, creating rhizomatic creatures (Malkki 1992: 36).

Method

Firstly, this study depends greatly on a scholarly approach, which largely consisted of reading various qualitative research articles on the subject. Usage of a literary oriented method allowed for a great amount of qualitative data from anthropologists who were very relevant, if not even instrumental, within this field of research.

Secondly, this thesis used Netnography as an alternative to more traditional ethnography. This means that the research has been done on the internet, rather than through a physical field site approach. The fieldwork for this study has been predominantly conducted online. This sort of ethnographic research is commonly referred to as Netnography(Berg 2015). Doing fieldwork online provides a massive field that is not bound by country limits, time zones, etc. It does, however, encourage discipline and vigilance when doing fieldwork, lest you research too broadly, and lose focus. The internet is a vast resource and, in many ways a helping tool, but I have in this chosen to limit my scope. I have bound my online field site to the online podcasts situated on the webpage of

Danish Refugee Council Youth (DFUNK) (See URL Index). I have listened to all the podcasts on the page, which are narratives told by a group of refugees themselves. I have chosen a few as key examples, and some I will draw into reference on a smaller scale. Regardless, all will play a role in the holistic understanding of this thesis.

Describing the methods, I ultimately ended up using, also warrants an explanation of the ones I did not, and a consideration of how they might have had affected my study. It would have been the obvious and fairly easy choice to conduct interviews with refugees for this study. Conducting my own interviews would have allowed me a deeper understanding of the narratives I would have worked with and would have allowed me ask questions I found more central to this thesis' subject. As it were, I did spend a disproportionate amount of time attempting to find interview subjects through various channels. Ultimately, this took up too much time, and meant that I had much less time to re-invent my thesis subject and do online fieldwork. Perhaps this cost some depth to the thesis, as the material I used, and the interviews I analyzed are what was public access, and not necessarily exactly meant for my thesis subject.

Previous research:

As far as previous research on the subject of refugee goes, I find it impossible not to mention Liisa Malkki and her work with the Hutu refugees living in Tanzania, alongside her concept of 'the national order of things'. Moreover, Malkki provided a thorough investigation of the rooting of people and what it means in a sociocultural setting for people to be judged as being 'out of place' (Malkki, 1992). As Malkki explains, the refugees' lack of bodily connection to their homelands does often equate with the understanding that they have had a loss of moral bearings (Malkki 1992:32). To be rootless is to be dishonest and dangerous because there is nothing to hold you in place. Hence, refugees are not normal people, they are an anomaly that require specialized correction (Malkki 1992: 33). This specialized correction can manifest in many ways, for example as refugee camps where the refugees are monitored and controlled carefully. This way the movement and space of the 'displaced' are managed (Malkki 1992: 34). Malkki uses the phrase the 'national order of things' as a synonym to institutionalized nationalism, i.e. that one's homeland is the natural place of belonging for a person. Moreover, it serves the purpose of representing a type of political organization that is inherently, deeply cultural and yet globally present. That the nation,

which is ideally defined by a clear territory, actually extends far beyond its borders in the form of transnationalism and diaspora (Malkki 1992: 37). Here by meant that nations will often take up more space than their earthly territories, commonly in the shape of their transnational and diasporic citizens. For example, does the United States of America have large quantities of transnational and diasporic groups such as Italians, Hispanics, Africans, etc. Groups such as these may cultivate strong links to their home nations through cuisine, music, art and so forth. Malkki argues that nations have a sedentary norm, which makes sedentary biased nations feel worried by uprooted peoples, because they represent a deviance to the sedentary norm. People who are rooted to one place are bound to its specific customs and laws, but the uprooted peoples are understood as having no such moral restrictions. If rootless for long enough they will become completely without any culture, and thus have no inhibitions, ergo very dangerous to the sane, cultured, rooted people (Malkki 1992).

Zachary Whyte has also provided a useful reinterpretation of Foucault's Panopticon and presented it as the Myopticon. Foucault presented the Panopticon as a system wherein normalization of power is based on total surveillance and isolation of people (Whyte 2011: 18). However, Whyte's reinterpretation, the Myopticon, represents a near-sighted and partial system of several surveillance systems, knowledge and sanctions that can be shown as if it is Panoptical, but in reality, only focuses on the objects that can be bureaucratically processed (Whyte 2011: 18). The Myopticon was a theoretical example of the functions of the Danish refugee camps, based on his real experiences doing fieldwork in a refugee camp on Bornholm, Denmark. Whyte's fieldwork and concept of the Myopticon serves as a thorough and critical assessment of the Danish asylum system, and how refugees are treated and marginalized within the Danish state (Whyte 2011).

What is also pertinent to this study is Zachary Whyte's collaboration with Matilde Skov Danstrøm that investigates refugee narratives as they occur in the refugee camps and in the courtroom. This thesis relies heavily on the research performed by Whyte and Skov Danstrøm (2019). They provide insight into the proceedings of asylum hearings, how the board members make their decisions, and how the refugees perceive these experiences. It also discusses the performative requirements of refugees at asylum hearings. Moreover, it explains how the board members at the Danish Refugee Council will often base their decisions on extra criteria things such as credibility and performance (ibid2019: 191).

An Immigrant's Guide to the Integration Soup

Firstly, it seems pertinent to explain the homogenic case of Denmark and what role refugees and immigrants play in it. To fully understand the closedness of the Danish nation-state and its people, some social researchers suggest that we look back to 1864 when Denmark lost Schleswig-Holstein to Prussia (Borevi 2017:7). The defeat highlighted weakness within the Danish nation-state and Danish nationalism took a toll. While the government lost its validity, the Danish people adopted the ideology preached by N.F.S. Grundtvig, commonly known as 'Grundtvigisme', and it became an important and leading political movement. Grundtvigism drew on the harmony of land, country, God, and the people (Borevi 2017: 7). In essence, Grundtvigism focused on the people with a grounded, 'for-the-people' attitude, and the sense that nationalism came from the masses. The 1864 defeat also spurred a change in Danish political thought. Post-defeat Denmark found itself geopolitically vulnerable, and unable to withstand large military attacks. Danish national pride was wounded due to the general knowledge that Denmark could, in fact, *not* protect itself, and so the Danish population sought solace in what was close to them; each other. Thus, the Danish population developed a very closed, homogenic populous state. A state that took great care of national identity, and the realization that if the Danish nation-state could not be the largest kingdom in the world, it could just as well be the strongest, least breakable, *most Danish* kingdom in the world. Also, during World War II Denmark found itself in a challenging military situation. It was under occupation from Germany, but nationalism survived through rebellions and underground resistances. All of which were largely unsuccessful but served as crucial enabler for nationalism. Perhaps Denmark wasn't a military powerhouse, but the Danes weren't just docile housecats either – fighting battles, and losing, was good for morale, and allowed for an even more close-knit national community when the war was won (Borevi 2017: 10).

Moreover, on the concept of immigration, Mikkel Rytter's article "Writing Against Integration" (2019) is highly relevant for this thesis. Fact remains, *integration* was an uncommon word in the Danish language in the mid-twentieth century. Even after its arrival, it has varied in meaning and has had many vastly different understandings attached to it. When the Danes first saw integration in the 1950's, it was also tainted by the war. Integration was an auxiliary word used to refer to the political, fiscal, and military integration of Europe after World War II (Rytter 2018:5). In the 1960's it was applicable regarding the expansion of the European Common Market. In the 1970's integration was a word used in the debate on pre-school education and how to implement children

with various handicaps so they could become part of the regular Danish school system (Rytter 2018: 5). Actually, it was not until the 1990's that the word integration was put in the same box as immigrants. Then it was used to refer to certain cultural and religious tendencies amongst the immigrants in Denmark. Now, integration is a political, journalistic, social science buzzword that when applied properly can create quite a stir. Integration *is* the official ambition of the Danish government according to the 1999 'Integration Act' (Rytter 2018:6). By integration it is commonly understood that the immigrants must become mainstream Danish as fast as possible (or faster preferably), and should the immigrant deviate from normcore society in any way they are expected to keep this as quiet as possible, as not to disturb the majority society and the national order of things (Malkki 1992). Different attempts have been made to decide what exact norms and practices are Danish. Although there is no clear agreement, issues such as food preferences (often focused on eating pork) and knowledge of Danish history (as clear in knowledge tests for citizenship) have been publicly raised as ways to prove immigrants' level of integration.

As Mikkel Rytter explains, sociocultural integration in modern Danish society is like a cup of soup. Integrating into Danish society should be done with the breakneck speed of the fast and the furious where the immigrant launches itself into the soup with the hope of melting and becoming one with the soup as fast as possible (Rytter 2018: 7). However, since the terror attacks on 9/11 and 7/7 integration took another turn in the Danish perception. Now integration has largely merged with questions of national security, where extra concerns and security measures are now layered onto integration.

Another way of understanding the role which integration and immigrants play in Danish contemporary society is to examine power dynamics in Danish society. Mikkel Rytter presents an interesting theory about the concept of Host and Guest in contemporary Danish society. This also represents the relationship between the majority (the ethnic Danes) and the minorities (immigrants) (Rytter 2018: 10). It also portrays the common thought that the immigrants, especially refugees, are just here *for now*, and can return once their home country is safe again. So, as all Guests, the immigrants, are expected to stay well behaved and blend into the soup. According to this logic the Hosts set the rules and are in charge of the habitus, while the Guests are expected to be well behaved and follow the rules. Should the Guests misbehave or deviate from the norm, the Host has the right to reprimand the Guests until they fall back into place – or possibly leave (Rytter 2018: 10-11)

Another crucial part of Danish culture that must be understood is the welfare state, and how it contributes to the alienation of immigrants in Danish society. Firstly, the Danish welfare system is a system which require its citizens to pay high taxes in order to receive a high amount of social security.

Rytter highlights the similarities between Mauss' study of gift giving and the Danish welfare state by explaining how both operate on the idea of reciprocity, i.e. a mutual moral obligation to give, receive and reciprocate (Rytter 2018: 9). In essence, it is a social reciprocity system between the people and the government. The people will pay a large quantity of their income in taxes and in return they have wide social security network, e.g. substantial social welfare benefits, free education, free healthcare, free daycare, etc. You enjoy most of these benefits in your youth, like receiving student finance benefits while you study, so you theoretically don't have to work while you attend the university. Then, after you finish your education, you are expected to enter into the job market and start *paying back* and *contributing* to society, ergo you pay back what you spent growing up in tuition, hospital bills, daycare facilities, etc. Then you pay back some more, so that you have saved up for your public retirement benefits. This is how the system ideally works, a lifelong reciprocity between citizens and the government (Rytter 2018: 9). In essence, paying taxes becomes the ultimate token of contributing to society and that the citizen belong to the community.

Nonetheless, there are also examples where someone might receive a benefit, and where it is uncertain if the receiver will be able to pay it back (Rytter 2018:9). An example of this is the social welfare benefit that refugees are entitled to. As mentioned above, the Danish parliament instated the 'Integration Act' in 1999, which included regulations that would allow for the best possible integration for refugees into Danish society. One of the stipulations was an obligatory three-year period where the refugees would be placed in predestined municipalities that would best allow for their individual integration into Danish culture and language (Larsen 2010: 334). New refugees would also be granted 'introductory benefits' during the three-year period, which was a little lower than the average social welfare payout. However, in 2001 the current conservative government cut this payment by 40 percent in comparison to average welfare benefits. The government argued this was done with the intention that it would serve as motivation for the refugees to find a job (Larsen 2010 334-335). A job so that the refugees might start *paying back* and *contributing* to the society they now lived in, and thus *earn* their social welfare benefits.

Another component of refugee integration in Denmark is the obligatory placement of the refugees in a specific municipality. According to the government this is done to avoid what is commonly known in Denmark as 'Ghettos'(Larsen 2010: 335). The broad placement of refugees purportedly preempts congregations of marginalized ethnic groups in Danish society, by spreading them out in small towns and villages throughout Denmark, where they might blend better into the soup to use Rytter's metaphor (Larsen 2010: 335). Before the 1999 'Integration Act' made these stipulations, refugees were mainly clustered together in urban areas, which would typically contain language schools, children's schools, job opportunities, municipally provided apartments, etc. These former placements were made with the intent of making it easier for the refugees to take full advantage of the socio-economic opportunities of the city and create social networks with the fellow expats living there, i.e. and become '*integrated'* (Larsen 2010: 335). When this resulted in a semi-large community of unemployed refugees living in municipal housing and living off social welfare checks, the forlorn government eventually introduced the 1999 'Integration Act', which effectively dispersed the newly arrived refugees and, allegedly, gave them a better chance of integrating into Danish mainstream society (Larsen 2010: 335).

The Danish Muslim community does constitute one of the most debated subgroups in Danish society. Some social researchers theorize that it might be because they actually settled in Danish society, whereas, for example, previous migrant groups consisted of guest workers who came in from Turkey or Pakistan in the 1960's and 1970's. These guest workers would only take up residence during the period they were working, and at that moment in time, everyday living was given very little attention from neither the media nor political groups (Rytter 2018: 6) However, some of them did make Denmark their place of permanent residence, and thus in the 1980's public perception of immigrants started changing. This was possibly due to the fact that at this point the settled immigrants started using public wealth-fare institutions such as day-cares, schools, the health system, etc. (Rytter 2018: 6). Of course, thus coincided with larger groups of refugees from the Middle East who were seeking refuge in Denmark. Then during the 1980's and the 1990's, a more sceptic and mistrusting view of immigrants occurred amongst the Danish public. This was also very pronounced by the Danish People Party (DF), which was then founded in 1995, and the rhetoric they presented regarding immigrants, refugees and integration. In 1995 DF's political ideology and viewpoints where quite radically rightwing oriented, but now their viewpoints are more commonly accepted (Rytter 2018).

For example, their opinion that Islam takes up too much space in the public sphere is not so radical now. The Danish People Party (DF) has actively attempted to prevent Mosques calling for prayer by making the constructing of minarets, and minarets themselves, illegal. DF party member Christian Langballe spoke at a parliament session with the proposal of prohibiting minarets. In his own words the reason he believed the minarets were worth banning was: “I believe that there is a high level of social control in the minarets’ function and in the way they work, that I find terrifying, also for the societies where there are minarets” (Christian Langballe 2016, Own translation[1], See URL list).

They (DF) argue that, firstly, the tall buildings would be disturbing to the surrounding views from apartments and take up too much space. Secondly, that the minarets and the call to prayer showcases a ‘high level of social control’ which is ‘terrifying’. But lastly, DF furthermore argues that Islam has taken up too much space in Danish contemporary society, and thus poses a threat to the Danish way of living. This proposal was laid forth despite the fact that there are already laws in place in Denmark that ban the actual call to prayer. This might be interpreted as an example of the immigrants being the Guests, and misbehaving (deviating from the norm), where the Host (Danish normcore citizens) then will attempt to reestablish the rule. The Danish People Party’s argument that Islam has taken up too much space in the public sphere and that it needs to be regulated. In lieu of that argument, DF member Alex Ahrendtsen wish to clarify for parliament that in theory a Mosque could be anything; “A palm hut can be a mosque. A tent can be a mosque. A factory building can be a mosque. A living room can be a mosque.” (Alex Ahrendtsen 2016[2], own translation,). What Ahrendtsen argues is that according to Islamic lore, as long as the qibla and the minbar is present it can qualify as a mosque. Thus, the Danish Muslim community doesn’t even need the minarets, hence banning them should be an easy decision. What DF’s argument could be understood as in the Host-Guest spectrum is that there is no reason for the Guest to misbehave or protest when they could easily fit in to normcore society. Why would the Guests even think about erecting minarets when they can just as easily pray in an abandoned warehouse? Thus, this rebellious act of blatantly calling for prayer will be prevented before it is even possible.

The inherent order of the Host-Guest relationship is that it will always favor the majority, since the majority will always be the host and the host will always be the ones making the rules. The minority

[1] Original text: ”Jeg mener, at der er en høj grad af social kontrol i minareternes hele virke og i den måde, de fungerer på, som jeg mener er skræmmende, også for de samfund, hvor der er minareter”.
[2] Original text: ”Så en palmehytte kan være en moské. Et telt kan være en moské. En fabriksbygning kan være en moské. En stue kan være en moské.”

will always experience being penalized for breaking the majority's normcore rules. So, the guests' opportunity for rebellion is then both practically and symbolically prohibited. That is, in this instance where the Guests are the Danish Muslim community, who are prohibited to call for prayer by law, but the Danish Church (Lutheran-evangelistic) is allowed to call for prayer through use of church bells. Actually, church bells are considered holy and good in mainstream Danish society. The call from a minaret is so dreaded and terrifying that it must be banned on all levels of the law.

In other instances when the deviance was too great the action in itself would be banned. For example, is the Niqab now officially banned to wear in public, through what the Danish government called the 'Masking Ban' (*Maskeringsforbud).*

One thing that absolutely goes without saying in Danish Muslim society is that any Imam or Muslim spokesperson is expected to publicly denounce any terror attack done by Islamic radicals. So, since 2001 integration is not only about culturally adjusting the immigrant, but it is also a tool for the government to regulate the day-to-day lives of immigrants – especially those within the Muslim community. As Rytter points out Muslims are currently being painted as the diametrical opposite of "Danish" (Rytter 2018: 7).

Muslims role in the Danish Media

As mentioned above, Muslims, although of different national backgrounds, are constructed as one of the largest immigration groups in Danish society, and definitely the most debated group of immigrants in Danish society. This part of the thesis will explain Muslims role in the Danish media, in an attempt to explain the public narrative regarding Muslims. Moreover, Islam is the second largest religion in Denmark, and it consists of several different branches (Hervik 2002: 21).

Previous studies show a clear correlation between hostile Danish attitudes towards ethnic minorities and political statements and the media's coverage of ethnic minorities (Hervik 2002: 13), i.e. the media stream which most Danes rely on is skewed by the Danish media's coverage of overseas events and inter-Danish happenings (like elections). An example of this could be the coverage of the presidential election in Iran. 2 of the 5 larger newspapers in Denmark send reporters to Iran to cover the election. In the period there were almost daily articles about the election in all the Danish papers, whereas the different papers wrote a different number of articles about the election. I.e. they prioritized covering the election differently. However, throughout all of the articles that were

printed in the newspapers that week about the Iranian election they all described Iran as an unhappy, less than ideal situation. The Muslims of Iran are presented as “poor”, “primitive” and as “savage” (Hervik 2002: 108)

It is commonly agreed upon in Denmark, that racism is a negative thing. Therefore, there is very few self-proclaimed racists in Denmark, as it would affect the individual very negatively – in the eyes of the public sphere, the individual’s private sphere, and everywhere else (Hervik 2002: 15). Moreover, if you were to point to one clear example of racism somewhere in Danish society, the majority population might agree that it is bad, and it should be avoided. Which then leads us to the real problem of racism and xenophobia in the Danish media. It is hidden behind a smokescreen in the public political debate, and sold off under guise of, for example, protecting the welfare state (Hervik 2002: 15).

It is also theorized in Denmark that regarding the refugee/integration debate (*indvandredebatten*) ‘political correctness’ represents the diametrical opposite to ‘racism’ but is also seen as a profanity. To be politically correct is for example to support minority rights. However, ‘politically correct’ is not *actually* what is politically right anymore, now what is politically *correct* is, for example, criticizing minorities (Hervik 2002: 16).

The Danish law regulating marriages between Danish citizens and foreigners also caught the attention abroad. In 2002 the British newspaper ‘The Guardian’ ran an article where the marriage law was compared to Nazi Germany’s treatment of Jews in 1935 (Hervik 2002: 17). As the author, Stephen Smith, said:

“The law's unspoken rationale includes a deterrent to arranged marriages between members of Denmark's Muslim community and people in Islamic countries abroad. Legislation making this explicit would be racist, so the Danish authorities have chosen xenophobia instead - equal discrimination against all foreigners. It works from the point of view of the immigration department, but then so would many other more drastic measures if human rights were no longer part of the equation” (Stephen Smith, 2002, See URL Index)

As Smith points out this law is not explicitly racist, but inherently based in xenophobia and uninformed prejudices regarding Muslim culture and marriage traditions. Arguably, it represents the inherent notion that ‘west is best’, and that deviant cultures are dangerous in some way.

Research that Peter Hervik conducted in 2002 suggests that in Denmark Islam is seen as an enemy because of the recurring notion that Danish-ness and Islam are incompatible (Hervik 2002: 18).

DF argues that they "[…]believe the Muslim way of living is incompatible with Danish thoughts of Christianity. Thus, it is against Danish thought to accept sexism, violent upbringings, separation of the sexes, arranged marriages, female circumcisions, beatings and brainwashing of school children" (Quoted from Hervik 2002: 18, *Own translation*[3], Originally from Dansk Folkepartis folketingsgruppe 2001: 190).

However, the 'Muslim way of life' is based on the Qur'an, like the 'Danish thoughts of Christianity' is based in the Bible. The generalization that arranged marriages and female circumcision is on par with Muslim living is inaccurate. What is being brought up as an example, is actually customs that have their roots in non-Muslim traditions (Hervik 2002: 19). It is rather an expression of culture more so than religion.

An Analysis of Narratives Amongst Refugees in Danish Contemporary Society

The Danish Refugee Council Youth (DFUNK) did a storytelling project where they went around Denmark and had refugees tell stories about their lives, how they had ended up in Denmark and what had happened since they settled in. Later on, they turned it in to a podcast series. Some of which are the ones I am basing this part of the thesis on. This narrative example will consist mainly of two different narratives from the project that I have summarized. Firstly, I discuss female Babishayini from Sri Lanka and her 8-year long struggle with the Danish asylum process. Secondly, male Moutaz from Palestine and his struggles with translating cultural codes and integrating into Danish society will be analyzed.

Babishayini – The Danish Asylum Process

Babishayini came to Denmark when she was 16. She is from Sri Lanka, but now lives in Aarhus where she studies to be a laboratory technician. Babishayini is a Tamil which is why she had to flee from Sri Lanka where the Tamil people are heavily suppressed. Babishayini fled for almost 8 months before she ended up in Denmark, where she decided to stay. She was placed at the Danish youth asylum-center Sjældsmark. Babishayini tells how she sat in her room that first night her thoughts racing, in a strange place, without even knowing what a duvet was.

[3] Original text: "Dansk Folkeparti mener, at den muslimske levevis er uforenelig med dansk kristen tankegang. Således strider det mod dansk tankegang at acceptere mandschauvinisme, voldelig opdragelse, adskillelse mellem kønnene, tvangs-ægteskaber, pigeomskæringer, prygl og hjernevask af skolebørn"

After three months she was moved to a different asylum-center, where after a while she got a letter from the immigration office saying that she was being summoned to a meeting. Babishayini didn't understand why she was being asked to a meeting or what it was about. It turned out to be an asylum hearing, which lasted 5-6 hours. 3 weeks later she got a letter saying they had rejected her asylum application because they didn't believe her story or that the threat to her was real. According to Babishayini, she wasn't too worried about the rejection at the time, because she hadn't really understood the system and what it meant for her.

Roughly one year later Babishayini received another letter. This time from the Refugee Appeals Board, the letter asking her to appear before the Board because they wanted to hear her story again. According to Babishayini the Board consisted of three people, who would hear her story and give her an answer that same day. She told her story and was, again, denied asylum in Denmark. Then Babishayini turned 18 years old, which meant that she had to move from the youth-oriented asylum-center to an adult one. She was moved to Kongelund asylum-center, where she quickly noticed a difference from her former one. Both in how they were treated, but also in what was expected of them. What's more, she was by far the youngest person staying in that center by her own accord. After some time staying there, she received a letter telling her to remain at the asylum-center while the state purchased her a ticket home to Sri Lanka. Babishayini got scared of the prospect of being sent home, so she fled to Switzerland, not knowing about the Dublin regulation which is a rule made within the European Union, saying that, should refugees leave the country they first applied for asylum in, they will be send back to that country. She got arrested in Switzerland, where she spent the next month in prison. Switzerland ultimately decided to send her back to Denmark, where upon arriving at the airport she was greeted by two Danish police officers who were there to place her under arrest for travelling illegally.

She was then imprisoned in Denmark too, where she was given an ultimatum. Either she would cooperate in her deportation, or she would be forced to leave the country. If she chose not to cooperate, she would have to stay in prison where she would have no outside access and no allowance. Babishayini chose to cooperate to get out of prison. She was then placed at the Asylum-camp Sandholmlejren and asked to wait there until they got her a ticket to go home. Babishayini then spent the next 5 years living in Sandholmlejren, where she eventually received a letter asking her to come to another meeting. She was asked what she did in her spare time, if she studied, if she ate Danish foods, etc. Babishayini answered the caseworker's questions in Danish, without the help of the translator. Allegedly this impressed the caseworker; that her Danish was so well after just 5

years. She was sent home and told that she would get a letter with the verdict in three weeks' time. This time she was told they had approved her for asylum in Denmark. This meant that Babishayini could move out of the asylum-center, after having lived in several different ones for the past 8 years, and get her own apartment provided by the Danish government and start her education as a laboratory technician.

Babishayini's narrative is a great example of what Zachary Whyte calls the Myopticon. As previously mentioned, the Myopticon is a reinvention of Foucault's concept the Panopticon. Whyte based the Myopticon on the Danish asylum system and described it as the constant feeling of being watched, without actually being watched, through constant bureaucratic process. The Myopticon here presents itself as the bureaucratic process that kept Babishayini in a liminal setting, living in asylum-centers for 8 years, before she was told she could stay in Denmark. It shows itself in her having to live in the asylum-center, while she is expected to integrate into Danish society. Yet, she is not allowed to live *in* the society she is expected to become one with, but rather asked to exist on the outskirts of Danish society, with other norm-deviants who also did not readily fit into Danish norm-core society.

Moreover, the Myopticon is seen in the process of Babishayini getting her asylum request granted. A bureaucratic process that took 8 years and several interviews with various boards of immigration. Ironically, the Danish nation-state were swift in telling her that she could not stay – that is, swift according to Danish bureaucratic processing time – but it was the actual deportation that took the longest. As Babishayini explains herself, the first time she was told she would be sent back to Sri Lanka she was placed at Kongelund asylum-center. At that point she had waited years and lived at three different asylum-centers. After she fled to Switzerland and was sent back, she was detained in Denmark. Upon her release she was told to wait at Sandholmlejren asylum-camp for her plane ticket home to Sri Lanka, which was a five-year process.

Eventually, Babishayini waited for five years in Sandholmlejren asylum-center under the believe she would be sent home. Despite the Danish state's decision to deport Babishayini, she was not allowed to leave by herself, and she was still expected to attend school or job training, i.e. integrate as well as possible without actually being allowed to be a part of Danish society. In summation, Babishayini's asylum process lasted 8 years and included 3 interviews, 2 rejections, several months spent in prison in both Switzerland and Denmark, including living at 4 different Danish asylum-centers. Babishayini's asylum process appears almost positively Kafkaesque, as she is herded

through the Danish asylum system, with no clear idea of what is going on or what is expected of her.

This kind of refugee narrative, a podcast, is a good example of contemporary ways for refugees to tell their stories. It functions as a more interactive media than text. In a Podcast you can hear the person's voice and get a better feel for the emotions the narrative might bring, where in text that is more difficult. Also, we know that the narrative serves as a way to self-assess and ascribe meaning to previous events in correlation to the present and future (Eastmond 2007, Skov Danstrøm & Whyte 2019: 177). Moreover, the narrative presented at an asylum hearing have to stand the test of credibility. In fact, 9 out of 10 asylum cases are determined based on credibility – does the timeline add up, do the events seem realistic, does the claimed threat seem likely? (Skov Danstrøm & Whyte 2019: 175).

As Babishayini also eludes to, she, as a 16-year-old asylum seeker, found the asylum system very opaque and hard to navigate. She didn't know about the Dublin regulation. What's more, Babishayini did not even know that she was going in for an asylum hearing the first time she told her story. She also did not know she would be given an appeal and a lawyer. The opacity of the Danish asylum system, i.e. the Myopticon, leaves many refugees unsure of their rights, the process and how to proceed. Here the lawyers might help shed light on the situation and the logics of it, such as how to construct and present the narrative (Skov Danstrøm & Whyte 2019: 175-176).

Moreover, her rejections, according to Babishayini, were based around the circumstances that different committees did not believe her story, and more importantly did not believe that the threat she faced in Sri Lanka was real – or at least as serious as the claimed. As Eastmond has already pointed out, it occurs that the individuals who serve on these committees do not have sufficient knowledge of the ethnic background of the person they are judging. So, in fact, what are important emotional and cultural clues that are laid out in the narrative can be lost or confused in translation (Eastmond 2007: 160). An example of these cultural and symbolic discrepancies could be when Babishayini explains how she, at her first night at the asylum-center, being unrooted from her own culture, and that she did not even know what the most common of Scandinavian household items, the duvet, was to be used for. This exemplifies just how different the Danish physical environment was from the Sri Lankan one, it is quite justifiable to presume that there might have been discrepancies between the sociocultural inherent understandings that Babishayini was explaining in her story and how the committee perceived it through their cultural glasses.

If we look back upon Babishayini's time spent in asylum-center, living the liminal existence of an asylum seeker, might we begin to understand the Danish asylum centers as ways for a sedentary people to restore roots for the rootless people? (Malkki 1992). As it has been suggested before, the asylum-centers can be understood as instruments of 'care and control' (ibid.). The Danish asylum-centers can be seen as attempts by the Danish nation-state, with a sedentary bias, to exert control over the refugees, and place them somewhere where they might sprout roots. Here the roots can be understood as integrating into Danish society. An example in Babishayini's case is that when she seemed exceptionally well rooted into Danish society, she got her residence permit. But before that, she was possibly not rooted enough in Danish society or not *de*-rooted enough from Sri Lankan society. As it was, 8 years later, when she got her residence permit, Babishayini was quite a rhizomatic creature. She was not just "Sri Lankan" anymore, but also "Danish". She was also "Aspiring Laboratory Technician" and "High School Graduate". Some of her old roots had withered by time, and she had grown new ones; such as knowledge of the Danish language, a general understanding of Danish society and active participation in Danish education. What ultimately seemed to help her the most was that she had readily accepted her new roots and had not attempted to sustain the old ones.

Babishayini, at the time she told this story, did not have any contact with her family as she hadn't seen them since she fled Sri Lanka – in fact she wasn't sure they were still alive. She had accepted Danish cuisine and Danish customs without complaint.

As a rhizomatic, multi-compatible refugee, who blended seamlessly into the soup, Babishayini was no longer a threat to the sacrosanct homogeneity of the Danish nation-state.

Moutaz - Adapting to Danish life

Moutaz is Palestinian but is born and raised in Syria as a refugee living in refugee camps. He's been in Denmark for 4 years and he is now 25. Because of war him and his family had to leave their home area, since their lives were in danger. Moutaz came to Europe over the Mediterranean, where he sailed in a ship with 168 other people. He was on the ship for 6 days where there was a high risk of drowning. They drank water that smelled like diesel and looked like anything but water. He ended up in Denmark. His cousin came to Denmark a year before him, and they agree to meet at the Central Station in Copenhagen. As Moutaz saw his cousin he ran towards him and gave him a hug. He also started kissing his cousins' cheeks repeatedly until his cousin pushed him away and said

“Stop it (…) See how people are looking at us, they think we are homosexuals. But you can kiss me at home, that’s okay” (Moutaz’ podcast, see URL Index). In the refugee camps he did a lot of interviews, one of them with a female police officer who asked him if he was married, which he wasn’t. She also asked if he had any children, to which he answered no, but was also confused because he had already said he wasn’t married. He expressed this confusion whereto the policewoman explained that in Denmark it is perfectly normal to have children, and not be married. “So, I asked her: How? And she asked how old I was, and I answered her 21 years old. I told her that of course I understand what the process is, but I am shocked because where I am from you cannot have children without being married” (Moutaz’ Podcast, see URL Index).

However, Moutaz learned to understand the cultural differences. He received his residence permit and an apartment in Dianalund. He found Danes to be very closed off, and it was very difficult for him to create a network. He had trouble sleeping at home because it felt like a prison, so instead he would sleep at his language school, because it was the only place that felt safe for him. Moutaz believed this is because of the things that he experienced in Syria. Moutaz also explained that he felt that there was a huge piece of baggage on his back that keeps him back from going into society. A baggage that is full of pain, and memories, and full of the 21 years he spent in Syria. But Moutaz wanted to be active in society and exist in reality, so in his own words he had to “sedate a part of his humanity to survive this absurd world” (Moutaz’ Podcast, See URL Index).

He started using social media to learn the Danish language, understand Danish society and hopefully create a social network for himself. So, he made a post where he explained who he is, what he does, etc. Five people answered his post, where one of them is a man named Jan who said he would be delighted to meet Moutaz, and that Moutaz could meet his family. Moutaz was very happy about this, as he had never experienced any Dane wanting to spend time with him and be friends with him before. Moutaz decided to see his profile pictures, to get a feel for Jan. Then he saw that Jan was wearing a Pink t-shirt in his picture in his profile, and Moutaz got scared and worried about meeting Jan. What if he tried to grab him or ask him to be his boyfriend?

But then he saw a picture of Jan and a woman where the text at the picture says that she is Jan’s girlfriend, which made Moutaz relieved and happy. He feels at home in Denmark now, as a part of the community because of the people who has let him into their lives and families. He has taken an education and works as an IT volunteer at the local library because he feels it is important to give back. He is very grateful that Denmark saved his life.

What seems most evident in Moutaz' narrative is the culture-clash he experiences when coming to Denmark. As he explains about the conversation with the policewoman, he is, upon rendition, able to laugh at his own misunderstanding of Danish living, but it is interesting that when he first arrived in Denmark and still lived in the asylum center, i.e. not integrated, he could not even fathom that one could have children outside of marriage. It wasn't even a possibility for him that a child could exist outside of marriage.

Moreover, he was forced to reevaluate what was acceptable social behavior. For example, when his cousin told him not to kiss him in public, because the people around them thought they were gay. This line tells us two things. Firstly, that according to their Palestinian heritage, two male family members kissing each other on the cheek is acceptable, even ordinary or mundane. It is a process of showing affection. Secondly, it tells us that being a homosexual is bad, or at least undesirable. It is not an image you want to project to the world. This is also reflected in Moutaz' first understanding of Jan, when he suspects Jan to be gay. More specifically does it scare Moutaz, who then fears that Jan might try to take advantage or force himself on him. As Moutaz speaks of this past event he laughs, now aware of the 'silliness' of his thoughts. In lieu of this train of thought, we might investigate another interesting concept. The result of refugee narratives and the harsh discourse of the public Danish debate.

Learning Culture and Appealing to the Masses

As mentioned above, can there be many disruptions in the lives of forced migrants, which also causes them to, occasionally, struggle with making sense of their lives and narratives. Nonetheless, these disrupting events result in a need or base for telling their narratives. They use these narratives as a way to estimate the events and to possibly negotiate the meaning of the events that occurred to them. They get a medium through which they can explain past events and tell their stories according to their cultural context, and, depending on the audience, this might also allow for them to put it in to a contemporary context and evaluate how they might go forth from there. Thus, a narrative holds the power of negotiating past, present and future (Eastmond 2007: 251) .

This can also be seen in the narratives provided by DFUNK and the refugees there. They all, in some way, reminisce about something that was strange to them when they first arrived in Denmark, but now seems silly. One of the other Podcast refugees is Greg, whose family fled from Armenia when the Soviet Union fell. He explains how he has a strained relationship with candles, since they remind him of a traumatizing time spent in Armenia, where he and his family had to sleep on the

floor in their big coats by candlelight because they had no electricity. So, the candlelight served both as heat and as light for Greg and his family. It is by the candlelight that Greg remembers eating black caviar with a spoon directly from the can, without any bread to put it on. Caviar was a cheap food in the Soviet Union, but in Denmark is quite expensive, so the juxtaposition of this mental image is almost tragicomic. An experience he now calls “absurd”, but also laughs at bittersweetly when he talks about it. Just like how he now laughs at how he ran from a girl’s apartment after he came to Denmark. He had been seeing a girl, and at one point she invited him over to her apartment. When he got there and she opened the door and there were candles everywhere, he got scared and so confused, as to what all the candles where doing there, that he just turned around and left. Now, Greg laughs at his reaction to the candles, now that he has *learned* that candles, in Denmark, are a contribution to *hygge* (coziness), rather than a state of destitution and malnourishment.

As we understand from the previous parts of this thesis the integration of refugees, and refugees in themselves, play a large role in the public debate in Denmark. Since every individual living in Denmark has access to the public debate through one public media platform or another, it is fair to assume that they are aware of the debate. Thus, we might also surmise that the harsh discourse surrounding refugees could have affected how the refugees told their narratives in these podcasts. It could be argued that it is reflected in the way that each podcast narrative ends with the refugee reminiscing about something they didn’t know when they came to Denmark but now know. Or perhaps, when they lay forth horrible things they went through as to prove that they are ‘true refugees’, but then they worked hard, and now they act, eat like and *are* Danish. They all seem grateful that Denmark gave them new lives.

Dare we argue that the intended audience for their podcast, the Danish public, affects how the narratives are told? For example, Babishayini lived for 8 years in various asylum-centers, spent time in prison, was told she would be deported *twice*, only to fall victim to the Myopticon and be forgotten for 5 years in an asylum-center. Surely, this process has been tedious and frustrating (to say the least), yet Babishayini never offers a negative perspective on Denmark. Or Moutaz, who had to flee via dismal ways and live off polluted water. Only to arrive in a country where he did not feel safe in his own home and was forced to change how he interacted socially. Yet, he ends his narrative explicitly saying that he is very grateful Denmark saved his life.

The point of this is not to criticize the refugees for their way of telling their stories. The point is rather, to attempt to illustrate how the highly negative public debate affect the way the narratives are told. The potential fear of the audience is so big, the power relationship between majority and minority groups so evident, that it bends the public refugee narratives to their will. It is the fear of being shamed and judged as 'not worthy' that causes the narratives to be bend. That the possibility of being subject to the disapproval and judgment of those who are 'legal' (Khosravi 2010:67), makes the forced migrants want to appear 'grateful' and more importantly, *deserving*.

Shame, Pain and Cultureless Capital

According to Shahram Khosravi, who is an Anthropology Professor at Stockholm University, and a forced migrant himself, being a refugee comes with a lot of shame. In his book "Illegal Traveler: An Auto-Ethnography of Borders" from 2010 he tells his own story and other refugees' stories. Khosravi argues that "shame is a part of the punishment for transgressing nation-state sovereignty" (Khosravi 2010: 67). Khosravi explains that he himself used to lie about what kind of refugee he was. He used to say that he was a quota refugee, one of the refugees that got offered resettlement by the state, and that he got to Sweden legally (Khosravi 2010: 67). In fact, one might argue that shame is central when it comes to forced migration narratives.

We have previously in this thesis speculated that the narratives presented at an asylum hearing could be misunderstood, etc. What is pertinent to note is how Khosravi, an asylum seeker who got offered asylum, explains how he told his refugee narrative in interviews. The narrative of his life left no room for notions of joy, childhood activities, or any personal background information. According to Khosravi, he had been educated to appear as much as a victim as possible and to strip his narrative of any specific culture, place or history (Khosravi 2010: 72). In fact, Khosravi points out that 'refugee' is often a role that is played, especially in the context of asylum hearings. This is what is also referred to as 'victimcy' (Khosravi 2010, Utas 2005). According to Khosravi, we might define victimcy as "a form of self-representation deployed by (…) refugees in their 'social navigation' of displacement" (Khosravi 2010: 72). Thus, asylum hearings are the forum to display victimcy and show no personal agency at all. An example would be one of Khosravi's informants who were told by her lawyer not to wear make-up or a skirt to the asylum-hearing, that otherwise she wouldn't look like a refugee. The lawyer argued that being a refugee is living out a certain 'refugeeness' that conforms to the western understanding of what refugee is. That being a refugee is

not just a textual thing, something you can be on a document, it is also a matter of visual representation, a role that they must play.

Here, in these asylum hearings, Khosravi manipulated *life as told* to his advantage, and told his narrative in a way that would cause the desired outcome from his audience. In the case of asylum hearings, the refugees want something from the board of officials they are trying to convince, so they frame and articulate their narratives according to the audience, who holds a significant amount of power over them. In essence, refugee is a role that can be played and a look that can be worn, here being a refugee is being the victim with no specific culture or agency. This specific act and look can be situational. Khosravi himself ponder his refugee/victim role, which he first came to realize he had in an anthropological methodology class, where he was interviewed by a classmate. For Khosravi interviews were subconsciously connected to asylum hearings and refugee camps, so he had, subconsciously, slipped back into his refugee role as he told about his life. It wasn't until the woman interviewing him started crying that he realized the story he was telling. He was telling the painful version that he would have as a refugee given in an interview (Khrosravi 2010: 72), not necessarily the one that most accurately reflected his *life as lived*.

What we might deduce from this, is that pain and suffering has become the cornerstones of 'refugeeness'. In order for someone to be a real refugee they must have suffered and be traumatized – above all, they must be sad (Khosravi 2002: 73). If a refugee does not fulfill these components, then they might simply not be believable as a refugee, they will lack 'refugeeness' (Khosravi 2010:73). So, a real refugee needs to display proper sadness and 'refugeeness'. If a refugee is too happy, or their travels were too easy, they might simply not be able to pass as 'real' refugees (Khosravi 2010: 73).

This perspective provides an interesting understanding of the narratives from DFUNK, who all end on happy notes (i.e. they 'integrated', they are happy now, Denmark is great, etc.), they also cover hard and troubling times first. Greg explains how living in the Danish asylum-centers were hard growing up. Especially, in one center where he was treated terribly by the other refugees living there. He was spat on, pushed around, and once someone even tried to rape him. Indeed, his peril almost seemed more evident while first living in Denmark than it did in Armenia. Greg justifies on several levels through his traumatizing time in Armenia and his traumatizing time in Denmark, that he deserves his refugee status, that he has sufficient 'refugeeness'. He, too, alter his *life as told* to the intended audience, presumably so the prospective audience might agree that he did suffer,

therefor he *deserves* his refugee status, in fact he earned it. Also, Moutaz who risked drowning on a boat only to face insomnia, loneliness and emotional baggage in Denmark, earned his refugee status through that pain and trauma. Babishayini fled from Sri Lanka, alone, when she was only 16, just to spent 8 years living in a proverbial Myoptical prison in Denmark. Surely, she earned and payed for her refugee status. Another of the podcast refugees, Hagos lost all contact with his fiancé when they fled Libya, and he was unable to find her. Only to have her and their son resurface years later in Sweden, but without possibility for them to live together. To be a deserving refugee, to have enough 'refugeeness', is to have payed in blood, pain, loss of family, psychological and physical trauma. When that deed is payed, the refugee might be considered a *deserving*, real refugee. So, they negotiate their deservingness through *life as told*. Their painful stories and traumatic lives become a commodity that, if sufficient, can buy them the role of a real, deserving refugee and ideally a Danish citizenship.

If we return to Mikkel Rytter's concept of integration as a soup, we clarified that Danish society is like a cup of beige colored soup that the immigrants have to blend themselves into in order to be considered 'integrated'. That means accepting and embracing the Danish culture, the Danish language and Danish food. This brings us back to Khosravi's notion that the successful refugee narrative has to be cultureless. The refugee knows pain, but is not dependent on a specific culture, place or history (Khosravi 2010:72) to explain this pain. Therefor it is the cultureless narrative that prevails, for it represents the refugee as not bound to any specific culture, but rootless in its pain. The refugee, in the scope of his or her narrative, becomes a being where his or her only valid cultural capital is pain. As such, one might argue that the more pain a plausible refugee narrative contains, the more 'refugeeness' the refugee has. 'Refugeeness' becomes a commodity and a capital where if you gather enough refugee capital you might be able to trade it in for a residence permit. When talking about 'refugee capital' I draw on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, but with a re-purposing that is specific for refugees and their sociocultural capital.

In that vein, should their narrative fail to provide enough refugee capital to get a residence permit their efforts might become Sisyphusian in its nature. Sisyphus was a man sentenced by the Greek gods to push a large boulder up to the top of a hill, but each time he almost made the top, the boulder would roll back down the hill and Sisyphus would have to start over. As such, we can understand the process of the unsuccessful refugee narrative in the Danish asylum system. With a lack of refugee capital, the boulder is not getting over the top of the hill, i.e. they are not getting approved for asylum. We might understand getting interviewed by the authorities as pushing the

boulder up the hill, but without the right amount of refugee capital it will never go *over*. The boulder will simply keep rolling back down the hill, i.e. they will be rejected for citizenship. However, with a narrative that contains enough refugee capital Sisyphus might make above the hill and onto the other side.

A Bonfire of Pain to Warm the Masses

The notion that the good refugee narrative is cultureless does reflect itself somewhat in DFUNK's narratives. The majority of the culture that is reflected there is Danish. Greg briefly mentions living in Armenia, eating black caviar directly out of the can, which does reflect a cultural difference, since caviar would not be the household item of any suppressed family in Denmark, as it is relatively pricey compared to other foods. Otherwise, the narratives of DFUNK's refugees do not seem to start until they arrive in Denmark. Moutaz skirts over his travels by boat and Babishayini explains that she, as a Tamil, was suppressed in Sri Lanka, but otherwise their *life as told* does not really start until they get to Denmark. This could arguably be because they are purposely, consciously or subconsciously, framing their stories towards their intended audience; the Danish public.

The Danish public is heavily influenced by the debate on immigrants, and more specifically, refugees. Since we have already established that the refugees are most likely aware of their heavily debated place in Danish society, it is therefore also reasonable to assume that they would prefer to give a positive impression of themselves to their audience (the Danish public). Thus, we see parts of the Danish public discourse reflected in DFUNK's narratives. One of the chief concerns of the immigrant debate is integration, especially the integration of refugees. The ethnic Danish population are, as we saw with Rytter, concerned about the reciprocity of refugees, i.e. that the refugee *pays back* to the Danish society. In both in taxes and in 'integration' (i.e. blending into the soup). Thus, we can interpret these podcast narratives as a way to prove that the refugees in question are integrated now. For example, as Babishayini, who explains that she, despite the Myopticon, managed to gain insight to Danish society. That she learned the language, the key cultural elements, she learned what foods to eat, and to educate herself. Greg learned to appreciate candles, and Moutaz learned not kiss his cousin in public. Moutaz also highlights that he is volunteering at a local library as 'to pay back' to the receiving society. As such, they have started to deserve their asylum. Both through their refugee capital (i.e. cultureless, painful narrative) and now through how

they have integrated in Danish society, but more importantly that they are grateful for their chance for a new life in Denmark.

As Eastmond says “suffering provides a moral merit, it must be made visible” (Eastmond 1996: 245), and that it provides a “central dimension of what makes life meaningful” (Eastmond 1996: 245). Like Rytter mentions Denmark is tightly bound upon the concept of reciprocity and paying your dues. So, the refugees pay their way into Danish society through their refugee capital, where they are justified in their co-existence with the Danes through the visualization of their pain. Pain, as we see, serves much of the same purpose as bonfire; there’s nothing better to bring people together.

Summation, Discussion & Conclusion

Narratives are socially constructed and culturally dependent. The understanding of narratives is equally culturally dependent. Moreover, the visualization and how defined the culture of the narrative is are bound upon many external factors. One of the most important factors are what the *purpose* of the narrative is. Such as, what feelings is it meant to bring out in which people? Will it have enough ethos, pathos and logos to accomplish this goal? Or will it perhaps have too much culture? In the case of the refugee, too much culture or too little pain might make Sisyphus’ stone roll all the way back down the hill.

We have established that integration is a heavily debated subject in Denmark. It takes up a lot of space in the public discourse and is often negatively minded when it comes to refugees, or just more specifically Muslims – even the ones that are not refugees. We have also established that when it comes to discussing politically hot-button issues, like integration and refugees, in the Danish media what is politically *correct* now is not being ‘politically correct’ but rather criticizing minorities.

Moreover, it is pertinent that a refugee can prove that they are integrated. That they have adapted to the sacrosanct Danish way living. That they eat pork, that they speak Danish, that they either work or attend school. This way they can fulfill their duties on the reciprocity and pay back to society. They integrate as their buy-in for the reciprocity system. Once they have Danish citizenship, and proved they have integrated, then they have to start participating in the Danish reciprocity system. Either through educating themselves or through working and paying taxes.

We have also concluded that the Danish asylum system is positively Kafkaesque in its function and is built to herd uninformed, confused refugees, like Babishayini, through their trials with as little

information as possible. Moreover, we have learned that it is important to be a deserving refugee and that deservingness can be negotiated through pain.

Furthermore, we determined that a good and successful refugee narrative will rely on being without culture or agency. That it will reflect pain, but not any traits inherent to the refugee's own culture – that way it does not pose a threat to the potential new nation-state. Moreover, that in the case of refugee narratives it is often the audience which affects the nature of the narrative; how culturally specific it is, what it will focus on, etc. Power dynamics also play a large role in these narrative decisions. The refugees are bound by the recognition of their intended audience, and playing a role that inspires sympathy and believability, and that is how the power dynamic occurs.

Moreover, we arrived at the term 'refugee capital' as a term for how much cultureless pain a narrative contains, and how a narrative that contains pain without culture, can be used as a form of (cultural) capital for refugees to gain asylum, a residence permit or ideally, a citizenship.

Maybe, the ultimate conclusion to this thesis, is that we can never truly understand another person's narrative. That we will always be limited by the scope of our own reality and the social dynamics of the world. Perhaps we will always affect the narratives people tell us by our very existence, limiting our understanding of the people around us. But perhaps, through cultural negotiation and estimation of our social power dynamics, we might reach a more common understanding, if we merely start by admitting our ignorance. Therefore, in conclusion the only thing I can say I know with absolutely certainty, is that I know nothing at all.

URL INDEX

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