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Abstract

In this paper, we supplement existing scholarship on the interactional process within volunteering with one that focuses on how inequality between volunteer and recipient of help is handled and (re)produced through interactions within voluntary groups. We focus on how empowerment projects with different interactional styles produce different forms of (in)equality on an interactional level despite dealing with very similar structural inequalities. We define interactional inequality as taking place along four dimensions: role distribution, framing rights, competencies, and sacrifice. Drawing on two different empowerment projects in the refugee solidarity movement in Denmark, we show how these dimensions of inequalities play out in the interaction between volunteers and refugees. We identify two strategies for overcoming the initial inequality between refugee and volunteer, one based on mutuality and another based on collectivity. Lastly, we show how these strategies produce interactional inequalities of their own.

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Introduction

Inequality is a central matter of concern for many voluntary organisations. The unequal distribution of social deprivations is typically what motivates volunteers in humanitarian, community, and welfare organisations. However, efforts to tackle inequality have generated new forms of relational inequality between 'helpers' and 'recipients', positioning the helper as the active, morally superior and the recipient as passive and victimised. Against this form of 'paternalistic philanthropy' (Salamon & Anheier 1998:225), volunteers have stressed the importance of mutual empowerment and worked at setting up institutional arrangements and cultivating certain interactional forms that are directed at minimising inequalities between volunteers and those whom they want to help.

In the literature on voluntary action, considerable attention has been paid to raising awareness regarding the various forms of inequalities concerning voluntary work. Studies have documented that volunteers are better off than non-volunteers and that they tend to come from high-status groups (Smith 1994; Wilson & Musick 1997). However, there is a lack of studies systematically exploring the distribution of high-status positions within voluntary organisations along socio-economic, cultural, and demographic lines (Harris 1990). Moreover, only a few qualitative studies have documented the power asymmetries between members within voluntary organisations (Eliasoph 2011). Similarly, few studies address inequalities between the helper and the recipient (e.g., Rogers 2017; Fisher, Adler and DePaulo 1983), but recently we have seen growing research interest in the dynamics of power and inequality between activists and refugees in refugee solidarity initiatives (e.g., Braun 2017; Vandervordt 2019; Agustín and Jørgensen 2019; Feischmidt et al. 2019), which is also the subject of this paper.

Our focus is on how these inequalities are handled within voluntary organisations (Shachar, von Essen, and Hustinx 2019); how organisations attempt to overcome them by redesigning organisational structures, framing their overall purpose, rethinking their repertoires of action, and redefining roles and modes of interaction. Furthermore, inequality work operates alongside various dimensions that can work against one another—for example, when an organisation tries to work at equality on one dimension it may implicitly and unintentionally increase inequality on another dimension (see, e.g., Leondar-Wright 2014; Rogers 2017; de Jong 2017; Cappiali 2018). Therefore, to understand inequality in voluntary organisations, we need to understand how these complex inequalities are addressed, or not, and handled, or not, by the activists themselves.

This paper makes two conceptual moves. Firstly, it acknowledges the fact that in many voluntary organisations inequality is an explicit matter of concern and efforts are put into developing strategies and tactics that enable organisations to overcome tendencies to what has been termed 'paternalistic philanthropy' (Salamon & Anheier 1998:225) and replaces the 'active helper-passive recipient' dyad with one of shared empowerment (Eliasoph 2015; 2016). Therefore, we have to understand the 'equalising work' within voluntary organisations. Secondly, we contribute to recent work that argues for a multidimensional concept of inequality (Lee et al. 2015). We conceptualise these as operating on two different levels, one structural and one interactional. We propose a conceptual framework for understanding how the 'same' structural inequalities are addressed and create very different forms of interactional (in)equalities

depending on the different cultures of 'equalising work' within voluntary organisations (Eliasoph & Lichterman 2003; Lichterman & Eliasoph 2014; Carlsen, Toubøl and Ralund 2020).

This paper is structured as follows. Firstly, we present the empowerment critique of traditional volunteering, arguing that this can be conceptualised as a concern with inequalities at a level of interaction. Secondly, we introduce cases, empirical material, and methodological concerns. We then unfold the theoretical framework of how different strategies of empowerment may produce new inequalities in interaction exemplified by two case studies. Finally, we discuss and conclude on our results.

From traditional 'philanthropic paternalism' to empowerment

In a recent essay, Nina Eliasoph (2016) pins down the various dilemmas involved in what she calls empowerment projects. An empowerment project is a form of organisation and a form of talk which has had a huge impact on the voluntary sector. The mantra of empowerment, according to Eliasoph, is characterised by a set of values/commitments: civic openness and inclusiveness, appreciation of diversity, personal transformation, helpfulness, and transparency (Eliasoph 2016). This rather demanding set of commitments stands in contrast to 'traditional' forms of volunteering that primarily focus on helping those in need. From the empowerment discourse point of view, traditional volunteering has several flaws. a) In its attempt at overcoming or reducing structural inequalities, it reifies the helper-recipient relationship, taking away the agency of the latter and underlining the moral, political superiority of the former. b) Furthermore, 'traditional' volunteering is not democratic and participatory enough in that it does not facilitate deliberation processes where both helper and recipient have a voice in deciding and coordinating activities. c) Traditional volunteering is not sustainable because it does nothing for the volunteer, it does not ensure personal transformation. d) A final central point of critique is the lack of appreciation of cultural diversity found in 'traditional' volunteering where the recipients are reduced to their material lack (Grubb forthcoming).

In overcoming these shortcomings of traditional humanitarian voluntarism, Eliasoph points to how empowerment projects face a set of dilemmas originating from the diverse commitments of such projects. For instance, she points to the tension between helping others effectively and appreciating diversity and between cultural diversity and civic openness (Eliasoph 2011; 2015; 2016). Following Eliasoph and others, we would like to propose the distinction between interactional inequality and structural inequality. This differentiation is important for several reasons. Firstly, it consists of two different concerns central to voluntary work itself. Reducing structural inequality is one of the main goals for a lot of voluntary work. This has typically concerned the material and legal disparities of certain groups, but also the 'recognition gap' between different groups in society (Lamont 2018). These concerns are structural in the sense that they concern large-scale and relatively stable inequalities at a societal level. However, as the empowerment wave makes explicit, many volunteers are also concerned with the interactional inequalities that play out in the day-to-day coordination and practice of volunteer work, especially those between helper and recipient.

From this perspective, the empowerment critique of traditional volunteering relates to the lack of concerns with the negative externalities traditional volunteering produces at the

interactional level in its attempts at countering the inequalities at a structural level. Many empowerment projects, therefore, seek to cultivate a sensitivity for interactional inequalities and institutionalise modes of interaction that minimise the degree to which structural inequalities produce interactional inequalities. Inequalities that play out and are handled through interaction within voluntary settings.

Eliasoph and Lichterman's work on scene styles has been increasingly adopted to reveal what takes place within voluntary settings (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003; 2014). Scene styles constitute an interaction order in Goffman's sense—the moral expectations of interaction and the systems of typification that volunteers and refugees (in our case of refugee solidarity activism) use to interpret the scene and coordinate action together. Eliasoph and Lichterman focus on boundary-making to other settings and actors; the internal bonds between members of a setting; and, lastly, the speech norms concerning what speech is for and what emotional tones are deemed appropriate.

We contribute to the focus on style by expanding the framework to focus on how different styles seek to handle inequalities in interaction and how they might emerge along other dimensions of interaction. Our focus on inequality between actors shifts our conceptual focus to capture the actors' characteristics. We analyse the 1) *role distribution*, which is the definition and status of the roles taken by the volunteer and the refugee; 2) *framing right*, which concerns who has the right to frame the situation; 3) *competencies*, which concerns the ability of the actors to express themselves and act correctly in relation to the interactional style; and 4) *sacrifices* made by the actors in order to partake in the mode of engagement. These dimensions are different yet complementary heuristics to the distinction used by Lichterman and Eliasoph (2014): *Group bonds*, the obligations between members that are assumed within a setting, maps on to *role distribution* in that relational obligations are guided in part by *roles* enacted within the setting; *speech norms*, the appropriate speech genres and emotional tones, relate to what the situation is about and should be about and hence *framing rights*; and finally, *speech norms* and more broadly the type of *civic action* going on within the setting demands certain *competencies* from the involved actors. Thus, different styles may relate to and produce different forms of inequality in interaction.

Inspired by the work of Eliasoph, we suggest that, in general, empowerment projects seek to overcome the asymmetries between helper and recipient by interactional tactics that stress *mutuality* or/and *collectivity*, which are reflected in the scene style. The idea of *mutuality* is that both parties come to the voluntary organisation in order to do, receive, and achieve something. Who is helping whom is not static but rather changes depending on the situation and the perspective. Studies have focused on 'intercultural learning' as an objective and discourse that undermines the asymmetrical role distribution (Palacios 2010, Everingham 2015). Another strategy is well known from research on social movements. Here, the focus is *collectivity* where all parties are a part of the same project working towards a common goal. Central here is how to establish a collective identity and a working collective coordination of action (Melucci 1995).

Below, we will analyse in detail how the two tactics of mutuality and collectivity seek to overcome the initial structural inequality between helper and recipient with different outcomes in terms of new forms of inequality in interaction. This analysis will be done along our four dimensions of interaction. Before we explain these four dimensions in more detail exemplified

with findings from our fieldwork, we will provide the necessary background by introducing our cases and empirical design.

Cases and Method

Our claim above is that both interactional and structural inequality, especially those between helper and recipient, is a central concern for voluntary organisations inspired by empowerment discourse. To inquire into the variation in strategies and dilemmas that arise in empowerment-inspired movements, we draw on field studies of two refugee solidarity voluntary organisations in Denmark, The Friendly People (Danish: Venligboerne) and The Trampoline House (Danish: Trampolinhuset). These two organisations have very different ways of handling the interactional inequalities between the volunteer and the refugee. Together they capture two poles within the empowerment movement, one focusing on being civic and democratic following an empowerment strategy of collectivity, and the other which focuses on personal transformation and activation following a strategy of mutuality. Below, we motivate the case selection, introduce the cases, and finally, outline central methodological choices.

Case selection

Our case selection strategy is aimed at ensuring high variations within the empowerment wave in the voluntary sector while sampling cases within the same context in terms of culture, time, politics, issue, and the group of deprived people whom the project aims at empowering. While these contextual conditions are interpreted differently in the two cases, their similarity better allows us to focus on how the different strategies of empowerment create different interactional dynamics. In both cases, the fieldwork began during or after the so-called 'Refugee Crisis' of 2015 in Denmark that motivated a massive mobilisation of the refugee solidarity movement in which both cases are embedded (Toubøl 2015; Gundelach and Toubøl 2019). Both projects were concerned with refugees and bettering their situation through empowerment strategies. The two organisations have different scene styles, one which handled the structural inequalities implication for interaction by focusing on mutuality and another which did so by focusing on collectivity. This allows us to explore and analyse strategies, trade-offs, sacrifices, and dilemmas in handling interactional inequalities within empowerment projects in the voluntary sector. Since the helper-recipient relations have not been studied in detail, we use inequalities in the refugee-volunteer scenario to draw out many of the interactional inequalities that might be effective, although not as articulate, in other voluntary settings.

The first case is the grassroots organisation of The Friendly People (FP) that uses the social media of Facebook as the primary forum for discussions and coordination. Originating in the countryside town of Hjørring, the movement quickly diffused into a nationwide popular movement with more than 100,000 members (For comparison, the Danish population is 5.8 million.) recruited broadly from the population organised in more than 100 groups and on Facebook (Toubøl 2017; Carlsen 2019). Thus, our case—the original group from Hjørring—has had a huge impact as a source of revitalisation of the Danish refugee solidarity movement. While asylum seekers and persons with official status as refugees comprise the main group receiving

help from the FP, in principle, everyone, including Danish citizens as well as undocumented migrants, is welcome.

The FP are characterised by a minimalistic formal organisation. Often, a Facebook group with a few administrators is the only organisational infrastructure that facilitates the members' ease of communication and coordination of action. In the Facebook groups, an abundant effort is put into ensuring an atmosphere of positivity and happiness since these emotional states are seen as the key instrument to empowerment through positive mutual exchange between volunteers and refugees reflecting that the FP constitute a clear-cut case of what we above have conceptualised as an empowerment tactic of *mutuality*. The group's action repertoire is characterised by, on the one hand, everyday practicalities such as providing refugees with clothing, food, and transportation and, on the other, by cultural and economic integration such as organising dinners for volunteers and refugees or helping refugees find a job or a place to live. These traditional volunteering task where performed and justified through what Eliasoph calls empowerment talk (2016:249). Mutually helpful relations were highly valued. Helpfulness was seen as transformative of one's character and the initial interaction between refugee and volunteer was motivated by seeing the meeting between diverse people as inspirational. However, to the FP's concept of empowerment through mutual exchange and personal growth, conflict and politics are seen as the antithesis. Therefore, contentious, political protest activities are not part of the repertoire.

Like the FP, The Trampoline House (TH), our second case, is also open to everyone, but the users are mainly asylum seekers, people with official refugee status and undocumented immigrants. TH is central to the movement and, in particular, well connected to the activist network in the capital city of Copenhagen where it is located. In TH, the focus is on creating a politically inclusive culture in which refugees participate on equal terms in face-to-face interactions with volunteers in a grassroots democratic project. TH is a decidedly political empowerment project based on direct, grassroots democratic encounters and mutual learning across differences of nationality, race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, or citizenship status (Doerr 2019). Thus, TH constitutes an example of the empowerment tactics of *collectivity*. Characteristic of the action repertoire is an openly political civic style based on the idea of egalitarian, grassroots, democratic decision-making in micro-interactions. This egalitarian style becomes visible in the name 'Trampoline House', which was chosen in a grassroots democratic process following a proposal by asylum seekers themselves who wanted the house to be a space for self-expression beyond the disciplining and constraining atmosphere of prison-like asylum centres (Whyte et al. 2018). The distinct political character of TH and its egalitarian style is also reflected in official documents and TH founders' and staffers' way of addressing all participants in house activities, that is, volunteers, as well as the primary target group of refugees as 'users' of the house rather than as 'guests', 'clients', or other stigmatising, denigrating, or victimising ways of addressing non-citizens (Doerr 2019). The TH was started in 2009 as a temporary art project (Siim and Meret 2018) but soon became a permanent space serving the needs of asylum seekers for legal advice, health and psychological support, and opportunities for internships and language education that the official asylum process did not offer to them (ibid; Doerr 2019; cf. Whyte et al. 2018).

The groups we studied faced an increasingly hostile external political context during the period of our analysis, 2015-2018. During that period, refugee solidarity movements and civic initiatives in other parts of Europe shifted toward more politicised forms of engagement (see, e.g., Della Porta 2018; Feischmidt & Zakaria 2019), which also resulted in tensions internally in the FP over the non-contentious strategy (Carlsen, Toubøl and Ralund 2020; Toubøl 2017). While parts of the movement did engage in the political debate, our case, the original group, stuck to a purified non-contentious style. In 2015, Denmark elected an immigration-sceptical right-wing government cutting funding for refugee solidarity organisations (Siim and Meret 2018). It did not influence the FP, which did not receive government funding, but the semi-professionalised TH, relying on government funding was directly affected (Doerr 2019). The loss of funding combined with a government decision to transfer asylum seekers out of the Copenhagen region implied a shift, at TH, toward outward going public protest actions organised together by refugees and volunteers cooperating at TH as an already politicised egalitarian-styled, grassroots, democratic organisation (Doerr 2019).

Method

In both case studies, the primary method used was a version of ethnographic fieldwork. In the case of the FP, the field was the online group of the founding Hjørring group on the social media platform Facebook, which was the central forum for discussion and coordination of the group's activities off- and online. One of the researchers has been following the group almost since its origin in 2014, and the observations are ongoing; the researcher is furthermore well known by activists in the movement and is continually in dialogue with activists from the movement. This is important to ensure what Nissenbaum calls *contextual integrity,* namely that the researcher respects the appropriate flows of information as they are established within the field site (Salganik 2018:314-317). We have, to the best of our knowledge, respected the informational concerns of members of the Facebook groups. At the time of data collection, the group had +20,000 members and was a closed group in its Facebook setting. However, given the size of the group and the type of communication it supported, it was considered a quasi-public space. However, due to the inherent ambiguities of the public-private divide in social media communities, we choose not to disclose the names of those quoted in order to minimise the risk of any harm from this study.

In general, communication in the group is in Danish or English when involving refugees. When quotes have been translated, it is specified in the notes. The online ethnography is supplemented by secondary sources such as newspaper articles and books written about and by the movement activists. These are critically evaluated in light of the author's extensive research and knowledge of the wider refugee solidarity movement generated through ongoing fieldwork, interviews, and online survey data (Carlsen, Ralund and Toubøl 2020; Carlsen 2019; Toubøl 2017).

The TH has a building in central Copenhagen that is the venue of the group's day-to-day activities and thus constituted the field in this case. One of the researchers observed TH activities through the method of ethnography participating in its regular weekly meetings for decision-making during the period of the analysis (September 2016-December 2017). The researcher introduced her research to the TH founders and participants several times during regular house

meetings in this period. TH regular weekly meetings brought together approximately 50 to 70 participants who met for one to two hours to take joint protest or organisational questions related to house activities such as cooking joint meals and offering activities of interest for refugees, for example, opportunities for internships, language education, or counselling. The researcher complemented observation about interactions in meetings through further interviews with refugees and volunteers participating in joint meetings. The language in regular TH meetings was English with regular simultaneous interpreting into Arabic, and Farsi (Doerr 2019). Elsewhere, Nicole Doerr has shown how linguistic barriers between TH volunteers and refugees, and notably refugees' lacking skill in Danish, as the host country language, fostered a need for volunteer interpreting and translation (Doerr 2019). Linguistic diversity and unequal language skills also empowered a part of the refugees who were bilingual or multilingual and who could use their language skills to translate for both Danish citizens and other refugees.

Four dimensions of inequality in interaction

In this section, we elaborate what we see as the four central dimensions of inequality in interaction, namely 1) *role distribution*, 2) *framing rights*, 3) *competencies*, and 4) *sacrifices*. One by one, we explain each of the dimensions. We draw on our two cases following distinct strategies of empowerment to compare how each dimension of inequality in interaction is handled and what dilemmas it presents to the two kinds of empowerment projects.

Role distribution

Role distribution concerns the definition and status of the roles taken by the volunteer and the refugee. In a classical humanitarian construction of the situation, there is an unfortunate, deprived actor in need of help and a benefactor capable and willing to provide help (Boltanski 1999). This distribution of roles has been heavily critiqued concerning voluntary work in development projects, especially concerning so-called volunteer tourism (Simpsons 2004) where it is perceived as a construction re-establishing neo-colonial binaries: the Western helper is constructed as active, giving, and morally engaged in the situation of the non-Western receiver of help, who is construed as passive, receiving, and backward and also is expected to be grateful and inferior to the helper (Simpsons 2004). Empowerment projects seek to handle these role asymmetries between helper and recipient by interactional tactics that stress mutuality or/and collectivity.

In cases of mutuality, who is helping whom is not static but rather changes depending on the situation and the perspective, a good example of which is the FP's role-equalising style. The core idea of the FP is that a better life for all can be achieved through friendliness in micro-interaction. This is expressed in the section on the Friendly Peoples' values on their homepage:

> Friendliness causes a feeling of an increased level of energy and mental resources. It also has a contagious and self-perpetuating effect.[5]

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[5] This quote was translated from Danish by the authors.

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This concept of friendliness is conceived as irreconcilable with any form of contentious politics. The uncontentious concept of friendliness—a form of positive psychology—was seen as a key method to empower the involved parties through the exchange of happiness and positive energy, resulting in more effectively dealing with difficult life situations such as poverty, exclusion or, as in the case of the refugees, forced displacement.

A crucial element of the FP's framing and style is that refugees are not seen as passive recipients of help. Rather, they are, as part of friendly interaction, co-producers of friendliness and love with all its positive effects on health listed in the above quote or as expressed in this Facebook group description:

> The Friendly People—Refugee Help is a group of volunteers who considers each and every refugee to be a source of inspiration. We view the encounter with our new fellow citizens as an opportunity for added happiness and insight about life. Outlook provides insight—and vice versa.[6]

Here, refugees are seen as equally productive. They enrich and inspire the lives of volunteers and vice versa as well as take an active part in coordinating action. For instance, refugees have an important agency and a vital role as translators of messages into the dominant languages among the refugees. Furthermore, the FP's central goals of promoting more friendly and respectful behaviour, curiosity rather than judgement, positive rather than negative were also pursued by the refugees. Hence volunteers and refugees were together in the process of producing social change. Importantly, the equalisation of roles was also expressed by an explicit refusal of volunteers who just want to help by donating things: Being a Friendly Person entailed more than just a donation; it entailed committing to friendship.

In the case of a strategy of collectivity, role equalising is achieved by all parties being part of the same project working towards a common goal. Central here is how to establish a collective identity and a working collective coordination of action (Melucci 1995), which is what the Trampoline House exemplifies. Here, the style of equalising the helper-recipient relationship was what we call the 'civic users style'. Unlike the friendly style, the civic user style is characterised by a decidedly political focus on inclusive, grassroots democratic, and self-consciously egalitarian relationships emphasising refugees as central actors and 'users' of the TH. This is expressed in TH's weekly 'house meetings' where two to three dozen participants normally are present. The content and style of such meetings reflected the founders' self-reflective attitude towards acknowledging role inequalities between different groups of participants within meetings in addressing the exclusionary dynamics of grassroots, horizontal or participatory consensus-based democracy in settings of structural and civic status inequality (Doerr 2019). Different groups in meetings reflected 1) volunteers, 2) paid staffers, and 3) refugees. During meetings, role inequities played out primarily between staffers and refugees rather than between volunteers and refugees—reflecting contrasts between formal role inequalities between the staff and refugees—contrasting the inclusive role expectations of these groups to interact as equal users.

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[6] This quote was translated from Danish by the authors.

As an example, in one meeting, staffers had just started the meeting by inviting all 'users' of the house present to 'join the meeting', an 'accident' around issues of leadership and power in the organisation became visible.[7] The staffer who opened the meeting had succeeded in including 30 people, almost half of them asylum-seeking women, taking positions in chairs around the meeting table in a warm atmosphere. The presence of these participants was a notable success given that many of them had travelled long distances to attend (Doerr 2019). Shortly after the staffer who had called for the meeting to take place also routinely took the microphone in his hand and started to facilitate the meeting, but there, right before he opened his mouth to officially welcome people he suddenly stopped laughing and looked slightly ashamed of himself. The staffer had just realised that he had broken the house principles which suggest that the 'users' of the house, that is, asylum seekers, and not volunteers or staff members, should facilitate and lead the meeting.

The inequality that the staffer self-reflectively tried to correct in this interaction resulted from a contrast between the idea of an all-equal civic users style and actual, formal role inequities between the paid staff and refugee 'users' of the house.

Framing rights

A second form of inequality concerns the right to frame and have a voice in the undertaking of the voluntary organisation. This is both about the wider goals of the organisation and everyday situations. Both are central objects of framing: coming to terms with 'what is going on' and 'what should be going on'(Goffman 1986). Framing rights concern who has the right to define the appropriate style of interaction within the voluntary setting. Role distribution and framing right overlap, of course, but there is a difference in emphasis. Role distribution is concerned with the relative status of the different roles, where framing rights concern the ability to establish scene styles of qualitatively different kinds. In the words of Lichterman and Eliasoph (2014), framing rights is the ability to establish and switch scenes from one type to another. Framing rights concern the power to change the role set and the aims of interaction. Equality in role distribution does not always align with equality in framing rights. This becomes apparent when considering the scenario in which someone refuses a certain egalitarian understanding of the situation and tries to establish a situation in which the distribution of roles is a clear case of benefactor and deprived. Here, equality in framing rights and equality in roles/status do not align.

The Friendly People provides an example of unequal framing rights, despite an equal distribution of roles. The Friendly style has been successful as a space of refugee agency in contrast to the character-corroding refugee centres (Kohl 2015, 2020). However, tragedy and suffering due to political conflicts and wars as well as tensions with the Danish asylum and immigration systems are central to many refugee identities. Such identities are not easily aligned with the non-contentious, positive, welcoming style of the FP which was upheld through unequal framing rights regarding what contents could be posted in the Facebook groups. On several occasions, administrators deleted refugees' or volunteers' posts with comments and pictures referring to the wars and conflicts that the refugees fled or criticising the Danish asylum system

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[7] Fieldnotes, TH meeting, Copenhagen, September 26, 2017.

or immigration policies. In one of the first of many instances of such censoring, an administrator attempts to clarify the rules and reasons why contentious posts should be avoided:

> During the last few days, there have been posted some messages that have been rather political. For example, about the war in Syria. […] We fully understand that refugees are frustrated about the war situations. We know that it has a big influence on your/their wellbeing. BUT we don't think that the Facebook page [The Friendly People—Refugee Help] is the right place to post it. […] the group […] is meant to be a group with a focus on the positive things in life in spite of the frustrating things that happen in life. A Facebook group filled up with the good, positive stories. The stories that bring hope back. The stories that show love and kindness between people. […] Actually, we believe that [The Friendly People] CAN change things for the better. Step by step.[8]

In this case, the regulation of the scene style expressed in this post was directly questioned or opposed by several volunteers, but the administrator did not yield and instead refers to the original idea and origin of the FP concept and its success to justify her stance.

There were unequal framing rights in the TH also. Here the staffers overruled refugees' definition of the situation. In one typical house meeting, a staffer who tried to create an equal setting reached out to several female refugee house 'users' to take the stick for facilitation, but none of them signalled an interest in leading the meeting. Finally, a male Ethiopian user agreed to act as a facilitator for the meeting. While he held the facilitation stick in his hand, passing it on to anyone who expressed a willingness to speak, it seemed that his visible leadership position was only symbolic. Moreover, this refugee's 'official' framing proposals for discussion as the meeting facilitator were complemented by staffers who informally intervened in all conflict situations during discussions, helping users to find common decisions. This labour division between an official refugee facilitator and staffers leading the meeting informally was typical and also occurred frequently in other observed weekly meetings. Many of the refugees saw the egalitarian procedures as staged (more on this below) and the staffer as those who led the meetings. Yet, this definition of the situation was overruled by the staffers who insisted on framing the situation as one enacting radical democratic procedure, where users, not staffers, facilitate the meetings. From a theoretical perspective, such interactions point to issues of overlapping role and framing inequality in meetings. The staffers were supposed to be equal with the refugees, but due to their formal role (as paid staffers), they had more influence to shape the discussion during meetings.

Competencies

Lichterman and Eliasoph's (2014) scene style concept was partly devised to understand the skills, democratic and otherwise, learned while partaking in civic action. Here, we focus on the requirements of competent interaction rather than the individual learning outcomes of

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[8] This post was originally in English so it has not been translated with the exception of the two bracketed references to the Friendly People that, in the original, were in Danish.

interaction. While framing rights points to the possibility of changing the workings of the situation, there is also a demand for competent engagement. This encompasses such aspects as the logic and acceptability of the argumentation, following the correct interactional norms for when to speak and how to speak, and more. Importantly, the competencies are relative to the interactional form and do not denote an overarching inequality of cultural capital, human capital, or the like—although these may certainly overlap. In relation to the refugee-volunteer relationships, there are, of course, extreme structural inequalities leading to potential miscommunication arising from overlapping linguistic and material differences (Steinhilper 2020; Doerr 2018).

Interactional competencies also map onto role distribution, where an overly demanding role can enhance competency inequalities because the interactional demands are much harder to meet for one party than another. In the language of Goffman, this can lead to a loss of face in interaction and disinvolvement. In this way, an equality in distribution of roles might actually result in less participation rather than more.

Equality concerning competencies is central to the FP's success with regard to equalising roles, which is to a large degree due to the simple but effective framing of the purpose and method of the movement. In the group descriptions, the method is often coined in three simple principles as follow:

> Our objective is to create community through FRIENDLINESS and a broad set of activities which all aim at building bridges between people. We have three key goals:
>
> 1. Be friendly when meeting others.
>
> 2. Be curious when you meet persons who are different from you.
>
> 3. Meet diversity with respect.
>
> We are not political. We are only concerned with one overriding ambition:
> We want us all to be our best. And that can be achieved if you decide so! <3[9]

These three rules are universally comprehensible and require only a set of basic competencies that requires no special knowledge or training (not to be mistaken with claiming that all persons possess them which is not the case due to prejudice or personality traits stemming from primary and secondary socialisation). Thus, the friendly style not only equalises roles but also equalises the competencies needed for participation: To be a full and equal member of the FP demands only a friendly approach specified by the three rules which are relatively easy to exercise by volunteers and refugees alike.

Requiring only these basic competencies is the consequence of the empowerment tactics of mutuality that in the version of the FP focuses on creating a positive atmosphere and excludes the more complex contentious issues and elements of refugee identities. We find several examples of how contentiousness requires more advanced competencies creating inequalities in the TH case.

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[9] This quote was translated from Danish by the authors.

Interactional inequalities between refugees and staffers played out during TH meetings. TH staffers and refugees differed in their interactional competencies regarding the staffers' long-term professional knowledge about routine media and protest dynamics in the specific Danish context and social movements' mobilising strategies to make a political impact in this place-specific context. While refugees were mostly newcomers to Danish politics, staffers included long-term political activists who had been active in leftist solidarity movements for decades. Also, staffers, due to their daily routine in the TH, generally had the most in-depth knowledge of political agendas by professional NGOs, political parties, and media actors. Staffers' privileged access to knowledge about potential allies and political party agendas and their long-term experiences as professional activists led to interactional inequalities during discussions in meetings.

The tension created by unequal competencies was illustrated in a weekly house meeting in preparation for a joint protest action in the autumn of 2017. An Afghan man in his 50s, who had taken the long way from his refugee centre in Jutland to the TH in Copenhagen, expressed his gratefulness to TH staffers who had organised a workshop for refugee children to participate in creating posters for the joint protest march on behalf of refugee families and children. The Afghan speaker ended his statement with the following words: 'I have great hope in the protest to change things.' In response, one of the staffers spontaneously intervened thanking the user for his comment, while at the same time trying to bring in his long-term experience as a long term professional activist with the knowledge of the limited chances of a political impact of the planned protest campaign:

> Thank you for your contribution. Unfortunately, I have to say something. […] The problem is that the demonstration may not immediately change anything for people living in [the deportation centre for rejected asylum seeker families and children]. In fact, the chance that anything changes in [the deportation centre] is so small (points with his finger). But we still have to fight![10]

Hearing the staffer's prudent response, the previously hopeful Afghan user showed signs of anger on his forehead. 'Tak' (Danish for thanks), he responded briefly and then closed his arms in front of his torso, letting his head drop on his shoulders.

In this situation, the staffer intervenes benevolently to help the asylum seeker understand the problem that the protest march may not lead to immediate social change. Regarding unequal competencies during interactional dynamics, this situation illustrates staffer's place-specific authority to explain to refugees the challenges of successful protest actions. The staffer could intervene due to his long-term professional experience as an activist organising protest and knowing how Danish politics work. His place-specific competencies as a long-term social change organiser in Denmark placed him indirectly in the position of being the judge evaluating the statement of the refugee user who, framed as the novice in Danish politics, simply seems to accept the comment.

In moments of frustration expressed by refugees during meetings, for example, when refugees shook their head or verbalised dissent, those staffers who did not co-facilitate meetings

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[10] Fieldnote, TH meeting, Copenhagen, September 26, 2017.

tried to intervene to balance exclusionary biases of unequal competencies. For example, in the above-mentioned situation, another staffer sensed the tension and intervened: 'I'll make it short: What (the other staffer) wanted to say is that social change doesn't happen fast. But still...' The Afghan man again answered 'tak' (thanks) in Danish. His facial expression softened, his 'tak' was direct and affirmative, and he looked into the intervening staffer's eyes in response to her intervention.[11] These findings based on fieldnotes indicate how staffers were aware of the potential unintended exclusionary dynamics of inequalities and a hierarchy of competencies.

Sacrifices

The last dimension of interactional inequalities concerns the sacrifice and cost made by the actors in order to partake in a mode of engagement. According to Thévenot (2007), modes of engagement all have cost and sacrifices involved. This is both at a collective level, where one mode of engagement comes at the expense of another, and at a more personal level, where one mode of engagement demands that actors leave personal attachments and preoccupations behind and invest time, effort, and actions in one form of engagement rather than another. It is these latter sacrifices which we will concentrate on here.

When engaging in justification, actors have to leave their particularities aside and qualify their arguments relative to some shared standard of evaluation (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006). In certain voluntary settings, strong emotions disturb the interaction order (Carlsen, Toubøl and Ralund 2020, Eliasoph 2005). Hence, strong personal attachments have to be downplayed or set aside. Importantly, these sacrifices can be rather unequally distributed between the helper and recipient. Much research has focused on the cost in time, effort, and emotional investment made by the voluntary worker (see, critically, Kleres 2018), but seldom has research focused on the cost of those who are helped.

In the case of the Friendly People, participation in the style of positivity and happiness comes with sacrifices for some refugees who have to suppress the contentious and unhappy elements of their identity and personal story about their experiences of flight. Fawaz Taha Alzatto, a refugee central in the formation of the first FP group, later, in another context, expressed his dissatisfaction with the ban on political and contentious discourse in the group. When he relocated to another town, he started his own FP group with different rules allowing for sharing of contentious and unhappy posts. In an interview with journalist Malene Fenger-Grøndahl, who for decades has written about immigration, refugees, and the refugee solidarity movement in Denmark, he expresses his frustration:

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[11] Fieldnote, TH meeting, Copenhagen, September 26, 2017.

> And then this thing about not speaking about politics with asylum-seekers and refugees? Excuse me, but I came here because I am a political refugee. I almost lost my life because of politics and because of political views. So, should I not be able to endure talking about politics? I came here because I want freedom and I wish to be able to talk and think freely—also with my friends from the Friendly People. (Fawaz Taha Alzatto in Fenger-Grøndahl 2017: 93, our translation.)

What Fawaz highlights is the fact that the welcoming FP style designed to include and foster positive energy empowering people, in some cases has the opposite effect and excludes refugees with very political identities like Fawaz (see also Ahmed 2010; Shachar & Hustinx 2019). What the example also demonstrates is how the asymmetry concerning framing rights implies sacrifices on the part of refugees.

The sacrifices and costs in this regard are not evenly distributed between volunteers and refugees for two reasons. First, generally, it is the refugees who carry stories of pain, suffering, violence, and political oppression. Second, in general, the refugees' network in Denmark is close to non-existent and they are fixated in the geographical position of the refugee centre. Thus, the FP are, in many cases, their only arena of agency and voice and, therefore, they cannot go elsewhere with their sadness, frustrations, and political identities. This is very different for the volunteers who have access to other networks and arenas where they can voice and act upon their political views even though they cannot do so in the arena of the FP.

Our interpretation of these interactions suggests that participating in the friendly style, which otherwise successfully dissolves the paternalistic helper-recipient relationship, comes with a potential cost. Despite the friendly style's effective equalising of roles and competencies, participation entails a significant interactional sacrifice on the part of most refugees and also some volunteers, who must suppress their political identities and unhappy feelings in order to participate. This constitutes a real paradox since the positive outcomes of this style would be jeopardised by allowing political and contentious discourse, which would also change the style by demanding different competencies, making it both less attractive and more exclusive to many. This implies that if the founders gave up their exclusive framing rights, they, at the same time, gave up on the distinct form of empowerment characteristic of the FP.

The distinct style of inclusive, grassroots democratic discussion and decision-making in joint TH meetings also constitute a real dilemma where egalitarian procedures were sacrificed for what staffers saw as good decision-making. While the TH's civic user style aimed at creating a setting where refugees had a voice and could express their emotions, often the meetings de facto ended up being dominated by staffers and volunteers. The reason was that, in relation to TH's goal of being a collective political project, staffers—compared to refugees—possessed significantly more of the relevant competencies: knowledge and experience with Danish politics and in particular the Danish migration system. As a result, when discussing politics and planning collective action, without it being the intent, refugees were often dominated because the staffers felt they had to intervene to avoid bad decisions being made or correct misconceptions of the political circumstances.

To some extent, the volunteers and staffers were aware of this dilemma. For example, a staffer, following a typical house meeting, tried to self-consciously reflect on the limitations of

the TH's egalitarian approach during meetings addressing both refugees' and volunteers jointly by calling out to their joint frustration with mainstream Danish society: 'Today's meeting wasn't as good as only I talked. [Nevertheless] transparency is important. Our Danish people here are totally frustrated with democracy, for them, it's just empty. That's why it's so important to have democracy here.'[12] The quoted statement highlights the staffer's attempt at promoting a grassroots democratic, a 'transparent' civic user style. At the same time, it also reflects an awareness of implicit sacrifices for diverse groups in this culturally diverse setting: At first sight, it illustrates his attempts at addressing participants' potentially varying experiences, diverse backgrounds and frustrations, and various types of sacrifices experienced by asylum seekers versus volunteers. For example, the staffer here refers to volunteers present in the meeting as 'our Danish people here' who are implicitly addressed in this quote as being 'totally frustrated' with mainstream, top-down, democracy. Also, the staffer simultaneously addresses the sacrifices suffered by asylum seekers present as well: 'Today's meeting wasn't as good as only I talked', implying that the refugees did not have a voice. This demonstrates awareness of how the dominance of staffers' voices creates frustrations among the other participants in the meeting eager to be part of open democratic deliberation, especially among refugees who travel from refugee centres to these weekly meetings which are their only opportunity to discuss burning personal and political issues.

Evidence from the interviews indicates that many refugees felt that their discussion contributions were not as valid as the voices of volunteers or staffers, and it implied sacrifices to take part in the meetings. One refugee who had participated in several of the regular TH meetings expressed this in an interview:

> They organise the meetings, where they make plans, like, 'Yes, we want to start a revolution', but they do nothing […]. I can tell about my problems, but no one listens to me. The staffers are 'official. (quoted after Doerr 2019)[13]

The above quote reflects a refugee's position on the typical sacrifices experienced during the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in the meetings. The egalitarian meetings are perceived as 'staged', where actual leadership is exercised informally by the staffers according to staffers' 'official' role as paid organisers of meetings. Thus, in the on-the-surface inclusive and egalitarian setting of the TH meetings, the refugee experience that 'no one listens to me'.

Discussion and Conclusion: Enforcing procedure or excluding forms of engagement

Our two cases of volunteer empowerment projects in the Danish refugee solidarity movement are characterised by stressing different forms of strategies for overcoming the structural inequalities between volunteers and refugees in the empowerment activities. The Friendly People stress a style of interaction that employs the strategy of mutuality in order to equalise roles. This is achieved by defining volunteers and refugees as friends in common, who both benefit greatly, thereby sidestepping the unequal positions of paternalistic philanthropy. Through doing so, the

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[12] Fieldnotes, TH meeting, Copenhagen, September 26, 2017.
[13] Interview with a refugee, Southern Denmark, November 2016.

friendly style also equalises competencies because being friendly and open are universal, basic human abilities. However, to keep things this simple and preserve the atmosphere of positivity, negativity and contentious politics are excluded from the scene. To uphold the style, extremely unequal framing rights are needed in the sense that the administrators exclusively frame the style by deleting and commenting on posts breaching the rules. Consequently, refugees, often having experienced horrifying and traumatising situations and often being very political, have to sacrifice these parts of their identity in order to participate in the FP's otherwise empowering activities. Thus, the FP style constitutes a dilemma in the form of its limited ability to include refugee identities fully.

In contrast, the Trampoline House civic user style stresses collectivity. All participants, refugees and volunteers alike, are formally sharing equal rights as 'users' of the house, collectively engaged in a shared radical political democratic project. This discourse of users and the insistence on refugees being the facilitators of meetings are designed to bar volunteers from dominating the discussions and securing equal roles. However, informally, both roles and framing rights are more unequal, as volunteers would often informally frame and facilitate meetings, despite this not being the intention. Thus, the scene style is characterised by inequality of both role distribution and framing rights. Furthermore, to participate in a radical grassroots democracy is demanding with regard to the competencies of navigating Danish politics, competencies that refugees new to Denmark often lack in comparison with volunteers more experienced with Danish politics and culture. This led to an unequal distribution of sacrifices biased towards the refugees who in the meetings around planning collective actions are often dominated by volunteers and staffers. This happens when staffers intervene in order to avoid what they see as a risk of allocating a lot of resources to organising a political protest event they deem will end as a demoralising failure achieving nothing. Thus, staffers and volunteers are faced with a real dilemma: to intervene and disrupt the inclusive democratic deliberative style or risk 'incompetent' decisions.

In both cases, the designers of the projects replaced the helper-recipient relationship by installing another guiding value of inclusiveness: on the one hand, friendliness and a strategy of mutuality in the case of the FP, and, on the other, democracy and a strategy of collectivity in the case of TH. Still, practising empowerment entailed scene styles that created new interactional inequalities along different dimensions in each case. This demonstrates that empowerment projects embedded in the same structural inequalities vary greatly with regard to interactional inequalities dependent on strategy and accompanying scene style, which, in turn, underlines the relative autonomy of the interaction order from the structural background.

Furthermore, drawing on our typology of interactional inequalities, it was possible to uncover how scene styles and their investment in countering one type of inequality resulted in another form of inequality. Theorising and investigating these interactional inequality dynamics seem especially relevant in relation to the empowerment project where they are direct objects of concern and intervention.

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