Politics that kill, slowly: the Danish deportation camps

Steve: I wanted to ask ... for me, personally, not that it’s something personal but I want to know, how is this place being run? How long does someone have to be here? How long do I have to wait here?

Niels: I cannot give you a personal answer because I simply don’t know. We have no insights into the individual case, which means that I don’t really know your background or why you are here. What I do know is that you are supposed to be here. Or, that you have to be here. In the long run, any inhabitant can stay here eternally.

Steve: Eternally?

Niels: Eternally. This is three years ago, the government made a decision about what they called sort of ... placement or housing by which phase you’re in. There are reception centres [...] all the centres for when you are in process [...] and departure or exit centres, Sjælsmark and Kærshovedgård. And the ambition is that any foreign person who has no legal residence in Denmark will be housed in either of [these centres]. That is the political intention at the moment. And that means that as long as an individual – and that could be you – has no legal access to stay in Denmark, you will live here. And that’s why I say eternally, or as long as the place exists, or, whenever. Literally, you can say that these individuals who have no perspective to gain residence permit in Denmark, they will stay here in this centre until the day they die. That’s the political ambition; how it will sort of be in real terms, I don’t know.

(Edward, Elsted, and Hansen, 2019: 02:00–04:36)

In 2013, the Danish Social Democratic-led government, with support from the Social Liberal party, the left-wing Unity List, and the right-wing Liberal Alliance, announced their agreement to establish two ‘departure centres’ (udrejsecenter; henceforth deportation camps), Sjælsmark and
Kærshovedgård. A new political invention, the deportation camps were added to the ‘motivation enhancement measures’, introduced in the Danish Aliens Act in 1997 (§§ 34, 36, 40, 41, and 42a), which were designed to pressure people whose asylum applications had been rejected to cooperate with authorities in the deportation procedure. Formally adopted as a way of ensuring ‘purposeful accommodation’ of people seeking asylum, the deportation camps were supposed to separate those whose applications had been rejected and to send ‘a very clear message telling them [rejected asylum seekers] that this is the last stop in Denmark and that now you must go home’ (Danish Ministry of Justice, 2013). Two years after the political agreement, Niels – whom the reader encountered in the prologue – and his staff installed themselves in the barracks, and Sjælsmark opened to receive its first residents. Steve was among them.

I recall first hearing this recording at a campaign meeting arranged by Steve and other resident activists in Sjælsmark deportation camp in 2016. The self-organised movement Castaway Souls of Denmark were arranging a series of protests against the deportation camps, which as they described, were ‘killing them slowly’ (Castaway Souls, 2016). As part of his activism and to understand the rationale behind the camps, Steve conducted several interviews with Niels, the director of Sjælsmark. In the above extract from one of their conversations, Steve asks how long he will be held in the camp. In a calm, matter-of-fact manner, Niels explains that the political intention is that as long as residents do not agree to leave Denmark, they will have to stay in the camp – even if that means they will remain there for the rest of their lives. As the interview continues, Steve asks Niels to share his opinion on this arrangement. Niels replies that as a professional public official, he must keep his personal opinions to himself; his role is to ‘carry out the job’. However, he remarks, ‘as a professional, I can say that this act of putting pressure on people does not seem to have any effect. That means that from a professional point of view, it might seem … pointless’ (Edward, Elsted, and Hansen, 2019: 14:41–15:07).

A seemingly pointless policy that subjects non-deported people to the prospect of indefinite waiting under conditions that practically if not legally amount to de facto confinement. Such is the setup of the deportation camps, which over the years have turned into central sites of contestation in Denmark’s deportation-oriented asylum regime. The conversations between Steve and Niels touched upon many of the same issues I later came to discuss with Niels. A crucial difference is, of course, that the conversations between Niels and me, or between Niels and the prison management – whom he would ‘annoy’ with his straightforward questions – were about theoretical scenarios and organisational concerns. In contrast, when he spoke to Steve about the possibility of people spending the rest of their
lives in Sjælsmark, he spoke to someone for whom the prospect of remaining in the camp until the day he died was a possible scenario. For Niels, the politics of slow death was puzzling; for the people residing in the camp, it was a lived reality. The violence of this condition was only amplified by the seeming ‘pointlessness’ of the policy, although the deportation camps had their rationales, too.

Incarceration is a costly means for governments to contain and control non-deported people. From a coldly bureaucratic and financial perspective, deportation prisons are resource-intensive and legally well-monitored, given the range of provisions for minimum conditions and procedural safeguards that states have to comply with (such as the EU Return Directive, Asylum Reception Directive, and Articles 3 and 5 of the ECHR). Politically, they can be costly, too, since the use of the penal system and of coercive force for the purpose of deportation enforcement risks drawing public criticism and generating resistance (as demonstrated by detention officials’ anxiety over reactions to forced deportations in Sweden). The human toll of incarceration is also significant, and there is no evidence that incarceration renders deportations more effective. Therefore, governments take to alternative measures to pressure non-deported people to leave, including confinement-like configurations, such as the Danish deportation camps, or the withdrawal of access to essential welfare provisions, which is practised in Sweden (Ataç, 2019). These approaches are manifestations of ‘slow violence’, which shift the governing rationale from care and control to the creation of injurious conditions that are supposed to deter non-deported people from remaining in the country. This governing logic, which operates through indirect violence and formal abandonment (Davies et al., 2017: 1270), compelled Niels and his prison officer staff to change the control-oriented approach that characterised their profession. Meanwhile, it compelled Steve and other people confined in the deportation camps to navigate a complex system of bureaucratic regulations and camp rules, which were designed to make their lives ‘intolerable’ by minimising their autonomy over their lives, and by exposing them to harm without touching them.

Infrastructures of intolerability

In 2016, Inger Støjberg, then Minister for Immigration, Integration, and Housing for the Conservative Party, was probed about the restrictive laws adopted with the purpose of tightening control over non-deported people, which critics argued were balancing at the very edge of human rights conventions. Støjberg answered that the deportation camps were meant to ‘make life as intolerable as possible’ for non-deported people, to make them
feel unwanted in Denmark (Støjberg quoted in Skærbæk, 2016). Her statement set the tone for what would become a heated public debate over the threshold of legality, morality, and indecency of the deportation camps (see e.g. Canning, 2019b; Clante Bendixen, 2021; Freedom of Movements Research Collective, 2018; Red Cross, 2019).

Sjælsmark was the first deportation camp to open in 2015, followed by Kærshovedgård, which came into operation in 2016. In 2018, the Red Cross asylum camp Avnstrup was converted into a third deportation camp, and later turned into a camp for non-deported families. In 2020, the three camps altogether counted 686 residents, but had the capacity to house 1,200 people, which roughly corresponds to the number of non-deported people who Danish immigration authorities count as being in a so-called departure position. According to the Danish Immigration Agency (2020), 200 of the people in this position had remained stuck in the condition of being non-deported for more than five years. Most residents were people whose asylum applications had been rejected, or who had had their protection statuses withdrawn since Danish authorities, under the new, restrictive asylum laws, considered it safe for them to return to the countries they had fled from. Since 2020, the Danish Return Agency is the authority that decides who must reside in the deportation camps, how often they must report to authorities, and which additional ‘motivating’ measures (such as voluntary return advice, incarceration, or pocket money) will be used in each individual case. The camps, importantly, exist in continuity with the pre-existing archipelago of asylum camps, and people are shuffled back and forth between them as their asylum applications are rejected, reassessed, and reopened. Sjælsmark was my primary fieldwork site, although I also came to visit the other camps regularly over the years.

Sjælsmark deportation camp is located just a few kilometres away from Ellebæk prison and from Sandholm asylum camp. The same gunshots from military training exercises that prison officers referred to in Ellebæk also echoed among the military barracks in Sjælsmark. The group of residents initially sent to Sjælsmark encompassed single adults and couples whose asylum applications had been rejected and who were deemed ‘cooperative’ in their deportation cases. Moreover, there were people awaiting deportation to an EU/EES member state according to the Dublin Regulation, and people whose asylum cases were classified as ‘manifestly unfounded’ and were bound for swift deportation. When I conducted fieldwork in Sjælsmark, the camp was not even half full and the streets ghostly empty; since then, Sjælsmark has expanded, the empty streets filled with the echoes of people who came and went. For some years, the camp hosted families with children, and the abandoned cafeteria building was temporarily converted into a kindergarten, which was subsequently closed when the families were
moved to Avnstrup. The fences, which at the time of my research were merely symbolic, were reinforced, and new monitoring mechanisms put in place.

Those who were deemed ‘non-cooperative’ in the deportation process risked being sent to Kærschovedgård, a converted open prison located in Mid-Jutland. Kærschovedgård lies well hidden in a forest, and with the closest town located nine kilometres away and no public transport available, residents’ only means to leave the camp is by walking or using donated bicycles. When I first visited in 2016 shortly after it opened, there were only a few residents, and reconstructions were still underway. Stoves, fridges, and kitchen items were removed from the resident buildings, as were pool tables and other leisure equipment, since non-deported people – in contrast to people imprisoned under the criminal code – had no right to cook their own food or to activities. The material conditions and regulations thus became significantly more restrictive compared to when it served as an open prison for imprisoned citizens (Danish Helsinki Committee, 2017). As Kærschovedgård was turned into a deportation camp, fences were also erected, and biometric controls installed at the camp gates. In 2021, the 278 people held in Kærschovedgård under these conditions of de facto confinement included single men and women whose asylum cases had been rejected. In addition, there were 112 criminalised foreign nationals, who had lost their residence permit or been sentenced to deportation in addition to their prison sentence, and thirty-six people on tolerated stay, an open-ended status for people who have received a deportation order (§10 and §25 of the Danish Aliens Act) but who cannot be deported due to the risk of
A significant number of the people residing in Kærshovedgård have been non-deportable for several years, some up to decades.

In 2018, Avnstrup asylum camp, located in Lejre municipality in a former tuberculosis hospital, was transformed into a deportation camp housing up to 400 people. As a result of protests organised by families living in Sjælsmark supported by advocacy groups, families were promised improved conditions in Avnstrup by the Social Democratic government that came to power in 2019. Its reputation as a better or ‘softer’ camp was earned by it being run by the Danish Red Cross, in contrast to Sjælsmark and Kærshovedgård, which are run by the Prison and Probation Service. Avnstrup is not surrounded by fences and has cooking facilities where residents have certain opportunities to prepare their own meals. However, the families quickly identified that these improvements were mainly cosmetic: with its remote geographic location, and novel restrictions on residents’ freedom of movement – which I shall return to shortly – they described Avnstrup as ‘another prison, but without fences’.

The three deportation camps differ in terms of their respective groups of residents, the legal and de facto mobility restrictions imposed upon residents, and in their so-called house rules. What they all have in common is that they are designed to ensure that residents are kept apart from Danish society. Much like the asylum camps, social exclusion and isolation is ensured by residents being separated from their family members, friends, and communities in Denmark (see Syppli-Kohl, 2015). By regularly moving residents around between the camps, authorities also prevent solidarity and a sense of community from developing among them (Canning, 2019b). Social isolation also operates through stigmatisation and symbolic criminalisation: the prison facilities, the fences, the uniformed prison officers, and intensive police presence made up a penal spectacle that induced fear and resentment among residents in the surrounding society. Ever since the inauguration of the deportation camps, their location has been the subject of heated political debate, with neighbours reacting strongly against hosting the camps in their municipalities. As Steve noted in one of our conversations,

The neighbours play an important part in creating this criminalisation. The fences around the camps, the officers in uniform, they instil fear into the neighbours – this is what the state wants, for the citizens to feel this fear, but also that the citizens work with the state. And people say, if you say they aren’t dangerous, then why are they in military barracks, why are there fences? So, these things are interlinked! The state makes these policies to instil fear into citizens, and to make them accept that the lives of rejected asylum seekers are made unliveable. They teach their citizens not to value the lives of these people, and when people then react by calling them criminals or security threats, this permits for the state to react with more dehumanisation.
Under the guise of addressing the safety risk allegedly posed by non-deported people, the deportation camps create the conditions that put non-deported people at risk and in fact construct them as risky subjects. The dynamic that Steve describes above was perhaps best illustrated by the 2018 plan of the Conservative-led government coalition, launched in response to the ‘concerns’ raised by neighbours to Kærshovedgård over the alleged criminal threat posed by residents, to relocate criminalised foreign nationals from Kærshovedgård to Lindholm, a deserted island which used to house research laboratories for infectious veterinary diseases. The plan was subsequently dropped by the Social Democratic government in 2019, allegedly because it turned out to be too expensive. However, ‘the island’ as social imaginary where the supposed threat posed by the criminalised foreign national can be contained, isolated, and extinguished is already practised in the present organisation of the deportation camps. Their remote geographic locations effectively hide residents behind fences and forests, immobilising and concealing them while fuelling popular imaginations that they pose an unknown, unidentifiable threat to society. As Alison Mountz (2020) has argued in her writing on the centrality of the ‘island’ and other hidden geographies as tools of dehumanisation and border enforcement, such politics of concealment removes unwanted people from public consciousness, entertains imaginations of them as an unknown, racialised threat, and invisibilises the oppression they are subjected to while in confinement. Mountz proposes that the island has become the idealised political fantasy of exclusion, where time, space, geography, and law are manipulated to dehumanise and devalue the people confined. The Danish deportation camps can partly be understood through this island imaginary, although located on land.

Legally, deportation camps are not considered comparable to detention – as prison officers in Sjælsmark were keen to emphasise, residents were ‘free to leave anytime’ (even though most people had nowhere to go where they were legally permitted). In practice, however, the duty to register and to report to authorities regularly, and the risk of being criminalised for failing to do so, leave residents de facto confined in the camps. Residents also lack access to the legal safeguards awarded to people who are de jure detained (in accordance with § 35 or § 36 of the Danish Alien Act), notably the right to appeal an order to be moved to the camps, and the stipulated time limit of eighteen months. The duty of residence (opholdspligt) stipulates that residents are obliged to spend their nights in the deportation camps. In addition, they should register regularly with authorities (meldepligt) and notify authorities if they leave the camp during the daytime (underretningspligt). In Sjælsmark and Kærshovedgård, the residence duty is controlled via electronic keys, which need to be updated on a regular basis, or the key will be deactivated, and the person registered as absconded. The duty to register
must be fulfilled in person, and the frequency ranges between three times a week for people whose asylum applications have been rejected, to every day for criminalised foreign nationals and individuals on tolerated stay in Kærshovedgård. In Avnstrup, there is no electronic monitoring of residents’ coming and going, but in return, residents are obliged to report to authorities twice a day (between 07:00–10:00, and 17:00–22:00, respectively). The punishment for failing to register has gradually increased through a series of restrictive legislative amendments. Following a first round of restrictions in 2019, 100 residents were arrested within the course of three months for having failed to register in the camp (Linddahl, 2019). In 2021, the punishment for failing to register two days in a row increased to sixty days in prison, demonstrating how the registration system directly contributes to the criminalisation of residents. Residents are also at constant risk of being detained in Ellebæk as a ‘motivating’ measure (§ 36(5) of the Aliens Act), which rarely ‘succeeds’ in making them cooperate in the deportation case, but traumatizes those affected, and disciplines others. The deportation camps have been criticised by numerous human rights organisations and legal experts for their ‘prison-like conditions’, and in three cases, the Supreme Court has found that the regulations of the camps disproportionately infringed upon residents’ freedom of movement (Amnesty International, n.d.; Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2016; Danish Helsinki Committee, 2017). The time spent in semi-confinement was deemed of central importance, and following two key rulings in the Supreme Court, the Ministry for Immigration stated that foreign nationals on tolerated stay could not be held in deportation camps for more than four years. However, the rule does not apply to all residents in the camps, but only to those on tolerated stay, who are subjected to the strictest regulations. This means that people who are relocated to deportation camps following a rejected asylum case or withdrawal of protection may still remain confined in the camps indefinitely. It also demonstrates how those tried under the Danish penal code were granted stronger legal protection than people whose fates were determined by administrative immigration law.

If the camps’ geographic location and the registration duties ensure residents’ spatial isolation, the temporal indeterminacy of residents’ stay was – as discussed in the dialogue between Steve and Niels – an equally important technology of exclusion. In the camps, time is weaponised as a technique of deterrence and control; and their everyday time is also meticulously regulated through administrative rules, which circumscribe their autonomy and, as Niels once bluntly put it, ‘take the meaning out of life for residents’. These rules include the catering arrangement, which obliges residents to have their meals in the cafeteria inside the camp, and prohibits them from
cooking their own food. They also include the prohibition to work or study, and the withdrawal of daily allowance for those considered ‘uncooperative’ in the deportation process. There are also unwritten rules, such as the prohibition to personalise one’s room, to arrange for spiritual practices, or to engage in recurrent, ‘meaningful’ activities which might contradict the motivating purpose of the camps (for a full list of camp rules, see Freedom of Movements Research Collective, 2018: 26–27). As a result, the daily lives of people held in the camps were highly circumscribed. The prison officers guarding the camps were supposed to monitor residents and ensure their compliance with the rules of ‘intolerability’.

The regime of intolerability

They are supposed to stay here, but most of them often leave. If they abscond, we notify the Immigration Service and the Police, their rooms are cleaned out, we collect their luggage. But nothing happens. Some of them reappear and are simply reinscribed into the system. And so, it goes on … people have a life around here, they do not depend on the centre. Some have family and friends on the outside. And what can we do about it – nothing! They can do whatever they like, just not on the centre’s premises.

Back in 2016, all staff working in Sjælsmark were uniformed, trained prison officers who had previously been working in low or high security prisons, or in Ellebæk. Being used to enforcing rigid control in prisons, they were, as Niels mentioned in our initial conversation, struggling to figure out exactly what their role was going to be and what kind of authority they were supposed to enforce in a deportation camp. The quotation above is from Eskil, a prison officer in his forties with a previous career in the Danish prison system, who describes his feeling of confusion when realising that there was ‘nothing’ they could do about the coming and going of residents. Yet, the prison officers soon realised that the fact that residents did not show up in the camps and instead disappeared was not necessarily undesired. Niels explained to me that ‘there are two categories of people here: those who pass through quickly – that’s why the camp is located close to Kastrup airport. And there are those who’ve got their minds set on staying.’ To these two categories, Eskil wished to add the great majority who, before or soon after arriving in the deportation camp, simply disappeared.

Statistically, you could say that it works when people disappear and are deregistered in our systems. On the other hand, it might create a bigger problem
when people disappear from the system but remain in the country and end up on the street. It’s worse for them and for our society, we get more crime, more illegal work ... but sure, statistically it works, when they disappear from here.

Prison officers kept no statistics over how many people disappeared on their way to or after having arrived in Sjælsmark (nor did the Immigration Service at the time). Some considered this a success of the ‘motivating’ measures; others took it as a sign that non-deported people did not care about the camps and their intolerable rules, and simply continued leading their lives in Denmark, disregarding their deportation orders. Regardless of where people ended up, by making them disappear from the system, the deportation camps produced a semblance of enforced onward mobility, which might not be exactly what the government’s deportation fantasies had envisioned, but close enough.

Apart from having no authority to control residents’ coming and going, prison officers also had limited means to sanction and control their behaviour. Like in Ellebæk, officers were stripped of their rehabilitative tasks, and knew nothing about residents’ deportation cases; but in contrast to Ellebæk, the officers in Sjælsmark were stripped of their mandate to use physical violence. Some officers found this frustrating. Mads, who also came straight from the prison world, said, ‘I found it difficult to get used to not running after people. It’s a bit irritating, not being able to sanction them when they break the rules.’ Others enjoyed being relieved of the constant anticipation of violence that haunted them inside locked prisons. Gert, a senior officer whose favourite spot in the camp was an armchair in the reception building, which permitted him to stretch out his feet comfortably on the desk, and look out over the empty streets, told me, ‘Here is like being on holiday compared to prison! Conflicts with residents don’t escalate, and I’m not interested in what residents do here. They can do whatever they want, and their problem is not our problem.’ Like Gert, several officers shared how, when arriving in Sjælsmark, they had felt their blood pressure drop, their shoulders relax, and their gaze soften: unlike in prison, they did not ‘constantly have to be on their guard’. They enjoyed the freedom of being able to interact with residents and ‘be more of a human’ than a control agent, as Mette, another officer, noted. Eskil agreed and suggested that the officers’ role in Sjælsmark was something akin to ‘social workers, but in uniforms. Or actually’, he added with a wink, ‘we are mostly looking tough in our uniforms’.

The official duties of staff included managing daily logistical tasks, such as monitoring the gates, registering visitors, distributing mail to residents, and updating their electronic keys, and cleaning out the rooms of those who had left. Every other week, they were supposed to distribute ‘pocket money’ to residents who were considered ‘cooperative’ in the deportation process. But since this, at the time, applied to almost no one, the event instead became a
ritual of rejection, where residents lined up in front of a building to confirm their presence, and prison officers confirmed that they were there, and that there was nothing for them to get.\(^2\) Given their lack of control functions, staff considered their role as being ‘social’ and predominantly positive, but the people living in the camps testified how interactions with staff were often intrusive, blunt, and abusive. With free access to residents’ rooms, officers were authorised to enter people’s private spaces unhindered at any time; they could conduct surprise raids in their search for banned objects, and they would assist the police in unannounced deportations. Women living in the camps recounted how staff would walk in while they were having a shower; men testified that the officers interacted with them with manners that were arrogant, racist, and degrading. One day, Anne, an officer in her forties who thought she had built up a decent rapport with residents, complained to her colleagues that she had got into a conflict with a man she was usually on good terms with. Anne had entered his room to have a chat and saw writings on his wall that made her concerned: ‘He said it was poetry, but how could I know? It could have been some terrorist message, for what I know. I don’t read Arabic.’ Anne had started taking pictures of the writings and told the man that this was for security reasons. He got upset and asked her to leave. ‘He must understand why I did this, I don’t understand why he got so upset’, she told us with a shrug. Anne seemed unaware of the racist undertones of her own suspicion, and of the stress it had caused the man to be portrayed as a suspected terrorist. A couple of hours later, she shared that they had another talk and that ‘the man was now happy again’. Happiness, along with gratitude and compliance, were the character traits that officers preferred among residents.

Officers’ limited duties in the camp were usually not enough to fill their work hours. When they were not patrolling the camp or monitoring residents, they would therefore spend most of their time in the office building or ‘service centre’ (which, as Bashir, one of the residents, pointed out, was a curious name for a reception that was not allowed to offer any services), browsing the web, or taking turns at the reception desk. Sometimes, one of them would drive off to a nearby town and buy Danish puff pastries for the others. The service centre also had a back door, which led out to a patio surrounded by what was probably the camp’s most functional fence: an opaque, wooden hedge, which was under construction at the time, but where staff would soon be able to enjoy a coffee, a cigarette break, and an occasional hot dog barbecue in relative privacy. Sitting down for a cigarette on the patio, the prison officers readily admitted that their role in the camp was mainly symbolic, and so were the security arrangements, and the manifestations of militarised state power represented by the fences, electronic gates, and surveillance cameras. Henriette, a senior officer, tartly noted, ‘we
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are part of a political masquerade here. We are prison officers, but you know over here, most of the time, nothing happens.’ Gazing out over the empty streets, she smattered her fingers against the table where we were sitting, repeating: ‘Nothing happens.’ Much like in Ellebæk, most prison officers took little interest in migration control matters. Some of them were irritated with the ‘lack of gratitude’ that residents showed for the welfare provisions they received ‘in spite of being illegally here’, as Gert noted. ‘They get food, shelter, what can they complain about? It’s them who are dirty, they don’t clean the place. No wonder they think it’s shit here, but it’s on them.’ Yet, there were also officers who were critical of the setup in Sjælsmark and felt uncomfortable with the intolerability regime. When I sat down with Jonas in the cafeteria, he told me,

This group has become so politicised. They are supposed to go back to their home countries, but I recognise many of them from when I worked in Ellebæk – they are just being sent back and forth between these different camps. And these are people we are talking about! They should at least get a dignified return. They have no private life, no money, no activities, and someone else decides what they should eat. They are just waiting to be sent off somewhere else. We should be able to offer them something to make them happier and feel better … I don’t think it makes people motivated to sit around and do nothing, it just makes them more frustrated with the system. Or that’s how I would feel.

Jonas, and other prison officers with him, contemplated that at the very least, they could try not to make matters worse for residents. That was the reason why they all appreciated Abolfazl, who was known among them as the Gardener, since he tried on his own initiative to retain a sense of normalcy, and to make the camp a little less hostile, for himself and for others. He did not complain or make any fuss. If more residents were like him, they contended, the atmosphere would perhaps not be so bad, after all. The officers regretted that they could not award his exemplary behaviour, just like they regretted not being able to discipline the others. Altogether, however, they considered their role in the enforcement of the intolerability regime as marginal; it was the facilities and the camp rules that were supposed to make residents’ lives intolerable, not the way staff treated them. But they were not there to make residents’ lives any easier, either.

There were, however, certain social functions permitted for staff to take up in the camp. For this purpose, the Red Cross were contracted to offer emergency healthcare, a limited set of daily activities, and so-called voluntary return advice (which was later taken over by the Danish Return Agency). The Red Cross’s work in Sjælsmark – and later on also in Avnstrup – illustrates the ambivalent role of humanitarian actors within the deportation regime. The Red Cross are by no means new actors in the Danish
asylum system: since 1984, they have been contracted by the state to run asylum camps. As argued by Syppli-Kohl (2015; see also Lindberg, 2020b), this places them in a position where they are part of the repressive asylum regime of the Danish government, at the same time as they are claiming to operate in the ‘best interest’ of asylum seekers. Like other ‘humanitarian’ border workers (see Andersson, 2016: 1068; Rozakou, 2012), they were supposed to alleviate the suffering caused by the border regime they partook in enforcing. Yet not all Red Cross workers did necessarily consider this position to be tension-ridden or problematic. A staff member whom I interviewed in the Red Cross coordination office in Copenhagen suggested, ‘it’s maybe a Northern European thing, to believe that we can operate on state contracts and solve our issues with them without jeopardising our independence’. In Sjælsmark, the Red Cross workers considered it of great importance to demarcate their difference from the prison officers. Having installed themselves in a separate wing of the camp, and carrying bright Red Cross vests at all times, the NGO workers insisted that they were ‘on the residents’ side’ against the intolerability arrangement, even though the rules of intolerability limited them in terms of the support they could offer.

The Red Cross were only allowed to offer activities that could motivate residents to comply with their deportation order. Any activity that would contradict the purpose of the motivation enhancement measures was prohibited; therefore, the Red Cross only offered English courses, even though Danish classes were in higher demand. They also gave computer classes and curriculum vitae workshops, where residents were supposed to think about what skills they could bring with them from Denmark ‘back home’. The two Red Cross workers in charge of these activities admitted that these workshops were poorly attended, but their English classes usually attracted between two and five residents. I sat in on some of these classes, which usually took place in the morning hours. Participants were instructed to fill in English sentences with the correct pronouns, to read aloud texts on Persian carpets, or to look at pictures from the US presidential White House and list its interior decorations. They were told to read in silence about how to make a pizza and memorise the ingredients. The classes usually ended with the teacher doing the hangman game on the whiteboard. Hannah, one of the two Red Cross workers, had previously worked in asylum camp Sandholm, which in contrast to Sjælsmark, was ‘full of life’ and where, as she put it, ‘people still had hope’. When I asked her what she thought was different in Sjælsmark, she said she found it ‘ghostly’. She went on, ‘and the prison officers … they are a bit square. We always must ask for permission for everything and explain why the activity is conducive to activation in the resident’s home country. We are not allowed to do anything meaningful with them.’ I asked what would count as ‘activities’ – anything that would
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make life less intolerable in the camp? ‘Yes, pretty much’, Hannah replied. Next to their limited activities, the Red Cross were starting up a so-called voluntary return advice unit, which Hannah hoped would help ‘inspire residents, make them happier, show them that there is a way out of their situation’. Even though all activities the Red Cross offered were aligned with the motivation enhancement measures, Hannah insisted that their presence in the camp served an important role as a ‘counterweight’ to the Prison and Probation Service: ‘The Red Cross should be a social watchdog to make sure people are ok.’ The more restrictive the policies, the greater the need for the Red Cross to be there to ‘humanise’ their implementation, she contended; even if that entailed maintaining residents’ lives at a very humanitarian minimum – and ‘helped’ them getting deported.

Since I conducted fieldwork in Sjælsmark in 2016, the Danish deportation regime has indeed continued to move in a more restrictive direction. Meanwhile, the role of the Red Cross in its enforcement has expanded since they overtook responsibility for Avnstrup deportation camp. While they maintained that they operated at a ‘critical distance’ from state authorities, their role is better described as being positioned on a ‘continuum’ alongside state actors (Kalir and Wissink, 2016: 34). In Sjælsmark, they could claim to perform a ‘purely’ humanitarian function, and distance themselves from repressive control measures; in Avnstrup, this symbolic differentiation was more difficult for them to maintain. As Akelio, who had experience of being housed in several Red Cross-run camps in Denmark, once told me, ‘they might help saving lives elsewhere, but here, they help killing us slowly’.

A politics that kills, slowly

I revisited Sjælsmark in August 2017. The camp then housed around 150 residents (who actually lived there), including families with children, many of whom had spent several years in the Danish asylum system. Some of the children had been born and raised in the camps. The staff had changed, too: prison officers had been called in to staff prisons elsewhere, and the majority were now civil employees with various backgrounds, many of whom had previously worked in asylum camps run by the Red Cross or a municipality. The Red Cross ran the kindergarten in the centre, and a bus came to pick up children for school every weekday. Still, the basic logic of the camp remained the same.

We drive around in the golf car, which the camp staff have acquired in order to move around in the camp since it expanded. Much changes, but much stays the same, they explain to me. Niels tells me that they are currently
housing a family with a mother who is suffering from cancer. The family knows they are not eligible for asylum, but they thought the mother might receive better treatment in Denmark than in their country of origin. Their asylum application has been rejected, but their deportation cannot be scheduled yet as the mother is about to die from her illness. This means she is going to die in Sjælsmark. Normally, Niels tells me, they would send her to the hospital but since they are rejected asylum seekers, the hospital will not allow the family to stay there overnight to watch over her due to their lack of legal residency. Staff in Sjælsmark have therefore tried to arrange a hospice in the family’s room, so that they can be together until she dies. For Niels, this is a novel situation: had this been a regular prison, the imprisoned person would normally have been pardoned or allowed to leave prison to die with the family. But that is not possible in Sjælsmark. The woman is expected to die there, and afterwards, the family will be deported and get to bring her body. ‘I don’t know what that will look like’, Niels says, and we drive on.

The ‘effectiveness’ of the intolerability regime in terms of its impact on deportation rates has been – and remains – politically contested. There is no evidence that they have succeeded in making more people comply with their deportation order, but this failure has itself been politically productive. Citing the substantial costs of running the camps – allegedly DKK 300,000 per resident per year – the government has been able to justify the adoption of further restrictions to put pressure on non-deported people to leave, and vowed to externalise asylum processes to a country outside Europe. Meanwhile, from a bureaucratic point of view, the deportation camps have only aggravated the limbo situation that they were allegedly meant to address. When I interviewed a group of immigration caseworkers in 2016 about their perceptions of the effects of the deportation camps, Nebe, one of the officials, told me,

I doubt that they really leave the country. Instead, they abscond, or leave for Sweden where they become Dublin cases – and then they are back here again, and some of them return to Sjælsmark. I mean, even they have got to eat … The reality is that some of them risk remaining there forever. The situation is troubling regardless – some of them end up in a no man’s land where they can never get a residence permit and never be sent back. If they really fear for their lives, it won’t be a punishment to be put on a catering arrangement in a departure centre. I understand that they would rather remain there than go back home.

Nebe’s observation corresponds with that of prison officers, with residents’ own accounts, and with reports by media and civil society organisations showing that the deportation camps have rendered a growing number
of people stuck in limbo, or pressured them to go underground, either in Denmark or elsewhere in Europe (Danish Helsinki Committee, 2017; Freedom of Movements Research Collective, 2018). Aya, an activist and resident in Avnstrup deportation camp, summarised why:

Many people think a rejected asylum seeker means people who don’t have the right to stay but won’t leave because they are enjoying themselves here. But the truth is that we are stuck in the system. We can’t go back because of human rights conventions that Denmark signed, because back is war, back is occupation, back is a place where life is not safe. But we are not granted the right to stay, so we are stuck here, for years and years. We don’t leave, we are just waiting to live.

Deportation camps have been utilised in other countries and proved equally harmful. The so-called return centres tried in Norway in the early 2010s did not enhance deportations but broke down residents mentally and pushed them underground (Valenta and Thorshaug, 2011). Similarly, the German deportation camps, which were designed to ‘wear down’ people’s resistance to deportation and make them ‘realise that they have no future [in Germany]’ (Ellermann, 2010: 419), did exactly that, but did not enhance deportation rates. The policies underestimate the resolve of non-deported people to endure intolerable conditions to evade deportation; something which Nebe and other bureaucratic officials were well aware of. To the extent that the Danish deportation camps had an effect on deportation rates, it was because they pushed people underground or pressured them to move on to other European countries, which enabled the Danish government to pass on responsibility for their cases to these states. Sometimes, they would reappear as Dublin cases; in other cases not, which is a matter I shall return to in Chapter 5. But if the camps were part of a political masquerade, as the prison officer Henriette put it, it was also a performance that came at high human costs. Indeed, if we understand them as a policy of orchestrated abjection, they have to some extent ‘succeeded’ in creating conditions that cause non-deported people’s premature death.

The intollerability regime was supposed to remove the meaning of life for residents of Denmark’s deportation camps, so that the ‘freedoms’ awarded to them (compared to those imprisoned in camps like Ellebæk) lost their meaning in practice. In theory, they were free to leave at any time, but in reality, they had – as Aya noted – nowhere they could legally go. In theory, residents were not confined in the camps, but in practice, they had very limited access to the financial and logistical means to leave the camps and to participate in society. If they left the camps without authorisation, they also risked criminalisation according to the house rules outlined above. In theory, camp staff had limited authority over residents and few ways of
sanctioning them, but in practice, the camp rules also enabled staff to monitor and regulate even the most intimate aspects of their lives, such as what, where, and when they could eat; who they could receive as a visitor and when; what personal items they possessed; and their daily habits. As the prison officer Eskil once noted, residents were ‘stripped naked in front of the system’. Or, as Mohamed, a seven-year-old activist in Sjælsmark, put it, residents had ‘no room of their own’. Issa, a resident in Sjælsmark, described his experience of the false semblance of freedom offered to residents in the camps in the following way:

Even though you are allowed to leave the camp, there are certain regulations which make it very difficult for you to live. You can’t have any activities that keep you going. It’s like a wall between you and the rest of society, one that you can’t see … As a normal person, you choose to do things when you want to. You can eat when you want, exercise whenever you want, decide how you want to live your life. In the camp, we are deprived of all choices. And you can’t make any plans for your life […] and this situation could go on forever. Maybe some of those who are there must stay there for the rest of their lives … and bearing this in mind is a burden you carry. It creates craziness. When life doesn’t have a purpose, when it’s made purposeless … it makes you go crazy. Knowing you have potentials, dreams. And this is just to make you sign a paper. (Issa, quoted in Freedom of Movements Research Collective, 2018: 30)

Issa draws attention to the temporal violence of the deportation camps, manifested in the deprivation of autonomy and power over one’s everyday life and habits, and in how the system deprived residents of their future hope, potentials, and dreams (see Lindberg and Edward, 2021). The orchestrated purposelessness created, as Issa notes, craziness – a craziness which manifested in the widespread mental and physical ill-health within the deportation camps. In Sjælsmark, there were residents who resorted to substance abuse (for which they also risked criminalisation). There were others who turned silent and apathetic; and yet others acted out, trashed the facilities, set fire to their rooms, or attempted to kill themselves. Several reports have detailed how the deportation camps have caused depression and anxiety-related conditions among residents, and aggravated pre-existing traumas (see e.g. Canning, 2019b; Clante Bendixen, 2021). As residents and activists in Sjælsmark and Avnstrup have emphasised, mental ill-health, anxiety, depression, and aggression are expected reactions to a politics designed to make life intolerable. Therefore, they insisted that their emotional responses to the intolerability regime were political and criticised the ways in which their reactions were either pathologised, criminalised, or blamed on themselves.

For some residents, the long-term exposure to stress, anxiety, and depression generated long-lasting physical conditions (and vice versa), which
remained untreated in the camps. While residents formally had access to emergency healthcare services, run by the Red Cross, this access was limited in practice, since healthcare personnel were instructed only to provide healthcare that was deemed ‘necessary, urgent, and pain relieving’. A standing joke among residents in Sjælsmark was that no matter what their health condition, if they sought help from the medical clinic, the Red Cross nurse would dismiss them with a prescription to ‘take a painkiller and drink some water’. As a result of this medical neglect, minor and curable medical conditions remain untreated, only to become aggravated over time and eventually turn into acute conditions. Behrouz Boochani (2018; see also Bhatia and Bruce-Jones, 2021) has called such minimum access to medical support in detention and deportation camp settings a form of cruel care, which deflects responsibility for the injuries caused by the system onto the suffering bodies and offers little remedy for them.

Another consequence of the deportation camps was that they directly contributed to the criminalisation of non-deported people. In addition to the military and prison facilities and uniformed prison officers running the camps, which fuelled public suspicion and fear against residents, the intolerable camp rules criminalised residents. Most of the rule transgressions committed by people residing in the camps could be directly attributed to the motivation enhancement measures, including violations of the registration duty. In 2019, authorities registered more than 40,000 violations of registration duty in the deportation camp Kærshovedgård, resulting in 234 convictions (Berlingske, 2020). Other misdemeanours could be attributed to the prohibition to earn an income, such as travelling without a ticket on the bus, some were criminalised for smoking weed or consuming alcohol on the camp premises, which some residents used as a way of coping with the intolerability regime. Residents would also easily be criminalised for getting into conflicts with staff (see Freedom of Movements Research Collective, 2018). Aside from adding to the restrictions and stigmatisation they experienced, criminalisation diminished residents’ legal prospects to remain in Denmark, since it might entail a deportation order that could jeopardise their possibilities of obtaining legal residency, even if their asylum case was reopened.

In exposing residents to social, mental, and physical harms, the deportation camps can be understood as operating according to a logic of ‘slow violence’, where residents were kept ‘alive, but in a state of injury’ (Mbembe, 2003: 21) – or as Aya once put it, ‘alive, but not allowed to live’. This slow violence operated on several axes that injured residents

psychologically, through the mental stress imposed upon them through the rule of intolerability and by depriving them of both their present and future hopes and aspirations; physically, through the psychosomatic and physiological
conditions they acquired from residing in the centres; and legally, by pushing them into illegality or criminalizing their very existence and means of survival. (Suárez-Krabbe and Lindberg, 2019: 93)

The staff in Sjælsmark were aware of the detrimental effects that the intolerability arrangement had on residents but had different opinions on whether they were legitimate. Eskil thought it was ‘fair’, since non-deported people could simply ‘choose to cooperate and go back where they belonged’ if they did not like it in the camp. Jonas, on the other hand, thought the arrangement was ‘shit’, arguing that ‘it is not decent to treat people this way, in a democratic society’. Henriette said, ‘you can’t think about what’s happening or what’s awaiting them all the time. It's not that all of them are sent to ongoing war, many of them are Dublin cases, but still, it must be crap. You have no money, you have nothing. Not even bus tickets. It must be quite awful for them. But there are rules we have to follow.’ Thinking of the rules, but not feeling responsible for their implications, enabled prison officers to selectively ignore or overlook the camps’ adverse and injurious effects. Because the violence was structural and indirect, it enabled a diffusion of responsibility for the suffering it caused.

Contesting deportability: the politics of presence

‘You see, in my country, death would be quick. But in Denmark, they are killing us slowly. And the state doesn’t even recognise its own role in doing it.’ Bashir was among the younger men who were staying in Sjælsmark and who participated in the self-organised protests initiated by residents in spring 2016. His statement reflects the dual frustration with being subjected to the ‘slow violence’ of the Danish deportation camps, and with the state denouncing its role in perpetrating this violence. This logic of responsibilisation, in addition to the dehumanisation and criminalisation of non-deported people taking place in the camps, was what Castaway Souls of Sjælsmark/Denmark were mobilising against. With the support of other activist movements in Denmark, the group initiated a series of demonstrations, art interventions, and a protest camp arranged at Copenhagen’s Red Square, where they demanded the right to have rights, freedom to stay and to move, closure of asylum camps and prisons, and an end to the intolerability regime (see Arce and Suárez-Krabbe, 2019). By drawing attention to how the conditions that ‘left them to die, slowly’ were orchestrated politically and sanctioned by law, they challenged the irresponsibility of the Danish government for the slow violence of the intolerability regime. Through these actions, the camp residents – like in struggles by non-deported communities
elsewhere – emerged as ‘haunting figures’ of Denmark’s violent deportation regime, insisting on their right to be seen, heard, and have their presence recognised (Nyers, 2019: 130). The protesters challenged the ‘political hierarchies of visibility and audibility’ (Minor Keywords Collective, 2021: 29) that determine who is allowed to participate in the political conversation in Denmark, and the political debates surrounding their condition, which had almost exclusively been waged about but without them.

In Sjælsmark, prison officers paid little attention to the demonstrations. When I asked them if they had heard of the protests, most of them shrugged, and repeated their mantra, ‘if they don’t like it, they are free to leave at any time’; but Mohamed, one of the organisers of the protests, noted, ‘they say we are free to say what we want, but they refuse to listen, so what’s that freedom worth? When residents smash windows, or harm themselves – are we still free to do what we want?’ Even if authorities did not heed their demands, they did not go unheard: after the protests, several participants of the movement were forced to relocate to Kærshovedgård (Arce and Suárez-Krabbe, 2019). Dispersal is a well-documented administrative strategy used by immigration authorities to discipline people living in camps and to disrupt solidarity networks (see Gill, 2009; Hiemstra, 2020). However, protests continued emerging in Kærshovedgård in 2017, and again in Sjælsmark in 2018, when the families who had by then moved into Sjælsmark mobilised to draw attention to the detrimental effects of the camps on their children’s mental health and well-being. A range of civil society organisations mobilised in their support (see Folkbevægelsen for asylbørns fremtid, n.d.), and reports were published documenting how the children in Sjælsmark suffered from chronic anxiety, stopped eating, and refused to attend school. Among them was a report by the Red Cross (2019), which concluded that 60 per cent to 80 per cent of the 130 children residing there qualified for a psychiatric diagnosis, which the medics assessed risked turning into a permanent condition (it should be noted that the Red Cross remained in charge of healthcare services in the deportation camps during this period). The protests resulted in the Social Democratic-led government, which took power in 2019, promising to offer the families improved living conditions in deportation camp Avnstrup, which was run by the Red Cross, and where they would get the possibility to cook their own food. Once they were moved to Avnstrup, however, residents criticised the fact that the metal fences in Sjælsmark had merely been exchanged for intensified reporting duties, which prevented them from leaving the camp and amplified their social isolation; and although they were permitted to cook their own food, they could only select groceries from a limited list of items delivered by Horkram, a large food service company, which did not cater to or satisfy their different dietary needs.3 Healthcare services remained limited, and children continued to
be denied access to adequate education (see ‘Avnstrup on Strike’ in VisAvis, 2020). As Aya, who was part of the renewed protest movement in Avnstrup, noted, the changes that came with the residents’ relocation to Avnstrup did not generate any substantial improvement of their situation but served to ‘deflect attention from the core issues: deprivation of autonomy, of future hopes, and of the right to liveability’.

Alongside these visible struggles, non-deported people continuously challenged the intolerability regime through acts of contestation that took place on the level of everyday life. By forming social relationships with people outside the camps, they circumvented their involuntary dependency on the state. The so-called house rules that were designed to regulate residents’ everyday lives rendered mundane activities into acts of resistance: including refusing to eat in the cafeteria, bringing cooking utensils into the camp and cooking for oneself, or decorating one’s room, which might indicate an intention to remain rather than leaving. Residents also challenged their enforced isolation by maintaining friendships, relationships, and community bonds beyond the confines of the camp, and by finding work in the informal sector. Although the camps rendered people ‘stuck’ temporally, physically, and existentially (see Hage, 2009), the fact that they remained in the camps also directly challenged the official function of the camps, which was to make them leave. They contested their deportability as well as the legitimacy of their deportation orders by staying put, waiting out the state, and by trying to reopen their asylum cases. Some of them succeeded in turning the same asylum laws that produced their exclusion into an avenue to regularisation: between 2016 and 2018, forty-seven residents in Kærshovedgård successfully appealed their deportation order and obtained asylum (Ibfelt and Skov-Jensen, 2019). Others continued their everyday practices of transgression, of living and hoping against the deportation regime, residents enacted a ‘politics of presence’ (Minor Keywords Collective, 2021: 30) against state authorities’ attempts at making them disappear.

Concluding remarks

In her book *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon (2008) draws attention to the ways in which power might manifest in acts of violence that cause bodily injury or death; or it might cause harm ‘without ever seeming to touch’, or in that which ‘causes dreams to live and dreams to die’ (Gordon, 2008: 3). In contrast to deportation prisons, the deportation camps operate through slow, indirect violence. They are set up to kill dreams: slowly and methodically, not through the immediate threat of a gun, as Bashir pointed out earlier in this chapter, but through indirect forms of control that expose
non-deported people to injuries and indeed, premature death. The intolerability regime can be translated as a denial of the ‘right to liveability’ (Rodríguez, 2018: 24), which operates through the orchestrated withdrawal of the means of making a life liveable, removing access to mobility and settlement; to healthcare and education; and to relationships, family, and community. The Danish deportation camps, and the deportation-oriented migration and asylum policy they are part of, actively seek to remove the dreams of a future in Denmark for the non-deported. While they ostensibly fail to increase deportation rates, they are, in this regard, ‘successful failures’ (Whyte et al., 2020: 143), as they sever the hopes and aspirations of people to make a life for themselves.

Slow violence has long-lasting implications. As Alison Mountz (2020: xvi) has argued, abusive systems of power continue to ‘haunt’ the lives of those who have been exposed to them long after they ceased to have their immediate effects. At some point during the summer of 2016, Steve and I started recording our conversations about the Danish deportation camps and their slow violence. By then, Steve had been living in Sjøelsmark deportation camp for more than one year. This is how Steve, back then, reflected on the toll of the slow violence perpetrated against people living in the deportation camps.

When I say a convicted criminal has more right as a human recognised in this society, another aspect is that he or she knows that one day, he or she will be out of jail. So, their lives still have a purpose. But for someone living as a rejected asylum seeker, this purpose of life is intentionally taken away from them. While you live in the camp, time pauses ... you know Daniel in the deportation camp? He has been in Denmark for nine years, in Europe for maybe fifteen to twenty years. Those are wasted years. This pause has no end.

Deportation camps steal people’s time by keeping them in an indefinite state of ‘not arriving’ (see Khosravi, 2018: 41): caught within the Danish archipelago of camps, or in circulation between different institutions of asylum, detention, and deportation in Denmark and across Europe. The camps not only render non-deported people stuck but also ‘stick’ onto people’s minds and bodies. Steve and I spoke about the camps again in 2021, when four years had gone by since he left Denmark. I shared with him the draft version of this chapter and asked him to share his thoughts on it. We ended up talking about what had and what had not changed since he left, and about what was still haunting him. He explained,

I thought when I left Denmark that I left this behind. I left anxiety and depression behind. Or at least, I thought had found a way of making myself become more ... human in the sense that I can try to live normally, whatever that means. But you know when I wrote you early this morning, I was still trying to go to sleep. I have this since Denmark. My eating habits are disordered, my
sleeping interrupted. I have anxiety when nothing is happening. And I can’t be happy when good things sometimes happen. Because I know that now a new struggle begins … I’m so confused, I don’t know how to live a life. There’s no structure, how to live a life again. And I’m struggling to do that. You think this is something that’s left … in the chapter it is mentioned that the system is exporting people with their problems to somewhere else where the state doesn’t see it. You are finally erased, good for you. If we can’t kill you and you are not dead, we must find another way, you disappear from the public, away from where we can see you.

Steve speaks about the long-lasting injurious effects of the slow violence he lived through in the Danish deportation camp. His testimony demonstrates how the ‘political masquerade’ of the deportation camps wears people down mentally and physically to the extent that it affects their ability to live a liveable life, even long after they have left the camps. Steve also contended that if he still felt changed by the camp, not much had changed in the camps themselves. ‘They do not change the laws, only the conditions. None of what we see happening now is new, nor does it change anything. There have been people living in the camps for fifteen to twenty years, and governments came and went during this time, but they were still in the camps.’ Steve highlights here the impossibility and inadequacy of relying on reform as a way of addressing the injurious effects of the deportation camps. Instead, since 2016, Danish governments have intensified their efforts to pressure non-deported people to leave, increased their investments in deportation enforcements, and expanded the scope of people who risk being sent to deportation camps by removing the protection status for refugees from Syria and Somalia, many of whom have nothing to ‘return’ to, and whom authorities have little or no prospects to forcibly deport. This way, the camps keep being filled with people enduring the deportation limbo; some of them will do so confined in the deportation camps, others might take the risk of moving on. Their lives will be put on hold, and at the same time, their presence will continue to haunt the Danish deportation regime.

Notes

1 Steve’s recorded interviews with the director of Sjælsmark later became a short film, which has been screened at multiple festivals across Europe. The trailer to the video can be accessed at https://vimeo.com/325701061 (accessed 10 August 2022).
2 The system of pocket money has since been elaborated. In Kærshovedgård, residents may earn up to DKK 427 every fortnight if they ‘cooperate’ in the deportation process; comply with their residence, registration, and reporting duties;
and fulfil their so-called education and activation contract, which obliges them to partake in certain activities such as cleaning their rooms and completing unsalaried ‘internships’ in the camp.

3 The ‘list solution’ was developed in response to families’ ongoing protests against the restrictions to their autonomy. However, instead of granting residents’ access to cash allowance, which would enable them to purchase their own food, they were given the option to select from a total of 300 items from the food service company Hørkram (of which eleven were different parts of chicken). The food items do not correspond to residents’ cultural preferences; for instance, there is no way for them to know whether the meat is halal, and the range of spices available is highly limited.