

Migrants and Swedish Activists in Solidarity: Pro-Asylum Activism as a Pathway of Political Socialisation in Malmö



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ABSTRACT

The article examines how pro-asylum activism contributes to the political socialisation of precarious migrants who become activists, and how it facilitates their social and spatial emplacement in a particular locality. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2013–2016 in the city of Malmö, an important site of pro-asylum and anti-racist activism in Sweden, the article analyses how some migrants re-establish their lives by building social relationships with established local activists. These relationships help them gain the knowledge and ability to develop their own activist trajectories, form their own organisations, and dare to conduct activism in public spaces, despite being undocumented.

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This article explores the ways in which migrants in precarious legal and social conditions (asylum seekers and the undocumented), become activists in a particular urban and political context. ‘Activist’ is used here in line with the common dictionary definition: a devoted and action-oriented person affiliated with an organisation that upholds certain political beliefs. ‘Activism is thus the practice carried out by activists who are discontent with the current order of things and act *collectively* and *contentiously* in order to change it’ (Leitner, Sheppard & Sziarto 2008). Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork from 2013 to 2016 of the activist scene in the city of Malmö, I analyse the political socialisation of migrants who build social relationships with local activists. Malmö possesses a high density and diversity of activist groups whose political activities are fostered by the supportive milieu of the city. It is a city in which migrants in precarious conditions encounter established activist groups and, in the process of creating relations with them, create their own actions and groups to struggle for recognition and equality (Hansen 2019). As this article shows, the Malmö neighbourhood of Möllevången is particularly important as a relational context that enables migrants to enter the public sphere and to make themselves visible as political subjects.

The local activists who feature in the article were members of certain extra-parliamentarian pro-asylum groups in Malmö during 2013–2016, and were predominantly white, born in Sweden, middle-class, female, and university educated. The migrants who feature in the article had crossed national borders and lived in precarious conditions with uncertain legal status, yet they found pathways of emplacement through pro-asylum activism. To acknowledge these precarious conditions in which the migrants live and to highlight the extreme structural inequalities in terms of economic, social, and symbolic capital between them and the Swedish born activists, I use the descriptive term ‘precarious migrants’ when referring to them in this article. As the article shows, these precarious conditions do not hinder these individuals from engaging in contentious actions and using their political agency. On the contrary, their precarity seems to be a source of activism. *Emplacement*, in this article, refers to social processes through which an individual builds or rebuilds networks of connection within the constraints and opportunities of a specific city (Glick Schiller & Çalar 2013). Emplacement is not synonymous with integration. Unlike the terms ‘integration’ or ‘assimilation’, as used in a discourse that targets migrants as threats to social cohesion (Putnam 2007), ‘emplacement’ emphasises the ongoing processes of establishing social relationships within space and time. Emplacement invokes a sense of place-making that encompasses both migrants and non-migrants. I thus set aside the discourse of integration, and instead investigate emplacement in Malmö through activism by addressing the ongoing social processes in which its residents (irrespective of their legal status) constitute the social fabric of the place. The Swedish activists also become emplaced by building relationships with other activists and by engaging in activism, which gives them a sense of meaning in life.

There is a growing research field on the solidarity mobilisations following the ‘refugee crisis’ in Europe in 2015 (see, e.g., Della Porta 2018), especially focusing on the role of volunteerism in this kind of mobilisations (Fleischmann & Steinhilper 2017). Work on pro-asylum and pro-migrant activism in Sweden is scarce, but there are a few recent exceptions (Djampour & Söderman 2016; Joorman 2018; Kleres 2018; Povranović Frykman & Mäkelä 2019). A number of scholars focus on aspects such as

‘deportability’, irregularity, borders, and citizenship enactment by migrants (see, e.g., Sager 2011; Keshavarz 2016; Nordling 2017; Nordling, Sager & Söderman 2017; Lind 2017; Djampour 2018). Accordingly, most research within migration studies related to activism, in general, deals with ‘illegality’, citizenship, and borders with a focus on migrants (Nyers & Rygiel 2012).

Therefore, this article contributes to the ‘de-migrantisation’ (Dahinden 2016) of research on migration. By connecting migration studies with social movement theories and concepts, I reorient the focus of the investigation away from ‘migrant populations’ towards social processes that concern ‘overall populations’, in this case activists. What makes the focus on the solidarity work made by radical left groups important, within the field of migration studies, is precisely the activists’ practice of mutual recognition and theory of radical equality (see theoretical section below). An important effect of this practice that I observed in Malmö was political socialisation: not only are some migrants’ precarious conditions resisted, but some of the migrants became activated politically in Malmö through their personal struggle to receive legal status in Sweden. In this process, they started to make sense of their position in the world as political subjects.

This article offers an in-depth understanding of how these relations – between migrants and Swedish activists – matter for the political socialisation of migrants and their inclusion into the activist scene in Malmö. This article also makes a contribution to a general understanding of how the relational qualities of a particular urban context offer pathways of emplacement for migrants through activism.

The next section presents the theoretical framework pertaining to solidarity and its relevance for fostering political socialisation. I then present my methodology and material followed by a presentation of the particular relational qualities offered by the neighbourhood of Möllevången in the city of Malmö. This is followed by my findings on precarious migrants’ political socialisation, the processes of becoming activists, and their organising of collective actions. The concluding section summarises my findings on how pro-asylum activism in Malmö contributes to the political socialisation of migrants who become activists and facilitates their social and spatial emplacement in a particular locality.

I—UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL SOCIALISATION THROUGH SOLIDARITY

I use the concept of *solidarity* to theorise the relationship forged between actors in unequal power relations with the aim of achieving a more equal order (Stjernø 2004; Scholtz 2008; Featherstone 2012). Social relationships established on the principles of solidarity – horizontality, mutual recognition, and a perception of ‘us’ – are crucial for enabling migrants to transform their dispossession into activism and even large-scale mobilisations. While becoming activists, some precarious migrants engage in the process of political socialisation, where they adopt ideological standpoints and worldviews characteristic of the extra-parliamentarian left in the city. These relationships are never symmetrical, and therefore I identify not only constructive outcomes but also the challenges involved in creating relations based on unequal power relations.

This article explores *political solidarity* (Scholtz 2008). It is not merely a passive feeling but rather an action-oriented solidarity that involves the creation of relations with the

people who suffer injustice. In the context of pro-asylum activism in Malmö, political solidarity is a relation that involves parties in a relationship of unequal power, but it is nevertheless built on a perception of 'us' and mutual recognition (Kropotkin 1902; Laitinen & Pessi 2014). Hence, socialisation through solidarity means a process of learning of certain norms and values that are existent within these leftist-oriented activist groups.

Political solidarity resembles Rancière's (1999) radical equality: a stance that criticises hierarchical relationships between givers and receivers, such as in charity, arguing that these relationships neither problematize the existing inequality nor formulate an aim of equality. Therefore, whilst pro-asylum solidarity includes elements of aid provision, it is done by activists with an awareness that aid provision is not enough to establish lasting societal change. Instead, activists attempt to create the conditions that enable the critical reflection of everyone involved and to encourage precarious migrants to represent themselves in their struggle.

One important relational opportunity offered by the activist scene in Malmö can be explained through Arendt's (1998) concept of a 'space of appearance'. A space of appearance refers to moments in which people, in particular the dispossessed, find a voice and demand equal access to a place, and where they create political subjectivities and experience a transformative process of political socialisation. In Malmö, it is often created through demonstrations. By enabling precarious migrants to engage in activism and by encouraging them to formulate their own demands, new political subjectivities are constituted.

II—METHODOLOGY AND MATERIAL

The ethnographic methods used for this study¹ mainly involved participant observation complemented by in-depth interviews (in Swedish) with a total of 35 research participants, of which 25 were activists (12 women and 13 men, including both Swedish activists and new migrant activists). Furthermore, I conducted dozens of informal conversations with both activist and non-activist Malmö residents of various class backgrounds, migrant statuses, ages, genders, sexualities, and professions, as well as brief interviews with passers-by (non-activists) at political events such as demonstrations. I attended meetings of two of the three activist groups (presented in the next section) and undertook participant observation in various collective actions (demonstrations, social gatherings, book fairs, and cultural events among others) between 2013 and 2016. I also made observations of the activists' communications and interactions on Facebook. I was myself involved for three months in one activist group (Aktion mot deportation) (for a critical account on insider positionality and the academic-activist relationship, see Hansen 2021).

A majority of the migrants who receive the activists' support in Malmö are undocumented young male migrants, aged 15–25, mainly from Afghanistan, Syria, and Somalia, and have had little or no schooling. Many of them have worked in factories and sweatshops from a very early age, for example knitting carpets from the age of seven or having experiences of living and working undocumented in Iran or Pakistan. Many, but not all, of the new activists from Afghanistan belong to the

1 This study was approved by the Regional Ethical Review Board in Lund. Matters concerning anonymity and potential harm to the participants were carefully considered in this study.

ethnic group Hazaras, who for decades have suffered from structural discrimination and racism in Afghanistan and in neighbouring countries (Mousavi 1998). Beyond experiencing harsh racism, many of these activists have witnessed violence and death under Taliban rule and had experienced a traumatic and long journey to Europe. A typical trajectory for the new migrant activists in Malmö was that upon arrival to Sweden and when applying for asylum, they were considered 'Dublin', meaning their fingerprints had already been taken in another country in the European Union (EU) or other non-EU member-states included in the agreement. According to the Dublin Regulation, Sweden must send migrants back to their first country of arrival (or formal registration) in Europe that apply the Dublin instruments. Hence, for 'Dublins' to have a chance to apply for asylum in Sweden, they must hide for 18 months, which was largely done with the support of activists. One example of how the first contact was made between an unaccompanied minor and activists in Malmö was told by Abdullah. He was living in a care home for unaccompanied minors in Malmö when he received an expulsion order (to a southern European country) from the Swedish Migration Board. Instantly, one of the employed staff at the care home advised Abdullah to get in touch with the Asylum Group (presented in the next section). He did this and with the help of two activists, Abdullah hid for almost two years and eventually received legal status in Sweden.

In activist circles in Malmö, particularly noticeable in pro-asylum groups, there is a large number of activists with migrant backgrounds, i.e. born to immigrant parents, mostly from Middle Eastern and Latin American countries. Many of their parents came to Sweden from Iran, Argentina, and Chile in the 1960s and 1970s as political refugees. While these activists are racialised in Swedish society and experience every day structural racism, the oppressive effects are far stronger for the newly arrived, working-class migrants, since the so-called 'second generation migrants' among the Swedish activists possess a level of cultural capital that cannot be compared with many migrants arriving today.

The in-depth interviews I conducted were based on the practice of using biographical interviewing as a way of collecting personal narratives with the aim of exploring individual activists' experiences of activism in the context of their life histories. People's stories can tell us something about how social actors, from a particular social position and cultural vantage point, make sense of their world (Eastmond 2007). Activists' biographical stories expose the personal – in terms of family background, upbringing, experiences of injustices – that underlies people's present political engagements with their environments. During my research in 2013–2016, there were approximately a dozen very active and organisationally involved migrants, and some dozens of migrants participating in protests. All empirical material was carefully coded and analysed by using Nvivo.

III—THE RELATIONAL QUALITIES OF MALMÖ

Nicholls and Uitermark's (2016; 2017) work on cities and social movements is highly relevant for my analysis, since they analyse activism with regard to places' relational qualities – networks among diverse activist groups – which they see as concentrated in cities and, as in the case of Malmö, in specific neighbourhoods.

Malmö, the third largest city in Sweden, is a 'migrant city' (Nicholls & Uitermark 2016) but also a city with a high density and diversity of activist groups (three such groups

are presented below). The Malmö neighbourhood of Möllevången (popularly called 'Möllan') plays a particularly important role for the activist scene in the city. Politically engaged individuals moved into this area as the city transitioned from industrial manufacturing to financial capitalism due to its central location and affordable housing (Hansen 2019). While the neighbourhood of Möllevången is known today nationally for its activism, it is, just as the entire city of Malmö, first and foremost known for the high presence of migrants of different origins, with different migration trajectories and times of arrival in Malmö or to Sweden. While Malmö in general is segregated, the neighbourhood of Möllevången is not: 44 per cent of Möllevången's residents had a foreign background (migrants born abroad or children of immigrants) as of 2017 (Malmö stad 2018). This demographic characteristic of Möllevången was pointed out by all the migrant activists as something that made them feel safe and welcomed.

The narratives that people tell of places also matter for the creation of relational qualities, since narratives affect how places are perceived and felt (De Certeau 1984; Massey 1995; Martin 2003). The narratives of Möllevången as a prominent anti-racist place, as a site of ethnic diversity, and a hub for leftist activism within the city matters for how both leftist activists and precarious migrants experience the neighbourhood. Möllevången offers a 'home-place' for leftist activists and other likeminded people in the city. However, the conditions that enable activists' emplacement in Malmö in turn may offer pathways of emplacement for precarious migrants who establish relationships with the activists. 'Outsiders' cannot tap into Möllevången and simply make use of its resources but 'must develop *relations* with more established actors in these environments to make use of embedded resources, knowledge, and information' (Nicholls & Uitermark 2017: 7).

Hakim, a 20-year old formerly undocumented migrant who became an activist in his struggle to attain permanent residency, shared his experience of coming to Sweden: 'When I came here, I felt as if I was not allowed to be here, because this is not my country. But not so in Möllan, in Malmö'. Hakim experienced 'the right to be here' (Eastmond 2007) in Möllevången (and thereby in Malmö), in contrast to the country as a whole which he perceived as unwelcoming. As many of my interviewees did, Hakim also elaborated on the characteristics of Möllevången that contributed to his feeling of 'the right to be here'. Beyond the presence of leftist activism and antiracism, in the widely accepted narrative as well as in the activities (e.g. demonstrations) and material infrastructure (e.g. social centres, cafés) and symbolic markers (e.g. posters, graffiti), it was also due to the diversity in terms of ethnicity and migration trajectories of the people living, working, and frequenting the neighbourhood.

During the time of my fieldwork, in 2013–2016, there were three prominent pro-asylum activist groups in the city: Aktion mot deportation (Action Against Deportation); Asylgruppen (the Asylum Group); and Kontrapunkt (Counterpoint) (for more details see, Hansen 2019: 54–66). Social movement scholarship categorises these groups as 'radical' since they are composed of individuals with left-radical outlooks such as syndicalism, anarchism, communism, and autonomous Marxism (Jämte 2013: 35, 37). Aktion mot deportation, formed in 2009, works for the closure of migrant detention centres and against migration policies that criminalise rejected asylum seekers. Their activism consists mainly of direct-action methods such as blockades and sit-ins. Asylgruppen, formed in 1991, works together with and in support of asylum-seekers (mostly unaccompanied minors) whose applications have been rejected. Their work consists mainly of assisting asylum seekers and undocumented people in finding

unauthorised shelter and other kinds of support (legal aid, food, clothing, access to healthcare, homework, school admittance, school materials, and communication with authorities, etc.). Kontrapunkt is the name of a social centre and important activist venue that existed in Malmö during my fieldwork. While Kontrapunkt usually arranged and housed solidarity parties, concerts, festivals, educational events, and workshops, during the large reception of refugees to Sweden in 2015, Kontrapunkt was converted to a solidarity-based shelter for arriving refugees (most of them in transit).

Together with a number of other activist groups (including media, film, and art collectives), these groups compose the left-wing, extra-parliamentarian scene in Malmö. It is an example of a 'social movement scene', namely 'a network of people who share a set of subcultural or countercultural beliefs, values, norms, and convictions as well as a network of physical spaces where members of that group are known to congregate' (Leach & Haunss 2009: 260), such as bars, cafés, and social centres. The infrastructure of solidarity-oriented meeting places in Malmö facilitates contact between activists and precarious migrants.

IV—MIGRANTS' POLITICAL SOCIALISATION: BUILDING SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS LEGAL STATUSES

My fieldwork revealed that the precarious migrants who created and established social relations with Swedish activists obtained various opportunities to resist their dispossession and displacement in the city and to acquire social wealth that was not mediated by competitive market or state relations (De Angelis 2003). Such opportunities included shelter (often a sofa in an activist's home), the support to hide from the authorities, cancelled deportations, legal aid, access to a social network, jobs, knowledge about labour rights and how to win labour disputes, political socialisation, and political agency.

The migrants who built social relationships with local activists – by living together, sharing daily household tasks, attending meetings, and participating in collective actions together – experienced different degrees of political socialisation, and some were simply more interested in politics than others. One way in which political socialisation is encouraged is that Swedish activists engage in discussions with precarious migrants on why it makes sense to assert themselves in the public sphere in spite of the risks posed by their precarious legal status (see Nicholls & Uitermark 2016, in which the 'Undocumented and Unafraid' emerged among undocumented youth activists in Chicago and Los Angeles). Activists also invite migrants to enter various political spaces and collective actions, such as in the Tent Action and the Asylum March presented further below.

Additionally, activists in pro-asylum groups in Malmö help cultivate and give meaning to political statements, for instance, the commonly used slogan 'against all borders' used to indicate national borders but also borders between different sexes, genders, abilities, and ethnicities. The slogan is further substantiated by pro-asylum groups' use of the LGBTQ movements' internationally known rainbow flag. Another example is the slogan 'No One Is Illegal' (*Ingen människa är illegal*), today a rather normalised slogan also among migrants (activists as well as non-activists) in Malmö. Many view these slogans and their associated discourses as normal and common-sense ways to

politically talk about their subordinate positioning. As Tariq, a 21-year-old activist who used to live as an undocumented in Möllevången, put it: 'No one is illegal. You should have rights even though you do not have some stupid papers. But today those people are called "illegal", and that is just sad'. This suggests how the migrants in precarious legal conditions who enter the activist scene in Malmö learn to formulate a counter-hegemonic language of 'illegality' and their sense of self.

In the process of constituting political subjectivities, some precarious migrants start recognising and problematising the broader structures in which they find themselves. Hakim, the 20-year-old activist quoted earlier in the article, was surprised that many of the local female activists in Malmö were lesbians. For him, and many others, becoming acquainted and even friends with Swedish activists implied a realisation of the interconnectedness of different forms of inequalities. Hakim's political socialisation implied an awareness of how the female activists are also fighting particular kinds of dispossession; in this case, the female and lesbian activists' fight against sexism and homophobia. He said:

I think those who are in Asylgruppen, they fight for [the rights of the] undocumented, yet they fight for their own rights too. The way that society looks upon an undocumented person is almost the same way as they see a lesbian, and the way they look at a gay too. I think those who are activists are the ones that society looks upon in a bad way. The commonality is how society perceives them.

Hakim thus eventually related his own dispossessive conditions with others' dispossessive conditions, recognizing and problematizing the broader structures in which he and the Swedish activists find themselves. This process illustrates the development of an 'us', as a mutually constitutive whole, which is characteristic of solidarity and mutual recognition (Kropotkin 1902; Laitinen & Pessi 2014). Activists' creation of 'us'-ness serves several important psychological, emotional, and political functions and ultimately contributes to a meaningful social existence (Simon & Klandermans 2001; Jasper 2011).

Hakim's political socialisation demonstrates what Miller and Nicholls (2013) claim, namely that the exchanges of ideas, arguments, and narratives between different groups as well as between different individuals within a group allow different people to empathise with the concerns, suffering, and struggles of other people. A pattern of close collaboration between migrants and LGBTQ activists similar to what I have observed in pro-asylum activism in Malmö was identified by Ruth Milkman's (2014) study of The Dreamers (migrant rights activists) in the United States. The Dreamers borrowed the concept of 'coming out': how undocumented people felt scared and unsafe but how they then felt empowered by 'coming out' as undocumented within an activist context and no longer felt as limited by their irregular status. Several participants of the recurrent Asylum March, which took place every summer from 2013 to 2018 starting in Malmö, were undocumented but felt safe within the space created in and through the act of marching together.

The migrants who eventually became activists in Malmö told me about how they started to reflect on the root causes of their own dispossessed position. Initially, Hakim's line of thought was simply: 'I am now in Sweden because there is a war in my country'. Eventually, he understood his situation in much more complicated terms: the reasons for war in Afghanistan involved complex networks of capital

relations between countries, especially the trade relations between the Taliban and Pakistan and between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. And, as Hakim pointed out during our interview, Sweden is also involved in this conflict through its arms sales to Saudi Arabia:

When you have a problem, when you are in a particular [precarious] situation, you have to ask yourself: 'why do I have this problem?' Then you have to think one step further: 'this is not only my problem; who and what are creating this problem?' [...] Why do undocumented people exist? Why are we here? Why aren't you in my country?

For Hakim, becoming involved in activism thus meant relating his position and interests with the positions and interests of other people as resulting from complex systems of power and inequality.

I did however identify various challenges within these relations made between activists with citizenship and precarious migrants. One challenge was that this relationship, to use the words of 35-year-old activist Lisa, was inevitably 'contaminated' with inequality. Although the aim is to create equality between the 'receiver' and the 'giver', and both parties *may* consider each other friends, it was not possible to overcome the economic, cultural, and educational inequalities within these asymmetrical relations. Instead, the potentially charitable aspect of the relationship is always 'lurking'. Hussein, an undocumented minor who received support from Asylgruppen, expressed his concern over these difficulties:

When I receive permanent residency, I want to move somewhere else, so I can have friends who are not my friends on the basis that they had to help me.

Despite the power asymmetry found in these relations and the accompanying challenges, this article focuses on the instances that nevertheless produce a sense of mutuality, interdependence, and 'us-ness', emerging as a source for discussions and collective actions on the common aspirations for a better world.

BECOMING ACTIVISTS: A SELF-TRANSFORMATIVE PROCESS

None of the newcomer migrants that eventually became activists had any prior experiences of activism and did not express to have had any direct interest in politics, in general, in their former countries of residence (Iran, Afghanistan). The migrants who acquainted certain activist groups and received assistance by individual activists did not imply political socialisation *per se*. Indeed, only a minority of all those in the position of receiving assistance from the activists become activists in turn. According to the 30-year-old activist Emma:

Most of them [migrants receiving assistance] just want to live a normal life. They want a job, to get a family, own a car, and buy nice clothes. They don't want to be activists.

I observed that it was primarily through close relationships of love or friendship that some precarious migrants experienced a political socialisation and became activists themselves. Becoming involved politically on an organisational level implied a certain intellectual trajectory – a change in the ways of perceiving the world and modes of relating to it (Dikeç 2017). Important to note here is that the precarious migrants I

interviewed had various experiences of social and political oppression, racism and persecution that have had a clear and formative influence on their political worldviews. Becoming emplaced in Mällenvången through activism meant being socialised into this particular political space that fosters a certain political analysis of society and injustice.

This commonly implied an adoption of leftist ideological and lifestyle-bound positions, drawn from fields such as feminism, vegetarianism, anti-consumerism, and animal rights, that are commonly held by pro-asylum activists within Malmö. Possibly, many migrants who receive assistance by activists are not interested in this particular kind of leftist-oriented politics.

Whatever the initial motivation to become engaged in activism was – anger, compassion, frustration, a romantic relationship, or a yearning for a social network or a purpose in life – the very process of engagement was itself transformative for all of my interviewees, irrespective of social and legal status. Activism constituted a self-transformative process, in the sense that it affected the person's being in the world in profound ways. Once they gained a politically informed awareness of structural inequality and power relations, it could not be undone. The political consciousness gained through political socialisation was addressed by the activist Zahra, in her forties, who grew up in a Middle Eastern country and has personal experiences both of being an undocumented person and of political activism before coming to Sweden in the 1980s:

For me, activism [...] becomes an integral part of my life. It's not a job, it's not my private life, but it's always there...it has changed my view of society, my view of my private life, or my job... [...] it affects a lot. [...] The deeper you go into this kind of work, get to know the issue, get to know how it affects others, then you will also become a part of it. And that issue also becomes a part of you. And you get very deeply involved in it.

Zahra described her activist life as something emotional and intellectual, which may, and often does, affect one's entire life. Zahra cannot undo her critical thinking about injustice, inequality, and, in particular, the conditions of displaced and dispossessed migrants. Once she gained that critical thinking, it affected her being in the world; it was as if she had crossed a line and then nothing was ever the same again (Cobo-Guevara, Zechner & Herbst 2018). Something similar was expressed by the activist Tariq:

If I compare [myself] with three and a half years ago, I'm completely a new person. I think. And I feel like I was reborn...here. I mean, [activism] has changed my life completely.

When I asked him to pinpoint what this change consisted of more specifically, he replied:

To be able to stay [legal status]. But also, nowadays I think, when I see people, I really want them to join us. That we should be one. I now struggle for people not to be divided into 'us' and 'them,' but for a society with equality.

Tariq points at how activists, by helping him to hide from the authorities while undocumented, enabled him to gain a chance of seeking asylum in Sweden (instead

of the country in which his fingerprints were first taken). One concrete and major change was personal and material: legal status (greater access to social welfare, housing, and the labour market). He then points to a change in aspirational terms: in the process of becoming an activist and supporting people who used to be in his situation, he has learnt to perceive the situation of undocumented migrants with a political lens, which indicates a political socialisation. Tariq continued:

There are many things that are considered normal in society in general, but now, through the activists, there are many things that are normal for us but not for society. So, that's why I think we always want to help each other to create the kind of society that we have through activism here. Or through Malmö, or like Möllan. For us, it doesn't matter at all if a person is white or black, a person with documents or without documents, if a person is a feminist, gay or lesbian or not, if a person has nice clothes or not, a person who showers once a month or a person who showers every day. For us, all these kinds of things are normal.

Tariq sees the political space of Möllevången as tolerant and open to diversity in terms of ethnicity, class, and lifestyle, which is something he does not experience in urban spaces that he perceives as mainstream society. Tariq started to identify with the political space of Möllevången and the political philosophy of the activists who live and act there.

SELF-ORGANISED COLLECTIVE ACTIONS AND ORGANISATIONS

The years 2013 and 2014 were particularly important in which new (migrant) activists initiated and organised, with the help and support of Swedish activists, a number of collective actions in Malmö, including the Asylum March, the Tent Action, Cykelstafetten (a bike action), and Aktion mot deportation's 24-hour sit-in outside the Swedish Migration Board in Malmö. Some of these actions unfolded at the regional and national scale: for example, the first Asylum March in 2013 lasted for 34 days, with the participants marching 750 kilometres from Malmö to Stockholm calling for asylum seekers' rights (Joorman 2018).

The Tent Action was arranged in the spring of 2014. One of the participants was Sanad, who lived in Stockholm. Sanad and three of his friends who, like Sanad, had also had their asylum applications rejected, got in touch with Aktion mot deportation in Malmö and travelled to Malmö to protest against their own deportation as they could not garner the same level of activist support in Stockholm to conduct the protest. The Tent Action was a temporary encampment in a small green area called Jesusparken in Möllevången with a small number of tents erected with the involvement of activists from Aktion mot Deportation, but it was also supported and encouraged through social media by Asylgruppen and Kontrapunkt. It lasted 6 weeks.² The last action from these examples, the sit-in outside the Migration Board, was entirely initiated and organised by migrants. The aim was to show solidarity with a group of migrants who were being deported from Sweden the same day (for an ethnographic account of this action, see Hansen 2019: 342–348).

The examples above show that precarious migrants assert their right to have normal, visible, and equal lives in the city and in the country and demand it for others in similar

2 The migrant activists from the action eventually received legal status in Sweden.

situations. Participation in such collective actions has a strong potential for becoming transformative for those who participate in them. The shared experience of entering a 'space of appearance' (Arendt 1998) and of acting side by side with others (from different countries, of different ethnic and class backgrounds, from different activist groups) generates broader, inclusive identities and political subjectivities. The social dimensions of such actions includes the common experiences of spending a lot of time together, eating and singing, meeting new people and connecting with them through Facebook, and in case of turmoil, crying and showing one's inner emotions. Activism thus appears as an important social setting in which networks of connection and friendships are made and sustained across social, ethnic, and legal differences and divides.

Beyond participating in collective actions in public space, some migrants I interviewed started to engage as members of Asylgruppen, Aktion mot deportation and Kontrapunkt. They attended and, in some cases, led these groups' meetings, and organised fundraising and aid activities. In the course of becoming activists, they also discursively engaged in contemporary Swedish politics. They expressed political awareness and interest through their comments on Facebook pertaining to the current state of affairs in Sweden, especially during the national elections in 2014, and particularly regarding the right-wing parties' planned privatisations of welfare institutions in Sweden. Hakim told me he felt devastated at what he felt were the consequences of neoliberal privatisation policies in Sweden, namely the handover of power from democratic state institutions to private investors. Whereas before becoming an activist, Hakim said he 'didn't know anything about what Right is and what Left is. I couldn't tell the difference between them'.

The migrants who joined the pro-asylum groups in Malmö became connected to the wider activist scene in the city. In practice, their exposure to activists involved in other areas of activism led many of the migrants to in turn begin supporting and mobilising in the city around issues of anti-fascism, anti-racism, LGBTQ rights, and feminism. This broader involvement in their new environment enabled the feeling of becoming part of a larger collective and the creation of shared experiences of actions and interests beyond those pertaining to those of precarious migrant status, thus creating a larger and more diverse 'us'. This is illustrated by a speech held at the renowned Kämpa Malmö ("Keep on struggling, Malmö") demonstration in Malmö in March 2014 which mobilised 10,000 people following the stabbing of four local anti-fascist activists by neo-Nazis (Hansen 2019). The speech was held by a middle-aged female activist migrant with Swedish citizenship and member of Aktion mot deportation. She acted as a representative of the Tent Action while standing together with the four asylum seekers and initiators of the Tent Action:

We feel strongly affected by what has happened to our friends [that were stabbed]. We know what racist violence means. We have been shot by border police, we and our little children have been close to drowning when crossing borders, we have walked for several months to save our lives, hiding in forests from guards and police, we have been distrusted and chased by police. We are undocumented, but we refuse to hide. We want to be with you in the fight against fascism, which takes many different forms. [...] We are by your side, and today we stand up together. Smash nazism, bring down fascism, stop all deportations!

The speech reflects the mutual support characteristic of solidarity. It also demonstrates the activists' understanding of the current conjunctures of inequality and injustice.

In 2013, migrants also formed their own organisations that focus on supporting undocumented youth, including *Ensamkommandes förbund* (The Unaccompanied's Association) and *Nyanländas Röster* (Newcomers' Voices). *Ensamkommandes förbund*, an organisation made by and for young refugees, was formed in May 2013 in Malmö and later grew and spread to seventeen other towns and cities in Sweden. This kind of self-organising meant that the migrants moved towards a 'politics of the first person' (Geronimo 2012), meaning they are no longer being represented by activists with citizenship but represent themselves.

Several Swedish activists I interviewed pointed out that the successful support of the emergence of a new generation of migrant activists in 2013–2016 in Malmö gave renewed energy to the pro-asylum movement not only in Malmö but in the whole of Sweden. The pro-asylum movement in Malmö succeeded in these years to fulfil what they have attempted to achieve for a long time: for undocumented migrants and asylum seekers to represent themselves in the public space through political struggles, which then in turn gave further strength to Swedish activists' continued commitment to direct action. The 'strength' gained shows the mutuality in political solidarity.

V—CONCLUSIONS

This article has examined how pro-asylum activism in Malmö has opened pathways of emplacement for migrants in precarious legal conditions: the process of re-establishing one's life in a particular locality, building networks, making friends, and developing a feeling of belonging to a new place. It showed how political solidarity contributes to the social and spatial emplacement of migrants who build relationships with the activists and how some become activists themselves through a process of political socialisation and activation. The building of social relationships with Swedish activists were decisive for these migrants' (who feature in this article) ability to stay in the country and consistently to form their own organisations and actions. The migrants who eventually involved themselves politically on an organisational level experienced a certain intellectual trajectory – a change in the ways in which they perceived the world and their modes of relating to it. They began making sense of the world by seeing themselves as political subjects in reflexive ways, in line with the process referred to by Dikeç (2017), and transforming their precarity into political struggles in collaboration with other precarious migrants as well as with local non-migrant activists. Activism made the city more liveable for those participating and gaining from the struggle despite those individuals not being able to solve the underlying socio-political and structural causes of those problems.

Building social relations on the principles of political solidarity meant encouraging precarious migrants to identify commonalities and think about those broader structural forces (inequality, racism, capitalist market forces, conditions for legal status) that caused their problems. Thus, through a process of political socialisation, some precarious migrants gained a language for formulating their displacement as a public problem rather than a private issue. Involving migrants in politics is thus a concrete example of a pathway of emplacement opened up by activists in Malmö. Close relationships appeared as an important element of the process of becoming an activist. The new activists not only engaged in pro-asylum issues but participated

in other struggles in the city, such as those relating to feminism, LGBTQ rights, anti-racism, and anti-fascism.

The new relationships enabled the migrants to assert their right to the city, but their claims to rights did not end at the city borders. Having established a base of power through their networks of connections, Malmö, and particularly the neighbourhood of Möllevången, constituted an institutional and relational launching pad for making broader rights claims at the national level. In other words, these new social relations forged through activism enabled precarious migrants to carry out political struggles that travelled beyond the borders of the city, thus enabling them to assert broad rights claims in the country (most prominently shown in the Asylum March) and to form their own organisations (Ensamkommandes förbund). Möllevången thus provides the resources and relational opportunities that can support emergent activists (Nicholls & Uitermark 2017: 8). The path of emplacement through activism discussed in this article is thus not necessarily emplacement into mainstream society, but into these local enactments of counter-hegemonic social structures and practices. These environments encourage political socialisation, the questioning of the status quo, and struggles for equality and social justice. The article thus shows that migrants in precarious legal conditions are not passive, oppressed victims, but actors highly aware of their circumstances, who use the activists' resources in ways that benefit themselves and their peers.

By supporting precarious migrants in becoming activists themselves, local activists contribute to the reconfiguration of socio-spatial and political relations in the city (Hansen, 2020). They contributed to making the pro-asylum groups more heterogeneous in terms of class, gender, and ethnicity and thus creating broader collective identities. The entry of migrant activists and the formation of their own groups and struggles enabled the creation of counter-hegemonic narratives that included more voices that were not based only on the experience of the typical (white) Swedish leftist activist experience. Hence, emplacement through pro-asylum activism contributes to creating shared experiences out of which wider political struggles for social equality and justice can emerge (Çalar & Glick Schiller 2018). The focus on the solidarity work made by radical left groups and their practice of mutual recognition and theory of radical equality is precisely what constitutes this article's main contribution to the literature in migration studies.

More qualitative research is needed, however, to understand the importance of the relations made between Swedish activists and precarious migrants in a long-term perspective. Another point that merits investigation is how the particular urban qualities and national political context affect this process, as the years of my fieldwork seem to represent exceptionally vibrant activist years in Malmö. It would be interesting to study the pro-asylum milieu in Malmö today, as migrants' led actions seem to have decreased after 2016. As migration politics in Sweden have become increasingly strict, Asylgruppen seems to have turned into a more humanitarian and charity-oriented organisation than at the time of my fieldwork, when it was strongly oriented towards advocacy and political action in public space. Aktion mot deportation conducts actions very rarely, and the social centre Kontrapunkt closed down in the beginning of 2020 as a result of economic deficits and internal power struggles.

Furthermore, since this article has focused on how these social relations affected precarious migrants' political socialisation, an important topic for further investigation is how these new relations affected the local Swedish activists' worldviews and

politicisation. Finally, research that is more focused on possible paternalistic patterns could unmask postcolonial hierarchies and give insights on how forms of domination and marginalisation may emerge in migrants' alliances (Cappiali 2017), even within radical left-wing groups. Hence, more ethnographic work is needed to see how political initiatives, like those presented in this article, may (despite good intentions) develop in paternalistic ways and restrict migrants' political socialisation and their gaining of prominent positions within the extra-parliamentarian scene in Malmö, or elsewhere.


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