

# Becomings of School-Fathers

– An Ethnographic Exploration of Migrant Fathers' Experiences and Navigation of Home-School Cooperation Practices



*The picture, painted by Emre from OC, illustrates his father and him in Tivoli.*

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PhD Thesis

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<sup>1</sup> All names are pseudonyms due to anonymity.

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## Prologue

This PhD thesis explores home-school relations between migrant fathers and teachers in Danish public schools, how migrant fathers experience these relations, and how the current expectations towards school parents affect migrant fathers' becomings as school-fathers. One of the main points is that the perspectives and experiences of the participant fathers are situated, as is the case for all experience and knowledge. This is also obviously the case for this PhD, thus this prologue aims to situate this study, and to provide an understanding of the context and potential obligation it takes part in.

The scholarship has drawn upon the consortium 'Learning Lift 2020' (*Læringsløft 2020*), which aims to carry out new research on Danish public schools. The goal is to produce new knowledge about the schools' concrete challenges, to strengthen research in elementary schools, as well as support competence-development for teachers. Taking its point of departure in a critical approach to school-practices, and an assumption that the school has not yet resolved its goal of creating equal opportunities for all pupils, the aim of the project was, from the beginning, to contribute with new perspectives on relations between school and home, which could lead to a more inclusive school. Such a school would endorse equal opportunities not only for all children, but also for all parents, as they play a vital role for the schooling of their children.

The obligation to 'bring something to the profession,' has inevitably formed my focus and placed the site of the school as central for the study. Thus, this thesis takes part of a research tradition, where the goal of research is to apply it to practice (see e.g. Whyte 1999). However, the aim of the study is far from suggesting so-called 'best practices,' but rather to present new perspectives on the phenomenon of home-school cooperation. With inspiration from anthropologist Clifford Geertz and his practice of 'thick description' (Geertz 1973), I bring into light previously unlit perspectives and experiences of relations between migrant fathers and school.

In the initial period of the PhD project, the focus was on so-called 'ethnic minority parents' in general. However, in dialogue with colleagues, practitioners and supervisors, the focus narrowed down to solely 'ethnic minority fathers,' encouraged by the general lack of research on this 'type' of father regarding home-school cooperation. There appeared to be a knowledge gap, which became even more pertinent, as I often, when explaining my topic of interest to teachers or other practitioners, met the wonder, "where are the 'ethnic' fathers?" –

these professionals experienced such fathers to be absent. This was a wonder that I also had – recorded from various child-professionals during my previous work as a social housing employee. In order to illuminate this ‘phenomenon of absence,’ I have tried my utmost to understand the fathers’ lifeworlds, as well as sought an open approach to understanding the dynamics, cultural dimensions and institutional logics of home-school cooperation at Rosendal School.

### **Introducing Vignette – Adnan and the Constraining Jobs**

The first time I met Adnan was in the Family Dinner Club in the community house of the social housing estate Elmehaven, where Adnan and his family lived. I knew Adnan’s daughter Naima from the Grade 7 class, which I followed as part of my fieldwork, and we all had dinner together. Adnan and his wife Faria were refugees from Bangladesh. At this dinner, I learned how life in Bangladesh had been much different. They had, for example, had another societal position than that they had achieved in Denmark. Faria had a university degree from Bangladesh, and Adnan had been involved and active in political work; now they were working as cleaners and pizzeria-owner. Adnan saw one of his greatest responsibilities as to be providing for his family. This need had become devastating, because their family was struggling to make ends meet; thus, Adnan’s income was crucial. In Elmehaven almost nineteen per cent of the residents lived below the Danish poverty line.

Adnan was in distress. The increasing competition in the area of his pizzeria had weakened his business, further aggravated by fact that the restaurant did not have the best placement. Thus, the profit was low, and the working hours high. Recently, Adnan had had to take an extra job as a cleaner, working sixty hours a week. He hoped to find a job in the public sector, with a steady, union-regulated income, and a thirty-seven-hours working week, equivalent to a full time job, with two days off. He felt tired.

Every time I met the family, the family appeared as a unit. Being together with his intimate family was the most important thing for Adnan. The youngest daughter, Ayah who attended fourth grade, was often hanging on Adnan’s arm, sometimes shyly hiding behind his leg. As a family, they were practicing Islam, and it meant a lot for Adnan and Faria that their two daughters were raised according to the life-philosophy of Islam, including among other things aspirations for developing greater compassion and humility. Both Faria and Naima

wore hijabs, covering their hair. Adnan had a modest, sometimes-introverted attitude emphasised by his low command of the Danish language.

Adnan did not have a close contact with the school; however, he saw the school as the most important institution regarding his children's future. Unfortunately, he explained, he did not have the time to either show up for the parent meeting or the parent-teacher conference that autumn, as he had to keep the pizzeria open – located in the opposite end of Copenhagen. Faria had attended the parent-teacher conference, yet attending the parent meeting was not possible since she was alone with her two daughters. Nonetheless, she always read the summary, she added. They both thought such school events were important and would have attended if they had had the time and opportunity. In Bangladesh, the school system had not demanded as much engagement and attention from parents, and Adnan felt ambiguously about these high demands. He thought it was good and important, but for him, at this point in his life, he could not meet the expectations of the school, adding how two years ago he had attended the meetings that took place in the mornings before going to work.

Steffen was the main teacher of Naima. He did not know Adnan, but he told me he knew the family was a “working-class family,” with what he thought to be rather “traditional gender roles,” and this was the reason that it was mainly the mother who showed up for school meetings. At the same time, he also thought of the home environment as stable, loving and caring. However, stemming from his best intentions, he saw one of his obligations as a teacher was to encourage Naima to break the so-called “negative social heritage,” in order to encourage Naima to get a better education and thus advance in the “class-hierarchy” of society. Yet, the concept of ‘breaking the negative social heritage’ tended to entangle with normative ideals on what a good life was. Thus, Steffen seemed, in different ways, to wish that Naima would shake loose of what he thought to be a working-class mentality and become more outspoken and *active*. This seemed connected to her being a so-called ‘headscarf-girl’ and his wish for her to break out of the assumed traditional gender roles for Muslims. His concern to make Naima break free showed in the parent-teacher conference during which he appealed to her to speak louder, be more outspoken and opinionated, straighten her back and talk and walk faster, and to be more active and “on” (*være mere på*). This confused her, but as Naima was put ‘on the spot,’ Faria was fairly overlooked during the conference. Naima had told Steffen that she wanted to become a doctor, and at some point return to Bangladesh, where she could “make a difference.” Steffen did not quite apprehend this; he did not understand why she wanted to return to Bangladesh, now that she had gotten the chance in Denmark.

Adnan's capacities and the skills he could offer as Naima's father remained unnoticed by the school. For example, Adnan's thorough knowledge about politics in Bangladesh was not considered a resource in the school context, and his favourite activity of watching Bollywood movies with his close family was not an activity that was recognised as a so-called "stimulation activity" in the eyes of the teachers. On the other hand, Steffen was concerned that Naima did not speak enough Danish at home, and he encouraged her to watch Danish news and read in Danish. Generally, due to a focus on learning specific academic skills, which largely was defined as skills measured by various tests in school, Adnan, and fathers like him, easily became redundant or of no help in the academic school-project; thus, their capacities were not converted into assets. Because of this and teachers' lack of knowledge about the parents, parents like Adnan and Faria could be classified as "resource-weak," and their home was not perceived as a so-called "stimulation home." Yet, for the prom night, having take-out with her Grade 7 class before the disco, Naima proudly brought pizza to her friends from her father's pizzeria.

Generally, Adnan felt the school had too many pupils in each class, and there was no time to go in-depth with each pupil, to "see" and understand each pupil. He was aware that the teacher thought Naima needed to be more outspoken, however the teachers ran too fast, he believed, leaving no time to concentrate on each pupil. Thus, it became an environment, where teachers overlooked certain pupils.

Although appearing absent from a teacher's perspective, Adnan was very concerned with his daughters' education. He thought his most important role regarding the school was to help and check up on Naima and Ayah's homework, and teach them to follow the teachers' guidelines and behave well in the school. In my interview with Adnan and Faria, Adnan described that he felt dependent on the teachers to do an extra effort for his daughters, because there were skills, such as a high command of the Danish language, which he did not possess. Faria felt the need for adding how they were "foreigners;" they could not read Danish that well, and the ways to solve math problems had been different in their country. She added how she from time to time felt that she could not live up to the great responsibility the teachers placed on the parents regarding the pupils' general academic development.

Adnan and Faria had one bad school experience to tell me: Once, a teacher and the educational leader, Dorte, blamed Naima for a serious bullying incidence in the school-class, and the 'proof' was a handwritten note they believed was the handwriting of Naima. According to Adnan and Faria, the teachers had ordered Faria around and talked to her in a rather imperious tone of voice. Even though Adnan and Faria had continuously denied that



the handwriting was Naima's, her teachers found Naima guilty. From their story, I got the impression that the parent of the bully-victim had possessed more of the skills needed to navigate successfully in the terrain of the school, and thus, the blame had ended with Adnan and Faria, leaving them with an excessive feeling of powerlessness. Despite this unpleasant experience, Adnan was generally grateful for Rosendal School. He praised the teachers' high academic and professional level, and how the Danish school encouraged pupils to think creatively and freely. He thought the Danish school system was better than in Bangladesh, where rich families hired private teachers to tutor their children at home after school. Thus, the school system in Bangladesh created greater educational inequality. He praised the Danish school system for its egalitarianism and the free educational system in general. In Bangladesh, lessons were based on sitting and writing down, or rote learning, whereas in Denmark, as an example, the pupils performed experiments in physics *themselves*.



# Chapter 1: Introduction

Adnan's story is one of many stories of school-fathers, which this dissertation aims to shed light on. Based on fieldwork in a Danish public school, Rosendal School, and various groups of migrant fathers, this dissertation explores the lifeworlds of fathers with a migrant background, and their experiences of the demands of the home-school cooperation and their encounters with teachers and pedagogues.<sup>2</sup> These fathers were engaged actors individually governing their own lives; they were complicit in their own fate and not simply insignificant and impotent creatures of circumstances (Jackson 2013,15). Yet, as we shall see, in addition to the fathers' own intentions for self-representation, ideas on childrearing and aspirations for fatherhood, there are complex forces at work, which had consequences for their fatherhood practices, their involvement in school and relation to their children. This dissertation aims at exploring these forces. Doing this it addresses the knowledge gap within school studies concerning migrant fathers and their experiences of and engagement with home-school cooperation.

Generally, studies about parents with a migrant background's relations to the school or home-school cooperation have focused on mothers (e.g. Larsen 2006; Matthiesen 2014; Timm and Bergthóra 2011); whereas fathers' perspectives on schooling, and that of childrearing in general, have been overlooked (see also Hoel 2016; Featherstone 2003; Gupta and Featherstone 2015). This tendency also exists in the Danish government's social integration projects, where the focus has predominantly been on refugee and immigrant mothers, and thus fathers appear to be forgotten or overseen as important caretakers of their children (see also Christensen, Larsen, and Jensen 2017; Seidenfaden 2011a; Frederiksen and Riemenschneider 2016)

Additionally, there is a tendency in the public debates to blame certain fathers with a migrant background – often referred to as so-called “non-western fathers,” for being absent and ignorant towards their children's upbringing (Harder 2012, DR/Ritzau 2018; Harder 2014; Omar 2012; Christensen 2013, Jakobsen 2012). In political rhetoric, as well as in integration-strategies, these fathers are urged to “get on the ball” (*komme på banen*) regarding

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<sup>2</sup> In Danish *pædagoger*, which are specially trained social educators mainly working with social aspects of schooling, the social well-being and development of children.

childrearing, framed as the solution to various social issues – a belief I also occasionally overheard from child-professionals during my fieldwork. There seems to be a discrepancy between the lack of focus on concrete involvement and inclusion of fathers with migrant backgrounds and, at the same time, accusations of being absent or ignorant. Importantly, we lack migrant fathers' experiences and point of view on these matters.

In this PhD dissertation, I aim at investigating these experiences and points of view situated in the context of school-home relations and the broader political context of Danish immigration and integration policies. This leads me to the following research objectives: *Based on an ethnographic study of migrant fathers' experiences of and relations to school professionals in Danish public schools, this PhD dissertation explores how current expectations of parents' school involvement and public images of Muslim masculinity and fatherhood practices influence migrant fathers' becomings as school-fathers.*

The study seeks to address these objectives based on fieldwork in three different settings: One public school in Copenhagen here named 'Rosendal School,' the nearby social housing estate 'Elmehaven,' and diverse so-called fathers' groups mostly placed in social housing estates and organised with relation to a community regeneration master plan initiative (*boligsocial helhedsplan*). In these different sites of fieldwork, different types of social identities and social becoming were at stake (Heidegger 1962; Johansen 2013, 21; Biehl and Locke 2010), and from these different places, I aim to shed light on (intensifying) home-school cooperation practices with the objective to inform how diverse fathers with a migrant background experienced and navigated such practices.

In this introduction, I will sketch out some of the main sites of which this dissertation is concerned. First, I will shortly introduce the phenomenon of home-school cooperation in today's Danish schools, and how it has intensified, placing increasing responsibility on parents. Following, I describe the context of being a migrant father in contemporary Denmark, and the incendiary political and public debates on migrants and how it affects my choice of terminology. Finally, I outline how I approach fatherhood analytically and describe the structure of the thesis.

## Home-School Cooperation

In the Danish society, with a comprehensive welfare state, childrearing is not only a matter of the parents' choices and conventions. Generally, children spend more and more time in

institutions, and various welfare professionals are motivated to intervene in the childrearing. Thus, the raising of children, to various degrees, takes place across the different spheres of home and institutions, requiring a dialogue between the parents and various pedagogues, teachers or other child-professionals (Bach, Kjær, and Dannesboe 2018; Dannesboe et al. 2018; Gilliam and Gulløv 2017).

Parents have to navigate this terrain and the sometimes ambiguous borderland between the school as a public institution and the intimate home sphere. Even though the welfare institutions are powerful, parents also interfere in the practices of the school. Yet, to do so successfully demands certain capacities and skills, which make this opportunity uneven for different kinds of parents (see e.g. Reay, Crozier, and James 2013; Crozier 2001). Yet, parents always have the choice to move their children to another public school or choose a private school for their child, which in the Danish context is not much more expensive than the cost free public school due to financial support of the state. Some of my interlocutors took this opportunity and placed their children in private schools, such as Muslim- or Arab private schools, “Danish independent schools” or other kinds of private schooling.<sup>3</sup> In this dissertation, formal home-school cooperation encompasses: biannual parent-meetings, to which all parents are invited and where the teacher informs the parents of plans for the upcoming half year; biannual parent-teacher conferences, where at least one parent was expected to attend; as well as the vast information flow from the intranet-platform, “Parent Intranet” (*forældreintra*). Parent Intranet is the public school online communication system, introduced in 2002. Today, this platform is used as the primary channel of communication between school and home. It is part of “School Intranet,” a communication system for teachers, pupils and parents. On the Parent Intranet, teachers would post various information and send private messages (see Akselvoll 2016a). Additionally, I also explore the more informal ‘casual’ aspects of home-school cooperation, such as volunteering breakfast arrangements, Christmas lunches, parent volunteering-groups, etc. As well as more conversations and everyday contact between the teachers and the parents regarding the child’s schooling and general well-being. In recent years, various scholars have pointed to how home-school cooperation and expectations towards parents’ involvement in schooling has intensified, and how, as a consequence, the home sphere has become a site for education and

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<sup>3</sup> In 2017/18, 542,534 pupils attended the ordinary public school, while 121,057 pupils attended private schools or private independent schools (*friskoler*) (Undervisningsministeriet 2019). Regarding pupils with Danish vs. migrant parents, the division between public and private schools are almost even with ten per cent vs. eleven per cent (Friskolerne 2019).

learning itself; the school has entered the family sphere, and has made home-based activities potential learning activities (Kryger 2015, Akselvoll 2016b, Bach 2016, Bach, Kjær, & Dannesboe 2018). Parents' involvement has largely been described by schools as a 'resource,' which has great potential in improving the school as well as the children's academic performances.

In 1974, home-school cooperation was formalised in a government act of the public schools, whereby the public school was required to cooperate with all parents. Scholars of educational research Karen Ida Dannesboe, Niels Kryger, Charlotte Palludan and Birte Ravn (2012) argue how the social practices of home-school cooperation over the years has taken the character of something "culturally given" (*kulturel selvfølgerigt*) (Dannesboe et al. 2012, 10) encompassing the dogmatic character of such practices as 'natural' and 'necessary,' and in which the parents are expected to find their position and role. Along these lines, it is often taken for granted by school professionals that home-school cooperation is for everyone's benefit. However, parents are rarely asked how it actually feels to participate in this cooperation, and especially fathers with migrant background have been an overlooked 'type of parent' here.

Danish law also reinforces parents' obligation to cooperate. More recently, in "Den nye folkeskolereform" from 2013 (hereafter The New School Reform), were parents again are termed as resources for the school:

Parents are a resource and must contribute to the school work. Therefore it is specified in the educational law that the school boards must include principles for collaboration between home and school and must include principles for parents' responsibilities in the collaboration (Agreement about professional improvement of the public school 2013, 16, my translation).

Scholars have likewise pointed to how, under processes of 'accountability' and 'responsibility of children's learning and development,' the success of the child is to a greater extent seen as equivalent to parents' abilities to guide, cultivate, stimulate and nurture their children (Ramaekers and Suissa 2012, Faircloth 2014, Kryger 2015). These intensifications can be seen as shaped through political and historical processes, which have been described as neo-liberal tendencies, in which the responsibility for children's learning and wellbeing to a higher extent is placed on the individual parents and seen as reflecting their abilities to support and stimulate their children (Akselvoll 2016b, 21). From the British context, sociologist Diane Reay points to how these neoliberal tendencies in national politics are intertwined in a

market-logic about economic optimisation, where parents are seen as *resources* in optimizing the economic growth, and part of a broader competition-state logic (Reay 2004, see also Bach 2016).

Scholars have also pointed to how especially immigrant- and refugee-parents in educational-political rhetoric on the 'responsible parent' are often problematised, and how such parents are often portrayed as passive and disinterested in their children's education (Matthiesen 2017, Timm and Bergthóra 2011). Similarly, Dannesboe et al. (2012) draw attention to how the Danish government in 2010 allocated fifty six million Danish kroner (approximately 7,5 million euro) to improve the collaboration between public school and so-called 'ethnic minority parents,' as this specific type of parent was thought to inadequately meet their responsibility as parents (Dannesboe et al. 2012, 9). Thus, within such intensified home-school cooperation and a greater focus on including parents, migrant parents have, from time to time, been problematised as not living up to these demands. As the ideal of the Danish public school is to provide a free and equal education system for all families, concerned with upholding pupils' well-being and generally equal opportunities, it appears how some practices of home-school cooperation result in the problematisation of certain parents. Additionally, scholars have found how intensified expectations towards parents regarding their children's schooling are not equally appreciated by all parents (see Akselvoll 2015; Palludan 2012). There is something at stake here concerning how to handle and live up to the extended responsibilities of being a school-parent, a matter of which this dissertation is concerned. In the following analyses, I will take a critical approach to the complex school-cooperation between child-professionals and fathers with migrant backgrounds, and explore how fathers experienced and came across the requirements of intensified cooperation with the school.

While this dissertation mainly aims at approaching such matters from the perspective of migrant fathers, the dissertation also aims to explore the phenomenon of home-school cooperation more broadly, and thus, the dissertation seeks to explore which dynamics within the school were causing the need for parents to take on more responsibility. I argue it is important to explore this phenomenon of intensified cooperation from various perspectives in order to better understand how some fathers could be experienced by the teachers as uninvolved, absent or even as "counter-players." In relation hereto, this dissertation draws forward certain, and sometimes-counterproductive, aspects of home-school cooperation to show how the efforts and struggles of school professionals in everyday life can be seen from

new perspectives, revealing aspects of the home-school cooperation that call for further reflections if we want a school with equal opportunities for all parents and pupils.

## The Construction of the ‘Non-Western Immigrant and Descendants’

The relations between parents and teachers analysed in this dissertation took place at a time when political tensions concerning migration has intensified. Thus, in order to better understand migrant fathers’ experiences of home-school cooperation, it is important to not forget the realities in which we are all entangled today, and in which the becoming of our characters unfold (Biehl and Locke 2017, 4). Major societal changes such as financial changes, increasing inequality, globalisation, refugee crises and political tensions towards migration, to only mention a few, were realities also affecting schools during my fieldwork, as well as encounters and intersubjective dynamics between teachers and migrant fathers.

The political debates on migrants in Denmark have been an ongoing topic of discussion since the first so-called “guest workers” came to Denmark in the late 1960s (Dindler and Olsen 1988, Pedersen and Selmer 1991). Thus, to understand better the social processes of migrant fathers’ becomings, it is important to investigate a chain of historical and political events that have caused certain political constructions of rationalities, heated debates and political disputes between political actors on the issues of integration, nationality, democracy, ‘Danishness’, etc. Correspondingly, it is important to explore how citizens with a migrant background have been categorised and othered throughout Danish politics and media-rhetoric in the last decades (Johansen 2013, 48-50).

In such heated political debates, the categories used to describe immigrants and refugees in Denmark are many, often referring to the “ethnic other.” As such, people with “another ethnic background,” (*anden etnisk baggrund*), “non-ethnic Danes” (*ikke etnisk dansk*) or “ethnic minorities” (*etniske minoriteter*) are all classifications constructed in opposition to “ethnic Danes.” Such terms are generally referring to immigrants and refugees from the Global South, the so-called traditional sending immigration countries of mainly Turkey, Pakistan, Former Yugoslavia, and Morocco (Pedersen and Selmer 1991, 33). Whereas the vast majority of refugees have originated from Afghanistan, Ex-Yugoslavia, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Jordan, and Somalia, or are stateless Palestinians (see Als Research 2011, 19–20). Meanwhile, the greatest immigrant country in Denmark in 2017 was Poland, and other



European countries, such as Germany, Norway, and Rumania (Danmarks Statistik 2017). However, such immigrants from Europe are habitually not included in the ethnic othering categories. There appears to be a culturally constructed division between immigrants from the Global North and South.

In recent years, the tendency of Danish media and political rhetoric to use the terms ‘immigrant’ or ‘refugee’ to describe people from the Global South, has been strengthened, or underlined, with the category of “non-western immigrants and refugees and their descendants.” This category has moved from statistical research into the Danish media, as well as political debates and law. Today, the term is frequently used in newspapers, such as in the headline: “Non-western descendants perform badly in school” (Wandrup 2017, my translation). The illustration accompanying this article is a picture of a girl wearing a presumably Muslim headscarf reading a book at a school-desk. The picture exemplifies a constant entanglement between the term ‘non-western background’ and Islam. Even though the countries within the category of ‘non-western countries’ are very diverse regarding religion, the category “non-western”<sup>4</sup> is mostly constructed as connected to countries with a majority of Muslims. According to Professor of Comparative Welfare Studies, Christian Albrect Larsen, the category of “non-western” is rather arbitrary: “The best, I can say about it [the category], is that it is a nicer category than Muslim/non-Muslim and white/non-white. As such, it has a more neutral sound to it...” (Spillemoose 2017, my translation).

In a recently adopted bill in the Danish parliament concerning politically defined ghettos, it is stated: “The Danish parliament notes with concern that today there are areas in Denmark where the proportion of immigrants and descendants from non-western countries is over fifty per cent. It is the Parliament’s view that Danes should not be minorities in residential areas in Denmark” (Spillemoose 2017). This assessment exemplifies how the constructed category of ‘non-western’ functions to differentiate and problematise a certain type of citizen, and how this citizen (possibly descendants of migrants) are described as being something else than Danish. In such ways, the problematisation of the ‘non-western immigrant or refugee’ has been reinforced in recent politics, intensified by neo-nationalist streams in Denmark as well as throughout Europe, and also entangled in the recent refugee-crises caused by the Syrian Civil war and general mass-migration. In the ethnographic

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Western countries’ include all twenty eight European Union countries, including Andorra, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Norway, San Marino, Switzerland, Vatican City, Canada, USA, Australia and New Zealand. ‘Non-Western countries’ include “all the other countries” (Danmarks Statistik 2017).

material of this project, such intensities appear to especially influence the lives of Muslim, migrant fathers, and the construction of the ‘non-western person’ may be argued to be embedded in certain political and historical processes of Islamophobia with strands back to Orientalism. Here the West is constituted as ‘the civilised nations’ in opposition to ‘the rest,’ the ‘non-west’ (see e.g. Said 1986; Inhorn 2012, Gilliam 2018, Andreasen 2007, Christensen et al. 2017), an argument which I will further unfold in the coming analysis.

Due to the processes mentioned above, this PhD dissertation is especially concerned with understanding the perspectives, positions, and life-worlds (Jackson 1996, 14-15) of migrant fathers of these so-called traditional immigration and refugee countries. For this reason, I have paid less attention to the experiences of migrant fathers from the Global North. Conversely, migrant fathers from either the Global North or South are classifications, which encompass an *extremely* heterogeneous ‘collection of men,’ in terms of origin, cultural and national background, educational capacities, language, upbringing, and so on. In addition, migrant fathers can be both immigrants and refugees, a difference that could have a great impact on the fathers’ lives, as the following analysis will illuminate. Thus, the classification that I have chosen here of ‘migrant father’ is highly complex. Being a ‘migrant’ in this thesis is a descriptive classification, “having moved across international borders away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of the person’s legal status” (IMO 2019), yet some fathers came as children and had attended Danish school. As the analysis unfolds, I attempt to embrace this complexity and diversity by describing the specific interlocutor’s characteristics and their life-circumstances in more detail via the empirical examples, and by such aim to show both differences and potential similarities, as for example condensations of certain life-circumstances within this broad classification.

## The ‘Ethnic Other’ Man and Father

Generally, migrants are highly essentialised in political and media rhetoric, yet within these constructions, essentialised forms of gender and ethnicity intersect. As such, the masculinity of ‘the ethnic other’ is often described as culturally defined by gender-traditions, which works as behaviour-explanatory (see also Hoel 2016, 6; Eriksen 1994, 121). In this way, men with ‘another ethnicity than Danish,’ appears to describe how these men have another language, culture and/or religion than ‘the Danes,’ which influence their gender identity (see Hoel 2016, Walle 2004). Such an ‘ethnic other essentialism’ is hiding the great diversity of gender-

practices and does not correspond with the great diversity of how fathers with diverse migrant backgrounds live their lives. One example of such a rhetoric is the newly launched "*Rettighedskampagne*" ("Rights Campaign") run by the Minister of Equality Eva Kjer Hansen. In an interview with a Danish newspaper, Hansen explains the Rights Campaign as concerning "immigrants in Denmark," a category she uses interchangeably with "Muslims" and "ethnic minorities." Hansen emphasises how "immigrant women" have the right to decide regarding their own money, the right to an education, and the right to divorce (Graversen 2018). Regretfully, she does not see much progress regarding the submission of Muslim women compared to her first period as Minister of Equality fourteen years ago (ibid.). Gender inequality appears as a certain 'ethnic problem,' solved by teaching essentially Muslim women their right of Danish gender-equality (ibid.). The Rights Campaign is launched together with the Ministry of Immigration and Integration, where the Minister, Inger Støjberg, pronounced on the website: "It is completely unacceptable in a democratic society as the Danish that there are ethnic-communities, where Danish values and freedoms are not in compliance, where middle-age values are dominant, and where women are suppressed and subjected to social control" (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet 2018b, my translation). I argue that the framing of the campaign makes the 'Muslim, immigrant man' stand out as an 'absent present figure.' This type of man is not directly mentioned, yet figures as a suppressor of both women and children since these women need to be informed about their freedom to choose themselves (see also Charsley and Liversage 2015, Seidenfaden 2011a). Nevertheless, the 'Muslim man' or the 'immigrant man' as categories refer to a collection of men so diverse that it, at all times, is malpractice to apply any form of general masculinity-practice hereto (Reinicke 2006, see also Inhorn 2012). In the Norwegian context, anthropologist Thomas Walle points to how public pictures of Muslim immigrant and refugee men must be understood in light of the 'Norwegian man,' as a majority-Norwegian self-understanding of an 'exceptional community,' with an extensive equality of gender (Walle 2004). Similarly, in the interview mentioned above, the Minister of Equality pictures a portrait of Danish gender equality as an essential feature in being 'Danish,' something that Muslim, immigrant men have failed to accustom to. Following Walle, a type of 'immigrant man' is constructed here as the antithesis of the modern Danish, or Scandinavian man, practicing gender equality. This 'type of man' appears to practice an obsolescent, patriarchal and old-fashioned masculinity, which aids in constructing an antithesis to the 'right masculinity' and largely constructing the Muslim, immigrant man as the problem, and thus women and children as victims (Hoel 2016, 8; see also Charsley and Liversage 2015, 2-3;

Christensen et al. 2017; Jaffe-Walter 2016). It can be argued that such portrayals of a suppressing 'Muslim' or 'ethnic other' man is working to (re)produce hierarchical categorisations of 'them' and 'us,' and take part in a discursive marginalisation and suppression of mainly Muslim, migrant men and their masculinity (see also Connell 2012). This is a tendency similar to what anthropologist Marcia Inhorn has described, from the American context, as "neo-Orientalist assumptions" (Inhorn 2012, 300) in western popular culture, where the West is understood as civilised and modern, whereas Middle Eastern societies are essentialised as static, underdeveloped and reactionary. Within such assumptions, the 'Middle Eastern man' is portrayed as a strong patriarch, dangerous and untrustworthy (ibid. 300).

Migrant fathers' subjective experiences often disappear in the Danish public debate, where complexity is narrowed down by social categories concerning the 'ethnic other.' Gregory Bateson (1990) described the discrepancy between social categories and diversity as 'categorical errors.' A categorical error appears when two different levels of the language – the communication and meta-communication-levels – are confused, where the meta-communication differs from communication (the message), being a 'message about the message' (Bateson 1990, 39). When the communication and the meta-communication are mixed, the levels are displaced: "The cat is black, ergo all cats are black" easily reveals such categorical error (Bateson 2005, 282-283). Yet, when the Minister in the newspaper article above points towards a few isolated cases of suppressing Muslim, immigrant men (described in an earlier article from the newspaper) as a general 'ethnic problem' and motivation for the Rights Campaign, the categorical error goes unnoticed. Thus, media and political rhetoric may display isolated cases to the general category of a 'type of migrant man.' It might be argued that such categorical errors happen in somewhat unproblematic ways, because the category of 'immigrant/ethnic other/Muslim men' is, in many contexts, a socially accepted category of 'the other,' open for ongoing constructions and negotiations (see also Salazar 2013, Johansen 2013, 50). I will further unfold this discussion in Chapter Ten. For now, I wish to draw the reader's attention to the conceptual framework of 'the ethnic other' as part of a dominant political rhetoric; a discursive force, which continuously entangled in the interlocutors' lived lives.

With the awareness of the processes described above, the aim of this dissertation is to avoid the closure of pre-constructed dominant categories, while at the same time, keep the analysis open for the deployment of categories important to the interlocutors' experiences. The lived life of the interlocutors, their imagination, aspirations, and everyday struggles for

belonging exceeded the categories informing experimental and statistical approaches; they demanded in-depth listening, and a readiness to make bold analytical swerves (Biehl and Locke 2017). Subsequently, the following analysis engaged with becomings thus takes on conceptual force by building multidimensional figures of thought from the stories and trajectories of the migrant fathers I engaged with in the field (ibid, 44).

## Contesting Ethnicity

As seen in the cases described above, 'ethnicity' is an often-used concept in the Danish context to describe immigrants, refugees, as well as their descendants as the 'ethnic other' in opposition to 'the Danes.' Similarly, the term 'ethnic minority men' or 'ethnic minority fathers' has been used in much academic research in the Danish context (Liversage and Christensen 2017, Jensen 2010), as well as in Scandinavia more broadly (see e.g. Hoel 2016).

I have chosen not to use this research-category for a variety of reasons. Professor of Cultural Studies Ien Ang (1993) calls for reflections on the habitual use of 'ethnicity' in relation to migrations and diversity, pointing to how, after many generations of immigration history, migrants and their descendants are no longer containable within *an* ethnic community, with an *actual belonging* to another geographically placed community and culture (Ang 2002, 1993; see also Abu-Lughod 1991). 'Ethnicity' habitually refers to a community that shares assumptions about shared common attributes to do with cultural practices and shared history. Thus, religion, language, and territory belonging are all included in the term 'ethnicity' (Phoenix 2001, 127-28). Describing interlocutors by an assumed different ethnicity may diminish their belonging to the county they inhabit, as well as potentially working to initiate an otherness, when placed in opposition to the 'ethnic Dane.' I am likewise inspired by psychologist and educational researcher Ann Phoenix (2001), who argues for drawing attention to *processes of minoritisation*, instead of placing interlocutors in a static category of being a (ethnic) minority, with the danger of objectifying these specific interlocutors. Similarly, fathers' experiences of being minoritised appeared to change with time, space and place.

My approach to 'ethnicity' is inspired by Husserl's notion of epoché: as a manoeuvre, where the researcher restrains from following the natural inclinations, or natural attitude, of a certain ontological position. Epoché is not about neglecting or ignoring the reality, "...but to suspend and neutralise a certain dogmatic approach to the world, in order to be able to focus more specifically and directly on the phenomenon given, – on the objects as

they appear” (Zahavi 1997, 58, my translation). Thus, ‘ethnicity’ is approached as an emic term and its appearance and meanings in social relations is examined (see Stoller 2009, 714).

Based on these reflections, I have chosen to use the term ‘fathers with a migrant background’ (see also Johansen and Jensen 2017). I do not argue that this term can solve problems of categorical errors, as our use of language will always fall into these oversimplifying generalisations. Nevertheless, if we change categories, we might see new things, and discover new variations. Besides, by using the term ‘migrant,’ I underline the generational differences, which I found to be influential for feelings regarding belonging and national identity. Such generational differences may become an underexposed factor, due to the aforementioned broader categories, blind for generational differences, as it is unclear how many generations after the migration took place can still be considered as a so-called ‘ethnic minority.’ When I use ‘migrant,’ it only refers to someone who has himself or herself migrated.

Anne Hoel, who studied what she terms ‘minority-ethnic fathers’ in Norway, has as one of her main conclusions the need for a theory-frame, which can encompass the great diversity between the fathers within such a broad category of “minority-ethnic” (Hoel 2016, 6). Such categories itself call for categorical answers, whereas Hoel met very different fathers with different life circumstances, backgrounds, from different generations and with different aspirations for fatherhood (ibid, see also Reinicke 2006). Inspired by Hoel’s assessments, and drawing on the concept of experience within phenomenologically informed anthropology, the study aims at encompassing how all individual fathers had their own specific migration history, with roots back to very different geographical areas, facing different life circumstances: each father had his own *horizon of experiences* (Duranti 2010; Moran 2011).

### *The Migration Background of the Main Interlocutors*

The migrant fathers’ different horizons of experience all encompass how they, at some point in their lives, had moved from one part of the world to Denmark, where they have sought a better life. To gain a little insight into some of these experiences, the following section shortly describes the migration background of the main fathers of this study.

The fast growth of industry in the late 1960s made the Danish government invite Turkish workers to take employment in Denmark, and the first guest workers arrived in 1967 (Pedersen and Selmer 1991, 23). The Danish government offered work in unskilled, low-wage jobs in labour-intensive, often precarious and unregulated manufacturing industries. This

invitation only lasted a few years, as the government in 1973, like most other EC countries, closed the borders for further immigration, and hereafter only wanted to receive the conventional refugees imposed by the United Nations Convention on Refugees or quota refugees (ibid. 26). As the oil crises took effect in the 1970s, the mainly Turkish, but also Pakistani, Moroccan and Yugoslavian, guest workers were expected by the Danish government to leave. However, despite that unemployment increased, many decided to stay and applied for family reunification, and their family thus immigrated to Denmark thereafter. After 1980, refugees came to Denmark on a large scale, due to conflicts mainly in the Global South. Central conflicts that caused these flights include the Iraq-Iran war (1980-88) and the Israeli-Palestinian war, where Palestinians were automatically granted asylum until 1989. In 1988, the civil war broke out in Somalia, where some of the interlocutors in this study had fled. Furthermore, many Kurdish refugees came to Denmark due to the war in Iraq in 1990-91, as well as many ex-Yugoslavians fled during the 1990s due to the civil war in the former ex-Yugoslavia. In 1999, the Danish government enacted the 'Integration Act' as the first intensified political focus on the notion of 'culture.' Thereafter, numerous regulations and Acts have been implemented to create successful integration (Johansen 2013, 53-56; Pedersen and Rytter 2011). Since the 1990s, many other migrants and refugee-groups have sought a life in Denmark, such as from Syria.

Thinking with the concept of 'horizon of experience,' most of the pupils with one or both parents having a migrant background I met at Rosendal School were born in Denmark. Among these pupils, some were struggling to linguistically belong to the category of 'Danish.' In line with this, some parents with migrant backgrounds told me how their children had started saying they were Danish too (see also Jørgensen 2017). This might point to emerging possibilities for new identity formations among new generations, as previous studies have found that so-called 'ethnic-minority children and youth' tend to refrain from identifying themselves as Danes (Gilliam 2009, 239; Gitz-Johansen 2006, Jensen 2010). For the dissertation to reflect these emerging identity-formations, I needed a terminology, which could encompass such identity-formations and struggles for belonging. When discussing the terminology with one of my younger interlocutors, Amjad (pp. 228),<sup>5</sup> he said, "I feel like I am a Dane with Iraqi roots," and then suggested that I use this description for 'someone like him.' Due to this suggestion, I describe the pupils as Danish and add their parents migration

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<sup>5</sup> This page number refers to more information about the specific interlocutor.

links to other places in the world, keeping in mind the links to these other localities were very different in terms of significance and materiality. Correspondingly, a motivation has been to find a terminology, which is somewhat complexity increasing, rather than decreasing, to underline the diversity in perceptions and feelings of belonging, and thus an analytic point by itself.

## On Becoming

To study how expectations of intensified school involvement in public schools affected how migrant fathers experience their social becoming as school-fathers, I take as a starting point the father's specific socio-cultural lifeworlds, and look at how these intersect with larger historical, political, social and economic processes (Desjarlais and Throop 2011, 90; Ram and Houston 2015, Good 2012). As an example, I take account of the intensities of responsibilities placed on school-parents by seeing it as a line of force, which, among other forces, influences the terrain of the school, where the interlocutors' experiences took place (Desjarlais 1996, 70). I explore how different fathers experience and negotiate encounters with teachers in this terrain, and how various forces affect the intersubjective dynamics between fathers and professionals, with an objective to emphasise the personal, subjective, emotional and existential parts of being and becoming a father (Biehl and Locke 2017).

I approach the social position as father from an analytic and theoretical perspective, where subjects are never fully constituted – they are always in a state of becoming (Aitken 2009, 232; Biehl and Locke 2017, 7-8). Thus, fathers became fathers, when their first child was born, yet I approach the social condition of being a father as an ongoing process, negotiated in encounters with significant others. Thus, the term 'becoming,' reflects how social identities, as well as the social world is an ongoing process and how identities are shaped and reshaped as people navigate the landscapes (Ingold 2018) or terrains (Desjarlais 1996) they meet while navigating life, in order to reach the desired future; terrains, which are never fully the same.

As argued by social geographer Stuart C. Aitken (2009), some social spaces are especially significant "coming communities" for fathers (231-232), as certain communities are exclusively occupied with negotiating expectations towards parent-roles. Inspired by Aitken, I aim to, in dialogue with the fathers' narratives, life stories and aspirations for fathering, approach the school-site as a coming community, which influenced fathers' becoming as fathers. Thus, I approach meetings at the school as having a special influence on how fathers



experienced themselves in the role 'as a father.' As this dissertation is especially concerned with schooling, I have chosen to use the term of 'school-father,' to point to this specific facet of fathering, while acknowledging how this part is entwined with becoming a father in a broader understanding. With the focus on fathers' becomings, Aitken argues for framing fatherhood as an ongoing process, with new practices and new potentialities, which are in constant conversation with father's individual aspirations for fathering and, importantly, their own childhood experiences; as men mainly know how to practice fatherhood from their own fathers (Aitken 2009, 11-13).

The moments, stories and observations of fathers' encounters with teachers are only incomplete views of subjects and lifeworlds in the processes of becoming. Taken together, these encounters make up an "ethnographic sensorium" (Biehl and Locke 2017, 3): a multifaceted and affective point of contact with worlds of inequality, political and historical intensities, fatherly aspirations, trust and suspicion, while also harbouring the potential for things to be otherwise (ibid, 3). Attuned to the "mutual constitution of entangled agencies" (ibid, 5) and the unstable nature and plasticity of all social terrains and subjectivities, the "Anthropology of Becoming" (ibid, 7-9), which this study is inspired by, acknowledges how power and knowledge form bodies, identities, and meanings, and how inequalities disfigure living. Still, this approach rejects reducing people to the workings of such forces of, for example, greater political regulations, discourses or child-professional interventions. Consequently, the intersubjective encounters between fathers and school professionals are sites where ideas and ideals on parental-roles are entangled, contested and countered. Such 'meshwork of entanglement' (Ingold 2010, 2015) become strands of fathers' experience-horizon, and thus something they carried with them towards the future. Whatever the outcome of such encounters, school professionals' guidance and interventions affect the becomings of fathers, and certainly a school-father.

Overall, the dissertation has three parts. The **first part** is placing the study within related research fields, unfolding the theoretical underpinnings for the study, and presenting methodological reflections. The objective of the **second part** is to illuminate the terrain of the home-school cooperation, and analyse how certain forces and institutional-logics, which were constitutive of this terrain, affected migrant fathers and their becoming as school-fathers. This part is mainly based on five months of participant-observation at Rosendal School, yet I also contest these home-school cooperation practices by perspectives gained from fathers in fathers' groups. In the last and **third part**, I look deeper into experiences of fathers with a

migrant background mainly based on fathers' narratives on their encounters with child-professionals. Some of these fathers had experienced school- or welfare professionals (Johansen 2017) to mistrust their capacities of being a caring father, which I analyse as a social phenomenon of a certain "mistrusted masculinity" (see also Jørgensen 2017). This part is largely based on data from my visits and interviews with migrant fathers of the fathers' groups.

By narrowing the lens towards a certain social phenomenon within the broader field of home-school cooperation, I aim to avoid the pitfall of making mistrust and negative interaction processes overshadow the general complexity of home-school cooperation analysed in Part II. The ethnographic material of this study is complex, and does not tell an unequivocal and clear-cut story of fathers with a migrant background and home-school cooperation. Experiences of home-school relations were manifold. This in itself questions potentially assumed similarities within the broad classification of 'fathers with a migrant background' (see also Reinicke 2006).

**Part I – Theoretical and  
Methodological  
Underpinnings**

## Introduction to Part I

The following three chapters aim at relating the study to related research-fields, providing a theoretical fundament for the coming analyses as well as methodological reflections related to the fieldwork.

Chapter Two provides a state of the art of relevant research fields including, masculinity, fatherhood, critical race/ethnicity-studies as well as research on home-school cooperation, with an objective to elucidate how this study is placed in relation to these established studies. In Chapter Three, I depict the phenomenologically inspired approach for the coming analyses. In Chapter Four, I discuss the methodological reflections and conditions regarding the production of the ethnographic data, and how the processes of obtaining access and thereto-related possible research-positions provided important data for the analyses. Since obtaining access was analytically relevant, the analysis outset in the methodological chapter.

## Chapter 2: State of the Art

### Masculinities- and Fatherhood-Studies

Matthew C. Gutmann defines masculinity as “men as men” (Gutmann 1996) whereas fatherhood can be termed as “men as fathers” (Jørgensen 2017). Thus, being a father is related to ways of being a man within society, which makes it relevant to reflect on masculinity in relation to studying fatherhood. As stated by Raewyn. W. Connell (2012 [1995]) in her famous book *Masculinities*, when studying masculinity the idea of plurality is central for understanding the variations within ways of being a man.

Connell has developed the only social constructivist analytical frame specifically for studying masculinities, providing the key concepts of ‘hegemonic’ and ‘marginalised masculinity’ (Inhorn 2012, 42, Hoel 2016, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). By drawing from feminist theory, Marxist sociology, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, and a theory of class-based domination, Connell wished to bring together the lived realities of inequality among men with men’s general group-dominance over women (Inhorn 2012, 42). Connell defines marginalised masculinity as constructed in contrast to the hegemonic, ‘correct’, superior and dominant masculinity. Hence, the marginalised masculinity is related to the authorisation of the hegemonic, dominant group and premises an internal hierarchy between masculinities (Connell 2012, 81). Connell’s theory was also ground-breaking, as it suggests that men do not per se possess the dominating position over women, as feminist scholars had earlier argued (Friis 2014).

In Connell’s studies of masculinities in America, she argues how the Afro-American working-class masculinity is different from the white American middle-class masculinity. The hegemonic white masculinity sustains the institutional oppression and physical distress that has framed the making of masculinities in black communities (ibid, 80). Hegemonic masculinity is continuously shaped and reshaped through political discourses and daily practices, and it cannot be isolated from its institutional contexts, such as the labour market, the family and the state. As an aspect of institutions and drawing on Marxist legacy, Connell’s masculinity types are linked to the exercise of power, division of labour and objects of desire (Inhorn 2012, 43). Connell’s theory has been criticised for focusing too much on structural power, with the danger of creating a dualistic and overly fixed picture of

masculinity as either hegemonic or marginalised (Inhorn 2012, Hoel 2016). While variations within marginalised masculinities is acknowledged within the theory, it still works to maintain and reproduce e.g. 'black' and 'working-class' as features of marginalised and submissive positions in relation to the hegemonic, normative masculinity, with a danger for ignoring variations within different groups (Walle 2004; Inhorn 2012; Hoel, 2016, 26; Elliott 2016). Returning to the marginalisation of the 'non-western-man' in the political rhetoric described in the introduction, Connell's theory illuminates such processes, by pointing to how the 'Danish man practicing gender equality' figures as an aspect of a hegemonic masculinity. Such (hegemonic) political discourses and hereto related constructions of 'the other' are influential in migrant men's lives, yet the lived lives of these men never fully aligns with such categories as 'a marginalised masculinity' (see also Geertz 1973). To embrace and analyse the complexities of the ethnographic data, there is a need for an understanding of masculinities with the possibility of transformation and resistance (Inhorn 2012).

Inhorn argues that Connell's theory falls short, when applied to ethnographic material: "Actual men's performance of gender is constantly in flux and may change radically as their social and physical circumstances change" (ibid, 45). She argues for perceiving ways of being a man as a social process that changes over a life course. Inhorn places emphasis on resistance and social change, which fits the ethnographic material of this study, as I faced fathers' alertness and opposition against being othered or marginalised e.g., via the negative picture of an assumed specific type of 'foreign Muslim masculinity' (see also Jørgensen 2017). To grasp and better understand the unpredictability and dynamism of the empirical material, along with the diverse masculinity-practices of the fathers involved, I lean towards Inhorn's notion of "emergent masculinities" (Inhorn 2012, 300). This is a concept produced to encompass the emergence of new masculinities of Middle Eastern men in present times; a term that attempts to capture all that is new and transformative in men's embodied personhood, also affected by influences and life circumstances beyond men's individual control (ibid, 300). I use this concept in relation to theoretical perspectives on human becoming (Aitken 2009; Ingold 2009; 2015; Jackson, 2013; Löfgren 2014, Biehl and Locke, 2010; 2017; Sørensen 2015).

## *Intersectionality and Gender Studies*

A way to understand the complexity of masculinities is through an intersectionality approach. The intersectionality approach originates from America; however, within the last decade it has been increasingly used in Danish and Scandinavian gender-studies research (Larsen 2006, Christensen, Larsen and Jensen 2017; Jensen 2010; Hoel 2016; Charsley and Liversage 2015; Christensen and Siim 2010).

Intersectionality comes from the word 'intersection' and points to where different (major) social categories meet and intersect with each other. Lawyer and woman's right activist Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the concept in the late 1980s as a part of the American black feminist movement with the objective to show how gender differences in representations of Afro-American citizens were overseen by the overreaching category of 'black,' which at that time often meant 'black men.' As such, intersectionality was about showing the, so to speak, 'double marginalisation' of a black woman. The core of intersectional feminism is that the identity and oppression of women cannot be understood simply through gender alone; we have to look at how race, gender, and class intersect to understand women's lives. As the primary social categories at stake in intersectional analysis are gender, race and class, other social categories have been added into intersectional analysis, such as sexuality, ability, religion, citizenship, 'ethnicity' etc. (Singh 2015, 659; Collins 2016, 2).

The intersectionality approach has in recent years moved into studies of oppression of so-called 'ethnic minority men' in a Scandinavian context (Charsley and Liversage 2015, Hoel 2016, Christensen et al. 2017). Applying this approach to men and masculinities in Denmark, intersectionality helps us understand how certain men experience oppression due to classed positions, gender and race, and depending on such characteristics or life-circumstances are placed in certain oppressed positions, which differ from the oppression of men with other characteristics (Liversage 2015, Jensen 2010, Christensen et al. 2017).

The intersectionality approach has been a unique tool for identifying and discussing the complexity of oppression by providing a vocabulary for discussing different types of oppression, which previously were difficult to articulate. Yet, it runs into some limitations, as I will discuss in the following sections. Political scientist Jakeed Singh argues that the intersectionality approach cannot stand alone, if we want to understand the *agency* of our interlocutors. By taking a starting point of the agency of religious women, Singh argues how religious agency has been absent within discussions of intersectionality. Studying religious

women's agency (as well as men's) exposes an ambiguity at the heart of intersectionality studies between identities, oppression and what he terms "its reliance on a negatively defined consensus on anti-oppression"(Singh 2015, 657). Women can *choose* what other feminist scholars have seen as 'traditional-oppressing religious practices' as these women are agents of their own lives, thus radically refusing these agents to be constituted by oppression alone (Singh 2015, 661). He argues that only certain aspects of identity and difference matter in the intersectionality framework, insofar as they pertain to being oppressed and seen as such, which might then limit our full understanding of women's (and men's) lives and agency (ibid, 669). Similarly, sociologist Boris Nieswand finds that the metaphor of intersection suggests a "bird's eye perspective on society" (Nieswand 2017, 1718), from which the crossings of major dimensions of difference can be observed. This perspective employs an imaginary notion of a society as a structure of crosscutting dimensions of inequality. Different from a merely holistic, macroscopic and structural view of society, Nieswand suggests an approach that sees society as a decentred and dynamic figuration of agents, situations and categories (ibid.). In line with this, social scientist Nanna Brink Larsen (2006) notices: "How can an orientation towards – relatively structuring – social inequality relations maintain, if we at the same time wants to question the cohesion of the categories and their presumed stable relation to the social reality?" (ibid, 66, my translation). She argues that these social categories seem to be placed in a rather stable 'inequality hierarchy,' where one risks overlooking the complexities in power relations within local contexts – for example, the shifting contextuality of such hierarchies and potentially the assets of the local community.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, sociologists H. Choo and M. Feree (2010) argue that by starting out from rather stable categories, we fail to grasp the changeableness in analyses (Choo and Feree 2010). They suggest a process-centred approach within the broader frame of intersectionality, by looking towards racialisation, rather than 'race,' economic exploitation rather than class, and gendering performances rather than 'gender' (ibid. 134).

Inspired by these assessments, this Ph.D. project follows the importance of approaching the oppression of women and men's lives with an understanding of the way intersecting axes of difference and oppression co-constitute one another and therefore cannot be studied in isolation. Concurrently, I aim to take into consideration both socio-economic life circumstances, educational capacities, gender, age, religion and many other life

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<sup>6</sup> How the tricky relation between categories – structure vs. agency – lies in the heart of intersectionality.



circumstances within interlocutors' lives. Yet, the ambition is to take an explorative and 'bottom-up' approach towards oppression in everyday life, which then later may be condensed into (three) major categories of race, class and gender. Taking an explorative approach, I ask if these three categories are always the most central social categories at stake for sharpening our understanding of the interlocutors' experience?

Likewise, we might ask what constitutes these 'bird's eye categories' of class, gender, and race? Additionally, how may this diverge from interlocutors' experiences? Especially the category of 'race' is interesting here, since 'race' has in most intersectionality studies in Scandinavia been replaced with the category of 'ethnicity' (see e.g. Charsley and Liversage 2015, Christensen et al. 2017). This change of category has been criticised by scholars of critical race studies for blurring the core of the black activist movement, which is the oppression through racialisation of skin colour (see Collins and Bilge 2016, 25-30). These scholars have problematised how 'ethnicity' habitually replaces 'race' as a central category in Danish intersectionality-analyses. Hence, suppression is entangled in /or explained by ethnic-related factors (such as a different culture, religion, language etc.), which makes the discussion of racism and processes of racialisation of physical characteristics fail to appear (Osei-Kofi et al. 2018, see also Andreassen and Ahmed-Andresen 2014). These scholars aim at exposing the habitually "colour-blindness" (Hervik 2015) of Danish discourses around inequality and discrimination, as I will return to later in this chapter.

The notion of "gendered subjectivity" (Chodorow 1999, 71) can be informative when contesting the meaning of social categories of intersectionality analyses, and how such meaning changes by person and contexts. Following, sociologist Nancy Chodorow (1999), we cannot fully capture the meaning that gender has for the subject if we do not consider individual personal emotions and meaning, what she terms the gendered subjectivity. Similarly, social categories such as gender, race, class etc., which may be situated in identical ways in social theories, 'contain' very different subjective experiences. According to Chodorow, gendered experiences are both experiences of fatherhood and motherhood as cultural symbols, intimate personal experiences during one's upbringing, as well as constructed by the emotional reactions to being excluded or included in communities; to the personal meaning of the infinite number of encounters that helped to shape one's personal sense of what whiteness, femininity, masculinity and so on means (ibid, 74). In accordance, sociologist Fatima Mernissi (1994) illuminates how gender conveys the subjective emotional and sensual experience of a specifically gendered culture: the smells of certain types of food, feeling of make-up, smells of perfumes, fabrics, looks etc. Gender is not simply internalised.

In the autobiography of Mernessi's childhood in Morocco, the young Mernissi and her boy cousin ponder upon each little step in gender socialisation. Showing how each value is charged, conflictual, and elaborated on, in individual and collective stories and plays, she explores how the emotional charge constitutes the cultural meanings of gender and keeps them alive for all the participants (Mernissi 1994; see also Chodorow 1999, 75). Subsequently, I take upon a similar explorative approach to subjective experiences of gender and social categories. I aim to look for social processes forming the interlocutors' gendered subjectivity, largely by detecting subjective animations to gender identity in fathers' narratives.

### *Anthropological Perspectives of Fatherhood*

The role of fathers as a separate site of research is limited within the field of anthropology, although anthropologists have started to focus more on this role (Inhorn, Chavkin, and José-Alberto 2015, Ingvarsdóttir 2014). A central anthropological contribution in understanding parental roles is the argument of the cultural construction of what appears as 'natural facts.' Marilyn Strathern argues that 'the biological' and 'the natural' play different roles and have different expressions in different cultures, and 'the natural' cannot be defined without the cultural and social (Strathern 1992, 194-197). To approach 'the natural' as cultural constructions can help to illuminate fathers' perceptions of their role as fathers.

The concept of "emergent fatherhood," (Inhorn et al. 2015, 7) has been suggested to capture the creativity, hybridity, and transformations abundantly apparent in both the discourses and practices of fatherhood in the twenty first century. This includes how the roles of fathers emerge due to how societies have changed over time in a transforming globalised world, following the convergence of widespread female employment, dramatic declines in birth rates, the rise of unprecedented global movements of people as well as new technologies to help infertility (ibid, 6). The term "emergent fatherhood" draws upon the aforementioned concept of emergent masculinities, where 'emergent' should be understood as new meaning and values, new practices, new relationships of men and fathers, with a focus on the ongoing, relational, and embodied processes of change in the way that men enact being a father (ibid. 7-8). Such emergent ways of practicing fatherhoods might also implicate new forms of fatherly affect and caregiving (ibid, 7).

Along these lines, anthropologists Tatjana Thelen and Haldis Haukanes (2010) argue that the cultural construction of the 'modern Western childhood' is intimately linked to the historical development of motherhood (Haukanes and Thelen 2010). However, they find

that there has in recent years been an increased focus on fathers' involvement in childrearing and child welfare services in both policy-making and research. For example, how recent studies have focused on how active fathering has been found to be beneficial for psychological well-being, growth, and development of the child (ibid, 17; see e.g. Lewis and Lamb 2003).

### *The 'New Roles of the Father'*

Fatherhood as a separate site of research within so-called Western societies has to a greater extent been studied within the field of sociology and social psychology, and also here has the focus on fatherhood grown (Featherstone 2003; Gupta and Featherstone 2015; Nielsen and Westerling 2016, Miller 2011, Madsen 2003, 2008).

Back in 1992, based on her study of middle-class, white men, Margaret O'Brien suggested that new social movements stemming from the industrial revolution resulted in the man no-longer being the only breadwinner in the family, which worked to generate a new father-role who is more involved in parenting-practices (O'Brien 1992; see also Griswold 1993). Since various scholars have argued that social and cultural changes have resulted in the phenomenon of such 'new' or 'modern' fathers, fathers are doing fathering differently compared with just a generation ago, being more family- and child-oriented (Eydal and Rostgaard 2016, 6). Here the Nordic welfare model and the idea(l) of gender equality have been mentioned as encouraging fathers to take a greater part in childcare (ibid, 2). Family and fatherhood researchers Steen B. Nielsen and Allan Westerling's (2016) study of "pioneering fathers" (189) discovers a tendency for some Danish men to venture into a field of intimate fathering. 'The pioneering father' labels a father, who is entering more intimate parts of childrearing, which earlier has been seen as an area belonging to the mother. This generates more opportunities for these fathers and a possible split and separation of the dyadic mother-child relationship, which may result in new common ground in families (ibid, 205). Sociologist Anne S. Bach (2016) points to how women's entry into the labour market, the spread of the contraceptive pill, free abortion and, not least, the education boom among younger women, have not only expanded the scope of opportunity for women, but also changed men's lives (see also Featherstone 2003, 244).

Back to the British context, philosopher Jonathan Ives (2018) sees a development in the father role from the 1930s 'moral overseer' to 'the distant breadwinner' in the 1950s. This father role again ventured into the role of the 'playing dad' during the post-war period, and subsequently, fathers became more involved in childrearing. Today this has led to how some,

mainly middle-class fathers, have ventured into the role of intimate nurturer. Ives underlines that such ‘new narratives’ about the role of the father have not taken over the old narratives, but have to be understood as an ‘add-on,’ not a replacement (Ives 2018, 2015, see also Dermott 2013). Thus, although many studies point to the ‘new role of the father’ in European and so-called Western societies, the roles of the father as the provider and breadwinner is still a culturally celebrated, sometimes quite dominant, image of the father (see also Dermott 2008, 25, Reinicke 2010, Miller 2011). This is also found in the ethnographic material of this study.

Similarly, Aitken (2009) finds how the Anglo-American fathers of his studies are ‘becoming-other’ – other than their own father and other than the dictates of patriarchy. This ‘becoming-other’ is, Aitken argues, related to what has been termed the “crisis of masculinity,” where the role of the father as *solely* the breadwinner, supplier, and potentially the patriarch, is, in many contexts, no longer a culturally celebrated role (Aitken 2009). With reference to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), he finds how patriarchal origins are replaced with, yet also placed besides, other assemblages of content and appearance (Aitken 2009, 30). Connell (2012 [1995]) was the first to document such ‘crisis’ of masculinities (Aitken 2009, 50-51), where power relations within families show the most visible evidence of crisis tendencies with the historic collapse of the legitimacy of patriarchy, with the global movement to emancipate women, and with a move towards economic equality between women and men. This crisis has left some men uncertain about, or weak to acknowledge and express feelings regarding the shift, and many may feel trapped between old-style, machismo, manliness and new nurturing man-ism (Beynon 2002).

The studies above generally focus on relatively highly educated, middle-class, majoritised fathers. Thus, it has been argued that ‘white middle-class fathers’ have dominated the research on fatherhood in Northern Europe and Scandinavia, and that migrant fathers’ experiences of fathering are still a quite unexplored field here (Liversage 2016, 209; Inhorn et al. 2015, 3; Featherstone 2003, Gupta & Featherstone 2015, Hoel 2016). As a consequence, the aforementioned ‘new roles of the father,’ is found to be a phenomenon in (white) middle-class families, which may affect that such fathers stand out as progressive, resource-strong fathers, nearly as an ‘ideal type,’ or what could be termed as a *‘hegemonic fathering’* living out the idealised value of gender equality. One question that arises here is: To which extent this argument is due to a lack of research on fathers who do not fit these specific characteristics? Lotte Bloksgaard et al. (2015) has studied ‘working-class fathers’ in Denmark, and finds many similarities with the emerging new role of the father as intimate nurturer. Even though some

of these fathers from time to time felt it could be challenging to express their intimate emotional aspirations for fathering in the jargon at their workplace, they still practiced and aspired towards such an emotional and nurturing role in the intimate family-life (Bloksgaard et al. 2015). This raises the question: To which extent new emerging ways of intimate fatherhood practices are determined by socioeconomic position, or degree of economic exploitation (Choo and Feree 2010), and to which extent such emerging roles might be affected by broader cultural, historical and political circumstances? One objective of this dissertation is to generate new perspectives on the knowledge-gap regarding emerging fatherhoods among fathers with a migrant background, whereof some also had constraining, low paid, jobs (Jørgensen 2017).

### *Fathers and Migration in the Danish Context*

Most research within the field of migration and gender in Denmark has investigated masculinities, generally omitting fathers and fatherhood (Eydal and Rostgaard 2016). Largely, most studies of masculinities of so-called 'ethnic minorities' have addressed children and teenagers (Gilliam 2009, 2017, 2018; Jensen 2007, 2010; Mørck 2006; Soei 2011; Hviid 2007; Gitz-Johansen 2006; Staunæs 2004). Recently gender researchers Ann-Dorte Christensen et al. (2018) have studied masculinities among so-called ethnic minority men, arguing how these men's masculinity is influenced by a low class position in society due to migration, along with experiences of othering and racism, which further worked to block labour market opportunities, providing painful challenges to their male identity. They argue that these factors degraded and disqualified these men as "marginalised masculinities," with reference to Connell's terminology (ibid, 183).

Senior researcher Anika Liversage (2016) is one of the few Danish researchers who has studied specifically *fatherhood* among so-called ethnic minority men. Liversage finds that her interlocutors, fathers who are first-generation immigrants from Turkey, are more inclined to understand the roles of men and women in the family as complementary rather than alike/similar, holding positions of authority within the family (ibid.). Thus, they believe the role of the father is closer to the breadwinner's role; yet, it was difficult for some interlocutors to maintain this role after emigration, owing to the high rate of un-/underemployment of immigrants. Following, father practices were circumscribed by challenges posed by their migration- and minority-status, which often correlated with a lower class position (ibid.). Many of Liversage's interviews were done with divorced fathers who were struggling or

failing to be present fathers. However, most of my interlocutors with migrant backgrounds lived in a family, and many expressing the importance of the intimate family union; thus not struggling to 'hold on to' their father-role.

Liversage (2016) argues how so-called 'ethnic minority fathers' in Denmark are largely from what she terms "the patriarchal belt" (210), where, among other characteristics, families tend to conceptualise men and women as being complementary rather than equal: the male as the breadwinner and female homemaker. This is connected to a broader patriarchal societal structure marked by large differences between male and female engagement in paid labour, thereby generally rendering women financially dependent on men (ibid. 210-211). Yet, within sociological fatherhood-studies of so-called white, middle-class fathers, there has been an excessive focus on how fathers try to balance family life and work life (see e.g. Miller 2011). Without neglecting the differences between societal structures of diverse countries, it looks as if the role of being the main breadwinner of the family is therefore not only significant for fathers from what Liversage has termed the patriarchal belt. According to social scientist Kenneth Reinicke (2010), who has studied masculinity and fatherhood in Denmark for 13 years, the role as the provider in the family still dominates Danish men's ideas on what it means to be a 'real man' and 'good father' (Reinicke 2010; see also Aarhus 2018, 179). Concerning the role of the provider, independence, autonomy, and strength are important masculine traits (Reinicke 2010). On the other hand, being unemployed is related to shame and something unmanly (ibid; Aarhus 2018, 179). This leads to the question: To which extent is the role of the breadwinner an ideal shared by fathers in general, regardless of background, and to which extent losing the role as the breadwinner becomes a rather stressful and hurtful experience of 'failing as father,' leading to identity struggles for all 'types of fathers' living in Denmark? It is not my ambition to answer 'yes' or 'no' to this question, but to provide nuance to these questions and place them in contexts of lived lives.

### *Diversity amongst Fatherhood Practices of Migrant Fathers in Denmark*

Reinicke has conducted interview-based research with twenty fathers with what he terms 'another ethnic background than Danish,' all with a background in a Muslim-majority country. The aim was to explore relations between gender, ethnicity, and fatherhood, and if there were any specific conditions or relations, which were recognisable when such 'ethnic men' became fathers (Reinicke 2006). Reinicke found many similarities with previous

findings amongst fathers with Danish backgrounds; both categories of fathers expressed how becoming a father had changed their lives completely, and how they wanted to prioritise a close relationship with their children. As in similar research among 'ethnic Danish men,' the fathers pointed to how they were not able to use their own fathers as the *only* role model. They wanted to be different (see also Aitken 2009). More of the fathers expressed how they treasured many Danish values, yet also wanted to keep some of the cultural elements, which they have themselves grown up with; they aspired to take the best from both cultures. Although such multicultural identity was expressed by fathers as a resource, they also expressed the difficulties about growing up in a 'different culture,' along with complex feelings about not feeling either as a Dane or as fully possessing the nationality of their country of origin. Some fathers were very concerned with gender equality, while others had a more traditional understanding of gender roles as complimentary (Reinicke 2006, 29-30). Moreover, some fathers refrained from taking maternity leave, while others were concerned to get all the maternity leave possible. The majority of the fathers underlined that they did not want to maintain traditional power- and gender hierarchies. Similarly, none of the fathers said they wanted to raise their children differently depending on gender. These fathers expressed frustration about being constantly generalised as 'immigrants with Muslim backgrounds.' Some of the fathers were religious, some underlined that religion only had an insignificant impact on their life, again others were atheists (ibid, 26-28). None of the fathers stopped seeing themselves as Turkish, Pakistani, Moroccan, etc., even though they had lived most of their lives in Denmark. However, they did not think that their lifestyle, norms or values differed much from the majority-Danes. In conclusion, Reinicke rejected the preunderstandings of a shared 'Muslim masculinity,' as he finds repeatedly constructed in public discourses, underlining how masculinities are never static.

Similarly, this PhD study points to the categorical error (Bateson 2005) of the category 'ethnic, or Muslim other' as impersonalising a type of masculinity, while recognizing that experiences from the country of origin are important and different for the individual fathers. I attempt to encompass this discrepancy by addressing the fathers' horizon of experiences, in order to add nuance within migrant fathers' life-experiences with migration. What this study adds is a focus on encounters with child-professionals, and how such encounters may affect migrant men's becoming as school-fathers.

## The Research Field of Critical Race/Ethnicity-Studies

### *A 'Race-blind' Ideology*

Some of my interlocutors, fathers, who had a darker skin colour, black hair and other Middle Eastern, South Asian or African characteristics felt that these characteristics meant something (see also Jensen 2010, Gilliam 2018, Andreassen and Ahmed-Andresen 2014, Jørgensen, forthcoming). These characteristics of their physical appearance seem to – especially in combination with a low command in Danish, an accent, an Arab or Muslim name, and/or wearing Muslim symbols – acquire importance in their everyday life. This points towards the role that racialisation plays in their lives.

In recent years, Nordic scholars inspired by feminist theory have pointed out the hegemony of Nordic whiteness, examining how assertions of anti-racism and colour-blindness go hand in hand with the silencing and exclusion of racialised minorities (Lapiņa 2017, Andreassen and Ahmed-Andresen 2014, Hervik 2015). One of these scholars is anthropologist Peter Hervik, who argues for the existence of a “race-blind ideology” in Denmark encompassing the general idea that physical differences “do not mean anything” (Hervik 2015, 31). Hervik argues that in Scandinavian countries, the term “race” is seen as referring to the racist German Nazi ideology, the oppression of African-Americans in the US, and the apartheid system of South Africa, which Scandinavian countries do not see themselves as a part of (ibid, 31). This underemphasising of racialisation is reinforced by the general egalitarian philosophy of the Scandinavian welfare model and the core value of equality in the Danish self-identity (Gullestad 1992, 2002; Hervik 2015). According to anthropologist Laura Gilliam (Gilliam 2009), this “colour-blindness” is reinforced by the fact that until approximately fifty years ago Denmark had no large population that could be termed black and could thus articulate Danish “whiteness” as a racial characteristic rather than just the ‘norm’ (244). This is in contrast to the American context, for example, where race and colour are more openly talked about as having an influence ‘by itself’ in interactions in everyday life and power relations in society (Hervik 2015, 45-46; see also Jørgensen, forthcoming). Yet, Hervik finds that racism is still a strong undercurrent in a strong nationalist discourse, where characteristics such as skin colour are not directly mentioned, but nevertheless given importance through essentialist notions of specific cultures/ethnicities as incompatible with ‘Danish culture or nationality’ (Hervik 2015, 46; see also Jensen 2010, 7). According to Hervik, a person can deny to be a racist in the ‘old way’ by declaring one’s hate against apartheid and Nazism, and at the same time behave in racist ways by using



stereotypes associated with certain ‘ethnicities’ or ‘cultures,’ dynamics which he terms as a “neo-racist form” (ibid, 2014). Here the idea of disharmony and incompatibility can be used for generating political initiatives. In line with Hervik, I see racialised processes as intertwined in both nationality and ideas of incompatible cultures found in neo-Orientalist assumptions entwined in physical racialised characteristics. Thus, racialisation goes hand in hand with ethnification, as a process of ascribing ethnic or racial identities or attributes to a relationship, social practice, or group that did not identify itself as such (Gans 2017).

### *Whiteness and Ethnicity*

In *I can Never be Normal* (Andreassen and Ahmed-Andresen 2014) the mother Uzma, being brown-skinned, explains how her two daughters are treated differently due to their different skin colour; the one girl with blue eyes and more white-skinned compared to the other. She argues that she cannot articulate and talk about this difference, since the Danish language only gives her the possibility to talk about ‘ethnicity,’ which does not explain the different ways Uzma’s daughters are treated, since the two sisters have the same ethnicity – here as sharing the same cultural upbringing, same language, etc. Thus, when ethnicity becomes the substitute for race, it becomes difficult, or even impossible, to talk about racism by itself, as well as how racial appearance determines interpretations of ethnicity (ibid, 28). Some minority positions (as e.g. sexual minorities) can remain unnoticed until specific identity traits are verbalised or acted upon. For racialised groups, they may be minoritised by their racial representations per se. (ibid, 32; Lapiņa 2017). In this study, I analyse how teachers occasionally linked ‘the different’ or ‘ethnic otherness’ with racialised categories such as ‘non-white,’ and how physical characteristics were given meaning by teachers. As, for example, when teachers made estimates on how many ‘bilingual parents’ had shown up to the parent meeting, this estimate was informed by the appearance of parents with racialised, ‘non-white’ characteristics, as ‘non-white’ bodily signs would be linked to bilingualism.

### *Post-ethnicity?*

Since the dominant vocabulary concerning ‘ethnicity’ may limit our focus on racialised experiences (Andreassen and Ahmed-Andresen 2014), ‘ethnicity’ may also be an inaccurate concept for understanding identity formations amongst people from families with a migrant history, as professor of Cultural Studies, Ien Ang, argues. After many generations of immigration history, migrants and their descendants are no longer containable within *an*

ethnic community, as it was tended to be assumed in the formative years of state-sponsored multiculturalism (Ang 2002, 29). Within the second or third generation, such peoples' ethnic identities are increasingly fluid, hybridised and westernised. Ang coins the term "postmodern ethnicity" (Ang 1993, 1) as she is interested in exploring the hybrid and contradictory nature of 'ethnic identity' and its estrangement from notions of 'authentic origin' (see also Felski 1999). Ethnicity "can no longer be experienced as naturally based upon tradition and ancestry; rather, it is experienced as a provisional and partial site of identity, which must be constantly (re)invented and (re)negotiated" (Ang 1993, 14). Ang emphasises the international characteristics of the world today, a tendency that was also recognisable at Rosendal School, where some classes could be termed as "super-diverse" (Vertovec 2007). Vertovec has described transition from "diversity" to "super-diversity," as a "diversification of diversity" due to changes in migration patterns worldwide. People from more places now migrate to more places, causing unprecedented forms of social and cultural diversity especially in the large urban centres of the world (ibid.).

Ang goes on to argue that although such internationalisation has taken place, there has not been a smooth process of integration of such 'postmodern ethnicities' into the national community. Differences between people's race, culture, religion, etc. are resistant to erasure: processes of inclusion and exclusion, the differentiations between self and others, etc., are significant features of human ways of sociality. This is one reason why ethnicities – including new, hybrid (post)ethnicities – keep being articulated and re-articulated as people form themselves into identity groupings in their quest for a sense of belonging in an insecure, rapidly changing world (Ang 2002, 29). Ang tries to foreground processes of 'ethnic othering' and encourages prospects of belonging by suggesting to think with the concept of 'post ethnicity' (Ang 1993, 2002, Phoenix 2001, 127-28). Similarly, I recorded in my fieldwork how 'ethnicity' (intertwined in processes of racialisation), could counterwork feelings of belonging, since racialised characteristics would be constructed and linked to 'another ethnicity,' and then also to another 'authentic' origin (Ang 1993).

## School Research

### *Class-focussed and Asset-focussed School Research*

When studying schools and concerned with the reproduction of inequality, a central study is that of sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu, who in his exploration of the French

school system found how the field of the school was dominated by French upper-classes who defined the 'appropriate taste,' language, competences and knowledge. By measuring relationships between consumption patterns and the distribution of economic and "cultural capital," (Bourdieu 1984, xviii) Bourdieu identified different classed tastes, where upper-class taste was characterised by sophisticated distinctions. This taste was dominant and superior in school and constituted the legitimate basis for 'good taste' here. Consequently, members of the middle-classes appeared to practice cultural goodwill in imitating the high-class behaviours and taste. Following, the taste of people belonging to this middle-class was not defined as much by authentic appreciation, as by their wish to compete in social status. In contrast, the popular taste of the working classes was defined by an imperative for selecting the necessary, as little importance was placed on 'the sophisticated.' This may be because of actual material deprivation excluding anything but the necessary, yet, also, because of a habitus formed by collective working-class experiences (ibid.).

Anette Lareau (2003), inspired by Bourdieu, finds how the American so-called white middle-class parents were preoccupied with and concerned about their children's schooling, what she termed as "concerted cultivation" (1-4). The so-called working-class parents, on the other hand, paid schooling less attention, yet they also lacked the capitals, appreciated by the school (ibid.). Thus, Lareau finds how different mentalities were significant for different classes in society, based on different classed experiences. Depending on class-position, parents did school parenting differently, which was valued differently in the field of the school in favour of the (upper) middle-class parents (ibid.). I am cautious regarding the notions of classed mentalities. By such, one could argue, dichotomist thinking about classes and classed mentalities, Lareau fails to notice similarities in child-rearing and school-parenting (see Dannesboe 2012, Bach, Kjær og Dannesboe 2018, 25).

Tara J. Yosso (2005) argues that, while Bourdieu's work sought to provide a structural critique of social and cultural reproduction, his theory of cultural capital has been mistakenly used to assert that some communities are culturally wealthy, while others are culturally poor (76). Yosso finds how such analysis tends to expose white, middle-class culture as 'the standard' and therefore other forms and expressions of 'culture' are judged in comparison to this 'norm' (ibid, 76). Moreover, educational sociologist Hassan Nuur (2015) finds, in his study of parents with a Somali background living in the UK, how Bourdieu's theory-aperture was not the most appropriate one in displaying and understanding his interlocutors' engagement and preoccupation in educational matters. Nuur argues that the concept of cultural capital is concerned with the accumulation of specific forms of knowledge,

skills and abilities valued by privileged groups in society and appears to point to his interlocutors' deficits; as *lacking* certain capitals (cultural, economic, social, etc.) (Nuur 2015 30-32). Nuur aspires towards another perspective, as well as raising the point that issues such as race and ethnicity factors appeared just as important as social and class background (ibid, 31). In line with Nuur, this study is not primarily concerned with dominant forms of capital or taste, but has an ambition of finding what has been termed as "otherised cultural capital" (Nuur 2015, 31; see also Nasir and Saxe 2003, Yosso, 2005). It thus attempts to see how different people, groups, and communities possess different knowledge, aspirations, experiences, and assets, by taking their perspective as a starting point (Nuur 2015, 31; Yosso 2005; Lo 2015).

### *Intensified Home-school Cooperation*

As also argued in the introduction, many scholars have shown how expectations towards parents' involvement in their child's schooling have intensified over the last decades (Knudsen and Andersen, 2013; Kryger 2015; Dannesboe et al. 2012; Akselvoll 2016b). In the first Danish school law from 1814, the responsibility of the parents was simply to send the children to school (Knudsen and Andersen, 2013, 70). Yet, starting from the 1950s, documents and school acts started to mention parents as someone expected to support and have trust in the school. The 'contact book' was introduced, a small notebook, which contained small notes from parents to teachers or vice versa. Along with the contact book, the parent-teacher conferences were launched. In addition, a few educational experts began to publish advice to parents about how to raise their children (ibid, Knudsen 2010), which concerned how the child must be rested and revitalised when entering the school, get a proper nutrition, do homework in a peaceful environment etc. (ibid.). From the beginning of the 1970s, the responsibility of the parents extended and became intertwined with a responsibility for the society in general: teaching the child about democracy, equality of gender, environmental issues, and health (Knudsen 2010). As such, the responsibility of school-parents could potentially grow to the extent, where some parents were not able to meet these demands, and thus new ways of being an 'irresponsible school-parent' emerged, and parents became at risk of being perceived by teachers as not supportive *enough*. Simultaneously, the childrearing around the 1970s started to be seen as a way to form children with their own opinions towards their everyday life and the so-called "authoritative childrearing" was criticised (Gulløv 2018). Children were gradually seen as a matter of the society, and for this

reason, debates about child-rearing, child-development and distribution of responsibilities between home and state has strengthened (ibid).

Hanne Knudsen and Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen (2013) have argued that over the past ten to fifteen years, public schools have started to insist that parents take on an undefined and infinite personal responsibility for their children's learning in school. The responsibility of children's behaviour in the school context is to a greater extent placed on parents, leading to the risk that complex problems, which involved different places and contexts, have been reduced to a matter of parents' 'lack of will' to take responsibility. This increasing responsibility has become dislocated and diffuse, since the definition of responsibility is not only a question of formulating rules or providing advice (ibid). Sociologist Maria Ø. Akselvoll (2016a, 2016b) gives examples of how teachers send quite long and inconcrete messages via the Parent Intranet, containing various exercises and preparation to the parents, which would "be nice to practice a little at home" (see Akselvoll 2016b, 2016a). Thus, parents are encouraged to take on an infinite responsibility in the children's education, intensified by what I will term as '*the technological turn of home-school cooperation,*' defining how home-school cooperation through the Parent Intranet increasingly takes place via rather standardised online communication systems and platforms. Anthropologist Charlotte Faircloth (2014), who has studied parenting, mainly motherhood, in the British context, has argued that parents are to a greater extent expected to act as pseudo-teachers, optimizing their children's intelligence through a range of extra-curricular activities (32). Consequently, when parents are perceived by child-professionals as failing this responsibility, they may become 'a risk' for their children, and one of the child-professionals' roles is therefore to detect risky-parents (ibid, 29).

Similarly, Frank Furedi (2002) finds, also in the British context, how children today are perceived as being vulnerable to risk. Parents are therefore urged to monitor, protect and nurture, and held responsible for everything that happens (and can happen) with the child, which Furedi coins as "parent-determinism" (ibid, 66). All kinds of socially unfit behaviours, such as early parenthood, drug use, crime, etc., are explained back to the individual parents' failed child-rearing (ibid, 66-67), consistent with neoliberal political trends of individualisation of responsibilities. Before this tendency, these problems were to a greater extent ascribed to the greater society and its errors (see also Akselvoll 2016, 22). In this study, parent-determinism was, which I will return to, reflected in how teachers were concerned about whether families were stimulating enough.

In their study of so-called minority parents and their cooperation with public schools, educational researchers Lene Timm and Bergthóra S. Kristjánsdóttir (2011) find a general lack of acknowledgement of the different capacities, which the parents with migrant backgrounds possess. Especially regarding their mother tongue, some teachers considered this as a “problem language,” which affected the self-esteem of both parents and pupils. Parents experienced how their linguistic and cultural distinction was perceived as lower and not as a resource. Similarly, social psychologist Noomi Christine L. Matthiesen (2014) finds how her interlocutors, mothers with Somali origin, were not heard or seen in meetings with teachers, and how teachers explained to them how things were regarding their child, leading Matthiesen to term these mothers’ perspectives as “unheard voices” (ibid.).

## Concluding Remarks

This chapter has provided a presentation and discussion of both empirically and theoretically relevant studies, functioning as a backdrop for the coming analyses. Some of these studies are occupied with repressive and hegemonic political and administrative structures, forming gender- or parenting-ideologies, intensified home-school cooperation, parent-determinism and neoliberalism, which constitute what anthropologist Bryon Good (2012) has termed as the natural gaze of the political order (26).

I approach such political and historical processes as empirically important as they influence the lived life of the interlocutors, and I am occupied with how specific socio-cultural lifeworlds intersect with such larger historical, political, social and economic processes (Desjarlais and Throop 2011, 90; Ram and Houston 2015, Good 2012). Yet, the objective of this thesis is to take as my starting point the interlocutors’ life-world and explore how such political and historical processes are experienced. As such, the project aims at bringing more adequate means of representation into light, with the ambition to incorporate unfamiliar and marginalised modes of perception to a language (Ram and Houston, 2015, 3).

## Chapter 3: Theoretical Underpinnings

This chapter further unfolds the scientific theoretical foundations for the coming analysis. Historically, the largest part of research on schooling and gender has been informed by a poststructuralist theoretical foundation; for example, informed by discourse analyses or governmentality analyses inspired by a Foucauldian understanding of the school as a societal institution, extraditing control through formations of knowledge and power (see e.g. Knudsen and Åkerstrøm Andersen 2013; Nielsen et al. 2011, Dahlsted 2009). Where poststructuralist theories primarily address the relationship between power and knowledge, as how governmentality forms subjectification through societal institutions, this PhD thesis has another focus. Since I was interested in the lifeworlds of fathers, as well as how the ethnographic material produced through the fieldwork encompassed narratives of fathers' subjective experiences, struggles, imaginaries and hopes, the material called for a theoretical approach that began with experience. Such a theoretical perspective is found within phenomenologically informed anthropology (Jackson 1996, 2013, 2016; Ram and Houston 2015; Desjarlais 1996; Desjarlais and Throop 2011; Good 2012a, 2012b; Ingold 2015). Another objective is, as aforementioned, to illuminate how fatherly becomings are affected by meetings with significant others. Here, the study is inspired by thoughts on becoming (Ingold 2015, 2018), especially those theories of human becomings that are concerned with addressing historical changes (often glossed as the "large-scale") to the questions of phenomenological experience (the "small-scale") (Biehl and Locke 2017, 6; Purcell 2017, 147).

However, as a poststructuralist lens has informed many studies of the themes I am concerned with, I also draw on these studies, and will, along the way, show how they can be considered within a phenomenologically informed analysis.

### A Phenomenologically Informed Anthropology

To analyse migrant fathers' experiences of home-school cooperation, and how these experiences may influence their becomings as fathers, it is important to investigate many of the elements and social phenomena, which characterise their life-world – elements they encounter while navigating in a world already full of meaning. I go beyond traditional,

philosophical phenomenology's primary concern with individual perception and bodily experience (the discussion of transcendental philosophy), and aim to bring phenomenological thoughts on becoming and experience into a study, which also encompasses larger scale political and historical processes.

In phenomenologically inspired anthropology (Jackson 1996, 2013, 2016; Ram and Houston 2015; Desjarlais 1996; Good 2012a, Good 2012b; Ingold 2015), the most important thesis is that we have to understand all experience and knowledge from the subject's position in the world (Jackson 1996a, 1). As Martin Heidegger (1962) famously coined, all experiences are indisputably linked to our "being-in-the-world." Only through this being is the world recognised and understood, and through our 'positioned being,' we understand phenomena around us. Hence, we understand the world through being and acting in it (ibid, 107), and in this way, experiences are *more* than the knowing consciousness. In this way, it is important to focus on the interlocutors' connectedness to the local places they live and act in, in order to understand their intentions and actions and the meaning they ascribe to the world around them.

Within phenomenologically inspired anthropology, I am inspired by a group of anthropologists who focus their research on how experience and social becoming in specific socio-cultural lifeworlds intersects with larger historical, political, social and economic processes (Desjarlais and Throop 2011, 90; Ram and Houston 2015, Good 2012a). Along these lines, Robert Desjarlais defines experience as 'more' than the traditional meaning of the German word *erleben*; "...the category of experience, which may be taken to be universal, natural and supremely authentic, is not an existential given, but rather a historically and culturally constituted process predicated on a range of cultural, social, and political forces" (Desjarlais 1996, 70). These larger processes do not take precedence for understanding human motivation and agency, but rather lay out strands in a texture of an ever moving social pattern of meaning, forming the terrain, or landscape, people navigate (Desjarlais 1996, see also Vigh 2006, Ingold 2015).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Among the many words to term the environment, social field, or landscape, we as humans are navigating, I use the term of 'terrain' cf. Desjarlais (1996), inspired by Vigh (2006).



## Experience

Experience must be understood as placed between the past and the present; thus, experience is always coloured by our previous experience and what we aim to achieve in the future – *our intentionality*. This constitutes a horizon we can look back at, and a horizon for looking into the future, navigating towards what we aim to achieve (Stroller 2009, Vigh 2006). As such, the temporal horizon encompasses all that passes between the past and the present, and hopes or fears for the future (Stoller 2009). Past experiences do not represent experiences that are merely past and gone, but instead, refers to those experiences in the *present*, so that the past is not simply added on, but constitutive for the given perception (Ram and Houston 2015; Jackson 1996a, 25). Consequently, when some of the interlocutors in this study felt ambiguity regarding meetings with school professionals, it could be due to previous experience, which colours the present moment, as the ambiguity corresponded with their horizon of experience.

The horizon is not a stable entity, but constituted by spatiality and temporality, and as such, the horizon changes as we move forward in our lives (Stroller 2009, 710, Jackson 1996a, 10-11). Not every element of our background makes its entry as a totality or as some inert force bearing down on us. We call up, like a conjurer, those elements that might support us in our projects and strategies, our navigation. Only some elements of these impersonal determinants may be supportive – others, if inappropriate, will be non-supportive, and fall into disuse or simply hold back either the individual or the collective agency of an entire social group. We can, therefore, speak not only of a particularity of experiences and their diverse social construction, but also of less supportive horizons, backgrounds or environments that hinder individuals or classes' efficacy in accomplishing tasks or projects (Ram and Houston 2015, 10). Thus, some backgrounds equip subjects to enjoy far greater agency, authority, and power in the world. In this way, it is possible to approach and discuss power in the very constitution of experience, without having to take abstract theoretical schema as our starting point (*ibid*, 10).

## Inter-Experience

The idea of intersubjectivity originates from phenomenological thoughts on how the human before anything else is situated in an already existing world, loaded with meaning shared in “inter-experiences” (Jackson 1996a, 27). Our understandings of the world are structured in

accordance with the intersubjective handling over of pre-understandings and patterns into which we are socialised, and which exist in an already-shaped history (Rasmussen 2017, 67).

Contrary to the poststructuralist perspective, the phenomenological perspective sees intersubjectivity as more than language; “even when cultural meaning is not explicitly stated, they can be implicitly registered, i.e., meaning can be distinguished even if they have not been clothed in a language act” (Stoller 2009, 727). Consequently, a child will be able to gather knowledge from its parents from the very beginning. As such, moods, looks, sights, body-gestures can provide important insight into understanding people. Subsequently, the ethnographic fieldwork has an intersubjective character: where we engage in intersubjective dynamics with our interlocutors, where we communicate in more ways than solely verbal, such as through tension, looks, body gestures or tone. Because we always presume a given thing, act, gesture as *something*, we constantly refer back to this social pattern of cultural meaning, even if we do not verbalise it (ibid, 727).

## Anthropological Thoughts on Becoming

Any theory of culture, habitus or lifeworld must include some account of those moments in social life, when the customary, given, habitual, and normal is disrupted, flouted, suspended, and negated (Jackson 1996a, 22).

The reproduction of this already given social – or cultural – pattern has been subject to much discussion, since it ventures into the fundamental debate of structure vs. agency.

Anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000) argues that human skills are not just the reproduction of embodied knowledge. As the surrounding environments are never exactly the same, skilfully reproducing a practice requires “care, judgment, and dexterity” (ibid. 353). Subsequently, reproduction is an intentional, although not always reflected, action (see also Jørgensen 2015, 29, Moran 2011, 54). For Ingold, all actions are skilled, and skills are developed through people’s movements and acting. Through our movements in everyday life, the terrain we navigate is woven into life, and lives are woven into the terrain (Ingold 2010, 11). Life itself becomes a movement, which is not simply from a to b, but as a way of being in the world. To be, is to be on the way, termed as “wayfaring” (Ingold 2015, 32-35). Human beings are always at the edge of something new; tomorrow the world and I will be older and changed. Tomorrow this ‘now’ will be ‘a line’ back in time – as the line of footprints we leave in a field,

Ingold writes (*ibid.*). These traits make us witness how we, as humans, are always on our way through the world – we are, with Ingold’s words, “undergoing life” (*ibid.*, 125-129, see also Rasmussen 2017, 57-58).

## Lines and Becoming

Within phenomenologically inspired anthropology, scholars have discussed whether the prefix ‘inter’ in intersubjectivity actually serves to reproduce the dualistic separation of two subjects (Rasmussen 2017, 72-73, see also Jørgensen, *forthcoming*). Following this, Ingold has used the metaphor of “lines of becoming” to argue that a frame of mind, a sentiment, or whatever social phenomenon concerned, is a product of the co-existence and entanglement of multiple objects and subjects (Ingold 2012, 2015). I use Ingold’s concept of lines in a broad sense, and see lines as constituted by both humans and things, history and discourses (see Rasmussen 2017, Biehl and Locke 2017).

Ingold argues that we are placed in – or inhabit – a world, which is already full of constituted lines interwoven with each other, and our intersubjective encounters can be described by the metaphor of the meshwork of these lines’ entanglement (Ingold 2012, 49). My argument here is that intersubjective encounters between migrant fathers and teachers can be studied as meshwork. Meshwork is to be understood as social happenings constituted of multiple lines of becoming, some being large-scale political and historical forces as the formations of neo-Orientalist assumptions or the intensified expectations towards parenting. In Part II and III of this thesis, some of these lines of forces are analysed – those, I argue, which had importance in the encounters between migrant fathers and teachers. These also include the aforementioned Danish media and political discourses on Muslim men. The linealogy-approach can be described as a way to ‘deconstruct the life-world’ (see also Jackson 2013, 272). Taking the perspective of the interlocutor’s being-in-the-world, the metaphor of lines works to grasp the various influences, which affected their becoming, with the result that sociality becomes dynamic and complex processes with no given closure. They are, so to speak, unfinished, “...minds and lives are not closed-in entities that can be enumerated and added up; they are open-ended processes” (Ingold 2015, 11), thus our identity is becoming, while undergoing life, in interplay with place, space and time (see also Ingvarsdóttir 2014, 10). When inspired by the notion of becoming, one effect is that we look at a place or ‘part’ of sociality where ‘things are (be)coming to be.’ This also means looking at the constant process

and drive of self-creation (Sørensen 2015). This focus can help open up for understandings of a certain '*social alertness*,' recorded during the fieldwork, as an intersubjective dynamic between teachers and pupils or me as researcher and some of the interlocutors encircling the interlocutors' tension against potentially being othered and a drive for positive self-creation.

When attuned to where things are (be)coming to be, we also attune to what encounters *do* to us. The metaphor of the meshwork provides ways for understanding how encounters with school professionals affect and model fathers' further becoming, without omitting these fathers' agency and intentionality.

Ingold's 'lines of becoming' is inspired by Gilles Deleuze's thoughts on human becoming (Ingold 2015, 2012), but in my reading of Ingold (2015, 2012) and as he is read by anthropologists Joān Biehl and Peter Locke (2017, 14), Ingold offers little attention to Deleuze's work on forces. Contrarily, Biehl and Locke pay more attention to this part of Deleuze's work. They argue that processes of human becoming, besides the small-scale forces of agents and materiality in intersubjective processes, are also affected by greater large-scale forces, such as political or historical processes, and discourses imposing segmentation and binary categorisation, constantly entangling with human lives.

### *Deleuze and Forces as Lines*

Deleuze's reception in anthropology has had multiple, and often incommensurable, dimensions (see e.g. Bialecki 2018). This PhD project refers to Biehl and Locke's reading of Deleuze and how they have integrated or 'reworked' some of Deleuze's thoughts (Biehl and Locke 2017, 16; 2010). Primarily, Deleuze was a philosopher, which made his interests in ontology rather different from that of anthropology. Thus, when the Biehl and Locke integrate some of Deleuze's thoughts into anthropological work, they underline the importance of starting the anthropological analysis from human *experiences* (Biehl and Locke 2017, 10). This also means that when we talk about lines as forces, such forces become relevant, insofar as they are relevant for understanding the interlocutors' lived life, and do not work as having their, so to speak, 'own ontology.' Thus, my motivation to include Deleuze is different from that of anthropologists engaged in the so-called 'ontological turn,' using Deleuze's philosophy as inspiration for theories on 'radical alterity' (see a critic of this in Vigh and Sausdal 2014), but instead, a way to understand how forces of different scales affect the interlocutors social becoming simultaneously.

According to Biehl and Locke (2017), human becoming is a process of entanglements of lines (similar to Ingold's meshwork). These lines of forces are both large-scale forces, of which some are sluggish and works to maintain a separation and difference by repeating them, such as in categorical binaries. While at the same time, such forceful segmentations are challenged and pushed by lines of people in intersubjective life; the small-scale forces. Having this focus, we see how power and knowledge form bodies, identities, and meanings, while refusing to reduce people to the working of such forces (ibid, 5). We cannot find a stable hierarchy between the strength of large-scale forces compared to small-scale forces, but ought to focus on how forces on different scales are entangled in a somewhat "horizontal manner" (ibid, xii).

Biehl and Locke (2010) analyse the relationship between different forces and human desire, such as with the case of a psychological hospital in southern Brazil. They describe how patients here try to claim their own experiences on their own terms by playing with words, which had deterministically influenced their life – like the hospital diagnosis-language, politics of displacement and altered forms of 'common sense.' By challenging and 'pushing' such 'forces,' they try to make these crucial elements into their own (ibid, 318). Inspired by Biehl and Locke's reflections on control and the transformative potential of becoming, I argue that many of the interlocutors in this ethnographic study challenged or transformed concepts. They changed meanings and challenged the world around them in their intention or struggle to reach acknowledgement and to 'govern' their own becoming – sometimes to escape the disapproval they had experienced in relation to their 'foreignness.'

## **The Terrain of Home-School Cooperation**

In this dissertation, I use the term 'terrain' to describe the social arena of the school and home-school cooperation. Desjarlais, who combines phenomenologically inspired anthropology with Deleuze's conceptual work (Desjarlais 1996, 75), argues that our experience takes place in terrains, in which future, present, and past mutually determine one another as part of a whole (ibid, 75). He describes the terrain as a texture woven by lines of forces, in motion. In Desjarlais' fieldwork among homeless in Boston, this social texture was intensified by powerful forces of a certain politic of displacement, which made his interlocutors "struggle along" (ibid, 70). In the coming analyses, I argue, the terrain of the

school, exposed to numerous political regulations, in some regards made teachers and parents struggle along as well.

The terrain is an illustration of all the different forces and variables, in which the interlocutors are, ‘moving along’ (ibid. 1996), ‘wayfaring’ (Ingold 2007, 79-80; 2011, 148), or ‘navigating’ (Vigh 2003), describing humans’ intentional manoeuvring in life towards hopes and dreams for the future (ibid.). In other words, such a terrain is in motion, and social fields are “leaking out on all sites” (Biehl and Locke 2017, 109), influenced by many ‘lines’ on different scales, which both children, teachers, and parents navigate from different positions (Desjarlais 1996, Biehl and Locke 2017, see also Christensen et al. 2006).

Biehl and Locke describe the social field, or what I term as terrain, as “layered entanglements of biology, environment, social life and material forces of all kinds” (2017, 8-12), and as such place importance on how materiality is constitutive of the terrain we engage in. In the terrain of the home-school cooperation, especially the computer and through Parent Intranet, this appeared to have a vast impact on possible ways to navigate the formal communication between home and school. In this way, the technological turn of home-school cooperation may be approached as a force, since it enforced certain, rather standardised, and written, online-communication. I found the technological turn to affect relations between parents and teachers in many ways, beyond both parents’ and teachers’ own intentions or rationales.

Thus, many elements were constitutive of the terrain, in which fathers navigated with their own intentions and with more or less success in the eyes of the teachers, and more or less aligned with the politically informed regulations. To approach the school as a terrain, it gives the possibility to incorporate the political and historical formations of e.g. intensified home-school cooperation, as affecting teachers’ agency, but also opens to how teachers sometimes opposed such greater forces; they so to speak ‘push them a bit’ in order to form new trajectories.

## Concluding Remarks

This study approaches large-scale political and historical processes as constituting lines (Biehl and Locke 2017, 7-11), which tangle with other lines as they make up concrete social fields, mutually constitutive and dependent (ibid, 8). In this way, the concept of lines works to illustrate all the various influences, which entangle with the interlocutors’ life and affects their

becoming, showing how human life never fully aligns with such forces, yet never fully disentangles from them either.

Thinking with the metaphor of various lines entangling with the interlocutors' lives affecting their becoming, we can approach the every so often negative portraits of Muslim men in the Danish political or public debate, as a discursive line of force marginalising a certain masculinity. I have earlier argued that the concept of "marginalised masculinity" (Connell 2012) falls short when trying to describe dynamic lived life, peoples agencies and contradictions, however, I suggest to incorporate the social phenomenon of marginalised masculinities as a discursive force, which may entangle with interlocutors' lived life in unpredictable ways. In this way, we can better grasp how such a negative image can be influential and powerful in men's lives, yet also how it can be counteracted and opposed by the people it aims to define. Furthermore, such a force may entangle in intersubjective dynamics and affect interlocutors' trajectory of becoming.

The analytic movement of incorporating other scholars findings or concepts (marginalised masculinity) into Biehl and Locke's theory on lines, can be justified with reference to anthropologists Smita Lahiri, Lilith Mahmud, and James Herron concept of "borrowing and extending" (Lahiri, Mahmud, and Herron 2010). A concept outlining a common analytic movement within anthropological analysis, where findings, concepts or terms are borrowed from other scholars work, and extended so as fitting the specific ethnographic material of the borrowing scholar (ibid.). Thus, forces as lines is a theoretical grip, to unfold the many different forces, on different scales, which affect the individual father's placement and becomings in the world they inhabit. Thus, the metaphor of lines is a mean to grasp all the different influences, be it large-scale forces or intersubjective dynamics to inform fathers' becomings as fathers. Furthermore, significant others, rationalities, materiality, power relations and political forces are inflected in one another, along with the impasses, thresholds, and breakthroughs, which are the materials of lifeworlds and subject construction (Biehl and Locke 2017, 28).

Borrowing and extending from Ingold's concepts, I see how the different migrant fathers in this study have their own lifeline, with their own horizon of experience, navigating (or in Ingold's words "wayfaring") through the different terrains they meet, hereby developing different skills. The objective for doing so is to provide an understanding of how migrant fathers, when entering the school, would bring with them many different backgrounds and skills and meet the demands of the school in different ways depending on

their horizons of experience – their lifelines – and with different outcomes. This differs from the theoretical lens of intersecting (oppressed) categories found in some intersectionality-analyses, as well as from theories that take their point of departure in dominance or hegemonic powers, and how they define the school's field. Instead, I aim to approach the meshwork between fathers, teachers, and political, historical forces in a dynamic way, as an attempt to understand the differences and variations in play.

I argue it is possible to equate these different types of lines of forces, because the perspective is that of the individual father. Thus, the lines and their meshwork is simply a metaphor, as a means to 'deconstruct the life-world,' with the objective to grasp and investigate some of the many elements and social phenomena, which characterise these fathers' life-world, elements they encounter while navigating in a world already full of influences. The entanglements of persons and ideas, objects and words produces the shifting matrix of relations through which one becomes a father (Biehl and Locke 2017, 14).

Hence, when we think of how we became the persons we are today, both people on the intersubjective level and political and historical formations on a larger scale level have affected us. In our own experience, these forces can be argued to have the same status; they are all part of our being-in-the-world and have all made us whom we are today. I argue that central narratives concerning gender identity, social constructions of 'the good father,' racialisations, and the race-blind ideology described in the previous chapter, can be approached as forces influencing the fathers' life-world. Talking about 'lines' is thus a way to provide a metaphorical illustration of all the different influences, which are constantly entangling, more or less, on our becomings.



## Chapter 4: Methodology

In the following chapter, I will introduce the different places for my fieldwork during September 2015 to August 2016, and discuss methodological reflections related to the construction of data. During this period of eleven months, I conducted participant observation and interviews at Rosendal School, the nearby social housing estate Elmehaven, and different fathers' groups.

There are several reasons for why I have chosen these different contexts for fieldwork. While I am primarily interested in migrant fathers' experience, and the many interviews concerned this, the fieldwork in the school helped me to understand the practices and dynamics of home-school cooperation from multiple angles, working to inform the analyses and contextualise the migrant fathers' experiences hereof. Doing fieldwork in the school-classes and everyday life at school brought along insight into teachers' expectations towards school-parents, what the teachers noticed and what actualised different practices. Participating in the everyday life provided me with an insight into how the fathers were spoken, or not spoken, about, how fathers were actualised in the children's lives and teachers' considerations, and insight into how teachers and fathers could have quite different experiences of the same encounters.

The fieldwork at Rosendal School was conducted in two classes at the kindergarten grade level<sup>8</sup> (0C and 0B)<sup>9</sup>, where the pupils were between five and seven years old, and one seventh grade class (7X), where the pupils were between twelve and fourteen years old. Over this five-month period (from August 2015 to December 2015), I participated in everyday life at the school, observed fifty parent-teacher conferences, three parents' meetings, and participated in other parent events, such as breakfast events, 'first school day ceremony,' orientation meetings for parents, etc., visited families in their homes to conduct interviews, and did participant observation in the community-house of Elmehaven. After the five months of intensive fieldwork, I continued being a volunteer in the community-house and

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<sup>8</sup> Students in the Danish Grade 0 are generally six years old. The class takes place in school and the pupils learn, among other things, the alphabet and basic math. It is equivalent to first grade in many countries.

<sup>9</sup> Each individual class was, as common practice in Danish schools, named by a letter. Thus, 0C is one of the two grade 0-classes I followed.

periodically travelled to visit fathers' groups and hereto-related events to do participant observation and conduct interviews.<sup>10</sup> The data collection ended in August 2016.

I have conducted semi-structured in-depth ethnographic interviews with twenty-seven fathers with migrant backgrounds, of which five of these interviews were group interviews: four with two fathers and one with three. The fathers were fathers of pupils at Rosendal School (eight), fathers from the aforementioned fathers' groups in social housing complexes, and one Somali parent association. Additionally, I conducted interviews with seven teachers, an Arab interpreter, the school integration-consultant, ten fathers and one mother with a Danish origin, and three single mothers with a migrant background. Also, I conducted five group interviews with pupils from 7X, and did a drawing exercise with a follow-up short individual informal interview with all pupils in 0C, where they told me about their drawing (which illustrated something they did with their father).

The breadth of the empirical data has been carried out in order to be able to contextualise migrant fathers' experiences with other 'types' of parents. As such, in order to better understand migrant fathers' experiences, we have to investigate which aspects of being a migrant father has to do with being a father more generally and how much of this is something most fathers experience in school, in contrast to the mother.

## Anonymity

All personal names and class-names have been changed to protect privacy, and all interlocutors have agreed to participate in the study. At all times, I followed the ethical standards advised by the AAA (American Anthropologist Association 2012), maintained a respectful and ethical professional relationship, protected and preserved all records, and was open and honest about my work and writing of my thesis. The anthropologist must not agree to conditions, which inappropriately change the purpose, focus, or intended outcomes of their research, while carefully weighing the potential consequences and inadvertent impacts of their work (ibid. 2012). Therefore, I have, in few cases, further anonymised fathers from the fathers' groups by changing years of living in Denmark or switching which fathers' group specific fathers belonged. In few cases I have split one interlocutor into two different

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<sup>10</sup> I have slightly changed the wordings of some interviews to make it more fluid, due to some interlocutors' not fluent Danish abilities.

characters in order to blur recognisability, when having no effect on the analysis (see e.g. Tjørnhøj-Thomsen and Hansen 2009; Jacobsen and Johansen 2009).

Such further anonymisation has been more difficult regarding the teachers at Rosendal School, since I only did fieldwork at one school and followed specific classes. Although years have passed between the fieldwork and publication, some parents, pupils or teachers might recognise some of the teachers, a returning concern for me, since some of the cases presented might stand out as unprofessional or discriminatory. I have come about this by blurring teacher's identity in few cases where it did not affect the analytic points, so there cannot, in all presented cases, be drawn a direct line between the specific teachers and the verbal statements. In this way, a given teacher cannot, in principle, be held accountable for a specific statement (see also Tjørnhøj-Thomsen 2009).

## Elmekvarteret

Rosendal School was situated in a neighbourhood termed 'Elmekvarteret.' Elmekvarteret is an area previously known for its low-income residents. However, the area was undergoing change due to gentrification: when conducting fieldwork, it was a mix of low-income and middle-class-income families, where hip coffee shops and art shops have popped up. The area was mixed between the many cafés, hip bars and experimental 'New Nordic' restaurants, along with many grocery shops, cheaper kebab-houses, and clothing stores selling clothes imported from e.g. Arab countries or Turkey. In this way, diversity was also reflected in the physical environment. Elmekvarteret was, in Copenhagen more broadly, known as a socialist, left-wing neighbourhood.

Approximately one-fourth of the inhabitants living in Elmekvarteret were immigrants, refugees, or their descendants from countries with the largest number of emigrants, including Lebanon, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, Somalia, Morocco, and Germany.

Elmekvarteret had become a more attractive neighbourhood, correspondingly due to lack of affordable housing in Copenhagen, and many families wanted to stay living there, also after they had children. Previously, many families would move out if they had the economic scope. As many of the apartments were traditionally small, working-class apartments, some higher-income couples would be able to buy two apartments and merge them together. In this way, Elmekvarteret was also changing 'inside the bricks,' whereas the low-income families would often live in one of the more social housing complexes (*alment*

*boligbyggeri*). Elmekvarteret still had one of the highest scores among neighbourhoods in Copenhagen, regarding citizens on social welfare, early retirement and integration benefits.<sup>11</sup>

There was a tendency of families with migrant backgrounds to be overrepresented in the social housing complexes, whereas citizens with Danish origin were overrepresented with regard to owning the apartment they live in. The combination of socioeconomic circumstances and citizens with a migrant background has given the foundation for what has been termed ‘ethnification of class’ (Johansen 2013, 49), where class-related limitations of the economic scope have been misunderstood as expressing cultural or ‘ethnic’ choices and actions, for example, how and where to live.

### *Rosendal School – Access as Processes of Learning*

Throughout the fieldwork, the anthropologist gradually learns the social fields’ qualitative dimension. However, this learning process starts from the very beginning, when working on obtaining access; here the concerns or hesitation some interlocutors may show regarding participation, can be traced back to important knowledge of the social field we are about to enter (Hasse 2003, 71). In the following sections, I will discuss such issues, and suggest how such ‘hesitation’ may point to essential aspects of the interlocutors’ life-worlds.

I had difficulties in finding a school that had the time and energy to invite me into their everyday life. I was often told that this was not a good time, due to a hectic period with many new regulations and acts to relate to. In the autumn of my fieldwork, The New School Reform was still being implemented, thus teachers were still struggling to find out how to meet the new requirements. In my desperation to find a school, I one day went unannounced to Rosendal School, to talk with the principal. As I had experienced mails not being answered, or kindly replied with a no, I simply showed up at the administrative office, and told the slightly sceptical secretary, that it was okay he (the school principal) was having a meeting “I’ll just wait outside until he is done.” Luckily, the principal Simon was positive to my suggestion. Rosendal School was located in Elmekvarteret close to the social housing complex of Elmehaven. It was a public and comprehensive school, which covered the ages of six – fifteen years divided into nine class-levels. Except for the grade 0. classes, which had their own special grade 0 teachers, teachers would normally follow their class for many years.

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<sup>11</sup> If a person has been living in Denmark for less than seven years, one will receive the relatively small ‘integration benefit.’

Later, I came to a meeting with the teachers from two grade 0 classes, whom Simon had poked for 'the task,' and the team for the grade 7 level, which encompassed four teachers. I believe Simon had been concerned with finding some skilled teachers, as both Lisa and Gitte from the grade 0 classes were known among colleagues as having a high professionalism, and they appeared as having the energy to accept my presence. On the grade 7 level, I was invited to follow the whole teacher team, and here the teachers were not pointed out in the same way. There were two school classes at the grade 7 level, and Astrid functioned as the main teacher of 7Y and Steffen for 7X. Yet, Astrid felt so stressed from all the reform-changes, that she did not have the energy for me to take part in her teaching, which restricted my access to 7Y. On the other hand, Steffen welcomed my presence and welcomed me to sit with him and his colleagues in the teachers' lounge during the break. Thus, Steffen became my main interlocutor at the grade 7 level. Both Simon and the other teachers knew of my university department, DPU, as one of the leading departments of critical research on the school-field in Denmark, which might have made some teachers more conscious of my presence. Sometimes the teachers would look at me as '*I did not say that*' or '*this is not something we really mean,*' when they evaluated, criticised or made distinctions between parents and pupils. Generally, teachers at Rosendal School seemed to strive for a high academic level, and from time to time appeared as if they were anxious about doing something wrong.

I frequently experienced how teachers would ask for my evaluation, as when Lisa, in the break between the parent-teacher conferences, asked me: "can we have a midway evaluation from you?" I told her, in an apologetic way, how I was, for now, simply writing down, being confused. I had to look at and reflect on all my notes later on, to be able to understand. Generally, I would try to turn teachers' questions into conversations, so that we could evaluate the issue together, which gave me an insight into the scripts the teachers used in understanding problems and finding the appropriate solution (see e.g. Gulløv 2015). At other times, teachers would forget my presence. Generally, I tried to position myself in the role of a 'confused student,' equivalent with how I generally felt.

Parents regularly came to the school, to bring or pick up their children, or to have a word with a teacher. Being at the school gave me an insight into how home-school cooperation was a rather encompassing part of the everyday school life, and how teachers would evaluate parents' engagement or lack hereof. Especially, I became interested in how fathers performed parenthood differently, and how this performance came to index a great

deal more about the father or the family as a whole, since the teachers normally did not know much about the extended life of the father or family.

### *The Social Condition of Being a Father to a Schoolchild*

There is no such thing as an already limited ethnographic field, to which the fieldworker can enter without leaving aspects out. In this way, the anthropologist will always take part in constructing the field, based on a specific scientific interest. Thus, the anthropologist is what anthropologist Raymond Madden (2010) has termed a “place-maker” (38).

The social field of interest for this PhD study did not correspond to a closed social community based on everyday practices, which is, or maybe more correctly – used to be – the case in ethnographic fieldwork (Hasse 2003, 71). The school classes could be termed as such ‘closed’ social communities, yet the fathers only sporadically came to the school, and these encounters did not constitute a social practice-community among them. Therefore, what more precisely defined the social field of scientific interest was the “social condition” (ibid, 71) of *being a migrant father to a schoolchild*. Following anthropologist Cathrine Hasse (2003), ethnographic interests in such social conditions are often explored by interviews (ibid, 71), which also became a central method in this study.

Fathers’ school practices could be studied by participant observation at the school, yet the fathers were often ‘on their way’ to work or on their way home, when they, for example, brought or picked up their child in the grade 0 classes. In the grade 7 classes, I mostly met fathers in relation to parent-meetings or home-school conference. To be able to get an insight into the fathers’ subjective experiences, we needed a room for reflection. Hence, I aimed at meeting the fathers outside the school as well, hopefully in their homes, learning about their experiences with school, along with using the home in itself as a source for information. While conducting the interview, I would, for example, ask for a physical thing, which symbolised something the father favoured doing with his child. In this way, the home functioned as a source for new perspectives on fatherhood practices and experiences. When starting the fieldwork, I had ambitions about extending the participant observation to the fathers’ homes or other family-context. However, it was difficult for me to obtain this access. As I presented my study to the parent meetings, some specific fathers were from the start keen to participate. These ‘ardent fathers’ often had a rather long and often academic education like me, and our common experiences and knowledge about academic research seemed to be a key to open up relations. I faced what I believe many parent-researchers have

faced before me, how convenient it was to spend time with such ‘ardent school-parents.’ This could be one reason why fatherhood-studies are often among fathers with a so-called middle-class status and long education (see pp. 32). Further, the common familiarity with scientific research also functioned to ‘disarm’ the potential suspicion about why I, as a woman, aimed to hang out with fathers. However, at Rosendal School, such ‘ardent fathers’ did in general not have a migrant background. If chosen to follow these ‘ardent fathers,’ I would probably have been able to observe fatherhood practices in other family-settings, yet limiting the variation between the fathers represented, since it was difficult for me to obtain access to the homes of the migrant families as well as other ‘less ardent’ fathers with Danish origin. Thus, in order to explore more specifically the social conditions of being a father with a migrant background, I conducted participant observation in the community house of Elmehaven and visited different fathers’ groups. As a result, the physical and social field for my fieldwork became a dynamic movement between different, yet entangled empirical rooms or contexts (Tjørnhøj-Thomsen and Hansen 2009, 93), also including the local sports-hall, a local banquet hall, etc. Additionally, the public debates on topics such as integration, Muslims in Denmark, including news articles, political acts, etc., became a supplement to the data I conducted through participant observations and interviews.

### **Rosendal School – Ardent Parents and Unheard Voices**

At Rosendal School and in the community-house of Elmehaven, I more frequently encountered mothers than fathers. In addition, conversations with mothers about school just happened more easily, regardless of their background. Mothers seemed more eager to share their reflections and opinions about schooling with me. Sharing the same gender seemed to have an influence here, but also how the school seemed to belong more to the mother’s domain than that of the father. Consequently, this study is from the perspective of parents generally second most involved.

During my time at Rosendal School, I tried, in different ways, to get in contact with the fathers of the pupils in the classes I followed. Some fathers were, as aforementioned, very interested in my project, and as I presented my project and need for interviewees at the parents-meetings, I got some contacts. Some were through the mother since she was the one attending, giving me the number of their partner. None of these parents had migrant backgrounds, except Moritz, who was a PhD student from Germany and father of Hans in

0B. As a PhD student himself, he found my study interesting, and felt obligated to participate. Moritz' interest and willingness reminded me to reflect on who finds participating obvious, potentially a kind of 'obligation,' and feel comfortable about being interviewed due to one's familiarity with such practices.

Generally, there seemed to be some parents who were always ready to participate or support various activities from the school, whereas others were more quiet or refraining from participating, and again others did not show up at the school much (Akselvoll 2016b, Aamann 2017,169). The coming analyses will suggest many different reasons for this, however these dynamics suggest how many "unheard voices" (Matthiesen 2014; Timm and Bergthóra 2011) potentially disappear in school or research, or are outshined by other parents' eagerness to have a say and share their opinions, which may also be the case in home-school cooperation.

As the parents' meeting only functioned in getting access to these 'ardent parents,' I, during the fieldwork, tried to get access to other fathers, partly through the pupils in the seventh grade classes or by calling them via the class-contact list, or addressing them when I met them at the school. In the school's everyday-life, I found myself to be quite far away from my main interlocutors (the fathers), simultaneously increasingly accepted by the pupils. The pupils in 7X often thought I was younger than I was, and I was fairly adopted as 'one of them' in one of the girls' groups. As this gave me an important insight in the pupils' family-life from their perspective, I was at the same time concerned with getting access to their fathers.

One day I asked Naima, the girl from the introducing vignette (pp. 2-5) if she thought I could interview her father, whereto she answered: "I don't think... hmm... this thing about an interview is something for my parents (...) well, firstly they are very busy and then, well I... do not actually think it is something for them." Rehan, whose parents had Pakistani backgrounds, continued while laughing, "I also don't think this is something for my father." I asked them if this had something to do with their father's Danish abilities, if they were comfortable in speaking Danish, whereto they both answered "no" [they were not good at Danish]. I ensured them that I could easily find an interpreter, and they both mumbled "ok." I felt both Naima and Rehan rather refrained from the topic, and I did not want to place more pressure on them. "Ask Mathilde," Rehan then said. Then Sofia, whose father came from Morocco and mother from France (with Moroccan roots), interrupted: "My dad is a Danish teacher, so it will be fine [interviewing him]."



I believe a major reason for these pupils refraining from connecting me to their parents was that they as teenagers did not want their parents to be too involved in their school-affairs and youth-life in general, a tendency also found in other studies on teenagers in school (Dannesboe et al. 2012, 128-29; Kryger 2019, 29). However, something else entangled in why some fathers appeared to be 'suitable' for this task, and others not. The pupils' distinction between 'capable' and 'not capable' for an interview seemed related to pupils' impression of to which extent fathers had the specific skills and capacities to be able to succeed, such as knowledge about the school system, a high command in Danish, and generally, to which extent they felt 'at ease' in the school context (Schultz 1944). Scholars have argued, how the Danish public school largely reflects the general academisation of the society (see e.g. Steno 2015), and how this again informs the image of the good pupil or family. Teachers often used the term of "resource-strong parents" to describe what they thought to be the good, active, energetic parents capable of stimulating one's child in the right (academic) way. Whom the pupils suggested to me to interview, appeared reflected in these categories, thus connected to which capacities and skills were acknowledged, recognised and celebrated by the school (see also Gilliam and Gulløv 2017). Thus, pupils seemed to know the school's evaluations of the appropriate "resource-strong parents," which influenced my access.

I became more familiar with Naima's family through events at the Elmehaven community house, and managed to arrange an interview with Naima's father, Adnan (pp. 2-5). Not only did Adnan show up, but also his wife and two daughters. During the interview, I better understood why Naima had been holding back; Adnan seemed a bit nervous about the interview, struggling with expressing himself in Danish, and Naima had to intervene and translate for him. This situation, although the mood was good, turned the power relations between parent and child upside down, and resulted in some reassuring laughs. Adnan did not know about certain aspects of Naima's school, which had to do with how he was working more than sixty hours a week in his two jobs. Additionally, it was his wife Faria, who generally took care of the school domain. Nevertheless, not being 'fit for the interview' seemed to make Adnan feel ashamed. Maybe because he ended up with giving an incomplete impression of himself, which did not match the image he wanted to give me, but could not fully express?

On the other hand, Sofia's father, the girl who had suggested I interview her father "since he was a Danish teacher," and I, ended up discussing various aspects of The New School Reform. Nevertheless, Kadin, who was born in Morocco and 44 years old, was

curious to know why I had exactly chosen to interview *him*, which I perceived as sparked by his social alertness about mainly Sofia but also him being othered or minoritised; *had I asked for an interview with him due to him being a father with an immigrant background?* seemed to be his concern. I answered Kadin that I interviewed as many fathers in 7X as possible. This was a complicated response, which placed me in a troubled subject position as researcher (Phoenix 2016, 3); was I here not true to my obligations for fully informed consent? However, the situation at Rosendal School was that teachers were cautious with differentiating among parents based on their backgrounds, at least outside the teachers' lounge, and with this social convention being a characteristic of the school in general, it affected how it was improper to state openly, that I was more interested in some fathers compared to others. I will discuss this further in Chapter Five.

## Gendered Constraints and Potentials

In the following section, I will present reflections on gendered positions in the fieldwork, when studying fathers as a female researcher. The range and the degree of influence and importance of gender in doing fieldwork changes from context to context. Marie Nordberg, who defines herself as a 'female researcher studying men' finds that what is important is which aspects of 'the masculine' is put forward in specific situations. Thus, a man might perform or 'narrate' (Frykmann and Gilje 2003) his masculinity differently to a female researcher than to a male researcher, as well as together with his old friends, or on the job, in his relationship, with his children, etc. Thus, sharing gender or not will assumedly affect our interlocutors' doing of gender, but none of these ways are more 'real' or 'true' than the other, but takes part in the intersubjective dynamics between the anthropologist and the interlocutors (see also Sjørsløv 2015). Advantages and disadvantages of studying the opposite gender have to do with how gender and gender differences are constructed and contested in different social settings or cultures. Although we are not searching for 'the Truth,' it can be fruitful to compare research done by men and women respectively. In this study, I have done so by including findings from fatherhood research done by male researchers (as e.g. Aitken 2009; Bouakaz 2007; Bouakaz and Persson 2007; Madsen 2008; Nielsen and Westerling 2016; Reinicke 2006; Nuur 2015).

Gender is only one of many subject positions, as there are other identity traits, such as style, generation, age, being a migrant, racialised characteristics, etc., which can also

articulate a 'we.' A migrant father at my age, for example, said, "We are another generation," which was a 'we' that he included me in, yet when topics related to having a migrant background or stories of having grown up in another culture than the Danish, I was no longer included in the 'we.' Thus, depending on the topic, situation, etc. various identity traits can be articulated or concealed (Nordberg 1999, 71). Here especially, what did it mean that I did not have a migrant background, and my racialised characteristics are white, and as such could be seen as 'traditionally Danish'?

In her study of infertile men and artificial insemination in Egypt, Inhorn experienced how her 'difference' from her interlocutors became useful in her ethnographic research (Inhorn 2012). As a tall, white, American woman, she stood out as 'very different' from her interlocutors. Before the study, access had been problematised; would she be able to obtain access to the interlocutors, was the 'difference' too big? However, such differences and the fact that she belonged to another continent, worked to disarm some of the cultural taboos about being an infertile man in Egypt, which made her interlocutors share even very intimate feelings of shame and sadness and uncomfortable marginalising experiences related to their condition with her (ibid, 16). Thus, the interviews became a kind of pressure valve or 'safe space' to let go of suppressed or difficult feelings (ibid, see also Nordberg 1999). In my interviews with migrant fathers in the fathers' groups, I likewise appeared 'different,' being a tall, blond, young female student. Yet, as a visitor, I was not involved in the fathers' everyday life; I did not even know which school their children went to, which seemed to work in similar ways as in Inhorn's case. I experienced fathers to open up and tell me about vulnerable episodes of their lives, feelings of sadness, frustrations, and feelings or suspicions of child-professionals mistrusting them. This points to how difference can work as an advantage in some contexts.

This was in contrast to my position at Rosendal School, where fathers knew that I had been attending the school for months, and as such, potentially, associated with the teachers of their child. This appeared to make some parents hesitate to tell me openly about their struggles. One mother, Yasmin, explained it as: "you don't hang up your dirty clothes outside" to describe to me how she did not feel like involving the teacher in all her distresses. I realised how I was involuntary entangled in a 'school's power,' and had to be careful about how this could be disturbing in the eyes of some parents. This gave me certain ethical responsibilities related to something as precarious as the future of the interlocutors' children, which demanded the greatest sensibility as a researcher when encountering marginalised

parents in a context with child-professionals power-superiority. This also illuminates the precarious position of some of the parents, and general inequality in school.

## Elmehaven

Elmehaven was a social housing complex built in the 1970s. The architecture was squared and functional, comprised of blocks with many floors. Between the blocks were playgrounds, football fields and parking lots, and a community house. Here I became a volunteer in some of the social events, which were organised by social project managers (*boligsociale medarbejdere*), along with volunteering tenants. Other students came from 'outside' to volunteer in the area (mainly in the child-activities), and I was generally positioned as one of them, or as a tenant. Thus, I did not stand out in the often-lively community house, where many different tenants and project-workers frequented.

Close to forty per cent of the adult tenants in Elmehaven were on social benefits. For Copenhagen, in general, the number was 14.6 per cent. According to the Danish Social Welfare Administration's latest poverty survey, close to nineteen per cent of residents lived in poverty, which is higher than the poverty level in the municipality as a whole, which was 14.8 per cent, a condition, which restricted the tenants' freedom of action in their daily life. The percentage of residents in Elmehaven with a migrant background were significantly higher than the percentage of Copenhagen in general.

During my fieldwork at Rosendal School, I overheard professionals talk about Elmehaven in degrading ways, for example a small-scale criminal acts of the pupil Sonny, was explained by a social service employee (*SSP medarbejder*) as "what to be done about this, when he lived, where he does?" During an interview, some of the pupils in 7X, those who had parents with a Danish origin and lived outside Elmehaven in self-owned apartments, told me how their parents had restricted them from entering Elmehaven in the evening. This surprised me, since many of their classmates lived there, and for them, Elmehaven was a significant place in their lives.

However, when I left the community-house in the evenings, I always passed a garage where a group of young men hung out. According to the rumours, these youngsters were selling drugs, and from time to time, the police would make a raid. For some of the tenants (especially having teenage-boys) this, along with similar experiences, was a 'sign of danger,' which made them concerned about potential dangers facing their children. One of

these tenants was Omo, who was the mother of Paul from 7X. She was born in Nigeria and arrived in Denmark in 2005 with her husband, who later went back to Nigeria, leaving Omo alone with their three boys to raise. Omo was afraid that her boys should get into crime, and therefore, she had prohibited Paul and his two brothers to go outside after six o'clock. Hence, they spent every evening indoors, often playing computers with each other or online with friends. As this way of raising one's children conflicted with many teachers' ideals of a 'free childhood' (contrary to notions of social control, which I will return to), it was Omo's best intentions to help her boys grow up in a safe environment.

For several of the pupils, Elmhaven was their home, full of friends to play with, friends they often had known for most of their lives; for many parents, Elmhaven encompassed a strong network, which could be strengthened in the community-house and various related associations. For many of the tenants moving was not a possibility, due to their economic conditions, as the apartments were big and cheap, compared to other types of housing in Elmekvarteret.

## The Fathers' Groups – Anthropologist by Appointment

The last of the three places, which constituted the fieldwork, is the fathers' groups placed in different locations, mostly on Zealand and one in Aarhus. These fathers' groups had different structures, but all, except for a Somali parent association, and the self-organised fathers' group in Elmhaven, were part of a community regeneration master plan initiative, which were nationwide social intervention projects located in different politically defined 'exposed social housing estates' (Andersen et al. 2014). With the goal to create positive developments through initiatives focused on empowerment, counselling and crime-prevention initiatives to improve living conditions for residents and the quality of life on the estates (ibid). The fathers in these fathers' groups mainly had a migrant background, and the men represented with a Danish background in some way or another were professionals who had a professional agenda in taking part in these groups (except one father and tenant, Kristoffer, who one time attended a barbeque in the fathers' group of Skovlunden).

In the fathers' group in Bøgelunden, the two fathers with Danish origin were a local priest and a police officer. Both working with social work in the area, and thus professionally interested in getting in touch with the Muslim community of Bøgelunden. The priest because his church was interested in community-work and "dialogue between religions," and the

police officer, because he was part of the local police cooperation with school and social service (*SSP*), and had, according to himself, a hard time with the young so-called “second-generation youngsters” in the area. He saw an opportunity to cooperate with some of the migrant fathers from the fathers’ group, so they could help him get a hold of some of these troublemakers, even though, to my experience, the fathers of these so-called “wild boys” were not directly involved in the fathers’ group. However, some of the present fathers knew of the parents of these “wild boys.” The project manager of the fathers’ group in Bøgelunden, Serkan, who himself had an Iraqi background, was, according to the social masterplan of Bøgelunden, obligated to cooperate with actors from the local community, and welcomed the police officer and the priest, which gave the fathers group a vibe of being a social intervention-project. Some fathers engaged actively in this, others avoided getting too much into the responsibilities that the police officer wanted to place on the fathers.

The migrant fathers I met in the various fathers’ groups were very different and came to the fathers’ groups for various reasons. The institutionalised fathers’ groups had a project-description and stated goals in order to get funding. In Bøgelunden, this was partially “promoting confidence, the quality of life and the well-being of young people in the local area, and supporting disadvantaged young people for a better future.” Nevertheless, such goals did not determine all activities. These groups were also a casual place for fathers and neighbours to meet, chat, have dinner together and talk about childrearing – or unruly teenagers. It was also a place for discussing politics and various aspects of being a migrant in Denmark. Subjects, which I also discussed with these fathers.

The institutionalised father-groups were mixed in terms of which country the fathers had migrated from, as it was not seen as appropriate in the context of social master plans to form groups of one specific national origin. To do so would conflict with politicalised ideals on ‘integration’ and strengthening the politically defined and problematised ‘parallel-societies’ (see Regeringen 2018). In this way, such fathers’ groups can be seen as part of a system, producing such phenomena as ‘the ethnic minority man,’ which in the father’s own vocabulary turned into “us foreigners” or “immigrants.” Contrarily, the two self-organised father’s/parent’s groups were homogeneous regarding national or pan-ethnic origin (Somali decent or Arab descent). These two informal groups were established before they were formed into an official association. Formal associations have a positive status in Denmark, as one can seek official funds and meeting rooms. The Somali parent group was a place where parents could help, guide and support each other. However, it was also a place where the children

were taught, e.g. Somalia, English and old folklores from the regions the parents had fled from.

My participant observation in the fathers' groups generally took form as visits. Madden (2010) describes this type of ethnography as "step-in-step-out" (80), where the fieldworker is present in rather short periods. Such short visits can be useful in thematic contextualisation, she argues. In my case, it also became a way for me to meet and interview more fathers with a migrant background, and thus illuminate my research questions from multiple angles.

I found it difficult to *participate* in these fathers' groups and struggled to find a suitable role other than 'the student who visits.' However, these visits brought along important insights, though not based on long-term ethnographic participant-observation.

Nordberg (1999) points to how our difference and sameness to our interlocutors is multifaceted and plays on many different identity traits – age, style, physical appearance, gender, nationality, etc. (Nordberg 1999). As aforementioned, due to my physical appearance as a tall, relatively young woman with almost white hair, pale skin and blue eyes, I in many ways appeared as 'a traditional Dane.' As such, not only my gender, but also other characteristics made me someone who just did not 'fit in.' In addition, I did not have any children, and as I described myself as a student, I felt many fathers thought I was younger than I was. Such elements made it difficult for me to find an available role in these fathers' groups. In addition, the fathers' groups were also a semi-private place for sharing at times intimate experiences or personal issues. Especially in the two fathers' groups who took the form of self-development-courses, I was told by the project administrators that trust in the room was important, therefore, other attendees than the actual participants were problematic.

Again, experiencing limitations in access is important in the anthropologists' learning process. The fathers' groups were gendered communities, which 'anyone' could not just enter; I never met other women in the fathers' groups except me. This seemed to be important, also because all the other events or activities in the community houses usually included children, youngsters and/or women too. Although I could not really find a suitable long-term role, everyone welcomed me as a visitor. The following fieldnotes from my first visit to the fathers' group in Skovvangen, illustrate aspects of such a 'visitor-role':

The visit was a bit confusing, partly due to the fathers speaking Arabic, Turkish or Somali with each other (...) Many fathers told me about how they also needed a place to meet, and that they as fathers could meet and, for

example, cook together. When having dinner together, one of the father's sons was there too, who was studying to be an engineer. The other student, who did the other interview [the same evening two other students were visiting], was stating, "The girls with another ethnic background just speed ahead" [referring to statistics that show that these girls do better with regard to education than the boys]. One father from the father's group was telling how it normally was, but then again, how things were also different. Giving as an example how he was the one cooking in his relationship – like – "it's normally not this way – but we are different" (like he wanted to surprise us). I felt some of the fathers actually would prefer not to answer all these questions. However, at the same time, I felt that fathers also saw it as a part of the group's agenda – they somehow wanted to challenge and change how the world looks upon them (...) I felt a bit like their becoming was affected by such visits 'from outside.'

Edited fieldnote

As described, I was not the only student to come that evening to 'study' the fathers. When I arrived, two students were already conducting an interview. Maahir, the project coordinator, explained that they often had visitors/students to interview some of the fathers. I felt a bit weird about being one in the line of students from outside of Skovvangen, to come and study them. I got the impression that the fathers had decided to welcome all the students, who contacted them, and thus somehow accepted to take on the position as experts or 'ambassadors of migrant fathers.' The two other students' project was about, roughly, "the overrepresentation of diabetes among ethnic minority men." In this way, the fathers were objectified and to some extent problematised (overrepresentation of health-problems) and placed in a position to answer on behalf of 'the ethnic-other man.' This was again reflected in how one of the students wanting the fathers' and the son's reflection on, why "the girls with an ethnic minority background" were ahead of the boys in terms of education? In some way ironically, the present son was studying to become an engineer, but became positioned as someone, who could talk on behalf of the 'lagging behind ethnic minority boys.'

Returning to thoughts on social becoming, these intersubjective dynamics were affected by forces of greater binary categories – 'the ethnic minority man' vs. 'the ethnic Danish man.' The students from the health-study brought with them statistics and research,



which were based on such categories that indicated problematic conditions related to the former. Biehl and Locke (2017) borrow the term ‘molar-line’ from Deleuze, to illuminate how such broad categories sort and define people. Underneath these molar lines are the lines of supply, charting the actual lives and social world that depend on the ridged forms (like the category of the ‘ethnic minority man’), while never quite corresponding to them (ibid. 8-9). The focus on these fathers’ social becoming across forms and scales highlights to which extent such greater binary categories (‘ethnic-other’ vs. ‘ethnic Danish’) does not align with empirical realities, but also never completely discharged from them, and how people in lived life are transforming and ‘sneaking around’ such greater structures. I experienced how fathers in these fathers’ groups at one time accepted being someone who was an ‘ethnic minority man-expert,’ but then again wanted to transform the negativity or mistrust, which stuck to this category, and as such, also to them.

My first meeting with the fathers’ group in Skovvangen illustrates how social becoming is embedded in complex realities neither completely constrained by nor fully detached from the legacies of historical and political patterns and systemic violence. In addition, how *I* was also entangled in those forces (see Biehl and Locke 2017, 10). Moreover, it reflects an old ethnographic point: that all positions have their own inbuilt pros and cons. In this case, the position of a visitor gave insights into how some fathers wanted to transform the mistrust or problematisation, which they thought I carried with me from ‘outside.’

This seemed, on some occasions, to lead to a form of collective narrative – co-constructed by me – about how they, fathers in politically deprived social housing estates, were *also* normal caring fathers who could also take part in household chores as e.g. cooking.

Places such as the fathers’ groups are contradictory, conflictual and influenced by political forces in their ongoing production, constituted by interactive relationships between people and the environment in which they act. In these processes, different actors have different agencies in regards to claiming, giving meaning, valuing or defining the place (Johansen 2013, Ingold 2009). I do not claim my study was much different from the health education students, although I tried not to state any negative presuppositions, like asking explanations of negative statistical surveys. However, in line with the health education students, I also came to the fathers’ groups because they represent such a category of ‘fathers with migrant backgrounds.’ Although I tried to come as a neutral visitor, I was already positioned in a place affected by broader categorical forces, which I could not escape somehow replicating myself. This gave me important insights of how my research field was in many ways already problematised, and how this unfolded in intersubjective dynamics.

## Reflections on Representativity

All ethnographic data is context-sensitive and relational. Thus, in the interviews I conducted, knowledge was produced between me as the interviewer and the interviewee's point of views (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 143). According to ethnologists Jonas Frykman and Nils Gilje (2003), stories told in interviews are in itself a navigation toward a certain portrait of a self; how it is the current "narrating," rather than the concrete narrative, which is central. Thus, not how the story *is*, but how it is *used* in a practical sense, or how this narrating creates meaning and coherence in a specific social context (Frykman and Gilje 2003, 40, see also Westerling 2016). In other words, how stories could be used to make me understand how a specific happening was experienced, or more broadly, *how it is to be me*. Some of the interviews I conducted ended with taking shape of a life-story interview; again, others were centred on positive and negative experiences with the school. In the fathers' groups, most of these narratives were told from the context of social housing complexes, with socio-economic characteristics, which made them 'exposed enough' regarding crime-rate, social problems, and poverty to get funding for a 'social master plan.' Thus, these specific fathers, were – to various degrees – also talking from a position in a marginalised housing complex, which in policies have been highly problematised as constituting "parallel-societies" (Regeringen 2018), which, from time to time seemed to affect how these fathers shaped their narratives.

I sought these fathers' groups because I knew I would be able to meet many fathers with migrant backgrounds here, and because I was familiar with this field from my former job. This has retrospectively made me reflect on, what happens when much research on citizens with a migrant background (as well as their children) often takes its starting point in similar housing residential areas. Subsequently, it was in these father groups that I encountered the most straightforward narration of the phenomenon, which I have coined as mistrusted masculinity (Jørgensen 2017).

At Rosendal School, most of the fathers with a migrant background found the home-school collaboration to be good and trouble-free. Here I observed ordinary, everyday practices that were perceived as unproblematic by both fathers and teachers. Likewise, migrant fathers from Rosendal School abstained from positioning themselves as 'us foreigners' as they navigated for them and their children to be 'like everyone else' (see also Phoenix 2016). Contrarily, fathers in the fathers' groups from time to time took the position of "us foreigners," in opposition to "Danes," and took part in discussions on "integration."

As the chairperson of the Council for Ethnic Minorities in Denmark has emphasised, ninety per cent of all “Danes with immigrant or refugee background and their descendants,” do not live in residential areas, politically placed on the Danish “ghetto-list.”<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, “When there is a strong negative focus on new-Danes (*nydanskere*) in ghetto areas, and these figures are not put in perspective, the whole group of new-Danes is quickly marked as being problematic” (Rådet for etniske minoriteter 2018). In these areas, problems potentially intensify due to economic struggles, a greater societal stigmatisation, and the like.

Perhaps because more interesting or new data is mostly found in such vulnerable areas, they attract attention from both researchers as well as journalists and politicians? As a result, problems will be and appear far greater and more general than they are. Researchers might look for the problems related to integration aiming to illuminate social issues (or the funding is given according hereto) to help solving them, while at the same time problems might appear greater than they are to the readers, resulting in categorical errors (see also Rytter 2018).

## Ethics in a Politicalised Field

The ethical dilemmas mentioned above are interconnected with broader national and international politics. My fieldwork took place during the comprehensive so-called “refugee-crisis” due to the civil war in Syria, and many Syrian refugees fleeing into Denmark and Europe in general. As my project has progressed, this crisis seems to have evolved into a broader “migrant-crisis,” where roads into Europe have gradually been closed. The Danish Prime Minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, declared in his nationwide broadcasted new-year speech on the first of January 2018, that Denmark could not take more refugees and immigrants. The limit was reached. “We must stop the entry of refugees and immigrants. We have done this. We must send the war-refugees home again, as soon as the conditions permit. In addition, those with foreign backgrounds, who will be staying here in the country, they, of course, must take responsibility and contribute...” (Rasmussen 2018, my translation). ‘Reaching the limit’ equally made the Danish government withdraw from the international agreement on quota refugees (Folketinget 2017). Alongside, the political rhetoric towards

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<sup>12</sup> A politically created list of the most exposed housing areas in Denmark (Regeringen 2018).

immigrants has in many ways been more antagonistic (see e.g. Padovan-Özdemir and Moldenhawer 2017). Such processes seem to have entangled with terror-attacks in bigger European cities, for which Islamist terror-organisations have taken the responsibility and have contributed to a representation of Islam as a dangerous religion. This tense political and historical environment has made me worry about how parts of the thesis might be taken out of context and used to fortify negative stereotypical imaginations of Muslim, migrant citizens in Denmark (see also Bundgaard 2009, 198-199).

Sociologist Sherryl Kleinman (1993) problematises one of her earlier fieldwork among students, where she, as the “political correct liberal,” refrained in differentiating between black and white students. “My white liberal ideology, then, kept me from gathering data (or examine the data I had) that might portray the black students as less than perfect humanitarians” (ibid, 11). Retrospectively, she realised how she was not only trying to protect the black students, but also her own liberal self-image. Her ‘blindness’ to differences related to race resulted in how she failed to examine the black students’ perspectives, because she wanted to enact a political correctness by treating black and white students’ experiences as synonymous, which indicated an enlightened, non-racist view (ibid,12). In a similar retrospective perspective, Jennifer Hunt (1989) argues that the absence of race-related issues in her field notes was a result of her discomfort with the issue (cited in Kleinman 1993, 13).

These examples all reflect methodological considerations I have done during this PhD process. Broader political and historical processes were forces, which influenced both the interlocutors and me, and evoked a climate with a certain tension and discomfort. This made it difficult to study experiences of being minoritised or racialised. That is: *How could I address difference, when it was already placed in a broader ‘inflamed’ context?* Due to this discomfort, it was difficult for me to introduce related topics in interviews, as I felt I was *othering* the fathers. As many fathers from the fathers’ groups would themselves draw in perspectives on “being a foreigner,” migrant fathers from Rosendal School generally did not introduce such topics themselves. I, myself, felt a tension about bringing up topics related to their migrant backgrounds into play; or I felt I could not ask further questions, which nevertheless were relevant for my study. Phoenix (2016) describes such a “troubled subject position” in relation to how an interviewer can find it difficult to introduce topics on (in her specific case) racialised experiences, because such questions can by the interviewee be seen as giving importance to race (ibid, 7). Thus, more of the interlocutors in Phoenix’ specific study found that speaking about racism functioned to bring it into existence as something related to the

interviewee. One interlocutor explained how asking someone about racism could make this person feel odd, and even question his or her existence (ibid, 7-8).

In line with this, I faced a troubled position, where I could not ask more questions about related topics. Therefore, I asked where the specific father had himself gone to school, and if and how this was different from Rosendal School. If I found it appropriate, I (towards the end of the interview in order not to 'prime' the interview) presented the fathers to other cases I had collected, where fathers with migrant backgrounds had felt their migrant backgrounds had influenced their relations to the school, and asked if they had experienced something similar. I tried to open up for topics especially related to being a migrant, without directly othering the father; however, for me the 'discomfort' was often an underlying factor.

I was, with my 'very Danish characteristics' in a position to minoritise or ethnicise (Gans 2017) these specific interlocutors, and I often felt a certain social alertness as an intersubjective dynamic related to this tension. More than anything else, what appeared to constitute these migrant fathers' or their children's 'sameness,' was the distress of potentially being othered.

## Concluding Remarks

The three different settings for the fieldwork – Rosendal School, Elmehaven and the various fathers' groups – were all social places assigned meaning through the everyday interactions and power-relations, and as such closely connected to the formation of subjectivity and social becoming (Ingold 2009; Johansen 2013, 21). Fathers' different positions within these settings were reflected in the foci and topics the fathers brought into our conversations; in these different settings, different aspects of being a migrant father were narrated. For example, the fact that I encountered more narratives of discrimination in the fathers' groups than with fathers from Rosendal School seemed related to how I was disconnected with their lives and their children's school, which made them more free to reveal and criticise some of the practices of the school.

This chapter has also described some of the obstacles that made some migrant fathers hesitate to participate. Feeling unfit, lack of language skills and alertness about being 'othered,' having a time-consuming, constraining job, being unfamiliar with doing interviews, uncomfortable with the child-professionals power, could be reasons for abstaining from my

invitation to be interviewed. Some of these factors might also play out a role in home-school cooperation, which I will analyse further in the coming chapters.

**Part II – Entanglements  
between Fathers and  
School**

## Introduction to Part II

Being concerned with migrant fathers' experiences, it is important to underline how experience is not an existential given, but rather a historically and culturally constituted process, founded on a certain way of being in the world (Desjarlais 1996). Thus, to study migrant fathers' experiences of home-school cooperation practices, we have to consider how these experiences themselves relate to specific social, cultural, political, and material forces (ibid, 89).

Accordingly, a problem with taking experience as a kind of unique authentic domain of life is that one risks losing an opportunity to question either the social production of that domain or the practices that define its use. As connotations of primacy and authenticity lend legitimacy to the anthropological analysis, it may simultaneously "limit inquiries to descriptions of the social terrain and how this terrain comes about" (ibid, 72). Hence, to explore how the terrain of the school came about, and more specifically the home-school cooperation, this second part approaches such terrain from different positions. I argue that to understand the positions of fathers with a migrant background, it is important to analyse other central actors' positions too. As parents generally perceived this terrain as belonging more to 'the mother's domain,' than that of the father, many experiences of migrant fathers were general for all 'types' of fathers. Hence, I include perspectives from both 'types' of fathers, as well as mothers and pupils.

In addition, I also, mainly in chapter seven, explore the teachers' positions, as a means to understand how some migrant fathers 'became absent.' Therefore, some of the sections in this second part may appear to the reader as remote from migrant fathers' subjective experience of home-school cooperation. Yet, my argument for doing so is to establish an understanding of the broader terrain of the school and various positions here, which constituted both restrictions and opportunities for fathers' agency. Both fathers and teachers navigated the terrain; a terrain which was intensified by different forces, and characterised by certain "cultural givens" (Dannesboe et. al. 2012, 11).

In order to analyse the context for being a migrant father within the school-context Chapter Five examines the construction of 'the foreign,' in order to show how aspects related to being a migrant were in some ways tabooed, yet at other times spoken about in subtle, sometimes depriving, ways. Chapter Six examines the terrain of home-school collaboration as a gendered space, in order to show how fathers in general were positioned and positioned themselves in the context of the school, with the objective of finding the circumstances that



were specific to migrant fathers. In Chapter Seven, I explore the phenomenon of home-school cooperation, in order to understand better the intensified expectations and dependencies that influenced the fathers involved. More precisely, I examine how numerous reform changes along with an aspiration for more flexibility made the teachers become dependent on parents' support. In Chapter Eight, I build on the previous chapter and contest the intensified expectations for school parents' (online) engagement with migrant fathers' everyday life, in order to show how certain constraining jobs imposed certain rhythms on some of these fathers' daily life, which did not match the school's appreciation for parents being visible and engaged. Taking the point of departure with contesting absence, I continue in Chapter Eight to analyse how some practices in school could work to make especially migrant parents redundant. I explore a cultural, institutional '*language-logic*,' which worked to place multilingual parents in a position as 'non-experts.' In this way, dynamics within the school could work to make fathers feel redundant or figuratively speaking, 'make them become absent,' although they were showing up at school.



## Chapter 5: Handling ‘the Foreign’ – Tension, Tabooing and Social Alertness

This chapter provides the context within which the home-school cooperation was played out at Rosendal School. I explore different ideas and meanings regarding ‘the foreign,’ and how they relate to the migrant families and their children's schooling. The constructions of ‘the foreign’ provide important insights into what characterised the terrain of the school, as they shed light on which preconceptions and figured identities were ready for the fathers, when they entered the school. As I collected most of the data regarding this aspect of Rosendal School during my fieldwork at the school, in interaction with teachers and pupils, I base this chapter on data with these interlocutors. However, as I will return to, such constructions of ‘the foreign’ were reflected in the home-school cooperation practices, and thus affected the fathers with migrant background. Hence, this chapter functions as a framework for the further chapters, by analysing relevant aspects of the social production of meaning at Rosendal School and more broadly, Elmekvarteret, and thus the context for being and becoming a school-father with a migrant background in this areas.

### A Super-Diverse School

Thirty-eight per cent of the pupils at Rosendal School had ‘another mother-tongue than Danish’ (The Annual Quality Report). On the Internet homepage of Rosendal School, it said that the school “was a school with pupils from very different backgrounds,” and went on to clarify how the school saw this as a force, since children can learn from each other’s differences and variations. Among teachers and parents in general, I experienced similar attitudes: how all kinds of pupils and families were welcomed, and how they were abstaining from dividing the pupils into national or ethnicised categories; they saw children *as children*. In addition, having a parent or grandparents, who at some point had migrated to Denmark, did not clearly appear to be assigned much importance by the teachers in the hectic everyday life at Rosendal School, where diversity or “super-diversity” (Vertovec 2007) had been a trait for many years. Especially in 0C and both Grade 7 classes, more than half of the pupils had parents or grandparents, who had migrated to Denmark, from either European countries or

the traditional migration countries as aforementioned. Sometimes only one of the pupil's parents had migrated, or only one of the grandparents.

Taking into account the super-diverse character of Rosendal School, the concept of 'ethnic minority pupils,' which I had used as a research category in my PhD-proposal, fell short. It became unclear what 'ethnicity' actually referred to, and how many generations back? For example, the pupil Kamille from 0C had a father from France and a mother from Denmark, yet they were divorced, and she lived with her mother in Copenhagen; was she then an 'ethnic minority?' And if so, 'how much?' We may investigate this as social processes, for example how she identified herself in relation to others; however, the classification of 'ethnic minority' fell short, if it is put to work as a delimited research category. Thinking back to the discussion on "postmodern ethnicity" (Ang 2002) in Chapter Two, the pupils' traits or roots to other places in the world did not necessarily mean that these pupils had strong feelings of an 'other ethnic belonging' to communities in other places of the world with whom they shared a language, beliefs and territory belonging (ibid, Phoenix 2001).

One example of this super-diversity was in 0C, where Gitte, the class teacher, one day asked the class, what they called their father. Both of Hans' parents were born in Germany, and he used *vather*, because they spoke German at home. Kamille with her French father and Danish mother, mentioned *père*, yet Gitte was not sure if he had moved back to France. Amira's parents had arrived in Denmark from Somalia as youngsters, and both had grown up in Denmark speaking both Danish and Somali at home. Asmae's parents were born in Morocco, and she called her father *baba*, similar to Emre, whose father had a Turkish migrant background. Valdemar had lived with his parents in New York City, as they worked in international politics, and he sometimes called his father "daddy." Silas lived with his mother, who was of Danish descent, yet Silas' father was from, and still living in, South Africa. Neither the class teacher nor I ever met him, but Silas often played counterstrike with him online. He called his father "daddy" too. As such, there were many traits or lines to different places in the world in 0C (see also Daugaard and Laursen 2012). This super-diversity is far from the case at all public schools in Denmark; however, at Rosendal School this character meant that diversity and multilingualism became – to some extent – ordinary among the pupils in the everyday life.

The super-diversity was also reflected in Elmekvarteret in general. Idle, who was the father of Amira from 0C, told me how he felt at home in Elmekvarteret due to the general diversity. Idle was a refugee of the Somali civil war, who had arrived in Denmark as a teenager. Before granted asylum in Denmark, he and his family had lived some years in

Damascus. Now he lived in Elmehaven with his wife, Fadume, and their four children. In other geographical contexts, he sometimes felt people “looked at him” – indirectly referring to his black skin colour. I asked if he also felt that in Elmekvarteret, and he said, “No, it is in other neighbourhoods, and not at Rosendal School.” I then asked about Sønderby, which was the city the authorities had transferred his family to live during their first three years in Denmark. “Ohhhh, Sønderby...that! [Laugh] Its good I moved away from there, for sure. It is a small town and... yes! [People had looked].” Sønderby was a rather rural town in Western Jutland.

## Concerned About Inclusion

As I participated in the welcoming event for the new Grade 0 pupils and their parents, the school principal, Simon, held a speech. All new pupils and parents had shown up for this ‘big day,’ and there were flowers and a big Danish flag on both sides of the podium where Simon gave his speech. This was a day of celebration, with nervous small children, who would soon have to leave their parents and follow their new teacher to their classroom, some excited, some crying and resisting letting go of their parent’s hand or leg. In the speech, Simon mentioned that the school celebrated many traditions: Easter, Christmas as well as the Muslim tradition *Eid*. Many studies find a strong entanglement between the public schools and Danish nationality (see e.g. Gilliam and Gulløv 2017), something which, in this specific ceremony, was reflected in big, Danish flags on each side of the podium and numerous flags in the classrooms. However, mentioning Eid was a way for Simon to acknowledge the many new Muslim families. Concurrently, the pupils were allowed to take these days off. As a public school, such elements, compared to other schools, appeared to be quite broadminded (see e.g. Gilliam 2009, Gitz-Johansen 2006, Jensen 2013).

The following edited field note from the first school day after the terror attack in Paris on 13 November 2015 also reflects how Rosendal School was a diverse school.

During the lunch break, Simon announced in the teachers’ lounge that a one-minute silence was to be held to remember the victims of the recent terror attack [from political side, public schools had been encouraged to mark the tragedy by one minute's silence]. Some of the teachers questioned the idea, and the teacher Lasse asked Simon: “What about all the other people who suffer around the world? What about the recent bomb-explosion in Beirut,

and what about Palestine?” Some of the other teachers backed Lasse up, and Simon seemed pressured, as I have seen him before when he was to give instructions to the teachers. “I’ll figure something out,” Simon said. As the announcement-speakers were turned on after the break, Simon announced: “We are holding a one minute silence for all the people who suffer from terror in the world...”

This episode reflects a school culture, where teachers and pupils are aware of conflicts around the world, since many of the pupils had roots back to some of these countries, encompassing a sensitivity from the teachers’ side, as to what this might mean for the specific pupils and their feeling of being included in the school-community. Right after the announcement, the main teachers in 7X, Steffen and Monica, used the lesson to discuss foreign politics, war, and terror with the pupils. Many of the Muslim pupils felt personally intertwined in the whole affair. They had witnessed an intensifying islamophobia in public debates, and their frustration was clear, when such topics came up. They were very alert about what Steffen and Monica said and explained. Thus, the discussion heated up, and Steffen tried his best to explain the one-minute silence by “the special bond between European countries” (although Simon had changed the wording, the pupils were aware that the ceremony was related to France). However, many pupils counter-argued his explanations, as they also felt special bonds to other countries, and/or felt excluded by the way Steffen framed his explanations. This episode illuminates how teachers and pupils constantly move between different scales, and how tension between ‘the West and the rest,’ as part of the rhetoric on neo-Orientalist assumptions (on a larger scale), entangled with the everyday school-life (on the small-scale) (see Purcell 2017, 147-48), which resulted in certain tensions and social alertness around certain topics.

Pupils discussed and negotiated these large-scale tendencies of neo-Orientalist assumptions and problematisation of immigrants and refugees in political rhetoric, which entangled with their everyday life and formed new ‘truths’ among them. One example that illustrates this was told by Isabel’s mother, whom I accidentally met after my fieldwork ended. We discussed the government’s new “Ghetto-plan” (Regeringen 2018), which Isabel’s mother condemned. She explained to me that Isabel (who now had just started third grade) had returned home one day and told her: “Mom! The Muslims have to move out of Elmehaven now. They cannot live there anymore. They have to pack their things...” Isabel, who was only eight years old, had difficulties explaining to her mother what she had heard,

nonetheless she had constructed this narrative, which became her understanding or, according to her mother, probably the existing story among the third-grade pupils. It is an example of how national political discourses were forces, which constantly entangled with everyday life and became a part of children's understandings and narratives, reinforcing the social alertness around 'the foreign.'

## An Intersubjective Tension

As mentioned above, many teachers at Rosendal School were concerned about not dividing the pupils into ethnified or national categories. When I had my first meeting with the two teacher teams I was going to 'follow' and Simon, I explained my focus as on "ethnic minority families," especially fathers.<sup>13</sup> Subsequently, the teachers and Simon explained to me, how they did not use such terms as 'ethnic minority pupils' or 'ethnic minority families,' to talk about, or evaluate parents. They would rather define and categorise the families as "resource-weak" or "resources-strong." In that very moment, I felt I had said something politically incorrect, and I learned how my topic, by drawing distinction between certain pupils and families, was problematic at Rosendal School. In my previous fieldwork as a master's student in a public school in central Jutland (Jørgensen 2009), I recorded how teachers would link or explain pupil's behaviour to ideas on their 'cultural heritage,' forming a "behavioural explanatory concept of culture" (*adfærdsforklarende kulturbegreb*) (Jørgensen 2009) a tendency, which is also found in other similar studies (Gilliam 2009, Gitz-Johansen 2006). However, at Rosendal School I hardly recorded any of these instances of such cultural stereotypes, when accounting for children's behaviour in school (see also Gitz-Johansen 2003), preferring to talk about possessing or lack of resources (*ibid*; see also Gilliam 2012, 169). The school principal, Simon, explained it this way:

I think that in the municipality of Copenhagen, you are light-years back in thinking of integration, and the way we ought to be together. In my view, it is not at all about bilingualism<sup>14</sup> or not, it is about socially disadvantaged

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<sup>13</sup> During the fieldwork-process, I found the concept of 'ethnic minority' to be problematic (pp. 80) and changed my study-object to *fathers with migrant background*.

<sup>14</sup> Politically, "bilingual pupils" have for many years been the politically correct term to define pupils with migrant parents (see e.g. Gilliam, 2006, 3) and the term has been legitimised in political statements and law, where schools receive additional financial support based on the number of 'bilingual pupils.'

families, who have no money for anything. Such things must create problems. It is damn unimportant where you come from (...) but if you do not have the money to maintain a normal life, you cannot make it. (...) That is why I term people resource-strong and resource-weak – because there are some, who have many resources, and some people do not have that. They may be bilingual, they may originally come from Turkey or – I actually do not think it is about that. They may speak just as good Danish as everyone else. That is why I am annoyed that bilingualism in Copenhagen's municipality is such a big thing.

Often, in the process of the ethnographic fieldwork, things start to puzzle us, as if our field of interest calls for certain attention. Such 'disturbance' can make the fieldworker change the focus, since 'it' seems to 'pop up' every time we try to answer the questions we came into the field with. As I came to the school to explore how 'ethnic minority fathers' were constructed and positioned by teachers in home-school cooperation, I was constantly confronted with the teachers pointing to the irrelevance of such distinction, which became interesting in itself.

In my interviews with fathers with migrant backgrounds who had children at Rosendal School, many expressed, as aforementioned, satisfaction with the school, and their migrant backgrounds were generally only verbalised insofar as I explicitly asked about how their own school years had been. Thus, if I compared the interviews I conducted with all the fathers from Rosendal School, having a migrant background was not an identity trait or characteristic these specific fathers would themselves draw to the front as central, when answering my questions related to home-school cooperation.

Episodes as described above, from time to time made me question: Are my research questions outdated? Surely, the families and pupils at Rosendal School lived in a diverse context in terms of religion, diverse language skills and family relation to different countries in the world (see also Daugaard and Laursen 2012). And the pupils seemed mostly to be taken up by computer games, music, clothes, Instagram and such things, and were mainly not dividing and grouping themselves into 'Danes' and 'foreigners.' The diversity rather seemed to be 'the normal,' which was very different from e.g. my own public school in a rural area in the north of Denmark in the late 1980s. Did I impose differences where such were not experienced as important? This I asked myself while I carried the general concern related to studying migrants and minoritised groups in general: that we as researchers reinforce



processes of othering by studying and emphasising, potentially constructing ‘the differences,’ and by such make it socially relevant (see Hedegaard 2003).

However, although teachers and parents refrained from venturing into discussions on topics related to ‘foreignness,’ it popped up in relation to talks about ‘mixing’ or ‘equal distribution’ of pupils. Later in the interview with the principal Simon, we came to discuss the problem of “resource-strong pupils” leaving the school in the late school years (e.g. to private, accredited schools), resulting in the Grade 8 and Grade 9 classes having a majority of the so-called “resource-weak pupils.” Then Simon added that new numbers had surprisingly shown a new tendency; that some parents had taken their children out of the school in the first school years<sup>15</sup> (*indskolingen*) and transferred them to Arab private schools. I ask him why he thought this had happened:

I do not know. I think our school is predominantly a Danish school – white school, if you want to call it that – in the ‘*indskoling*.’ I think there are many...like... bilingual parents, if that is what they should be called... who find it difficult to see themselves in that culture. That is what I think. The school board<sup>16</sup> was shocked [after the numbers were introduced], some of them [the parents in the school board] are very resourceful people sitting up there, saying, "Oh my God, is it us, who are pushing them out?" I do not know. They are very concerned with it being a multicultural school.

We see how “resource-weak” and “strong” are mixed with ‘bilingual’ and ‘white.’ Although Simon tried to avoid making such distinctions, discussing the distribution of pupils nevertheless made him venture into these distinctions and categorisations. In different ways, throughout the interview, Simon associated “bilingualism” to socially disadvantaged children.

The teacher Steffen told me that he “hated to mention it,” but many of the “ethnic Danish pupils” would leave Rosendal School in the last years (from end of Grade 7), and then the division would be “unequal.” Steffen did not like to distinguish between the pupils, but he, in line with Simon, nevertheless saw the tilt between ‘Danish’ and ‘bilingual pupils’ in the last school years as problematic. Problematisations of how “resource-strong pupils” or

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<sup>15</sup> A common term for the first school years from Grade 0 including Grade 3 is ‘*indskoling*.’ The term for Grades 4 to 7 is ‘*melletrin*’ and ‘*udskoling*’ for Grades 7 to 9.

<sup>16</sup> A board consisting of school professionals and a majority of parents, who make decisions regarding school practices.

“ethnic Danish pupils” leave in the last school years are a common phenomenon in public schools, and among school professionals this is known as ‘thinning’ (Gilliam 2009). Simon and Steffens alertness and discomfort about how to label or deal with ‘the differences’ was not rare. To be unsure which terms to use, when interlocutors were trying to formulate issues around what they believed to be a ‘them’ and a ‘us’ matter was something I also encountered in interviews with fathers, which I will turn to in the following section.

## Tabooing ‘Foreignness’ and Ideals on Diversity

...There, I think there are many ordinary Danes, I do not know how to say it uhh...ethnic Danes, or what the hell should we call us, right?! However, so... the white, they were frustrated...

Claus, father of Frederik from 7X

As reflected in this quote, Claus was not sure what to call ‘us’ (him and I – as “ordinary Danes”), and the topic made him get sweaty hands, he later explained. The discomfort Claus expressed was something I often recorded. Taboos, tension or alertness ‘sticked’ to talking about issues related to social constructions of ‘the foreign.’ ‘Foreignness’ is a term, I suggest, which should be understood as a social construction of something, which is verbalised or portrayed in opposition to ‘the Danes’ (which is at the same time constructed as ‘the norm’), as for example ‘bilingual’ or ‘bilingual culture.’ The social construction of making something ‘foreign’ depended on the context, time, place, and part of constructions of differences, belonging, and othering.

Claus had a Master’s degree in history, but had not worked as a historian much, and now he was again in-between jobs, he explained with despair. When I interviewed Claus, he explained how he and his (now) ex-wife had wanted their two children to attend a public school, because they thought it was good for their children to meet different kinds of people. After agreeing on this matter, they had then been concerned if there was a good distribution between “bilingual pupils” and “ethnic Danes.” “We did not want him [Frederik] to attend

Elmeskolen, which was the closest,<sup>17</sup> because there was ninety-five per cent [bilingual pupils] and I have myself attended that school.” At this point Claus explained how he was getting “sweaty hands,” and added, “But generally, the thing with bilingual pupils, it’s a bit taboo in the schools. Now, we have had a good debate about it here at Elmekvarteret, because we have that many bilingual pupils.” Claus then explained that at some point there had been ninety per cent “bilingual pupils” at one of the other public schools placed in Elmekvarteret, and how the parent group (of non-bilingual parents like him) had “said enough.” The school principal had agreed, and had advocated for the “max forty per cent or thirty-five per cent,” Claus said, and added:

This was a good initiative and it was received really well... at least by the non-bilingual parents... I have myself been a supplement-teacher in some of the schools in the neighbourhood, and at least on Elmeskolen, over there they cancelled the school camp.<sup>18</sup> They had a cottage, and they sold it because no one came to that school camp. It is not in the *bilingual culture* to go to a school camp; they keep the children more at home and stuff like that. Sooo, something like birthday parties, where you go home [to visit each other] that was cancelled, it was not something you did (...) the white, they were frustrated that Danish culture was not quite visible anymore. The school where I was teaching, the Danish children talked just as much *jalla* language as the immigrants did. We were fourteen nations in one class (my emphasis).

Elmeskolen was a public school nearby Elmehaven, which had closed around seven years ago. Many parents mentioned this school as a dysfunctional school, which was often, at some point, linked to how there had been too many ‘bilingual pupils.’ That there could not be a major overrepresentation of ‘bilingual pupils’ in the ideal school was a social convention I observed between both parents with a Danish background as well as (although less frequently) among migrant parents. There was a limit to how much ‘foreignness’ was acceptable.

Thus, to my observations, Claus’ point of view was not rare, but what was rare was his openness and honesty in telling me about it, since most parents refrain from going into

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<sup>17</sup> All children are associated with a particular public school district by virtue of their residence. They have unconditional right to admission to this school. The child also has the right to register at another public school and is usually accepted, if there is room (Undervisningsministeriet 2018a).

<sup>18</sup> A school camp is a school excursion, which involves at least one night. As school camps have a goal of academic learning, it is, among teachers, also seen as beneficial for the social community of the class.

more detail about this topic. Nevertheless, Claus expressed great difficulties related to talking about this topic. He got “sweaty hands,” as well as with affect he had burst out: “What the hell should we call us!” Affective reactions can be signs of not having a suitable vocabulary to express oneself, or feeling that the vocabulary is ‘trapping one’ into a certain position, as Claus here seemed to struggle to find the right words to use. Similarly, Claus continued with frustration:

There is a lot where you are accused of being a racist when it is, in reality, another focus you try to place on the matter. In the multicultural society, there should be a space to be an Arab, there should also be a space to be a Muslim... hmm... but how much space should there be? That is a debate, which is really difficult to take... and there are so many taboos.

Claus then explained, that he understood how difficult it could be to be a Syrian refugee and arrive at a new country, while not knowing the norms – e.g. birthday traditions, but he also thought it was important that there were families who could take the lead and show these newcomers what these Danish norms were. The children’s birthday (traditionally celebrated in the specific pupils’ home) appeared to be very important for Claus, as well as the school-colonies. Lisa, the class teacher of 0B emphasised in similar ways how participation in birthdays was essential. Thus, that the pupil Mustafa did not participate in these birthdays resulted in Lisa, along with other teachers, talking about the need for Mustafa to “be more integrated.” The colonies and birthdays stood out in our conversation as “cultural fix points” for Danish culture (Jensen 2003), which had to remain for the Danish culture not to ‘vanish’.

Claus’ story reflects a development, which had taken place at Elmekvarteret within the last ten years approximately: how parents with a Danish background had together agreed to place their kindergarten-aged children in the same public school, so that there would not be too few ‘Danes’ in the new classes. The father of Mathilde from 7X, Tom, had been engaged in such meetings with other similar parents from Mathilde’s kindergarten, back in 2007, when they were about to pick a school for Mathilde, and had all together agreed on picking Rosendal School. Tom thought that it would be problematic for Mathilde if there had been too many “bilingual children” because they would be too different from her. Similarly, he explained how he thought that Mathilde’s new friendship with her classmate Delisha, who was Danish, born in Elmekvarteret and had Pakistani roots, was complicated because Delisha had another religion (she was Muslim) and culture. They are simply “too different,” Tom thought.

Both Claus and the principal Simon were constructing 'foreignness' through a notion of "bilingualism" or "bilingual culture," which was defined by what such 'bilingual culture' did *not do*; as not supporting the school camps, not speaking Danish language, not supporting birthdays or not feeling at home in 'Danish' – or 'white culture' of the *indskoling*. In the fathers' group in Elmehaven, the fathers, all with Arab backgrounds, equally remembered Elmeskolen as dysfunctional and thought that the teachers in the end had given up and things had floated. One of the fathers here, Abdul, had had his children attend Elmeskolen, and he explained how they had not learned enough, especially Danish, thus he was happy, when the school closed and his children were transferred to Rosendal School. These migrant fathers pointed to problems of teachers giving up and a low professional level; however, they did not mention a certain 'bilingual culture.' That Simon and Claus did so might be seen as having a majority-position from where they were able to 'culturalise,' 'essentialise,' and 'minoritise' certain types of parents, as practicing a(nother) 'bilingual culture.' They were constructing the 'ethnic other.' Although Simon announced the school was blind for 'ethnicity,' some pupils were nevertheless pointed out in opposition to 'the Danish.'

### **“The Black” and “the White” Class**

The ideal about 'mixing' of the two categories of pupils; the 'bilingual' and 'ethnic Danish pupils', was also reflected in how I – even though very seldom – experienced teachers talk about racialised categories. The year before my fieldwork, the two Grade 6 classes (which were now 7X and 7Y) had had a different division of pupils. The need for a new division had various explanations. Some pupils explained that it was because of the new "main-subject" (*linjefag*) (which had been cancelled in the very end); others thought it was because "we have to learn to meet new people." The teachers, generally, also used this latter reasoning. However, one day as I was sitting with Steffen and his colleagues in the teacher's lounge, teachers revealed to me that the two Grade 6 classes had been termed the 'white' and the 'black' class. Steffen looked at me, with an apologetic facial expression, like saying, "yes, we are not supposed to say things like this." He then added that he had had "the black class", adding, "So I was used to the resource-weak and removed parents." The episode reveals how the school, contrary to teachers' assertions, did pay attention to racialised categories. The present teachers told me that they had had to mix the two classes, since the academic level

was too low in the “black class.” “That just didn’t work,” the teacher, Britta, said. Afterwards, some of the so-called “resource-strong parents” from the previously “white class” had sent written complaints to the school administration, insisting on a written explanation for why precisely *their child* had been moved to another class (the one with the lower academic level). These “resource-strong parents” from the former “white class” were upset, problematising and criticising how their children had been removed from their best friends. Under these parents’ reasoning of friendship, and the general logic of mixing the ‘bilingual’ and ‘ethnic Danish pupils,’ there seemed to be some social convention about a combination or proximity between black as ‘resource-weak’ and academically problematised. A combination concerning ‘the foreign,’ which was mostly tabooed, however, now and then appeared as something culturally given, as when Britta concluded, “that just didn’t work.”

### Constructing the ‘Bilingual’

As seen above, ‘foreignness’ as something which stood in opposition to ‘the Danish,’ which was often described as related to ‘bilingualism.’ However, ‘foreignness’ was not always equated with pupils who were multilingual, which I will describe with the following case. As the four Grade 0 classes had too few pupils in each class, they had to be grouped into three classes in the coming school year. From the time Simon revealed this, the new combination of pupils became an ongoing discussion among the teachers of these classes (as well as concerned parents). In such discussions of a ‘proper distribution,’ both gender and assumed academic level as well as how many ‘resource-strong’ or ‘weak’ pupils and parents in which new class were discussed. However, there were also some assumptions about how OB was too alike or identical. This was mentioned in a way, where it was somehow implied (to my understanding), that this was about distribution of ‘Danish’ and ‘bilingual pupils,’ but mostly not openly discussed. In OB, there were, to my perception, only three multilingual pupils. One of the three, Isabel, was normally not counted in as bilingual. Isabel had Spanish parents, and the mother was fluent in Danish and was doing her PhD at a Danish university (I never met the father). In this way, it was like Isabel did not possess enough ‘foreignness’ and seemed to blend in as an ‘ethnic Danish pupil,’ which also seemed to be linked to how she performed very well academically. Furthermore, her name was a common Danish name and she had a light skin colour. Josef had a mother with a Danish background, Maria, and a Polish father, Eryk. Yet, to my experience, Lisa did generally not count Josef in as ‘bilingual’ either;

however, she mentioned Josef's home to be "quite non-stimulating." Josef's name was both common in Danish and Polish, and he had white bodily features. Yet, it was different with Mustafa, who had parents from Turkey, both with a low command of the Danish Language. Betül, the mother, wore a hijab, which came to symbolise their 'foreign religion,' and they all had certain Mediterranean characteristics, such as black hair and brown skin colour. Mustafa received more attention as 'bilingual,' which again seemed to be entangled in that he had some severe pronunciation difficulties. These examples point to the unsteadiness of the social category of 'bilingual,' and how this category could be entangled in certain, phenotypical features as well as symbols of 'foreignness' and academic challenges. In this way, some multilingual pupils would disentangle from the category of 'bilingual' because of certain skills or characteristics.

Because of these circumstances, teachers perceived 0B as *too* homogeneous. One of the pedagogues who was associated with the Grade 0 school-cohort, told me with despair that the secretary could at least have looked towards the children's *names*, when he had formed the four Grade 0 classes. This seemed to be related to how some names would point towards 'bilingualism' or perhaps more accurately 'foreignness,' and as such the secretary could have made the classes more 'even,' but again this was not openly revealed.

## An Institutional Whiteness?

In the following, I will illuminate how 'whiteness' was influential in the school. After having observed the boy Tony from 7X repeatedly struggling with the class exercises, one morning I asked the teacher Mikkel, who had specialised in special training for pupils with special needs, if he knew if Tony had some kind of learning difficulties. Mikkel answered: "I really don't know what it is with Tony. He has a Danish mother, Charlotte, so he is not a bilingual child ...so that is not the case with him. I have never figured out, what's with him..." Tony had a dark-brown skin colour, and assumedly because of this physical characteristic, Mikkel thought (I thought) he was 'a bilingual pupil,' which could be the explanation for Tony's academic challenges. This then proved wrong, since his mother had a Danish background. Tony's Afro-American father was not living with them anymore, as he had left the family when Tony was a little boy. The brown colour of Tony's skin made him fit the category of 'bilingual with special bilingual challenges,' but again unfit because his only present parent had a 'Danish background.' This 'unfit' seemed to obstruct or puzzle the solution as to what

special help Tony needed. I argue that the colour of Tony's skin did not make him fully *pass* into the majoritised category 'ethnic Dane.' That Mikkel was linking Tony's skin colour to certain attributes reveals how racialised characteristics point to, or are combined with, certain meanings. As such, racialised characteristics can work as the silent marker for who is a 'bilingual pupil' and who is 'ethnic Dane,' as such who is an 'ethnic other.' When this chain reaction is done, different kinds of assumptions about this supposed 'other ethnicity' (culture, *language*, religion etc.) emerge. Feminist Scholar Sarah Ahmed (2007) argues that some institutional settings have a nonverbalised 'natural whiteness,' where whiteness is what lags behind; white bodies do not *have* their whiteness, as they are not orientated towards it. When white bodies 'lag behind,' they extend their reach (ibid, 156). This 'not' is what allows whiteness to cohere as something, which bodies are orientated around. The whiteness, so to speak, 'goes unnoticed,' thus the skin colour can be a factor of experience before it is verbalised.

In an interview with Tony, Sofia, Basim and Hannah, all from 7X, Tony was the only one to mention that he thought some teachers at Rosendal School were racist. Sofia (whose parents had Moroccan background), replied, "Oh noo... I don't think you can say that." To say teachers were racist was perceived as a very serious accusation at Rosendal School; it was not something one 'could just say.' This seemed entangled in the aforementioned 'race-blind ideology,' where racism was linked to neo-Nazism or neo-nationalism, from which the general left wing and globally aware teachers strongly distanced themselves. However, if we study whiteness through experience, the meaning of skin colour can be a factor of experience – before it is verbalised, Ahmed argues. Sofia did not experience this whiteness, but Tony did, which already gives a reason for discussing if, or when, whiteness can be part of experience in Danish institutions. When Tony expresses racialised experiences (Yosso 2005), we must try to understand such experiences, and here whiteness can be an analytical tool. Starting from subjective experiences, we avoid reifying whiteness and making it a structural determinant for social interactions, thus I am cautious not to construct a reification of whiteness (Ahmed 2007, 150).

In line with the race-blind ideology (Hervik 2015), migrant fathers, generally, did not openly discuss skin colour or racism with me. However, some used the category of 'brown Danes,' or indirectly pointed to their appearance, as saying "when they see someone like me," which points to how fathers felt some characteristics were noticed, yet did not directly discuss racism. When I interviewed Idle, he quietly added after saying that people did not look at him in Elmekvarteret (pp. 80) "more than was to expect," which appeared as



his way to say he knew he was 'different,' that he somehow 'stood out' by being dark-skinned. Such an awareness points to Ahmed's argument that whiteness lags behind, is difficult to verbalise, however it makes 'not white' noticeable. Experiences and feelings of 'standing out' as Idle pointed to here, could potentially influence some fathers' feelings of belonging to certain institutional settings.

## Tabooed Divisions

I have argued how an idea about mixing of 'bilingual' 'black/white' and 'ethnic Danish pupils' was socially relevant at Rosendal School, but also how teachers avoided going into details about *why* – it appeared as tabooed. Anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966) argues that taboos are about engaging in protecting a vision of the good community. Therefore, reflections on taboos involve reflection on the relation between *order* and *disorder*, where the taboo helps to protect the order of the good society, having a protective function, with the consequence that whole areas of life become unspeakable and, as a consequence, unthinkable (Douglas 1966, 7). Taboos are a coding practice, which set up a vocabulary of special limits and physical and verbal signals to hedge around vulnerable relations (ibid xiii). If this code is not respected, certain dangers may arise. That is, breaking the taboo might affect people's relations within society.

Following Douglas, the taboos around 'the foreign' hid divisions and (de)valuations of certain pupils or parents and the fact that skin colour seemed to *mean something*. Thus, the taboo protected a vision of the good inclusive, harmonious community, with room for everyone; simultaneously, the chapter points out limits to this vision. In Elmekvarteret, there could not be *too many* 'bilingual pupils' conflicting with 'the story of Elmekvarteret' as being a socialist, left-wing neighbourhood, embracing diversity. A tendency also reflected among parents, who in various ways expressed how they disagreed with what they saw as a harsh national political rhetoric and its image of 'the problematised immigrant.'

If the coding practice of the taboo (Douglas 1966, xiii) was broken, it might affect the (vulnerable) relations within the community and social order of everyday social practices. Claus' "sweaty hands," the affective outbursts and Steffen's shamefaced look when his colleague mentioned the "black class" can be analysed as fear of entering the tabooed subject, and fear of revealing the cracks in the 'good community.' The idea of the good community, which was race-blind, where everyone was equal, seemed to have some crevices. With such

vocabulary limits, working to protect the social order meant it was difficult for me to get a grip on and discuss such tabooed aspects of the culture at Elmekvarteret with the interlocutors; in this way, the taboo reinforced the dormant social alertness.

## Social Alertness

This dormant social alertness sometimes showed in tension, anger, or other affects. One such example was, when Steffen the class teacher in 7X, whispered “the bilingual pupils,” as we were standing in the classroom while the pupils were doing exercises. I believe he did so, because saying it out loud would probably have resulted in a discussion: “Do you say, we are different?!” Malak could have said instantly, who was a very observant, attentive, and discussion-willing girl, with Palestinian roots, and who was also the class representative in the student council.<sup>19</sup>

The following case works to further demonstrate, how this alertness was also related to fathers' with a migrant background. One day, at the beginning of my fieldwork,<sup>20</sup> I asked Malak if she thought I could conduct an interview with her father. She then told me, that her father did not even know where she went to school. I was surprised, but I also did not want her to feel any discomfort. I said that this was not a problem; I would just ask him some general questions about his view on schooling very broadly. Then Malak turned to me, and in a quite upset tone, said: “You are not going to do that thing on my father! Of course, he knows where I go to school, and he has given me a lot of things – like the will to learn and to have an opinion!” As Malak and I still did not know each other that well, and she assumed I was interested in her father's ‘difference’ (as I in a way was), she concurrently seemed to assume I had some negative stereotypical prejudice about her father. I went to the field to contest such stereotypes, but Malak did not know this, and her reactions, I argue, can be analysed as a social alertness regarding prejudice and othering towards her father, who was a father with Palestinian background.

According to anthropologist Michael Jackson (2005), to be othered or objectified (181-182) is an act characterised by being unable to react on one's social status. An objective status, or to be othered, thus means for the individual that its humanity is diminished, bearing

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<sup>19</sup> The student council speaks for the students' common cause, so that the students gain influence on the school day and the school's development.

<sup>20</sup> When I still had not developed a trustful relationship to Malak and her group of friends.

in mind that the human being is characterised by the universal need for being able to act meaningfully and with influence (ibid, 181-182). Following this, I argue that social alertness was a way to forego such ‘dehumanisation,’ and to actively react on one’s social status – one’s future becoming. Being and becoming in the world is not only to belong to this world, but also to be *acknowledged* by others in this world. Human existence and becoming is always relational, and in interplay with others (Jackson 2006, 33).

Human becoming takes place in ‘the middle’ across forces on different scales. One scale here, I argue, was the large-scale force concerning the problematisation of the Muslim migrant man, as described in the introduction, and another line of becoming was the tabooed proximity to the ‘bilingual,’ ‘black,’ ‘foreignness,’ ‘underachievement,’ and problematisation. Affected by such lines of becoming, social alertness functioned as a subtle revolt in a school context, where experienced discrimination seemed difficult to discuss openly, as processes of racialisation and ethnification were difficult to verbalise by the existing vocabulary.

In the example above, Malak pushed the lines, or forces, which she had experienced working to classify her father as someone mistrusted and disengaged in his child’s education. She challenged this classification by using her agentic capacity to contest my intention regarding the interview. In this way, agentic capacity is a ‘mutual constitution’ of entangled agencies constituted by both people, forces as well as the specific terrain (Biehl and Locke 2017, 5). Thus, greater forces of large-scale historical or political formations is entangled in an intersubjective dynamic, but they are not necessarily successful in defining or determining the outcome (ibid, 33). Malak disrupts the lines of becoming for her and her father, and this disruption was not futile. Malak surely made me think of my position in the class, and the ethical aspects of my project. Processes of becoming can, so to speak, ‘escape’ history: “History amounts only to a set of preconditions, however recent, that one can leave behind in order to “become” that is: To create something new” (Deleuze 1995, 171, see also Biehl and Locke 2010, 10). The primacy of desire and intentionality may move power and reveals the openness and flux of the social terrains. I argue, in line with Biehl and Locke (2017), that we cannot find a stable hierarchy between the strength of forces on different scales, but ought to focus on how such lines of becoming (Ingold 2015) operates on different scales and are entangled in a somewhat ‘horizontal manner.’ Thus, lines of forces may at times work in hierarchical ways, at other times they change place and appear in a new formation (Purcell 2017).

Due to the tabooing and tension around ‘the foreign,’ there was not an available vocabulary for either Malak or Steffen to have a neutral dialogue about the use of the

category of ‘bilingual’ or Malak’s experiences of othering. Due to such tensions, I could also not openly reveal that I was especially interested in encountering fathers with a migrant background. In the everyday engagement in Rosendal School, I became a student who had to write a (very long) assignment about fathers and school.

## Concluding Discussion

This chapter has analysed different interlocutors’ constructions of ‘the foreign.’ Teachers, pedagogues and parents in many ways tried to live up to the culture of inclusiveness, which characterised Elmekvarteret, and was a principal hallmark of Rosendal School. However, from time to time, school professionals or parents used different references to ‘the foreign’ in constructing difference between pupils. Importantly, at other times, teachers were again undoing these differences, as well as there were many more dimensions for constructing difference: such as gender, age, generation, etc. (see e.g. Knoll and Jaeger 2019).

Yet, recurrently, ‘the foreign’ was constructed by teachers or parents with Danish backgrounds as something that was not to be too much of. It was feared that the so-called “resource-strong parents” (which often came to mean parents with a Danish background) would leave the school, if ‘Danish culture’ was declining and too many “resource-weak” families would lower the academic level. Thus, divisions between ‘them’ and ‘us’ were social constructions, revealed and exposed by cultural fix-points of ‘Danish values,’ which made some interlocutors reveal and expose the taboo. Thus, we see a social terrain of the school, with a dormant undercurrent, where ‘the foreign’ in somewhat subtle ways could be problematised, which would be pulled out, and become socially relevant in *certain* contexts. Generally, no one wished to take ownership over this undercurrent, as e.g. Steffen said, when telling me about the problems of ‘thinning’ in the older classes: “I hate to mention this, however, this is how it is [an actual problem].” Yet, as we have seen, school professionals did pay attention to, for example, racialised categories.

This ‘undercurrent’ resulted in an atmosphere, where some pupils, or migrant parents, were alert about how other people saw them; as the potentiality for being negatively defined, problematised, minoritised, racialised, or in other ways ‘othered,’ seemed to lie under the surface. Lines on a larger scale, such as politics and media discourses problematising migration and Islam, would reinforce this feeling. This social alertness made some topics or aspects concerning being a migrant or child of migrant parents difficult to talk

about, for example the stereotypical negative picture Malak indirectly refers to concerning her father or, I argue, professionals subtle problematisations of ‘bilingual pupils’ underachievement.

The social alertness was a kind of dormant ‘intersubjective doubt’ that was difficult to verbalise. Thus, social alertness is a concept, which I suggest opens up for understanding social dynamics that might happen in meetings between parents and school. Teachers like Steffen, to my experience, did not intend to exclude any of the pupils when discussing the one-minute silence in class after Simons’ announcement (pp. 81), however it entangled in many other lines of forces, as well as pupils’ struggles for belonging.

The social alertness was an intersubjective dynamic, which branched out to my interviews in the fathers’ groups as well. During visits to the fathers’ groups, I experienced how some fathers would check with me, to see if I came with suspicion or mistrust, a dynamic that also affected me as researcher; as an *intersubjective* tension, the social alertness affected both parts involved. I shall return to this issue in Chapter 11.

Pupils as well as fathers who have experienced that they possess some characteristics or attributes, which other people comprehend as ‘foreignness,’ may have experienced that they are subject to being othered or subjected to a possible intervention (Daniel and Knudsen 1995). This may leave an intersubjective doubt about the other person’s intention, as was the case with Kadin (pp. 61), who was curious to know why I had precisely asked *him* for an interview. “Does she only ask me, because I come from Morocco?” seemed to be his concern. That someone like him was ‘the kind’ who could be othered. Yet, the tabooing around ‘the foreign,’ and hereto-related tensions and contradictions, made it difficult to directly ‘spot,’ ‘grasp,’ and thus oppose. In such uncertain waters, social alertness was a way to forego othering processes, and insist on having a say in, to be recognised, acknowledged and mirrored in who one is. Thus, the social alertness worked to insist on a positive trajectory for one’s future becoming.

Remembering that any inner existential reflections on ‘who am I’ are eclipsed by the external definition of what one is in the eyes of others (Jackson 2006, 68). In our becoming, we are therefore, some more than others, cautious regarding others’ view on us. I argue for the concept of social alertness as an intersubjective dynamic of tension about (potentially) being othered, which was a dynamic that kept interfering in the fieldwork, however changing expression and appearance depending on the context.

Social alertness must be understood in light of human beings’ wayfaring through life, as it is through this wayfaring that our experience-horizon takes form in our memory.

Here we call up past and present experiences to tell us how we are to understand things and relationships. When we are alert, it is due to various lines of forces, which have entangled with our wayfaring through life, leaving us with the suspicion that something might happen to us again, *I will probably be othered, ethnified, or minoritised again.*

## Chapter 6: The School as a Gendered Coming Community

♪ “Now we are off school (nu har vi fri)  
Now we are off school  
Now we are all off school  
When I cross the road  
Yes, because I am big now  
I wait with playing  
I go straight to mum  
[short pause]  
or dad  
or the family  
or the afterschool-care  
or something else” ♪

‘Goodbye song’ in 0C

The objective of this chapter is to examine the overall gendered aspect<sup>21</sup> of the terrain of home and home-school cooperation at Rosendal School, for hereafter to narrow the lens to which experiences were more specific for migrant fathers. To analyse the overall gendered aspects, I include ethnographic material concerning both mothers and fathers, as well as fathers with Danish backgrounds and fathers with migrant backgrounds.

Across the fathers, I recorded a common experience of the school as a site, which belonged more to the mothers’ regime, as Christian, a father with Danish background, termed it, or what the father Raza, with Pakistani background explained as the “the realm of the mother” adding, “so we [fathers] cannot get in.” To which degree fathers experienced it as such seemed to depend on the specific father, and how he perceived fatherhood, schooling

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<sup>21</sup> As the fathers I encountered at Rosendal School were all living in heterosexual couples, other ways to practice gender are not reflected in this study.

and gender. That the school was somehow closer to ‘the realm of the mother’ is also reflected in the excerpt from the goodbye song above, where the pupils’ instructed by the teacher sang father after the mother. This little song was sung every afternoon, before the pupils left the classroom.

## A Gendered Space

Generally, mothers seemed to be more present at the home-school events, and I also noticed a higher degree of expectations towards mothers (Faircloth 2014, 27-28, Bach 2017). Still, fathers would express to me that there were also high expectations towards fathers, and that those expectations had increased too. This was something Pelle’s father, Søren, expressed in an interview. Søren was a father with a Danish background, who had four children with his former wife Viktoria. Pelle was the youngest, and he went to the 0C class. Søren felt that the gender roles had changed over the last decades, and that the expectations towards both genders had become more even as well have increased. Such experience of increasing expectations fits the aforementioned studies of intensified parenting (Hays 1998, Faircloth 2014). Generally, fathers expressed that the gender roles have become more alike over the last decades, but they still found that some tasks still belonged more to one gender than the other. Søren had experienced that there were more mothers present at the home-school events, and at the school in general. He then said:

Well... I nevertheless think that the old gender roles are still there, that it is mostly the mother who does these things (...). However, what I have experienced with women is, umm, that they really want to take the responsibility for that, and that they are not necessarily (...) affected by the man’s ideas. It is as if, in the end, they really want to decide, like also the way to decorate the house. Maybe they are listening [to the man], but they might not do things differently from what they had already decided.

Søren told me about an episode where he had bought clothes for one of their children:

So, if I bought something, then it is not really ‘the right thing’ after all, right? Then, well... you do not really bother to do it again, right? Then it is easier, she does it. However, well, on the other hand, it can also be a bad excuse



like [saying], ‘that is fine,’ but I mean, there will always be some kind of division of tasks...

Søren found that some tasks were gendered, “So, if I always was the one to wash the car, then I would find it weird if she started to interfere.” This was a way for Søren to explain about gendered tasks. Using this example, some tasks related to child-rearing were more women-centred tasks in contrast to washing the car. Søren’s situation was also influenced by his divorce with Viktoria, and that he only had Pelle staying with him every second extended weekend. I got the impression that he found it a bit difficult to be a father for Pelle, when Viktoria had Pelle most of the time, and in addition seemed to claim the child-rearing domain. Søren also seemed, during the interview, to reflect upon how much (or little), *he* actually did to claim some of this domain, as he points out, how it could be a bad excuse for fathers to say “that is fine.” Psychologist Svend Aage Madsen (2008), who studies fatherhood in Denmark, finds the same ambiguity. Even though he finds great changes in the perception of gender roles and fathers’ early emotional connection to their child<sup>22</sup> (ibid), he also finds ambiguity in the way some fathers, simultaneously, tend to refrain from claiming their competencies and right to decide concerning ‘the child-rearing domain.’ Such ambiguity is found to be related to a culture, where care and care-work are not a dominant line of development in the masculine identity, at least not compared to the feminine (Madsen 2003, 569-70).

## The Mother Myth

Regarding parent meetings and more casual home-school events, such as ‘Christmas lunch’ or ‘well-being activities,’ Søren had always given Viktoria the ‘lead role.’ Such activities Søren termed ‘not concrete events,’ referring to how the exact purpose or outcome was unclear to him. I asked Søren, what he then did instead, and he mentioned his work – he was the breadwinner. He added how this reflected rather ‘old’ gender roles, “yes, yes, and I am fine with that,” he said. Søren was not very present in the school and he somehow became a rather unengaged father in the eyes of the teacher Gitte. Moreover, he was always wearing a

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<sup>22</sup> It is no more than approx. 50 years ago men began to attend childbirths at hospitals, where, incidentally, they were not always well-received. Few places, fathers were forbidden to take part in the childbirth until 1979. In 1999 ninety-five percent of fathers were present at the childbirth (Madsen, Munck and Tolstrup 1999).

suit, and in some ways, had a more ‘authoritative vibe’ than most other fathers. I will look deeper into Gitte’s scepticism concerning Søren’s presence – or rather absence – in the section ‘becoming mystified’ (pp. 151).

In his ethnographic study of fathering after cohabitation breakdowns (*samlivsbrud*) in Denmark,<sup>23</sup> anthropologist Johnny Carlsen (2007) finds that despite tendencies of ‘the new role of the father,’ there was still a tendency to see the father as the one who leaves the home as the breadwinner. Practicalities such as laws concerning maternity leave, gendered expectations at the workplace, and uneven salaries entangled with, and worked to maintain, the culturally constructed idea that the child is naturally more dependent and more strongly connected to the mother than the father (ibid, 98-99; see also Madsen 2008; Strathern 1992). Carlsen found that the mother-child relation was a strong recurring element in the fathers’ accounts of life after the break, which took form of the “mother myth” outlining the naturalisation of motherhood, and hereby undermined the importance of paternity (Carlsen 2007, 51, 98). In similar ways, Søren was in our interview legitimising his distance by referring to the naturalisation of motherhood.

Sharmarke was a father with Somali origin and the father to four children, where the three oldest attended Rosendal School.<sup>24</sup> Sharmarke also expressed ‘the natural’ (ibid, Strathern 1992) of the special and intimate connection between mothers and child, especially in the early years of childhood, a point of view I also recorded among fathers in some of the fathers’ groups. For the father Christian with a Danish background, this connection was something that came from inside, like a natural force. As such, the mother myth was a social, naturalised ‘truth,’ which was recorded among many fathers regardless of national origin.

According to Søren, the specific classroom in OC was also a gendered space. We did the interview in Pelle’s classroom one late afternoon, where Søren at some point in the interview pointed towards the walls full of small clippings, the calendar with flowers, pictures and descriptions of the forthcoming Christmas lunch, etc., in order to show me how he found the room gendered. He read aloud from the Christmas lunch invitation hanging on the wall, and pointed to how difficult it was for him to figure out the exact date, the time, and what was *precisely* expected from the parents. For him, a more ‘fact-based’ invitation-letter would be

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<sup>23</sup> Fathers after divorce or breakup with the mother to their child.

<sup>24</sup> Just before our interview, Sharmarke and his wife had chosen to change schools to a private Arabic school.

more masculine, and he found the invitation letter and the wall decoration, in general, more about moods and feelings, which he understood as more feminine.

### *The Awkward Spaces of Fathering*

During my participation in the monthly breakfast event, I sometimes saw fathers standing by themselves or/and a bit unsure about how to 'place themselves.' Søren also radiated this 'unsureness,' adding to his descriptions of the school as a more feminine place, as well as his difficulties on finding his place in the school events. Such awkwardness might, without being verbalised, make fathers unsure about their 'equal position' in the terrain of the school.

Aitken takes issue with the notion of fatherhood emerging from the distant breadwinner of the nineteenth century to today's father as a potentially equal co-parent. In the context of such social changes, Aitken explores, by means of American fathers' narratives, how much of the social position as a father hinges on an 'idea' that does not embrace the fact of fathering as a daily emotional practice that is negotiated, contested, reworked in different spaces. He finds how social spaces are often contrived and constructed by inchoate ideals of fatherhood, which foments a set of emotional practises that are awkward and incoherent (Aitken 2009, 230). Fathers experienced some spaces as awkward, because defining the context of embodied practices was never completely comfortable for the fathers; these spaces 'display' that the fatherhood practices were different from that of mothers, but simultaneously made fathers unsure about what the appropriate fatherhood practices were. Thus, "awkward spaces" (ibid, 3-4) affected the becoming of fathers, sometimes making fathers unsure about, *what is my role as father here?* potentially contesting emerging ideals on 'intimate fatherhood.' Aitken approaches fatherhood as an ongoing, incoherent process, which is negotiated in the various communities in which fathers take part. I have earlier argued for approaching the site of the school as a central "coming community" since it is a space and terrain concerned with parent-roles, and thus fathers' becoming (ibid, 131-32). In extension hereof, some fathers' experiences of 'awkwardness' might diminish their feelings of belonging as an equal co-parent in school.

Tariq was a father who had grown up in Pakistan and had immigrated to Denmark with his family at the age of ten. He was now 48, had four children, and was volunteering in one of the father's groups. He was one of what in the discourse about volunteers in associations and social projects is termed as a "fiery soul," who came to guide fathers living within the social housing estates, in which the father's group was placed. He had obtained a

Master's degree in Denmark, and was a member of the school board of his children's school. He had an extensive insight in the Danish school system, which he could use, as he would guide other migrant fathers. As we talked about parent meetings, and why mostly mothers showed up, Tariq said, "You know, well it is something... because it is very much a women thing, and it is also the women who are setting the agenda. The fathers do not bother so much, because it is this small-scale organising (*lavpraktiske ting*), about the lunchboxes, pencil case and such. On the other hand, fathers seemed to be more interested in the bigger picture." Tariq exemplified how he knew, how fathers from the fathers' group were concerned about the general academic progress of their child and would engage more, if severe problems arose. However, similar to Søren, they found discussions on small-scale organising to be less important.

Tariq added that discussions on the parent meeting could be difficult for some migrant fathers to read, if they did not have that many previous experiences with the Danish school system and practicalities around home-school cooperation. Some migrant fathers had experienced another type of school in their country of origin, and they sometimes experienced it as unclear, those adjustments which were discussed. In addition, it could be vague what was expected from them, "can someone please say what is expected here. What is the thing we are going to find a solution for?" Tariq said to underline his point. Yet, Tariq also knew fathers with Danish backgrounds who felt this way.

The fathers Ahmad and Ibrahim, both with Arab origin and both from the fathers' group in Elmehaven, explained to me, how they had attended the parent meetings in the beginning. However, they found discussions on the packed lunch, mainly the need for rye bread and vegetable sticks, quite pointless. Actually, they thought this was rather boring (*tarvelig*) food: "it is a pity that the children have to sit and chew on tough celery sticks and dry rye bread," Ahmad said and laughed; and why was it that the school was so obsessed with *their* children's food?

I asked the father Christian if he experienced any specific gendered differences regarding home-school relations. Christian was a father with Danish origin, who had a Master's degree in political science, and now had a high-skill and high-income job, as a member of the parliament.

Well, I have noticed, that it is mostly women, who are active on the intranet, the intra, and I have thought a great deal about that. Ehmmm...and I have also thought about, why I don't myself, why I let Lisbeth do it the most, in

our family home, and that is very much, because uhmm, yes, what is it? [Thinks for a while] (...) there can be some rigid ideas and regimes about, how you do things. Then it is easier to let them do it, who has the most firm meanings about it. I mean, when you are a bit like 'it makes no difference; if it should be twisted bread or if it should be sausages [to eat for a school class-event], or if it should be fruit-syrup-water or soda' or things like that, right? Then I say 'well, that is fine', then they [mothers on the intra] agree on something (...) then I just follow, and then I do something else.

Christian also thought fathers, in general, were too comfortable or laissez-faire, but he also explained that Lisbeth, his wife, really, really wanted to be the one going to the parent-teacher conferences. Christian had also wanted to go (to the first parent-teacher conference), but as they had two small children to take care of, they had to decide on one of them. It had not escalated into a fight, it was more like, Christian said 'Ok, that's ok; I'll give you this one.' Christian explained how he would say: "I want to go to that meeting,' and then Lisbeth would say, 'I really want to go to that meeting' and then I'll say, 'OK, then, I will take care of the children here at home'... This is how I sense it is going on around here (...) that they, the mothers, they really, really want to go, right?" There was a tendency that fathers, regardless of background, told about mothers' preoccupation with such "small-scale organising" in a tone indicating that this preoccupation was 'a little too much.' As in Christians' case e.g., where "whether it should be twisted bread or sausages" was told in a tone of quite 'silly little differences.' This might be a way for fathers to differentiate from the feminine, and thereby define themselves as masculine and preoccupied with 'bigger, more important matters' (see e.g. Reinicke 2010, Madsen 2003).

As seen above, fathers often experienced the school-site to belong more to the realm of the mother than that of the father. One exception was Felix' father, Jeppe, who, according to Christian, was the only father actively taking part in the parent-discussion on the Parent Intranet. He was also a member of the "well-being group" (*trivselsgruppen*)<sup>25</sup> in 0C, and therefore involved in arranging the breakfast-event, where I always met him. Jeppe stood out in the sense that he was very active in the child-rearing of both his sons. He seemed to have the main contact with the school, and he spent a lot of time with his sons in the afternoon. He

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<sup>25</sup> A group of parents who had volunteered to arrange events for the pupils in the class. Each class had their own 'well-being-group.'

had taken most of the maternity leave with their youngest son.<sup>26</sup> His wife had not really liked to be on maternity leave, Jeppe explained, and preferred to work. She had just finished her PhD and was now spending a lot of time on starting her career. He still thought there were too many expectations towards parents, and he was often longing for moments to “just sit in the sun with his sons on a bench,” a sentence which reflected how many of the parents in different ways expressed longing for “slow time” (Eriksen 2001, 199).

Jeppe did not find the school a gendered space in the same way as e.g. Søren. In addition, since Jeppe was involved in organising the breakfast event, he never had these awkward moments standing by himself, as I saw other fathers sometimes did. Jeppe had more time off than his wife did. He was working in the IT industry, and had earlier had his own company with one of his friends, which they, later on, had sold, with a great profit. Now he had another job in the IT industry, but could ‘flex’ his working hours a lot, and he would sometimes work in the evenings, when his sons were asleep. The career of Jeppe’s wife was the one to ‘dictate’ the division of tasks more than his own career. As we talked about her job, Jeppe found it compelling to just shortly mention, that he still earned more than his wife. Which meant that his income was higher than that of his wife. I wondered if this was Jeppe’s way to tell me that he was still the main breadwinner in the family, even though he had taken over many tasks, which in the eyes of other fathers, belonged to the realm of the mother? Maybe, by telling me this, he ensured me how he, as a good father, was still living up to the cultural norm of the good father as the ‘providing father’ (see Reinicke 2010).

This likewise supports the aforementioned point of Johnathan Ives (2018, see also Dermott 2013) that the recent narrative about the new role of the father is adding on to other previously narratives, rather than replacing them. Following, some fathers may feel some ambiguity to appear too engaged in the home-school cooperation, because it might insinuate that they do not fulfil the role as the breadwinner. This might point to some ambiguity in living up to two existing narratives at once: that of the intimate nurturer *and* a breadwinner.

Along the same lines as Jeppe, Idle (pp. 92) did not experience the school as gendered in the same way, as for example Tariq and Søren did. In his marriage, which of them would go to the parent meetings depended on who had the time to attend, he explained. Idle was known among many of the school professionals as a very friendly, cheerful and active father, and teachers perceived his extroverted and cheerful attitude very positively. Idle

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<sup>26</sup> Yet, it was still Jeppe’s wife, who took care of organising the lunch-meal.

had gone to a Danish high school (*gymnasium*) and thus had a broader experience with the Danish school system than other migrant fathers, who had arrived after finishing their education. Three of Idle's children attended Rosendal School, and I often met Idle at the breakfast events or in the mornings, when he brought Amira to school. He was also actively using the Parent Intranet. However, he thought there had been a difference between how he and his wife were met by the pedagogues in the kindergarten and nursery care. "As parents, we had noticed it in the kindergarten (...) when a mother meets up, then she gets more information, (...) but in this school, there is not so much difference, I think." I asked Idle about what kind of information his wife got, to which Idle answered, "Information about how he sleeps and eats, and... but, in this school, when you go there and they are explaining something about the children, regardless of it being the mother or father, they tell what goes on." Yet, in the kindergarten and nursery care, Idle had experienced, how the pedagogues told his wife much more than him about caregiving. When he had gone to the meetings in the kindergarten, they were short, but when Fadume went, they were much longer, an issue, which they had both noticed and discussed among them.

The longer meetings Fadume had had with the pedagogues, resulted in how she got more involved in issues related to the intimate nurturing of their children. Concurrently, she was also given the responsibility to act and adjust according to this information. Although Idle had not wished for it to be this way, and had himself showed up to many of these meetings, he was not equally included in the many suggestions and advice from the child-professionals. In this way, the responsibility for implementing all the advice regarding the nurturing of Idle and Fadume's small children was not equally placed on them. Such processes can be seen as processes of intensified mothering (Faircloth 2014, 27-28), and can work to illustrate the tendency Faircloth describes as 'the buck stops with the mother,' in this very case because Fadume had been included and thus made more responsible. These dynamics also meant that there was much more at stake for the mothers to maintain the identity as 'the good mother' (ibid, 27; see also Bach 2017).

During my observations of parent-teacher conferences, I saw tendencies, which matched the notion of the school as belonging more to the realm of the mother. Especially in 0B, I observed how some of the conferences increasingly became a talk between Lisa and the mother, as they found a common language in many of the mother's concerns regarding their child's well-being in school. I observed how mothers had many questions and shared their concerns with Lisa, which Lisa would understand, acknowledge, respond to, and by such, spend time calming these mothers. During several parent-teacher conferences in the Grade 0

classes, where both parents attended, I noticed that fathers sat on the tip of the chair when the meeting started. Slowly, while Lisa seemed to look more towards the mother and the conversation became more and more between them, some fathers over time seemed to give up, lean back and/or look around in the classroom or out of the window.

In conclusion, in many fathers' experiences, mothers were both more engaged in and largely set the agenda regarding the home-school cooperation, especially as the children were in the earliest school years (*indskoling*) or earlier, in kindergarten. However, many fathers seemed, to various extents, find it to be rather 'natural' that the mother was the most engaged in the cooperation, along with how some fathers appeared to withdraw. Yet, fathers such as Jeppe and Iidle did not find 'the realm of the mother' as strong as other fathers, which seems related to the division of tasks with their partners, the partner's own wish for engagement, and their general involvement in the home-school cooperation. Regarding multilingual parents, a factor that 'trumped' the gender-related domains, was whom of the parents were speaking Danish the most fluently, which would then be the most present. Thus, differences within families, and who had certain skills were important for distributing tasks.

In the mornings, I met many fathers of children in 0C and 0B. As the children were still too young to walk to school themselves, it was a good place for me to observe father practices. The mornings were a place to ask the teachers about things or maybe share a concern. Especially in 0B, it was often fathers, who delivered their child to the school. These fathers would enter the classroom, sit for a while with their child, small talk with them, and wish them a good day. I noticed how intimate these fathers were with their child, and there was a lot of kissing and hugging.

One day, Gitte told me about a new type of father, which had been especially present in the Grade 0 class she had taught the year before. She termed them the "mother-fathers;" a type of new very concerned father, who, according to Gitte, was just as concerned, worried or even anxious as the "mothers normally were." Gitte's reflections tell us something about her general perception of parents' 'gendered-ways of acting.' To Gitte's experience, mothers normally were more concerned or even anxious about their child's well-being. Moreover, she had experienced this new type of concerned fathers ('mother-fathers'), which points to how fathers were normally less concerned, but also that she saw new emerging ways of practicing fatherhood. I then mentioned my observation from 0B, and Gitte said, "yes – this year it is Lisa who has them [the 'mother-fathers']." This new type of father can be understood in light of the emergence of new father-roles, or tendencies of 'pioneering fathers'



(Nielsen and Westerling 2016, 189) and can be understood as a social phenomenon placed in a certain time and space, and as tendencies of social formations of a general “intensified parenting” (Hays 1998).

## A Gendered Contact Lists

When I talked with fathers about if they thought that the school, as an institution, prioritised the mother over the father, many fathers answered that they did not directly think so. Maybe mothers checked Parent Intranet the most, but it was equally accessible for fathers as well as mothers, as was all the meetings, these fathers argued. Thus, although many fathers felt the school belonged more to the realm of the mother, they, regardless of background, did not think this was directly institutionalised through the information channels. Everyone could go and talk to the teacher, and everyone could access the Parent Intranet. As I asked about some institutional or structural inequality, some fathers – or mothers – would mention how the child benefit<sup>27</sup> would be sent directly to the mother, which for many was a sign of gendered inequality. However, this answer seemed to be concerned with finding an answer to my question, since they were not aware of such institutionalised inequalities, in relation to home-school cooperation. Nevertheless, there was an issue with the contact lists. In the following quote, Jeppe reflects on if the school contacted mothers, more than it contacted fathers:

I don't find that the school in any way has differentiated the communication, no (...) The only place, that is, I believe, is how everyone has an inclination to write 'mom' on the top of the phone list (...) they always do that. Mom is always placed on top of the telephone list, and then it is she, who is phoned first, but it is not sure, that it necessarily is the best to call her first. This is because, you have this idea that moms should be called first, because she can find out to coordinate, if you have to pick up children, if they are sick or something like this, right? (...) all institutions have a contact list (...) to list the mom on top is just a pure backbone reaction; mom... and *then* dad, right?

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<sup>27</sup> An economic benefit given by the state to parents until the child is eighteen years.

For Jeppe this was the only issue he could come up with, where mothers had a kind of structural prevalence, and according to him, this was also fitting to 'reality': "Well, this is also how it works in reality" he said and laughed a bit uncomfortably "much of the time," he then added. Generally, Jeppe thought that women were more "project-coordinators" and men were less capable of multitasking; instead, men were more "specialists." This, he believed, had to do with biological gender differences, and since child-rearing and cooperation with institutions had a lot to do with coordinating and multitasking, it became rather natural that women generally took care of this. By extension, he added that the reason I saw that many fathers dropped off their children in the morning was because they were working longer hours, and thus their partner would leave earlier and pick up their child from school.

In the administration office at Rosendal School, there was a shelf with binders for each class. Teachers, administration staff, pedagogues and such could then always get in contact with a pupil's parent if needed. Each pupil had a paper form in the binder. On this form was a picture of the pupil, and then a line for the mother's name and phone number, and beneath that the father's name and phone number. So the form in itself had listed mothers first. Sometimes the fathers' names and the number was not there, sometimes it was, but generally, the mother's name and number was always there. Hamid, a father with Somali background, worked as a school-consultant, mainly regarding parents with Somali background. He had experienced the school contacting mothers more, because it is, in line with Jeppe's observations, always the mothers name and number on top of the list. Additionally, sometimes the fathers name and number were not there at all.

Sharmarke had experienced how teachers would call his wife more than him. He thought it was a bit odd, why it was like this, and added, "I don't know, why they [the teachers, do this]... Why she talks to the mother. I do not know, they have my telephone number too (...) maybe there are many things, which goes to the mother, because almost all the teachers, are mothers themselves..." Here Sharmarke, as Søren, finds the school sphere a gendered place, partly due to the overrepresentation of women. When Sharmarke mentioned the issue about the teacher calling the mother more, he added in a joking tone: "You also did not call the dad, when you called us." "Oh, I only had that number," I replied laughing, and explained it was the number given to me by the secretary in the school-administration office. Then Sharmarke explained how he, regarding one of his daughters, had given his number personally to the teacher. At his second oldest daughter's first school day, he had been invited to the school, but could not attend due to work. After a few days, he had personally gone to

the class teacher to introduce himself, so the teachers would know who his daughter's father was, and had given his number personally to the teacher. Subsequently, the specific teacher had primarily called him. Interestingly, the secretary had given me the number of the mother. This suggests that Sharmarke's effort did not change the school procedures which automatically gives primacy to the number of the mother. Although Sharmarke had found the communication directed to his wife, he had experienced how he – by giving his number personally, and introducing himself as a central figure for his daughter – could change such routines. Thus, Sharmarke had experienced how he had to do something extra, to be the primary contact. Sharmarke later mentioned how this extra could be difficult, "I have taught my children everything because I did not have any family here in Denmark [after he had fled from Somalia]. I came a very long way, so I was myself like, I had to learn everything myself (...) how the children had to be raised here and such. Every day, in the same way like them [his children] I get more clever as I get older." Sharmarke had had nobody except his wife, when arriving in Denmark 25 years ago, and as a refugee he had his life turned upside down. There were e.g. no "network families" (Westerling 2016, 128-29) as old friends or grandparents to help them out, something other families found to be of great help. In addition, some of the child-rearing practices from the Somali context did not fit into the Danish context and child-institutions. He was generally happy with how the teachers at Rosendal School had helped them take care of his children, and he was grateful that teachers had helped his children with things, which he was not always capable of himself. However, Sharmarke had had to spend more energy than other fathers did, on learning how things functioned.

### **Fathers Becoming Redundant**

Although Sharmarke found the tendency of the school to belong to 'the realm of the mother' as more striking than other fathers did, fathers at Rosendal School largely perceived this as rather 'natural,' and this tendency was not directly criticised or expressed to me with frustration. However, I recorded more frustration in the father's groups and the Somali parent association, as I will discuss in the following section. As I interviewed Hamid and Bashir from the Somali parent association, who were refugees from Somalia and lived in Denmark for about twenty years, they told me how they as fathers had felt overlooked in the home-school cooperation. Hamid said, "I can use myself as an example. My children, they attend

Eastside-school, and for example, when we meet for the parent-teacher conferences and my wife sits here, and I sit here, and my child here, then I experience a closer contact, a special attention towards the mother.” Bashir (laughed) “Yes! That is true!” and continued:

There are really a lot of women in the kindergartens, really a lot of staff in schools who are women, so there is always this kind of a woman-approach (...) So when you think, you are all the time on your guard against (laughing), who decides now? He thinks [the Somali-father], ‘what does he [the teacher] say.’ All the time, this kind of uncertainty or you are doubting [yourself] all the time, yes, alert, mistrusting.

Hamid backed him up “...I know this too,” he said. Bashir continued to explain that he tried to take it easy, but he felt annoyed about how the teacher was mostly talking directly to his wife and his child. He was not used to that, he explained. As he sat there, he really, really wanted attention too, he said and laughed. Bashir explained to me that when he was a child, in the area where he grew up in Somalia, the contact with school had belonged to the role of the father. Thus, during his upbringing, it was his father, who attended meetings at the school. Additionally, there had not been far as many casual events as he now experienced regarding his own children; generally only one parent-teacher conference per year (see also Matthiesen 2014, 137; Bouakaz and Persson 2007, 161).

Hamid, who had worked as a Somali/Danish school interpreter for many years, continued to explain that during this job, he had often experienced how, if only the father shows up, the teachers would be missing the mother and ask, “‘Where is the mom?’ Always! ‘Where is the mom?’ [Laughing] I have worked many years now [as an interpreter].” So the reasons could be many, Hamid pointed out, she is busy, she is pregnant, tired, and so on. He felt the teachers mostly seemed uninterested in the father, adding that even though there was a very active and engaged father, it was still like this.

As aforementioned, interviews have to be analysed as social engagements – which is always taking place in a certain time and place, and with some inbuilt intentionality. Bashir and Hamid were stating these aforementioned points to me, when our discussion ventured into why some school professionals were wondering *where are the bilingual fathers?* Their narrating seemed to be about how there is another side of the coin, concerning the experience of becoming redundant, and as a result, fathers would find it less meaningful to engage in the so-called ‘cooperation.’ Feelings of becoming redundant in such intersubjective dynamics

were something I mostly recorded among fathers with a migrant background having the aforementioned racialised and ‘foreign’ characteristics (pp. 36) and originated from the so-called traditional Muslim migration countries (see pp. 12). Such experiences were not always mentioned by fathers with these characteristics, but I have found indications of this tendency in the ethnographic material, where feelings of becoming redundant entangled with feelings of alertness, which Bashir mentioned above, as well as feelings of being misunderstood or mistrusted, which I will analyse further in Part III.

Such forthright stories of being overlooked, redundant or misunderstood were in particular present among fathers in the Somali parent association and the fathers’ groups. These communities provided a room for discussing shared experiences of unjust and providing mutual support. The fathers with a Danish background and white bodily features did not express such experiences in the same way. One of the reasons might be that I did not focus my fieldwork on specific fathers’ groups or associations for fathers with Danish backgrounds. However, I did encounter one such organisation. During my fieldwork I participated in a political consultation (*høring*), held by the Danish ‘Father’s Association.’<sup>28</sup> Here I overheard similar stories of fathers with Danish backgrounds feeling redundant, mainly in processes of separation and divorce, where some fathers experienced child-professionals to listen, show sympathy and contact mothers more than them. From such stories, the impression given was that these fathers had not paid much attention to these differences as representing inequality (following the naturalisation of ‘the realm of the mother’) *before* the process of separation. However, during and after separation, ‘the realm of the mother’ suddenly became an obstacle, and the ‘Father’s Association’ gave these fathers a room for discussing such feelings of inequality.

Although this points to similarities with the stories told by Bashir and Hamid, there were some differences. ‘Father’s Association’ was a politically engaged association specifically for fathers experiencing gendered inequality, and precisely worked to put such experiences forward for politicians to take action. However, in the Somali parent association and the fathers’ groups, the primary agenda was not politicalised about fathers’ rights. For example, the Somali parent organisation was primarily concerned with schooling and childrearing of their children, as well as providing a central and valuable network. Thus, the

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Foreningen Far’ is the largest organisation for fathers in Denmark, advising fathers on topics like children’s health, fatherhood practices, fathers’ rights in relation to maternity leave, divorce, etc.

two contexts are not directly comparable, and point to how becoming redundant and feeling misunderstood, alert or mistrusted seemed to intensify among certain types of fathers.

### “Come, We Also Need You”

Hamid, who had worked as both a school interpreter and school integration-consultant, explained to me how he had experienced some divorced fathers with Somali background “getting lost” and losing contact with the school, because they did not know their rights. Hamid mainly thought it was especially, what he termed, “the minority” who had such experiences.

Well, I believe, it is especially, the minority, because there is, I do not know actually, but what I think, is that (...) the mother she lives with the children and she has the child-custody or has a shared custody, and the father does not live at the address. Then he actually thinks that he cannot come to the school. (...) So, he actually believes that it is only the mother, who decides over the children. However, it is not true. He had the right to come to the school. Therefore, it is the school, who should inform and illuminate this for the fathers and say: ‘do you know it is your children too? If you do not live together with your child, it is not a problem, you are very welcome.’ They should inform him about his rights (...) we have experienced that there was a child, who broke an arm in the school and the school has contacted the mother directly, and they could not get ahold of her. She did not pick up, and then it was like, but what can you do? Then they called me, and then I have called the father. Nevertheless, [the school staff had said] ‘we do not have information about this, his [the fathers] name does not stand here.’

When Hamid had called the father, he showed up immediately. Hamid experienced he had become the link between the school and the ‘lost fathers,’ which he thought was problematic. The school should have all the information of the fathers too and should reach out: “come, we also need you,” he exemplified. Even though these fathers could easily show up at the administrative office at the school and give their phone number, etc., they did not feel encouraged to do this. The school had a responsibility and should do *more* to include the father because they were an important part of their children’s life, Hamid thought, adding that

this was also about changing the general (unspoken) mistrust towards these fathers. Even though the fathers may seem absent and maybe perceived as uninterested in the eyes of the child-professionals, Bashir argued, they most often were a great part of the child's lifeworld, and an acknowledgement by the teachers. To be invited in would affect the teachers' relation to these children in positive ways.

Listening to the story, and others similar, fathers seemed more easily, compared with other fathers with Danish backgrounds, to lose contact with the institutions. Westerling (2016) argues for understanding parenting amongst divorced couples as having to manage "we-ness apart," requiring separate parents to work and coordinate together (127-28). Trends in this study indicate that fathers with a migrant background more often faced exclusion from this 'we,' partly because they were not supported in their role as a father by child-institutions. This can be due to lack of knowledge about constitutional rights as a parent, potentially also a tendency of professionals to disregard certain Muslim, migrant fathers' potential for fulfilling the role as parent, as I will return to in Part III.

### **'Gender Givens' and Different Horizons of Experience**

In the case of Bashir and Hamid, the feeling of being redundant was reinforced by how the gendered aspects of the home-school cooperation were different from the local area they originated from in Somalia, where, contrary to the general picture at Rosendal School, the school-sphere primarily belonged to the realm of the father. As argued by Dannesboe et al. (2012), home-school cooperation as a phenomenon in Danish schools have many cultural givens (*kulturelle selvfølgeligheder*), referring to how practices around this cooperation have taken certain forms, which appear as obvious and not questioned. This study finds some of such cultural givens to be gendered, suggesting the concept of '*gender givens*.' This means that fathers, who had experienced the school-sphere as mostly belonging to the realm of the father during their own upbringing, could find such gender givens surprising, and potentially reinforce feelings of being misunderstood and make them insecure or alert, regarding what was expected from them, potentially reinforcing feelings of becoming redundant.

To understand such feelings, it is fruitful to bring in thoughts on how experience and to feel at ease in certain cultural and social patters are connected. According to Alfred Schultz (Schultz 1944), experiences, repetition, and familiarity make people feel "at ease" (ibid, 500). Drawing on Edmund Husserl's notion of 'reduction' and 'habit,' Schultz built up

his theory about feeling at ease, claiming that our understanding of the world is built on reductions based on our previous horizon of experiences. When we see a tree, we cannot see the back of the tree, but we imagine the back due to our previous experiences, which tells us that this might be the case again. Thus, we feel at ease, when our reduction about other people's behaviour, appearance and actions are relatively equal to how people actually are and what they do. This makes us feel relaxed; one does not have to be on one's toes, we quite know what will happen. We have a 'pattern,' which we can use to achieve the goals we have, and this pattern (and prior experiences about how this pattern is), makes us come about challenges in the everyday life (Schultz 2005, 204). The more we feel at ease, the less our acts need previous reflection about how to understand and act in the social pattern (Schultz 1944, 500).

Following Schultz's thoughts, we are reminded that the cultural givens of the home-school cooperation were not obvious for all types of fathers (as well as different types of parents in general; see Dannesboe et. al 2012). For instance, certain gendered practice had developed around this cooperation, which to the teachers might appear as natural, and into which all types of fathers were expected to find their place. However, the migrant fathers in this study had very different horizons of experiences to draw from. Logically, it is not only gendered experiences that matter regarding feeling at ease in the school context, but all the many experiences and skills the diverse fathers brought with them, which formed certain scripts for how to handle different situations and challenges. These include the interlocutors' own school experiences, which not only depend on the given country's national school systems, but also to what extent their school had been a, for example, private school in a big city, or a small local, rural school.

Some of the migrant fathers in this study had had most of their school years in the Danish school; others had gone to schools in their country of origin, which had school structures similar to Danish schools. For example, Tariq (pp. 103) had attended a private, English boarding school in one of the biggest cities in Pakistan, which had similar structures with the Danish school system and with an education in English; Tariq could continue his further education in Denmark, taking an English-language Master's degree. For him, his experiences of a school-pattern, which were to some extent similar to the Danish, made him feel at ease in the Danish school system, which he could use to achieve the goals he had, such as taking part in the school board. Thus, his previous school experiences helped him overcome challenges in the everyday life of being a school parent.



On the other hand, the way Hamid and Bashir described some of the schools in rural Somalia back in the 1970s, was that they had quite different expectations towards parents, and a different structure in general. However, schools in the bigger cities in Somalia were again very different, and more similar to the Danish school system.

People constantly develop their knowledge and skills, and thus extend their familiarity with the social pattern. To feel at ease has to do with the skills people develop from practicing (Moran 2011). Subsequently, as both engaged in translation and counselling-jobs at schools, Hamid and Bashir had achieved great insight into the school system. However, when the divorced and excluded fathers, which they knew of, were never invited in, they never got the opportunity to learn about their rights as well as extend their knowledge and skills, and by extension the 'appropriate engagement' (Dannesboe 2012). They appeared as quite alone with figuring out the web of nonverbalised cultural and gender givens.

The father Abir from the Bøgelunden fathers' group, with Pakistani origin, who in 1988 immigrated to Denmark as a 28-year-old, told me how he knew about the appropriate engagement and behaviour for parents in school, including to be active at the parents meetings, to take part in the discussions there, and even better, place some suggestions on the agenda. Abir also wanted to share his opinions at these parents meeting; he wanted to show he was engaged *too*. However, when he had formulated a good sentence in his head (he was not fully fluent in Danish), he experienced how the topic of the discussions had already changed, or someone before him came with a similar argument. "I left with heavy shoulders," Abir told me. "Every time I burned inside with something, leaving without contributing, my shoulders got heavier, so I stopped coming to the parents meeting," he explained with despair. Abir felt he had failed with showing the world, that he was also an engaged father. Feelings of being at unease are related to feelings of lack of belonging, not to feel "at home" (Schultz 2005, 204), and these feelings could result in some migrant fathers' withdrawal. In continuation of this, some migrant fathers expressed how they felt they were troubling the other parents if something had to be translated for them, and thus felt they delayed an already hurried parent meeting.

Abir's story reflects the fragile sense of belonging. Jackson (1996) describes the instability of human consciousness as the way awareness continually drifts or oscillates between a related, substantive, and ontological secure sense of self, and a comparatively expanded and unstable sense of self in which one is sometimes fulfilled in being with another, at other times overwhelmed and engulfed (10). I argue that the hectic discussions at the parent meetings made Abir unsure of himself. When talking with me, Abir's Danish was good. Yet,

to stand up and speak aloud at such parents' meetings were something different, and would change his feeling of confidence in his language abilities. Human beings all the time engage in intersubjective dynamics about whom they are, and whether others will support or doubt this self-image. Abir's experiences made him feel he failed the self-image he had, which again weakened his feeling of belonging, since the structure and routines of such parent meetings did fail to make visible, and thus acknowledge, his engagement and general assets.

## Concluding Remarks

This chapter revealed how practices around the terrain of home-school cooperation had certain gender givens, that is; how certain practices have developed as, for example, belonging more to the realm of the mother than that of the father. This 'division' appeared as relatively incontrovertible, and fathers were expected to find their positions. However, such gender- or more general institutional-givens, lacked a sensitivity towards complex processes in the lifeworlds of the diverse families, as well as the variations of parents' own school experiences, capacities and skills (Dannesboe et al. 2012, 140, Krab 2015, Akselvoll 2016a; Jørgensen 2019), thus some practices failed to bring into play fathers' different assets (Yosso 2005).

This chapter has compared experiences of fathers with Danish backgrounds to fathers with migrant backgrounds. Many experiences of gender givens appeared to be parallel independent of background, where mothers, in general, were expected to and did take a greater part in home-school cooperation.

The chapter has also shown how some fathers with a Danish background from time to time mentioned how they were practicing rather traditional gender roles, as for example Søren, who hereto added "yes, yes, and I am fine with that." As Søren had to leave a small comment on this fact, I generally recorded some ambiguity concerning exposing the 'ideal of Danish gender equality,' like Jeppe's awkward laugh (pp. 108), when he explained me that it was actually fitting with reality, when the mother was on top of the contact-lists (as she was the most obvious to call). I believe this laugh was about the uncanny in 'admitting' or exposing the ideal, or social imaginary of Danish gender equality. Thus, the laugh was a way to come about this ambiguity; in a place surrounded by progressive modern left-wing families, these rather 'traditional gender roles' still existed. Moreover, being interviewed by a female PhD-student interested in gender-issues, he might have been afraid that I would see him as someone who agreed with these traditional gender roles and not support gender equality.

Awkwardness around this discrepancy was not rare in the intersubjective dynamics of interviews with young fathers with Danish backgrounds; how some ideals on equality of gender exist as a part of the ideal Danish self-image nevertheless conflicts with some fathers' everyday experiences, where traditional divisions of tasks appeared to remain.

The analysis has shown how encounters with child-professionals affected fathers' feelings regarding their role as a father in different ways. We may approach the migrant father's encounter with school professionals as a meshwork (Ingold 2015), where the encounter affects the fathers' further line of becoming – his further trajectory. Thus, the school professionals constituted a force, on a small-scale level, significant for fathers' becomings as school-fathers. Some encounters made migrant fathers – to various degrees – experience becoming redundant, and fathers reacted differently hereto. Sharmarke (pp. 102) contacted the teacher to claim that his position as a father was important. Thus, he took initiative at a new meeting, which then affected the teacher – who would then call Sharmarke every time necessary. In this way, fathers could navigate their terrain from a position of secondary importance, yet doing so successfully, they could change the trajectories; their pathway for becoming, and thus avoid becoming redundant. Thus, we see how the meshwork can both work to push the fathers' trajectory further away from the school; when fathers felt they were becoming redundant, they could abstain from engaging in the future 'collaboration.' Yet, encounters may also tighten the relation, as in Sharmarke's example, where taking initiative, as well as acting on the teacher's calls, strengthened his relation to the school. Especially divorced migrant fathers faced difficulties in navigating the terrain of home-school cooperation, since they might not be positioned as important actors and caretakers here, and were not invited in; potentially facing a path towards 'becoming absent.'

Some Muslim, migrant fathers in this chapter felt they were not believed to be a central caring figure in their children's childrearing. This seemed to reflect some child-professional assumptions that the mother was the most involved parent, as well as their considerations of to whom this special and important task could be entrusted? This anticipates one of the later arguments in Part III of this thesis, where I argue that some migrant fathers, with certain characteristics, were perceived by child-professionals as having a certain patriarchal and controlling masculinity.



## Chapter 7: Flexibility, Dependency and Problematisation of ‘Absence’

I met Lisa the day after the parent-teacher conference with Altun and Betül, the parents of Mustafa from 0B. As often, the talk ended with discussing the ‘challenges with Mustafa.’ [Mustafa had pronunciation problems, a diagnosis, and his parents were ‘different’]. Lisa was frustrated. “They are just so apathetic,” she said. At some point during the conference, Altun had yawned, she added. “I mean, that was too much!” Lisa did not really think they appreciated all that they did for Mustafa, and they had also not signed-up for the parent-teacher conference, [as well as checked other notifications] on the Parent Intranet. Then Lisa said, “I had to say to them, if they do not get on the ball (*komme på banen*),<sup>29</sup> I do not think Mustafa can stay at this school.” Afterwards Altun and Betül had had a half hour introduction to Parent Intranet with help from the already present Turkish-interpreter. Lisa hoped it would help.

Edited fieldnote

The case with Mustafa was rather complex, because he had diverse challenges in school. He had pronunciation problems as well as an ADHD or ADD-diagnose – the inclusion pedagogue was not sure which one. This was also the reason I did not get the chance to participate in the conference; present already was Lisa, her assistant Sigurd, the speech therapist, the inclusion pedagogue, Tobias, a representative from the afterschool-care, and the Turkish interpreter. Consequently, Lisa thought one more would be too much. Mustafa had been recommended to attend a special school before starting in 0B, however, the special school found him too highly functioning to attend this school, to Altun and Betül’s great relief. Yet, Lisa experienced that it was difficult to include Mustafa in the class of 0B, where

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<sup>29</sup> ‘*Komme på banen*’ is a Danish expression regarding being engaged, show one’s interest and/or participate in the community.

the general academic progress was very high. Thus, there were many issues to discuss in relation to the case of Mustafa. What I focus on in this chapter, is the specific component that Lisa was able to state "...if they do not get on the ball, I do not think Mustafa can stay at this school." How could Altun and Betül's engagement in the home-school cooperation be so important that Lisa articulated it as *necessary* for Mustafa's learning and development to take place in school?

Teachers' experiences, thinking and ways to evaluate pupils and parents were all processes embedded in the environment, or terrain, in which they are placed and act. Thus, to explore the institutional-logics of home-school cooperation, how and why parents' engagement in schooling was given importance to such an extent that it was possible to 'fail' such cooperation, we need descriptions of, and critical reflections on, the characteristics of this terrain that the teachers navigated in order to understand their agency (Ingold 2000, 171). Thus, we need to look closer at the characteristics of the teachers' profession and their working conditions to understand how they became dependent on parents to be 'on the ball.'

First, I analyse the ideal of, and steering for, more flexibility within the school, encouraged by political reforms and made possible through the Parent Intranet, in order to illuminate how this influenced the relation between teachers and parents. Second, I analyse how this dependency made teachers preoccupied with the parents' 'resources,' in order to understand better the emic notions of "resource-strong" and "weak," and how these notions entangled with being present. Finally, I return to the case of Altun and Betül, discussing how it was possible for them to 'fail' the home-school cooperation. One general objective is to illuminate how the conditions for being a teacher in the terrain of the school made some parents more problematic than others, and based on these thoughts, how teachers would have perceived such parents differently in another social terrain, with different characteristics and dynamics.

## Expanding 'the Flexible'

A central characteristic of Rosendal School was the general quest for flexibility. All school-schemes were 'flexible.' The teachers so-called "autonomous-teams" were supposed to be agile and flexible; the lessons and the school day was expected to be more varied, as well as the two Grade 7 classes were flexible too, in the way that they sometimes merged into three classes, sometimes one. However, paradoxically, this flexibility appeared to lead to

formations of dependency in other ends. In the following section, I explore how many recent reforms along with a greater focus on flexibility (as an appreciated standard), created a condition of what I will term as ‘*ontological uncertainty*.’

The New Reform, which took effect during my fieldwork, implied wide-reaching changes, such as significant longer schooldays, new subjects, more varied schooldays and obligatory homework cafes (The Danish Ministry of Education 2014). This was implemented at the same time as the new working hour agreement (*arbejdstidsaftale*) for all public school teachers. The political motivation for The New Reform was to improve the academic level of the pupils, and in the end of the nine years of compulsory schooling, the pupils should be able to perform at a higher level than before the reform. For example, at least eighty per cent of pupils should achieve higher scores in the national tests in mathematics and Danish. Simultaneously, the pupils’ well-being had to be improved, as well as new practices should break the negative social heritage (*ibid.*). The reform was added to many recent regulations: such as the reform on including more pupils with special needs in the normal classes (partly through differentiated teaching), which came along with a goal of ‘more learning’ (*større læringsudbytte*) and a higher well-being of the pupils. These regulations added to the ninety-five per cent objective; how ninety-five per cent of all pupils of a specific school year, must complete at least one youth education. All these regulations took up much of the teachers’ energy as well as reinforced a focus on improving the outcome of tests, already from the first school years.

Politicians described the reform as a necessary intervention, due to the poor performance of the public schools, referring to a disappointing result in the PISA test (Holm 2017; Krejsler et al. 2012). This test is a worldwide study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) intended to evaluate educational systems by measuring school pupils’ scholastic performance, with the aim to provide comparable data to enable countries to compare and improve their education outcomes. OECD has advocated for more reforms to increase the outcome of education and make pupils “ready for the future,” an advice many countries have followed. 450 education reforms have been adopted between 2004 and 2008 (OECD 2015), a tendency, which made sociologist Stephen J. Ball (2013) state that: “Education reforms are spreading across the globe [...] like a policy epidemic” (155). Thus, the many reforms and changes at Rosendal School were affected by large-scale forces – here as the intensified competition between countries, which entangled with the everyday life demanding more tests and a ‘readiness for change.’

The many new changes affected the atmosphere at the school. Most of the teachers at Rosendal School perceived the political arguments for the need of the New Reform and especially the new working hour agreement, as a critique of their work and engagement, and something which undermined their professionalism through more control. Additionally, both Steffen and Monica often expressed to me how they, as teachers, felt discredited in the general extensive public and political debate on The New Reform. As if they had not been doing it well enough before. Teacher, parents and pupils were confused about how things were going to be. Parents were worried whether their children would have time to attend the sports club due to the longer school days, and to which extent the longer school days would be too exhausting for their children. The longer schooldays were generally found to be challenging for both pupils and teachers. I experienced how teachers did not know how to fill out the time in the last hours of the school day, where the pupils were tired, and the teachers estimated that the pupils could not concentrate anymore; at times they took the class to the local park to simply hang out. In addition, pupils found it generally unfair that they had to spend so much more time at school. Due to the new teachers' agreement, teachers had to prepare for lessons within the school, to my observations, often disturbed by their colleagues, as well as preparation hours were cut back. Many teachers expressed how they felt stressed out. In general, The New Reform seemed to enforce an atmosphere of uncertainty and frustration.

The local municipality had a large influence on the actual implementation of the New Reform, and following the local school's own management needed to consider these frameworks in their daily operations. This meant that it was up to the school principal, Simon, and his administration team to define how the schooldays became more varied. At Rosendal School, two new actions were implemented: "autonomous teams" and "flexible school schedules." The autonomous teams meant that all teachers on the same grade-level constituted a team, and had to prepare their own flexible schemes – which would change for each week (or, if up to Simon, even more often). In many ways, Simon promoted the autonomous team-structure, since it could provide a lot of flexibility and variation, which he associated with more and better learning. The teams could "do exactly what they wanted – the new flexible schemes had no limits."

Anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2005) has described tendencies of "new work" in Scandinavian contexts (56-57). Arguing that increased flexibility (ibid, 59), is defining these new jobs, where workers, here teachers, are asked to behave agilely, to be open to change on short notice, and to be willing to take risks continually (as Simon encouraged



the teachers to take risk in relation to an unpredictable and “fluid school day”). The workers must be open to change and be willing to do things differently, as opposed to the rigid formality associated with the old economy. The flexibility is framed as entailing a great degree of freedom and choice on the part of the employee. Creativity is good; routine is bad (ibid, 50). Paradoxically, Eriksen argues, more flexibility gained in one domain tends to reduce flexibility in another (ibid, 50). For example, there has been a concomitant loss of flexibility regarding time, since the omnipresent communications technology tends to fill all available gaps (ibid). Along Eriksens’ arguments, the following examples will point to more types on loss of flexibility within ‘more flexibility.’

Along with the autonomous teams and the flexible schemes, a lot of administrative work followed. Astrid and Monica were in charge of generating and updating the new flexible schemes for 7Y and 7X. They were both struggling with this task, because they did not know how to use the new inflexible computer program in which the schemes had to be created. Additionally, the program had some errors. Soon the pupils had been to school for fourteen days and they still did not have a school schedule, Monica said, in a frustrated tone, and told me she had problems sleeping. This mess was not a professional standard she wanted to represent, yet I also got the impression that she was a little nervous about getting complaints from some of the parents. Astrid felt so stressed out that she could not have me follow her class; pointing to loss of flexibility within the increased flexibility (ibid.).<sup>30</sup>

After some months, Monica and Rikke became more familiar with the task of flexible-schedule planning, however still quite time-consuming. The flexible schedule planning was complicated, Monica told me, because there had to be annual *fixed* amounts of lessons in each subject, which made the overview rather incalculable, again pointing to less-flexibility within increased flexibility. For the autonomous-team to agree on the flexible scheme also required many team-meetings; teachers spent an increasing amount of time on negotiation and collective planning. Consequently, the teachers tried to make the schedules in the old way with fixed weekly schedules, as it became too confusing and time-consuming.

However, according to Simon, teachers had to “let go of the reins,” suggesting how, for example, the new subject ‘assistant learning’ (*understøttende undervisning*), could merge with the normal school-day to form more fluidity and flexibility. However, in everyday school-life

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<sup>30</sup> Both teachers’ classes were large with 28 students in each, adding to the overwhelming workload.

such visions were difficult to practice and everything got quite chaotic, as the following fieldnote shows:

I met Ubah and Malak [two girls from 7X] in the corridor. We were all late, and since no one had had time to check the flexible schedule for the day, we did not know where to go. Ubah and Malak did not seem that nervous about being late. In fact, this was somewhat usual, and Steffen and Monica were not that strict about it. Sometimes the teachers were themselves confused about how they had agreed on dividing the classes or who took which lesson, which day. We discussed what subject they thought they were going to have, as we decided to go to the main classroom. Meanwhile, Malak tried to access the flexible schedule through the Pupil Intranet (*elevintra*) on her smart-phone, but something went wrong, and the schedule would not open.

Edited fieldnote

This confusion was not rare. Repeatedly, pupils asked me what was next on the schedule as well as, I quite often overheard teachers say, before the break was about to end, “Oh, so what’s next?” Both pupils and teachers seemed to need some daily routines in their everyday life, however at the same time, flexibility and agility appeared to be elements necessary to be “ready for the future” (Ball 2003). One day I asked the teacher Thor, why he thought so many things had to be flexible. He looked surprised at me, thought for a while, “well... it’s good to be flexible.” Often teachers seemed to blame the longer school days or the less preparation hours for them feeling stressed out; however, I experienced an (unreflected) undercurrent of increased flexibility and infinite agility to be a source of confusion and feelings of stress.

## Parents Becoming Dependent

The flexibility also had a great influence on parents, as we shall see in the following interview with Adnan, Faria and Naima, the family from the introducing vignette (pp. 2-5). Faria was the one in her relationship to check the Parent Intranet. Thus, she took the lead, as we started to talk about the flexible scheme, while Naima, took on the role of translator.

Naima: “It was because the teachers kept changing it [the schedule] every week. In addition, the teachers cannot expect that we go online every day and see

what we have to do, because it is not like, you know, that they [her parents] have time for that. In addition, sometimes they do not even put a schedule there [on the intra] so us pupils do not even know what we have to do in the morning.”

Anne: “No, often I also struggle to figure that out (...), which subject is on.”

[Laughs]

Faria: “Well, but we also do not know that!”

Anne: “No. But then... I am not sure I understood (...) because then there is actually too much information, but you mentioned earlier, how there is too little information? [Faria had earlier said that she needed more information from some of the teachers].”

Naima: “But it is actually not information. Because the week-plan (*ugeplanen*) is also not sent out properly, because there are many teachers, who do not write [the facts needed to know what was going to happen] on the Parent Intra. In addition, they do not tell us (...), when we have the national test or something like that. They tell... we arrive in school, and *then* they tell us.”

Anne: “And then they tell it? I see.”

Naima: “Yes, but our parents do not get that information.”

During the interview it appeared to me, how this was a topic they had discussed quite a lot at home (Naima rather knew what her mother would answer), and they both seemed quite frustrated about not being provided the information they needed to properly navigate the terrain of the school. Naima complained about how the teachers would send out new schedule messages with short notice, and how they all found this rather confusing. In this way, teachers' uncertainty branched out to the pupils and parents.

The interview as a whole revealed some ambiguity. Faria had earlier said she wanted more information on the Parent Intranet (similar to how Naima called for the weekly schedule to be sent out in time), but at the same time, Naima underlined, it was not as if parents “had time for this.” I found that the increased flexibility, and the weekly changing schedules, as well as short notice schedule messages, were practices, which made parents *need* a lot of information, even though they felt they did not have time to get their bearings in the vast information flow.

Parents, regardless of background, were generally concerned about whether their child would miss something as, for example, not give their child rubber boots, warm clothes,

and a raincoat if they were going for a trip.<sup>31</sup> Along the same lines, a father told me that once a teacher had sent an important message via Parent Intranet about a trip the day before the trip. Incidents such as this made parents think they needed to check the Parent Intranet almost every day (also see Akselvoll 2016a; Jørgensen 2017), which again resonates with Eriksen's argument, that increasing flexibility in some areas tends to lead to the loss of flexibility in another, as parents became *dependent* on checking the Parent Intranet (Eriksen 2005).

Monica also became dependant on the new computer-system to create flexible schedules, which according to her was a rather complex and rigid program, demanding a lot of her time. This is another point stated by Eriksen: flexibly does not necessarily (even though often assumed) liberate more 'free time.' Both parents and teachers ended up spending a lot of time on checking, reading and writing on the Parent Intranet. To be able to navigate the terrain of the home-school cooperation, and to be orientated and prepared regarding their daughter's schooling, Faria needed to check up on the Parent Intranet daily, and searching for and sorting out information. This reflects how, in some areas, both teachers, pupils and parents seemed to struggle-along (Desjarlais 1996) in the unpredictable and changing terrain of the school (-home cooperation).

Thinking back to the case of Altun and Betül from the very beginning of this chapter, they did not have the capacities to fully live up to this dependency, as they, for example, were not fluent in the Danish language and not effusive users of the Parent Intranet. Thus, parents could quite easily 'fall through' and become noticeable as 'non-active parents' because of the information they might miss.

### *Logics of the 'Technological-turn' Within Home-school Cooperation*

Teachers, although many ended up spending a lot of time on the Parent Intranet, also found it an easy and conventional information canal, as they were able to send out a vast information load to all parents. In these ways, the Parent Intranet was perceived as convenient and flexible. Some teachers would use the Parent Intranet to send out requests to parents to help their children with assignments, and to oversee the children reading or encourage engagement in extra-curricular educational activities. Lisa and Gitte would upload numerous pictures

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<sup>31</sup> Something which teachers also noticed: Gitte gave as an example of "resource-weak parents" those who did not make sure their children had proper clothes when they were going on a trip, or generally did not make sure they were prepared for excursions, etc. (pp. 162).

from each excursion, encouraging the parents to look through them and talk with their child about their experiences, and Lisa would ask parents during the parent-teacher conference, if they had seen and talked about the pictures with their child. Some teachers would send out detailed week plans, with detailed plans for every day, potentially along with small suggestions for what parents 'could do' with their child at home to support this plan. Akselvoll (2016a) argues how the Parent Intranet has left parents with an omnipresent demand and indefinite expectations concerning online involvement in schooling. For many this 'could do' turned into 'ought to do,' or potentially feeling insufficient (ibid, 92).

Teachers seemed, every so often, to forget how things looked differently from the other side: the diversity of families and how messages were received and interpreted differently by different parents (see also ibid.). Based on my fieldwork at Rosendal School, it was only a small number of parents who genuinely wished for this much information. Yet, the Parent Intranet had become 'a matter of course' and a resilient part of a school-logic, which also the following example illustrates.

During the class-conference,<sup>32</sup> Bente, the class teacher in 0D, expressed her frustration about how some parents did not check the Parent Intranet, and few of these parents had not shown up for the parent-teacher conference either. It was especially the "bilingual families," she explained. That these parents were absent was especially a problem, since some of these parents' children had performed poorly in the language-test. Since they did not check the Parent Intranet, she could not communicate with these parents. The discussion went on, and then, a bit later, Dorte, the educational leader, suggested that Bente send the parent of the poorly performing children a "language-packet"<sup>33</sup> (*sprogpakke*) via Parent Intranet (which Bente precisely had mentioned these parents did not use).

As this example demonstrates, the communication via the Parent Intranet nearly appeared as the only communication possible, and more about delivering a message, or shifting a responsibility, than engaging in a *dialogue* or mutual *cooperation* with the parents. As Ingold argues, a mutual understanding, or what he terms as "to common" (Ingold 2018, 4, 26) entails placing oneself into the other person's lifeworld, for a short while, to get a sense and understanding of how your message might be perceived in the other person's position. Both parts must be open for changing ones preunderstanding, by listening to the other person.

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<sup>32</sup>A meeting with all the Grade 0 teachers and the pedagogical leader with a particular focus on the pupils in complicated learning situations.

<sup>33</sup> An 'internet-platform' with texts, folders and exercises for parents to practice the Danish language with their children at home.

Otherwise, Ingold argues, we will not truly *learn* from each other (ibid, 4-5). To learn from each other is about transforming our view on the world (and a potential problem or misunderstanding), which requires some openness and sensitivity, which the communication via the Parent Intranet did not entail. Parent Intranet was not sensitive to the differences of the parents involved. It was in many ways a standardised communication-tool, which lacked the opportunity for teachers to sense the other person involved (ibid, 6). In this way it reinforced a picture of all parents as alike (see also Crozier 2001), as in the example above, where sending out a link to, or an online-folder from the language-packet became a solution, which was not flexible regarding the parents and their different skills and perspectives. Thus, again underlining Eriksen's point of the inflexible within flexibility. In the very end, Bente arranged, together with the integration-consultant,<sup>34</sup> Shamia (who was also taking part in the class-conference), that Shamia would call these "absent bilingual parents" in for a meeting, instead of sending out the language-packets. Later on, Shamia explained how this had been a successful meeting, whereto she added, in cases like this (with increasing frustration from the teachers' side and silence from the parents' side), face-to-face meetings could, "change a whole world." In conclusion, some flexibility was possible (as Shamia found another solution in arranging a meeting), but for Bente such meetings were experienced as difficult, demanding and time-consuming, because, it might be argued, they did not fit with the 'rigid standards of flexibility.' There were many examples where teachers were looking for a 'quick fix,' for more complex problems and issues – like sending an online-folder from the language packet. Along the same lines, taking the position and time to reflect on these practices, failed to appear. For whom is this 'cooperation' meant? Moreover, whom was benefitting from it? (see also Dannesboe et al. 2012, 141).

One way to understand teachers' focus on 'quick fixes' is through Desjarlais' concept of "struggling along" (Desjarlais, 1996, 70), to describe an acutely tactile mode of perception that attends to episodic, temporally finite encounters with others and obstacles of everyday life (ibid, 70).

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<sup>34</sup> An 'integration-consultant' was a child-professional, often with a migrant background, who teachers called in, if special challenges arose regarding 'bi-lingual pupils' or 'parents'.

## Struggling Along

The intensified 'flux' of the terrain of the school appeared to affect the teachers' orientation in everyday life, and give priority to their engagement in short-term problems rather than long-term. This was due to how the flux made teachers unsure about how things operated, since routines were disrupted, which again affected their feeling of control and authority, altogether resulting in a feeling of ontological uncertainty.

Desjarlais works with how the scale of forces and sensations course through the lives of the people we study (Desjarlais 1996, 70). To understand these forces, Desjarlais draws on Deleuze and his concept of "pulsional intensities" of life (Deleuze 1985, 146-47). Such intensity, "functions as means to intensify states of experience – dynamic flux that intensifies the distancing movement, as we are carried to our horizon and beyond" (ibid. 146-47). Desjarlais sees these forces as part and parcel of historical, social and political circumstances, and pays attention to how these circumstances can be experienced as intensities affecting our being-in-the-world. Thus, experience is a way of 'moving along' in the terrain organised through temporal, as well as spatial, lines (Desjarlais 1996, 75). Desjarlais finds in his fieldwork among homeless in Boston that a specific "politic of displacement" (ibid, 88) worked as an intensifying force, which affected his interlocutors' experiences in the terrains they were navigating to come about life. The politics of displacement affected the homeless interlocutors, by working to relocate where they could live and generally to make living conditions difficult. The terrains the homeless navigated became unpredictable and ever changing, and Desjarlais finds that such flux affected the interlocutors' being-in-the-world, which became more fragmented in how they oriented themselves in the world; their aspirations and planning centred on short-term time-scales, since the terrain felt unpredictable. Desjarlais terms such ways of experiencing as "struggling along" (ibid, 87); which can contribute to an episodic orientation towards time, where each incidence takes precedence over any larger temporal context, as well as, to the need, at times, to stop the rush of events and find some point of stability (ibid, 88). Bearing in mind Desjarlais' context is profoundly different from the terrain of the school; he himself points to how certain characters of life in post-industrial societies share the same characteristic of temporality, changeability and episodic sequences of events. Hence, returning to Rosendal School, it might be argued that the many reforms and what might be termed as '*the politics of changeability and flexibility*,' affected teachers' being-in-the-world in such ways that they became unsure about

how to navigate such a terrain in flux. This seemed to intensify a focus among teachers on problems and issues on a smaller temporal context (ibid, 87-88).

### *Engaged in the Small Temporal Context*

The job as a teacher has always led to very flexible and unpredictable tasks and acute problems. Furthermore, ideals on equality and a strong community among pupils (*fællesskabet*) over time have proved to be persistent ideals within the teaching profession (see e.g. Gilliam 2016). However, the analysis suggests how recent reform-changes appear to have affected the teachers, who have developed a more episodic orientation towards time, in which each incidence took precedence over any larger temporal context. For example, teachers did not have the energy and overview to engage as much in complex long-term problems. Returning to the case of Altun and Betül (pp. 121), half an hour's introduction to the Parent Intranet was not enough to fully make them users, since one of the main obstacles for Altun and Betül was their low command of the Danish language and unfamiliarity with written Danish. Similarly, it appeared as an insurmountable task for Bente to engage in a long-term, relationship-building collaboration with the "absent parents." Thus, problems of a larger temporal context could be demanding for teachers to engage in, since the characteristics of the terrain made them orientate around more episodic issues, as they were struggling along.

### **Ontological Uncertainty**

The politics of changeability and flexibility described above also brought along teachers' insecurity regarding which rules and procedures they ought to follow. How they, in the profession of teachers, ought to handle the new elements in the school day – how did they teach the new subject "supportive teaching" (*undestøttende undervisning*), which was not clearly described anywhere? How could they motivate the pupils a full day, when they saw that they were tired after 2 o'clock? How could they facilitate 'a more varied school day,' and what did that actually mean? The following case exemplifies such uncertainties.

Due to the longer schooldays and new requirements for homework-café, it was an ambition that the pupils were not given any homework. However, as some pupils claimed that they could not finish the exercises in the lessons, and the teachers were not allowed to give homework, some pupils would never finish the exercises. This became an excessive problem for Steffen, since when he wanted to go through the exercises in class, as he had



done in all his many years as a teacher, many pupils had not finished the exercises. After many considerations and grief, Steffen nevertheless chose to give homework, if the pupils had spent an excessive amount of time on the tasks in school. However, some parents took this up and criticised it in messages they sent to Steffen or other teachers via the Parent Intranet; some of these parents were dreaded for their frequent meddling in teachers' decisions or how the school worked. Additionally, the excessive public debate concerning 'reforming the school' became a way for parents to debate and place question marks on the teachers' practices and judgment in a hectic everyday school life.

Such incidences made teachers at Rosendal School unsure about their authority and more vulnerable to critique, since they felt they had lost the overview. One day in the teachers' lounge while sitting with his laptop, Steffen told me he had nearly a stomach ache about logging on to Parent Intranet. The reason was that a dispute had arisen with Mads' parents, Henrik and Merete. They both had Danish backgrounds, higher education, and mental energy – characteristics that were rather common for the so-called “complaining parents.” These parents' critique was especially dreaded, because they possessed the skills and capacities to take their criticism further, as also Simon was cc'd on this specific critical mail of Henrik and Merete, which made the case even more precarious for Steffen. Another such example was the father Tom (pp. 88) who threatened Steffen during Mathilde's home-school conference with making a complaint about safety at the school to the municipality authorities.

In their critical mail, Henrik and Merete complained about how their son Mads was scolded, because he had been late to class. They argued that Steffen and Monica had given the pupils different information, as to when the pupils were to be back in the classroom. The long mail, written in a rather legal and academic tone, ended with stating, that in these new times of the new autonomous team-structure, they as parents *certainly* expected the teachers to be able to cooperate.

The teachers' decisions and judgment in the hectic everyday school-life was embedded in social processes, where they invested themselves on a personal level. Thus, decisions were often based on teachers' personal estimations, which made the teachers vulnerable to critics – it easily became personal (Gulløv 2015, 180, 265). Yet, due to the flux, teachers seemed to be unsure about whether their judgement was right, since their former experience might not fit the new aspects of the school terrain, and they had to invent new routines and new argumentations. It was, for example, new for Steffen to cooperate with Monica in the structure of teams, and maybe they had actually said different times to the pupils? I sensed he was not sure, yet Steffen somehow also had to pretend so, to stay an

authority – also in the eyes of the pupils. Thus, the critique became severe and, to my observation, some parents' critique took enormous amount of teachers' energy. Hence, fear of other's critique affected how the teacher's agency took shape through returning concerns with their surroundings (Desjarlais 1996, 88).

Such processes made other parents less visible. I generally observed the parents with a migrant background at Rosendal School to have a high degree of trust in the educational project of the school and in the teachers' professional capacities (see also Bouakaz 2005, 174-175). Additionally, I recorded different perceptions of how to be a good, 'appropriate school-parent.' Here some migrant fathers believed it was improper for parents to interfere in the teachers' work, in line with how these fathers had themselves experienced the teacher to be an authority during their own school-years (see also Bouakaz 2007; Jørgensen 2017). Yet, finding it improper to interfere entailed the risk of appearing unengaged in the eyes of the teacher. Concurrently, the teachers were generally more relaxed about meeting with such parents, some of which they interchangeably termed as "resource-weak."

Although the so-called "resource-strong" parents, as Merete and Henrik were generally perceived by teachers as possessing the skills and capacities to stimulate the child in the 'appropriate ways' at home, and the "resource-weak" to a greater extent as lacking such capacities, paradoxically, the criticizing so-called "resource-strong" parents seemed to occupy much of the teachers' time and energy. This contrasted with how most teachers found it to be an important task of being a teacher, to focus on the pupils and parents who they believed needed support and guidance the most. This leads to the question: who actually takes up the teachers' time and energy, and how this relates to the assumption that all pupils and parents ought to have equal opportunities?

The cases above work to exemplify a general tendency: how some parents, which teachers termed as the "resource-strong" ended up taking much of the teachers' time and mental energy, while other parents became more unnoticed. Thinking back to the case of Altun and Betül, their struggles with living up to the high expectations of engagement appeared to a great extent to be overlooked, or left to themselves to solve. Thus, *their* struggle was not placed on the agenda as an argument for making procedures change.

## The Well-Being Group – and the Good *Supporting* Parents

We are sitting in the classroom of OB, and one by one, the pupils bump in and are seated with help from their parents. Inga's father Jonas is telling the teacher Lisa that the '*trivselsgruppe*' has arranged a play date event today in the park and, well, he just wanted her to know, he says. Lisa lightens up and says that she is so happy to hear that. What a good idea! Inga noticed her father is talking with Lisa and she looks proud. The parents leave and Lisa starts the lesson by saying that Inga's father had just told her about the play date event today, and how this made her so happy to hear. Isabel raises her hand, and proudly tells Lisa that she is visiting Inga today, after school, where they are going to bake a cake for the event in the park. Lisa responds, in a praising tone that that sounds so cosy, and that she is happy when someone arranges such things. Later that day, all teachers of the Grade 0 classes gathered for the class conference. Bente says that she is having a hard time with the parents of her pupils. The few active parents in the well-being group are having a hard time (*de har sved på panden*), she explains, just to get anyone to meet up. Bente clearly feels sorry for these few active parents. Lisa is nearly bragging about such good parents she has this year, and today they are arranging a play date event in the park, she proudly says.

Edited field note

As aforementioned, the phenomenon of home-school cooperation encompassed both formal and informal events. Besides formal events as the parent-teacher conference and the bi-annual parents-meetings, many other social events were held at the school; such as breakfast events, Christmas lunch, information meetings for new parents, and various events arranged by the well-being group. These volunteer parents had themselves indicated that they would like to be the "well-being parents" (*trivselsforældrene*) at the parent meeting. Even though these last-mentioned in-formal social events were described as casual and voluntary, many examples from my fieldwork pointed to how parents' presence meant something in the eyes of teachers, and generally, parents were encouraged to take part in voluntary tasks such as the parent-council and the school board. The parent-council and the school board were more formal

groups, who (as a democratic ideal), could influence the organisation of the school in various levels.

The well-being group in the two Grade 0 classes arranged breakfast events once a month, and play dates for pupils and parents, or, in 0C a bonfire with twisted bread event. Parents who took part in these voluntary groups were generally perceived as ‘good, supportive parents.’ The teacher Gitte equally defined the “resource-strong parents,” as those who would do something *extra*: bake bread rolls, or look for a movie at home if Gitte would ask for a good movie on the Parent Intranet to watch with the pupils Friday afternoon.

Bente stated at the class-conference, how she felt sorry for ‘her’ well-being parents. They had “sweat on the forehead” since it was so hard for them to make the other parents show up. Bente’s class was known for being “the most challenging class that year,” and she complained about how many parents were not engaged, e.g. not checking the Parent Intranet. I got the impression that checking often, was by Bente perceived as supportive parents. On the other hand, by not showing up or not checking the information,<sup>35</sup> this could become equivalent with not supporting the school project.

As also the following analyses will reveal (especially Chapter Eight), the reason for not showing up or volunteering in arranging activities could be many, and not equivalent to not supporting the academic project of the school. However, since teachers genuinely did not know much about the intimate everyday life of the homes and its tasks and challenges (or sometimes also not the parents), they could misunderstand the absence of some parents (see also Dannesboe 2012, Nuur 2015). Teachers thought differently, and many teachers would mention to me how they knew a parent or family had difficulties with the Danish language – and therefore Parent Intra. For again others parents, who did not have much extra energy, the teachers would excuse them from not being active. However, in everyday hectic life at the school, such knowledge of complexities could be overlooked, or forgotten, if the teachers felt stressed out.

Jeppé (pp. 105) was active in the well-being group of 0C. He told me how the monthly breakfast event was a good activity because the parents were already there bringing their children to school. “Then you can get a hold of them” (*Så kan man lige fange dem*). Even though these parents did not plan for joining, the well-being parents would, so to speak, ‘catch them.’ To be able to stay, meant that parents were able to postpone checking-in at

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<sup>35</sup> Teachers were able to see, when different parents had logged on to the Parent Intranet.

work, which seemed to be forgotten by the parents in the well-being group, who themselves had jobs with flexible working-hours. Jeppe saw one of the central goals of the well-being group was to get all the parents to support the event. It was in many ways the same logic, which Bente subscribed to, when she referred to how 'her' wellbeing-parents had "sweat on the forehead," because it was so hard for them to get the other parents to show up.

The wellbeing group in the two Grade 0 classes were constituted by three or four parents in each class and was a mix of fathers and mothers. They would send out a collective message on Parent Intranet to the other parents if they needed help, e.g. with bringing stuff for specific events. Sometimes a couple would share the 'seat,' as in the example with Inga from the fieldnote above. As the 'seats' seemed to belong more to couples in 0B, it was more fixed roles in 0C, where Moritz and Jeppe were both regular members and Anne's mother, Ingrid, was a member too. In both Grade 0 classes, the wellbeing-groups were constituted by parents with a Danish background, except Moritz (pp. 59), who had just finished his PhD at University of Copenhagen and was waiting to start his Post.doc. Moritz was fluent in Danish, and his writing-skills made it easy for him to navigate in the planning on Parent Intranet.

These well-being parents generally had a long education, a flexible job, and generally seemed to feel 'at ease' in the school environment (Schultz 2005). In Schultz's thoughts on being at ease (pp. 61), he draws on Husserl's philosophy on habits and habitus (see also Moran 2011). To feel at ease is closely connected to the exercise of a skill, the carrying out of routines, and the embodiment of activities such as writing, reading, and so on. Additionally, it is also connected with knowledge, expertise, and moral practical understanding of the social pattern (Moran 2011; Schultz and Luckmann 1974). The well-being parents had the skills needed to feel at ease in the terrain of the school, as the social pattern was recognisable to them, which also made them use less effort reflecting on how to navigate, because they were familiar with these social patterns (Schultz 2005). As not having to reflect on how things ran also gave these parents more mental energy.

Even though these well-being parents could be busy, they still had the surplus or '*overskud*' to do this extra. 'Overskud' was an important emic term, which referred to parents with appreciated capacities, such as *time* and *mental energy* to do some extra work, and were also often associated with a positive, engaging, sociable approach to school (Bach 2014). 'Overskud' can be translated as having 'extra energy,' but could also function to describe families' material and economic surplus, or capacity to stimulate their child regarding social maturity or academic progress. Having 'overskud' also meant having more capacities and

energy than needed, and therefore an ability to give and be generous towards others (ibid, 225-226).

The direct translation of 'overskud' is 'surplus,' which is mainly used in economic contexts in the English language, yet, there was nevertheless a connection, as I expected this 'overskud' would be 'counted up,' constituting its own system of 'accounting resources.' Thus, to appear as having 'overskud' was linked to being 'resource-rich parents.'

According to Bach (2014), parents with such 'extra energy' are perceived as parents who 'give more' to make the project of the school function or 'run', and she draws on Marcel Mauss' thoughts on reciprocity (Mauss 2016). In Mauss' theory on reciprocity, the ability to give is a powerful ability, since it strengthens social relations in which the receiver is obliged to receive and then return (reciprocate). When the mother of Villiam from 0B unexpectedly baked an "excursion cake" for 0B's excursion, Lisa praised it, and Lisa again mentioned it months after during the parent-teacher conference. The gift has a 'spirit' that makes the receiver obligated to give back, and giving and receiving creates the necessary opening that creates and preserves peaceful relationships (Selmer 2007, 73). In this way, 'giving extra' functioned to construct and reconstruct a positive cohesion between these parents and the teachers. In the exchange, the cake functioned as an acknowledgment of the school-project and the work of Lisa, something was giving back, which made visible that the school (and Lisa) was also giving.

Jeppe told me, how he and his wife (who had been in the well-being group for their youngest child) had the philosophy that "the widest shoulders should carry the heaviest burden." They thought they ought to, since they were a family with 'overskud.' More parents, also the 'overskud' parents, expressed that all this parent-involvement sometimes got out of hand. Christian, who was working in the parliament and his wife who worked as head of department in the municipality, mentioned this, since they also had two small children and the nursery-care also encouraged them to be present in events; nevertheless, Christian ensured me that at least one of them would *always* attend the school-related events. Jeppe expressed the same ambiguity, and once told me that "well actually, honestly speaking, being a member of the wellbeing-group was a shit gig" (*lortetjans*). Such moments of honestly speaking made me wonder, to which extent these 'overskud' fathers actually sincerely wished to participate and arrange these events. At least, they appeared ambiguous about it, and sometimes I sensed it was more about *performing parenthood* in the right way, as these parents knew they would get 'points' in the eye of the teacher by being active parents.

Kryger (2012) describes similar strategic behaviours among pupils in his school-studies, where he coins the term “the school-adaptive voice” to capture how some pupils tactically performed the correct answer for both teachers and him as the researcher, as a way to successfully navigate the terrain of the school. The way these pupils formed their narratives helped them obtain the desired role of being the ‘good school pupil,’ and receive the teachers’ praise (ibid.). Adding to Kryger’s findings, some parents seemed to engage and put on this so-called school-adaptive voice or performance, in order to be the good school-parent. However, statements of honestly speaking from time to time pointed to how these ‘overskud’ fathers sometimes volunteered more ‘of need’ than ‘of desire.’

As volunteering was articulated as ‘charitable work’ (“the widest shoulders must carry”), these events could paradoxically function to problematise certain types of more absent parents. From time to time, ‘bilingual families’ would be mentioned as such a type of ‘parent that does not show up.’ As also Jeppe mentioned, “we have not yet succeeded with getting them [the bilingual] to come yet.” I asked him why he thought it was like this, and he replied,

It may be all sorts of things. It may be that people have to work. That they are simply not as flexible as... So you probably find a little more of such academic-types that can flex their working hours. This is obvious because, if you have to meet at work at eight (...), then it is not sure...uhmm...that you can just. (...) In general there is also a little overrepresentation of the Danish-speaking-parents...

Jeppe added, how he thought it was also difficult for some parents, who were not good at Danish to take part in the many events-discussions on the Parent Intranet – and how confusing the Parent Intra-platform in general was for all parents (see also Akselvoll 2016b). He refrained from venturing more into the ‘not Danish speaking parents,’ possibly due to the general tabooing of ‘the foreign.’ I asked if he had asked any of ‘them,’ why they had not attended, where to Jeppe shortly answered “no.” I sensed it would be difficult for Jeppe to ask, since such a question would easily appear as a reproach. Yet, it also illustrates how little some parents actually know of each other, and their different life-worlds.

At other times, along with the cultural celebration of the parents, who could do ‘a little more,’ the absence of other parents was mentioned in an annoyed tone. As I for example observed Bente to sigh about the “disengaged” parents she had that year; referring to the “resource-weak parents,” which was a category she would interchangeably place the

“bilingual families” in. This leaves the question, for whom such voluntary parent-children events were arranged for? (see also Dannesboe. et al. 2012). As these events were done for the sake of the pupils, to do fun activities together, the use of the word ‘well-being’ also pointed to how these events were perceived as sites for strengthening the well-being among the pupils. In this way, parents, by their engagement outside school-hours, were given an unclear responsibility concerning creating better well-being *in* school. Such ‘passing-on-the-responsibility’ made the parents responsible for a good environment in the classroom, even though they were not directly involved in the everyday life at school (see also Knudsen 2012, Knudsen and Andersen 2013). Moreover, such events also functioned as celebrating a certain type of appropriate performing parents, while devaluating another type of more absent parent, who, paradoxically in some rhetoric were articulated as someone to *benefit* from this ‘charity-work’ done by the ‘broadest shoulders’ (see Jørgensen 2019).

## Becoming Absent

I will now return to Altun, from the vignette in the beginning of the chapter, and the question: how could Altun and his wife ‘fail’ the home-school cooperation? Altun was essentially a visible father in the school. It was he, who brought Mustafa to school every morning (Betül was a cleaner and worked early in the mornings). Moreover, I occasionally met him at the school, while he was waiting to meet with Mustafa’s speech therapist. He had also joined his wife for the parent-teacher conference. Thus, it was not the case that Altun did not show up at school. However, he did not show the same ‘overskud’ as Jeppe, for example.

Additionally, Altun did not seem to ‘feel at ease’ in the context of the school in the same way as most other parents in 0B. Altun had not attended a Danish school himself and did not speak much Danish, either. This contrasted with the other generally highly educated parents in 0B, those Jeppe had defined as the ‘academic-types.’ At the same time, Altun seemed a bit shy and introverted, and to my experience, he sometimes seemed overwhelmed when Tobias, Mustafa’s extroverted inclusion-pedagogue, addressed him. One such example was one breakfast-event, where Altun stayed for a little while, but had to leave early due to work. He was working in a flower-shop, with fixed opening-hours. It was a rather bizarre moment; Altun, who seemed to sit and enjoy himself with his son, and Tobias, who was so up to ‘including him’ that he nearly overwhelmed Altun and tried to make Altun stay a little longer. Afterwards, it was discussed how nice it had been that Altun had showed up – yet it



was also added that it was a pity he left *that* early. Lisa and her assistant Sigurd framed this viewpoint as if it was Altun's personal unwillingness to stay longer, which made him leave.

Mustafa had become the 'special child' in 0B, due to the diagnosis and pronunciation difficulties, and was given a lot of attention. Due to these special needs of Mustafa, Altun and Betül were generally called in by professionals and spoken *to*. It was mostly Altun who participated, and to my experience, not much time and effort was made to hear his opinion on things. To use educational anthropologists Bjørg Kjær and Niels Kryger's (2016) wordings, he met a "wall of experts" (293), which functioned to silence him. Generally, Altun seemed a bit overwhelmed and powerless against this wall of professionals, who were involved in 'the case of Mustafa.' What Lisa experienced as apathetic (*sløve*) could be argued to be an entanglement of many factors. Hereof the panel of experts during the parent-teacher conference, which tended to position Altun in a position of 'non-expert' in Mustafa's schooling, which had the effect of him becoming quieter (*ibid*, 295). Yet, personal traits also appeared to play a role here in that Altun appeared as a rather introverted person, along with his low command of the Danish language.

When looking through my field notes, I was surprised at how often we (Lisa, Sigurd, Tobias and I) ended up talking about *them*. And at some point, the problems turned into a matter of lack of integration, as the only case I recorded, being directly related to integration: Altun and Betül had two times not sent Mustafa to the birthday of a classmate; the first time they had chosen to attend a wedding instead, and the second time because they were expecting visitors, despite the professionals' advice on doing differently. However, the professionals found it important that Mustafa participated in the birthdays for the sake of his language, for his social-well-being in the class and for integration. It was underlined that it was a *Turkish* wedding, which somehow entangled with the need for more integration. Yet, by not following all this advice, Altun and Betül tended to be positioned as "counter-players," rather than "co-players." In all the many discussions about Mustafa, Tobias underlined to me that Mustafa was not a case of failed caring. Tobias himself found it difficult, this task of 'integrating Mustafa,' "I can't force him to eat pork, can I?" Tobias one day said in a frustrated tone, as an intentional exaggeration to show how he found the issue of including and/or integrating Mustafa an unclear, as well as problematic task, while also revealing to me how he was insecure about the actual functions as an inclusion pedagogue.

Few weeks after the parent-teacher conference, I visited Altun and Betül in their apartment to conduct an interview. Altun and especially Betül seemed a bit tense, because of Lisa's ultimatum about them having to get on the ball, for Mustafa to be able to stay at the

school. In the interview, I realised how much Mustafa's schooling occupied the minds of Altun and Betül. Betül read twenty minutes with Mustafa every day, as child-professionals had advised. That day they read a book about Indians, which Mustafa was going to present for the class a few weeks later. Now he nearly knew it by heart. They had agreed to pick up Mustafa later from the afterschool, as likewise advised by the professional, although Mustafa could be very tired (I shall return to such advices about 'picking up later' in Chapter Nine), and Altun often came to the school to meet the speech therapist. They had also both participated in the parent-teacher conference, and Betül had attended the first and only parent meeting. To their experience, they did a lot regarding school.

However, Altun and Betül had not checked/responded on the information sent out on Parent Intranet, and they had not signed up online for the parent-teacher conference, either. They had also not given in to the professionals' advices regarding the birthday parties. Thus, for Lisa they were not enough "on the ball" or "on track." The high expectations towards parents' involvement (following the school's academic striving and need for parents as 'assistant teachers') and obedience towards the guidance of the school professional were not met, and thus these parents were advised to be more '*on*.' This functioned to overshadow other assets of the family. Concluding, I argue that some dynamics *made* Altun 'absent,' even though he was actually a quite visible father.

## Concluding Remarks

This chapter illuminated some central aspects of the home-school cooperation and the general high expectations and celebration of visibility and engagement. In this way, the chapter illuminated social processes causing Altun's 'failure of the home-school cooperation.' In such cases, the technological turn of home-school cooperation had the effect that the distance between teachers and parents increased (see Eriksen 2001, 2005). As in the case of Altun and Betül, as well as other similar cases, where parents did not check-up or respond on Parent Intranet, teachers could perceive this as a lack of interest, support or appreciation, although many efforts, engagements and school-related activities could be happening in the homes of the families. In this way, the Parent Intranet brought along new forms of experienced absence for teachers. The lack of response on a message or lack of checking up left a void or vacuum, which could be interpreted by the teachers in various ways, often without sufficient insight in the parents' life-world and their perspectives on these matters.

This chapter reflects a tendency at Rosendal School that some types of ardent parents' quickly took the stage and were 'on.' In this way, taking the position of the teachers, many migrant fathers were – as a general picture – experienced as less visible at Rosendal School, or, via certain social processes, 'became absent,' as in the case of Altun. For example, it was Naima's mother, who checked the Parent Intranet, and parents with Danish backgrounds (except Moritz) constituted the well-being groups in the Grade 0 classes. In 7X there was one mother with a migrant background represented in the well-being group, Omo (pp. 65), and Kadin, the father of Sofia (pp. 60), had at some point been a member of the school board, although not anymore. Thus, migrant fathers, or parents in general, were certainly also represented in parent-groups, however, in the classes I participated in, less frequently. In the next chapter, I will shed light on this observation, by looking closer at some migrant fathers' lifeworlds and the everyday rhythms, which prevailed here.



## Chapter 8: “Us Foreigners – Our Fathers Just Work a Lot”

When some fathers with a migrant background failed to meet the high standards of parents' involvement, it must be seen in light of the father's life-circumstances and the rhythm of their everyday life. Thus, it appeared that many of the migrant fathers from Rosendal School had certain constraining jobs. Thus, one answer to the question 'where are the fathers?' could be: at work. According to anthropologist Mette-Louise Johansen (2013), 'ethnic clustering' and segregation in Denmark emerged with the "ethnification of the Danish underclass" (49) in the 1970s and 1980s, and developed into a neo-nationalistic process that foregrounded 'the ethnic other' during the 2000s. Thus, class-related constraints have been blurred with notions of 'ethnic othering,' Johansen argues (*ibid.*). Malak likewise explained to me one day at school: "You have to understand, us foreigners – our fathers just work a lot." This reinforces the importance of examining the fathers' everyday lives, which may clarify limitations and possibilities within these fathers' life-situations to perform their fatherly practices. Therefore, the objective of this chapter is to inform the absence some child-professionals occasionally hinted at concerning fathers with migrant background, by analysing the fathers' everyday rhythm. The chapter also aims at shedding light on how some divorced migrant fathers could become absent by certain dynamics at school.

### Constraining Jobs and Everyday Rhythms

Many elements in our daily lives are constitutive of our daily rhythms (Kullman and Palludan 2011, Ingold 2004). In this section, I especially emphasise the rhythm of the interlocutors' labour as well as relating it to the premise of the technological-turn of home-school cooperation. As aforementioned, the fieldwork material does not provide full descriptions of the interlocutors' everyday life, since I did not get the chance to either live or work with them. Nevertheless, the many meetings, talks, and interactions with fathers with a migrant background gave me a sense of the rhythms of their everyday lives.

Adnan, the father of Naima did not possess a broad knowledge of the home-school cooperation (see pp. 61), and in our interview, his wife Faria sometimes had to answer the

questions, as she was the one to take care of school-related tasks. Adnan had two jobs: one in his pizzeria, where he worked during the daytime and evenings, and in the early mornings he worked as a cleaner; together around 60 hours a week. Saturday was his only day off, when he prioritised spending time with his wife and children. Adnan dreamed about an 8-4 job in the public sector. Then he would get a steady and fair income, and some fixed and reasonable working hours. Once, having dinner with Adnan and his family in the Family Dinner Club, we again discussed the topic of the pizzeria and the hard competition in the area. I realised that this was the biggest concern in Adnan's life – to get the business going or get a full-time job so that he could sell the pizzeria. If he would be able to sell the pizzeria, he would get rid of many worries about the uncertain income, and generally long working hours.

I will describe Adnan's various jobs as a “constraining job” – a job whose tasks, concerns, or profits dominate someone's time and thoughts (see also Jørgensen 2017). At the same time, interlocutors with such jobs were not always in control of when they had to work or how much time this work was going to take. These constraining jobs were also physical jobs. Driving a taxi, cleaning, delivering parcels, and working in a pizzeria or flower shop are jobs that demand the worker's physical presence at a certain place and meant that the body, and one's attention, was directed at a physical task.

According to Ingold (2010), who draws on philosopher Henri Lefebvre,<sup>36</sup> our bodies adjust to the rhythms of everyday life, influenced by the place and objects, which we interact with, “the way in which the movements and rhythms of human and non-human activity are registered in lived space (...) as they go about their business” (ibid, 11). In our everyday working environment we adopt and adjust to the things and people we interact with, and so “its paths, textures, and contours (...) are incorporated into their own embodied capacities of movement, awareness, and response” (Ingold 2004, 33). In this way, the objects around us, being part of the landscape we navigate, transform our rhythms, and every object with which we interact consumes time and/or evokes feeling (see also Lefebvre, Régulier, and Zayani 1999, 6; Löfgren 2014). Thus, environmental, social, and technical rhythms restrict and enable action, and we have to examine these rhythms to acquire adequate insight into the varied routines and necessities that condition human agency.

One way the constraining jobs shaped the interlocutors' rhythms was by making them ‘be on the move.’ For example, Amira's father Idle (pp. 92) could not easily confirm a

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<sup>36</sup> I use Lefebvre in line with how Ingold is inspired by his rhythm-analyses, but not the entire theoretical apertures.

time for an interview with me, because his working hours continually changed. He was a taxi-driver, mostly given the night shifts, and he had to adjust to the varying need for him to work. Likewise, Mohamed's father and Malak's father (both from 7X) were in constant motion. I tried many times to secure an appointment with these two fathers. Every time I phoned, they were at work. Both delivered parcels and were on the road when they picked up the phone. Mohammed's father worked in Jutland most of the months before Christmas, where he delivered parcels for an electronics company. He, therefore, asked me if I could phone him again in two weeks, as he did not yet have an overview of the coming weeks. I got the impression that he had to be reachable for his job, and open for working overtime if more work appeared. At the same time, he ensured me, how he found my research topic relevant. He also found it important that I "ask the fathers," as he said. As there may be many reasons for fathers to decline to be interviewed by me (see pp. 73), one of them was these constraining jobs, which demanded and overruled autonomy over one's time (see also Jørgensen 2017).

Chris, a teacher at Rosendal School, also mentioned this tendency to me. He often caught fathers with a migrant background 'on the move,' when he phoned them. Nonetheless, they usually tried to help him with whatever he wanted to consult or discuss with them – as much as possible – on their way to somewhere, or to something. Thus, the physical absence was largely a matter of how the various objects and circumstances of the given (constraining) jobs imposed a certain rhythm on the interlocutors' everyday life (ibid.). Chris' comment also points to another important point: that many teachers did not make the direct link between physical absence and lack of goodwill or interest in their children's education. This seemed to be the result of many teachers having worked with fathers with diverse migrant backgrounds for many years, and having experienced a general goodwill, for example, when they phoned them when they were 'on the way,' dealing with these constraining jobs (ibid.).

These constraining jobs contrasted with other fathers having more "flexible jobs" (ibid.). Such flexible-jobs were common among parents, which Jeppe had termed "the academic-types." Jobs, which also tended to be more steady, union regulated and profitable – often office jobs with a fixed number of work hours per week (37 hours of work), and/or a high degree of flexibility concerning when and where the, often computer-based, work may be done. It is important to underline how fathers with migrant backgrounds would also work in such flexible-jobs; however, I experienced an overrepresentation of fathers from Rosendal School with a migrant background from the aforementioned traditional immigration and refugee countries, working in such constraining jobs. Contrary to the constraining jobs, fathers with flexible-jobs could more easily go to work an hour late and work an hour longer

in the evening if needed. Thus, these jobs did not require the worker's physical presence at a specific spot at a certain time, which made it easier for these fathers to show up to, for example, breakfast arrangements or leave early to arrange a play arrangement after school. Likewise, there was a clear connection between parents with flexible jobs and the ones represented in the well-being groups.

While I was interviewing Steffen, the class teacher from 7X, he suddenly realised (as I asked questions about the various pupils' fathers) that he generally did not know the fathers who he termed as those "having another ethnic background." This was not something he had seriously reflected on earlier; for him, it was important that *one* of the parents showed up at the parent-teacher conference. However, if it was the mother or the father, was not essential to him. Idle (pp. 106), who mostly worked during the night, could then be at the school during the day, and he often showed up to the breakfast event, the home-school conference, and other school-parent events for the other siblings. As also mentioned earlier, Idle was generally known among the teachers at Rosendal School as "a really good father," which seemed related to his general, cheerful mood and the fact that he was a *visible* father. Even though Steffen did not directly tell me that his lack of familiarity with the fathers with 'another ethnic background,' was problematic for him, Idle's, as well as the father Kadin's appreciative and engaged appearance, nevertheless influenced their reputation in positive ways. Considering the appreciation of fathers being visible, it had an influence that the constraining and often time-consuming jobs of some migrant fathers restricted how much these fathers could engage in the breakfast event, parent-meetings and other activities, thus potentially a challenge to their reputation of being an 'good (engaged) school-father' in the eyes of the teachers.

## Absence on the Parent Intranet

The analysis has so far revealed how different jobs require different rhythms for fathers. In the next section, I analyse how fathers' everyday rhythms could also influence their access to information from the school.

According to Douglas Rushkoff (2011), the computer and smart phone give the option to always be available online, which places a constant pressure on human beings with the consequence that people might end up divorcing themselves from human rhythms and coherence (Rushkoff 2011, 37-38, Eriksen 2005). It may be argued that the extent to which the parents are dragged away from their daily rhythms depended on how much they already



engaged with technology. In other words, how much working on the computer was already a part of their everyday life: how much the rhythm of the computers already influenced and shaped the fathers' everyday operations. As such, coping with the high demand for checking the Parent Intranet was easier for parents who were already working in an office, where the constant flow of e-mails was a part of their everyday rhythm (see also Jørgensen 2017).

Christian (pp. 104) had such a flexible job, where he was more or less constantly connected to his work-mail. He told me, as we discussed the vast information-flow from school to home: "It's really not that difficult because I have made this setting that when there is a message on the Parent Intranet, I get an email in my work email, and then it's quite easy." Since much of Christian's job concerned reading, sorting information online and writing e-mails, he was already attuned to such tasks; his rhythm and thus directedness fit the premises of online home-school cooperation. 'To be online' also made parents like Christian able to rapidly pick the most suitable day and hour for the parent-teacher conference, as soon as the subscription-link was available, even though it was easier for him to 'flex' his working hours.

Fuaad was born in Somalia and was fifteen years old when he came to Denmark. Fuaad had five children and worked as a full-time IT engineer. He always showed up at parent events at the school, and other social arrangements in his neighbourhood. Fuaad was known as "a good father, always showing up." He was also the president of a Somali association, and active in the fathers' group of "Vanggaarden," the area where he lived. In this way, he was one of the many fiery souls (*ildsjæle*) I met during the fieldwork, engaged in association- and community-work, guiding other migrant fathers. In his marriage, Fuaad was the one who went to the parent events at the school, and he attended them all, he told me. It was time-consuming, but "...this is how it is here in Denmark," he explained, "parents have to get used to that." He was also the one in his marriage who checked the Parent Intranet. Since he was an IT engineer, it was not a challenging task for him, however time-consuming. If there were private messages regarding more of his children, Fuaad could spend nearly up to an hour a day on Parent Intranet because of his five schoolchildren. I wondered how he found time to do all these things; that he always showed up to all the events, and managed all the tasks of various associations too? He then told me that his wife was not working now. As Fuaad's wife was at the moment in-between jobs, she had the time to take care of all the other family-related tasks. This gave them the possibility for Fuaad to be such an active performing father; however, it was very time-consuming with five schoolchildren. The cases above fit other observations from my fieldwork, and how many interlocutors explained to me that the

high demands on parents in the schools in Denmark fit a family with maximum two children, not four or five (see also Jørgensen 2017).

### *Providing Mobility*

Another example of a constraining job was the one Abir had. During his children's upbringing, Abir (pp. 117) had been running his own corner-shop mostly by himself, and had had to be present there six days a week. Still, it had not been a profitable job. Today Abir was worn down, and he tried to sell, or lease, the corner-shop. So far without success. It had been hard work. However, he also felt fulfilled, he said; all his children were managing well in school or high school, and he felt he "had made it". With all this hard work, he had been able to take care of his family and provide for his children, and in a broader perspective, to make them well-off in life.

Anthropologist Jessaca Leinaweaver (2015) has worked with the concept of "father-as-provider" (10) in the context of Peruvian fathers leaving their family to work abroad. She describes how the interlocutor César sees his most important role as father to ensure his daughter's good education and general material provision. The father-as-provider role may include a considered absence from one's child, in order to provide the child for what it needs, also the provision of future opportunities and mobility. In César's case, to provide for his daughter's opportunity to move to him in Spain, if she at some point wanted, and generally to be able to 'move up' in society regarding reputation and a steady, sufficient income (ibid. 10). Leinaweaver connects her interlocutors' emphasis on providing to their social position, where mobility was not naturally given (ibid, 97). Likewise, in Abir's, as well as in Adnan's case (pp. 146), providing became a central aspect of fatherly practices, and mentioned in relation to their children's future mobility; to get a good education and following this to be able to choose among increasingly different jobs, with better conditions and a stable salary than they themselves had experienced. For some of the migrant fathers in this study, the case was that if they had arrived in Denmark after their educational-years, their educational-diplomas were not accepted in Denmark. Also, some struggled with the Danish language, while some faced difficulties in entering the Danish labour market; they experienced discrimination and other migration-related issues (see Liversage 2016, Dansk arbejdsgiverforening 2015). For some migrant fathers, this had resulted in a so-called "class-journey," where migration circumstances made parents change their class-status in society (Christensen et al. 2017). I

experienced many fathers to be concerned that their children take a class-journey the other way – upwards – that also meant that further education was considered very important.

### **A Precarious, Invisible, Job Market**

In extension of the discussion on constraining jobs, I wish to draw the reader's attention to a factor, which could further intensify some migrant fathers' working conditions. One day, as I visited the Somali parent association, Abdikani, his daughter, Nuura, and I waited outside for the father with the key to arrive. Nuura was running around, playing, while we chatted about his everyday life and the schooling of his daughter. Abdikani had fled to Denmark together with his wife 26 years ago. In a proud voice, he told me that he had been working nearly every day since he was granted asylum. His latest job was as a cleaner in the local bank for ten years. Just recently, he had been fired. Many bank departments had closed due to online banking, and the few cleaning jobs left had been given to an East-European company, which was cheaper, Abdikani explained. Abdikani continued to tell me how many East-European workers were also driving the public buses in the city nowadays – and how they were good hardworking people.

In 2016, the Polish migrant-workers constituted the highest number of foreign employees in Denmark, with 24,000 fulltime employees from Poland and 49,000 from Eastern-European countries in total. Since 2010, employment among immigrants with citizenship from an Eastern European EU country has increased by 37,000 (+166 per cent), so that they accounted for a total of 59,000 employees in Denmark in 2017 (Grunnet-Lauridsen et al. 2018). The low-skilled constraining jobs, which some of the migrant fathers had, were jobs, which did not require a high command of the Danish language or long education, e.g. cleaning jobs, working in restaurants, kiosks, delivering, bus driving or taxi driver. Like Abdikani, some interlocutors explained to me how they faced being 'squeezed out' from this already precarious labour-force, due to the increase of work-migrants from new EU countries, and how Eastern European companies due to lower payment and lower tax-regulations would outbid the Danish companies. Some companies would request sporadic working-hours, which were difficult to meet (especially for a single parent). However, Eastern-European working immigrants could meet these improper working hours since they did not face other family-obligations; they had come to work hard and earn money.

As such, some of the interlocutors of this study were part of a precarious blue-collar workforce, in a job-field with an intensifying pressure due to an internationalised labour-flow which increased the precariousness (see also Leinaweaver 2015, 88). Much data of this study points to the existence of a hidden unregulated or ‘underground labour market,’ without accordance with the otherwise well-established unions’ agreements. An underground labour market, which was generally not of political, or general, awareness in Denmark, calling for further investigation. Migrant fathers with such jobs faced precariousness, stress and were ‘struggling along’ (Desjarlais 1996) to fulfil the idealised narrative of the providing father (Reinicke 2010).

## Divorce as Reinforcing Absence

I now move on to investigate some dynamics within school, which further worked to make some migrant fathers ‘become absent.’ It appeared that some fathers’ absence was caused by being divorced, and after the divorce, the connection to the school had vanished. One such example is the case of Wasim, the father of Ali, who went to a Grade 4 class at Rosendal School. Wasim was a war refugee from Iraq; although he had now lived in Denmark for many years, he had never felt included in the Danish society and appeared, to my observations, quite isolated, reinforced by his low command of Danish and severe physical problems, which did not allow him to work. The reason I came to interview him was quite accidental, which became an important analytical point in itself.

As I was sitting in the teachers’ lounge, Simon, the school principal, came and asked me how my study progressed. I said it was a bit difficult to get enough interviewees, and Simon called in Frida, a teacher who often worked with children who needed some extra attention, who sat close to us. “Don’t you know any bilingual families?” Frida thought for a while and said, “There is this boy Ali. I worked a lot with him last year, he is so sweet, but I am not sure the mother speaks much Danish... [she called out to a teacher sitting in the teachers’ lounge] Mona, you are Ali’s class teacher now, right?” Mona answered that she was, and underlined that Ali’s mother was very resource-weak, how she did not have much ‘overskud,’ and was sick too. Last time she cancelled their meeting, Mona said and added, “...a translator is needed, she does not understand anything.” Frida explained that I had a translator. I mentioned that I was mostly interested in interviewing fathers, and Mona answered, quite loud from the other side of the teachers’ lounge: “I don’t know if there is a

father.” Following this, I went to the contact-list folders in the administrative office, where I found the number of Wasim. With the help from an interpreter, who called Wasim while having me on the other line, Wasim agreed to be interviewed. Wasim and the interpreter talked for a while, and the interpreter explained to me, that Wasim was generally satisfied with the school, but he had some recommendations, and therefore he would like to be interviewed. Thus, the interview became a way for Wasim to get his voice heard inside the school, illuminating how certain parents felt they lacked a communication-channel to the school. During the interview, Wasim told me about certain issues he found problematic, which he wanted me to pass on to the administration; that the school would hire only professional and generally more qualified teachers in the mother-tongue language classes. Wasim told me how the mother-tongue teachers were simply someone who spoke the language, but did not have any teaching-qualifications. That his children were taught Arabic was important to Wasim, who did not speak much Danish himself. Wasim’s unhappiness with the mother-tongue lessons reflects a general downgrading of mother-tongue teaching in Danish public schools during the last decade, which may be seen as reflecting an intensifying singular and national focus on literacy (Holm and Ahrenkiel 2018, Holmen 2008). In addition, Wasim hoped for the school to give Ali, and pupils like Ali, who had parents who were not able to help their children as much with homework as other parents, extra tutoring and more attention, than was the case now.

During the interview, it appeared that there were more things and procedures of the school, which Wasim did not know about. However, it was difficult for Wasim to admit to the interpreter and I that he had lost track on these things. Education was noticeably important to him, and appearing uninformed seemed to make him feel ashamed. After the divorce, Ali was mainly living with his mother, and since then, no one had invited Wasim into the school (I was not sure who had the legal custody of Ali, however it appeared to be Ali’s mother). Besides, Wasim mentioned, he felt the school was already a gendered place, in favour of the mothers.

During the interview, it turned out that Wasim had mainly accepted my invitation to be interviewed, due to the fact that someone had been inviting him to the school (he explicitly preferred to do the interview at the school), so he finally had the chance to show his children that *he* was also engaged in their schooling. Although Ali mostly lived with his mother, he did stay with Wasim infrequently, and according to Wasim’s responses, he appeared as a significant figure in Ali’s life. Mona had explained about the case of Ali’s mother as problematic, due to her sickness. It may be argued that Wasim was an unused

potential in a case, where Ali both faced challenges in school and had a vulnerable mother, fitting the argument of a wide-ranging “father blindness” amongst child-professionals (Haukanes and Thelen 2010, 16). In addition, the way Mona casually and loudly said, “I don’t know if there is a father?” exemplifies the aforementioned argument that the terrain of home-school cooperation was gendered in favour of mothers. Mona did not say it with any embarrassment, but more like the case represented a cliché; as if it was reasonable not to know or expect anything from fathers like Wasim.

Divorce appeared to be a factor in how fathers, regardless of origin, may face becoming more excluded. Juliana, who was a mother with a Danish background living alone with her son Aske from 7Y close to Rosendal School, openly admitted that she tried to keep information about the parent-teacher conferences or parent-meetings to herself, as long as possible. She would only tell her ex-husband and father of Aske the date and time a few days before the event, to decrease the risk of him being able to participate. As mothers seemed to have a stronger connection to the school, they could also use this connectedness to control which information would be passed on after a divorce. Juliana also kept Aske at Rosendal School, even though she thought there were better schools for him. However, she did not want to start a process of moving schools, because she was afraid Aske’s father would suggest a new school closer to where he lived. Such processes and mechanisms are complex and multi-layered; however, it is important to draw attention to how some divorced fathers experienced exclusion, which, in some of the cases with Muslim, migrant fathers, seemed to be reinforced by mistrust of their capacities as caregiver, as I shall return to in Part III.

## Becoming Mystified

The father of Emre, a boy from 0C, was another case of an ‘absent father,’ which can illuminate the phenomenon of fathers becoming mystified in the eyes of the teacher. Emre was living with his older brother, sister, and mother, Ayşe. Emre’s older brother accompanied Emre to school, and Gitte had only met Ayşe a few times. Gitte had heard from the pedagogues from the after-school care (who also knew Emre’s older brother) that the mother at some point had moved to a women’s shelter, because of domestic violence. The teacher did not know the exact details, this was what the rumours said. Emre’s father was mystified and confounded in everyday chats among the pedagogues and teachers, but mostly he was just not mentioned. When I interviewed Gitte, I mentioned that it would be interesting for me to

interview Emre's father, but his name and phone number were not in the contact folder. Gitte put on a rather grave face, and said, "No no, you should not interview him!" She believed, in respect of the mother, it was best not to contact him. Maybe my enthusiasm to interview fathers went too far here, nevertheless, no one knew the story of Emre's father from his point of view. I never found out what exactly the father had done; the whole story became quite mystified.

One day I asked all the pupils in 0C to draw a picture of what they did together with their father. Emre drew a picture of him (the picture on the right), and "baba," his sister and brother in Tivoli. Emre told me the name of the road where his father lived and that he was only together with his father on the weekends (it was unclear to me how often). Often, pupils and teachers talked about "mom" and "dad" in the classroom, as what they had done in the weekend or which family-members constituted their family, but due to the mystification of Emre's father, no one wanted to mention him; he kind of became invisible. Whomever Emre's father was, the picture shows that he was still a significant part of Emre's life. As I was not granted access to Emre's father, such observations are tricky to analyse further; however, one thing that struck me was



how the whole case – based on rumours – was tacitly accepted and silenced, although Emre's father appeared to be a significant figure in Emre's life. Professor of Social Science, Brid Featherstone, who has studied fatherhood, divorce and social-case-procedures in UK, finds similar tendencies of silencing the fathers (Featherstone 2003). Featherstone finds how social workers frequently positioned fathers as a thread in social-cases, which could lead to exaggerations of fathers' impulsiveness and uncontrollability, leading to the fathers' exclusion (ibid, 249-50). Moreover, many social workers tended to assume that fathers were of no use; some fathers were just not seen, as it did not occur to the social workers to involve and include fathers without authorised parental responsibility. Sometimes this was the social worker's practice, sometimes at the mother's request. Especially black fathers were more easily excluded, due to social-workers assumptions about certain risky masculinity-traits

along with how a dominant narrative concerning ‘the absent and ignorant black father,’ worked to further exclude these fathers (Gupta and Featherstone 2015, 7). Returning to the example of Emre, we cannot speculate further here, however Featherstone’s findings point to tendencies recognisable in the mystification of Emre’s father, as well as the above case of Wasim. Both fit the tendency of fathers as ‘just not seen.’ Featherstone also finds that, in general, initiatives to develop better access to arrangements or other initiatives directed at divorced fathers could arouse mothers’ hostility and be perceived as discriminatory, which needs to be understood, reflected on and worked with by (social) workers, teachers or pedagogues, who are often women themselves (Featherstone 2003, 249; see also Maxwell et al. 2012). Such tendencies can be argued to have caused Gitte’s repellent reaction towards interviewing Emre’s father, and the fact that I felt ashamed after this reaction.

It was not only migrant fathers, who could face exclusion due to divorce. Another father, who became quite mystified, was Søren, Pelle’s father (pp. 100). Søren only had Pelle every second weekend, and Gitte found this “absence in his son’s life” rather “old-fashioned,” reflecting the tendencies, and new expectations, of an emerging new role of the father. Sometimes Pelle refrained to talk about what Søren and him had done in the weekends, which made Gitte suspicious about if there had been an issue, to which she asked the mother, Viktoria, during the parent-teacher conference. “No, no. There had not been anything,” Viktoria said. Later, Viktoria asked, if the school thought it would be preferable (Pelle had had difficulties to adjust to the class) if Søren would be more involved in Pelle’s schooling? “No, no” Gitte replied, “There is no need for that,” and by such Gitte indicated that she did not think that involving the father was of any use. Søren had left Viktoria one and a half year ago, and Viktoria had involved Gitte in how she had had a total breakdown. Viktoria also often came a bit early to chat with Pelle and Gitte before the lessons started in the morning, and seemed to have Gitte’s sympathy. When I told Gitte I was going to interview Søren, she seemed to wonder, why I wanted to interview *him*? The day after she was quite curious about, how he had behaved.

These different cases show, how ‘suspicion’ or ‘mystification’ did not only occur towards migrant fathers, and how certain aspects related to divorce could work to further exclude fathers. Wasim felt ashamed by losing track of his children’s schooling, as well as failing as the providing father (Reinicke 2007, 2010; Carlsen 2007). I also sensed that Søren, in our interview on fathering, was stuck by guilt when facing/revealing, how little time he actually spent with Pelle due to divorce and long working-hours. Yet, it appeared as Søren had much more capacity to change this condition, having no problems with speaking Danish,



knowing his rights, and having a high-income job and no physical issues, giving him much more capabilities to change how things were compared to Wasim.

## Invisible Fatherhoods

Sometimes I got the impression that some migrant fathers' engagement and aspirations for fatherhood practices became invisible in the eyes of the teacher, if they did not perform the appreciated active parenthood, described in the previous chapter. This could happen because teachers did not know much about the extended lifeworld of families outside of school, thus performing attendance and engagement *within* the school-context became (the only) signs working to index fatherhood, as well as family, practices.

One such example was Altun. I have described Altun throughout the previous chapters, and how his more introverted performance 'failed' to meet the image of the 'engaged, supportive parent' (see pages 119, 138). In addition, Betül was the one in their marriage, who, as in most other families regardless of backgrounds, dealt the most with school-related tasks at home. However, it was Altun's Danish, which was the best among the two, that made him the one to attend most of the school events. Thus, he became the overall representative of the family. However, Betül was the one to handle the reading and general decision-making concerning school, which placed Altun in an ambiguous situation. During my interview with Altun, Betül was home too, and she in many ways took over the conversation. She seemed to want to control the outcome of the interview, to appear 'on the ball,' as Lisa had requested. However, when I asked Altun if he could show me something that symbolised something he did together with Mustafa, he lit up, as happy memories came to his mind. He started telling about how Mustafa had gotten a hammer from his uncle (probably he had brought it home from Turkey). They had played with it a lot, and here the other day, they had tried to break a coconut together by using this hammer, Altun said laughing. Altun wanted to get the hammer as his thing to show me, but Betül was a bit sceptic, and said; "It is not what she asks about. She asks if you have a certain thing you play together." Then Altun, who sensed her scepticism, said, "No, we do not have a specific game." I rather liked the story with the hammer, since Altun seemed so pleased to tell it, and it was the first thing, which came to his mind. I added how I thought it was a fine thing. Nevertheless, Altun seemed to get his wife's hint about how the story was too silly, and then told me, how they also played Lego together. Following, he went to the other room to get a

huge Lego house that Mustafa and he had built together. Lego was often presented to me by fathers, as the ‘correct stimulating toy,’ with a learning potential (see also Bach 2017, 219-220).

As our talk turned to play, swiftly Altun took the stage, as we sat there with the Lego-house between us. He praised Mustafa’s fantasy, how he built things, which he never had himself thought of; “he has some pictures, and then he elaborates on them, and he extends his fantasy,” Altun explained to me. He kept on explaining how Mustafa and him would lie on the floor and wrestle, or sit in the couch and play with the iPad. Betül explained how Mustafa looked so much up to his father. “He repeats everything, which comes out of his mouth,” she said. According to Betül, sons, in general, see the father as a main role model, which made me recall the day, when Mustafa and his best friend Asger, in all breaks, had combed their hair with water and a black comb Mustafa had brought from home, imitating Altun. Yet, this affectionate relation between Altun and Mustafa somehow entered the background, and other evaluations and mechanisms as illustrated in the previous chapters, made Altun a problematised father in 0B. We might turn the case upside down, imagining: what if fatherly affect or closeness constituted the scale for evaluation? Then the case of Altun would be very different. He would be a good example: a father with assets. Yet, the specific learning discourse and the failing of being an active co-player and online-engaged father, along with Altun’s yawn during the home-school conference,<sup>37</sup> made Altun problematic, even though he was Mustafa’s biggest role model.

## Concluding Remarks

The analysis has shown, how the high expectations of (online) parent-involvement in home-school cooperation fit some fathers’ everyday rhythm better than others, as well as how there could be many more reasons as to why some fathers appeared absent to the teacher. Importantly, such absence did not denote that these fathers were finding the education of their children unimportant.

Migrant fathers’ absence could be due to various factors, including: the realm of the mother in school, gender givens, language difficulties, many school-aged children, different

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<sup>37</sup> Which I do not know more about, besides Lisa finding it a sign of Altun being a “counter-player.”

perceptions of how to be an ‘appropriate school parent’ (as respecting the authority of the teacher and thus potentially appearing more withdrawn), gendered divisions of tasks or divorce. Furthermore, the chapter points to how constraining jobs constrained fathers’ abilities to act, potentially restricting them from performing in the active, visible ways the intensified parent-involvement prescribed. Despite the many variations among migrant fathers, I recorded how a majority of fathers with migrant backgrounds at Rosendal School had such jobs, which made these specific fathers face the (force of) economic exploitation (Choo and Feree 2010) much stronger than other fathers. Additionally, for some migrant fathers, such as Adnan, economic concerns took much of their energy and considerations. When working long hours, Adnan tended to prioritise the intimate family life when free from work, and not institutionalised associations such as the well-being group.

As aforementioned, the public school is a politically regulated terrain, which is intensified by various forces. One such force was, as argued in the previous chapter, the idea of competition between OECD countries’ educational-systems, which appeared to affect the need of agility and flexibility, which again seemed to make teachers ‘struggle along’ and *dependent* on parents to follow certain routines. Such intensified dependency seemed to require that the parents were active, vital, online engaged, and ‘on track’ (*være på*). This made some parents ‘struggle along’ (more than others), to meet the high expectations of such engagement. In addition, such dynamics within home-school cooperation failed to bring into a light the many other assets of fathers, than the specific “resources” that teachers were preoccupied with. This latter point is also the theme in the coming chapter. Here I investigate how problematisation of “language-confusion” could work to make migrant fathers experience becoming redundant in home-school cooperation.



## Chapter 9: The Language-Logic

“Nothing is going on in that home,” Lisa once told me about Josef’s home. She continued, explaining how Josef should not be in such stagnant home, where nothing was going on, but “get out where something happened.” She thought this was also, what Josef wanted the most. During the parent-teacher conference with Eryk and Maria (pp. 90), they both wore tight jogging suits, were a little overweight and sat rather reclined on the chairs, characteristics which seemed to reinforce Lisa’s idea, that Joseph’s home was not a particularly “stimulating one.”

In this way, teachers were continuously evaluating parents; apparently trying to read parental skills from small cues in the short encounters at e.g. parents meetings and parent-teacher conferences. Due to the high academic focus and general striving for better performances in the various tests, already from the Grade 0 class level, teachers were concerned with whether the home was “stimulating enough,” a notion, which entangled with the category of being a “resource-strong-home,” with extra energy (*overskud*) (see also Bach 2017, 217–18). Lisa’s evaluation above was thus one of many examples of how teachers were, in different ways, concerned about what was happening in the homes of certain children, and how teachers would connect this to the pupils’ academic performances in school. Within such evaluations, this chapter is overall concerned with analysing how a certain ‘*language-logic*’ functioned to make some multilingual homes problematic, and, in addition, how this logic functioned as legitimising various interventions and regulations. To do so, the case of the father Yonis and his daughter Leyla will be central, but I also include other cases to exemplify different aspects of teachers’ evaluations of different homes, what such concerns and actions were about, and what they meant for the fathers involved.

### Super-Diversity

As aforementioned, the majority of the pupils in 0C had one or both parents with various and diverse migrant backgrounds from both the global North and the global South. Thus, there were many of the families here, which could be termed “multilingual” (Daugaard and Laursen 2012; Holm 2017; Holm and Ahrenkiel 2018). Due to these super-diverse characteristics of 0C (Vertovec 2007), features such as pupils speaking multiple languages,

having migrant parents and/or being Muslim, or other such characteristics that in other contexts would stand out as ‘foreign,’ thus became less different and less noticed. In addition, Gitte had for many years been working in the reception class (*modtagerklasse*) for newly-arrived migrant children, who did not yet speak Danish. Therefore, she had been working with newly arrived migrant parents from many different countries for many years. Gitte had many experiences to draw on, and that the migrant parents had different capacities, skills, and experiences to draw from regarding the home–school cooperation was not something Gitte generally problematised to me. Thus, the ethnographic material of this study points to a greater complexity in teachers’ distinctions between families and pupils, than what Gitz-Johansen found in his study in a public school (2003), where teachers overall problematised the so-called ‘ethnic minority pupils,’ and saw their families’ other cultural heritage or differences as socially problematic (Gitz-Johansen 2003). As an example, although Steffen thought many of what he termed “other ethnic families” had rather traditional gender roles, he also thought that overall these families in 7X were caring and provided a harmonious home and stable foundation for the pupils. At the same time, he pointed to how many of the “ethnic Danish parents” were divorced, some rarely saw their father, and again some of the “ethnic Danish parents” had social problems. During an interview, many of these pupils from the divorced families likewise told me about how they felt that they did not know their father very well. Gitte, likewise, opposed how colleagues, from time to time, used “resource-weak” as synonymous with “bilingual,” something she had experienced the teacher Bente would do. Gitte found it unprofessional. What became central for her categorisations of “resource-weak” mostly had to do with whether or not some parents had acted arrogantly, criticised something, and/or were absent like Pelle’s father Søren or Emre’s mother; or if parents did not provide their children with the appropriate and suitable clothing, such as when Oda’s parents had dressed Oda with a thin crinoline, when going for a school excursion in winter. Such distinctions seemed to be highly influenced by a sense of mutual understanding and trust (see Høyrup 2018, Kjær and Kryger 2016); generally if the parents acted as “co-players.” Thus, the teachers drew on different logics to evaluate parents (see also Knudsen 2010).

As the following case exemplifies, Gitte could also problematise a family, if she did not perceive the parents to be stimulating the child in the appropriate ways. The case points to, how certain characteristics of ‘foreignness’ or ‘difference’ could function to reinforce teachers’ concerns when other signs of risk appeared – in this following case, a poor result in the language test.

## The Language Test

The language test was obligatory for all pupils in the Grade 0 classes in public schools (Undervisningsministeriet 2018b). The test was performed collectively in the classroom. If one or more of the students had not placed any crosses on the answering-formula paper after approximately five minutes, these pupils could take a break and did not have to do the rest of the test, Gitte explained. Instead, they would have to do a special language test another day, together with her outside the classroom. Leyla was the only pupil in 0C who 'failed' the common test and then had to do the special test with Gitte later on. During the second individual test, Leyla was mostly interested in telling Gitte about the cake that she baked together with her mother the day before. Gitte was confused; she could not make Leyla concentrate on the test and the questions. Afterward, Gitte told Henny (Gitte's assistant) and me about this odd situation, and in a laughing tone, Gitte imitated Leyla "cake, cake, cake." However, at the same time, Gitte seemed worried.

Certain mechanisms within this individual test made the 'failing pupils' stand out. In the two Grade 0 classes I followed, the pupils would generally score around 40-90 per cent, but for the two pupils, who did the individual test outside the classroom later on (as was the case for Mustafa from 0B and Leyla), the result ended close to zero: 0.5 per cent. I do not know the test score calculation-logic well enough to be able to explain how this result was measured; however, the consequence was that the 0.5 per cent results became a huge issue in the everyday talk about Leyla. It became a symbol of her problematic language-capacities, which seemed to be reinforced by an almost 'mythical belief' in science and numbers, including measurable indicators, and 'the fact' that Leyla had a language capacity of 0.5 per cent nearly made her language not existing. I mentioned the remarkable lower scores of the individual test to Gitte, who believed that this happened, since it was seriously bad when a pupil was not able to do the ordinary test; then a pupil could probably not get much more than 0.5 per cent, she thought. Gitte took the test-result seriously; there was a reason to be seriously worried about Leyla's further development.

In my observations of Leyla, I found that she would often win discussions among her friends, as when Leyla one day won the discussion around the small round table about which game they were going to play in the break, and whom should have which roles. Leyla was altogether a very active and social girl, but also one of the youngest in 0C. One day, as the pupils were making Halloween-decorations, Leyla was intensely concentrated on the task, because if she finished the pumpkin, she would have time to make the ghost too. I saw how

she did the task both fast and very concentrated, because she had a clear goal. Yet, such observations were not included in the school professionals' evaluation of Leyla's language. The test only measured Leyla's language capacities in one specific setting, time and place, where the goal with the activity, was potentially not as clear as in other times. However, in everyday chats about Leyla's language, the test referred to her entire language-capacity.

Sociolinguist Lars Holm (2017) has argued that language tests, like the type used in the case with Leyla, only focus on a narrow part of literacy (Holm 2017; Holm and Ahrenkiel 2018). In Leyla's case, the test measured the capacity to read letters and combine them with certain boxes, yet did not focus on e.g. the social parts of literacy. In this way, there is an implicit (narrow) understanding of language as not interactional, but something that ought to be learned and measured in specific learning situations. Following this, having a language-capability of 0.5% did not reflect Leyla's general literacy capacities. Generally, Leyla spoke a lot in Danish, as also revealed by Eva (a pedagogue from Leyla's after-school-care) during the parent-teacher conference, which I turn to now.

It was Yonis, Leyla's father, who attended the parent-teacher conference. Yonis was a father with a Somali background, and he came along with Leyla and Leyla's younger sister, who was around two years old and slowly got more and more impatient (and loud) during the conference. Yonis had, from time to time, to calm her down. Henny, Gitte's assistant went to play with Leyla outside the classroom. Yonis was not fluent in Danish, which also influenced the 'fluidity' of the dialogue, and seemed to make Gitte somewhat unsure as to which extent he understood what she said.

Eva started by problematising how Leyla had not attended the afterschool-care much. Leyla had been a little bit sad about coming to the afterschool-care in the beginning, and Eva added that, "she just needs to get inside and then play with Maria, and then it always gets better." Yonis was sitting nodding on the front of his chair actively listening to Eva and Gitte. Both Gitte and Eva recommended that Leyla would attend the after-school care more frequently. It was also problematised that Leyla had been some months away from kindergarten before starting school. Yonis explained that Leyla had needed some time home, because she had broken her leg. Both Gitte and Eva acknowledged that, and Eva then added that since this will be changing now [that she assumed they were 'agreeing on' how Leyla will start to spend more time in the afterschool-care]; it will help Leyla a lot. Yonis said "yes." Gitte explained that sometimes Leyla found the exercises in school easy, other times difficult, and that she was generally struggling with math. She also told how Leyla was talking a lot. Yonis answered, while laughing, "yes that is true," and everyone laughed. Gitte continued,



saying how she believed that Leyla was generally feeling comfortable in the class. Yonis agreed, and added that she loved to play, to which Gitte added, “well, actually we do not play that much.” She explained further, how sometimes they had to help Leyla a bit regarding the meaning of the game. Gitte explained how Leyla would sense if something was not quite right regarding the game, which Gitte thought was one of the reasons Leyla had been too uneasy in the beginning. “Maybe she was a little stressed in the beginning,” Yonis suggested in a questioning tone. Then Gitte answered that surely she is learning something new, little by little, every day. “Yes, she does,” Yonis said. Then Gitte told Yonis that Leyla had not checked any boxes in the language test. Yonis suggested that maybe she had not understood what the test was about, to which Gitte explained that she had then done a new test with a poor result. “Ok” Yonis answered in an accepting tone. Gitte told Yonis that she was aware of this problem, and was working on how to help Leyla improve. Yonis said that Leyla was good at many languages. However, there were also many languages in her world. She spoke English, Swahili, Somali and Danish. He said with great pride, “she is really good at learning languages, and faster than most of the other children at her age.” This was something friends and family of Yonis had agreed on, Yonis continued proudly. Gitte then said in a both concerned and firm tone, that that might be too many languages for Leyla, suggesting them to “turn down” for some of the languages. At the end of the conference, Eva summed up: “I can only say this: Attend the afterschool-care some more.” Gitte added, “She will learn more language there.” Hereto Gitte added, in an imperious manner, that it was furthermore important that Leyla did not bring *any* candy with her to school, and that he had to tell his wife this. In an accepting way, yet with an underlying irritation, Yonis replied “yes” and ensured that he would do so.

This parent-teacher conference was predominantly a one-way conversation, where especially Gitte wanted to ensure that Yonis knew it was important that he accepted the advice they, as professionals, gave him. Gitte and Eva both stressed how Leyla “learns more” and “progresses” by being in the afterschool care, pointing to how Leyla needed to progress academically, not “just play.” Similarly, Gitte and Eva thought the months Leyla had been home from Kindergarten were too long, as it was thought to slow her development. In various ways, both Gitte and Eva seemed to indicate that there were some (potential) problems with Leyla, but she would progress as long as she attended the afterschool-care some more, and generally follow their advice. This advice was based on Gitte's best intention for Leyla to develop her Danish-skills. However, concurrently, this way to communicate seemed to undermine Yonis' role as Leyla's father. Gitte's imperious tone of voice, and how

she framed her sentences, functioned to place Yonis in a position, from where he was no longer an expert regarding Leyla. Gitte raised her voice to make sure Yonis had understood what Leyla needed (reinforced by her being unsure of how much Danish he understood). From time to time, Yonis tried to add his perspective on the matter, for example he expressed how he believed Leyla had needed some time home, due to her broken leg. To my experience, Yonis attempted to utter his belief about, how Leyla would benefit from homely-time, care and parenting support to mature and develop. However, his comments seemed to be ‘closed down,’ or ‘corrected’ (Palludan 2012, Kjær and Kryger 2016; Johansen 2017, 14).

After the conference, there was a break in the schedule, and Gitte and Eva’s aversions towards Leyla’s parents somewhat broke out. Gitte explained to Henny, Eva, and I, how Leyla’s mother was quite “controversial;” one day she had complained about how Leyla again had lost her water bottle. Gitte had ensured the mother that it was Leyla, herself, who had lost her stuff; she had to teach her daughter to look after her own stuff. “So, I had stopped her here” (*jeg fik lagt hende ned*) Gitte ended, and Henny approved. I had already heard this story from Gitte once before. More issues about Leyla and her family came up. I was quite surprised about this sudden thorough critique; it was as if the conference had confirmed – starting from the failure of the language test – how there was something potentially risky about Leyla’s parents. Gitte also expressed her curiosity about how this “controversial mother” would react to what Gitte had said about the lunchbox and no candy. Still, as Gitte continued in an upset tone, Leyla had brought a Kinder egg to school one day, “That was too much!” In addition, she always brought white bread with her, in the lunchbox, Gitte said, and continued to tell about a day when the class went on an excursion, where Leyla would not eat the vegetable soup they all had. Gitte thought she was not able to chew it, because she was only used to soft food, like the white bread. Gitte and Eva agreed that there was not much stimulation going on in the Leyla’s home.

Sociolinguist Martha Sif Karrebæk (2012) has studied the symbolic meaning of the lunchbox in Danish public schools. When brought to school, lunch-boxes came to index cultural values in the home; what is in the lunchbox becomes symbolic gifts and signifiers of the home. That is, in spite of the sensitive character of the lunch-box, they become subject to teaching practices (*ibid*, 5). Similar to Karrebæk’s study, rye bread had a special status, as the most nutritious food to bring. Leyla would mostly bring white bread, with the crusts cut off with chicken sauce in her lunchbox and some sort of Arabic snack, which looked like a mix of a fruit bar and a Kinder milk slice. However, for the small snack, which the pupils would eat in the break before lunch, she brought raisins and fresh apples cut in slices, which Gitte

seemed to forget in her evaluations. Thus, in the eyes of Gitte, Leyla's food was 'soft food,' without nutrition, and bringing candy (or what looked like candy) to the school was a matter of breaking the social order of the school. The soft bread without nutrition seemed to function as a reflection of a home with 'no character.' Thus, small signs of social-cultural choices of Leyla's parents seemed to entangle with her academic 'failure' and reinforce the potential risk regarding Leyla's home. Another example was how Eva and Gitte thought Leyla was too "princess-like," since she wore mostly pink clothes with the Disney princess-figure from "Frost." Symbols, which came to index the family as spoiling Leyla, and made Gitte think she was also "the princess at home" too, that seemed to work as a confirmation for Gitte to ensure herself, and us, that Leyla was not getting quite the right stimulation, thus development, from her parents (see also Gulløv 2012).

The process of Leyla's segregation was a meshwork of different symbols merging and reinforcing each other, and exemplifies how various performances and symbols worked to index to which extent the home was capable of giving the right stimulation and further exemplifying how many teachers had a perception that the children's social capacities and approach to the school entangled with the stimulation of the family (see also Gilliam 2012, 149). However, in this case, the poor test-result seemed to evoke the other symbols of risk. Thus, many other pupils in 0C did not solely bring the most celebrated rye bread, as well as other parents were not completely fluent in Danish, but these did not attract the same attention. I believe this was so because the academic progress was said to be fine, according to the test. Thus, the empirical material hints at how the test-result functions as the legitimate, professional measurement of the pupils, and if failed, the gaze would move to the home.

Some weeks later, the class-conference was held. Here, Gitte mentioned how Leyla was under the category of pupils to be especially worried about. "She scored 0.5 in language," Gitte said with a worried tone, and explained how she had talked with Henny about how they could "get more language in her" (*mere sprog ind i hende*). Gitte mentioned, how Leyla's parents were "understanding parents," yet underlined how there were *too many* languages in the home, and that the father had agreed on "closing the door to some of the languages." Then it was clarified (and thus explained) by Dorte (the educational-leader) that Leyla was not an "institution-child" – which in this context meant that Leyla had spent too much time at home and not enough in the public institutions in the years before starting school, working as one of the explanations for her poor result. Dorte could read this in Leyla's transfer papers. Generally, Dorte used the category of "language-child" for multilingual pupils who, like Leyla, had a low score in the test. Gitte added, "...she does not spend enough time in the

after-school care, for it to make sense.” Gitte ensured Dorte that the father had understood this, since after the parent-teacher conference, Leyla had spent more time in the afterschool-care. Lately, there had only been a few days, when Leyla’s mother had picked her up right after school, Gitte said in a satisfied tone.<sup>38</sup>

## Concerned Professionalism

Gitte was, as many of the other teachers at Rosendal School, critical towards the language test. Gitte had even written a critical assignment about the test during her further education. Nevertheless, Leyla’s ‘failure’ in the language-evaluation system seemed to evoke a chain-reaction of concerns. We might see this as two different rationalities ‘fighting’ about the power to define what is right to do. The logic from Gitte’s further education (a critical, deconstructive approach to the language-test) clashed with and appeared to be overruled by a practice-rationality. This can be understood in light of Gitte’s role as the class teacher, a role where she was forced to act (*handletvang*, see Larsen and Thejsen 2012, 246-47) as well as professionally encouraged to detect potential risks amongst her pupils.

## Detecting Risks

To ‘break the negative social heritage’ has been an issue in educational politics for many years, but according to political scientist Gitte Sommer Harrits (2014), this has intensified along with a general intensification of detecting potential risky environments for the child. Both in political agreement in the late 1990s and again in 2010/11, objectives for day-care and public schools further explicated combatting negative social inheritance (Harrits 2014, 149). Here the means to break such negative social heritage is found in early interventions, based on a philosophy about detecting potential social problems as early as possible, while still small, which will prevent and avoid bigger and more expensive problems (as e.g. argued by Heckman, Stixrud, and Urzua 2006). A tendency concurrent with the aforementioned parent-determinism, where various social problems are traced back to parents’ failed childrearing (Furedi 2002). According to Harrits (2014) the focus on prevention requires an obligation of professionals to, in the meeting with children and families, make a measurement

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<sup>38</sup> Gitte’s way to ensure Dorte also seemed to work as ‘I am professional and have my class under control.’

or estimate, and a categorisation, which may identify potential social problems (149, see also Ramaekers and Suissa 2012). Likewise, the increased focus on breaking the negative heritage has become a greater part of the legislative policy texts describing the central goals of the education of pedagogues (Larsen 2016, 12). To ‘break the negative social heritage’ in early interventions, is also mentioned as a way to get more young people the prerequisites for completing a professional qualifying education. This places pedagogues in the social- and work-political field, as they must be able to spot the children, who will not be able to take an education later in their life, and pedagogues thus become “screening-actors” (ibid, 12). The purpose of pedagogues are, as such, moving away from ‘internal pedagogical work,’ as curiosity, investigative, nature-detective, democratizing, social, etc., and instead to a greater extent placed in the context of a broader political context of social- and work-related progress and risk (ibid 12-13, see also Faircloth 2016; Furedi 2002).

Along these lines, Gitte detected risks among the families in her class, and here Leyla’s home became a potentially risky environment for so-called “language-confusion,” with the result that a great part of Leyla’s life-world also became potentially risky. In Leyla’s case, the institutionalised problem-categorisation appeared to be the “bilingual pupil with a poor Danish,” or which, in some everyday discussions would turn into, “children without much language,” as the intensive focus on language-development, only focussed on *Danish* language skills, and made other language-capacities not existent. Paradoxically, there was simultaneously a fear of language-confusion in Yonis’ home. Thus, other languages were here acknowledged, or seen, yet articulated as potential risks for weakening Leyla’s Danish; I argue, a quite normative and nationalistic evaluation of which languages were useful and acceptable (Daugaard and Laursen 2012, 103; Holm and Ahrenkiel 2018; Holmen 2008).

## Early Language Determinism

Along with an intensified focus on early interventions, there has been an increased focus on language and early language interventions to prevent children from lagging behind in their further education. In 2009/10, the language test was made obligatory in all Grade 0 classes (Undervisningsministeriet 2018b). On the Danish Ministry of Education’s homepage, early language-resources and language stimulation is mentioned as important for succeeding in life, linking to the report “The language can be strengthened” (Bleses et al. 2015, my translation).

This report states that early language-development<sup>39</sup> is the foundation for further reading competencies and learning. Children who meet the school with a solid linguistic foundation are managing best in school, the report states, by referring to certain statistical surveys. Contrarily, children with a weak language foundation, when starting school, are already at risk since this fragile foundation makes it difficult for them to build new learning on top of this (ibid.). Therefore, it is an important task of the child-professionals, to find out how they can strengthen language development for all children. In such official reports, the measuring of language capacities have ‘moved down’ to also be central in day care (institutions before school). Moreover, as common practice, Danish language is used as synonymous with literacy in general, reinforcing the narrow nationalistic understanding of literacy (see also Holmen 2008).

The compulsive focus on early language development has recently made the Danish Government pass a law stating that children in so-called “non-western families” living in politically defined ghettos are required to attend public child-institutions after their first year (Regeringen 2018). The arguments are built upon the ‘core Danish values’ of equality (Gullestad 1992) expressed through equality in language-capacities, to ensure that all children have the same possibilities, when starting school – and more generally – in life. Yet, they do so by enforcing unequal political acts on Danish citizens dependent on national origin and residence. The political motivation is also that these children, along with learning the Danish language, will learn Danish culture and democracy (Regeringen 2018) working to underline the proximity between Danish language and Danish nationality.

I argue that the report “The language can be strengthened,” as well as forced day-care, have inbuilt rhetorical-logics about, what I will term, an ‘*early language-determinism*,’ which had potentially already singled Leyla out. If a weak language foundation determines all further learning, how could Leyla then, with such poor language-resources as 0.5 per cent in the Grade 0 class, ever reach the level of her classmates? Gitte’s severe reaction to the 0.5 per cent ‘in language,’ must be understood in the light of such conventions of early language determinism, based on the philosophy that a child’s linguistic capacities could be measured by one language-test, and that this result was reflecting how children would learn in the future.

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<sup>39</sup> Before school, the report is targeting day-care.

## The Language-Logic as a ‘Successful Failure’

As all pupils were different, certain differences (as Leyla’s poor result) were put forward and problematised, while others not. In “Successful Failure” (1998), anthropologists Ray McDermott and Hervé Varenne analyse how the pupil Adam ‘successfully’ became a pupil with a learning disorder. They argue that although Adam faces some practical problems, these problems do not consist in him being “Learning Disabled” (LD) as much as in his living in an institution that is well organised to label him as such. Thus, cultural and institutional logics and consequential practices lead professionals with various degrees of authority to look for children to identify them as “LD pupils.” They argue, that when taking away the institutions, the problems of such “LD pupils” disappears, even if the difference does not (McDermott et al. 1998, 42).

I found that the detecting of the “language-children” or “bilingual pupils with less language” functioned in the same way; administrators formulated regulations, teachers were required to follow these, and specialists were defined, trained and put to work, doing what they legitimately had to do. In this process, the language-test in itself, although often criticised, was an integral part of an “institutional-logic” (Haveman and Gualtieri 2017, 14; Geertz 1973, 207, 220). Such predominant focus on language development, I suggest works as a *‘language-logic.’* This encompasses the philosophy of early language determinism, including how various practices in school constituted its own language-logic around this. Such an institutional language-logic also took shape indirectly, as language became a key point of professional attention. For example, when teachers interacted (talked, evaluated and worked together), they made sense of the meaning of such institutional elements collectively, which then guided their decision-making (Haveman and Gualtieri, 2017, 14; Geertz 1973, 207, 220). As when Gitte with concern discussed Leyla’s poor test-result with her colleagues, and how generally professionals were concerned with categorising pupils as “bilingual” or “language children.” Large-scale forces, such as political regulations on detecting (language) risk earlier along with political requirements on more tests, motivated this institutionalised language-logic.

Before moving on, I shortly want to draw the reader’s attention to the argument that the language-test discriminates against multilingual pupils. Holm (2017) has pointed to a default in the very construction of the psychometric literacy test (as the one in the case of Leyla). The test is based on the so-called “average language-understanding for a certain age-average,” found by including many different variables, i.e. gender (boy; girl), school size,

geographical location (east; west /country; city) (ibid.). However, multilingual pupils are *not* incorporated in measuring this average (ibid, 10). Therefore, the average is not based on the de facto variation among pupils in Denmark, and thus, there is an inbuilt logic in the language-test, which discriminates between different groups. This means that multilingual pupils are already more doomed to fail from the beginning.

Although language tests (which continued to be conducted throughout the school years) can be criticized, they reinforced an institutional language-logic, and the focus on improving Danish extended its reach. That is, I observed many interactions between teachers and pupils /or their parents, where the argument for various interventions and regulations were justified via the argument of developing Danish language. For example, when Naima from 7X during the parent-teacher conference (pp. 3) was asked to straighten her back, look up, and walk and talk a little faster, these were correspondingly argued to “improve her Danish.” These regulations appeared to me to be related to Steffen thinking Naima was too apathetic (*sløv*) and not performing actively enough in the class. However, the argumentations were taken from the language-logic, because the logic appeared resilient and almost impossible to argue against; a triumphant argument about the need for multilingual pupils to always need to improve their ‘language.’ The language-logic made the identification of “bilingual pupils with a deficient Danish” both morally good and commonsensically neutral (Varenne et al. 1998, 43) and opened up for numerous and multifarious interventions and regulations, which were argued to improve language. Besides walking faster and speaking louder, Naima was also, as many of the other ‘bilingual pupils’ of 7X, encouraged to read more Danish at home, to watch the Danish news, and so on, to improve “her language.” Although teachers professionally perceived such practices to develop capacities in Danish, it also kept placing some pupils in a minoritised position. Thus, it reinforced the teachers’ position as expert of the ‘supreme language,’ and the multilingual pupils as secondary and thus minoritised (Canger 2008, 194-95). These dynamics could also branch out to the multilingual parents. During Naima’s parent-teacher conference, Steffen suggested Naima to read an article about pollution in Bangladesh, which he had recently seen in the newspaper. It was his best intention to make Naima read Danish, starting from a topic, which he believed she would find interesting. “Then you can also translate it to your mother,” he added. Faria, who sat next to Naima, had not said much during the conference and was (in line with Yonis) positioned as a non-expert regarding her daughter’s schooling *and* language. Since Faria did not have the ‘superior language’ as her mother tongue, it appeared that teachers would recurrently position such multilingual parents in the non-expert role.



## “They Cannot do Anything at Home, Anyway”

After the parent-teacher conference of Leyla, I asked Gitte, why she had not told the accurate result of 0,5 per cent to Leyla’s father since, she had done this to all the other parents? Where to Gitte answered: “No, this he does not need to know, they cannot do anything at home anyway.” With the best intentions, Gitte did not want to hurt Yonis, by informing him about the poor result, as she presumed that he could not do anything about this anyway. In addition, Gitte did not, as she did for other parents, suggest ways for Yonis to practice language with Leyla at home. As I formally finished the fieldwork at Rosendal School in December 2015, I came back to visit the school now and then. A couple of months later, I came back to interview Gitte. We talked about Leyla. She had made great progress, which was, according to Gitte, because she spent more time in the afterschool-care. I here mentioned to Gitte that the mother had a good command of the Danish language. Leyla’s mother was actually fluent in Danish, something I had speculated a great deal on since the parent-teacher conferences. Gitte agreed, but said that they had to speak Somali at home, because all research pointed to how the parents should speak their mother tongue at home. The mother tongue had to be strengthened; otherwise, if the children did not know the words in their mother tongue, there would be no reference point for learning the words in Danish. Thinking this way was the general professional theory and part of the language-logic. In this way, there was not much for Yonis and his wife to do; a certain, complex language-logic seemed to keep them as ‘bilingual parents’ in a minoritised and redundant position, working to prevent a normalisation (*almengørelse*) (see also Kjær and Kryger 2016; Timm and Bergthóra 2011).

## Becoming Redundant

Unfortunately, Yonis did not accept my invitation to interview him. Nevertheless, Leyla’s case was not unique, and as I do not have Yonis’ reflections on the matter, I will discuss the empirical example of Yonis becoming redundant in the home-school cooperation, by including data from an interview I did with the fathers Bashir and Hamid from the Somali parent association.

During this interview, we came to discuss the topic of teachers advising parents to let their children spend more time in the after-school care, and I presented the fathers to the case (anonymised) of Leyla. Bashir and Hamid, who had worked as Somali-Danish

interpreters in school-settings for many years, had many experiences with meetings between families with Somali origin and school professionals. Both of them had often seen teachers or pedagogues suggesting, or, according to Bashir, *demanding*, parents with Somali background to send their children to afterschool care, or, if they already went there, to let them spend more time there. Hamid said: “Yes! I know it very well. Just now, I have three cases. The same, actually [as Leyla’s case]. And the solution is; he has to start in the after-school-care, he should attend the club, nothing else.” Hamid also sometimes counselled the families with Somali origin about the school, and therefore he had more insight in these cases besides translating. “Yes, and where the teacher is not honest and tell the parents, what it is actually about... but the teachers are very different; some teachers are super, actually, fiery souls and really good,” he explained. Hamid did not want to make this an accusation of all teachers, and Bashir agreed. With their many collegial relationships with teachers, they had met many fiery souls; teachers working hard on getting a good relation and informing the parents, as well as finding professional solutions.

But there are some [teachers] who are distanced, and some who are not honest towards the parents about what the problem is, the concrete problem, which the child has. There was this child, which I followed up to the Grade 4 class. The teacher did not tell [about the concrete learning difficulties to the parents], and I was not able to interfere due to confidentiality. I was not able to intervene and tell about the child, although I knew the [bad] result.

Hamid experienced being placed in a precarious situation. He worked with families, some he had known for more years, but was not able to tell them about concrete issues facing their children. Hamid continued to tell how the new teachers in Grade 4 had been surprised: “What in the world?” “She can’t read, she cannot write, what is going on?” In addition, the parents had been shocked, because suddenly they were told that their child was on a Grade 1 level – but going to a Grade 4 class, Hamid said. Then the parents had talked with other parents and had found a homework café for their daughter to get help. Within two years, the level of the girl had improved, impressively, he added. According to Hamid and Bashir, it was important to include and be honest with parents, if there were any problems. In this way, parents would invest in the children, do homework with them or pay for homework-help, or find someone else, who could help them; “they do what they can,” Bashir explained. The Somali parent association itself was a community, where parents would help and assist each other with various tasks related to schooling (see also Nuur 2015).

Fuaad, who also was a father with Somali-descent (pp. 149), had similar experiences. Suddenly in Grade 8, the class teacher of his son told him that his son did not have the aptitude for high school (*egnet til gymnasiet*). However, he had not been included in his son's academic challenges before. With great frustration, Fuaad had experienced how the main class teacher in his son's class had been replaced time and time again. Fuaad framed this experience as his worst experience with the school. His main suggestion for where teachers should improve: "they should tell things as they are." After finding out, Fuaad did an immense effort to help his son to be declared aptitude for high school. He never got this declaration, however the son passed the qualifying test in the end. Many parents with migrant backgrounds told similar stories about teachers not being honest about the pupil's academic challenges, and related feelings about being kept in the dark by teachers, or that pupils were left to themselves, when lagging behind academically, the latter being the reason for Sharmarke and his wife to change schools (pp. 102). Thinking back to the example with Yonis, Gitte equally thought there was no reason to include Yonis in helping Leyla, since he "could not do anything anyway," but this might, in the eyes of Yonis, be a misunderstood consideration.

According to Bashir and Hamid, and many of the other parents they knew from the Somali association, advice about spending more time in the afterschool-care could feel more like a command, contrary to starting a dialogue about the child. In this way, school professionals indirectly told these parents that the children would benefit more from being with other adults than them, and thus how they, as parents, subliminally were not seen as contributing to their children's development. Hamid said: "I have worked for many years [as a school interpreter] and seen a lot...and some parents, even though they have the right to say no to the after-school care, they [teachers or pedagogues] say 'you have to.' (...) However, it is the parent's decision, because it is their payment. If you have to pay for something, you should be free to decide for yourself." Yet, in some of these cases, parents would be afraid that the school would make a notification (*underretning*) to the social services, and would therefore, refrain from challenging the teacher's decision (see also Johansen and Jensen 2017, 307-8). Bashir felt, how, in the worst cases, the school-representative had crossed the line for what was legal. In a so-called "democratic school system in Denmark, where everyone has individual rights," as he termed it, how could such intimidation or threat take place, where the teacher could say, "you have to do this and this...you *have* to..." In the role as a hired-in interpreter, Bashir could not interfere in such matters and inform the parents about their rights, but some parents got truly sad and felt run over. However, they could not see through

their rights, and ended up with accepting picking up their children later and later, Bashir explained.

Hence, some parents in the Somali parent association questioned the idea that spending time in the institutions was profitable by itself. Two different rationalities clash here; among teachers, there existed an assumption of how spending time in the after-school care was itself beneficial and valuable (Gilliam and Gulløv 2012, 61; Kryger 2015; Kampmann 2004; Krab 2015). Here pupils could achieve both academically, socially and ‘language wise,’ and in some cases, the afterschool-care was perceived as more equipped than certain parents to raise and *stimulate* the child. This reflects a cultural perception among professionals in Danish children institutions, where the potential of the institutions is highly valued, and where child-professionals took up a position to challenge and evaluate certain parents’ aspirations for raising their children (Gilliam and Gulløv 2012, 33). Drawing from the language-logic, the need for appropriate language-stimulation functioned as the legitimate argument to form various interventions, and suggests (or demands) the institutional-life as a stand-in for a stimulating sphere.

On the other hand, some of the parents with Somali background, which Hamid and Bashir represented, did not buy into this logic. They instead wanted to engage in their children’s homework or thought their child needed a little rest before starting, and thus questioned or were sceptical towards the teacher’s logic. When spending so much time outside the home, the children would get so tired, Hamid explained; “and they cannot read, they cannot make his homework when they get home, because they are already ‘used.’” Some parents preferred that their child got home, relaxed and *then* did their homework. According to both Hamid and Bashir, spending more time in the after-school care would not in itself solve, e.g., learning difficulties, since children “just did what they wanted to do,” and sometimes all by themselves, without pedagogical support. The children could play computer all day in the after school-care – which they might as well do at home, Bashir added. In addition, the after-school-care was not a cost-free institution, as Hamid mentioned above. According to him, some parents did not want to pay for something (with potentially an already limited income), where the child mostly played computer. In addition, Bashir’s experience was that the most severe conflicts between the children would happen in the after school-care, since the children would spend a lot of time playing on their own without supervision from the staff.

## Moral Adjustments and the Imperious Tone of Voice

As seen above, parents did not always agree with the child-professionals, however, it was often difficult for parents to utter their disagreement directly to the teacher. Such intersubjective dynamics can be seen as reflecting a culture of the institution, where the family ought to *trust* and *share* the childrearing with the child-professionals, or further, the welfare state (Høyrup 2018, Johansen 2013; 2017). In the parent-teacher conferences that the teachers termed as easy, both teachers and parents seemed concerned with maintaining their own face and the face of the converser. This meant that the line taken by each participant was allowed to carry off the role she or he appeared to have chosen for her- or himself (Goffman 1967). The teachers would often say they were happy to have the child in the class, and the parents would thank the teacher for the effort she/he made regarding their child.

The parent-teacher conferences can be approached as sites of moral adjustment. According to Veena Das (2010), the ordinary everyday life is a site of adjustment, conflict, and risk, and this paradoxical mix creates a mutual shadowing of 'the ordinary' and scepticism (376). Accordingly, everyday ordinary practice forms the moral life, where we are responding to the claims of the other, and we adjust ourselves to them, and their claims; the process of becoming who we are, and what we think we are capable of (ibid, 376-377). As a site for moral adjustment, I recorded a certain tone of voice; what I will term '*the imperious tone of voice.*' This tone seemed to function to emphasise the teachers position as the expert and thus also the moral overseer. While this voice functioned to position Yonis in a position from where he could merely answer 'yes' or 'no,' he tried to suggest other explanations for the described challenges. However, the imperious character of the professionals' voices did not position Yonis in a role from which he could start an equal dialogue (see also Kjær & Kryger 2016). For example, although Yonis was initially proud of Leyla's great language proficiency, he was 'morally adjusted' to "turn down all the other languages," as Gitte said.

Based on my observations, it appeared as if for Yonis, being and becoming a father was closely related to the realm of the family; through everyday practices of parental roles and home activities, where he would talk and play with Leyla in Somali, which he was encouraged to do, but then again problematised. In this process of morality and adjustment, the school took a central position in everyday micro-regulations of Yonis' family (see also Dannesboe 2012). Such moral adjustments affected Yonis' further becoming, whom he was as father, and of what he was capable – and not – capable of. It appeared to me that Yonis wanted Leyla to manage school well, and thus it was difficult for him to oppose the strong

language-logic and imperious tone. In such 'ordinary routines' of the parent-teacher conference, something extraordinary took place; Yonis became a potential risk for his daughter's language development, and possibly much more – as the trend of early language determinism was combined with success in life in a more general sense (Bleses et al. 2015; Furedi 2002).

I only recorded one case with a pupil having Danish as his first language to be advised to spend more time in the after-school care. This was the case of Villiam, where Eva, the pedagogue from the after-school care, advised Villiam's parents, during the parent-teacher conference, to pick him up later. This advice was placed in the slipstream of Lisa problematising Villiam's lack of engagement in the exercises done in the class, as well as how the result of the language-test were below middle. However, when I later asked Lisa to elaborate on why they as professionals had advised Villiam spend more time in after-school care, Lisa answered that, this was, in fact, not something she herself would have advised Villiam's parents. She had not agree with Eva, adding how the more inter-disciplinary cooperation, which the New School Reform had further encouraged, was difficult for her, as she did not always agree with the other professionals. Then she added, that she would "only advise the bilingual parents such things," reflecting how to advise multilingual parents to let their children spend more time in child-institutions was a common, and morally good, practice to make the 'bilingual pupils' improve their Danish. Additionally, Villiam's parents were, as a general practice, explained how they could do exercises with Villiam, to help him improve some of the weaknesses to which the language-test had pointed, e.g. doing more rhymes with him. This stood in contrast to the conference with Yonis, where neither Gitte nor Eva suggested Yonis to do exercises or other training with Leyla at home. I argue this was due to how his home was linked to 'language-confusion,' and thus how Leyla's parents became redundant in the eyes of Gitte. Such extent of 'becoming redundant' within a home-school cooperation, I found to be unique for multilingual families.

## Pushing the Lines of Becoming

The case of Yonis has functioned as a prism for understanding some of the many different logics, variables, and forces, which entangled and affected the interlocutors becoming as school-fathers. The school-terrain, in which fathers as Yonis faced *becoming redundant* was made up of different forces, operating on different scales. That is, the possibilities for fathers'

agencies were mutually constructed of both *things*; as the concrete language-test and its mysterious measurement-logic. *People*, as the given teacher or pedagogue as well as greater *large-scale forces* as historic and political intensities, such as the intensified focus on tests, and early language-determinism, which enforced how children's life arenas ought to be stimulated in certain ways, as well as encourage the professionals to intervene. In this way, the social becoming of fathers is about how the human-subject is always under construction in a world with "plastic powers" of people, thoughts, materiality and politics (Biehl and Locke 2017, 50). 'Plastic' as connoting the elastic and flexibility of powers, how it changes between scales and contexts, as an attempt not to contain, reduce or simplify our understanding of powers (ibid. 50).

In Yonis' case, these different lines of forces, or 'lines of becoming,' appeared to be quite powerful, and Yonis and his wife gave in to the teacher's suggestion. However, fathers could also counteract and push the lines, which were entangling in their becoming. In the following case, we see how Kadin (pp. 97) managed to obstruct the binary categories concerning 'ethnic Danish' and 'bilingual,' which he experienced him and his daughter were placed in. The story exemplifies how lines of forces and people mutually affect each other, and how the process of becoming is always in motion; how such lines of forces can, so to speak, be 'pushed a bit,' and change trajectory (ibid.).

Kadin had a Moroccan origin, while his wife Amira, had grown up in France, with Moroccan roots. Together they had two children. Sofia, the youngest, was 13 and attended 7X. I got to know Sofia pretty well during the fieldwork; she was very open, talkative, as well as popular with her teachers. Kadin's story tells us how he tried to disturb the lines, which affected the becoming that lay in wait for him and his daughter. When I asked Kadin about a negative experience with the school, he, after some time of thinking, answered: "Well, there is this single incident," and he started to explain. In the Grade 0 class, Sofia had had a language test, which she did very badly. This test was equivalent to the test Leyla had done. According to Kadin, Sofia was having a bad day, yet the result was so poor that the teacher thought Sofia had serious problems, not only academic but also social. The teacher had told Sofia's mother Amira, abruptly and severely, that there were serious problems with Sofia, a description, which reminded me of the imperious tone of voice, I had earlier recorded. The teacher stated the need for special interventions regarding Sofia. Kadin and his wife were shocked, as they had heard a quite different story from the kindergarden, which Sofia had attended before starting school. Amira's limited command of Danish at the time made it problematic for her to react to the teacher's rather severe manner, and she felt 'run over' and

saddened that the teacher had sounded as if she had given up on Sofia. A few days later, Kadin had gone to the school to talk to the teacher. He had explained that Amira and he would like a proper meeting about Sofia's future, and that they would appreciate if a representative from the school's educational administration would participate in the meeting as well. During the meeting, Kadin and Amira argued for a less dramatic reaction to the test, and Kadin explained to me how he afterward had felt that the meeting had gone well. The teacher and Kadin had agreed to wait some time to initiate any special interventions and wait with deciding if Sofia needed special assistance after some time. As Kadin told this, I said I thought it was good and brave he had done something back then, and that I thought some parents would not feel the same power to intervene. Kadin agreed: "Yes, exactly, that is what often happens." He later added, "I saw how my wife was heartbroken, and I said, I'll go directly to the teacher (...) I told her, 'You have talked with my wife, and it was not a good conversation, so we need to talk together again.'"

Kadin was a Danish teacher in adult education, and with his knowledge and familiarity with the school system, his fluent Danish and his insight in the dynamics and logics of school, Kadin was able to push some of the forces, or lines, which were about to place Sofia in the category of a 'problematised bilingual child with special needs.' By involving the administration and arguing in the 'correct ways,' he hindered the category in which the teacher was about to place Sofia – and potentially also the whole family as linguistically, potentially literally, challenged and generally as a 'resource-weak' family (see also Jørgensen, forthcoming).

Kadin possessed the capacities needed to navigate successfully in the terrain of the school. After this incidence, he had no other bad experiences with the school. Today, Sofia was one of the best performing pupils in the class, which I had myself observed. As I told Kadin about the example of Leyla, he was rather frustrated that such a language test was still being performed at Rosendal School, and still seemed to have the same devastating influence on differentiating and categorising the pupils. "That is very, very wrong," he concluded. Kadin thought these tests mostly functioned to label a failure in the class rather than supporting pupils' progress. An observation which matched mine (see also Varenne et al. 1998).

Kadin's case exemplifies, how people always depend on the large-scale forces (such as rigid forms of categories and boundaries for instance 'bilingual,' 'language-learner' or 'language child'), but not always correspond to them. This exemplifies Biehl and Locke's (2017) point that people are means and materials of bendy transformations, which cannot



simply be engineered by the arts of governance (8). Thus, Kadin manages to escape the negative categorisation of Sofia, his and his wife's parenthood, and changed the pathway, which lay ready for them; the pathway of becoming a 'usual resource-weak, bilingual family.'

Although Kadin managed to transform and bend such forces, he still had to be careful not to lose this position. It might be the reason why Kadin refrained from discussing his Moroccan origin with me, as a way to avoid negative categorisations. Thus, as I asked Kadin how it had been to attend the school in Morocco, he answered shortly "it was the same." Similarly, he also refrained from mentioning his Moroccan origin in any of the aspects of home-school cooperation we discussed. I got the impression that Kadin did not want to talk about his origin in an Arab country. As a means to be able to belong to the 'resource-strong-category,' he had to leave his 'foreignness.' An argument supported by his wondering of why I had exactly chosen to interview *him*? (pp. 62) and the fact that both his children were named common Danish names. Contrarily, Kadin placed a lot of effort in telling me how much education meant to him and sharing his views on The New Reform with me. This can be seen as Kadin's way to claim and hold on to his position as a 'resource-strong parent.'

Interestingly, Steffen, who was Sofia's main teacher, did not think of Kadin as 'bilingual.' As I interviewed Steffen, and we entered the topic of 'fathers with another ethnic background' in 7X, he did not include Kadin, which surprised me, since he was born in Morocco. As I asked something like "what about Sofia's father?" Steffen replied, "No... he is not...uhmm. I do not recall if either of them [mother or father] is from Morocco." I got the impression that Kadin in the eyes of Steffen, did not belong to the categories of 'other ethnic background' or 'bilingual' and then potentially 'resource-weak.' In the eyes of Steffen, it seems Kadin's strategy for his and Sofia's becoming had succeeded, and they appeared as a 'Danish, resource-strong family.' I argue that since Kadin did not appear as 'resource-weak' it was also not 'necessary' to draw forward his 'other ethnicity,' underlining the proximity between categories as 'ethnic other,' 'bilingual' and 'resource-weak.' In addition, this reflects how such categories move and adjust in social dynamics, and exemplifies how 'ethnic other' may not align with the definition of being a migrant (pp. 14).

## Concluding Discussion

The analysis reveals a certain preoccupation with (Danish) language at Rosendal School, and how the convention of early language determinism, to be found in political regulations and

acts, appeared to, effectuated through the language-test, have a forceful influence on teachers evaluation of pupils as well as parents. In the hectic days at the school, which left teachers with an ontological uncertainty, the test could function as a beacon for performing ‘professional choices.’

I argue that the tendency of early language determinism entangled in and reinforced the extensive focus on language in school, altogether forming a powerful language-logic, where teachers were preoccupied with language, as for example reflected in the categories of “bilingual” and “language children.” The language-logic also entailed risks of “language-confusion,” and if the test-result was poor, the language-logic evoked problematisations of the extended lifeworlds of ‘bilingual parents,’ sometimes even made them risky.

However, the chapter also finds that teachers’ evaluation of parents invoked complex, dynamic processes, as in Kadin’s example; as well as how teachers sometimes opposed the proximity between ‘bilingual’ and ‘resource-weak.’ The same tendency is found in anthropologists Alex Knoll and Ursina Jaeger’s (2019) study of a super diverse kindergarten in Belgium (12). Here the educators pushed, broke off, and paused differentiations, which could also ‘go to the ground’ and no longer be socially relevant, thus broken up by the unpredictable and changeability of language use (ibid, 12). In similar ways, teachers at Rosendal School would do and again undo differences, due to how time passed, and teachers and parents entangled in new meshwork (Ingold 2010, 2015). Conflicts may have arisen; yet at times later solved. Thus, as Leyla’s mother was criticised by Gitte, as shown above, things had changed when I returned to the school in February. Then their disputes appeared as forgotten, and Gitte then praised Leyla’s mother, among many things, for having “such good humour” – they seemed to have ‘found each other.’ In similar ways, Kadin managed to make the teachers ‘undo’ making Sofia ‘a bilingual pupil with poor Danish.’

To understand better how different meshwork had different outcomes, we will benefit from investigating the different lines of forces, on different scales – large, as well as small – which entangled in the meshwork and caused new trajectories for the people involved. In some moments, larger scale-forces tended to define the interaction, as in Yonis’ example, where the test-logic had an excessive influence. However, in other meshwork, small-scale agencies, as Eva’s (unexpected) suggestion to let William spend more time in the afterschool care, or Kadin’s revolt against the devaluation, were essential for the consequences of the meshwork. Thus, we can only trace people’s trajectories as they grow out of themselves, fold

in exteriorities, and become other in meshwork of various lines of forces (Biehl and Locke 2017, xii).

Kadin sensed the many potential consequences or ‘costs’ of having a child placed in the category of ‘a bilingual pupil with language-difficulties,’ or ‘language-child.’ Besides knowing what this could mean for Sofia’s position in the class, he also possessed the right skills and capacities to navigate successfully, and opposed such a minoritising process. Through successful navigation, he escaped the classification as a ‘problematic bilingual home,’ and he formed new pathways for him and his daughter, Sofia. Yonis did not possess the same educational and language capacities, and did not share the extensive knowledge about the school system. Thus, he was not in a position in similar ways to obstruct the potential becoming of Leyla as a ‘problematic bilingual pupil, nearly without a language.’ In many ways, the problematisation of Sofia and Leyla was similar, yet with different outcomes; we see how certain skills may strengthen one’s agency power in such meshwork. The example with Sofia also casts doubt on to which extent such test-results ‘measure’ language potentials; Sofia failed the test, but ended up as one of the best performing pupils in 7X. Although being a single case, it nevertheless places doubts on the validity of the test, and by such also the early language determinism (depending on such test). Again, this leads to questions as to how much the ‘institutional impoverishment’ of Leyla in itself may affect her further development in negative ways. Although Leyla had only spent three months in school – and thus had many school years to learn to handle such a language test better, Gitte attached a lot of importance to this single result and various processes made her into an inept pupil (see Kjær & Kryger 2016). Overall, failing the language-test provided an identity-position defined by *lack*, assumedly affecting Leyla’s further becoming.

In the language-logic *Danish* became synonymous with language, and how this language could be well-stimulated in Danish-speaking institutions, and ‘confused’ in places where other languages were spoken. By this logic, teachers oversaw how literacy played out and developed in numerous ways and contexts. Based on studies in numerous multilingual settings, educational researchers Eve Gregory, Susi Long and Dinah Volk (2004) find how children learn language and literacy with siblings, grandparents, peers and community members. Finding how children skilfully draw from their varied linguistic (or cultural) worlds to make sense of new inventions and experiences, they also find that such assets of the pupils’ lifeworlds are often invisible to educators (Gregory, Long, and Volk 2004; Nuur 2015). Correspondingly, teachers were often not familiar with the extended life-worlds of the pupils. Additionally, the *Danish* language-logic and the teachers’ execution of it led to only

recognising very few contexts as language-stimulating, encompassing a very narrow understanding of how children develop languages (Holm 2017; Holm and Ahrenkiel 2018).

The language-measurement made certain differences socially relevant. Although teachers aimed at avoiding ethnified categories, the extended focus on *Danish* language nevertheless entangled in ethnified categories such as ‘having another mother tongue,’ and recurrently stated Danish as the supreme language. Here, some social mechanisms resulted in that school professionals could take a position as experts, placing the multilingual, migrant parents in a position as ‘language-learners’ themselves, rather than an expert regarding their child. Thus, teachers’ interventions could be difficult for migrant fathers to oppose, if they did not speak Danish (the ‘supreme language’) as their mother tongue. In this way, the language-logic also initiated processes of minoritising and ethnifying certain parents.

In retrospect, after analysing the cases above, it struck me how little professional-responsibility the teachers involved took themselves to help these so-called “language-children” develop their Danish *within* school (not only by time spent in the after-school care). Through my observations, I did not observe any concrete arrangements implemented in the school-class for Leyla. Since I was not in the class every day, I do not know what happened on the days I was not present, but it was not something that teachers made explicit to me or I experienced that teachers discussed. Thus, to my experience, there were no specific language-programs launched to help Leyla develop her Danish (assuming she needed one), supported by the fact that Gitte also explained Leyla’s progress as due to her spending more time in the afterschool care. Yet, taking into account the vast problematisation of Leyla’s language, a similar professional failed to appear; no other pedagogical or didactic initiatives seemed to be enacted. This conflicted with how both Bashir and Hamad believed that a good teacher is one who takes the problems seriously and does something about them; shows an extra effort to both understand the child better and offer concrete professional solutions.

Teachers like Gitte found themselves amid shifting scales, as they tried to reflect over the test-score at nearly ‘0 in languages,’ while being urged to detect the ‘risky-homes.’ Yet at the same time, personally, they were against the intensification of academic performance and tests. Gitte believed that “bilingual-pupils” should not be perceived as a problem-category in school, as she said, “We have many different pupils at the school with different needs. That’s how it is, and that’s how it should be.” Nevertheless, in the cases presented above, the obligatory language test seemed to function to point out especially “bilingual pupils” (based on the cases I recorded), and potentially made their homes risky. This points to how Gitte faced difficulties in pushing and disentangling herself from these

large-scale lines of forces in her work as a child-professional, and how political regulations, such as the obligatory language-test and intensified learning-goals, ended with influencing the intersubjective dynamics at the small-scale, i.e. her relation to Leyla and Yonis.

In this way, the terrain of Rosendal School registers a range of large-scale political regulations into which the parents and teachers are drawn, one of which was the current intensified focus on ‘performing better’ academically and hereto related numerous tests, which again work on a larger scale level to compare schools both national and international (PISA). These forces continue to resonate and disrupt the present and imposed certain ways to practice being a professional schoolteacher, while the personal and intersubjective, for example Gitte’s collegial discussion at the teachers-lounge or her subjective political-belief, believed otherwise, which constantly impose doubt and ambiguity. Different forces were at play, and in a non-linear, but messy way, these different formations of forces affected her becoming as teacher.

This chapter has also illuminated processes where fathers experience their fatherly beliefs and aspirations, in different ways, as becoming redundant. For example, both Yonis as well as fathers from the Somali parent association uttered their beliefs about how home time was important for their children’s’ maturing and learning. This was also a belief Villiam’s father uttered, when he with despair told me, how he did not understand why Villiam had to spend more time in the after-school care. Yet, they were confronted with various entangling lines of forces, some on a more political level, others as teachers intervened in the life of the family outside school. Thus, powers on various scales impose certain ways to practice being a parent (or leave it to the institution), while some fathers and their communities believed otherwise, creating friction or uncertainty.

In the greater landscape of being a father, the school was far from the only coming community (Aitken 2009), which formed these fathers becomings. As an example, the Somali parent association was another central coming community for some of the interlocutors, where fathers discussed and contested experiences with school and as fathers more broadly. Thus, as a part of their becomings as school-fathers, these fathers oriented themselves within such shifts of normative orders (see also Purcell 2017, 134-144). In terms of fatherly becomings, this leaves us with some questions: How do fathers navigate different forces, different from their own childhood, while clinging to their own ideas on, and aspirations for, being a good, present father? How do the fathers from the Somali parent-association navigate the terrain of the school, when they are not experiencing that teachers grant them a position as authorities here? Moreover, how can such migrant fathers live up to the intensified

expectations of home-school cooperation, when experiencing becoming redundant? When we ask such questions, we connect 'large-scale' changes with phenomenological experiences, the 'small-scale' (ibid, 147). Paying attention to such questions will help us understand how fathers apprehend larger scale processes of change and, in the process, change themselves.

## Concluding Discussion for Part II

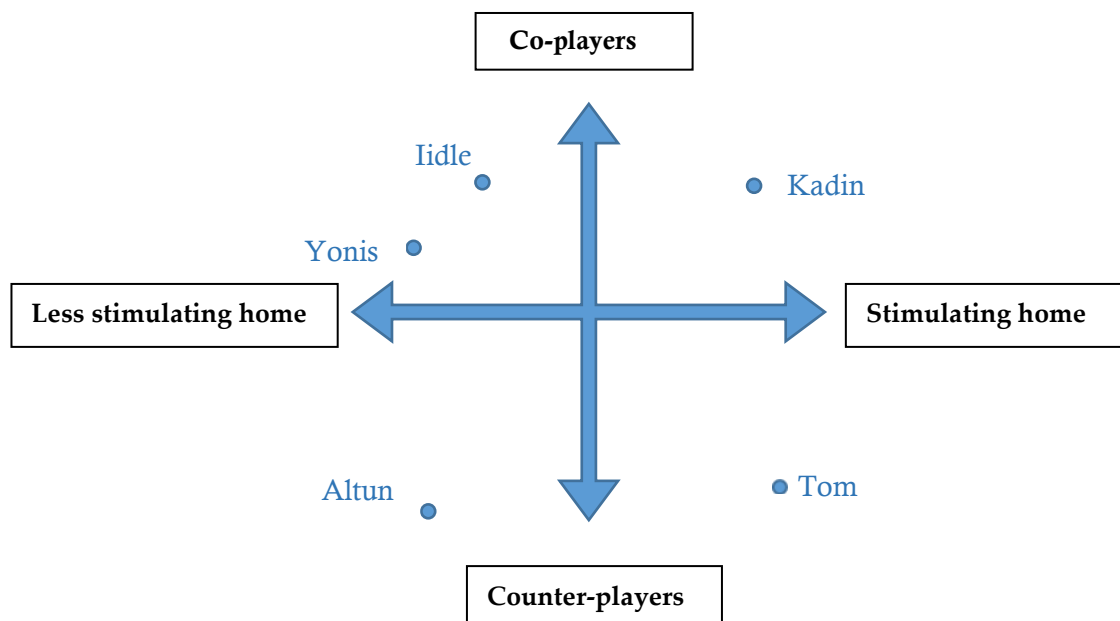
Part II of this dissertation has analysed various aspects of the terrain of home-school cooperation, how fathers navigated this terrain differently, and, from the teachers' perspective, more or less successfully. Different from Gitz-Johansens' study (2003), which finds how the teachers described the "bilingual pupils' homes" as socially problematic and "resource-weak," the ethnographic material of this study points to a greater complexity. As "resource-weak" and "strong" were the teachers' preferred categories for distinction, these distinctions did not consistently follow 'ethnified categories.' For example, although the teacher Bente often linked "bilingual" to "resource-weak" and 'socially problematic homes,' Lisa, Gitte, and Steffen from time to time counter-argued such (de)valuations of certain pupils, as well as many of their evaluations did not follow this dichotomist thinking. As a further development of Gitz-Johansens' study, this concluding discussion works to further inform the central empirical distinction of "resource-weak" and "strong," and how it related to the fathers described throughout Part II. In short, I suggest two central axes for how teachers distributed resources in the 'resource accounting': "co-players" vs. "counter-players" and "stimulating" vs. "non-stimulating," which I will describe further in the following section.

The terms "co-player" or "counter-player" kept popping up in the teachers' evaluations of fathers. Teachers' sensations or feelings of fathers to be either "co-players" or "counter-players" were informed by intersubjective dynamics of mutual understanding of how things 'were to be' – establishing *trust*. This was related to whether parents were giving in to the cultural givens and logics of the school, and how/if fathers performed with a positive and acknowledging attitude as well as followed the teachers' guidance. I found how personal characteristics of being – or performing – extroverted, positive, and grateful, and performing an appreciative body language, were features the teachers generally valued (see also Høyrup 2018). Different teachers made the distinction between "co-players" and "counter-players" differently, as well as the different school-classes diverged. As Lisa with a class of mainly "academic-types," Altun and Betül stood out, for example, by not checking up on Parent Intra. However, in 7X, Steffen seemed to give in to that many parents in 7X did not check the Parent Intranet regularly. Thus, 'co-players' for Steffen was different from what it meant for Lisa.

Another term, which teachers often mentioned regarding the pupils' homes, was "stimulation." Generally, teachers were concerned with the homes' ability to stimulate the

child, which should be seen in the light of a greater responsibility placed on parents regarding their children's learning in school. Here, borders between the private sphere and the institutional sphere have weakened, and children's home-life arenas are entangling more and more with the institutional contexts, meaning that also the family sphere has become subject for learning (Kryger 2015, 68-69). Parents are encouraged to spend time on school-related activities, for example "dialogic reading 20 minutes a day," or suggested activities from Parent Intranet and other stimulating/educating activities (see also Dannesboe et al. 2012, Krab 2015; Kryger 2015; Akselvoll 2015, 2016b). That pupils' learning is to a greater extent seen as depending on the parents' abilities to stimulate, made the teachers concerned with whether the home was *stimulating enough*?

I suggest the following figure as an extraction from the above analysis. However, with the reservations that teachers were *doing*, and again *undoing* differences, as well as that teachers differed. Thus, the figure must be understood as *dynamic* since fathers could change their positions over time, reflecting how we in general have to attune to the singular and the partial, which requires a fine and, potentially, more humble logic than that of repartition or holistic binary categorisations (Biehl and Locke 2017, xi). With these reservations in mind, the figure aims to illustrate *processes* of becoming "resource-strong" or "resource-weak."





The first axis is the degree of how stimulating the teacher perceived the home to be. On the one end were highly educated parents, whom teachers perceived as capable of providing the pupil with the ‘right’ academic capacities, which were easily converted into “resources” in the school’s learning-goals. Only certain skills and knowledge counted in this ‘resource-accounting,’ and generally, the fact that the ‘bilingual parents’ knew more languages or potentially had a thorough knowledge about life-circumstances and culture in other places of the world, teachers did not perceive this as ‘resources.’ Similarly, such assets of pupils were not included as assets in the lessons, as well as it was not measurable by the existing tests (see also Paris and Alim 2014). Contrary to the “stimulating home,” was the “non-stimulation home,” which in the worst case became an environment of risk, such as, for example, if many languages were spoken, as for example Yonis’ multilingualism became a deficit.

On the other axis, was the abovementioned dimension of intersubjective dynamics concerning agreeing and building trust, verbalised as either a “counter-” or “co-player.” This distinction was highly entangled in the (sometimes-unforeseen) intersubjective dynamics between parents and teachers; yet criticism was precarious and, if set, it had to be wrapped up in appreciation and displaying trust in other aspects of the school.

As aforementioned, Gitte perceived Idle as a “very good father,” his attitude was in the eyes of Gitte trustworthy (pp. 106). Idle was a “co-player,” although Gitte did not perceive his home as a “stimulating home.” On the other hand, Altun, by performing less actively and not giving in to the teachers’ suggestions regarding the child-birthday, and by yarning during the conference (pp. 121), appeared to make him a “counter-player,” which also Lisa explicitly told me. In the eyes of Lisa, to be a “co-player,” the parents had to be “on track” or “on the ball” (*være på*). In addition to this, Altun also appeared as different or ‘foreign’ in the class, actualising a need for more integration.

Steffen praised Kadin, who he experienced as possessing the acknowledged academic skills and generally, to radiate a “stimulating home” by his engaged and extroverted attitude. Besides, Kadin’s (former) engagement in the school board was something Steffen praised; he was a “co-player.”

I have also placed the father Tom in the figure (pp. 133). The case with Tom was precarious to Steffen. Although Steffen praised Mathilde’s home, as he for example said: “One can feel she comes from a well-stimulated home with many conversations.” Another time, with admiration in his voice, he told me how the mother was a psychologist and the father a journalist. Thus, the fact that they had a long education reflected a “stimulating home.” However, Steffen was provoked by how Tom, during the parent-teacher conference,

had criticised the teaching in 7X, and, for example, had ‘threatened’ Steffen and Monica regarding sending a written complaint to the municipality due to the safety-issues (pp. 133). Steffen did not *trust* Tom, which made Tom a “counter-player.” Additionally, Steffen was concerned about Mathilde’s general well-being, due to an ongoing separation between her parents, as well as Tom’s unpredictable behaviour. One important add on to the figure, was how teachers were often evaluating from estimates and senses, since they did often not know much about the parents’ extended lifeworld. Concerning the case of Eryk and his wife Maria from the vignette of the previous chapter (pp. 161), Lisa perceived Josef’s home as “non-stimulating,” although I learned that both Eryk and Maria had obtained a Master’s degree in agronomy, and thus had a long academic education, which would normally count as constituting a “stimulating home.”

Thus, as “resource-strong” and “weak” were the legitimate categorisations for making differences between parents, such differentiations were repeatedly shifting between these two axes (see also Knoll and Jaeger 2019). This can help inform, how teachers position fathers in schools, as well as fathers different experiences of home-school cooperation.

# **Part III – Mistrusted Fatherhood**

## Introduction to Part III

Having analysed fathers' navigation of the terrain of school-home collaboration, this third and last part of the thesis shifts the focus towards the phenomenon of mistrust, which was a recurring social phenomenon arising from the ethnographic material. Thus, this part examines certain migrant fathers' experiences of being mistrusted by various child-professionals, along with how these fathers experienced becoming redundant, not acknowledged and/or perceived as a central resource in their children's upbringing. In many ways, the phenomenon of mistrust was entangled in Islamophobia and certain racialization-processes. Therefore, the next chapters concern mainly Muslim, migrant fathers from the so-called traditional migration countries.

The fathers in this part of the thesis were actors individually governing their own lives; they were complicit in their own fate, nevertheless, there were forces at play in the lives of these fathers, such as nationalism and neo-Orientalist assumptions, in addition to the fathers' own intentions of self-representation and ideals for fathering (see Jørgensen 2017). Thus, to better understand certain fathers' feelings of being mistrusted, I argue we have to look at the large-scale formations of rhetorical and categorical forces (Biehl and Locke 2017), which influence migrant fathers' becomings. Therefore, I, in Chapter Nine, examine the political rhetoric and certain historical circumstances concerning Muslim, migrant fathers, and how this effected these fathers' political subjectivity. In Chapter Ten, I will further analyse mistrust as part of intersubjective dynamics in meetings with child-professionals. Chapter Eleven will be concerned with how experiences of being mistrusted could turn into '*concerned fatherhood*,' and by extension hereof, analyse and discuss conceptions around emerging fatherhoods.

# Chapter 10: Contextual Horizons for Being a Muslim and Migrant Father in Contemporary Denmark

## The Public Debate on Muslim Migrants

Sharmarke: You get sad when the media is talking about you, right? Then you get sad. Then you can choose not to get sad. Well, the problem is also the media (...), but it is the politicians too. So the politicians, when they talk about the refugees... well, I came to Denmark in ninety-three [from Somalia], and from that very first day, they talked about us – the politician, right. So you get sad. Why can they not just talk about something else? Also, the Kurds and the Iranians... why do they only talk about the refugees? So I get really sad – I remember once they talked about, those who live in Denmark [the Somalis], why do we not just take them into a helicopter and... [Sharmarke's brother in law finishes the sentence] 'Throw them out.'"

Anne: So you think, it is more the Danish politics, which should be changed, and not so much the Danish school, is that true?

Sharmarke: Yes! Politics has to change...

Sharmarke (pp. 119) describes how he experienced the political climate in Denmark since he came to Denmark in 1993. The politician he is quoting here is Tom Benche, who in 1997 stated: "The Somalis have to be sent home now. If it happens with a parachute on the back, it would not bother me" (Berlingske Tidende 1997, 17.11, my translation). Tom Benche was at the time a member of the parliament for the extreme nationalist party "Fremskridtspartiet" and has later on explained the quote as a political provocation in response to the former interior minister Birte Weiss' lack of readiness to send Somali refugees back to Somalia. As this quote can be seen as rather extreme and exceptional, nevertheless, it became a way for Sharmarke to explain to me, how he, for a long time, had felt targeted and discriminated by political rhetoric in Denmark. For Sharmarke this rhetoric was especially harsh in Denmark,

and less extreme in other countries, such as for example in the UK where his brother-in-law lived. He still remembered the quote; it had become a landmark in his horizon of experiences, something he carries with him in his further life – something which entangled with other experiences and memories as part of his further becoming. Sharmarke was far from the only father who felt put down and haunted in the general public-debate. It was something which affected many of the Muslim migrant fathers of this study, and the objective of this chapter is to analyse this public debate, and how it affected the interlocutors' experiences and potentially also entangled with their encounters with child-professionals. The chapter also functions as setting the context for the analyses of the following chapters.

## The Political Subjectivity

The quote of Sharmarke can be illuminated by anthropologist Byron J. Good's concept of "political subjectivity" (Good 2012a, 26). Good is one of the phenomenology-inspired anthropologists especially interested in understanding subjectivity in interplay with political and historical processes. He argues that studies of subjectivity within phenomenology-inspired analysis can be much more than classical studies of 'self' or 'person,' by investigating how images and portraits in political discourses are interpreted and given meaning by people and become a part of their subjectivity – their political subjectivity.

In Good's own specific fieldwork in Java, Indonesia, one such historic process is the long and cruel history of violence through numerous wars (ibid, 24-25). Political forces and complex forms of censorship had at times tabooed and silenced this violent history. Self-censoring had continued and had left many of his interlocutors with silenced traumas, which was not possible to talk about in public (ibid, 31). Through mutual conversation and discovery with the interlocutors, Good finds how historic and political conditions influenced these interlocutors' being in the world. Thus, he argues for linking individual psychology to social, historical, and political processes. Such ethnography concerning political subjectivity must view subjectivity through a broader historical and political lens as an example of subjectivity in the light of post colonialism and the 'colonised other' (ibid, 28).

It [the political subjectivity] indicates the importance of linking national and global economic and political processes to the most intimate forms of everyday experience. It places the political at the heart of the psychological, and the psychological at the heart of the political (Good 2012a, 5).

The political subjectivity is not to be confused with mystification or false consciousness of, for example, the proletariat, like in the concept of ideology within the Marxist-tradition.

Following Geertz, which forms the background for Good's theory, such perspectives on ideology as simply internalised are, as a one-way explanation, full of inconsistency due to insoluble antinomies: between liberty and political order, stability and change, efficiency and humanity, precision and flexibility, and so forth. All these frictions emphasise the discontinuities between norms in different sectors of the society – the economy, the polity, the family, and so on (Geertz 1973, 204). Thus, the political subjectivity is not aligned with the forces of e.g. political ideologies, rather it is informed by interpretations of images and symbols, which people meet in their everyday life.

The meaning of these politicalised symbols (as the images of the refugee with a parachute) is not an accessory to or a reflection of 'something else' – the idea that the symbols are a layer on something, which is more real. Instead, the symbols are part of the constitution of 'the real,' as we experience and interpret it in a place, time and specific context (Krause-Jensen 2007, 248). Contrary to the Marxist understanding of ideology, Geertz suggest an understanding of such an ideology as a symbolic framework for political organization, which is not reducible to the narrow interest of elitist power, but should instead be seen in and against the context of the cultural system it is generated within (Geertz 1973). Along these lines, we can ask, "In which cultural system may a politician say such a thing, as what Tom Benche did? How such symbolic framework portraits 'the other' as with the Somali refugee? In addition, how is this symbolism placed in a broader symbolic framework?"

## **Representations of the 'Foreign, Muslim Masculinity'**

Inspired by Good, I argue for understanding the political subjectivity of my interlocutors in the light of certain political and historical traits. Here a central symbolic framework for the political organization (Geertz 1973, 164-65, 169) is the awakening of Islamophobia after the 2001 terrorist attack on The World Trade Centre in New York. Following Geertz, this does not mean that this is the only 'truth' presented, but that stories in the media and the political debate have emphasised the risk of terrorism, associating Muslim men and youth with risk and danger (Ismael and Rippin 2010; Saeed 2007; Inhorn 2012, 4; Mørck and Khawaja 2009, 28, 34). These representations constitute a symbolic framework, which has given rise to what has been termed a new era of Orientalism, or, neo-Orientalism (Inhorn 2012, 50-62, 299-301;

cf. Said 1986, Jørgensen 2017), borrowing from the historic symbolism of ‘the Orient’ (Said 1986). Similarly, anthropologist Mikkel Rytter and Marianne Holm Pedersen (2011) found how the term ‘integration’ after 2001 became framed in political discourses as related to, and necessary for, (national) security (ibid, see also Johansen 2013, 48; Padovan-Özdemir and Moldenhawer 2017). Thus, after 11 September 2001 the concept of ‘integration’ changed from addressing “adaptation of refugees and immigrants to Danish norms, traditions, and lifestyles” to “control and regulate the country’s Muslims and secure that they do not obstruct the state, its citizens, and its values” (Pedersen and Rytter 2011, 15, my translation). Similarly, educational psychologists Iram Khawaja and Line Lerche Mørk find that in their longitudinal study of so-called ethnic minority street workers, their interlocutors started to talk differently about Islam and their ‘foreignness’ in general after 11 September 2001, than they had done before (Mørck and Khawaja 2009). In line with these findings, this PhD study finds that such views on Muslim migrants and the increased political and media stigmatisation have affected the Muslim interlocutors’ political subjectivity. Representations of neo-Orientalist assumptions became lived realities in many of my interlocutors’ everyday lives through symbols such as words, acts or images (Geertz 1973, 249). Thus, headlines, political posters, TV-debates, etc. made Muslim interlocutors experience confrontation with negative images of Muslim migrants in their everyday activities (see also Gammeltoft 2014). These are related to the Danish public debate on integration, which is often based on stories about migrants from the so-called traditional refugee and immigration countries, who face difficulties settling down in Denmark (Pedersen and Rytter 2006). The focus on the ‘troubled immigrant or refugee’ has resulted in politicians, in general, declaring that integration has failed (Bondesen 2015; Schmidt 2016).

The following examples illustrate how such stigmatising debates become a part of the interlocutors’ life-world – all the way to the living room. Omar was a 47-year-old father who emigrated from Morocco and a member of the fathers’ group in Skovlunden. He explained to me how he was aware of which TV-debates his children watched – as he did not want his children to think Danish people were racists. He did not believe that Danish people were racist, he urged to add, but he thought some political debates would influence his children in thinking in such ways. Hence, Omar tried to prevent his children from gaining exposure to the symbolic framework of neo-Orientalism in order to avoid them from feeling unwanted – in other words, to avoid letting such discourses become a too large part of their political



subjectivity. Similarly, the father Kadin (pp. 179) explains the negative presentation of Elmekvarteret in the media.

I never experience anything [unpleasant here]. I think Elmekvarteret is a fantastic neighbourhood. It is extremely peaceful here. Absolutely. That is why it is such a shame [the negative representations in the media] since, in reality, nothing happens; you do not experience anything [violence, crime, etc.]. And the people you meet are totally normal people, there is nothing, but you make it a problem if you debate it, I mean the problem is actually in the centre of the debate and not in reality. [Kadin continued telling me about a TV debate about refugees, the Middle East, and Islam, he had watched] (...) I remember I followed this debate once, and then there was a politician, who said (...). ‘What is it we cannot talk about? (...) Why can we not talk about, uhmm, Islam *as* a problem, the Muslims *as* that problem they truly are? Why is it that we cannot talk about that?’ So, if I [Kadin himself] had been there, I would have confronted him [and asked the politician], ‘do you not think, that you have been talking long enough? Do you not think we have talked enough about this topic?’

Kadin experienced that politicians in debates, newspapers, TV, radio (in line with Sharmarke’s experiences) have problematised both Elmekvarteret as well as Muslim immigrants in general for a very long time. However, most problematic for him seemed to be how such negative portrayals were justified to continue, by the (impossible) argument that the real problems of Islam had not yet been revealed and discussed.

One way to illuminate these processes is with the concept of “the negative controlling image” a concept coined by Patricia H. Collins (2000, 13). In line with how Collins finds a certain problematised historical image of ‘the black man’ in America, I argue for similarities in the Danish context concerning a negative image of ‘the Muslim migrant man.’ Collins developed the concept of ‘negative controlling image’ in her research of American history, where she found elements used in the symbolic construction of the black woman and man in America. This consists of images with roots that go back to slavery, where the white elite created the negative controlling image of black enslaved men as the ‘buck,’ which needed to be tamed by the ‘civilised white man.’ This image depicted black men as intellectually inferior to whites and reinforced the political status of enslaved African men as chattel (Collins 2005, 100). As such, the negative controlling image can be seen as portraits or images, which represents

certain topics within a broader symbolic framework. Collins emphasises the autonomy and individuality of consciousness, although she does not minimise the centrality of relations of domination. Arguing that consciousness is created and not determined, she underlines the importance for feminists (black feminist thoughts) of bringing constant attention to both the social-cultural-political realm and the individual creativity of consciousness (see also Chodorow 1999, 73). “The same situation can look quite different depending on the consciousness one brings to interpret it (...) there is always a choice, and power to act, no matter how bleak the situation may appear to be” (Collins 2000, 309). As such, ‘controlling’ should not be understood as governing the people, but controlling a certain image in its historical, negative heritage. In similar ways, I argue for a negative controlling image of men with certain ethnicised and racialised characteristics, and how this image may become a part of the lifeworld of fathers with such characteristics. Intrinsically, I am interested in how such a negative controlling image in general rhetoric (as well as acts and portrayals) of Danish politics and media were taken in by the fathers and how they reacted to it in their everyday life. The following section works to exemplify the gendered aspects of such negative controlling images in Danish politics.

## A Negative Controlling Image of the Oppressing Patriarch

The underrepresentation of women with a so-called ‘non-western background’ on the Danish labour market has been a central topic in the integration-debate. The following quote is taken from the Socialist People’s Party (*SF*), which is the second most left (socialist) party represented in the Danish Parliament. On 14 April 2016, in relation to the annual meeting of the party, the leader Pia Olsen Dyhr announced to the national broadcasted TV-station TV2 that the party was ready to withdraw social benefits for immigrant women, if they did not get “out of the home” either to work or into education. The method of using financial sanctions in integration-policies was, at this time, new on the political left and criticised by some members of the parliament, to which Pia Olsen Dyhr replied, that it was done for the sake of feminism and equality of gender. She went on to explain:

Half of the women we have with another ethnic origin is not in work, and the problem is a bit that they are being kept at home. (...) If they are not in work, they have to get into the educational system, because it is where they learn about our democracy, equality of gender and that you are not the property of the man,

that you [as a woman] actually have your own rights. (...) We want to give [these] women rights, which they do not have today (...), who have difficulties with getting permission. That is the point. In the patriarchal system, in which they live (...), where the man keeps them at home. Therefore, we need this 'nutcracker' [the law regarding restrictions on benefits for immigrant home-wives] to get these women out into the society (...) We need to make the men understand, that it is unacceptable to use social control by keeping the women at home in the role of the housekeeper within the four walls of the house.

(Bolvinkel 2016, my translation).

In Dyhr's explanation, the main reason why around half of immigrant and refugee women are not represented on the Danish labour market is that their husbands force them to stay at home. In this rather common narrative of Danish politics, a portrait is made of a controlling, women-oppressing patriarch, exerting social control, who causes a vast societal problem. Dyhr legitimates the new law proposal with the (culturally celebrated) Danish values of gender equality and feminism (see Gullestad 1992, Jaffe-Walter 2016). I argue that these legitimatising arguments celebrate symbolic representations of 'Danishness,' where the 'other,' here the man with 'another ethnic background,' is the antithesis to these celebrated ideals of Danish self-understanding (Hoel 2016).

Looking at the underrepresentation of immigrant women on the Danish labour market, it is revealed that the unemployment rate is high for both genders. In 2015 the Danish Employers Association conducted research about so-called 'non-western immigrants' and their representation on the labour market. The research shows how 49 per cent of female immigrants and refugees with a so-called 'non-western background' were working, and the number was 59 per cent for men. For women with a Danish background, the percentage represented on the labour market was 74 per cent and 78 per cent for men (Dansk arbejdsgiverforening 2015, 20). The study finds that if we focus on the general structural-barriers for both men and women with the a non-western background to enter the Danish labour market, lack of network, Danish language skills and problems of converting education is mentioned as obstacles (Dansk arbejdsgiverforening 2015, see also Liversage 2016). Immigrant and refugees from non-western countries were also the type of citizen, which were hit the hardest by the Danish economic crises from 2008-2010, which fits the aforementioned

findings concerning some migrant men's precarious positions on the Danish labour market (pp. 151).

Looking at separate gender barriers, immigrant and refugee men seem to experience more difficulties in obtaining an education than women (Dansk Arbejdsgiverforening 2015, 53-55; see also Featherstone 2003, 245, Gilliam 2017, 2018). A report from The Danish Institute of Social Research (*SFI*) finds that 'ethnic minority men' to a greater extent than 'ethnic minority women' experience being discriminated against in the labour market, as well as men and women face different types of prejudice. Where women typically face prejudice because of wearing the Muslim headscarf, men are attributed to be aggressive, criminal and male chauvinistic (Dahl and Jakobsen 2005, 8). These specific barriers to men seem to be pushed in the background in the integration-debate concerning representation on the labour market, as the focus seems to be mostly on these men *as* the problem. As the gender difference between men and women with Danish background on the labour market is 3 per cent, it is 10 per cent among immigrant and refugees from so-called non-western countries. This leaves a difference of 7 percentage points. When this number is compared to the rhetoric about how 'men with another ethnic background' are keeping their wives at home, this explanation seems inadequate in relation to a general high unemployment rate for *both* genders as well as structural barriers present for both genders.

Similarly, anthropologist Katherine Pratt Ewing finds (2008) how men with Turkish-descent in Germany have experienced a stigmatisation of their Muslim masculinity, produced through the practice of governmentality, public debates and the German media, as a manifestation of a social fantasy that underlines a German national imaginary, resting on the foundation of the objection of a social other (*ibid*, 20). Equally, I argue that there is a strong marginalisation of the migrant, Muslim masculinity in the symbolic framework around underemployment of migrant groups, which works to construct the 'Danish man' as possessing the correct 'Danish values,' especially practicing the culturally celebrated ideal of gender equality. Sociologists Ann-Dorte Christensen and Birte Siim has described this dynamic as a "racist-ethnic-nationalistic bias that overshadows multiple and complex inequalities" (Christensen and Siim 2010, 12).

## Media

The tendencies of a negative controlling image of the Muslim migrant man is also found in Rikke Andreasen's (2007) study of how the Danish media portray so-called 'ethnic minorities' in Denmark. In her book *Der er et yndigt land*, (2007) Andreasen shows how the portraits of ethnic minorities in Denmark have a great influence on the Danish self-image and idea of Danish nationality. When ethnic minorities are portrayed in a certain way, the 'Danes' are concurrently portrayed as the opposite and correct ways to be a man and a woman.

Andreasen is specifically interested in how the Danish media portrays the gender and sexuality of ethnic minorities, which at the same time stands as a contrast to the correct Danish concept and ideology of gender-equality and sexual freedom. Andreasen finds that the Danish media often portray young ethnic minority men, or young Muslim men, as criminal and sexually aggressive, whereas the women generally are portrayed as oppressed by traditional Muslim gender roles such as exposure to violence and potentially forced marriages (Andreasen 2007, 237, see also Charsley and Liversage 2015).

## Absence in the Integration-Strategies

The portrait of the Muslim, migrant man as a potential risk is likewise found in the Danish governments' initiatives on integration-projects. Line Seidenfaden (2011) has examined the Danish Government's "Plan of Action:" "Work, participation and equal rights for everyone" (Regeringen 2005), and the Danish Government's "Experience Database," which covers 500 integration-projects that were launched from 2005 to 2011. The Plan of Action states that patriarchal family-roles are central in most so-called ethnic minority families and, therefore, ethnic minority men have to be educated about the Danish tradition of gender equality (Regeringen 2005, 7–10). The initiatives for women emphasise learning their rights in Danish society, whereas the initiatives for men focus on changing the men's attitude and opinions, mainly with regard to patriarchal gender roles (Seidenfaden 2011, 42). Seidenfaden sums up (ibid. 49) how, generally speaking, the focus is on problems *with* men (their masculinity) instead of problems *for* men (structural barriers). The Experience Database reflects the same tendency. Out of the 500 integration-projects, 105 were gender-specific. Sixty-six per cent targeted women, but only three per cent targeted men. A further two per cent targeted men *and* boys, and twenty-nine per cent targeted youth. Looking specifically at projects concerning parenting, most were directed at women, and the few for men were focused on sports

activities and crime prevention.<sup>40</sup> This points to the same tendency seen in the Plan of Action, where the father's role (and that of men in general) seems to be unnoticed by the Danish integration-projects, especially in the projects concerning young children, where women are seen as the central target group (ibid. 51). These tendencies are also visible regarding schooling and special integration-initiatives. Food-evenings, women's cafés, and other social activities have been launched (Balvig-Phillip and Hansen 2014); yet these activities might not offer an accessible and obvious role for men and fathers (Seidenfaden 2011). During my fieldwork in the social housing project in Elmhaven, I recorded a similar tendency. All three permanent employees were women and the greatest part of the launched project targeted women, mothers, children, and youth.

The masculinity, which the above plans and strategies ascribe to Muslim, migrant men, appears as a kind of marginalised masculinity (Connell 2012). The Plan of Action articulates Danish masculinity as superior and thus hegemonic, and as a masculinity that is not patriarchal (Connell 2012, 80; Seidenfaden 2011, 85). To integrate into Danish society, these immigrant men have to 'surrender' their culturally inculcated patriarchal masculinity and take part in the Danish equality of gender culture. 'The Muslim masculinity,' which in media and political rhetoric is repeatedly entangled with 'men with non-western background,' stands forward as being connected to a kind of inherent essentialised culture as a kind of behaviour-explaining patriarchal culture, which a certain man carries within him. Also, working to underline the neo-Orientalist assumptions, as the western man as civilised and the rest, the 'non-west,' as backwards. Non-western culture becomes inherited and essentialised in processes of 'othering,' and this certain type of man, with a certain kind of masculinity, has to be treated in a certain way, as likewise argued in Collins' study of the negative controlling image of the black man, who needed to be tamed. The integration-discourse above suggests a need for a breaking down these inherited cultural-behaviours in order for integration to happen. Such essentialised culture-behaviours, and hereto-related patriarchal and controlling masculinity, is often explained by ways of being a man in specific geographical areas, instead of understanding such men's actions by experiences and life-circumstances within the country they live.

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<sup>40</sup> It may be argued that by connecting and expecting migrant fathers to specifically engage in these crime-prevention-projects, their masculinity is somewhat expected to be authoritative and strict (see also pp. 252).

## ‘A Patriarchal Belt’?

The majority of so-called ‘non-western immigrants and refugees’ originates from North Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia, which have, as aforementioned, been termed, “the patriarchal belt” (Liversage 2016, 210). In these countries, Liversage argues, gender roles of men and women in the family are seen more as complementary rather than alike, with an emphasis on fathers as the breadwinners and holding a certain responsibility for the family, whereas mothers are responsible for the home and children (ibid.). These gender-structures are argued to embody a patriarchal society-structure.

In her book, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Abu-Lughod 2013), Abu-Lughod takes up general Western assumptions about gender roles in Arab, Muslim countries. She exemplifies how women and men’s lives in the Arab countries are extremely diverse, and points to how extreme and (certainly unjust) stories of violence against women have been used to set a certain picture of ‘The Arab world,’ especially after the terror attack in 2001. Abu-Lughod shows how political structures and forces often impact everyday life circumstances for women in this part of the world. These political systems are often national or international even though they might seem local or traditional in how they are influencing the lived lives of women on the local level. Accordingly, what is from time to time explained by ‘tradition’ or ‘culture,’ might be results or reactions to war, poverty, economic crises, political suppression and general instability. According to Abu-Lughod, value-loaded words in Western rhetoric such as ‘choice’ and ‘freedom’ can be used as instruments to exemplify submission of women in cultural contexts, which are much more diverse. As such, these concepts are blunt instruments to hide the dynamics and variations and qualities in local Arab worlds (Abu-Lughod 2013).

In her book, *The New Arab Man* (Inhorn 2012) Inhorn argues that the Western picture of the dominant masculinity in Middle Eastern countries are extremely essentialised and vilifying. She argues how contemporary and emerging masculinities in the Middle East can rarely be captured in such stereotypical pictures, even if elements of such a dominant masculinity caricature may, at times and in certain places, be true to the lives of some men (Inhorn 2012, 51). Inhorn finds that Middle Easterners themselves occasionally make reference to indigenous notions of ‘the Orient man,’ as the Arabic term “rujula” might be used to describe manhood or masculinity and used to describe masculine hegemonic attributes, including tribalism, getting many sons, and a dominant position over women. “However these notions of “rujula” are more and more criticised by Middle Eastern men as

‘backward’ and ‘old fashioned’ and traditional” (ibid, 55). During Inhorn’s study with Arab men living in the Middle East concerning infertility and fatherhood, her interlocutors took great pains to signal their modernity, education and ‘modern culture,’ condemning the past as oppressive to both men and women.<sup>41</sup> It is interesting, how Aitken (2009) finds the same tendency among white, middle-class American fathers, defining their own identity as fathers in opposition to the former patriarchy, in which their own fathers had practiced fatherhood. These findings points to the need for perceiving masculinity and fatherhood as emerging, and often defined in opposition to the previous generations and what is often perceived to be old-fashioned patriarchal-gender-structures.

The migrant fathers of this study had all experienced different types of gender roles in the country they were born in, and these experiences were constituted by many different factors of their families; e.g., their parents’ education, economic status, religious practices, local cultures and so forth. As such, the importance of the complex multidimensionality of the intersectionality-approach (racialised experiences, gender-dynamics, economic exploitation or prosperity, educational capacities, etc.) are equally important factors regarding the understanding of masculinity and fatherhood practices in the interlocutors’ country of origin. Correspondingly, this study points to a great diversity among Muslim migrant fathers, and a great diversity of, e.g. how to practice Islam and ideas about fatherhood and motherhood in the family. For example, the father Kadin (pp. 197), having grown up as a Muslim in Morocco, had an agnostic view on religion, much different from his parents. He found it problematic, how understandings of Islam were essentialised in Denmark, and how it was difficult to discuss Islam on a “neutral basis” – also in the school, where religion according to his experiences could be reinvented and misused in disputes between pupils (see also Gilliam 2015).

As the interlocutors with migrant background had diverse horizons of experience, there were also condensations in the life-situations they faced. One such condensation was, how Muslim migrant men with certain racialised characteristics, experienced being ascribed a negative controlling image. These migrant fathers were not necessarily Muslim (as was the case with Kadin); yet certain racialised characteristics would be perceived as characteristics of Muslims. Thus, the negative controlling image concerning especially Muslim men could

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<sup>41</sup> In relation to Abu-Lughod and Inhorn’s work on gender roles in the Arab world, it is important to keep in mind, how Arab countries only constitute some of the diverse backgrounds of migrants in Denmark.



interfere in intersubjective dynamics, without the person involved knowing the religion of the other person. Therefore, I occasionally place (Muslim) in parentheses.

The many different backgrounds, which constituted migrant fathers' diverse horizons of experience, often disappear in discourses about so-called 'men with another ethnic background' or 'non-western immigrants and refugees,' imposing a kind of common identity or culture within these categories (see also Inhorn 2012, 53-55). Within these categories, gendered-divisions of tasks between migrant parents may be perceived as old-fashioned, patriarchal and backward if framed around the Danish ideals of equality. Nonetheless, some of the "Danish academic type" fathers, as the father Jeppe termed it, also practiced gendered-divisions of tasks.

Above, I have argued that in some political rhetoric Muslim, migrant fathers' masculinity figures as a marginalised masculinity, yet such a notion of a marginalised masculinity falls short when trying to understand lived life. Instead of reducing men's stories into fixed categories, such as a marginalised- or working-class masculinity (pp. 25, 39), the lived reality of different forms of masculinities appear in the ethnographic material to be ever-changing social strategies endorsed through practice (Inhorn 2012, see also Reinicke 2006), as also the following analysis will reveal. Thus, the negative controlling image is not describing a particular type of man. It was part of a symbolic framework for political organization within the context of the cultural system. It was an image that existed in the world, and became a part of the lifeworld of such fathers in different ways (see also Gammeltoft 2014).

I suggest terming this specific negative controlling image concerning the (Muslim), migrant man and father as a "mistrusted masculinity" (Jørgensen 2017) relating to being a patriarch, unpredictable, aggressive, controlling the mother and the family in general. Additionally, as I will analyse further in the coming chapter, someone uninterested and unengaged in the schooling of one's child and general well-being, as well as potentially violent. The mistrusted masculinity was a social phenomenon, which the interlocutors had to cope with and navigate according to. Both large-scale forces as the political discourses as well as real life experiences (the small-scale forces) of being mistrusted and discredited as a father informed this social phenomenon of mistrusted masculinity. Thus, the negative controlling image also interfered in 'the meshwork' between child-professionals and fathers.

## Moving Between Scales

As analysed in Part II, some of the interlocutors expressed their frustration with how they felt they were becoming redundant in meetings with child-professionals. Such experiences could entangle with the negative controlling image of the (Muslim), migrant man, and result in experiences of being discredited or mistrusted by child-professionals. In the following quote, the father Waail from the Somali parent association, and father of four children, tells about such feelings. Here, the negative controlling image of a man who controls his wife, (concurrent with the quote of Pia Olsen Dyhr, where the ‘immigrant man’ was portrayed as keeping his wife at home), entangles with meetings with teachers.

If the father is coming for the parent-teacher conferences, if the father picks up the children from kindergarten, if the father all the time..., then they think that [Waail mimic a child-professional] ‘Oh well, it is him [the father] who decides it all. She [the mother] is not allowed to come to the kindergarten.’ This is such a family where the father has time for, uh... time for taking care of his duties, I mean, a part of the work [concerning child-rearing] and then the [child-professionals] says: ‘Well, it’s only him, who,’ I mean it is a bit like this (...) I think they [the child-professionals] think she [the mother] are not allowed to come. They believe he is controlling her. However, it is a problem, I mean, they just believe, how he [the man] decides over the women, uh..., and [the child-professionals] just say, ‘Okay we want to talk to’ I mean, I have experienced this ‘we want to talk with the mother, can we talk with her?’ It is a paradox, even if the father is active; he is being blamed for controlling the mother.

I believe Waail was somewhat exaggerating in order to make his point clear, an assumption supported by his interposed phrase “I mean, it’s a bit like this.” At other times in the interview, Waail told about good experiences of cooperation with teachers he appreciated. According to Purcell (2017), the moving between scales is not only a scholarly imperative, but also something that people do in their daily life. In the interview, Waail was recalling small-scale school-practices amid encounters with teachers as well as a dominant political rhetoric reflecting greater political and historical large-scale formations, which imposed a certain negative controlling image of a (Muslim) migrant father, which he believed affected the teachers’ perception of him, thus also himself. These different forces at play, on different scales, affected the fathers’ becoming, merging in non-straight contoured and messy ways.

Thus, stories of being mistrusted ‘grew bigger,’ concerning a larger political and public-imaginary thought to transcend the local, yet, at other times mistrust ‘grew smaller’ when referring to local small-scale home-school cooperation practices; “I mean, it’s a bit like this” (see Purcell 2017, 147).

By highlighting the complex spatiotemporal orientations of the interlocutors, I question the approach that imagines fatherly becoming as a straightforward trajectory. Furthermore, I attempt to refute political ideologies or categories of marginalised-masculinity that define or work to fully encompass the lived life of migrant fathers. Processes of becoming moves in both directions at once, referring back at the past and into the imagined future. In the landscape of the interlocutors, their becoming always eludes the present, causing the future and colouring the past. Thus, the interlocutors’ acts of alignment or opposition is not a linear one; they move back and forth on different sizes of scales, and their becoming as fathers is happening in-between. In this way, their actions were orientated towards wider scales of significance – which are themselves multiple, overlapping, and contested (ibid, 147). As this chapter has been concerned with the mistrusted masculinity on a larger scale, the objective of the following chapter is to illuminate processes of being mistrusted on the small-scale – in the intersubjective encounters.

## Concluding Remarks

This chapter revealed how various political discourses, which formed a negative controlling image, function to make the (Muslim) migrant man and fathers different or ‘foreign.’ Moreover, the chapter has discussed how this image became a component in the interlocutors’ lives and thus may have affected encounters with child-professionals. Jackson describes such process well, when he states that; “the refugee or immigrant thus finds familiarity of the voice of those who take it upon themselves, in the name of national pride to defend ‘their’ cultural space against refugees or immigrants, telling them to go home, or to be or act differently” (see Jackson 2006, 68-69). Similar voices, as those Jackson refers to, affected the interlocutors’ political subjectivity in different ways. Potentially working to make (Muslim) migrant fathers experience being objectified, fixed by categories or processes of ethnification, placed by the Other, ‘the indigenous’ (Jackson 2006, 68-69), working to obstruct feelings of belonging. In the next chapter, interlocutors speak about concrete happenings or

dormant intersubjective dynamics of child-professionals mistrust towards their ability as fathers.

## Chapter 11: Experienced Mistrust

I can tell this story: I am one of those parents who are very active – everyone knows me – my daughter went to preschool at Vestergaards School My daughter and I have a very good relationship, she tells me everything, and she would tell me many things before telling her mother. There is a special bond between us – that is just how it is. One day, she came home and said that there had been an incident in her class. [Tahir continues to clarify the context of the incident]. A girl in the class had a quite old father. He had been married before (...) He was not good for her. He may have lost power – I do not know anything about that actually ... and that is their problem ... anyway ... However, it happened that the mother wanted to leave him and she had to go underground. Well, it was their problem, really, but of course, the school knows about all this. Therefore, the schoolteacher – she wants to check with all the foreign children [if the same thing had happened to them – having been exposed to violence]. There were only three in the class. Then my daughter came home and said; ‘baba’ – she is quite mature for her age [he proudly says] – ‘my teacher has shown me some puppets, some puppets with different ages’ (...) ‘who looks like your mother and who looks like your dad’, the teacher had asked. ‘How many siblings do you have ... 1? OK!’ and so on. A full hour and the teacher had finished by trying to find out whether we have beaten her – or if *I* had beaten her – that is what they go for ... My daughter had told them: ‘My father never beats. My father gives me love, both my father and mother give love.’ They ask about who had beaten her, blah blah ... I could not sleep that night ... I also asked her who else they [the school] had asked, and it was her, her and him ... fine. It was all the children with foreign [background] ... yes!

Tahir was born in Pakistan and had lived in Denmark for twenty-five years. The fathers’ group, where I met Tahir, was located in Skovlunden, which was a politically defined “exposed social housing estate” in a suburb, straight South of Copenhagen, which had a relatively poor reputation, struggling with a public image as crime-ridden. Tahir explained that he had chosen ‘Vestergaards School’ for his daughter because he wanted a school with a

better reputation than the local public school, Skovlund School. Tahir thought the teacher's intervention had something to do with her lack of experience with "foreign families."

During my visits to the fathers' group, I observed the fathers' strong identification as fathers, and expressing great pain in their engagement in child-rearing, simultaneously with how some fathers struggled with the general perceptions of their 'foreign-masculinity' as not trustworthy and potentially aggressive, as exemplified by Tahir's story. While explaining, Tahir emphasised his close and effective relationship to his daughter: "My daughter and I have a very good relationship, she tells me everything, and she would tell me many things before telling her mother. There is a special bond between us – that is just how it is..." When emphasizing their warm and close relationship, Tahir also positions himself in opposition to the mother. He (as a father) was also able to have a strong relationship with his daughter, and even a stronger relationship than his wife had (see also Jørgensen 2017). Tahir's narrating (Frykmann and Gilje 2003) was positioned in a certain time and space – and presented to me as an 'outsider' of Skovlund. The narrating reflected his struggle for recognition as a trustworthy father and presented to me how fathers like him were important and virtuous for their children's child-rearing, nevertheless often misrecognised as such. It may be argued that Tahir and the other fathers reacted to the social phenomenon of a mistrusted masculinity.

### **Mistrust as a Way of 'Being-in-the-World'**

The mistrust Tahir experienced appear to make him suspicious himself. Anthropologists E. Valentine Daniel and John Chr. Knudsen present in *Mistrusting refugees* (1995) an understanding of trust as something, which corresponds to a certain way of being. By trust, they do not imply a largely conscious state of awareness, something akin to belief, but rather its opposite: something more akin to Heidegger's concept of "being-in-the-world" (ibid, 1). They argue that the continuous interferences and interventions with a refugee's way of being in countries of exile create mistrust among refugees and force them to see the world differently (ibid, 1). Similarly, the teacher's intervention above, and the general mistrust towards Tahir's 'foreign characteristics' became a part of his being-in-the-world. For Tahir, to be able to trust was not up to him alone; "the capacity to trust needs to be underwritten by the capacity to tame chance, especially the chance to be hurt. This capacity [to trust] is not an individual matter, but a gift that cultured society gives a person" (ibid, 2). To be met with mistrust towards one's masculinity and misrecognised as a caring father resulted in a re-

positioning, which, according to Daniel and Knudsen, by itself may create a loss of the ability to trust, through which the refugees previously have accessed the world; the many interventions and suspicion created and reproduced a reality of mutual mistrust (ibid, 1). Similarly, in Tahir's case, the teacher's intervention made Tahir frustrated and raised concerns, and the potentiality for encountering future mistrust resulted in him developing the dormant social alertness about being othered again; here, as the possibility that someone else would potentially mistrust or interfere in his way of fathering. It is possible that the episode changed Tahir's perception of the school more generally; as he experienced how the school did not/would not trust his ability to be a caring and loving father. Furthermore, Tahir's way to frame the narrative points to how he had *already* the suspicion that the investigation was linked to his 'foreignness,' since after the episode he looked into if this intervention was done for all pupils of what he termed "foreign families," showing that he had already read the incidence as the teacher's suspicion towards such 'foreignness.' Tahir also emphasised his distance from "the Danes," and the whole narrative somehow ended up with an 'us' and 'them' dichotomy, as Tahir also said: "That is what *they* go for." This episode supports Anders Linde-Laursen's argument (Linde-Laursen 1993) that we find the most detailed processes of cultural differentiation at the micro level of interactions, which may create the utmost sense of otherness (ibid; see also Johansen 2013, 110).

Studies have argued that the Danish welfare state is possible because of the high degree of trust among Danish citizens (see for example Bjørnskov 2016; Høyrup 2018). In Johansen's study of Palestinian refugees (Johansen 2013), Johansen noted that the staff at a local day-care centre found 'trusting the institutions' a fundamental and core Danish value. When one of the interlocutors of her study experienced that the staff in the day-care centre had forgotten her child after closing time, she reacted, quite extremely, by phoning the local newspaper. This affected an extensive conflict between the mother and the professionals at the day-care centre, where the staff explained to the mother that she had to learn to *trust* institutions as the general Danes do. Johansen here finds that micro-level interactions can work to define what Danes 'do and say,' which will potentially marginalise parents with a migrant background, as their claims against an institution may be disregarded because these claims are turned back to the parent as being 'not being Danish enough' – in this case 'not trusting enough' (ibid, 113). Supported by Johansen's study, it may be argued that Tahir was placed in a trust paradox too. He had to be 'Danish' and trust the school, but at the same time, his experience was that the school did not trust him (see also Jørgensen 2017). Tahir told his story with great frustration, explaining how he had gone to see the teacher, and in an

upset tone had declared; “I want to see your tools! Tools? Yes, the puppets.” The teacher had shown him the puppets and Tahir had thrown them into the garbage can. “If you ever do voodoo again with my children, then I will promise you that you will end up in Africa, and you will never teach in Denmark – or any other country – again.”

Such experiences of exclusion and misrecognition in a ‘trusting-the-state culture’ made Tahir veer towards more extreme means of being visible and included in the ‘Danish community’ (like the mother phoning the newspaper). I experienced Tahir’s excessive reaction as a way of expressing his frustration with wanting to become ‘a normal father’ in a ‘trusting-the-state culture’ where he felt he was *not* trusted as an affective and caregiving father; noticeable through his recurring emphasis on his close emotional relationship, and special bond to his daughter (see also Jørgensen 2017). Although we might argue that Tahir’s severe reaction was due to this frustration, it, in the eyes of the teacher, might prove a ‘not very Danish’ way to act, thus working to emphasise that he *was* different, or ‘foreign.’

The mistrust Tahir experienced may be seen as an example of him being ascribed a mistrusted masculinity, which potentially influenced his general ‘being-in-the-world’ (ibid.). This mistrusted masculinity appeared to be linked to certain racialised and ethnicised characteristics; a Muslim name, a not fluent Danish language ability, which was found among immigrant and refugee fathers from other Middle Eastern, South Asian, North African, or other Muslim African countries, who shared some of the same characteristics as Tahir. As a social phenomenon, which must be understood in light of the previously mentioned neo-Orientalist assumptions, this reinforced mistrust towards ‘the Muslim man.’

As I did not myself observe this episode, I can only relate to Tahir’s reconstruction. Tahir raised his voice when he told about the episode, and his affection, when telling the story, must be understood in the light of the self-representation he wished to present to us, me, and the other father, Omar, who also participated in the interview. The ending of the story also became a narrating about, how he was not someone silently accepting such degrading behaviour, which can be seen as a sign of claiming to the world his right to claim and define his own line of becoming; what kind of father *he was*.

## You Are Not Going to Do That Thing to My Father!

I also observed reactions to the phenomenon of mistrusted masculinity among pupils in 7X. As when Malak reacted to, how I seemed to believe that her father did not even know where



she went to school (pp. 94), with the comment; “You are not going to do that thing to my father! Of course, he knows where I go to school and he has given me a lot of things – like the will to learn and to have an opinion!” I felt that Malak was testing me to see whether I shared the negative prejudices about her father, which she might have experienced other adults to have. In other words, if I subscribed to the negative controlling image of men like her father, and thus believed that her father did not even know where she went to school. This empirical example points to how the awareness of the implicit, negative controlling image did not only exist among migrant fathers, but also their children. As such, the mistrust towards a certain kind of father not only affected the fathers, but also their childrens’ way of being-in-the-world (Jørgensen 2017).

The example also points to another dimension of the social phenomenon of mistrusted masculinity. It not only relates to fathers as a controlling and aggressive, patriarchal father, it also includes assumptions about these fathers as indifferent, ignorant and not caring. This includes assumptions about how ‘such a type of patriarchal man’ was doing what he wanted, mostly thinking of his own well-being, and not engaging in his children's lives and schooling, since he largely left the upbringing to the mother.

As aforementioned, I found the pupils in 7X to be very aware of, and opposed to, processes of ‘ethnification’ or ‘othering.’ When I asked Malak for the interview, I did not indicate that it was because her father had an origin in Lebanon, or that he was a ‘bilingual father.’ In spite of that, the negative controlling image seemed to influence Malak’s perceptions of my intentions. The affective reactions and opposition found in the cases above appeared as a means to try to change the social becoming, to push the lines of becoming in new directions, forming new paths for being a Muslim, migrant father. A path without mistrust.

Pirjo Lahdenperä (1997) finds in her study of immigrant pupils in Swedish schools a similar mistrust towards immigrant fathers’ abilities as caring fathers. These fathers were the group of parents, whose behaviour the teachers considered to deviate the most from the accepted and appreciated norms of the school. Equally, the fathers with an immigrant background were the group of parents, who most often faced antipathy, discrimination, and prejudice (ibid.). Lahdenperä observed how the mothers would more easily evoke the teacher’s sympathy, although she also experienced how they, from time to time, were described as problematic (ibid, see also Bouakaz and Persson 2007).

## Community of Experience

The fathers' groups, as the one Tahir and Omar joined, were spaces, where such experiences of being mistrusted could be shared and discussed. Here fathers with migrant backgrounds experienced belonging to a "community of experience" (Vigh 2004, 121). Anthropologist Henrik Vigh (2003, 2004) coins this concept in his study of youth soldiering in Guinea-Bissau. A community of experience is a community, where the actors share similar social positions and horizons due to a shared process of becoming (Vigh 2004, 121). As such, in a community of experience, the actors share specific trials, practice perspectives and positions within a specific terrain, and thus share specific reference-points (Vigh 2003, 18). As also Vigh points to, the concept runs into some limitations, which is important to bear in mind, when the concept is used analytically (Vigh 2004, 133); actors never share the same experiences and positions. The shared experiences will always differ, as they lean onto different individual horizons of experience. Yet, the concept is useful as it opens up for seeing how certain communities, such as the fathers' groups, may depend on and gain strength in, certain shared experiences.

As such, the fathers' groups, as a community of experience, provided a space for migrant fathers to identify condensations of experiences related to being a migrant father, and thus a room where stories of being mistrusted could be articulated, discussed and supported. When other (Muslim) migrant fathers recognised other fathers' senses and suspicions, when certain fathers told about them, they were given a common language. Fathers would share the same positions of feeling mistrusted, and when verbalised, they resonated with other fathers' similar experiences or uncanny suspicions and made them more 'real.' This, I believe, was one of the reasons why experiences of the social phenomenon of mistrusted masculinity was more outspoken in the fathers' groups. Individual experiences of oneself being (potentially) mistrusted would often be uncanny feelings or suspicions, like the teacher not looking towards the father, asking if the mother would show up too etc. (pp. 206), instead of a more concrete act of discrimination, as the one Tahir had experienced (pp. 209).

## *Uncanny Suspicions*

If we return to the ethnographic data from Rosendal School, we might get a better idea of how such uncanny suspicions appeared, and, importantly, how they could be difficult for fathers to grasp or detect. Here, the mistrust towards a certain type of father had a character of being concealed, whispered or appeared as an implicit social imagination, and therefore

not something that seemed dominant, which seemed to relate to the general tabooing of 'the foreign.' Nevertheless, I recorded some everyday-dynamics reflecting a social imaginary of a certain mistrusted masculinity.

One such case was when Gitte told me about how she had been almost shocked, when Asmae's father had suddenly shown up at school, "Wow, suddenly Asmae's father had been there, he simply stood there, and I was not prepared!" Following, the intern, in a joking tone, asked, if he had been the stereotypical (immigrant) man with open shirt and gold-chains, something which appeared to be related to his 'Arab masculinity' and as such 'exposing' a stereotypical image of such a man. Gitte looked at me, saying "no, no." As if the comment from the intern had revealed a negative controlling image which in the context of the school was tabooed. Alternatively, when Tony, who was a black pupil, threatened the new substitute teacher by saying, "just wait, my family will come after you!" Where to Astrid, when discussing the episode in the teacher's lounge, said; "...ha ha, but well it is just Tony, his little brother, and Mom..." and by this, implying there was 'no big father,' which would make the threat an actual threat.

Another incidence, which reflects the same social phenomenon of a taboo surrounding a certain mistrusted masculinity, was told by the integration-consultant, Shamia. A teacher had called Shamia in, due to the challenging cooperation with a Muslim migrant father who had become too uncooperative. The teachers had talked about this father as being a type of Muslim fundamentalist, Shamia said. The negative image of this father was strengthened by a certain episode; at a meeting with the teacher, the father had said, "shut up" to his wife. At least, this was what the interpreter had translated since the specific teacher did not speak Arabic. Afterwards, the interpreter had described the father as behaving controlling and aggressive. Shamia, who spoke Arabic herself, had then called the father. According to her, they had had a positive dialog, and she afterwards met with the parents. She had only met a father, who wanted to cooperate, she said. Contrary to being a controlling fundamentalist, the father appeared rather fragile, Shamia told me. She got the feeling he was slightly depressed. She thought the interpreter must have misunderstood the father, or, she did not get how this negative picture had come about. Nevertheless, it seemed this image had been enlarged amongst the teachers involved. It may be argued that this case reflects how a father with Arab background, fell into, or was ascribed the social imaginary of a mistrusted masculinity. The case also reveals another important point; the great influence of the

interpreters, although they sometimes did not speak the same dialect of e.g. Arabic, as the certain migrant parent, something I will return to shortly (pp. 232).

Another tacit indicator of the mistrusted masculinity was when Bente at the class-conference spoke about a problematic family with Pakistani background, which did not want to “open up” towards the school. Hereto the present social worker described the father as, “Yes, he is one of those men, who cannot accept that women decides.” The other child-professionals present nodded understandingly and placed no further questions, as if they recognised this ‘type of man.’ They seemed to know what the social worker meant. I argue they shared the social imaginary of the mistrusted masculinity. The last example is when Steffen reflected on why some years earlier, it had mostly been fathers with what he termed “another ethnic background,” who had attended the school-meetings (contrary to 7X). I asked him why he thought this was the case. He thought for a while, then suggested that maybe these fathers were best at Danish and then added; “But well, if the wives never get out [of the home], how could they then learn Danish?”

The cases above point towards a social imaginary of a certain type of father who is uncooperative, potentially someone to fear, a fundamentalist, and not encouraging his wife to get out of the home. I argue these aspects are part of the social phenomenon of the mistrusted masculinity. However, these aspects of mistrust were not revealed or shown to the fathers involved, in the same forthright ways as in Tahir’s example. Sometimes aspects of this mistrusted masculinity appeared, but just after it was ushered away since it revealed a kind of taboo among teachers to express this outright.

Thus, it could be difficult for fathers to prove such mistrust, confirming the previous point; mistrust may be uncanny feelings of suspicion, rather than outspoken acts.

### **I Am a Good Man – I Am a Gardener!**

During the meetings in the father's group, I several times experienced how fathers wanted to challenge or change my view (or more precise, their preunderstanding of my view) on the neighbourhood and/or, as mentioned above, on them as (Muslim) migrant fathers. For example, if I had been worried about entering the social housing estate, due to, for example, negative representations of politically defined ghettos (Regeringen 2018, see also Johansen 2013). I sometimes felt I was already, from the beginning, positioned as someone potentially

cautious or suspicious. These dynamics were part of the aforementioned social alertness; fathers were at the forefront of upholding how they were *also* caring fathers and used their narratives to ensure me about the homely aspects of the area, in order to disentangle their area from negative stereotypes. This was especially the case in the fathers' group of Skovlunden. Here the fathers also shared a community of experience regarding living in a social housing estate with a poor reputation, which may work to intensify experienced mistrust. In the following example, the father Omar reflects on mistrust, and, furthermore, how it may intensify when living in a housing estate like Skovlunden.

As the fathers in Skovlunden fathers' group became better acquainted with me, it turned out that not all the fathers present were actually living in Skovlunden. Some, including Omar, were fiery souls who came in as some kind of volunteers, helping fathers with some knowledge and energy to help and guide other, more marginalised, fathers in the area. Omar told me that he sometimes felt tired after a long day of work, but he still went to the fathers' group, as he thought he would encourage other fathers to participate, and talk and discuss and help each other; work to strengthen the network, which some of the migrant fathers needed, he said.

Omar had worked as a gardener for eighteen years. He had five children and told me with pride that they all had, or were studying to get, a good education. He was very proud to say how his eldest daughter was a midwife, which in Denmark is one of the most difficult professions to enter since you must have one of the highest-grade averages. However, Omar's daughter had faced difficulties in finding a permanent position, which worried him. He was worried that negative prejudices played in, conceivably because she wore a hijab, which reflected a persistent worry for him that his children would feel excluded from the Danish community and lose self-esteem (see also Jørgensen, forthcoming). In my interview with Omar, the theme of mistrust came up when he told me about his meeting with a pedagogue at his one-and-a-half-year-old daughter's nursery institution:

My daughter, when she started in the nursery, I said to the pedagogues that her Danish is not so good (...) One day she bit one of the other children and she did it again, and then eventually, the educator from the nursery called us [Omar and his wife] in for a meeting. Soo... the educator thought, 'There must be violence in that home... why does she bite the other children? There must be something wrong with that home!' See how they are thinking about us!

Omar continued to explain to me that there could be many different reasons, why a child bites, such as pain when teeth are coming in. He continued:

I have told them that I am not a sick person, I am a good man, I am a gardener!  
I think that if the pedagogues are stressed out, and they [the other children] just take her toys away from her, and she does not know the language, she cannot speak the language...

For Omar, the biting was his daughter's way of communicating, and in his view, the pedagogues did not do enough to help her with her language problems: "They have to get more education, to be more open toward other cultures. Because it is just so important for us, I mean, us in Denmark." After some time, Omar's daughter stopped biting the other children. Omar thought it was because the other children stopped taking her toys away from her. For Omar this was his proof that he was a good father after all; the biting was not because of him. Yet he felt that the pedagogues were still keeping an eye on him. "They thought I was violent," he repeated to me.

I was a bit unsure of how verbally direct the pedagogues had accused Omar of being violent or whether he had felt accused, due to some language difficulties. Following Frykman and Gilje (2003), this is not a crucial point, since the story itself narrates how Omar explained to me the mistrust he perceived toward his Muslim- and 'foreign' masculinity. It is the current narrating, rather than the concrete narrative, which is central. Not how the story *is*, but how it is *used* in a practical sense; or, in other words how the narrative creates meaning and coherence in a specific context (ibid, 40). Accordingly, Omar communicates his experience of how it is to feel mistrusted. As he now and then referred to "us immigrants," I got the impression he was somehow also speaking for the other fathers in the fathers' group, or even generally Muslim, migrant fathers living in Denmark (see Jørgensen, forthcoming).

Omar's story is an example of how mistrust toward Omar's Muslim, migrant masculinity became a central line of experience in Omar's life. The crucial experience, in the central coming-communities (Aitken 2009) such as the child-institutions, affected his social becoming as an institution-father and thus the ensuing encounters with child-professionals. Whether or not the pedagogue actually had directly expressed an expectation that Omar was beating his daughter, the aforementioned negative controlling image of Muslim, migrant fathers' masculinity as patriarchal, aggressive, oppressive and potentially violent was in operation here (Jørgensen, forthcoming).

What made the situation even more complicated, Omar continued, was how teenagers in Skovlunden could become involved in reproducing a negative image of the Muslim, migrant father. If the police caught a teenager for a small crime and the teenager changed the focus and blamed the parents, then the police or social authority would most likely listen to the teenager. “They don’t even have to prove anything,” Omar said. To clarify his point, he continued: “... if the police come, the teenager will say ‘my dad hits me’ – they are actually threatening their fathers (...), and from then on, the fathers cannot do anything anymore.” According to Omar, the specific father now knew that there was a case on him (he was under observation), and from then on he had to let his son do whatever he wanted, in the worst case spending time on the streets until late at night with the potential risk of getting into criminal activities (*ibid.*). Families in Skovlunden knew of cases of intervention in families (in the worst case, forced removal of a child), and the rumours could run fast among families in the neighbourhood, as Omar explained – “It is just like a small village.” The fact was that some migrant families in Skovlunden did not always understand the motivation behind the interventions for the social services, which was mainly because of limited resources in education, lack of knowledge concerning the Danish social system, Danish-language skills etc., and they became anxious that this kind of intervention might happen to them (see also Johansen 2013). Following Omar, this fear of state-intervention in the family could lead to a more *laissez-faire* upbringing than the fathers living in Skovlunden in fact wanted (see also Jørgensen, forthcoming).

## Corporal Punishment

As we have seen, a great part of the mistrust towards the migrant fathers’ abilities to be a caregiving father was entangled with suspicion of corporal punishment, which therefore will be addressed in the following section. Corporal punishment is legal in most of the so-called traditional immigration countries (UNICEF 2014). Among families living in these countries, it can sometimes be considered an acceptable practice in the child-rearing (see also Jørgensen, forthcoming). The father Alim was born in Lebanon, as a stateless Palestinian and moved to Denmark as a child together with his family. As an adult, he became the leader of a youth club in an area with many migrant families. Here, he especially had worked on building up a good relationship with and including, what he termed “the foreign fathers.” To Alim’s knowledge, corporal punishment had been used in childrearing among newly arrived

immigrant or refugee families, but it was no longer a common practice in the child-rearing of these families, because the parents had integrated Danish norms.

Omar hinted, without saying it directly, that physical punishment might occur in some homes in Skovlunden, but he emphasised that this was “with love.” According to Omar, being clear about what is right and what is wrong is a much more important part of caring for your child and your child’s future than taking a *laissez-faire* approach to childrearing. The *laissez-faire* approach was particularly problematic in Skovlunden due to the circumstances in the neighbourhood, where the dangers of teenage boys getting into selling drug and the like lay just outside the front door, Omar explained. He added that this was only a few of the youth in the area, nevertheless they constituted a risk (see also Jørgensen, forthcoming).

To my experience, Omar here attempted to explain that in some families, giving a smack was seen as part of being clear in one’s child-rearing, especially needed in social housing estates where more young people ended in criminal activities, compared to most other neighbourhoods. In this way, some parents, for example, did not perceive a slap as violence, but as being part of a clear upbringing, to clarify when something was particularly wrong. More fathers, who lived in comparable neighbourhoods, likewise expressed such worries (see also Beckman et al. 2015, 28). It was, therefore, important to be very clear about what was right and wrong in order to help one’s teenage son stay on the right track. It was rarely parents’ first choice to live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods with a higher crime rate than average. Nonetheless, some families were not able to move because they were on special rent allowance (with the state supporting their rent) and other types of housing would be too expensive (ibid. 14).

Today, in the general public discourse in Denmark, the use of corporal punishment is not tolerated. However, 21 years ago it was still perceived as a legal part of the upbringing in some Danish homes. In 1967, corporal punishment was abolished as a legal tool for teachers in the public schools. In 1985, a provision in the Danish Public Administration Act was introduced, which read: “Parents are obliged to protect the child against physical and mental violence and other abusive treatment” (Folketinget 1997, my translation). This wording was later perceived as ambiguous due to doubts as to whether the obligation to protect the child also meant that the parent could not use corporal punishment. Therefore, in 1997, the Danish parliament adopted, after a longstanding political debate, the need to clarify the wording, and in this way unequivocally abolished the last remnant of the right of corporal punishment. The



wording above was changed to: “The child has the right to care and security. It must be treated with respect for its person and must not be subjected to corporal punishment or other abusive treatment” (ibid, my translation). After this abolition, violence against children is punishable under the Penal Code, to the same extent, as violence against others.

Yet, a 2011 survey showed that seventeen per cent of children in Denmark have experienced corporal punishment (Oldrup, H., Korzen, and Christoffersen 2011). This relatively high number came as a surprise to many. A later survey from 2017 which looked specifically at the child-rearing of ‘ethnic Danish youth’ compared with ‘ethnic-minority youth,’ concluded that while five and six per cent (girls vs. boys) of Danish eighteen-year-olds surveyed answered that they had experienced corporal punishment from their parents, the number for ‘ethnic-minority youth’ was eight and nine per cent (Liversage and Christensen 2017, 77). The three per cent gap among ‘ethnic-minority youth’ is in the survey (*SFI rapport*) explained by a lower socio-economic position in society and the so-called cultural heritage from countries where corporal punishment might be considered a conventional part of child-rearing (ibid.).<sup>42</sup>

Overall, the issue of corporal punishment is blurred and complex, but it may be argued that the generally high mistrust of the Muslim migrant man’s masculinity is not proportional to how the surveys only show a marginally higher incidence of three per cent. Another context to this issue is how, in Omar’s stories, the accusations of corporal punishment eventually seemed to escalate into “... they think I’m violent.” It seemed that owing to the taboo on corporal punishment and the underlying mistrust, the accusations and the experience of accusations had grown out of proportion; into Omar experiencing being accused for being a, essentially, *violent* man and father (see Jørgensen, forthcoming).

Omar’s story also highlights another essential point: his daughter’s negative behaviour in the nursery was explained by problems *within* his family. In her study of so-called ethnic-minority pupils in a Danish public school (Gilliam 2017), Gilliam found how a class teacher often linked the inappropriate behaviour of ethnic-minority pupils in the school context, with her ideas about these pupils’ culture at home. For example, the teacher would declare that the unsatisfactory behaviour of “the wild bilingual boys” was because the boys’ parents were

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<sup>42</sup> The two surveys define corporal punishment slightly differently, which explains the differences in frequency.

unable to restrict their behaviour or a lack of positive attention at home, or that their parents were hitting them (ibid, see also Gilliam 2018, 92-96). Such explanations appeared, even though the teachers knew very little about the “the wild bilingual boys” homes. Likewise, according to Omar, the pedagogues explained the problematic behaviour of his daughter, with the presumed immoral conditions in the home. Such perspective on the ‘bilingual family’ as problematic contrasts with how fathers like Omar perceived the family unit as the most important social sphere, and the fathers’ strong identification as a father in the father’s groups (see e.g. Nefissa 2015).

### Coercive Concerns and Ideals on ‘Seizing Freedom’

According to Omar, the teenagers in his narrative had learned from pedagogues and schoolteachers that they could obstruct their parent’s decisions and rules. If there was any problem or disagreement, the teenagers knew they would get the support of teachers, social workers or other welfare workers, who would say, as Omar exemplified: “Don’t worry. We will help you; it is not your dad who decides at home [read: we do].” Rannveig Haga (2016) finds similar reports among Muslim, Somali mothers in Sweden. In Haga’s study, the Somali mothers explained how they felt that teachers or pedagogues did not think they, as parents, knew of their children’s best interest, which was that they should be “free” (ibid, 40). In the Swedish context, as in Denmark, the concept of freedom is closely related to secularism and individualism (see also Bach 2017; Kryger 2016) and Haga finds that, since the teacher or pedagogues perceived the Muslim child-rearing as traditional, authoritative and not democratic, these Somali mothers felt they were not seen as a resource in the childrearing. Haga concludes that these mothers wanted their children to be reflective and independent thinkers for themselves, but at the same time they fought their own and their children’s disempowerment (Haga 2016, 52).

I encountered similar tendencies among teachers at Rosendal School, although the teachers were different and they did not directly reveal to me how *the* Muslim upbringing was controlling or authoritative. Yet, similar assumptions, as those mentioned above, appeared in the shape of some teachers’ concerns, which played out in different ways.

The teacher Steffen was firm in telling me, how he did not care about, which religion his pupils had; it was a personal matter, he underlined multiple times, and something

he practiced in his professional life. Additionally, Steffen wished for his pupils to form their own individual identities, know their rights, and he encouraged the pupils to take their individual political standpoints regarding various issues. During the prom-night,<sup>43</sup> Steffen encouraged some of the more quiet girls (some with migrant parents and some with Danish background parents, and a few wearing hijab) what he in a joking tone called “the knitting club” to get on the dance floor. Hinting if they, indirectly ‘the geeky girls,’ were not going to look for a boyfriend. Later that evening, Steffen told me in a concerned tone of voice how “the Muslim upbringing” was restricting or limiting the acceptable amount of freedom, as children grew older, venturing into teenage life, referring to the “the funnel-model”<sup>44</sup> (*tragt-modellen*). The funnel-model is a rather old educational-model, which illustrates, by the narrow top, how freedom becomes limited within “the Muslim upbringing.” This dynamic is shown as opposite in Danish families, where freedom increases (Mikkelsen and Üzeyir 2002, see also Gilliam 2012, 166). It was as if the prom-night reflected the teenage liminal phase, which the grade 7 pupils were about to enter, which made Steffen reveal his concerns about, how some of the Muslim pupils might not be allowed to live out this youth-phase. Following this, Steffen added how he thought it was great that the girls in 7X were so much “on the ball” (*så meget på*), and added “also the ones with headscarf.” I argue, that the absence present in the sentence was, how one did not expect that the so-called “headscarf girls” (*tørklædepigerne*) would be so loud and outspoken, as they were; the headscarf was perceived as a symbol of submission (see also Jaffe-Walter 2016).

The biggest friend-group of girls in 7X was mixed of girls wearing hijab and without, some were Muslims, others were not, and some had parents with Danish backgrounds and others had migrant parents. However, the loudest were Malak and Ubah, both identifying themselves as Muslims and Ubah wearing hijab. Although Steffen was pleased that the girls were so much “on the ball” (*på*) he nevertheless had a suspicion it could be otherwise. The teacher Astrid, during the above-mentioned prom-night, explained to me how many of the Muslim pupils was not allowed to have a boy- or girlfriends, and how she had experienced pupils of the Grade 9 classes to hide their relationship – something she was ready to support, if needed.

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<sup>43</sup> A school evening party for the three oldest class-levels (*udskoling*).

<sup>44</sup> See appendix 1

Anthropologist John Gulløv studies school professionals' concerns, and more generally how teachers navigate in the numerous and complex tasks of being a teacher. He argues that, depending on the local context, teachers, in correspondence with their colleagues, form "judgment approaches" (*dømmekrafttilgange*) and hereto related "scripts" for conceivable actions (Gulløv 2015, 267-68). These scripts functioned as both orientations for detecting problems, and ways to solve these problems, which became typical ways to orientate and prioritise between different considerations. As such, teachers have a repertoire of scripts – to be used when facing issues, to which they had to act. In this process, difference between pupils and parents was converted to a kind of commonness, which overlooked the uniqueness of single situations and persons, as a need to narrow down complexity (ibid, 205). One of the existing scripts for interpreting Muslim girls' quietness, or some pupils hiding their relationships, was the script of these pupils experiencing a controlling or quite authoritative child-rearing.

Reva Jaffe-Walters (2016) sees a similar tendency, or script, in operation in her fieldwork in a Danish public school, where teachers' concerns stem from a wish to liberate the Muslim girls (ibid, 84). Thus, the teachers were evaluating various acts and opinions as expressions of the Muslim girls' limited freedom to choose themselves. Jaffe-Walters gives examples for how teachers try to 'push' these girls to seize more freedom, what she terms a "coercive concern" (ibid, 6-7, 103). This coerciveness was from time to time to found in the aforementioned imperious tone of voice. One example was the parent-teacher conference of Naima (pp. 3, 172). During this conference, Steffen problematised how he found Naima to be too quiet, apathetic and not enough "on the ball" (*på*). With an accumulative imperious tone of voice, Steffen seemed to encourage Naima to 'break through' and 'seize freedom.' This was reinforced by Steffen's best wish for Naima to liberate herself from a too stagnant (although cosy and safe) home – to be more outgoing and 'on.' To me, this seemed to be a mix of his socialistic class-based approach as well as his idea of 'appropriate youth.' Thus, for Naima to revolt against the economic exploitation of her parents' labour, and encourage her to climb the social-ladder and obtain a middle-class life, in combination of encouraging her to free herself from, what Steffen perceived as a traditional, Muslim child-rearing with traditional gender roles, which was assumed to hold her back from taking her own idiosyncratic choices. Naima afterwards uttered great frustration with me; she had sensed Steffen's rather firm tone of voice, yet did not quite understand all this fuss about her personal traits (as for example walking too slow), and how all this appeared as more important than her academic progress. I argue that the imperious tone of voice implied how 'to liberate herself' became a coercion.

### *Normativity and the Appropriate Youth*

The cases above reflect how freedom to choose and individuality reflected a pattern of meaning of appropriate youth among teachers at Rosendal School. In the article, *Youngsters' Ambiguous Struggle to Conquer Freedom* (Kryger 2016, my translation), Kryger argues that, for youth in Denmark, it is not only an opportunity, but also an *expectation* to find one's own lifestyle. Youth should liberate oneself through their youth-years, where alcohol and having a boy- or girlfriend is seen as part of such appropriate freedom. Kryger also points to how Muslim youth might face others' suspicion, if they do not drink alcohol as part of their youth life; "are they then 'unfree'?" (ibid, 59). These mechanisms made freedom about sharing the freedom-values of the majority of youth, and thus it in some ways became coercion (Jaffe-Walter makes the same argument 2016).

As I interviewed the father Abir (pp. 150), he told me with despair how youth, not yet even teenagers, had come to his kiosk to buy alcohol and cigarettes. Even though he refused to sell such items to minors, he knew they would get it somehow, if not in the next kiosk, then the following. It struck me how some of these aforementioned constraining jobs exposed or revealed some of the thinkable down-sides of the youth freedom; like being a taxi-driver during night-shifts bringing drunk youth from bar to bar, something which was much different from the youth some of the migrant fathers themselves had experienced. As also Kryger points to, there is a subtle balance between how to live out the "youth liberation" (Kryger 2016, 51-52). It demands personal identity work and self-control to administrate the Danish alcohol culture (ibid. 58-59). In our conversations, I sensed some of the migrant fathers at times were obstructed by the Danish drinking culture (for further discussion of this drinking culture see Kryger 2016). Although I do not have much concrete material on boundaries in child-rearing, the migrant fathers of this study placed boundaries in childrearing differently, as well that the pupils expressed very different aspirations for their youth-life.

Returning to the notion of mistrusted masculinity, we have seen how the ethnographic material points to how mistrust was also entangled in child-professionals concerns regarding lack of 'individual liberation,' within their imaginary of 'the Muslim childrearing.' This made some fathers feel, as in the case of Omar, that some child-professionals saw one of their roles as liberating their children from the Muslim family – and thus, would listen more to the child than to the father, who was potentially aspiring towards a more controlling child-rearing.

Such concern amongst child-professionals have been strengthened by a politically intensified focus on combatting “social-control,” where the education institution has been seen as a place for both detecting and liberating (Muslim) youth from such social control (Udlændinge og Integrationsministeriet 2018a).

### *“It’s Best for Our Children to Know Where We Come From”*

Teachers’ concerns regarding Muslim youth to ‘seize freedom’ and perform their own self-creation appeared closely related to secularism and taking idiosyncratically choices (see also Kryger 2016). However, such concerns discharge the value of the religious community of the family or other communities.

For some of the Muslim parents, to practice Islam was an important part of socialising their children. This was, for example, the case for the two fathers Abir, the father mentioned above, who was working in a kiosk and Adnan from the vignette in the Prologue. They both wished for their children to practice Islam, as it was practiced in their own country of origin, or local region. Thus, both of them had provided weekly Skype-lessons for their children, with a religiously educated person from the specific region they originated from. As Abir explained to me, it nearly appeared as a quite big industry in Pakistan; teaching children of migrant parents around the world the local ways to understand and practice Islam. According to Abir, it was not that important, who taught these lessons, since the religious material they taught was not very complicated. In the very moment Abir told me this, I was shortly struck by a worried thought: what if his daughter was taught things, which her father did not know of? There had recently been a great focus in the Danish news about a young boy how had been recruited via the internet by ISIS to fight for them in Syria, who then died in the battle. How could Abir be so calm about, not exactly knowing the background of who taught his daughter?

In retrospect, I feel quite embarrassed about thinking this way. However, my concerns reflect a “tradition of knowledge” (Barth 1993, 6), which has influenced me and my own horizon of experience; being exposed to the dangers of Islam in Danish media and political rhetoric and law, has made me adopt this concern – which I then projected to Abir. Along these lines, child-professionals might perceive such internet-based religious lessons as inhibiting Umma’s integration (Haga 2015; Rytter 2018; Rytter and Pedersen 2014). Reinforced by an anti-radicalism paradigm, which within the last decade has urged child-professionals in Denmark to detect potential signs of radicalisation. Here teachers,

pedagogues or health care professional (*sundhedsplejersker*)<sup>45</sup> have been encouraged to take part in integration-related tasks, encompassing security work in the form of detecting signs of radicalisation amongst children and youth (Regeringen 2016; Johansen and Jensen 2017, 305; Brønsted forthcoming, 187-88).

For Abir, Islam was about moral, peace and humanity. To let Umma learn about their cultural heritage and local ways to practice Islam was for him an important aspect of fatherhood practices and care, since he believed the best for Umma was to know “where they came from,” along with what Abir believed was the best morals for a good life. Along the same lines, anthropologist Marianne Holm Pedersen (2015) studied Muslim practices in Muslim migrant families in Denmark, and how religious socialization of children unfolded. She underlines how this socialization was different from each family; however, she found that generally the parents wished to give the children a good future by providing them with the Muslim values and reproducing the family as a core institution (ibid. 50). Such practices were always situated and depended on the family’s relation to the surrounding society. Thus, the practices must be understood in the light of the interactions with the broader society (ibid. 66). When Muslim practices are approached with concern and mistrust, the agency of fatherly affection and concern, which were a part of socialising their children into valued cultural and religious practices, is disregarded. For the migrant parents in this study, their way to practice and discuss the relation to their country of origin, as well as religious practices, were always dependent on the specific parents and were always situated. For instance, in the Somali parent association, more fathers described how they used this community to tell their children old Somali folklore, as an impetus to talk about life in Somalia, and where they originated from. Migrant parents, in different ways, were forming a path for their children to become harmonious, balancing between ‘the Danish’ and the parents’ cultural heritage and traditions. To grow up to be a harmonious person, many migrant parents expressed that, “It’s best our children know where we come from.” This was meant to form an identity that contained both “the Danish” and the culture of the parents' country of origin, in order to create a stable, balanced identity, and thus a balanced and good starting point for their children’s future life in Denmark (see also Reinicke 2006).

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<sup>45</sup> Often in formalized cooperation with the social service and local police (*SSP-samarbejde*).

## Being a War Refugee

The main perspective in this chapter so far, has been that of the fathers. To conduct my research, I was dependent on fathers' agreeing to be a part of my study. Refugee fathers, who faced various traumas or other severe challenges, were conceivably not as encouraged to participate. Nevertheless, problematic and challenging cases of fatherhood practices may reveal to us, where some teachers' concerns stemmed from, as in the example with Tahir, where the teacher's discriminating investigation with the puppets had started from the concrete teacher's experience of one appalling case.

The following story is about Amjad's childhood with a distressed father, who struggled to find foothold after fleeing to Denmark. I knew Amjad, because he translated as a student-job besides his university studies, some of the interviews I conducted. Amjad was very interested in my research, and I suggested that he read some of my analyses, so that we could discuss it. Amjad thought my text did not reflect all the social problems, which could be part of growing up in a migrant family, which had faced difficulties adjusting to life in Denmark. Especially the influence of religion was missing, he thought, which he believed was due to the general problematisation of Islam in Denmark. This meant that migrant fathers I had encountered might refrain from mentioning their Muslim practices and values, because of the general suspicion towards Islam, so that Muslim families felt that being a believing Muslim was not accepted, and therefore they refrained from talking about it (see also Gilliam 2015). Hence, the religious aspect was something he wanted to add to my analyses.

Amjad had grown up in a very religious family, and his parents were still a member of a Muslim network, which is known for practicing a radical version of Islam. Twenty-two years ago, when Amjad was five years old, he and his four siblings and parents had fled from Iraq and came to Denmark. They, like many other refugees at that time, were assigned to live in a social housing estate in the suburbs of Odense, with relatively poor inhabitants, and overrepresentation of tenants on social benefits. Amjad's parents had faced many difficulties when encountering the Danish society. One of them was how Sohrab, Amjad's father, due to his religion, was not allowed to shake hands with women. As Sohrab had been on social benefits for many years, he was forced to go to job interviews and had had to wear gloves, in order not to touch the hands of another woman. Sohrab and his wife, Zahra, did not like that Amjad's sister was riding a bicycle, since it was not proper for girls to do so, yet to be able to ride a bike is, in Denmark, assumed as something every child should learn. In addition, as new in Denmark and living quite isolated, Sohrab and Zahra had been sceptical about what



happened in the school and especially during the school camps. Additionally, they did not want Amjad's sisters to shower naked after the gym-lessons. These issues, especially about school camps and showering, are known as key dilemmas (*fixpunkter*) in integration-dilemmas in Danish schools (Jensen 2003, see also Jørgensen 2009).

Amjad and his siblings had been much faster in learning about the school they were attending than Sohrab and Zahra, and soon they knew much more about the school than their parents, which gave them a possibility to control which information would reach their parents. Moreover, Amjad explained, he and his siblings had felt embarrassed about their parents; the father, who would not shake hands with the female teachers and the mother in her "strange clothes" and headscarf. It was embarrassing, because they were so different. Therefore, Amjad and his siblings had played down the importance of, for example, the parents-meetings and told their parents that it was not something important. The parent-teacher conferences were tolerable, since it was an individual event, however these ways to play down events at the school made Sohrab and Zahra appear as absent parents. Sohrab and Zahra were in general dependent on their children informing them about what was going on in the school. Amjad also told how translation had sometimes been problematic, because the teachers had not been aware of which dialect his parents talked, and had ordered an Arabic translator speaking a different dialect. In Arabic, there are more than twenty-five dialects. Especially the Tunisian and Moroccan dialects were impossible for his parents to understand. Amjad explained, while smiling, about a specific parent-teacher conference, where the teacher had told the parents that Amjad's sister had not brought spare clothes with her for the gym-lessons. The translator translated "spare clothes" very wrongly – and used a word, which in Amjad's dialect was a swear word. This was still an ongoing joke among Amjad's siblings.<sup>46</sup> In addition, Amjad's father had been concerned about where the translator came from, which family they represented, and if they potentially would tell other Iraqi families, or the "Iraqi community" about their challenges.

Amjad had generally helped his parents a lot, and he had received the Parent Intranet messages regarding his younger siblings, on his mail. Amjad was also today in charge of his parents' mail, and he, for example knew both parents' CPR-numbers<sup>47</sup> by heart, because he used it again and again when dealing with "all these things on the internet," such

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<sup>46</sup> At the time of the fieldwork and beyond, it was not assured that translators from the translator-companies used by public schools had any special education or certificate for working as translator.

<sup>47</sup> A ten-digit identity-number, which all Danes are registered by.

as NEM-ID,<sup>48</sup> online banking, E-box, etc. His friend, who also had Iraqi roots, whom he had just met before meeting me, likewise got the messages from his parents' Parent Intranet forwarded to his e-mail. This tendency, of siblings taking over the home-school-cooperation tasks, was not exceptional; older siblings could become of great importance as so-called "language-brokers" (Dorner, Orellana, and Jiménez 2008) referring to how (often older) children in migrant families translate for their parents in various contexts. This also gave these children great power to control the information flow, which could also be used strategically.

Sohrab had had a bad temper. Even though it was unpleasant and tough for Amjad to say aloud, Sohrab had hit them as part of their upbringing. At some point, the oldest brother, Karam, had run away from home, and told the welfare workers that Sohrab had hit him and his siblings and had consequently been assigned to an orphanage. "Investigators" from the social service had then interviewed Amjad and his siblings; however, they covered for Sohrab. After a year, Karam felt terribly lonely in the orphanage-institutions without a family, and he ended up telling the child-professionals how it was all a lie. He was then allowed to return home to live with his family. After this episode, understandably, the relation to the school had been much more problematic and distrusting.

Sohrab had not been the best father, Amjad said, yet he had also had many war-traumas, he added. Then Amjad started to tell the horrors his father had witnessed during the Iraqi war, where, at some point Sohrab had watched his two sisters being killed. That he had not been able to save them, was something he had never forgiven himself. I asked, in extension hereof, if his father ever had received any psychological treatment in Denmark or any help of this kind. To Amjad's knowledge, his father had never had any professional help; instead, he had turned towards religion as a pathway, or salvation, for him and his family.

Amjad's story was both sad and tough, and I understood his need to tell it to me. He had had to take many fights with his father, and it had not been easy, he ensured me. He had had numerous discussions, also regarding him and his siblings' right to select their spouse themselves. However, all these discussions had led to Sohrab changing his perceptions on these matters and he was now supporting "the free love marriages," which Sohrab now also encouraged his more traditional family in Iraq to follow.

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<sup>48</sup> The log-in-system for both public and private self-service internet-solutions, online banking etc.

Amjad's story reflects a group of traumatised war-refugees living in Denmark, whereof some have been living in isolation with their traumas. The narrative also illustrates a persistent border between Sohrab and the social system. The children became the mediators between the family and the social system/school, yet the border, remained. Karam, who left his home, crossed the border to the system, however, this made him lose his family, and this situation made him cross the border back to his family. Karam had, so to speak, to choose one of the sides of the border; as there were no obvious bridge or channel for mediation. In similar ways, the child-professionals had crossed this border to investigate the family, but had left again, since Amjad and his siblings had been too scared about losing their family if they were honest about the corporal punishment. Sohrab had not crossed the border himself, either to get help from a psychologist or to start a dialog with the social system, neither had the social system reached out to help Sohrab or generally to help improve the family-dynamics (see also Johansen 2013, Featherstone 2003).

In many ways, Sohrab fits the negative controlling image of a controlling and aggressive Muslim, migrant man. Yet, instead of seeing his actions as simply reflecting a type of inherited or habituated masculinity, it would be more accurate to see his behaviour as that of a traumatised war refugee, who was never provided, or had asked for, the psychological counselling he had needed. The case may be seen as reflecting, how inexpedient behaviours of migrant fathers with psychological diagnoses such as PTSD, might be misunderstood as assumptions about 'inherited cultural behaviour,' and thus work to counteract further interventions (see also Featherstone 2003, Soei 2016). As such, the negative controlling image might function as the explanation, and counterproductively work to hinder psychological treatment. Yet, these findings call for further investigations.

I heard of one similar case at Rosendal School. One day as Gitte and I were wiping the small tables in 0C after lunch while the pupils were out playing in the courtyard, Gitte told me about this "totally impossible family," she had had. At a certain point, the father had had a breakdown at the school, and had been shouting at Gitte in front of the whole class. These parents were "totally out of reach," Gitte said. I asked more about the situation, and at some point in Gitte's story, she mentioned, "well, I also think they were traumatised or something like this." In my previous fieldwork (pp. 83), a similar extreme episode took place, where a traumatised father had a similar overwhelming breakdown at the school. In this case, the teachers partly explained this fathers' extreme behaviour with his assumed "Arabic mentality," as a way to try to understand what had happened. Gitte did not connect the

happening in her story above to a general ‘Arabic mentality,’ as she generally tried to avoid such oversimplified categories. Nevertheless, she told me, in an inserted sentence, that she was not sure where the father had come from, thus she disclosed that he did not have a Danish background.

Teachers’ scripts for how to handle certain situations are formed by teachers’ previous experiences, yet narrowing down complexity to reduce the individual complexities. Such complexity reducing scripts must be understood in light of the hectic everyday life at the school and how teachers were forced to act (*handletvang*) and perform on different scales (see e.g. Gulløv 2015). Such experiences, as the one Gitte told about, may function to inform teachers’ scripts, potentially reinforced by the negative controlling image of a certain ‘Muslim masculinity.’ Importantly, information about how the given father was traumatised, as for example diagnosed with PTSD, did not appear as a central report in Gitte’s story. This, I argue, was a very central aspect, which appeared as a side-comment, and only came up because I kept asking about the episode. As aforementioned, teachers did often not know much about the families’ intimate life or personal issues, or traumas, unless this was something the parents had told the teachers themselves, or it was explicitly mentioned in the handover papers from kindergarten or other schools/teachers. For example, Gitte only ‘knew’ about Emre’s father (the father who no one had meet, but whom the pedagogues from the after-school care thought had been violent to Emre’s mother (pp. 154-55 )) from oral assignment from the pedagogues of the afterschool care. Although, war-traumas causing PTSD could change the rest of a war refugee’s life, it might not be a knowledge the teachers had (or other professionals, who could offer such parents help). In extension hereof, I afterwards reflected about, how Amjad’s story illuminated a tendency of unnoticed traumas. Before moving on to another case concerning a war refugee father with PTSD, I shortly want to include another important factor revealed in Amjad’s story.

### *Language Brokers – Shifts of Authority and Dependability*

One of the many other themes, which Amjad’s story touches upon, was how children of migrants with a low command of Danish functioned as language-brokers. “You have to write about that we are so dependent on the children,” a teacher once told me, as I explained to him about my project. Along the same lines Kadin, the father to Sofia from 7X, one day explained to me that the children of parents with a low command of Danish could face many demanding tasks, but luckily, what then also happened, Kadin continued, was, that they

would, from handling these tasks, “get much stronger and tougher.” Afterward, I was wondering about this statement quite a lot, “What did Kadin mean?” As I started analysing my ethnographic material, this statement gave increasing meaning to me. One such example was Naima’s home-school conference (pp. 224), where Steffen seemed unsure of how much Danish Faria understood, and thus placed Naima on the spot, who then had to explain many things to Steffen. When Naima was put on the spot, it is important to remember how this space was a space with specific power relations, and that she became the target for various problematisations, and thus had to defend herself. Contrary to Naima’s conference was the one of Mathilde. Mathilde’s parents shielded Mathilde during the conference, partly by her father Tom’s (pp. 133) critiques on and suggestions for how Mathilde could benefit more from Steffens’ lessons. I became aware of how much more responsibility some pupils would be given. During my fieldwork at Rosendal School, I also observed parent-teacher conferences, where siblings would attend instead of their parents, or where siblings would translate for their parents. For example, the younger sister of Ubah from 7X translated for their mother during the parent-teacher conference at the age of eleven years old, since Ubah could not attend herself.

An American study of language-brokers (Dorner, Orellana, and Jiménez 2008) points to how most of the interviewed language-brokers found it natural to translate for their parents, and were happy to help. However, some also reported that they had felt nervous in specific situations. From time to time, adults had expected these children to know, or be able to do more, than they felt capable of (ibid, 540). These findings resonate with my findings. Youth were strong agents, who possessed many capacities that they would put into play to navigate the social environment they were placed in; yet also from time to time they were given an excessive responsibility, or were placed within power-relations, which overwhelmed them. Thus, in some cases, being a language broker seemed to be something ‘more’ than simply translating (ibid, 537).

## The Rule of the Game

The case above illuminates how war-traumas came to influence the fatherhood practices of Sohrab. The following example works to further inform circumstances of being a father with war-traumas, and how this could entangle in cooperation with the school. Nabil was a 48-year-old father, from the fathers’ group of Bøgelunden. Nabil had grown up as a Palestinian

refugee in Beirut, where he had experienced the dreadful ‘war of the camps,’ when the Shi’ite Amal militia besieged the Palestinian refugee camps of Beirut during the 1984–90 phase of the Lebanese civil war. The refugee camp in which Nabil and his family lived had been bombed, while they were being held imprisoned there. In 1985, Nabil had lost his 17-year-old brother. The brother had simply disappeared, and no one knew what had happened to him. Half a year later, his father died in the war. The terror Nabil had experienced still influenced his life, and it was the first thing he chose to tell me, when I met him for an interview. I had prepared questions about school-home cooperation, but Nabil started to tell his story by beginning with the war. This became his way of framing his life-story, and thus his way of making clear that it had affected all the other things, which he would tell me about (see also Jørgensen, forthcoming). This stood in contrast to the previous two cases, where this information fell in the background. Struggling with PTSD, Nabil was eventually awarded early retirement benefits (*førtidspension*) for the rest of his life, a stable, though quite low, income.

After fleeing to Denmark, Nabil had married Dora, who also had a Palestinian origin, and they later had three children together. Today, Marwan was 22 years old, Yasmin 19, and Amin 14. Amin, who had special needs, attended a special school.

Later on, Nabil and Dora were divorced, and since then Nabil had been trying to see his children as much as possible, which had been exceedingly difficult after a particular life-changing episode: When Yasmin was 13, she attended a sports event, after which she was supposed to move to Nabil’s place for the weekend (at this time she was living at Nabil’s place every second weekend). Late in the afternoon, Yasmin sent Nabil a text message saying she would not be home at 6 p.m. as agreed, but maybe she could make it at 10.30 p.m. Nabil texted her back, but Yasmin did not reply. Nabil then phoned the mother of Yasmin’s good friend (who had also attended the event). The mother said Yasmin was on her way to Nabil’s place, but she did not arrive, and Nabil got very worried. It turned out that Yasmin had gone home with her girlfriend and intended to sleep at her house. Nabil got quite upset, and at some point his son, Marwan, went to find Yasmin. Marwan made a big fuss in front of the friend’s mother, and in the end, the police showed up and told him to leave. The friend’s mother started to talk bad about Nabil and tried to convince Yasmin not to go back to him. Now Dora wanted full custody over Yasmin and took the case to court. Nabil was convinced he would lose all custody rights.

Moreover, at the time Yasmin preferred to stay with Dora, according to Nabil, because Dora set very few restrictions on her behaviour. In Nabil’s view, Dora’s approach to their children’s upbringing was too *laissez-faire*. Convinced he would lose custody, Nabil still

insisted on taking the case to court, because he did not want his daughter to think when she grew up that her father would give up fighting to safeguard their relationship. As expected, Nabil lost all custody. From that point, he had to give in to whatever Dora preferred. Sometimes she would ask him, at just a few hours' notice, to have the children at his place for the weekend. Nabil was always prepared for this: he did not want to say "no" to his children, and additionally he was afraid that if he did say "no," Dora would not ask him next time. According to Nabil, there was nothing he could do. These were the rules of the game (see also Jørgensen, forthcoming).

Gradually, Dora became an increasingly unstable parent. On one occasion, the school contacted Nabil, because they had rising concerns for Amin. Sometimes Amin did not show up at school, and he seemed not to be cared for properly. Nabil had to explain, how there was nothing he could do, because he had no custody rights over Amin, but he suggested the school to make a notification (*underretning*). Consequently, the school made a couple of notifications. Gradually, Dora asked Nabil to take the children more and more often, and Yasmin and Amin ended up mostly living at Nabil's place. Sometimes all three children ended up being with him for the whole week. Since Nabil was on early retirement pension, it was difficult for him to provide for all three children, since he also had to pay for the monthly child support to Dora.

In this period, and with Dora's poor energy, Marwan almost became a street child, Nabil explained. Dora could not control Marwan, and when Nabil tried his best to control Marwan, he would simply leave Nabil's place, because Marwan knew Nabil had no legal rights to restrict him, because his legal address was at his mother's place.

It had been a challenging time for Nabil, but since then much had changed. As Dora had become an unstable mother, Nabil managed to recover custody over Amin. Today Amin lived permanently with Nabil. In addition, Yasmin was regularly staying at Nabil's place, but her official address was still at Dora's place. That Nabil had succeeded in becoming a legal father again, had demanded countless meetings with social workers and additionally, loads of paperwork, Nabil explained. Nabil was especially proud of one of the reports in Amin's case files. This report described how Amin was always in good shape, and that everything was 'all set,' when the school-taxi came to pick up Amin.<sup>49</sup> Amin had not always been in such great shape when he lived at his mother's place.

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<sup>49</sup> A special school taxi picked up Amin every morning, because he had special needs.

Bearing in mind it was problems between Nabil and his wife which had started the issue, and as I only have Nabil's word regarding why he had lost the child-custody, one can argue that Nabil's history reflects certain structures, procedures and cultural givens (*kulturelle selvfølgeligheder*), or more precisely 'gender givens,' within the Danish welfare system. When looking back at Nabil's story, no one seemed to have done an effort to include Nabil in the childrearing of his children, and as Dora seemed to lose energy, Nabil was still not included until the school had sent more notifications, and the social system took up the case for further investigation. Likewise, no one had tried to encourage or empower Nabil in the role of the father during his struggles. These characteristics are supported by Seidenfaden's study (2011), which points to how migrant fathers have been overlooked in social integration projects.

In the British context, Brid Featherstone (2003) has found similar tendencies (see also Gupta and Featherstone 2015). Limited specific initiatives, particularly addressing their role and identity as fathers, have been launched for single or divorced migrant fathers. According to Featherstone, initiatives to develop better visiting arrangements or similar interventions in favour of these migrant fathers have aroused hostility from mothers and, as aforementioned, may be perceived as discriminatory. Hence, these dynamics need to be understood and reflected on by social workers, teachers, and pedagogues, who themselves are often women (*ibid*, see also pp. 156).

I felt as I interviewed Nabil that he was embarrassed about the incident, that night when Yasmin had not returned home. I also asked Nabil, if the confusion that night had led to any kind of charge. "No, no," Nabil promptly replied. "Nothing happened. Of course, I got angry (...), but I do not hit. No." Taking into consideration, that either Marwan or Nabil had been charged or found guilty in any crimes, it can add wonder how the incidence then had so much impact and discharged Nabil's ability as a father.

In one of Featherstone and Anna Gupta's studies (2015) on criminal records of poor migrant fathers living in the UK, they found that, when investigating these cases in-depth, the matters on record were sometimes not real cases. Thus, they could not be used to prevent the specific father from seeing their children; nonetheless, they were used in this way. According to Gupta and Featherstone (*ibid.*), assumptions about a certain kind of untrustworthy and dangerous masculinity (*ibid*, 11) were in play, when such criminal records were turned out of proportion. Nabil's case seemed in similar ways to be turned out of proportion, and from a legal point of view, the incident had far too radical consequence (see also Jørgensen, forthcoming).



There is another important facet to Nabil's story. The harsh performance on the crucial evening was not Nabil's but Marwan's. Thus, we see how children can distort perceptions of the father's character. In the same way, as Omar's daughters biting was explained by how Omar was causing problems in the family, Marwan's aggressive behaviour somehow came to index the conditions in Nabil's home and functioned as an extension of Nabil's presumed violent and irrepressible masculinity. In addition, Nabil also spoke about more times where Marwan and Yasmin had been fighting when they were teenagers. These teenage-disputes potentially intensified the incidence that evening. In brief, the 'uncontrollable teenager' as Marwan might, by his behaviours, come to represent function as a kind of 'uncontrollable meaning-carriers' about his father's personality and masculinity. In such processes, the teenagers' agenda and how they are themselves, strategic agents, goes unnoticed (see also Jørgensen, forthcoming).

## Concluding Discussion

The objective of this chapter has been to analyse how some fathers with a migrant background faced a particular set of intersubjective experiences in their encounters with teachers, pedagogues, or other child-professionals. As argued, encounters with school professionals were affected by power relations and by the individual fathers' skills for navigating the terrain of the school. Moreover, a certain sentiment of mistrust toward their racialised and ethnicised masculinity seems to affect these fathers' life-worlds in various ways. This sentiment could arise by experiencing the negative portrait of the Muslim man, as described in Chapter Ten. Others could be personal meetings with teachers, like in Omar and Tahir's example, where child-professionals mistrust these fathers' capacities as caring fathers. Alternatively, Nabil experienced a welfare system, which did not find it necessary to include him as a significant person in his child's upbringing. All these experiences influenced the social becoming of these fathers, who navigated being a worthy father for their children. Thus, to be mistrusted became a strand of experience in these father's lives, which again influenced their further becoming.

The chapter has also illuminated and analysed, how the negative controlling image reflected in political and media-rhetoric, could 'play out' in lived encounters between fathers and child-professionals. Such experiences left their markers on the involved father. These experiences of

being met with the negative image of one's capacities as a father could leave their mark and colour fathers' general perceptions of others' perceptions of them. Returning to theories of intersubjectivity, expectations about the others' perception of my intentionality are influential for the intersubjective dynamics (Jackson 2015); what I think you think *means something*.

The above cases illustrate how encounters between fathers and child-educators are different and may lead to a different outcome. With Ingold's terminology, these encounters are a form of meshwork, where fathers, with their individual strands of experiences entangle with other actors and *their* intentions and concerns, in a specific time and place. Such meshwork form new pathways and trajectories for fathers' continuous social becoming. Some child-professionals had the power to intervene in families, which could make such a specific meshwork crucial; therefore some fathers felt they had to be cautious, which affected how they practiced their fatherhood; eventually becoming more laissez-faire than they actually wanted, as Omar pointed to. Additionally, while Kadin in Chapter Nine was able to push and influence the directions of the social becoming that lay in wait for him and his daughter Sofia by challenging the teacher's deprivation of his daughter, the fathers Nabil did not have the same capacities to do so. Among other factors, Nabil's poor Danish, an uncontrollable son, his PTSD and his divorce made his 'hand of cards' weaker than Kadin's. Nevertheless, he managed to regain custody of his son Amin.

The analysis also points to how children, or teenagers, as Marwan, Nabil's son, can function as 'floating signifiers,' which can affect fathers lives in different ways (see also Jørgensen, forthcoming). Children and especially teenagers had their own agendas; the teenagers were pragmatic agents situated in their own life-worlds. They had their own goals and intentions, and figured out their navigation to reach these goals, as people are always motivated by something and acting "in order to" (Schultz and Luckmann 1974, 74-75). People reach goals by skilfully using the 'tools,' which the surroundings offer, and these tools can be meaning and symbols, which are already loaded with meaning in the given context. Which tools are the most useful, the person selects by referring back to one's knowledge and previous experiences (ibid.). The negative controlling image of the Muslim, migrant father can function as such a symbol, and become a powerful tool to weaken the fathers authority: as the teenagers navigated for more freedom, the perception of a controlling, patriarchal Muslim father was a symbol which was "ready to use" (*ready at hand*). An underlining factor here was the ideal about the democratic individualism as a key part in the idea of the civilizing

project of “Danish child-rearing” – that is, the ideal of how the child must be raised to become a strong, self-regulated and independent individual (Bach 2017, Kryger 2016, Gulløv and Gilliam 2017).

Fathers expressed to me, and each other, how their relationship to their child was an emotional, key element and yet also precarious part of their lives. Consistently, Tahir (the father, who had experienced the investigation with the puppets) expressed with anxiousness how he was concerned about what his daughter would now think of him after such investigations: “Children are smart,” he said, “they sense stuff” – suggesting his daughter had potentially felt or sensed the teacher’s suspicion towards him. When the mistrusted masculinity merged into a ‘*mistrusted fatherhood*,’ it became a precarious and vulnerable state of affair, not only affecting the father, potentially also his children. Fathers’ sometimes-affective ways to tell their stories must be understood in light of this crucial dynamic (see also Bouakaz 2007). Mistrust was not always an important factor in the fathers’ coming-communities. The teachers and school professionals varied and had different experiences and rationalities to think with, as well as drawing from different logics, and thereto-related scripts to both detect and solve problems in everyday life (see Gulløv 2015, 279). Nevertheless, when the subject of mistrust came up in my interviews, most fathers from the fathers’ groups, with the aforementioned racialised characteristics, could tell me at least one episode of feeling mistrusted.<sup>50</sup>

The analysis reveals how fathers’ encounters with teachers were temporary entanglements that exposed both transformative visions, submission, resistance, and where new potentials emerged from unanticipated corners. Consequently, the negative controlling image of mistrusted masculinity should not be understood as a rather fixed social aggregate, but as momentary, imprecise constructions of a social phenomenon, appearing and disappearing around the interlocutors (see also Biehl and Locke 2017, 11). Accordingly, sometimes these stemmed from uncanny suspicions, rather than acts that are more concrete.

Fathers, who had experienced being mistrusted, might develop what Vigh describes as a state of “negative potentiality” (Vigh 2011, 100); characterized by a constant awareness

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<sup>50</sup> In interviews with Danish background fathers, I never heard similar experiences of child-professionals mistrusting their capacities as fathers.

and preparedness toward the negative potentialities of social figures and forces. Thus, fathers having experienced such figures and forces before; fear encountering it again, which could inform a suspicion towards child-professionals in general. Such a negative potentiality emerged alongside the distressing forces of dominant political rhetoric, described in Chapter Ten, pointing to how fathers' becomings happen across different forms and scales.

Fathers reacted to the mistrust in many different ways. Some migrant fathers reacted in resentment, others would change the school of their children, and again others would silence it, in order not to make their children sense the mistrust. Omar tried to silence it when he, for example, did not want his children to watch certain political debates in the television, as he was afraid it would affect their becoming in negative ways, leaving them with a feeling of being unwanted in Denmark. However, Omar was himself struggling with such feelings; struggling with creating his own pathway, disentangled from the mistrust. Yet, he used occasions, such as our interview, as well as other students' visits to the fathers' group, to tell the world about how this felt.

The oscillation between being an actor and being acted upon is felt in every human encounter, and thus intersubjective life involves an ongoing struggle to negotiate, reconcile, balance or mediate these antithetical potentialities of being and becoming (Jackson 2006, 13-14). By extension, I argue that the (Muslim) migrant fathers in this chapter experienced being acted upon when confronted with the negative controlling image of their mistrusted masculinity. Additionally, how being recurrently confronted with this image made their struggle for belonging more 'exhausting,' than for other fathers, pointing to a kind of '*existential inequality*.' To belong to the world is "...to believe that one's being is integrated with and integral to a wider field of Being, that one's own life merges with, and touches the lives of others" (ibid, 12). However, as Jackson argues, when others limit or make impossible our own influence to belong, the subject will not only feel limited in its influence, action, and recognition, it will also feel limited in its *existence*, since what Jackson describes as a basic need of a human being is to experience existence by acting meaningfully. In continuation hereof, it is important to mention how especially the uncanny suspicions of being mistrusted were difficult for fathers to act upon, reinforced by how fathers often experienced child-professionals as powerful; "This is the rule of the game," as Nabil expressed it. Furthermore, due to the race-blind ideology (Hervik 2015), it was difficult for these fathers to verbally express such racialised experiences. Here the dormant social alertness was a way for fathers to try to oppose the (potential) mistrust and insist on having a say in their own becoming. That

is, 'to act meaningfully' by means of struggling to define their own trajectory for the future, navigating towards the shifting horizon against which their becomings unfolded.



## Chapter 12: Concerned Fathering and Emergent Fatherhoods

In the previous chapter, a dichotomy between the migrant fathers and the child-professionals or “the system,” from time to time, arose. In Omar’s narrative, the fear of intervention in the family (potentially forced removal) became a worst-case scenario, which in some marginalised families in Skovlunden, placed the welfare workers in the position of an enemy instead of a helper. Consequently, since some of these families experienced how “the system” did not trust them and their capacities to raise their children, this generated a wide-ranging counter-mistrust back at “the system.” A dichotomy I also found in other studies of relations between welfare workers and migrant families (see Johansen 2013, 113; Johansen and Jensen 2017; Dbouk 2018). Such general fear of welfare workers should be understood in the light of the marginalised position of some of the families in Skovlunden. As such, these migrant families’ marginalised social positions and limited knowledge and understanding of the logics of the social system provided them with an omnipresent concern.

This chapter explores how mistrust and fear of intervention was not only a reality for fathers in marginalised positions. First, I introduce an empirical example concerning a so-called “resource-strong father,” in order to exemplify how certain traditions of knowledge related to Islam, could function to raise father’s concerns regarding fathering. The chapter goes on to analyse further examples of fathers’ concerns in relation to childrearing, yet in the end of the chapter I approach fathering in a broader perspective in order to illuminate additional aspects of emergent fatherhoods among migrant fathers in contemporary Denmark.

### “Even Such a Resource-Strong Alpha-Male-Type”

The next empirical case is another example of a migrant fathers’ experience of the phenomenon of mistrust. In continuation hereof, this example goes on to show how this mistrust could translate into what I will term ‘*concerned fatherhood*’.

Raza was a father with Pakistani background, who helped to start up one of the fathers’ groups, and volunteered there. Raza was one of the so-called “resource-strong fiery

souls,” having a role as a kind of administrator or organiser of the fathers’ group, who in our interview took a position as a kind of ‘migrant father expert’. Raza also went into the topic of mistrust between certain marginalised migrant families and what he termed “the system.” To describe how such mistrust existed in different degrees and with different expressions, he used the metaphor of a “mistrust-umbrella.” “Something I have heard many, many times under the mistrust-umbrella is that they will come and ‘eat our children.’ That they [the social services, or, as Raza also expressed it, “the system”] will come and take our children. That is what they are scared of.” Such radical perceptions of the welfare state (see also Dbouk 2018, Johansen 2013) were far from a general picture of Raza’s or his peers’ perception of the social system. However, as Raza added, less radical forms of (counter) mistrust, existed under the “mistrust-umbrella.” Raza knew of what he termed “resource-strong, highly educated fathers with foreign background,” who had also been accused of practicing corporal violence; so that, to Raza’s experience, economic wealth and generally higher-class live-circumstances did not, in itself, disarm being mistrusted. Returning to the analytical lens of intersectionality, one could say that racialised experiences and economic exploitation seemed to intersect (greater mistrust seemed to correlate with economic and socially marginalised positions as e.g. in Skovlunden); yet to face more privileged life-circumstances (in the rhetoric of intersectionality belonging to the middle-class) did not disarm mistrust.

Raza then told me the story of his friend, Murad, also with Pakistani origin, who had immigrated to Denmark at an early age and had achieved a university degree in Denmark. Raza termed Murad as a “resource-strong father,” with a well-running, profit-making company, and with a broad insight into the educational system of Denmark. Murad’s son, Serkan, who went to a Danish private school, was one of the only pupils in his class, who had migrant parents and was a Muslim. According to Raza, Serkan, therefore, had to act as a kind of ambassador of immigrants, and had become the target of different kind of questions related to this kind of ‘foreignness,’ he somehow came to represent. Raza continued:

[Serkan is] such a cool boy; he is 14 years old and very ambitious...very high ambitions. He became aware of 9/11 some months ago. Then he started to investigate it on the social media from different sites. Then he wanted to write an essay, which was very critical. Then he started to ask his father about, you know, Muslims and non-Muslims, all these things – almost conflicts of the civilization – in this age they become so aware of such things, and he [Serkan]



is so concerned about such things; justice and unjust. Then the father was telling [Raza repeated to me, what Murad had said to him]. ‘My dilemmas was here, that I want – that I ended up saying to my son: Well, cool down, do not write all these things. I agree with him [my son], in his way to think critical, and that he should be proud too, but calm down, please, because what will happen? They can then get it and then it might end up at the principal’s desk.’ [Raza is again talking from his own perspective] And that man, he produces for maybe one million a month, he is the boss of 100-110 people, you know he is a super resource-strong alpha-male-type, who stands there with his son and says, ‘please do not do this (...) you risk getting stigmatised like this or that.’ I told him [Murad], that this is *your* strength [to think independently and critically]. How this is why you have managed to build all this. You have always said your opinion, now you tell your own child [not to follow this strength], who also has that [the same positive characteristics]. Now he has seen that you give in to it [letting others mistrust affect him]. He [Murad] had said: ‘what the hell should I do?’ And all these feelings of injustice.

For Raza, this was an example of how fearing the system was not only experienced by marginalised migrant families. Even such a “resource-strong alpha-male-type,” like Murad, feared a potential stigmatisation of his son, as his son wanted to write a critical assignment about 9/11, where he, to my understanding, wanted to include and reflect on the many conspiracy-theories about who stood behind the attack, as well as critically investigate the American government’s many counter-attacks.

Murad’s dilemma between supporting his son’s free critical thinking and his fear of his son’s assignment ending on the principal’s desk can be understood in light of an increasing political interest in the radicalisation of Muslim youth, also described on page 227. Where child-professionals are encouraged to detect signs of radicalization among Muslim pupils and youth (Regeringen 2016; see also Johansen and Jensen 2017, 305). This must be understood in light of the aforementioned formations of neo-Orientalist assumptions. Whereas for some families of Skovlunden, their general fear towards welfare-professionals seemed to intensify due to lack of knowledge and insight in the welfare system, Murad’s concerns about a case on his son were actually due to his comprehensive knowledge and insight in this system, and its intensified awareness of potential radicalisation and its consequences.

For the fathers presented in this chapter, the mistrust they experienced seemed to, in different ways, become a *concern* in their lives; leading to, what I will term as concerned fathering. Anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1993) has investigated and worked with the concept of concerns, and he finds how concerns are related to a specific directional navigation. Concerns reflect a balancing between agent's actions and the broader cultural system, where none of these sides become outweighed from the other (see also Stockholm 2007). Concerns must be understood in relation to "the knowledge traditions" in a given society (Barth 1993, 6), as available frames for possible action and understandings of the cultural world. Knowledge is what a person uses to interpret and act in the world, and thus includes both perceptions, settings, information, bodily skills, verbal taxonomies, and conceptual knowledge, which have been experienced in social praxis (see also Stockholm 2007). There will be different, and sometimes contradictory knowledge traditions, or frames for interpretation, in a complex society as the Danish, which may prescribe contradictory ways to handle a situation. The agents' concerns are weighed different prescriptions for actions.

In Murad's case, two contradictory knowledge traditions were at stake, which provided different suggestions for how Murad should act regarding his son's assignment. On the one hand, a Danish educational system, which imparts values of democracy and freedom of speech and thought; on the other hand, the neo-Orientalist assumptions, which combine Islam with danger, thus radicalisation, and are further entangled in the political rhetoric on the problematic "non-western immigrants."

Even though Murad did not subscribe to this tradition of knowledge (for him, Islam was about peace and charity), he nevertheless had to relate to this knowledge tradition, because it was a powerful frame for interpretation in the society in which he lived, and one the teachers of his son's school potentially would take into account. At least, he was *concerned* that this would happen. Balancing the different frames of interpretation of what might happen formed the basis of Murad's decision. He found that the best way to act as a father in this situation was to prevent his son from being potentially stigmatised at school, where he already stood out as the 'most foreign.' This also reflects how powerful this frame of interpretation is. On the other side of the scale, was Murad's concerns about holding Serkan back from thinking critically, leaning towards the Danish ideals of freedom of speech and thought. His choice to convince his son not to write the specific school assignment was the result of weighing these concerns. Thus, Murad's concern about how to guide his son includes a balancing act between these different guidelines for action in the position of being a

Muslim father in Denmark, and reveals contradictory knowledge traditions, which such fathers may have to balance.

Murad's example points to how mistrust could also be a concern among fathers facing life-circumstances that are more privileged. However, some interlocutors did not express mistrust towards the school or teachers, including some, who faced marginalisation or economic exploitation. For example, Adnan and Faria, who were living in the social housing estate of Elmehaven, both having constraining jobs with low incomes, nonetheless expressed a general trust in the school and the welfare system in general to help their two daughters achieve a good education (e.g. pp. 242). As did the fathers Abdul and Rashad, who were the organisers of the fathers' group in Elmehaven, who likewise expressed a general satisfaction with Rosendal School, and did not speak of any experiences of being mistrusted. Thus, fathers trust in the school system and grateful attitude towards the Danish welfare system providing free education was something I often heard from fathers with a migrant background (see also Jørgensen 2017). To understand both the declared mistrust towards 'the system' and an declared gratefulness towards the welfare state with its free education, professional teachers and specially trained pedagogues, we have to approach both these attitudes as possible frames of interpretation, as each attitude was supported by its own tradition of knowledge. As Barth states, we cannot predict how actors will relate to different concerns, only that they will make their decisions based on some of them. Although actors in a community share certain cultural circumstances, they are acting from different positions, have different experiences, and are navigating to reach their individual goals in different ways, using different strategies (Barth 1993).

## Concerned Fathers

The ethnographic material points to how *concerns* for acting and guiding one's son or daughter in the best way, could become a large part of fathering. Along these lines, the following empirical examples illustrate how intervention projects could reinforce such concerns.

As the fathers' groups functioned as coming-communities, where fathers could discuss their concerns and guide each other for how to handle certain situations as fathers, the fathers' groups were also very different. For example, the Skovlunden fathers' group appeared to be built on a grass-roots community initiative, whereas the fathers' group in Bøgelunden was more structured, with welfare-professionals coming to visit the group to give talks to educate

the fathers. Although these welfare-professionals' inputs were thought of as a opener for discussion and a help to the fathers, it could also, as we will see in the following examples, result in greater concerns, making fathers unsure about their fatherly practices.

Ammar was a father I met in the fathers' group in Bøgelunden. He was originally born in Lebanon, as a Palestinian refugee, and was granted asylum in Denmark when he was 20 years old. Now he had five children. He told me about the following episode, which works to illustrate his concerns about social interventions, which he could not 'battle alone.' One day some years ago, Ammar had received a letter from the municipality, calling him in for a consultation because he was accused of hitting his son. A neighbour, who shared the courtyard with Ammar and his family, had made a report to the social services that a father in the courtyard had hit his child. It was unclear to Ammar, how the episode was linked to precisely him, but Ammar thought he had been contacted because there had already been a case on his son Yusuf due to his need for special teaching. Therefore, maybe, Ammar said, he had been accused. Ammar got frightened when he received the letter, yet he had a good relationship with the health care worker (*sundhedsplejerske*) at his children's school. She had witnessed all of Ammar's children growing up during their school years and had known the family for almost eighteen years. Ammar brought the letter to the health care worker, who called the specific social-service department. Ammar resumed the call like this: "It is a good family, and they do not have such things in that family, so they [the municipality (*kommunen*)] said 'sorry we will close the case.'" I asked if Ammar ever found out who had reported him, and he answered, "I do not know it exactly, there probably had been a boy beaten in the courtyard, but I believe it had been guess-work from the caseworker's side, so it was frustrating." It was a bit unclear to me how some of the parts in Ammar's story went together, due to Ammar's command of Danish. Nevertheless, there are more elements in Ammar's story, which fit previous findings: how Ammar seemed to fit the role of the suspect by his foreign name and gender. Moreover, as we have also seen in previous examples, Yusuf's special needs were linked to problems *within* the family, insofar as Ammar's analysis of the incidence was right.

Another important element in the story was how Ammar got frightened when he received the letter, even though he was innocent. Something is at stake here about being, potentially, mistrusted as a Muslim migrant father, while being subject to an unpredictable and powerful municipality (or 'the system'), which Ammar needed help from the health

care worker to 'battle.' This worked to exemplify his feelings of powerlessness. Even though the powerful municipality made Ammar scared, he did not generalise from the story like "this is how *they* think about *us*." He also received help from 'the system', in the shape of the health care worker, who called the specific caseworker. Still, he was depending on such help, in navigating the terrain of a complex social system.

When I asked Ammar, what he had learned from the fathers' group, he mentioned "communication." Some of the welfare-professionals who had visited the fathers' group in Bøgelunden, had taught the fathers about communication; a certain kind of communication, where one is not simply delivering a message/order to children, but where one communicates in a more "friendly way," as Ammar termed it. He continues to tell me that he found it difficult to practice this in real life, because he did not experience his son listening to him. A few days ago, his son had gone to Turkey. Ammar had told him not to go because he had to start high school, and now he would miss some of the first days. "I would never accept that he is wasting his education because he wants to travel. If he wants to travel, when there is a holiday, I do not have anything against it, but not when the school starts. Then it is difficult to practice what you have learned, in real life," Ammar concluded.

It seemed that the welfare-professional presumed Ammar and the other fathers would normally communicate in more "unfriendly ways." This fits the social imaginary of a negative image of the strict and authoritative 'Muslim child-rearing, or 'the Muslim, patriarchal father.' However, Ammar was concerned about his son's education and that his son did not listen to him. As he said, "independence plays a major role in their mentality [teenagers growing up in Denmark like his son], it can be good, but also bad if it comes to this: 'I will do it, and I do not care, what you say.'" Ammar had problems with getting his son to listen to him, and he felt rather powerless, when his son did not listen to him and just left for Turkey without his permission. Thus, Ammar's son did sometimes require more than 'friendly words,' considering the fact that most parents would have become more firm in such situations. There appeared to be a mismatch between the expectations of the welfare worker and Ammar's challenges; the welfare-worker's pre-understanding of Ammar being *too* strict and preventing his children for having a 'free,' 'dialogical' and 'democratic' upbringing. From Ammar's perspective, his son just did what he wanted to do, and 'talking friendlier,' did not help him. Ammar was in need for guidance, but the premise for such father-courses to succeed was, with Ingold's terms, *to common*; the need for the welfare-professionals to listen to and learn from the fathers, and for a time imagine themselves in the fathers' positions, in order for their education to be helpful. Contrary, it appeared to result in greater concerns.

Thus, I argue, both the wrong letter from “the system” and how Ammar was adjusted not to be too strict, left Ammar in a state of concerned fathering. Along the same lines, the father Abir (pp. 117), who had participated in the same courses of the fathers’ group of Bøgelunden, told me:

It is something like this... that the parents are afraid to scold – a little more – at the child. This... I believe, it means a lot, because if the child goes to...hmm... I mean... you scold at the child, and the child goes directly to the school and says ‘my dad had scolded me’ and then the parents are being called in [for a conversation]. Then you will sit there as if you were in the court. Even though the father is innocent (...), then he is being a bit...hmm...he is being called in. This he does not forget. If you...if you, for example, have a child, what is it you do, then? You always do the best for your child. Always, always! If your child falls, and quickly you will fall too. You have your life in your child... (...) When you are in the school, all the children sit here, and the teacher says, ‘your parents cannot do this, and this.’ And they [the children] gets like ‘uuh... aha!’ And then the parents get really sad. They keep all the reprimands; they keep them inside themselves (...). It really hurts. When your child does not [listen]...and you know, what he is doing is stupid, and you cannot say anything. If he comes home at midnight and you want him to come at ten, and, you cannot shout at him. Then it hurts inside you. You cannot sleep. You wait. You wait for your child. Because it is your child. And he cannot feel, who you are.”

Abir express another concern besides having a son who does not listen, which is that his son might not feel, “who he is” as who he is as a father, because he cannot act in his natural way, or as who he really is. This points to how concerned fathering may translate into a concern about being inauthentic as a father: to feel being held back from whom one really is as a father.

### *The Solution is Within*

In another fathers’ group, Hørhaven, most of the fathers were appointed to participate, due to child-rearing challenges. According to the organiser, many of the fathers were refugees, dealing with war-traumas on different levels. Hørhaven fathers’ group provided a kind of self-

development course, which also invited child-professionals in to share their point of views. One of the activities was to bring the fathers to a graveyard, and then the fathers were told to imagine how their children would remember them as fathers after they were dead. According to the organiser, fathers showed rather strong reactions to this ‘exercise,’ which was perceived as positive, since the exercise was described as a kind of wake-up call for these fathers. In my experience, this was to make them “get on track,” that is, engage positively in the relations to their children. Such self-development exercises placed the solution of the problem on the individual father, and the possibility of a successful change in the father’s effort or *choice* in personal-development, and can be informed by the aforementioned neoliberal tendency, where the responsibility for various challenges are placed on the individual family or father (pp. 10). Along the same lines, Johansen shows, how social intervention projects in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the margin of the Welfare-state may become laboratories for social-psychological development projects, where new initiatives are tested on (marginalised) citizens without a professional-knowledge-foundation, if these initiatives can have harmful psycho-social side-effects (Johansen 2013).

Subsequently, the welfare-professionals’ solutions for various challenges to a lesser extent addressed external factors, such as a non-union-regulated salary, long working hours, constraining jobs, being worn-out (*nedslidt*) or difficulties entering the established labour market and the following shame and marginalisation of being unemployed, or, in some cases severe traumas. In addition, how some of the fathers’ children were growing up in crime-ridden neighbourhoods, where the father could not control their children’s friendships. This was a returning factor in the ethnographic material: fathers’ great concern about their children getting positive friendships, and how they could avoid their children from becoming members of gangs and groups of youth based on a resignedly, aggressive or destructive counterculture. Although the organizers of the fathers’ group in Hørhaven were aware of these external factors, they appeared to be more unmanageable, and thus the counter-reactions were more individualised.

The father Abir, for example, had been working most of the time his children were small in his own corner shop. He had worked twelve to fourteen hours every day and had therefore not spent as much time with his children, as he had wished. Thus, lower-working-class life circumstances determined how and how much fathers could be physically present in their children’s’ live (although some children would hang out in the shops of their fathers). To place the responsibility on the individual fathers’ personal *choice* potentially works to ‘blame

the victim' (see also Aamann 2017). In extension, it reflects a neoliberal authoritarian ideology that has cast poverty as a personal deficit rooted in perceived individual failings and moral blame (Gupta and Featherstone 2015). The father Raza termed such spins of responsibility as "father-bashing," referring to how he experienced fathers with a migrant background were blamed as the reason for many different problems regarding their children, especially the teenage boys, which overlooked greater societal and structural matters, and thus it was not up to the individual fathers alone to battle their sons' future.

Along the same lines, Ammar found a talk by an educational leader, who had visited the Bøgelunden father's group to be rather unfair. This educational leader had given a talk on how the fathers could (ought to) show up and engage in his children's schooling. However, Ammar said, since he had five children there were, for him, too many events to participate in. Although accepting that he could have been more engaged in the school-events, this was still not a matter of his choice alone, but also of the prioritising, he had had to do.

### *An Assemble Role as 'the Strict Father'*

The case of Abir and Ammar reveals another aspect of fatherly being and becoming, which was also to be found in the case of Omar and Nabil; they all, in different ways, describe being held back from setting limits on their teenagers' behaviour, which was related to child-professionals intervening or mistrust in their fatherhood practices. Paradoxically, many of the fathers' groups, which were part of social regeneration plans, had a crime-reduction agenda, urging migrant fathers to be (more) 'on the ball' concerning the so-called "wild youths," especially the "wild boys." This was also the case in the fathers' group of Bøgelunden, which Nabil, Abir and Ammar attended. The sometimes-participating police officer told me in a firm tone that the fathers "... *had* to learn to take responsibility, as these young kids are simply running around in the neighbourhood getting into crime." This view seemed a common one among many social workers, but then again, the empirical material paradoxically suggests that some fathers felt *prevented* from setting restrictions in their child-rearing, as they had experienced how welfare workers want to interfere and intervene in their fatherly practices, which made them concerned about what was 'acceptable' to do. This paradox, I believe, must be taken into account in future social projects, and generally calls for further investigation.

Thus, we see a paradox concerning fathers feeling being 'held back' from setting limits, and at the same time being blamed for not being enough 'on the ball.' This paradox



gets even more complex, taking into consideration those voluntary roles, the fathers were offered in many of the social intervention projects. Looking back at my visits in fathers' groups being part of a community regeneration master plan initiative, there were several examples that the voluntary role that lay ahead of the fathers, involved getting control of the "wild youth" – especially "the wild boys." Thus, I recorded a frequently accessible and positive acknowledged role in such projects for migrant fathers to take part in generating peace and order in the residential area or in the local communities more broadly. For example, these fathers were encouraged to take part in local 'patrolling fathers' group' to patrol in the area, and 'look after the youth' (see also Johansen 2013, 140). In this way, fathers would be placed in a role of the strict father, which could reinforce prejudice of a certain controlling, patriarchal masculinity. Thus, we see how social intervention projects may insinuate positive meanings to the aspect of a controlling father, which needs to be investigated more.

During my participant observation in the community house of Elmehaven, more roles appeared more approachable for women and mothers than for men. For example, Faria was encouraged to take part in the "mothers-group," the "women-association" and was assigned the role as cleaner (*oprydder*) during the Family Dinner Club, where she even had a badge symbolising her belonging to the community-house. Generally, it seemed that women more easily fell into roles concerning care work, together with the fact that most activities and groups were for women, and the main employees were women as well. Thus, women were offered various acknowledged voluntary-roles in Elmehaven community-house; many concerned care work, which contrasted with the aforementioned voluntary-role as a member of a patrolling-father-groups.

The contra-distinction mechanism, that migrant fathers experienced being held back from being too strict, and on the other hand 'called in' to take on such a role of the strict father (as in the patrolling groups), was also a mechanism I encounter regarding schooling. Raza explained to me how he, as well as other migrant fathers he knew of, had felt overlooked in the early years of their child's schooling, where the teachers had mainly addressed their wives. However, the teachers' gaze would change when the children went into teenage years. If the teenager, especially the boys, Raza underlined, was involved in conflicts, finally these fathers were called in to participate in the home-school cooperation. Now, the teacher would seek help from the father to "put the son in place" and in a way urged him to take on a role of the strict, patriarchal father, which these fathers had tried to avoid, as Raza explained. I encountered the same tendency at Rosendal School. However,

fathers with Danish backgrounds could experience the same. For example, Claus, the father of Frederik in 7X, felt that the case of his son reselling stolen bikes was a matter in which the teachers had exclusively included him, as a father. Thus, this may be an experience of fathers in general, although this matter became more multifaceted in cases with migrant fathers with the aforementioned racialised and ethicised characteristics, due to the negative controlling image. These cases also place a question as to which extent being a migrant father to boys vs. girls may affect fatherly becoming, as mistrusted masculinity might also be ascribed to teenage boys (see e.g. Jensen 2010). The logic of ‘putting a wild teenage son in place needs a strong patriarch,’ may potentially work as a regenerating dynamic.

## Emergent Fatherhoods

In this chapter so far, I have analysed various factors, which entangled with migrant fathers’ lives and influenced how these fathers would practice, as well as perform, fatherhood. What I above have termed as concerned fathering, was a reaction to mistrust and mistrusting as a way of being-in-the-world for some of the interlocutors. Thus, mistrust and concerns appeared as a significant context for emergent fatherhoods of Muslim, migrant fathers in this study. Nevertheless, for some interlocutors, it did not appear to be a crucial part of fathering – at least not when explained to me.

Thus, such concerned fathering is only one aspect amongst many others, which one could describe as emerging fatherhoods among migrant fathers. In addition, although many of the above described factors and forces, on different scales, potentially worked to disempower the fathers involved, the fathers responded to (the lines of) forces in creative and unpredictable ways as fathers, and here the focus on emergent fatherhood foregrounds those practices of fatherhood, which appear new and transformative (Inhorn et al. 2015). Thus, it is crucial that the phenomenon of mistrusted masculinity does not overshadow or determine our understandings of (Muslim) migrant father’s lives in Denmark. The following cases illustrates the opportunities for transformation and resilience within fatherhood practices among migrant fathers (Inhorn 2012; Inhorn et al. 2015). How being and becoming a father involves a variety of transformative social processes, involving change over the male life course, generation and social history (Inhorn et al. 2015, 9-10; Nielsen and Westerling 2016; Westerling 2016).

### *“He Was so Different in Many Ways”*

As found in other fatherhood-studies (Aitken 2009; Nielsen and Westerling 2016; Reinicke 2010, 2007, 2006; Eydal and Rostgaard 2016) fathers often define themselves in opposition to their own fathers, stating how they both find similarities, yet also differences. When I asked Kadin (pp. 204) if he was a different father from his own father, he quickly agreed, while laughing a bit. His father had been a builder in Morocco, and according to Kadin, “He was so different in many ways.” He had been a good and respectable father; however, he had not been able to help Kadin with his schooling and homework, and Kadin did not remember them having such a close emotional relationship as he felt he had with his own children today. Kadin told me that the most important thing for him was for his children to be happy in school and achieve a good education. I knew from Sofia (his daughter) that Kadin often helped her and her brother with their homework; how Kadin and his son would discuss physics for hours, Sofia declared to me, in a rather ‘I don’t get the fuss’ tone. Kadin’s story is one of many, where migrant fathers expressed being different from their own father. Another example is Jawad.

With help from Delisha (pp. 88), I arranged an interview with her father, Jawad. Delisha was a knowledgeable and hardworking girl in 7X. Jawad was a cleaner, as was his wife. Jawad’s greatest wish for Delisha was that she would obtain a good education. His physical condition would not allow him to continue working as a cleaner much longer; therefore, he was searching for a pizzeria to buy. He hoped for Delisha to be able to choose among different jobs when she grew older, more than him and his wife had been able to. For that reason, he always told her how important it was for her to do her homework, participate in class discussions, and so on. He was sad he was unable to help her because of his lack of knowledge about the exercises and due to his low command in Danish; however, he knew of a homework café, where Delisha would get help.

As I did with all the fathers I interviewed, I asked Jawad, if there was something in particular he loved to do with Delisha. He told me how they often baked together; that was their special thing to do together. From Delisha, I knew that she had a very close relationship with her father, she preferred when he was also home, and she told me she was a “father’s girl.” Jawad thought he was a different father from his own father. Jawad’s father had had a high position within the Pakistani military, and Jawad recalled him as a rather strict man.

Jawad instead wanted to have a closer emotional relationship with his daughters. For that reason, he had decided never to shout at Delisha, “I am afraid that she will pull away from me,” he explained (see also Jørgensen 2017). Christian, Valdemar’s father (pp. 104), explain something similar to me: When it sporadically happened that he would lose his temper, he was very cautious always to say sorry to Valdemar afterwards, something he did not remember his own father had done. Both fathers were concerned with not harming the emotional relationship they felt to have with their child. In general, fathers I interviewed explained, in one way or another, how they felt emotionally closer to their children than their own father had been to them. Many fathers underlined that their fathers had also been very affectionate fathers; however, they continued to clarify that nowadays they spent more time together with their children. One such example was Idle (pp. 148). Idle had only good things to say about his own father, but he had not spent that much time together with his father. Idle, for example, went with his children to different sports activities and similar activities, through which he experienced becoming closer to his children by spending more time with them, just the two of them (see also Madsen 2003).

I argue that the previously described trend on new roles of the father (pp. 32) or pioneering fathers (Nielsen and Westerling 2016) is also visible in the material of this study, and found amongst fathers of diverse national backgrounds. As mentioned earlier, scholars have mostly studied such tendencies among fathers described as “white, middle-class fathers.” In continuation hereof, I argue, this focus potentially gives the idea that such new roles of fathers only belong to a certain privileged group in society, or as exclusively belonging to a kind of ‘middle-class mentality,’ similar to how Lareau (2003) finds different classed-mentalities in her study of school-parents. The findings of this study do not confirm such classed mentality, a discussion I shall return to in the conclusion.

First of all, the study finds multifocal ways to narrate fatherhood (Reinicke 2006). This study also finds trends of new roles for fathers among interlocutors with a migrant background, with various degrees of education, and having both high- and low skilled jobs. More precisely: an emerging aspect of fathering about experiencing, aspiring and obtaining a stronger emotional relationship with one’s children. Thus, having a closer emotional relationship with one’s child than one had with one’s own father has been a recurrent theme among the interlocutors (see also Jørgensen 2017, 3-4). However, the empirical material puts forward that many practical child-rearing tasks still appear as ‘motherly-tasks,’ such as preparing the lunch box, checking the Parent Intranet, remembering the extra indoor-shoes, the fruit for the harvest festival at the school, and the like (Bach 2017; Tress 2000). These

practices, in most families, regardless of background, appeared to belong more to the realm of the mothers, than that of the fathers, although there was a great variation between how couples divided tasks between them.

## Concluding Remarks

Fatherly becoming happens within interactions with and navigation of different landscapes, one of which was the terrain of the school. Fathers entered this terrain of the school, were placed in different, and partly, unequal positions to engage in the demanding and intensified home-school cooperation. Here, some migrant fathers, in the eyes of the teacher, appeared as disengaged or absent. However, venturing into the topic of fatherly affection and what has been termed as pioneering fathers (fathers venturing into and aspiring for a closer emotional, intimate emotional relationship to their child), this leads to a discussion of which practices and symbols we choose to be *indicators* for such emerging tendencies in fathering. I suggest that if we measure fathers' participation in, for example, the intensified technological communication or degree of living up to the high expectations towards school-parents engagement in schooling (Akselvoll 2015; Kryger 2015), such indicators appear as a blunt tool for understanding intimate fatherhood practices. Many of the migrant fathers in Rosendal School did not perform the role of a pioneering father in settings observed by child-professionals, and the analysis presented here has shown different reasons for this. Yet, fatherly emotional bonds and general affection were not directly reflected in, or equal to, such performances. Thus, fathers' devotion to the intimate family life and their fatherly engagement in their children's life might not be reflected in being an 'ardent school parent.' Furthermore, this study points to how fathers with migrant backgrounds aspire towards having a close emotional relationship with their children, as well as spending more one-on-one time with them as they had themselves done with their own fathers. Such changes are, I argue, emerging tendencies of new roles of the father: moving towards closer emotional relationships. However, these aspirations are not a one-way trajectory for all fathers, as different fathers have different starting grounds, backgrounds and life-circumstances (Nielsen and Westerling 2016, 188).



## Chapter 13: Conclusion

“Where are the ‘ethnic’ fathers?” some child-professionals wondered, as I described in the introduction. Throughout this dissertation, I have suggested various answers for this question. One central finding of the study is how many of the fathers with a migrant background at Rosendal School were held back by certain constraining jobs. Others became absent because of having many children, and again some (paradoxically) due to trust in the teachers’ autonomy or lack of knowledge about how much visibility and engagement the school actually required, as well as how much it could mean in the eyes of teachers. Other reasons for absence could be gendered divisions of tasks, how the school generally belonged to ‘the realm of the mother,’ the parents being divorced and the child living with the mother. Yet, another factor appeared to be how some fathers with a migrant background did not feel at ease at the parent-events. For example, how meetings for parents did not, by the way they were structured work to include fathers, who were not fully fluent in Danish. Thus, such fathers did not always feel encouraged to take the floor in these larger assemblies. The analysis shows how fathers with a migrant background would often be categorised by teachers as ‘resource-weak,’ something some fathers also felt being met as. In this way, some fathers with a migrant background felt they became redundant in school-home cooperation-practices, which in itself could work to further exclude them. Additionally, the analysis finds that especially Muslim, migrant fathers may experience mistrust from child-professionals, which discouraged them to further engage in the school-home cooperation.

Overall, the absence of migrant fathers could work as an ‘empty space’ open to child-professionals’ interpretations and assumptions about where these fathers were, what they cared for, and not cared for, generally without a broad understanding of these fathers’ extended and complex life-worlds. In addition, such interpretation could be influenced by the social imaginary of the father having a certain mistrusted masculinity, potentially reinforced by isolated cases of domestic-violence, as was the case in Tahir’s story (pp. 209).

Yet, it is important to mention, how many of the interlocutors *did* engage in home-school cooperation, and that the dominant narrative concerning fathers with such mistrusted masculinity as being an ‘absent and ignorant father’ was self-perpetuating and worked to reinforce this image of ‘absent’ by itself. However, many school professionals did not share

such negative prejudice with me, due to many years of positive cooperation with this ‘type of father.’ Besides engaging actively in the home-school cooperation, migrant fathers of this study also volunteered in other associations or community-work.

In a larger perspective, the fathers of this study navigated in-between and pushed lines of forces on different scales in their struggle for fulfilling the father-role they aspired towards, as well as achieving recognition hereof from significant others. By this navigation, the migrant fathers’ becoming, figuratively speaking, happened ‘in the middle:’ they were moving along and amid multiple lines of becoming, pushing the boundaries of forms, as well as escaping and investing new forces. In this way, the work of becoming a school-father was inherently a work of creation (Biehl and Locke 2017, 9).

One social phenomenon, which can be studied as such a line of becoming that entangled in fathers’ becoming as school-fathers, was the discourse concerning how many ‘bilingual pupils’ there ‘ought to be’ at the school, echoing a dominant discourse within educational politics of Denmark, concerning a percentage maximum of ‘bilingual pupils’ in public schools. However, this discourse was largely tabooed in the everyday encounters in Elmekvarteret in order to protect the community, where many inhabitants were those that there could not be *too many* of. The case of the ‘black class,’ (pp. 89) also reflects the problematisation of too much of ‘the foreign’ and generally, how racialised categories entangled in the idea of mixing and the allocation of pupils. Although Elmekvarteret in general reproduced the “race-blind ideology,” that physical appearance did ‘not mean anything’ (Hervik 2015), bodily features *were* nevertheless racialised in some contexts. However, the race-blind ideology and general tabooing of ‘the foreign’ shaded the constructed proximity between ‘the foreign,’ academic underachievement, problematisations, and certain racialised characteristics. Yet, no one wanted to take ownership over such problematisation as well as processes of racialisation, which made it difficult for fathers with migrant backgrounds of colour to verbalise or ‘prove’ their feelings of being disregarded, discriminated against, etc. This circumstance seemed to be one of the reasons for an increasing social alertness among the fathers, and why some migrant fathers’ narratives of experienced discrimination, was told with such great affect. That is, there was not always a suitable vocabulary to draw from, when fathers narrated their stories about being required to trust the school, while not themselves feeling that they were trusted, and how this entangled with their racialised characteristics.

Putting the social processes of ‘thinning’ in the older classes into perspective, it also meant that the parents categorised by teachers as the “resource-strong-parents,” indirectly



became the families the teachers wanted to keep at the school as they were thought of as keeping the academic level high and stopping the process of ‘thinning.’ Thus, Mathilde’s father Tom had, since he grouped up with other similar ‘resource-strong Danish parents’ and agreed on choosing Rosendal School (pp. 88), been indirectly seen as a desired and appreciated ‘type of father.’ This appeared to lead to some parents being given special attention, or privileges; for example, Tom managed to convince Steffen to take special provision to Mathilde in terms of the group division in the class, so that Mathilde was stimulated and did not get bored. Such special considerations contrasted with, for example, the parent-teacher conference of the father Yonis, where he was explained things and placed in a position as ‘non-expert,’ demonstrating inequity between fathers.

Another social phenomenon, which can also be approached as a line of becoming, was how the school site belonged more to the realm of the mother, than that of the father. Often, teachers positioned the mother as a more important caretaker than the father, making some fathers feel they became redundant in the terrain on the school. Similarly, fathers, regardless of their background, found that it was largely the mothers, who sat the agendas in home-school cooperation. However, many of these fathers also found such ‘gender givens’ rather natural. The analysis overall finds how processes of becoming redundant in schools were especially crucial for divorced migrant fathers.

Another force of line which affected migrant fathers’ becoming as school-fathers was a strong language-logic, in which literacy became synonymous with Danish, with the consequence that other languages could become ‘problem-languages’ (see also Timm and Bergthóra 2011). If the obligatory language-test was done with a poor result, the child-professionals’ concerns branched out to the homes, and by means of the language-logic indirectly made the time pupils spent in a multilingual home potentially risky due to “language-confusion.” This led child-professionals to suggest to multilingual parents that they let their children stay longer in the after-school care, and as such indirectly problematised the life-worlds of multilingual families, working to increase migrant fathers’ feelings of being redundant.

Throughout this dissertation, the analysis suggests, how the ‘poor result’ of Danish schools in the PISA test has encouraged reforms, partially based on the philosophy that a varied and flexible school day and week worked to improve learning. In this way, the intensified competition between OECD countries operated as an intensifying line of force, affecting the terrain of public school (Desjarlais 1996). The increasing flexibility brought along a need for greater dependency between teachers and parents, which affected the fathers’

becoming as school-fathers, making some struggle along. If parents did not check up on the many schedule changes and notifications online, they could quite easily fall through, and in the worst case scenario become 'counter-players.' This dependency seemed to reinforce how 'the good parent' was someone on track with things, both with the Parent Intra, yet also in a broader understanding as being 'on the ball,' as an engaged and visible parent, which again entangled in intersubjective dynamics concerning mutual trust. Therefore, it was problematic for those migrant fathers who had rather constraining, low paying jobs, with a rhythm that did not match the rhythms of the (online) home-school cooperation. Thus, when some child-professionals were wondering where the so-called 'ethnic fathers were,' this study suggests to look to these fathers' rhythms of everyday life. In an overall picture, the study finds that the economic exploitation (Choo and Feree 2010) of the Danish underclass had a certain influence in some migrant fathers' lives, restraining them from performing in the appreciated visible and 'active' ways at school. Thinking back at how much the intersubjective dynamics between fathers and teachers meant for establishing trust and being seen as a 'co-player,' these jobs constituted an obstacle for earning this trust.

### Mistrusted Masculinity

Migrant fathers experienced cooperation with schoolteachers, or other child-professionals, very differently, as well as the teachers differed and valued fathers' characteristics differently, due to their own horizon of experience and hereto-related normativity. Yet, the study finds a condensation of experiences among, especially Muslim migrant fathers from the so-called traditional migration countries, in terms of experiencing child-professionals mistrust or disqualifying them as important caretakers for their children. Thus, another line of force, which could influence (Muslim) migrant fathers' becoming as school-fathers was the above-mentioned force of the negative controlling image of a mistrusted masculinity. This could lead to a social imaginary of a mistrusted fatherhood; making teachers concerned if the father was patriarchal, aggressive, oppressive, violent, and/or absent-minded and careless. This seemed to entangle with many teachers' concerns regarding lack of freedom within 'the Muslim childrearing.'

Mistrusted masculinity should be understood as an etic concept, which I suggest captures a social phenomenon within certain historic and social circumstances. A social phenomenon, which is 'in the world' shaped and reshaped in intersubjectivity as well as

produced and reproduced in negative images of the (Muslim) migrant man in media and political ideologies. Such ideologies influenced these fathers' being-in-the-world, since the symbolic framework recurrently played on symbols, which they experienced concerning someone like them. In this way, the political became personal. This ideology reflected tendencies of neo-Orientalism (Inhorn 2012, 299-300), connecting Islam with danger and positioning Muslim men in the positions of a controller and patriarch, and women as suppressed. Such neo-Orientalist portrayals of Muslim men were constructed in contrast to imaginaries of Danish gender equality, where the constructions of the orient-other (Said 1986; Holslag 2015; Inhorn 2012) functioned to maintain and reproduce the 'Danish man' as personifying gender equality. Here the 'Muslim man' stood as 'the other' and represents the antithesis of modern and enlightenment values, where 'traditional gender roles' are perceived as a Middle Eastern or Muslim underdeveloped cultural element contrary to Western egalitarian values (Ewing 2008, 28–29, also see Haga 2015, 40).

This study finds how the concept of 'gender equality' becomes a core value of the modern democratic family in a Danish context. Some of my interlocutors with migrant backgrounds did believe that specific tasks were connected more to one gender than the other, which in the Danish debate on gender equality could be perceived as 'old-fashioned' or as 'traditional gender roles.' I generally got the impression that this division of tasks was by mutual agreement. It seemed to be based on the idea that men have a role closer to the breadwinner, and women's role was to be closer to the child and child-rearing (see also Jørgensen, forthcoming). However, such beliefs were also expressed by fathers with Danish backgrounds (see also Carlsen 2007, Reinicke 2007, 2010). As for example, the mother myth was, to a varying degree, an existing naturalised explanation (Strathern 1992) for the mothers' primary connection to the child, among both migrants as well as fathers with a Danish background.

Fathers with Danish backgrounds, in different ways, related themselves to the ideal of Danish gender equality. The father Jeppe thought of himself as a modern father, and he laughed in an awkward way when he told me how generally many child-rearing tasks were still a task of the mother. Jeppe's awkward laugh can be seen as his reaction to exposing the social imaginary of Danish gender equality. The ethnographic material points to an interesting difference here; as young "academic type fathers" with Danish backgrounds from Elmekvarteret (like Jeppe) related themselves to the ideal of gender equality, and seemed uncomfortable, when it was 'exposed,' some Muslim, migrant fathers in contrast, seemed occupied with convincing me that they were *also* engaged fathers. For example, they also did

‘motherly tasks’ as the fathers from Skovvagen fathers’ group were concerned with telling me how e.g. they *also* cooked. The different ways these fathers framed their fatherhood-narratives reflect two different stereotypical images they thought I (and others) had on them (that of the Danish man practicing gender equality and that of the mistrusted masculinity of migrant men). This meant that their narrating was different, although many of their fatherhood practices might not be.

The kind of fathers within this study who experienced being ascribed the negative controlling image of the mistrusted masculinity had proximity to the politically problematised category of the “non-western immigrant,” by having fled or migrated from the so-called traditional refugee and immigration countries. This proximity illuminates how such broad large-scale categories (the “non-western man”) are put to work to sort and define people, and how ‘underneath’ – the small-scale lines, those of actual fathers, become subjects to such rigid forms. As these fathers’ lives were not consistent with the negative images sticking to this category, and the fact that such large-scale binary categories do not align with empirical realities, the people they are working to sort and define can never completely disentangle from them, either. Therefore, these fathers were struggling along (Desjarlais 1996) with overcoming this phenomenon of mistrusted masculinity.

Mistrust and trust have been central phenomena in this study. I have argued that we, by trusting, both relinquish control over our environment and attempt to extend our control over others (see also Carey 2017, 7). When we, for example, trust someone to keep a secret, this trust also works to control the other person; failing to keep the secret my trust will withdraw and I might no longer be someone to share secrets: “trust requires compliance from those we trust, lest it be lost, perhaps forever” (ibid. 7). In this light, we may approach mistrusted masculinity as ‘you have already lost my trust – you might work to own it back.’ That is, some (Muslim) migrant fathers were, from the very beginning, in a position to work for the trust of the child-professionals. This points to a central inequality concerning many migrant fathers of this study; having from the very beginning to *earn* trust back. Idle’s cheerful mood and his accommodating, positive, and acknowledging attitude seemed to function to make the teacher and pedagogues gain trust in him. However, the father Altun failed to build and earn the same trust, although he was visible in the school-context and Mustafa’s great role model, yet his introverted attitude worked against ‘earning trust.’ Moreover, to make decisions that differed from what the school professionals suggested (as choosing a Turkish wedding over the child-birthday) counterworked to achieve the child-professionals’ trust. Mustafa therefore needed to be integrated; in-between the lines, his

parents were not trusted to be raising Mustafa in 'the right (Danish) way.' However, Altun was expected to trust the many interventions in Mustafa's everyday school-life, and that these were solely working for Mustafa's wellbeing. Both to let Mustafa spend more time in the after-school care (although he could be very tired, when he came home), along with all the special arrangements, e.g. the inclusion pedagogue, the many lessons with the speech therapist, psychological observation in the classroom, and the general focus on Mustafa's abnormality such as his diagnosis. Interventions, which to my experience, positioned Mustafa within a context of deviation and worked to maintain a deviating position in the class as a whole. This made Mustafa recurrently declare to Tobias, the so-called inclusion pedagogue, "I do not want to be different." Nonetheless, Altun had to *trust* the institution was doing the best for his son.

Migrant fathers are in political and media discourses often described by their 'other ethnicity,' sometimes implying how their masculinity is different due to having another culture than the Danish. However, the migrant fathers of this study rarely explained their actions and concerns with reference to how they had such an 'other culture' or 'ethnicity.' Yet, some migrant fathers could struggle with unfamiliarity with the institutional-logics or gender givens of the Danish school system, or feel their language capacities were insufficient to interfere and place their agenda on discussions in the parent meetings, or they struggled with constraining jobs, etc. In this way, the study finds how concrete everyday life circumstances – and the skills and knowledge needed to navigate different terrains successfully, to reach the hopes and aspirations for the future – were the interlocutors' primary concerns.

The study points to how there are more coming communities (Aitken 2009) for discussing and negotiating motherhood than fatherhood. This was, for example, reflected in the many activities for women and mothers in the community house of Elmehaven, as well as in other similar social housing projects. Similarly, many of the social practices at school appeared to include and appeal more to mothers than they did to fathers. There were also more mothers present at the parents events at the school to discuss and negotiate motherhood with. As the role of the mother appeared more primary, mothers also tended to more easily achieve a positive acknowledged role *as mother*. When integration into the Danish labour-marked tended to be more difficult for some migrants – or/and more precarious – the study points to how women could more easily find a positive acknowledged role in merely being a present, caring mother. Here, the local community, including the school, tended to appreciate and encourage such a position; in other words, obtain a positive acknowledgement and fulfil

the position in society *as mother*. Contrary to this, some migrant fathers, facing unemployment, and feeling they were becoming redundant in interactions with child-institutions, had difficulties in assessing a positive acknowledged role in society, and did not in the same way find an, in itself, adequate role *as father*. When struggling to find positive acknowledged positions, while potentially being confronted with a certain mistrust towards one's masculinity, and the feeling of failing as the providing father, this would push some fathers into further exclusion. This study has revealed such cases, and how especially for divorced migrant fathers, exclusion and marginalisation processes appeared to threaten these fathers' belonging to the world (Jackson 2013, 256). Returning to the question of "where are the fathers?" this study finds that in some severe cases, divorced migrant fathers faced an extent of exclusion – or maybe more precisely – finding no pathway to *belong*, so that they faced depression. This is a societal, overlooked, responsibility, calling for further investigation.

Overall, the study points to the same tendency found in more international studies, that there are generally few strategies and initiatives developed for men to work on and develop their identities as fathers (Gupta and Featherstone 2015; Maxwell et al. 2012; Baum 2016). This has also been argued to be the case in Denmark, although not debated much (Skovby 2012).

## Social Alertness

The people who enjoy the greatest ease, and to whom work and conditions in life bring the greatest internal satisfaction, are those who have justified their existence to themselves.

Ella Sharpe 1930, 81

Social alertness was migrant fathers, or their children's, means to influence their social becoming, by reacting to (potentially) being othered. As such, the interlocutors' tried, in the word of Ella Sharpe (1930), to justify their existence or 'shake loose' of meanings-attachments that they did not identify with themselves – not only to themselves, but also to the world around them. In this way, fathers in this study were concerned with overcoming the

mistrusted masculinity they experienced as ascribed, and by such be and become justified in the world they inhabited.

Social alertness must be understood as a pre-condition for being othered – an intersubjective attention on claiming one’s right to define oneself by the self-image one had. Processes of othering may have many faces, depending on the given context and the people involved; thus, the social alertness had an ‘undefined content,’ in a way that it was not always clear, what tricked this alertness, only that it was connected to opposing processes of othering. In this dissertation, I have mainly focussed on othering by way of the negative image of the mistrusted masculinity of the ‘ethnic other,’ and how some migrant fathers navigated to disentangle from this image, to be recognised as a caring, supportive, providing father figure. Thus, in processes of becoming, the potentiality of being othered was an existential condition for many of the Muslim, migrant fathers in this study. Having experienced being othered before, knowing how this could happen to someone like them, ‘their kind,’ such as black hair, a Muslim or ‘foreign’ name, brown skin or other racialised characteristics, a certain dialect etc., created this social alertness of never being sure, when it would (potentially) happen again. These were experiences that many of the migrant fathers carried with them, while navigating for the desired future in the horizon.

I use ‘social’ to underline the intersubjective aspect to this alertness, to avoid reducing this phenomenon to an individual psychological feature; it appeared in human relations – in *inter-experience* (Jackson 1996). It was potentially working from both sides, as both teachers and I were cautious not to confirm such negative pictures. However, as the analyses have shown, we were all placed amongst different large-scale forces, which we could not fully disentangle from.

### *Shaking Loose of Being Defined by Lacks*

Lareau (2003) locates parents’ different strategies concerning schooling within a class perspective, and argues how middle-class parents’ urge to stimulate their children’s development and maximise their potential intensified parenting – the concerted cultivation. Contrary, working-class parents were framed as being less engaged in schooling and instead think of their children’s development as a “natural growth” (Lareau 2003). Along these lines, sociologists Reay et al. (2013) suggest in “White middle-class identities and Urban Schooling” (Reay et al. 2013) how a preoccupation with educational matters is also ‘raced.’ Within this PhD study, Lareau’s classed distinction appears too simple, as the study suggests that parents

with a migrant background, regardless of socio-economic life-circumstances, were preoccupied with a successful education of their children (see also Dannesboe et al. 2018; Nuur 2015). Thus, having what could be termed as a ‘working-class job,’ or with Choo and Feree’s (2010) wording, experiencing a high degree of economic exploitation did not imply being less preoccupied and concerned with the education of one’s child (see also Nuur 2015).

Considering these aspects, I suggest to turn the lens away from ‘class-defined mentalities,’ and instead towards possibilities and restraints for *performing* actively and engaged; e.g. how the rhythms of school-fathers’ everyday life differed. The fathers with the flexible jobs faced better opportunities to perform in the ‘appropriate way.’ Nonetheless, this inequality in possibilities and constraints should not lead us to conclude that migrant fathers with such constraining jobs are not concerned with education as well as present, concerned, engaged and caring fathers in the intimate family-life.

I have sought a theoretical lens to handle categories (as class or ethnicity) as more dynamic (Choo and Feree 2010). Instead of placing interlocutors within *a* class or an ‘(other) ethnic group,’ I have sought to describe the interlocutors’ lives as movements; how people live their life as ‘lines in motion,’ bringing experiences from the past into the future, and how people’s movement through life affects and pushes other people’s life-lines in new directions. Here peoples’ becomings are dependent on the capacities and skills they possessed to endure and live on as they reckon, with the overdetermined constrains and possibilities of the worlds into which they are thrown. While also, with Biehl and Locke’s words, “calling on their ability to approach the open-ended, to imagine worlds and characters that do not, but may yet exist” (Biehl and Locke 2017, 9).

The analyses point to how different migrant fathers navigated differently – with different horizons of experiences, capacities and skills. Yet, one wide-ranging trend was how migrant fathers expressed a great wish for their children to achieve a good education and, for some, to archive a steadier and better-paid job than the jobs these fathers had themselves achieved. Overall, the migrant fathers in this study were navigating for their children to be or stay happy in school, and for them to achieve a good education, was the beacon of the horizon. In this navigation, some of the migrant fathers experienced different obstacles as well as possible routes to take. This study has revealed some of the many and different lines of forces, which affect these fathers’ becoming as it unfolded in meetings with teachers or other child-professionals. By doing so, I wish to put forward a theoretical approach and method, which relinquishes the grand ambition of producing a total account of all the determinants that produce perception and ideas, without giving preference to class-based structures.



However, we cannot hope to produce an account that makes all the determinants of consciousness entirely available at any one given time, as well as there can be dimensions that are not available for reflection (Ram and Houston 2015, 11). However, I have suggested some of the many forces that may determine the interlocutors' existence.

It has been argued that public schools favour the capitals of 'white, middle-class parents' (and pupils), and how this is the reason for certain pupils' underachievement (Reay et al. 2013). Here, Professor of Education and Critical Race Studies Tara J. Yosso (2005) makes us aware how, "...theoretical insight about how a hierarchical society reproduces itself has often been interpreted as a way to explain why the academic and social outcomes of People of Colour are significantly lower than the outcomes of Whites" (70). The assumption follows, Yosso argues, how People of Colour 'lack' the social and cultural capital required for social mobility. As a result, many schools have wrongly worked from this assumption in restructuring ways to help 'disadvantaged' pupils (or parents), whose 'race' and 'class' background left them lacking necessary knowledge, social skills, abilities and cultural capital. Additionally, "If we have been gagged and disempowered by theories, we can also be loosened and empowered by theories" (ibid. 70). Yosso argues that if some knowledge has been used to silence, marginalise and render People of Colour invisible, then 'outsider' knowledge (Collins 1986) can value the presence and voices of People of Colour, and re-place the 'knowledge of the margin,' as the *centre* instead (Yosso 2005; see also Paris and Alim 2014). On the other hand, if we start from the dominant capital of the field of the school, it may unintentionally lead to keeping People of Colour (which in this thesis could be converted to *fathers with a migrant background, of colour*) in deprived positions, defined by 'lacks of capitals' (Yosso 2005).

This viewpoint fits to what happened to Naima as described throughout the dissertation (see e.g. pp. 2-5, 224); where coming from what Steffen thought to be a 'working-class home' seemed to encourage Steffen to 'liberate' and 'empower' Naima, providing her with what she lacked from home. These interventions generally seemed to confuse her: *what was wrong with her?* The analyses in this dissertation have revealed how teachers often did not know of the extended lifeworld of migrant families, and their actual capacities, skills and knowledge; similarly, how teachers often did not explore these parents' assets (see e.g. Paris and Alim 2014). In addition, although teachers generally valued parents' educational experiences, teachers might not be aware of them, because migrant parents were frequently over-skilled in the jobs they did; as Adnan had had a political career, and Faria had a

university degree, and they now both work as cleaners. Thus, being described by lacking the resources needed, they became “resource-weak” and rather redundant. However, if we aspire a fruitful cooperation between home and school, such focus on deficits and lack needs to be changed to a focus on assets.

Besides encouraging a greater focus on fathers’ assets, this study suggests a greater awareness on emergent fatherhood practices and formations of new roles of fathers within migrant families. This would lead to a better understanding of the migrant families when forming different (integrations) parenting initiatives, which could benefit from including fathers, who, in the ethnographic material of this study, sometimes appeared as an *unused potential*. Advocating for child-professionals to spot the diversity, the good intentions, and the role of the fathers in the lives of their children. Also to challenge the endorsement of the mistrusted masculinity.

## Epilogue

The main objective of this dissertation has been to bring new perspectives and experiences of home-school cooperation practices into light. This has been done to exemplify, how the efforts and struggles in everyday life can be seen from new perspectives and with the hope that these new perspectives will cause further reflection among school professionals (Whyte 1999). In extension thereof, this epilogue provides some practical suggestions, thought to make home-school cooperation more inclusive.

### *“Show Us that We are Important!”*

These are the words of Tariq (pp. 116), formulating his greatest call to child-professionals. This statement reflects, what also the analyses have revealed, how some migrant fathers faced becoming redundant in home-school cooperation. This might reflect some teachers’ lower expectations to certain parents (*forventningsfattigdom*) (see also Matthiesen 2014, 137), entangled in teachers’ categorisations of some parents as “resource-weak.” As Tariq added; “it is the system, which make us resource-weak!” Referring to how – if the resource-logics of the institutions were changed, then migrant fathers’ assets would count. Such a perspective fits the theory of asset pedagogy (see e.g. Paris and Alim 2014), where the school’s pedagogies focus on the practices and knowledge of the communities in which the school-parents live,

and in which the school is placed. For example, by encompassing pluralist outcomes that are not centred on e.g. monolingual norms of educational achievement (ibid.). As an example, Tariq told about a teacher at his children's school, who had held a meeting and asked the parents present to solve math-exercises in the way they had learned it during their own school years. An exercise, which had provided the migrant fathers present with the acknowledgement of their way of solving the math-exercises were *also* correct, as well as causing many fruitful mathematical reflections. This event had been a great success, Tariq ended, bringing diverse fathers' assets forward. By taking in and valuing the assets of the local community, it would also decrease inequality processes, where certain so-called "resource-strong parents" somehow became more 'desired' than others; which at Rosendal School also seemed to result in how such "resource-strong parents" took, and were allowed to take, the teachers' time and energy.

Many of the recent political reforms implemented at public schools are counterproductive for such an asset-approach. Introductions of standardised tests, affected by large-scale forces concerning competition between countries (PISA), reinforced a narrow and monotonous definition of assets, as well as what learning in school is about. This competition requires a political technology of comparative studies, which mainly draws on a neo-positivist paradigm and large quantitative comparative studies across countries – as the many tests throughout the school years. This has reinforced a look at pupils and parents as *resources* in 'optimising' the position of Danish schools within the 'competition-game' among OECD countries, where countries' future economic growth is increasingly understood within the frame of so-called knowledge economy discourse (Krejsler et al. 2012, 175). In continuation hereof, there has been a greater standardisation of the learning objectives (*læringsmål*) in the school's subjects over the past few years. By means of these tendencies, a narrow understanding of 'resources' followed, and by such the category of "resource-weak." All working to limit the possibilities for a community grounded, asset-based pedagogy.

### *What do We Want to Gain from Home-School Cooperation?*

This dissertation has revealed how time, energy and special skills are often the requirements for school parents today. Parents are expected to get involved in their children's schooling and take responsibility for everything from well-being events, sorting out and taking a position on the information provided on the Parent Intra, as well as, to a greater extent, engage in learning activities with their children at home. Yet, as we have seen, to do so was

not equally possible for all parents, and these standards of engagement could be almost impossible for some parents to meet (Jørgensen 2019; Akselvoll 2016b; Dannesboe et al. 2012; Krab 2015).

According to many teachers, a good relation to parents and thus more home-school cooperation was what was needed to “break the negative social heritage,” and home-school cooperation was generally perceived as an unrestricted good (Kjær and Kryger 2016, 296). Although the idea of ‘breaking the social heritage’ in many ways can be problematic, as it intermingles in teacher normative evaluations of what was ‘good’ or ‘negative’ heritage (see Gitz-Johansen 2003 for further discussion), it was, among teachers, uttered as their best intention to create equality for pupils. That the pupils would, after leaving the public school, possess equal qualifications and self-confidence to take the further education they wanted regardless of their parents’ academic capacities, social position and general *overskud* (extra energy).

What was contradictory here, was how ‘cooperation,’ due to the technological turn, had largely turned into a vast information flow. In this way, home-school cooperation in many regards had turned into (often one-way) communication and less *relations* (cf. Ingold’s notion of ‘communing,’ Ingold 2018). This excessive flow of information was not automatically a help for parents. Most parents found the Parent Intranet homepage to be messy and expressed their frustrations about how it was difficult to find, or sort out, specific information from the superfluous, thus to be sure one has read all the *important* information, etc. However, the time spent on it seemed to increase proportionally with parents’ lack of certain capacities. This was not explicitly concerning migrant fathers, as many migrant fathers of this study did not struggle with the Parent Intranet, but concerns how different parents in general possessed different skills. Such as: Bookish/academic capacities, command of the Danish language, dyslexia, lack of familiarity with working on the internet and/or written communication in general, sorting out online-information, as well as the standard of one’s computer or phone, etc. were of influence here (see also Akselvoll 2016b). In this way, certain types of parents were given an extra, and possibly quite time-consuming, task, functioning to increase inequality; furthermore when, as we have seen, the lack of checking the numerous information could, eventually, make teachers think that the parents were not supporting the ‘school project’ in general. Additionally, some types of jobs, particularly academic jobs, were more conducive for being a ‘resource-strong’ parent merely due to having a flexible schedule to participate in school events, etc. Therefore, the ‘resource-strong’ has much to do with time than any other particular skills or assets.

Paradoxically, the parents who struggled to meet these expectations were often from the same families the teachers thought of as “resource-weak,” and those they wanted to empower to break the negative social heritage. Thus, following the idea of breaking the social heritage (if we are to use such a concept), the intensified home-school cooperation counterworked the teachers’ intentions.

This might lead to the question – what is actually meant by home-school *cooperation*? Who is meant to benefit from this cooperation? Dannesboe et al. (2012) has argued that the word ‘cooperation’ in several ways is misleading, as the structures and logic of home-school cooperation is relatively fixed. The word co-operation institutes a power-neutral space, where it is possible to make adjustments on *both sides*. However, when some logics were as firm as they were, (for example not to give the most important information on printed-paper as some parents had wished for), it might be better to use the term home-school *relationships*. Thereby emphasizing the home-school collaboration’s sluggish structures and power relationships, which do not form the basis for a real collaboration (Dannesboe et al. 2012). In continuation hereof, we might go on to ask – what is the nature of such relationship? Due to the technological turn, home-school relationships have, to a great extent, become rather standardised written, online- communication, as well as a comprehensive information flow, as described above. However, it is not given that such extensive information flow and online- communication in itself creates better *relationships*. As Ingold (2018) writes, there are profound differences regarding learning within the same environments with possibility for sensitivity towards variations. This stands in contrast to how much online communication today is not context sensitive, and has to a greater extent taken form of transmission of information instead of inter-experienced “communing” (ibid, 6-12). This trend additionally seems to make misunderstandings occur more easily, which different cases in this dissertation have worked to exemplify. In continuation hereof, the analyses point towards the importance of teachers finding time for physical meetings, with time and willingness to enter into a real dialogue and endeavour to also see things from the parents’ perspective and to reach confidentiality, mutual understandings and agreements. I have argued how the increased flexibility within school demanded a lot of time from teachers. However, if less flexibility was desired, as well as a decrease in the information teachers ought to involve parents in, it would release more time for the teachers to work on the actual *relations* to parents.

The analyses also point to how, paradoxically, some of the parents who needed an extra hand from the teacher, or who were not able to help with the homework at home as

much as other parents, were sometimes also the ones who could face being overlooked. Alternatively, in some cases, this led to the teacher's frustration, since they did not live up to the extensive dependency between teachers and parent. Yet, other parents – generally the ones who were deemed as “resource-strong,” were sometimes dreaded for their interference in the teachers' judgment and decisions taking much of the teacher's energy (pp. 134). Such dynamics might be fruitful to think with, and leads to the question: Which parents actually occupied the teachers' already limited time? In addition, how does this relate to teachers' general motivation to promote more equality among pupils? Subsequently, I experienced how teachers often felt alone with dealing with parent's interference or critiques, and the general blurred boundaries between school and home. As a suggestion, schools ought to discuss and agree on standards, which may take some of the pressure away from the individual teachers. Similarly, the analyses have pointed to various processes, where the intensified home-school cooperation counter-productively worked to exclude certain parents, or left them with a sometimes-unclear omnipresent pressure. It is up to schools and teachers to create a balanced interaction between schools and home, and to take into account those parents, who wish for the home-school cooperation to be less demanding. In continuation hereof, we might question to which extent the intensified home-school cooperation is beneficial for the school's scholastic project, or if it has become a kind of 'good in itself'? Thus, questioning, to which degree this 'cooperation' functions to create good learning conditions for the pupils within school?

### *Mutual Dialogue*

Another observation, which I believe teachers would benefit from, was how migrant parents – although showing up to parent-teacher conferences – could experience becoming redundant. One way this happened, was when teachers during home-school conferences tended to turn to the pupil, sometimes caused by the teacher being unsure of how much Danish the parent understood. Although the parent-teacher conference in the older classes are framed as a dialogue between teachers, parents and pupils, some of the conferences I observed worked to diminish the parent's position as an authority and expert regarding their child. This entangled with how some migrant fathers of this study took a position as the listener. For some migrant fathers it was difficult to break into the conversation due to a lower command of the Danish language than the teacher, as well as some fathers felt embarrassed about saying that they did not understand everything said, or for example, how it was difficult for them to navigate the

Parent Intra. In such ways, I experienced more parent-teacher conferences with migrant parents, where these parents became silent, told how things *were*, and what had to happen. Such encounters ended with the teachers delivering a message, rather than communing (Ingold 2018).

It might be difficult for teachers to navigate this situation, yet one way to start a dialogue, and acknowledge the presence of the father/parent, is if the teacher – with openness and sincere interest includes the parent by asking, “How do you experience your child’s schooling? What is good, and what do you find difficult? Do you have any suggestions, for things to be otherwise?” In mutual dialogue, and by balancing the responsibility between school and parent, teachers may include parents more. In addition, teachers ought to be careful about pointing out a problem, without also offering a professional solution hereto.

Especially in conferences with an interpreter, the mutual dialogue became threatened. Often teachers delivered a message through the translator, and when told to the parent, the teacher was eager to deliver the next message – information passed through the interpreter, without leaving time for the parent to have a say in the conversation. In such processes, the teacher rarely got an impression of the given parents’ lifeworld and potential misunderstandings would not be solved. If the goal is to *cooperate*, there is a need for willingness and (more) time to listen to the parent. Furthermore, teachers may reflect on, if and how, they use the pupil as a language-broker. If they, as more teachers in this study, unthinkingly used the pupil as translator, with the consequence that sometimes the pupils would be placed in the position of the parent, certain dynamics worked to inappropriately place the pupils ‘on the spot,’ in a room with certain power-dynamics, sometimes with an imperious tone of voice.

The teachers represented in this study already did a great effort in order not to minoritise and discriminate against parents and children. This dissertation works to further the work already being done and provide an in-depth analysis to reveal aspects concerning inequality that might have been overlooked. One such aspect being precisely informed by teachers concerns with not minoritising or ethnicising pupils, was the taboo of ‘the foreign.’ I find this tabooing to work to equalise the pupils, yet also worked to silence many aspects of the pupils’ and their parents’ life. The study points to how racism, despite the race-blind ideology, was something more migrant fathers of colour (as well as their children) *had* experienced at some point in their life. Thus, one last suggestion is for teachers to include discussions of intersectionality within the classroom. I have earlier pointed to how the intersectionality-approach might overemphasise certain categories if we wish to understand

subjective experiences and agency. Yet I find the intersectionality-approach an important tool for teachers, pupils, and parents to start conversations regarding racialised experiences and inequality in the Danish context.



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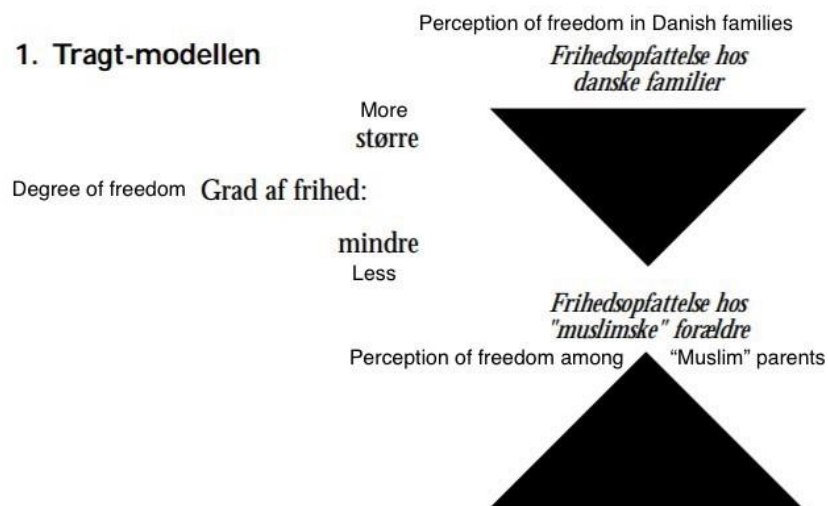
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# Appendix

## Appendix 1 – The Funnel Model

### 1. Tragt-modellen







## Appendix 2 – Summaries

### *English Summary*

This PhD dissertation investigates migrant fathers' experiences of home-school cooperation. One objective is to shed light on how the increasing expectations towards school-parents in Danish public school affect migrant fathers – how they are navigating such intensified expectations and how this effects their experiences of fatherhood in a broader perspective. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in a public school in Copenhagen called Rosendal School, a social housing complex close by, and various fathers' groups, the analysis finds how migrant fathers are navigating the terrain of home-school cooperation differently, and how certain constraints in the interlocutors' lives hindered some fathers from performing as 'visible, engaged and active school-parents' – performances, which teachers at the school appreciated. Failing to live up to such standards, caused some migrant fathers as being classified as 'resource-weak,' the worst case being 'counter-players,' yet with teachers' very limited insight into these fathers' extended life-world and assets.

The dissertation draws on a theoretical perspective of phenomenologically-inspired anthropology and its conceptions of experience, along with perspectives from the "Anthropology of Becoming." This anthropology of becoming puts forward how people are navigating (or wayfaring) through shifting terrains in life, and how being a father is a dynamic social position being negotiated and influenced by the many elements these fathers encounter on this wayfaring towards the desired horizon of the future. Thus, the study approaches subjects as never fully constituted – always being in a state of becoming. The interlocutors possessed different capacities and skills to navigate the terrain of home-school cooperation, and they did so, with their own intentions and agencies. In addition, various forces influenced the terrain of the school, which in different ways affected the interlocutors' navigation and thus also their becomings as school-fathers.

The dissertation has three parts: The first part places the study within related research-fields. Generally, migrant fathers have been an underexposed 'type of father' within studies on home-school cooperation, as well as within fatherhood research more broadly. The majority of studies on fatherhood practices in Scandinavia and Northern Europe have focussed on so-called 'white, middle-class fathers,' where scholars are suggesting a 'new role of the father,' which is a role closer to that of an intimate nurturer. I argue that due to the limited

representation of diverse fathers within fatherhood-studies, such new roles nearly stand out as solely practiced by these 'white middle-class fathers.'

In Part II, I analyse various aspects of the home-school cooperation-practices at Rosendal School. The analysis identifies an intersubjective dynamic termed as 'social alertness,' which both relates to a general tabooing of 'the foreign,' as well as the interlocutors' previous experiences of being othered due to their 'foreignness.' Such processes of othering both happened in personal encounters and by means of a dominant political rhetoric problematising immigrants and refugees. This resulted in a dormant alertness regarding being (potentially) othered again. The analysis goes on to argue how teachers were also entangled in this social alertness, abstaining from making differentiation between the pupils and parents. Nevertheless, by means of a comprehensive 'language-logic,' multilingual pupils and parents were problematised and minoritised by being perceived as Danish *language-learners*. Throughout Part II, the study finds a subtle proximity between the categories 'resource-weak,' 'bilingual' and various social constructions of 'the foreign.' To be perceived as 'resource-weak' left some migrant fathers with the experience of becoming redundant in encounters with school professionals, and the analysis finds how such feeling could intensify due to various 'gender givens' of the school. Here fathers, regardless of national background, felt the school belonged more to the realm of the mother than that of the father. For example, fathers, in a general picture, experienced teachers contacting mothers more than them.

The analysis also finds how, due to a more varied school day/week, the teachers became increasingly dependent on parents to be checking up on, and involved in, the school affairs of their children. As some of the migrant fathers from Rosendal School were having certain constraining jobs, they faced difficulties in living up to the high expectations of parents' involvement in schooling, as well as the general 'technological turn of the home-school cooperation,' demanded certain skills, which some fathers' possessed more than others.

The third part of this dissertation examines the social phenomenon of 'mistrusted masculinity.' We see how a certain negative controlling image of the Muslim, migrant man, is figuring in political and media rhetoric, where this 'kind of man' is represented as controlling, a patriarch and as a brake on integrations and equality of gender. Migrant fathers expressed how they, in various ways, had to relate and navigate according to this negative controlling image. Additionally, how this negative image might influence encounters between school professionals and migrant fathers. This leads to analysing migrant fathers' subjective

experiences of school professionals mistrusting them. Such experiences were manifold, and illuminates how the negative controlling image of 'the Muslim, migrant man,' may play out in intersubjectivity and hinder a fruitful cooperation between (Muslim) migrant fathers and school professionals.

Various shades of mistrust lead some migrant fathers to practice 'concerned fathering,' where the potentiality of being mistrusted and othered lead to migrant fathers' concerns regarding how to raise and guide their children. Although many migrant fathers expressed such concerns regarding raising their children with reference to the mistrust they had experience adhered to them and their religion, this aspect of fathering only represented an incomplete view of their fatherhood practices. The study finds how aspirations for a closer emotional relationships to one's children that oneself has experienced from one's own father, was a recurrent theme amongst the migrant fathers. Yet, the dissertation argues how the aforementioned 'new role of the father' is also noticeable amongst the migrant fathers of this study.





## *Dansk resume*

Denne ph.d.-afhandling undersøger relationer og interaktioner mellem fædre med migrantbaggrund og lærere samt disse fædres subjektive erfaringer hermed. Et af afhandlingens mål er at belyse, hvordan skolens stigende forventninger til forældres engagement og deltagelse i deres børns skolegang influerer på fædre med migrantbaggrund på forskellig vis. Således undersøges det, hvordan disse fædre navigerer i disse øgede forventninger samt hvordan det påvirker deres tilblivelse som 'skolefædre.' På baggrund af etnografisk feltarbejde i en folkeskole i København, et nærtliggende alment boligbyggeri samt forskellige fædregrupper, analyseres det, hvordan forskellige begrænsninger i nogle af fædrenes liv forhindrede dem i at fremstå som "synlige," "engagerede-" og "aktive skoleforældre," hvilket var de anerkendte måder at performe forældreskab på, set fra lærernes perspektiv. Det faktum, at nogle lærere oplevede visse fædre som fraværende eller som værende ikke nok "på," kunne medføre at disse fædre blev klassificeret som "ressourcesvage," på trods af lærernes begrænsede indsigt i, og forståelse for, fædrenes livsverden, og den viden og de kapaciteter og evner, som fædrene hver især besad.

Analysen tager sit afsæt i en fænomenologisk inspireret forståelse af erfaring. Primært er afhandlingens sigte at belyse skole-hjem-samarbejdet fra fædrenes perspektiv. Herudover inddrager jeg perspektiver fra 'the Anthropology of Becoming,' bl.a. hvordan mennesket forstås som et subjekt, der hele tiden er under tilblivelse. På samme måde anskuer jeg den sociale position af at være far, som en position, der er til forhandling og som formes gennem fædres mange møder med forskellige subjekter, diskurser og andre kræfter, som de møder i deres navigering af forskellige terræner. At være far er således noget der forhandles og genforhandles gennem fædrenes færden gennem livet og de forskellige sociale miljøer og elementer, som de navigerer i og interagerer med, på deres vej mod den fremtid de intenderer. Fædrene, der deltog i denne undersøgelse havde forskellige kapaciteter og evner til at navigere i skolens terræn, samt deres egne subjektive erfaringer og intentioner.

Afhandlingen er delt op i tre dele: Den første del placerer studiet inden for beslægtede forskningsområder. Her argumenterer jeg for, at fædre med migrantbaggrund er en underbelyst 'type far,' når det kommer til skole-hjem-samarbejde, men også i studier af faderskab generelt. De fleste studier af faderskabspraksisser i Skandinavien fokuserer på såkaldt "majoritets, middelklasse, fædre," hvilket også har medført, at de beskrevne tendenser på en 'ny faderrolle,' tegner sig som et særtræk for denne type af 'majoritetsfar.' 'Den nye

faderrolle' betegner en farrolle, som er mere engageret i det nære omsorgsarbejdet med barnet, også i de tidlige år af forældreskabet.

I del 2 analyseres forskellige praksisser inden for hjemme-skole-samarbejdet. Analyserne identificerer en intersubjektiv dynamik, som jeg betegner '*social alertness*.' Denne sociale dynamik relaterede sig til en general tabuisering af 'det fremmede' eller 'det anderledes' og vævede sig ind i informanternes tidligere erfaringer med at blive andetgjort, både i personlige møder men også via en andetgørende politisk retorik om såkaldt "ikke-vestlige indvandrere og flygtninge." Disse erfaringer medførte at migrantforældre og deres børn var 'på mærkerne' i forhold til at blive andetgjort igen. Lærerne var også på mærkerne, og tilstræbte at undgå at kategorisere eleverne i etnificerede eller minoriserede kategorier. På trods heraf, peger analysen på, at især lærernes fokus på sprog og sprogtilegnelse medførte en distinktion mellem eleverne, som også kom til at handle om at være "etnisk dansk" eller "etnisk anden." Jeg betegner denne optagethed på sprog som en særlig '*sprog-logik*,' som medførte at flersprogede elever og forældre kunne blive problematiseret og minoriseret gennem logikker om det at være en, der er ved at *lære* dansk. På den måde peger analysen på en tæthed mellem kategorierne "ressourcesvag," "tosproget" og forskellige konstruktioner af 'det anderledes,' hvilket medførte at nogle migrantfædre følte, at de blev overflødiggjort i mødet med læreren eller pædagogen. En sådan følelse blev forstærket ved, at der var mange '*kønnede selvfølgeligheder*' i skole-hjem-samarbejdet, som gjorde at fædre – uanset baggrund – følte at skolen tilhørte "morens domæne" mere end "farens domæne." For eksempel oplevede mange fædre, at læren havde en tilbøjelighed til at kontakte moren før faren.

Analysen peger også på, at lærerne i høj grad var afhængige af, at forældrene tjekkede op på Forældreintra og at de var "på." Denne afhængighed blev forstærket ved, at skoleskemaerne var fleksible, og at skolen som konsekvens af reformer tilstræbte en "varietet" og "omskiftelig" skoledag, hvilket bevirkede at lærere og forældre blev afhængige af at holde tæt kontakt. Da nogle af migrantfædre havde, hvad jeg betegner, som '*begrænsende jobs*,' havde de ikke mulighed for at leve op til de generelt høje forventninger om engagement. Når nogle fædre med migrantbaggrund oplevede forhindringer i deres navigation mod at blive en god og 'passende' skolefar, så skyldes det således visse elementer i skolens organisering, som for eksempel Forældreintras specifikke logikker. Det var nemmere for fædre med de såkaldte '*fleksible jobs*' at leve op til forventningerne om at 'tjekke op' på den bestandige strøm af informationer fra Forældreintra. Samtidig har den '*teknologiske drejning*' inden for skole-hjem-samarbejdet, siden Forældreintra blev lanceret i 2002 medført at dette samarbejde

hovedsageligt foregår gennem skriftlig online kommunikation, som kræver nogle helt særlige færdigheder af forældrene. Mange migrant fædre oplevede desuden, at skole-hjem-samarbejdet i de danske folkeskoler passede til max. to børn og ikke for eksempel fire. På denne vis belyser afhandlingen forskellige faktorer, der havde indflydelse på fædrenes tilblivelse som skolefædre.

I den tredje del af afhandlingen undersøges fænomenet *'mistænkeliggjort maskulinitet.'* Analysen peger på hvordan der figurerer et særligt negativt portræt af "den muslimsk mand" i politiske diskurser, hvor "den muslimske mand" portrætteres som kontrollerende, patriarkalsk og som en forhindring for integration og ligestilling. Gennem migrantfædrenes fortællinger, analyserede det hvordan disse fædre på forskellig vis forholder sig til disse negative portrætninger, og hvordan de på forskellig vis navigerer i et sådant politisk landskab. Analysen belyser også hvordan en sådan negativ portrættering af en "mistænkeliggjorte maskulinitet," kan spille ind i skole-hjem-samarbejdet og de intersubjektive dynamikker her. Dette leder videre til at analysere fædres subjektive erfaringer med at blive mistænkt af lærere eller pædagoger. Disses forskellige erfaringer havde både ligheder og forskelle, men centrale elementer i mistilliden omhandlede lærere og pædagogers bekymringer om, om fædrene var omsorgsfulde fædre, som tilskyndte en fri og demokratiske opdragelse.

Forskellige afskygninger af mistillid medførte at nogle migrantfædre udviklede hvad jeg har betegnet som et 'bekymret faderskab.' Fædrene blev bekymrede for hvordan de bedst navigerede i de institutionelle kontekster og hvordan de bedst opdragede deres børn. Selvom denne bekymringer om mistillid mod deres maskulinitet eller religion, kunne påvirke fædrenes opdragelsesstrategier, var disse bekymringer kun én facet af et mangefacettert faderskab. Undersøgelsen viser, hvordan migrantfædre på forskellig vis engagerer sig i deres børns liv, og det at have en tættere følelsesmæssigt relation til ens børn, end man selv havde haft til sin egen far, var et tilbagevendende emne. På den måde peger undersøgelsen på, at det der er blevet betegnet som 'den nye faderrolle' også er at finde blandt fædre med migrantbaggrund.

