



**AALBORG UNIVERSITY**  
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Global Refugee Studies  
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**An Ethnographic Study of Reciprocal Expectations in the School-Home Cooperation with Refugee Parents in a Danish Welfare State Context**

**Master's Thesis**

Author: Mette Dahl Hansson (20162230)

Supervisor: Michael Alexander Ulfstjerne

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how practices of exchange are influencing the school-home cooperation with refugee parents in a Danish welfare state context. The research is constructed around Marcel Mauss (1967 [1925]) theory of the gift, social exchange, and reciprocal obligations.

The thesis investigates how macro-level dynamics are influencing every-day interaction in the Danish schools in relation to the cooperation with refugees. To illustrate this connection, the research is divided into two analyses that are interconnected. The first analysis explores the Danish welfare state in relations to the integration of refugees and immigrants, and the second analysis examines how dynamics and macro-level tendencies are reproduced in the school-home cooperation with refugee parents.

The first part is analysing how the construction of the welfare state has influenced the notion of a homogenous Danish society, where the solidarity and the redistribution of resources among the citizens derives from the notion of Denmark as “the Family of Denmark”. Immigration into this welfare state is considered problematic because of refugees and immigrants’ foreign origin and cultural differences, and the successful integration is perceived of as decisive for maintaining the solidarity within the state, and ultimately the survival of the welfare state. Through a comprehensive elaboration this thesis illustrates how the general sentiment in the Danish welfare state is that refugees and immigrants have been permitted into the territory of Denmark that belongs to the Danes, and therefore they must as guest obey and follow the rules of the Danish society. Therefore, it is required of refugees and immigrants to not only contribute and pay taxes, but also to assimilate and adjust to Danish norms and values in return for the admittance and the social benefits they receive from the Danish state. These reciprocal expectations are informing the second analysis, where the main argument of the thesis is unfolded, that is, that dynamics from the macro-level and practices of exchange are influencing the school-cooperation with refugee parents. On the one hand, the correlation between equality and sameness in the welfare state, and the narrow definition of what constitutes family relations and adequate parenting in Denmark influences the teachers’ perception of the parents’ ability to participate in the cooperation, and the teachers’ approach towards the parents is guided by a deficit logic where they either compensate for the parents’ inabilities or demand that the parents adjust their culture insofar it coheres to Danish standards. On the other hand, the parents of this enquiry only express gratitude, appreciation, and satisfaction with the cooperation with the school because their children

can attend school in a safe country, and they do not articulate any discontent with the expectations that the school and teachers have for them.

The conclusion of the thesis is that in the school-home cooperation with refugee parents, the teachers rely on the macro-level sentiment that it is legitimate to make demands of cultural assimilation of refugees and immigrants, while simultaneously the parents also understand that they are in an inferior position vis-à-vis the teachers in the context of the Danish welfare society. It is thus acknowledged that what is expected and legitimate to require in return for education in Denmark is to submit to the values and norms of the Danish society, and ultimately pay the 'cultural price'.

**Keywords:** welfare state, reciprocity, school-home cooperation, refugee parents, integration.

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# CHAPTER I

## 1. Introduction

I am welcomed into the home of Omar and Zallouh. The table is covered with delicious snacks, tea, and coffee. The youngest boy Shvan sits by the computer watching football. It is Real Madrid against Barcelona. The middle child Juan, and the parents Zallouh and Omar sit in the couch where I take place between them. In their living room is both a Kurdish flag and a Danish flag hanging on the wall. Omar tells me that here in Denmark, there is freedom. Here in Denmark they can have their Kurdish flag visible. They were not allowed to in Syria. “Here you have a democracy”, he says. He further clarifies that Denmark has helped him and his family: “There you go! Come! We will help you; we help you with language school, with a lot of things. Why should I notice the flaws? It is a country that helps me, why should I not help them too?” Omar expresses gratefulness towards the Danes and to Denmark as a society, who have helped him, and his family get back on their feet after fleeing the war in Syria. He wants to return the favour. This pattern was evident during my visits in all the families’ houses. It became apparent to me that there is a great amount of appreciation among the parents with regards to the school and the Danish society more generally. After living in a war-torn country for years where their children’s school have been compromised, they are happy to be in a safe country, where their children have a future.

With this perspective in mind, this present thesis sets out to explore what characterises the cooperation between schools and teachers and refugee parents in a Danish welfare state context. The interest in the cooperation between refugee parents and the professionals at the schools stems from my internship, where reactions from teachers on the educational material about refugees have been that their main challenge with receiving refugee children in their classes is the cooperation with the parents.

Therefore, constructed around Marcel Mauss’ theoretical conceptualisation of the gift, this present thesis will examine the following research question:

### 1.1 Research Question

*How and to what extent are expectations of reciprocity influencing the school-home cooperation with refugee parents in a Danish welfare state context?*

## **1.2 Elaboration of Research Question**

This present thesis sets out to explore what characterises the cooperation between refugee parents and the professionals in schools. However, because the work in the institutions reflects the overall political climate, it is necessary to discuss what characterises the relationship between refugees and the Danish state more generally. Therefore, the thesis' analysis will be twofold, and to answer the primary research question I have identified the following sub-questions:

1. What characterises the integration of refugees and immigrants with non-western background in a Danish Welfare context?
2. What is the school's role in integration in the Danish welfare state?

The thesis does not intend to cover the entire research field of integration in a welfare state context, however, it is included to identify and point towards important aspects within the field that influences the relationship between refugees and the Danish people and its institutions. Integration is a widely disputed area in Denmark, and the welfare state has a wide-spanning institutional apparatus that works towards ensuring a successful integration of immigrants and refugee in Denmark. Schools play a significant role in this because it is expected that the educational system can prevent or even contribute to a successful integration process. Therefore, Danish policies have intensified their effort in getting all children into public institutions, the earlier the better, to ensure a proper and successful socialisation and integration process (Gilliam and Gulløv 2017: 2). In other words, the work in the institutions cannot be separated from the overall political agenda that works towards securing the Danish state. Instead it can be an interesting field to explore how the norms of society are manifested in every-day interactions in the institutions of the schools. With these observations in mind and informed by the narratives provided during my fieldwork that continuously were imbedded with gift-theoretical terms, the dynamics of first analysis of the welfare state in relation to refugees and immigrants with non-western background will inform the second analysis of what characterises the school-home-cooperation with refugee parents.

## **1.3 Literature Review**

The following section will highlight some relevant studies that, firstly, have informed my own research and, secondly, will be integrated in the analysis. School-home cooperation has received much attention both nationally and internationally, which I have explored and found much inspiration in. Studies have tended to find that particularly ethnic minority and refugee/immigrant parents either show passive engagement or engage in their children's education in ways that are

not recognized by teachers (Michael E. Lawson 2003; McBrien 2011; Garcia Coll, Cynthia, Daisuke Akiba, Natalia Palacios, Benjamin Baily, Rebecca Silver, Lisa DiMartino & Cindy Chin 2002). Some researchers emphasise cultural differences to explain why immigrant and refugee parents are less involved by pointing out that school-home collaboration is not the norm in the refugees' home countries, and that their view of teachers and schools is more authoritarian (Peterson & Ladky 2007; Rah, Choi & Nguyen 2009). Additional research has argued that this school-centric notion of school-home cooperation is based on a western middle-class norm that result in certain groups of persons being marginalised as their ways of engaging in their children's lives is not perceived as adequate (Michael E. Lawson 2003; Mathias Dahlsted 2009). For the purpose of this present thesis, however, I will primarily refer to research conducted in a Danish or Scandinavian context. This decision is based on the particular context the welfare state represents and the specific circumstances it causes. I have chosen to let the analysis be informed by research by Noomi Christine Linde Matthiesen (2015; 2016; 2017) and Karen Bergset (2017) because their researches are contextualised in a Scandinavian welfare state setting, and because their researches provide great insights into the parents' perspective of the cooperation, which in many instances offers nuanced perspectives to the mainstream research mentioned above.

Noomi Christine Linde Matthiesen and Karen Bergset both set out to explore parents' own narratives in relation to school-home cooperation. From the perspective of the parents, both analyses are informed by *positioning theory*, which set out to explore how the parents through their own narratives position themselves vis-à-vis the school. The purpose of these studies is to uncover a wide variety of parent positions contrasting much research that positions refugee parents as passive with regards to the school and their children's education.

In her PhD "Voices of the Unheard. Home-school collaboration between Somali diaspora parents and teachers in Danish public schools" (2014) Matthiesen explores the school-home cooperation among Somali mothers in a Danish context. The results of the PhD are divided into three articles (Matthiesen 2015; 2016; 2017), which are the references used in this enquiry. Her research takes place in an urban setting in a larger town in Denmark. The research provides valuable insights into what characterises the cooperation between families of marginal positions in the Danish society and schools. Following this research, she has published three articles where she presents the cooperation from the perspective of the Somali mothers and, also from the perspective of the principals, teachers, and schools. A general theme in her research is that the cooperation is characterized by a *deficit logic* that leaves both parents and teachers paralyzed in terms of possible actions in solving the problems the teachers meet. This deficit logic



places the root of the problems the teachers face in the classroom within the homes of the families. The problems are explained with cultural differences, which are difficult to change. Following Matthiesen, this deficit logic upholds the power of defining ‘good parents’ to the teachers and schools, while neither the teachers nor the parents can do anything to solve the problem. According to Matthiesen, it leaves the parents silenced and with no real influence in the cooperation with the school, and results in the continuing marginalisation of the Somali parents (Matthiesen 2017: 504, 505). Karen Bergset’s (2017) research takes place in a small-scale community in Norway, and in her research the parents position themselves as initiators and agents vis-à-vis the school and their children’s education. According to Bergset, the parents in her research succeed in their effort to a larger degree than in Matthiesen’s study. Bergset argues that this may be explained by the different contexts the researches are grounded in. As Bergset expresses it: “Smaller communities and closer contact between parents and teachers may mean that refugee parents will have a larger number of positions available to them when in contact with the school.” (Bergset 2017: 76). Matthiesen’s research argues that the school-home cooperation is characterized by an asymmetrical relationship, and that the cooperation always is on the school’s premises with regards to how the school is silencing the Somali mothers and that the cooperation is based on deficit logics. Bergset’s research, however, gives great insights into how there might be more positions available in the cooperation with the school for refugee parents who are living in a smaller community.

The analysis will be informed by both the empirical findings and the theoretical concepts from Matthiesen and Bergset’s research. The above-presented empirical findings will be linked with the data I have collected for my own research. Moreover, I have kept these studies and perspectives in mind throughout the research process.

#### **1.4 Placing the Thesis in the Research Field**

Before conducting fieldwork, I made a thoroughly review of the abovementioned research in the area. With these studies in mind I had an expectation that the parents would voice some type of discontent and powerlessness regarding the cooperation with the teachers and the schools. However, during my visits in all the families it became evident to me that there is a great amount of appreciation, but also an element of an indebted relationship between the participants of this present thesis and the school, the teachers and ultimately the Danish state. Hence, the interlocutors continuously expressed their relationship with the Danish state and the Danish people in gift-theoretical terms.

In addition, the thesis is also informed by the public - and political discourse in Denmark. Within these there is an element of how refugees need to appreciate and return the

favour that Denmark and the Danish people have done for them by receiving them, allowing them to stay here and assist them in getting started in their new life in Denmark. As part of my fieldwork I participated in a social café arranged by ‘Venligboerne’ in Skive, where refugees and Danes meet to talk. The day I was there a woman stood up and propagated for a fundraising campaign in Skive by Folkekirkens Nødhjælp. She emphasised how good it would be if some refugees would participate. She believed it would send a good message of “refugees giving back”. She did not specify to whom the refugees were in an indebted relationship with, however, it was evident that they were indebted to someone merely because of their status and presence in Denmark. Additionally, the Danish Minister of Foreigners and Integration Inger Støjberg has previously stated that: “When you come here [Denmark] then you need to be grateful, you need to be humble, and then you need to make an effort” (TV2 Nyhederne 2017).

Informed by these observations I obtained during my fieldwork, I assess that exploring the relationship and cooperation between teachers and refugee parents through Marcel Mauss’ conceptual lens of reciprocity and social exchange can provide an additional perspective to the cooperation. This perspective does not assume that the patterns explained in the various studies mentioned earlier do not exist, however, it explores what characterises the relationship between the schools, teachers, and refugee parents from another angle.

The thesis unfolds the argument partly with an indebt elaboration of the characteristic of the welfare state with regards to integration and particularly refugees and immigrants from non-western countries. Much research has explored the specific context the Danish welfare state constitutes with regards to integration (Olwig and Paerregaard 2011; Olwig 2011; Romme-Larsen 2011a, 2011b; Jöhncke 2011; Rytter 2011; Gullestad 2002; Gulløv and Gilliam 2012, 2017; Gitz-Johansen 2006; Nannested 1999, 2001, Necef 2001, 2004). The research is mainly informed by social constructionism and Foucauldian conceptualisation, where the Danish state through its wide-spanning institutionalisation is moulding its citizens and the deviants into a homogenous mass. These perspectives will also inform this thesis, but the argument of this present thesis is that there is an element of reciprocity and indebtedness in the Danish welfare state in general, but also in the relationship between the Danish welfare state and refugees. This can arguably shed a different light on what characterises the relationship between the Danish state and refugees and immigrants, as well as the cooperation between teachers and parents with refugee background.

## **1.5 Research Design**

The purpose of the thesis is to provide insights into different perspectives of the school-home cooperation with refugee parents. The research is primarily constructed around narratives pro-

vided by the parents and teachers during the interviews and my fieldwork. It will moreover be supplemented with preliminary studies contextualised in similar contexts, and studies addressing the welfare state in general, and particularly in relation to refugees and immigrants.

Since this thesis seeks to shed light on two aspects; both the welfare state in relation to the integration of refugees and immigrants, and moreover how these tendencies are displayed in the school-home cooperation with refugee parents, the argument will be unfolded in two analyses.

The first part of the analysis will explore the context the welfare state poses to integration, and why there exists a growing sentiment both in public – and political discourse of how particularly non-western immigrants and refugees are considered a problem for society. In doing so, I will also discuss the welfare state through the conceptual lens of reciprocity, both in general but also in relation to refugees and immigrants. The purpose of this analysis is to, firstly, illustrate how refugees are perceived in Denmark more generally, and, secondly, how the principle of reciprocity is applicable when analysing the relationship between the Danish state, Danes and refugees and immigrants.

In the second part of the analysis, I will elaborate on the school's role in integration, and the general perception of refugee and immigrant parents' ability to participate in the school-home cooperation in a Danish welfare state context. In this analysis the main argument of the thesis will be elaborated, that is, that the observations in the first analysis can be translated into what characterises the cooperation between refugee parents and teachers. This part of the analysis will be structured around narratives provided by the interlocutors of this thesis. Informed by Wetherell and Potter (1992) how we speak about the world cannot be separated from our understanding of the world. In other words, it is not important whether what is uttered in the interlocutors' narratives is true or not, but rather how certain 'realities' are produced and presented as true (Wetherell & Potter 1992). Wetherell and Potter are interested in exploring peoples here-and-now interactions, and in understanding how people draw on socially and historically produced 'realities' to achieve certain purposes. They stress the dialectic relationship where realities and subjectivities are historically, politically, and socially constituted at a macro level, while simultaneously are drawn on and reproduced in here-and-now interactions (Matthiesen 2017: 497, 498). Therefore, the first analysis will inform the second analysis because the political and societal understanding of the status of refugees in the Danish society, and the general perception of refugees' ability to participate in the school-home cooperation is necessary to include in order to understand the produced realities from both the teachers' and the parents' perspective. The analysis will furthermore be supplemented with empirical findings from research contextualised in similar contexts

## 1.6 Clarification of Concepts

Throughout the thesis different terms will be used that need to be elaborated and contextualised beforehand. These are the terms refugees, immigrants, ethnic minorities, majority and bilingual. The use of these terms varies dependent on how they are used in the different research included in the thesis, different contexts and by the different interlocutors.

When referring to refugees it includes all who have been granted conventional refugee status following the 1951 Refugee Convention<sup>1</sup> as well as §7(2), §7(3) and §8 of the Danish Alien Act.<sup>2</sup> The refugees who figure in this thesis' empirical data have all been granted temporary protection status in accordance with §7(3). 'Immigrants' refers to persons who do not have refugee status, but who have immigrated to Denmark for other reasons.

Throughout the thesis 'majority' and 'minority' will also figure when describing the relationship between the Danish state, Danes and refugees and immigrants. In scientific terms, 'minorities' and 'majorities' are analytical terms that describe a type of relation between groups in society. For this present thesis I have chosen to rely on Helen Krag's (2007) conception of minority and majority, where a minority always figure in an asymmetrical relation to the majority. The majority has in this relation the power to decide common norms and values for the given society, and it will always try to distribute its norms onto the minorities. In this process, the majority either forces the minority to assimilate or exclude themselves. Moreover, in this process, the minority is left with no power to determine what is considered normal in the given society (Krag 2007: 38-39). In much of the research evolving around refugees and immigrants in Danish schools and Danish society, as well as in public – and political discourse in general, the distinction between the majority and the minorities in the Danish society is categorised in ethnic terms. Hence, refugees and immigrants are in many instances referred to as ethnic minorities in contrast to ethnic Danes in the Danish society. The concept of ethnicity has been discussed in many instances, and often been described as a group that contains specific essential characteristic. However, in his pioneering work *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* Fredrik Barth (1969) developed a new, dynamic conceptualisation of ethnicity. Instead of describing ethnic groups as entities that shares specific characteristic, he describes them as demarcations of everything and everyone outside this group. Consequently, he refrained from describing ethnic groups in essentialist terms, and focused on the boundaries they create in a society instead (Barth 1969). In other words, when the term ethnic minorities are used with regards to refugees and immi-

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<sup>1</sup> §7(1) of the Danish Alien Act.

<sup>2</sup> Retsinformation (n.d.a) "Consolidation of the Danish Alien Act".

grants, particularly with non-western background, it clearly demarcates them from the majority of the Danish population, who in turn are defined as an ethnic group. Throughout the thesis the term ‘ethnic minorities’ will also be used when referring to refugees and immigrants in Denmark, however, it is with this power relation between majority and minority and the demarcating feature in mind.

The teachers who figure in the thesis’ empirical data in many instances referred to the refugees, immigrants and their children as ‘bilingual’<sup>3</sup>. The teachers in the research by both Thomas Gitz-Johansen (2006) and Laura Gilliam (2009) also use the same term when referring to refugee and immigrant children and parents. In strictly linguistic terms, the word ‘bilingual’ simply means a person who speaks more than one language and it is often associated with resourcefulness. However, Gitz-Johansen and Gilliam both argue that the use of bilingual in the Danish school, and Danish society in general, is associated with problems, difficulties, and deficiencies because it represents something other than the majority (Gitz-Johansen 2006: 49-52). The term ‘bilingual’ will be used in instances where relevant research that uses this term is included, but also when the interlocutors have used the term. This also serves to illustrate the teachers’ perception of refugees’ and immigrants’ position in the Danish society

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<sup>3</sup> In Danish: Tosprogede

## CHAPTER II

### 2. Fieldwork in Skive

In the following section the context of the fieldwork, the schools, and the interlocutors whom I interviewed during my fieldwork in Skive will be presented.

#### 2.1 Preliminary Considerations

Early in the process I decided to conduct fieldwork in a smaller city mainly because much research on school-home cooperation has mostly been on schools in urban settings. I was interested in exploring the possibilities and limitations a smaller community provides newly arrived refugee families in their relation to the schools and teachers. As Karen Bergset (2017) argues, small communities and closer contact between parents and teachers may mean that refugee parents will have a larger number of positions available to them when in contact with the school (Bergset 2017: 76). This setting could moreover provide insights into teachers' perception of the work with refugee children and their parents, which for some of them may be something they have no previous experience with.

In Denmark, a policy of spatial dispersal of newly arrived refugees was introduced with the Immigration Law in 1999, and according to the Danish Ministry of Integration it was implemented in order to secure a better geographical distribution of the new refugees and promote their integration into Danish society. The logic behind the policy was that by dispersing refugees to local communities it would reduce their risk of becoming socially and economically marginalised in urban ethnic ghettos and, also enabling them to develop social relations with the local ethnic Danish population. This, the Ministry believes, will give them a better opportunity to become integrated into mainstream Danish society (Romme-Larsen 2011a: 335). The three families who are part of this thesis empirical data were all located in Skive municipality after they were granted refugee status as a part of the mandatory spatial dispersal policy. They had no relatives or acquaintances in Skive, or any knowledge of the city beforehand.

#### 2.2 Context of the Field

In the following section the context of the field, the main participants and schools will be presented. The fieldwork in Skive was conducted throughout a period of three weeks between the

end of February and the middle of March 2018. I spend one consecutive week in Skive, where most of my interviews were conducted. The remaining time consisted of individual and informal appointments with the families, and with one of the schools.

I decided to do fieldwork in Skive because it is the city I grew up in, which gives me a prior understanding and knowledge of the city, the neighbourhoods, and the schools. Skive is a midsized city in the mid-west of Jutland, and following the government's spatial dispersal policy, Skive is expected to receive 48 refugees during 2018. In 2015 Skive received 166 refugees, during 2016 Skive received 83 refugees, and in 2017 the municipality received 36 refugees and 38 from family reunification (Skive Folkeblad 2017; Skive Kommune 2016).

The fieldwork was conducted in the homes of the three families and in three different schools. These fields enabled me to access the interlocutors in the two spheres specific for the parts involved in the school-home cooperation: The teachers in their professional environment in the schools, and the families in their private homes. These two fields moreover emphasise the positions the teachers and parents respectively have in the cooperation between school and home, where teachers are positioned within a professionalised and institutionalised environment as opposed to the parents.

### **2.2.1 The Schools**

The children go to three different schools in Skive: Resen School, Ådalskolen and Aakjærskolen. The municipality in Skive wishes to disperse the refugee children into different schools after they have attended 'modtageklasse' in Skivehus School. However, in the municipality of Skive the parents can decide themselves where their children shall attend school, which makes the dispersal of refugees within the city dependent on where the refugees are either offered housing or find housing themselves. The children of this enquiry all go to regular public school, and the parents all chose the school that was located nearest their home. I was able to get access to the different schools and teachers because the three families gave me permission to attend and observe their children in the schools. While I was at the different schools I engaged and interacted with the teachers during classes and recess, and they all expressed great interest in my research topic, and the conversations mostly revolved around this topic.

Resen School is in the wealthier neighbourhood Resen and has 604 pupils divided between preschool classes to ninth grades (Resen School n.d.). The school only has a few ethnic minorities and refugees. The principal of the school informed me that the total number of bilingual children is twelve. Aside from the three children who are part of this empirical data, the school has not received any refugee children the last couple of years.

Aakjærskolen is in the centre of Skive. The school has 462 pupils divided between preschool and ninth grades. The principal of the school informed me that the school has 102 pupils that are bilingual children, which make up 25 % of the total number of pupils. He further told me that Aakjærskolen has received 33 refugee children within the last year, and he explains that this large number is the result of the school's location in the centre of Skive.

Ådalskolen is in the neighbourhood Dalgas, which is a lower income area in Skive. The school has 247 pupils divided between preschool and sixth grades. The principal of the school informed me that 66 out of 247 are bilingual children. Within the last three years the school has received ten refugee children.

## **2.3 Interlocutors**

In the following section the main interlocutors will be presented. There are three families, where the main interlocutors are the mothers, and four teachers from three different schools.

### **2.3.1 Families**

Fatma and her family have been in Denmark for four years. The family consists of three children, two boys and one girl. Roudi is in third grade, Hamid is in fourth grade and Angelina is in second grade. They are all pupils at Resen School. In Syria Fatma was a teacher, and in Denmark she works part-time as a translator and attends tenth grade classes at VUC. Her husband Ahmed has opened his own garage where she also helps if needed. After seven months in Denmark living in numerous asylum centres they got a temporary protection status and was after that located in Skive. They live in the neighbourhood Resen in Skive in a terrace house, very close to the school.

Roubin and her family have lived in Denmark for three years. She and her husband Mahdi have two girls, where one of them was born in Denmark. Stella, the oldest girl, is in first grade in Aakjærskolen. In Syria Roubin was a staying home mom, while Mahdi worked full-time. In Denmark they have attended the obligatory three-year introductory programme<sup>4</sup>, but they have not found a job yet. They live in an apartment in downtown Skive, relatively close to the school.

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<sup>4</sup> When refugees arrive in the municipality, the refugees must participate in a mandatory introductory programme (language school, internships) organised by the municipality in accordance with the Integration Law with the objective of making refugees self-supportive within a year (Udlændinge – og Integrationsministeriet n.d.c.).



Zallouh and her family have lived in Denmark for five years. When I met them, they had just recently had their residence permit renewed two more years. Zallouh and her husband Omar have three boys, Svhan, Juan and Ali. Svhan is in third grade and Juan is in sixth grade in Ådalskolen and Ali is in seventh grade in Brårup School. In Syria Zallouh and Omar owned an orchard. In Denmark Omar has a job in a factory in one of the small villages outside Skive and Zallouh attends ninth grade classes at VUC. They live in an apartment in a block of flats in the neighbourhood Dalgas.

### **2.3.2 Teachers**

Birgitte is a teacher from Resen School, and she is the class teacher in third grade, which is Roudi's class. She has worked as a teacher for almost forty years. She has no previous experience with working with refugee children.

Christian is Shvan's class teacher in third grade in Ådalskolen. He has been a teacher for eleven years, and he has been working at Ådalskolen for three years. Before working there, he had no experience with working with refugee children.

Jesper is Juan's Danish teacher in sixth grade in Ådalskolen. He has been a teacher for fifteen years and worked in Ådalskolen since 2006.

Jane is Stella's class teacher in first grade in Aakjærskolen. She has been a teacher for twelve years.

# CHAPTER III

## 3. Methodological Approach

In the following chapter the methodological approach and ethical considerations concerning my fieldwork will be presented.

### 3.1 Semi-structured Interviews

During my fieldwork in Skive I made eight qualitative, semi-structured interviews; one with one or two teachers from each school, and one with each mother. Omar, Zallouh's husband also participated in the interview with Zallouh. I also interviewed a social worker from the Family centre in Skive, however, I decided not to include this interview in my empirical data because my research area developed during the process, and in the end this aspect was no longer necessary to include in the thesis. The seven interviews that are included in the thesis are listed in appendix 2, and the recordings are located on an USB that can be submitted if needed.

The purpose of the qualitative interview in research is to provide insights into the interlocutors' world and their understanding and relation of it (Kvale 1997: 31, 41; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009: 44). The individual interview is a commonly used method in social sciences. The interview shares many characteristics with a private conversation, where the researcher gains insights into an interlocutor's implicit understanding of the world s/he lives in. The method is thus qualitative in character (Kvale 1997: 31, 41; Aggergaard Larsen 2010 [2003]: 253). Following Holstein and Gubrium (1995), both the interviewer and the interlocutors are involved in the production of meaning occurring during the interview. With this point in mind, it is necessary to emphasise that the interlocutors' narratives may have been influenced by the interview situation with a researcher, who represents the majority of the society. Thus, the interlocutors may have over-emphasised their satisfaction with Denmark and the cooperation with the teachers and the schools and their own involvement. However, what is relevant for this present thesis is not the actual events, but the narration and experiences from the interlocutors' perspective.

All the interviews were recorded, which made the conversation more formal than when I just interacted with the families and teachers naturally. According to Aggergaard Larsen, the formal character of the interview is one of the restrictions of the method because it does not

give room to informal conversation (Aggergaard Larsen 2010 [2003]: 263). Therefore, in addition to the qualitative interviews, I have also included *participatory observations* and informal conversations as part of my empirical data both from the classrooms and the families' homes. Following Spradley: "doing ethnographic fieldwork involves alternating between the insider and the outsider experience, having both simultaneously" (Spradley 1980: 57). In other words, participating while also observing and keeping distance. I found the technique of *participatory observations* valuable as a supplement to the interviews because the perspectives and statements that appeared in between interviews provide valuable insights into the interlocutors' implicit understanding of the topic as well. For instance, during the interviews, the teachers mostly spoke from a professional point of view, while they spoke more freely without regard for my position as a researcher in the informal settings of the staff room. Particularly in this setting it became clear that there is a wide consensus that working with refugee and immigrant parents is problematic. Similarly, in the families' homes, I attended family dinners, afternoon tea and board games, where I at times became an unquestioned part of the setting and the conversation ran naturally, and issues with case workers in the municipality were broad up. Whereas in other situations I had the peculiar position as a researcher interviewing them, a position that inevitably underlined my visibility in the field.

### **3.1.1 Interview Situation**

According to Brinkmann and Tanggaard (2010), the interaction between the interviewer and the interlocutor is crucial for the information that can be obtained during an interview. Therefore, different relations can create different knowledge (Brinkmann & Tanggaard 2010: 33). With this point of reference, I was dedicated to building a relationship with especially the families during my fieldwork. The teachers mostly spoke from a professional point of view, which arguably does not require the same amount of trust.

The interviews with the mothers were all conducted in their homes. In all cases I had been in their home previously. The day the interviews were conducted I had been in their home for a period of time beforehand. There were different considerations behind this approach. Firstly, I wanted to interact with the families and have informal conversations to ensure that they trusted me. In this way, it was my perception that they would feel more comfortable sharing their perspectives with me during the interviews. Secondly, I wanted to avoid the formal character of the interview setting by conducting it in an informal place where they feel comfortable.

The interviews with the teachers were conducted at the schools during lunch break or while the children were during group work. This setting was also informal, and the teachers were in a setting where they are the experts and authorities. I had been with the classes for sev-

eral hours before the interview, and the teachers were all aware of the purpose of the interview and me being there.

### **3.1.2 Interview Guides**

Before my fieldwork in Skive I had prepared three different interview guides: One for the parents, one for the teachers and one for the family centre. The interview guides were prepared inspired by previous research on the area and my prior knowledge of the research field, and the guides ensured that the interview covered the themes relevant for my research (Brinkmann & Tanggaard 2010: 37-38). However, as the purpose of the interview guides were merely to help structure the interview situation, the semi-structured approach with open-ended questions allowed the interlocutors to elaborate and express what they felt was important for the subject (Ibid.). It moreover allowed me to ask elaborating questions to the interlocutors relevant to the information I gained during the interview, which opened up for perspectives that I had not encountered in my preliminary research.

### **3.2 Ethical Considerations**

Both prior and during my fieldwork in Skive I ensured to clarify the objective of my research to the interlocutors, emphasising that this was the purpose of my presence in both the families' homes and in the schools. Especially with regards to the families I had many considerations with keeping the balance between being a researcher with a clear objective, while also participating in family dinners, game nights and other social activities. Moreover, I was particularly aware of my position in the field as a Danish researcher representing the majority of society. In this interaction, the refugees on a temporary protection residency are in a precarious and uncertain situation in relation to the majority. Therefore, I was considerate of informing them that they could speak freely, and that what they told during the interviews or in my presence would not affect their position here in Denmark.

# CHAPTER IV

## 4. Theoretical Framework

In the following section the overall theoretical framework that has informed the analysis will be presented. The choice of this theoretical framework stems from the observations and narratives provided during my fieldwork. It will serve as an attempt to further nuance what characterises the cooperation between refugee parents and the teachers, and the relationship between Danes, the Danish state and refugees and immigrants more generally.

### 4.1 Marcel Mauss and the Theory of ‘The Gift’

It has long been recognized within anthropology that certain obligations and moral conventions are attached to social exchange. Marcel Mauss explored reciprocity through an analysis and comparison of gift exchange within different societies in his pioneering essay *The Gift* (Mauss 1967; Danneskiold-Samsøe 2011: 189). Maurice Godelier (1999) sums up Mauss’ initial interest in gift-exchange in the following:

Why is it that, in so many societies, at so many periods and in such different contexts, individuals and/or groups feel obliged not only to give, or when someone gives to them to receive, but also feel obliged, when they have received, to reciprocate what has been given and to reciprocate either the same thing (or its equivalent), or something more or better? (Godelier 1999: 10).

Mauss was particularly interested in a form of exchange he termed *préstations totales* (‘total prestations’). Total prestation is a system in which giving, taking and reciprocating are the basic collective activities through which social relations between groups are produced and reproduced (Mauss 1967[1925]: 8). Reciprocity is a social principle that establishes relationships and which both relies on and produces trust. The gift is voluntary because it cannot be forced and obligating because the violation of the norm of reciprocity can entail social sanctions. In other words, through compliance with these obligations of gift-giving, social relations are formed and affirmed. Conversely, not complying with these obligations, that is, not receiving or returning a gift, will disturb social stability. Gifts, reciprocity, and trust are therefore of fundamental importance for the cooperation of actors and the establishment of social order in general (Danneskiold-Samsøe 2011: 189; Adloff and Mau 2006: 106, 109).

What obligates the receiver to return the gift rests for Mauss on the fact that the gift or the given object is not divorced from the identity of the giver. Mauss explains this through the investigation of Polynesian sources. Here, he finds the condition that things given have a soul (*hau*) so that the thing given still holds parts of the giver (Godelier 1999: 15; Weiner 1992: 45). As Mauss expresses it:

“We can see the bond created by the transfer of possession (...) this bond created by things is in fact a bond between persons, since the thing itself is a person or pertains to a person. Hence it follows that to give something is to give a part of oneself (...) the thing given is not inert. It is alive and often personified and strives to bring its original clan and homeland some equivalent to take its place”. (Mauss 1967 [1925]: 8).

The gift does not erase the debt because the thing received is “alive”. Even after the giver has handed it over, it is still a part of him, and through it he has power over the receiver, and furthermore it strives to come back to its original place (Adloff & Mau 2006: 98). Here, Mauss moves on to explain the nature of gift-giving in spiritual and religious terms, which also was the focus of Lévis Strauss’ criticism of his theory. Lévis Strauss as a structuralist argues that Mauss fails in this explanation because he accepts the premises and values of the field he was supposed to analyse. Instead, Strauss explains it through a structuralist understanding of the mind (Godelier 1999: 17-18). Maurice Godelier attempts to explain it through practices of sister-exchanges among the Baruya; at the end of the exchange, each woman has taken the place of the other, but she still belongs to the family from which she was given. Here, one sister replaces another while simultaneously constituting the production of a relationship between the two families. According to Godelier, this is what characterizes the economy and the moral code based on gift-giving as opposed to commercial exchange. In the former what is exchanged cannot be alienated from the giver, while the commodities in the latter are detachable from the sellers (ibid: 43). In short, the logic of gift-giving is that, firstly, nothing is “given back”, but is simply replaced by other things or persons that produces a specific social relationship between the groups involved, which give rise to a set of reciprocal rights and obligations. Secondly, there is no soul or *hau* in the things given, which gives rise to the obligation to return the gift, except the fact that the giver continues to be present in the thing, and therefore continues to have rights over it, and thus also over the one who accepts the gift. Consequently, because the thing given is not alienated from the giver it becomes the “power” that works on the recipient and compels him to “give in return” (ibid: 44, 45).

Annette Weiner (1992) further explores the inalienable objects in her book “The paradox of keeping-while giving” In this book Weiner elaborates on the concept *inalienable*

*possessions*, which are possessions that cannot be given and must not be sold, which she argues is an important aspect of the constitution of pre-modern societies (Weiner 1992: 33, 37-39).

Godelier writes the following on inalienable possessions:

These things [inalienable possessions] that are kept – valuables, talismans, knowledge, rites – affirm deep-seated *identities and their differences of identity* between individuals, between the groups which make up a society or which want to situate themselves respectively within a set of neighbouring societies linked by various kinds of exchanges. (Godelier 1999: 33).

The differences of identity constitute a hierarchy, and strategies of giving and keeping play distinct but complementary roles in the process of the production and the reproduction of hierarchies among individuals, groups and even societies (ibid: 33). In other words, power is not acquired through gifts and counter gifts as in *potlatches*<sup>5</sup> (Mauss 1967 [1925]), but rather through keeping some possessions sacred. Informed by Weiner's research, Godelier shifts the focus in his book "The Enigma of the Gift" from what is given to things that are kept because in "the things that are kept are always "realities" which transport an individual or a group back to another time, which place them once again before their origins, before the origin" (ibid: 9, 200). Godelier claims that every society requires sacred objects that are withheld from reciprocity and rivalry. These sacred objects exercise power over people and place people in the state of continual debt, which cannot be erased. In other words, these objects, and the imagined sacred origin of them constitute, protect, and reproduce the social order (Adloff and Mau 2006: 99).

These theoretical considerations are interesting both in terms of the obligating aspect of gift-giving, and the objects that are kept from exchange. The perspective that things are not given, but simply replaced by something else is interesting with regards to the welfare state and its citizens and the welfare state's obligating character. This is an aspect that will further be elaborated in the next chapter. Furthermore, the theoretical conceptualisation of the inalienable possessions is interesting with regards to what characterises the relationship between both the Danish welfare state and its citizens but more interestingly how it influences the relationship with the Danish state and the Danes and refugees and immigrants. In the following chapter the abovementioned theoretical perspectives will be applied in an indebt analysis of what characterizes the welfare state in relation to its citizens as well as in relation to immigrants and refugees.

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<sup>5</sup> Mauss describes potlatches as agonistic total prestations, where power and hierarchy is obtained and maintained through the amount of gifts one individual or group is able to give, and thus humbling the recipient (Mauss 1967 [1925]).

# CHAPTER V

## 5. Refugees in the Danish Welfare State

In order to contextualise this present thesis' empirical foundation, and what influences the produced realities of both teachers and parents, it is necessary to elaborate on what characterises the Danish welfare state and the relationship to its citizens in general, and in particular in relation to immigrants and refugees.

Generally, among nation states the admittance and accommodation of immigrants, and particularly refugees, is contentious for most nations because it is likely to impose costs on the receiving community (Miller 2016: 107). As Michael Walzer has noted “the restraint of entry serves to defend the liberty and welfare, the politics of culture of a group of people committed to one another and to their common life.” (Walzer 1983: 39). With regards to refugees and asylum seekers, receiving societies face the difficulty that the legal obligations toward refugees are much more stringent than toward other migrants, but at the same time, the costs of integrating them are often significantly higher (Heins and Unrau 2018: 11). As opposed to labour migrants, when receiving refugees, in strictly economic terms, there is typically no obviously good deal available for the receiving population. Both the opening of national borders for refugees and the first steps toward integrating them into mainstream society are not trade-like but rather gift-like interactions in the sense that political leaders and ordinary citizens gratuitously surrender a small share of wealth to noncitizens (ibid: 11). Peter Nannested (1999) has previously termed this interaction the ‘price of solidarity’ (Nannested 1999). In Denmark specifically, the integration of refugees and immigrants is perceived as a major issue. In political discourse it is often portrayed as a matter of the survival of the welfare state. Several researchers have explored this matter (Olwig and Paerregaard 2011; Olwig 2011; Jöhncke 2011; Rytter 2011, 2018; Gullestad 2002; Gulløv and Gilliam 2012, 2017; Nannested 1999, 2001, Necef 2001, 2004). The researches primarily describe integration as a welfare state project where integration is institutionalised, and the purpose is not only to integrate immigrants and refugees into the labour market, but it is also to integrate them socially and culturally for them to be properly ‘absorbed’ by the given societies.



## 5.1 Reciprocity in the Danish Welfare State

Following sociologist and political scientist Gøsta Esping-Andersen's (1990) welfare regime typologies, Denmark has a universal welfare regime, which is financed through taxes and is based on the principle of citizenship. Ideally, the welfare programmes are widespread and universal. In other words, the welfare programmes are allocated to all citizens regardless of economic situation, gender, and ethnicity; however, this universalism is limited to the boundaries of the nation state. The core principle in the universal welfare regime is social citizenship: equal social, political, and civil resources, which is guaranteed in individual rights to ensure every citizen a dignified existence (Esping-Andersen 1990: 21-29). The universal regime creates while also requires a distinct level of solidarity among the citizens. In the universal regime marginalised populations are considered a common problem, where the solution is found in the principle of respect and consideration for every individual. This solidarity is consolidated through the common understanding that everybody contributes to and benefits from the system as far as they are able, and as long as they are able. It creates a sentiment among the population that they are "all in the same boat". While this understanding creates solidarity among the citizens, it also gives the system its political legitimacy (Esping-Andersen 1990: 27-28; Torpe 2013: 191).

Informed by the research by Adloff and Mau (2006), welfare state programmes can also be understood as a reciprocal arrangement on a macro level. Here, welfare state programmes are viewed less as a one-sided relationship of assistance, and more as a specific form of reciprocity between givers and receivers of assistance. The transfers of social benefits create demands on the side of the givers and put the receiver of welfare benefits into a position of debt (Adloff & Mau 2006: 113). Informed by the theory of the gift and norms of reciprocity the readiness of individuals in a welfare state to contribute to the financing of collective goods is not only based on the benefits that these promise, but also from the adherence to norms of exchange and reciprocity (ibid: 114). In other words, the citizens of a welfare state give to a common pool of resources, but the resources are not alienated from them, which is the power that compels the citizens to pay taxes and adhere to the norms of reciprocity. This dynamic produces and reproduces the social relationship between the citizens of the welfare state. According to Adloff and Mau, the primary reason for adhering to the norm of reciprocity is not just the internalisation of the norm but rather the trust in its legitimacy: "(...) trust is a central mechanism as it is the only way that a step (the gift) is conceivable in which we act "as if a social relation already existed between us, we fabricate social relations in order to let it become reality." (ibid: 109). Translating this perspective into the Danish welfare state, the citizens are adhering to the norms of reciprocity because they trust in the legitimacy of the welfare state and that everyone contributes as

far as they are able, and as long as they are able. Furthermore, more importantly, they trust that they in the future will receive benefits in accordance with their needs.

In a universal welfare regime, the corresponding reciprocity type is *generalised reciprocity*, where people understand themselves as partaking in a collective arrangement of reciprocity. Here, the relations between the specific benefits and repayments are undefined both in terms of time range and in terms of amount because “people conceive of themselves as co-operators in a societal solidarity contract.” (Mau 2004: 64). As Jöhncke (2011) suggests “(...) paying taxes becomes the definitive proof of one’s participation in and real contribution to the community, that is, to the working of the whole of society.” (Jöhncke 2011: 43). In other words, the reciprocal arrangements of in the Danish welfare state and the redistribution of resources has throughout time created solidarity among the citizens and consolidated the notion of being part of a community.

## **5.2 Integration of Refugees and Immigrants in the Danish Welfare State**

Following Jöhncke, the universality in the Scandinavian welfare state model is legitimized through the assumption that ‘the entire population’ forms a natural unity in terms of a people of significant ethnic, linguistic and social homogeneity. As Jöhncke expresses it: “The nationalist imagery of “being of one kind” has served as an important argument in favour of the establishment of the welfare state as a politically and economically legitimate project of integration.” (Jöhncke 2011: 38). According to Jöhncke, the Danish version of the welfare state is a social construction and a political achievement that, according to general sentiment, has benefitted the people of Denmark in numerous ways, and has both drawn on and contributed to the notion of Denmark as a society and as an integrated whole (Jöhncke 2011: 38). Even though Denmark traditionally has been heterogeneous in terms of class and geographical dispersal, these differences are downplayed, and the idea of a homogenous people has been constructed through nationalistic discourses to legitimize the universalistic character welfare state (ibid. 39; Romme-Larsen 2011b: 336).

Following Marianne Gullestad (2002), there exists a persistent idea in Scandinavian societies that before immigration Scandinavian societies were culturally homogeneous. Moreover, Gullestad has further pointed towards how the notion of equality in a Nordic context varies from other places because it is so closely associated with the notion of *sameness* (Gullestad 2002). In other words, equality and sameness is the norm in the Danish welfare state. Consequently, the solidarity and the trust within the Danish welfare state is associated with being similar and sharing the same culture, ethnicity and language, so the welfare state strives towards creating equality and *sameness*.

The consequences for immigrants and refugees of this interconnectedness between *sameness*, that is, “Danishness” and the welfare state is that they are viewed as a threat to the overall cohesion of society. Within the Danish welfare state, refugees and immigrants have been constituted as particular problematic and integration demanding because of their foreign origin and cultural differences, and the welfare state works through the logic that they must be socialised and rehabilitated until they “become like us” (Vitus 2005: 21-22). Originally, the concept of ‘integration’ was an etic theoretical concept employed by scholars such as Émilie Durkheim to examine social and economic cohesion of a society from the perspective of organisations and institutions (Durkheim 2006 [1897]). Today, however, it has become an emic term attributed with specific cultural, social, and political meaning, implying what it takes for immigrants and refugees to become proper members of a given society. In Denmark the concept has been used to promote a vision of society resembling an integrated whole, where new comers need to and are expected to blend in and assimilate as fast as possible (Olwig 2011: 197; Rytter 2018: 4).

Following Lars Torpe (2013), the most persistent threat for the solidarity and social trust in the Danish welfare state is when marginalised groups, both economically and culturally, are growing and the gap between the “irregular” and the “regular” middleclass Dane increases (Torpe 2013: 199). If this gap increases the sentiment of being in “the same boat” effectively decreases. Therefore, the differences that exist in the Danish universal welfare state must be minimized. When immigrants and refugees are in the process of *becoming integrated*, it is equivalent to the process of closing the gap between them and the average Danish population. If they do not become integrated, the nation and the welfare state are facing disintegration, fragmentation and upheaval, a societal condition Durkheim conceptualised as ‘anomie’ (Vitus 2005: 21-22; Rytter 2018: 4, 8). In order to avoid this condition, an increasing number of institutionalised programmes have been designed and implemented by the state in order to address these differences with the purpose of altering the family life, religion and traditions of immigrants in order to make them Danish (Romme-Larsen 2011b: 336; Rytter 2018: 6). Following Mehmet Necef (2001):

“A society that considers not only its citizens and its immigrants’ relief, but also the creation of equality both among its citizens and among its citizens and its immigrants as a cardinal public matter, will have a stronger tendency to demand cultural identification and assimilation (...) in other words, cultural assimilation is the price that Nordic welfare states - implicitly or explicitly – demands of its ethnic minorities in return for public relief and equal access to social benefits” (Necef 2001: 42 – My translation).

Consequently, there is a close connection between the Danish welfare state and the many institutionalised integration initiatives aimed specifically at refugees and immigrants. The successful integration is portrayed as a matter of the survival of the welfare state and the overall cohesion of society and the nation (Rytter 2018: 8). The integration initiatives not only define the problems, they also categorize them and decide how these problems must be corrected. As a result, the extensive efforts of the welfare system to integrate immigrants and refugees will have the result of drawing attention to a category of people that cannot be recognised as belonging to this society (Romme-Larsen 2011b: 336; Vitus 2005: 21-22; Olwig & Paerregaard. 2011: 16).

### **5.2.1 “The Family of Denmark”: ‘They’ Need to Submit to ‘Our’ Ways**

This categorization of who belongs and who does not is what Mikkel Rytter (2010) refers to as the construction of “The Family of Denmark” in public discourse. In this discourse, idealised fantasies of the nuclear family are associated with the more abstract level of Danish national community. Here, this imagined form of kinship is a power mechanism that structures the relationship between Danes and immigrants. Following Rytter, the relationship between the Danes and refugees more generally can be understood as a ‘figured world’ between hosts and guests. As Rytter argues, the kinship image of ‘The Family of Denmark’ has made it possible and even legitimate to distinguish between ‘real’ and ‘not-quite-real’ Danes, which produce and reproduce demarcations (Barth 1969), or ‘symbolic fences’, between different segments of the population (Rytter 2010: 307-309; Rytter 2018: 10). In this world, “The Family of Denmark” sets the rules and are in charge, while the guests must be polite, behave in a civilised fashion and so on. According to Rytter, this figured world of host-guest places the Danish population in a permanently superior position, whereas the immigrants and refugees must stay silent and subject themselves to the will of their hosts (ibid: 10; Rytter 2010: 307-309;). In other words, the logic produced through these structures is that ‘they’ need to submit to ‘our’ ways and rules to reciprocate the gesture ‘we’ have shown ‘them’ by allowing them to be here. Here, we can understand the power mechanism through norms of reciprocity. Immigration to Denmark is for the majority of the Danish population tantamount to forced helpfulness, and it collides with what Nannested (2001) calls “the reality of selfishness”. As mentioned earlier, the admission of refugees, particularly into a welfare state, will impose costs on the receiving society. Nannested argues that it has a great influence on the general negative attitude towards refugees and immigrants in Denmark (Nannested 2001: 28). By applying gift-theory and norms of reciprocity on the welfare state it opens up for an explanation of why the admittance and integration is considered challenging. Informed by Heins and Unrau (2018: 13), what is at stake in these challenges is primarily social trust. As mentioned earlier, trust and reciprocal relations are closely related, and in the welfare state the citizens are adhering to the norms of reciprocity because they trust in

the legitimacy of the welfare state, and because they understand themselves as a being “in the same boat” as the rest. Specifically in the Danish welfare state, this trust and solidarity is associated with being similar. When admitting refugees and immigrants into the Danish welfare state costs are associated with it and the Danish citizens are surrendering a small share of their wealth to these “strangers” who have been admitted into society. It means that the share and the quality of the benefits will be reduced (Necéf 2001: 34, 61). Moreover, immigration is contentious because reciprocity or even “gratitude” is not assured, and the citizens do not trust that the refugees and immigrants who have been permitted into society will reciprocate and contribute (Heins and Unrau 2018: 11, 13). In other words, the solidarity and the trust in the welfare state as well as the system’s legitimacy is challenged by the prospects of admitting refugees and immigrants into society, who will be given a share of the common pool of resources, while there are no guarantees that they will adhere to the norms of reciprocity, and contribute to the reciprocal arrangement of the welfare state.

### **5.2.2 “Something for Something”**

In recent years, there has been much debate of whether or not immigrants and refugees are entitled to welfare benefits because they have not been part of the generalised reciprocity over a full life time as has Danish citizens, which means that they are not entitled to benefit from the reciprocal relationship either (Rytter 2018: 9). In an analysis of the relationship between the Danish welfare state and immigrants, Mehmet Necéf (2004) claims that the Danish welfare state previously has been run according to the principle of “something for nothing”. He compares the Danish welfare model to the Christian bible’s message of charity because what the Danish citizens pay in taxes does not necessarily corresponds with the benefits that they receive. Hence, in cases where people do not pay taxes and contributes, either because of sickness or unemployment, the Danish state works through the principle “something for nothing”. This, he argues, has also been the case with a number of refugees and immigrants who have lived in Denmark for 10-15 years without having contributed to the labour market and paid taxes (Necéf 2004: 3). However, specifically with regards to refugees and immigrants, this has changed to a principle of reciprocity or “Something for something”. In other words, the benefits and social services must be reciprocated (Necéf 2004: 4). This principle of reciprocity in the Danish welfare state is mirrored by Danish national politics, especially concerning the reciprocal relationship between immigrants and welfare institutions. At the opening of the parliament on 7 October 2003, Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen stated:

The founding principle of our society is that everyone makes an effort and that special efforts are recognized. Consequently, the individual must sense the consequences when he

does not fulfil his obligations. The individual must apply the principle of “something for something”. [...] For many years immigration policy was characterized by a laxity and lack of consistency. We must make demands and demonstrate consistency in immigration policy. The individual immigrant has a great responsibility to be integrated. They must learn Danish. And they must accept the fundamental values of our society.” (Danneskiold-Samsøe 2006: 203).

Here, the Prime minister is arguing for a balanced, reciprocal relationship of “something for something” between welfare institutions and citizens (ibid: 203). Following Necef, however, it is not required of the unemployed or sick Dane to fulfil extra requirements to receive the benefits. Here, the universal character of the welfare state is evident because these marginalised segments of the population are considered a common problem, and the solidarity is consolidated through the common understanding that everyone contributes as far as they are able, and as long as they are able. However, this solidarity does not necessarily extend to immigrants and refugees, who in return for the benefits in the welfare state are expected to adopt the principle of “something for something”, hence the Danish culture and Danish values (Necef 2004: 3), otherwise it will have consequences. In other words, the solidarity is maintained in the Danish society because the universalism of the welfare state does not extend to those who are not considered to be a part of the community.

This perspective is further emphasised through the welfare contractualism the Danish welfare state has implemented in relation to refugees and immigrants (White 2000: 512), who need to sign an “integration contract” and a “integration declaration” when they arrive in Denmark. In the contract refugees and immigrants must, in cooperation with the municipality they live in, fill out a detailed plan for how they can become integrated and self-supporting in Denmark (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet (n.d. a). Moreover, in the declaration they must declare that they will conform to Danish norms and values, participate and be active citizens in the Danish society, and reach the overall goal of a successful integration into the Danish society (Appendix 1). The integration contract sets out a detailed integration plan for the individual refugee or immigrant including spatial dispersal, a three-year obligatory introduction programme and language and society school (Romme-Larsen 2011a: 248-249). The content of the integration contract will support a coherent and integrating effort until s/he will apply for citizenship (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet (n.d. a). This welfare contractualism further illustrates that the universalism and solidarity in the welfare state does not include refugees and immigrants who have not yet contributed to society, and that the state needs to ensure that the reciprocal relationship works through the principle of “something for something” with regards to refugees and immigrants. The current Danish government’s policies in relation to immigrants

and refugees further illustrate this argument. Since 2015 the government has been committed to ensure that immigrants and refugees in Denmark will have fewer rights and benefits. The Ministry of Foreigners and Integration has worked dedicated towards tightening the area of immigration and integration. At the time of writing, they have made 76 changes that all limits and tightens the rights of refugees and immigrants in Denmark (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet (n.d.b)). The policies work through the principle of accumulation. For instance, refugees and immigrants receive introduction benefits instead of social security. Furthermore, to receive social security on equal footing with ethnic Danes, refugees and immigrants must have had residency in Denmark for 7 years.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, refugees and immigrants cannot receive child support as ethnic Danes can before they have lived or worked, that is, earned the right to it in a period of six years out of ten years in Denmark (Borger.dk (n.d.)). This principle of accumulation is also applicable in areas such as the right to social security and financial support in relation to education.<sup>7</sup> While these regulations are not based on ethnicity, the consequences of the regulations, however, are that it clearly distinguishes refugees and immigrants from ethnic Danes who are in the same social position. These regulations clearly illustrate how refugees and immigrants receive some benefits, but not the same level of benefits and rights as native Danish people until they have earned and proved their right to receive the same benefits. Before getting a job, paying taxes and contributing, refugees and immigrants are in a position of ‘negative reciprocity’. Negative reciprocity is a situation where someone receives welfare benefits that he or she is not entitled to. They are thus cast as a problem for the well-being of the Danish population and they challenge the solidarity and sustainability of the welfare state (Rytter 2018: 10). In other words, the Danish welfare state do not trust that immigrants and refugees will cohere to the norms of reciprocity and contribute to the Danish society on equal footing as ethnic Danes. Instead, the welfare state has implemented welfare contractualism and principles of accumulation, so that refugees and immigrants need to show a consistent effort and contribution throughout a long-time frame and prove their right to receive the same amount of benefits as Danes. However, Mikkel Rytter argues that even when paying taxes and accepting the principle of reciprocity, refugees and immigrants will still be subjected to the ever-present suspicion of ‘negative reciprocity’ because of their foreign origin and differences (ibid: 10). In other words, to escape this

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<sup>6</sup>Retsinformation (n.d.b) ”Consolidation Act of Active Social Policy § 11(3). The residency demand for the right to social security is planned to be prolonged from 7 years to 9 years out of the last 10 years. In addition to there will be implemented an employment demand of 2 and half year out of the 10 years in Denmark (Commencement January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019)

<sup>7</sup> Retsinformation (n.d.b) ”Consolidation Act of Active Social Policy § 11(3).

position in the Danish society, they must reduce their differences in relation to the ‘middle-class’ ethnic Dane.

### **5.2.3 Keeping-While-Giving**

Informed by Annette Weiner (1992), the principle of accumulation and the exchange between the Danish state and refugees and immigrants is characterized by how the state is giving refugees and immigrants some rights, while withholding others, effectively differentiating them from Danish citizens. According to Maurice Godelier (1996), the inalienable possession in modern western societies is the constitution: “The constitution is the property of no one person as such; it is the common, inalienable property of all those who respect it because they have chosen it, “voted it in””. (Ibid: 206). The constitution is the common property of all those who live under one constitution and recognizes it as their inalienable property. It is the gift, which citizens give to themselves and which founds their public social relationships (ibid: 207). Following Weiner, participants in exchanges remain aware of what is not being exchanged. Even the knowledge that an inalienable possession is hidden away confirms the presence of difference between the participants and illustrates how hierarchy is at the very core of reciprocal exchange (ibid: 40, 42). Informed by this perspective, the Danish state and the Danish citizens’ inalienable possession is the Danish constitution, the nation state, and the identity, culture, language, and rights that go with it. It is what creates the “imagined community” of Denmark. This inalienable possession is affirming the identity of the Danish nation state and its citizens, and effectively demarcating it from other states and non-citizens.

In relation to this point, anthropologist Katja Kvaale (2011) has analysed how the right-wing Danish People’s Party to a large extent claims that Danes are an indigenous people who have a historical right to their nation, territory, and soil, which is implying that:

“Ethnic Danes – in their capacity of assumed descendants of the first human beings residing on the geological deposit material later to be known as Denmark – are seen as the natural stake holders of rights from a historically conditioned and ethno-culturally legitimized perspective (Kvaale 2011: 235).

In the 2015 general election the Danish Peoples Party gained more than 21 % of the votes, and through their discourse they have managed to create an image of Danish people as an indigenous people, where immigrants present in Denmark are regarded as aliens and intruders (Rytter 2018: 12). By allowing immigrants and refugees to stay here, and giving them some rights and benefits, while withholding others, the Danish state and its citizens are maintaining a position of power and superiority in relation to immigrants and refugees, while also clearly distinguishing between who belongs, and who does not, who are deserving, and who are not.



These perspectives and the long timeframe and list of requirements that need to be fulfilled before immigrants and refugees can acquire equal citizenship status and equal rights as ethnic Danes (Borger.dk) reveals the uncertainty of refugees' citizenship status and their position in the Danish society. Moreover, it reveals how it limits their access to the social benefits of the welfare state, which illustrates that the requirements to be included on full terms in the universal welfare state in Denmark is to be similar and to "be of one kind".

#### **5.2.4 Refugees as the Eternal Outsiders**

The welfare state is engaging in a tremendous effort to integrate immigrants and refugees. As was indicated in the former Prime minister's statement of a reciprocal relationship of "something for something", what is expected in return for the social benefits and rights the Danish state gives to immigrants and refugees is besides making an extra effort also "accepting the fundamental values of our society" (Danneskiold-Samsøe 2006: 208). This point corresponds with Necef's claim that refugees and ethnic minorities implicitly or explicitly are required and expected to assimilate in Nordic welfare states in exchange for social benefits. However, following the rationale of Danes being an indigenous people with a special right to the Danish nation, it becomes almost impossible to succeed in the process of integration, as being Danish and belonging are based on the ability to make legitimate claims to the Danish nation (Rytter 2018: 12).

Here, "the downside of reciprocity" is exposed. In a situation where the gift is unreciprocated it has moral consequences that were anticipated by Mauss:

"The unreciprocated gift still makes the person who has accepted it inferior, particularly when it has been accepted with no thought of returning it... Charity is still wounding for him who has accepted it, and the whole tendency of our morality is to strive to do away with the unconscious and injurious patronage of the rich almsgiver" (Mauss 1990 [1950]: 83).

Thomas Hylland Eriksen extends the 'downside of reciprocity' from merely being a matter of unequal power relations to be a matter of humiliation for the person who is unable to repay the gift given (Eriksen 2007: 5-7). In other words, if refugees and immigrants fail in meeting the requirements that have been set out for them to *become integrated*, it keeps them in an inferior position in relation to the Danish state and Danish people, but more importantly, it puts them in a position of humiliation because of their categorisation as a problem for the Danish society. If they are unable to meet the requirements, then they cannot contribute to society with valuables or create value that corresponds to the benefits they have received (Danneskiold-Samsøe 2011: 190). Hence, the price for social benefits is not only the contribution through labour and tax payments, it is also cultural assimilation (Necef 2004: 3), and the motivation may not only be

the desire to remove oneself from an inferior position, but also to avoid the humiliation of being an outsider in a society that perceives them as problematic. Through this perspective, the eagerness to adapt and assimilating can be understood as a strategy employed by immigrants and refugees to reduce the inferior, indebted position that they find themselves in in relation to the Danes and Danish state.

Birgitte Romme-Larsen discusses in her PhD (2011a, 2011b) how refugees scattered around Denmark because of the government's spatial dispersal policy are trying to convince their neighbours to accept them as decent people by obeying instructions and advices about how to be a proper Dane, including drawing back the curtains and preparing a proper lunch for their children (Romme-Larsen 2011a; 2011b). These tendencies were also present during my fieldwork in how Fatma prepares a text-book Danish lunch for her children, just as she was taught by the family-centre in Skive so her children can blend in in school, and how she does not speak her own language when she is in public because she does not want Danes to look at her badly. In Syria, Fatma tells me, she and her family were always second range citizens because they are Kurds. This experience she does not want her children to grow up with in Denmark, so she does everything in her power to blend in. Fatma expresses awareness to the fact that her and her family's language and culture are not equally valuable to the Danish language and culture, so to become and feel equal she assimilates and hides her own culture and language. However, following Rytter (2018) the problem with integration in this scenario is that even though immigrants and refugees do their best to blend in and accept the wishes and demands of their hosts, new 'invisible fences' are constantly being built at the same time. Informed by anthropologist Inger Sjørnslev, Rytter argues that immigrants face a situation that resembles a double-bind: "you are not ready to become integrated until you are like us, and you will not prove that you are like us until you are integrated" (Sjørnslev 2011: 83 in Rytter 2018: 11). In other words, the prospects of living up to the criteria of a successful integration and bringing valuables into the exchange with the Danish welfare state and Danes are scarce following the double-bind and the rationale of Danes being an indigenous people.

During my fieldwork, the interlocutors continuously expressed their relationship with the Danish state and the Danish people in gift-theoretical terms. As exemplified in the introduction, Omar wants to help Denmark and the Danes after they helped him to such a large degree when he arrived in Denmark, both in terms of providing safety, but also in terms of learning the language, housing, and school for his children. Now he proudly voices how he speaks Danish, has gotten a job, contributes and pays taxes. In this way he feels that the interventionist welfare state has assisted him in reciprocating the gift. By adhering to the wide-

spanning institutions of the welfare state, Omar is now able to participate and contribute to the Danish society. In this regard, the theory of the gift may expose a different, and more active dynamic where the interlocutors of this enquiry may be willing to meet the requirements to break free from the indebted relationship to the Danish state. Omar explains that before he was under the power of the municipality. They had the power to tell him where to go for an internship, how many hours he had to be in the language school and so on. Now, however, he is free. In contrast, Roubin and her husband are still in this position to the municipality because neither of them have been able to find a job. As she says “It is normal that the municipality says what we shall do. They are our “boss”. We signed this contract. But we cannot be mad. We chose to come her, and if we had not fled from Syria. Who knows? Maybe we would be dead”.

This dynamic can explain the adaption in active terms rather than as a passively moulding by the Danish state, as well as explain why the interlocutors do not narrate any apprehensions with the expectation and requirements to assimilate and respect the Danish values and norms. However, Omar still reckons that he is a refugee. “You are Danish, I am a refugee. I am a Syrian Kurd, but I work now and help many people by paying taxes”. Here, Omar clearly understands the demarcation between himself, his family, and the rest of Denmark, and that he is not an equal and a part of this “family” even though he contributes and pays taxes.

### **5.3 Sub-Conclusion**

In Denmark the integration of refugees and immigrants is often portrayed as a matter of the survival of the welfare state. The Danish welfare state is characterised by its universality: Its social benefits must cover the entire population. Through national discourses the political and economic project of the welfare state has been legitimised through kinship images of “the Family of Denmark”, where Denmark is constructed as a homogenous nation, a family with specific cultural norms, values and language. In the Danish welfare society solidarity and social trust are associated with being similar, and sharing the same culture, ethnicity and language. The consequences for refugees and immigrants in this society are that they are perceived as a threat to the solidarity, trust, and overall cohesion of society because of their cultural differences. Therefore, the Danish welfare state has a widespread institutional apparatus that through different social technologies attempts to absorb them into society. Additionally, the solidarity within the Danish welfare state is maintained because the universalism in the welfare state does not include refugees and immigrants, who are not considered to be a part of the community. Instead, the state has implemented welfare contractualism with regards to refugees and immigrants, who need to prove their right to receive the same amount of benefits and rights as native Danes, effectively demarcating refugees and immigrants from ethnic Danes. Consequently, the Danish welfare

state works through the principle of “something for something” and demand cultural assimilation of its ethnic minorities in return for public relief and equal access to social benefits. This relationship between “the Family of Denmark” and refugees and immigrants can be understood as a figured world of ‘hosts’ and ‘guests’, where the guests have to submit to the rules and norms of the hosting society. Here, the reciprocal expectations also become visible. The benefits given by the Danish state represents the Danish state, its history, its citizens, and its ethics of redistribution, and refugees and immigrants are thus expected to assimilate and submit to ‘our’ ways and rules to reciprocate the gesture ‘we’ have shown ‘them’ by allowing them to be here and giving them social benefits. By viewing the dynamic between refugees and the Danish state through the conceptual lens of the theory of the gift, refugees are positioned in an indebted relationship to the Danish state and the Danish citizens by being here and receiving benefits, which make expectations of assimilation legitimate. More importantly, the theory of the gift can shed a light on the refugees’ eager attempt to adapt and contribute because if they do not, they will continue to be categorized as problematic and stay in a morally inferior relationship to the Danes and the Danish state. However, the constitution and the full set of citizen rights are withheld from the exchange, clearly separating those who belong to the state, and those who do not, effectively maintaining the hierarchy within the Danish state.

The following analysis will explore whether the demands of assimilation and the principle of reciprocity between the Danish state, its citizens and refugees can contribute with an additional perspective to what characterises the school-home cooperation with refugee parents.

# CHAPTER VI

## 6. Refugees in the Danish School System

The following section will include, firstly, a short introduction of role of the school in the Danish welfare society, and specifically its role with regards to integration. Secondly, it will elaborate on the institutionalised home-school cooperation, and the perception of refugees' ability to participate in this. The institutions and the everyday interactions cannot be separated from the overall political agenda that works towards securing the state. Therefore, the analytical points from chapter five are included in the following analysis to illustrate how these macro-level tendencies are influencing both teachers and parents in the school-home cooperation.

### 6.1 The School's Role in the Integration of Refugees

In Denmark schools play a significant role in the integration of immigrants and refugees because it is expected that the educational system can prevent or even contribute to solving the main challenges in Danish society, whereas a central concern is the integration of refugees and immigrants. The Danish government's interest in the school in relation to integration is because it is believed that it is through the school that the Danish society's fundamental values are communicated. The schools are responsible for creating responsible, democratic citizens. As Haas (2004) formulates it, it is in the school that future citizens learn to be democratic and participating citizens, and it thus the place where “” they” [refugees and immigrants] need to be familiar with “our” [Danes] democratic values and respect them.” (Haas 2004: 91,92). Therefore, Danish policies have intensified their effort in getting all children into public institutions, the earlier the better, to ensure a proper and successful socialisation and integration process (Gilliam and Gulløv 2017: 2).

All teachers in this enquiry express how the school has an important role and responsibility with regards to the integration of the refugees Denmark has received. Birgitte from Resen School emphasises the responsibility in the following statement:

If you do it [integration in school] right, then someone like Roudi, you see, he is completely integrated in class, and has many friends crisscross class. If it [integration in school] is not done right, then the children may become lonely, or hang out with children who are also

from another country. But Roudi does not do that here. He would probably not even consider that he is not Danish.

When I follow up and ask her what she means by “completely integrated” she explains the situation when you cannot tell a refugee from a Dane, when they are completely alike. Here, Birgitte explains the successful integration where the school has ‘done it right’ and made Roudi like every other Danish child. Studies by both Laura Gilliam (2009) and Gitz-Johansen show how the integration project in the school, and the standardisation the institutions cause also can result in differentiating and marginalising practices as Birgitte describes as isolation or situations where the children “hang out with children who are also from another country”. These studies are specifically addressing the marginalisation and problematization of bilingual children as well as their parents who do not fit into the standards. Gilliam further argues that bilingual children are per definition characterized as ‘problem-identities’. Even before the children enter the schools, the teachers have prepared special measures to ‘handle’ them (Gilliam 2009: 445). The teachers’ narratives and discourses in both Gilliam’s and Gitz-Johansen’s research all search for and find the explanation to the problems with the bilingual boys outside the school. The explanations revolve around cultural differences and even cultural deprivation in the bilingual homes (ibid: 176-177; Gitz-Johansen 2006: 65-68). Christian from Ådalskolen expresses similar concerns because, in his opinion, the school’s role and responsibility with regards to integration is dependent on the childrearing at home. Here, he believes that cultural differences play a major role and problematizes the school’s ability to succeed in its quest. In other words, what studies and narratives show is that when teachers experience issues with children in school, they search for the source of the problem outside the school and within family, and differences in the family relations are perceived to be a central issue.

## **6.2 School-Home Cooperation with Refugees**

Since the welfare state is being predicated on the notion of sameness, the state intervenes particularly in immigrants’ and refugees’ family relations, and in institutions revolving around children because they are categorised as a group that do not follow Danish social norms concerning family relations (Olwig 2011: 192; Johansen 2017: 8). This narrow definition of what constitutes family relations and adequate parenting in the Danish welfare state can according to Mathiesen (2017) marginalise certain groups of parents who engage in parenting and school-home relations in a different way. To illustrate this point, she emphasises the following observation made by Guo (2012):

A deficit model of difference leads to beliefs that difference is equal to deficiency, and that the knowledge of others – particularly those from developing countries – is incompatible, inferior, and hence invalid (Guo 2012: 123 in Matthiesen 2017: 497).

In other words, the knowledge parents with refugee or immigrant background have is not considered valid in the cooperation with the school. Instead, the only knowledge that is considered valid is the one that the school and the teachers formulate through the institutional standards of the school, hence Danish norms, language, and culture.

In Denmark this deficit logic guides the general perception of school-home cooperation and parental involvement with regards to refugees and immigrants, and it is perceived that this cooperation requires extra resources and an extra effort to succeed. For instance, the Danish government allocated 56 million kroner in 2010 to enhance the collaboration between public schools and ethnic minority parents, as this group is thought not to sufficiently live up to their responsibilities as parents (Matthiesen 2015: 11). In Skive, Ådalskolen, Aakjærskolen, and a third school have aligned in a cooperative strategy in order to improve the reception of refugees in their school, and in order to provide their teachers with additional training specifically with regards to handling the fact that the schools have received a number of refugees in the last couple of years. Noticeably, informed by my fieldwork and political – and public discourse, there exists a persistent conviction that receiving and having refugees in Danish schools requires additional resources, both in terms of economy, but also in terms of an extra effort and extra education. Furthermore, informed by statements from the teachers' room in all three schools there is a wide consensus that the cooperation with refugee parents and ethnic minorities is particularly problematic. In other words, the narrow definition of what adequate parenting and school-home cooperation entails are reproduced as realities among the teachers of this enquiry. This is particular evident in the case of Resen School, who in total has twelve bilingual children and only received three refugee children, while the general perception of the problems concerning the cooperation with refugee and immigrant parents was unmistakable in the teacher's room.

The principle of school-home cooperation was first inscribed into Danish law in the 1974 and enforced in 1975. The Educational Law thus institutionalises cooperation between school and home, and in a Danish school tradition it is thus widely accepted and almost considered as a natural given that parents cooperate with the school. The parents are thus required to 'work together' with the teachers to achieve the goals of the Danish public school. However, it is the school's role to define which responsibilities and duties parents have. Moreover, the focus on parental responsibility is not defined originating from responsible parents but rather as per-

sons who follow and obey duties and norms prescribed by experts (Matthiesen 2017 498; Knudsen 2010: 255).

### 6.2.1 Integration Through Participation

Hanne Knudsen (2010) has through an analysis pointed out that the school-home cooperation is historically contingent and has developed throughout time. She argues that the discourses have developed in specific historical settings, but they can, however, all be identified and actualised today. Hence, some things that happen today can be traced back to ideals and routines from the school in the past. The discourses do not just replace one another, but they exist simultaneously in different layers and intervene and influence each other (Knudsen 2010: 98). The five discourses that Knudsen has identified through her analysis are *duty* discourse, *supportive* discourse, *participation* discourse, *user* discourse and *responsibility* discourse. Following Knudsen, the cooperation today is characterised by two contradictory discourses: Responsibility and supportive (Knudsen 2012). However, as the following passage will show, the participation and supportive discourse are particularly visible in the cooperation with refugee parents.

The Danish welfare state is built around a narrative that it is summed up of experts, whose practices is based on scientific evidence and *best practice*, hence, the institutions in the welfare state appear as guarantees for *best practice* (Johansen 2017: 10). Following Johansen (2017), this sentiment about the welfare state being the “Danish thing” infuses the Danish understanding of being a good citizen: In order to be a good citizen, one must actively participate in the institutional work of the welfare state, one must not be critical but trust in, support and cooperate with the system. Informed by Johansen, this concept of a good citizen is used to define the Danish community in opposition to all those who are not a part of this, that is, people who are not actively participating and “strange” non-citizens who have not yet become integrated in the Danish society (ibid. 10). Jesper from Ådalskolen draws this distinction between good citizens and those who are not participating in the institutional work of the school. More specifically he is referring to the parent council on the school and the lack of initiative and participation from the ethnic minority and refugee parents:

(...) It is not like they volunteer to the parent council, you know, we have this expectation that there is a parent council that arrange social events for the classes during the school year, and here we also have an expectation that bilingual parents volunteer and participate on equal footing (...) it could be nice if some of the bilingual parents thought “I also want to be part of the parent council”, “I also want to do something good for the school”, and here I believe it could be a strong signal to other bilingual parents if Juan’s parents participated and that someone takes the first step because then it will definitely attract other bilingual par-



ents. Then they [other bilingual parents] would probably think: “If they [Juan’s parents] participate, then we can probably also participate”.

In the narrative above, the concept of a good citizen in a Danish welfare state is reproduced in Jesper’s understanding of how Omar and Zallouh’s participation in the institutional work of the school is inadequate. Through this understanding he expresses a clear distinction between Danish parents, who make up the parent council in Ådalskolen, as good citizens, and bilingual parents, who do not participate on equal footing. In this regard, elements of the participation discourse become very evident. In this discourse, the family has received a new role. Following Knudsen (2010), the family is a little community that is part of a larger community, the school, which again is part of a largest community, society. The participation discourse includes the logic that participation in the community, in this regard the school, will rear families who fall outside the norm to fit into the community’s norms. According to Knudsen’s analysis, the purpose of the participation is to even out any differences and to increase the possibility for participation in the larger community (Knudsen 2010: 101, 176). In other words, when the parents are participating in school activities the school’s norms and values can rear them, and thus it is more likely that they adjust to the norms and values of the larger society (ibid.). The participation discourse furthermore coincides with the logic behind the spatial dispersal policy, that is, refugees and immigrants have better prospects of becoming properly integrated if they interact and participate in society with ethnic Danes. As Romme-Larsen argues, the logic behind the policy of spatial dispersal of refugees and immigrants is an impeccable example of how the welfare state strives towards creating equality and sameness by effectively differentiating between different categories of people within the state. Hence, it is assumed that if refugees and immigrants are forcibly placed among ethnic Danes, their necessary interaction and participation with ethnic Danes will contribute to a faster incorporation of them into the majority of Danish society, instead of risking that they settle in enclaves of ethnic minorities in urban areas creating parallel-societies that do not follow the norms of the Danish society (Romme-Larsen 2011a: 87).

Jesper from Ådalskolen clearly expresses elements of this discourse. Following his reasoning, if Omar and Zallouh participated in the parental council, it might inspire others to join as well. This reasoning clearly expresses his understanding that they are different, and, also must feel different and as ‘outsiders’ or ‘guests’ in the company with ethnic Danes. Moreover, it illustrates his understanding that participation in the parent council and interacting with Danes will contribute to their process of becoming integrated.

Zallouh tells me during one of my visits that she would like to participate in the parent council and arrange social events for the kids, but she does not feel that she is able to

because, according to herself, her Danish is not good enough. Instead of meeting the requirements Jesper and the Danish society have to her with regards to participating in the institutional work, and thereby positioning herself in the category of the good citizens, she refrains from this because she feels unable to participate on equal footing because of her inadequate level of Danish. The strong emphasis on the importance to learn and be Danish to participate in the Danish society is reproduced in Zallouh's understanding of her own abilities to participate on equal footing with Danes. In other words, the level of integration and the process of becoming integrated are being measured on the level of participation, and the uncritical cooperation with the schools, however, Zallouh understands the requirements for participating to be an adequate level of Danish, and she therefore feels inferior and not good enough to participate. Informed by Rytter (2018), the double bind that follows the logic that "you are not ready to become integrated until you are like us, and you will not prove that you are like us until you are integrated" is evident in this interaction. Hence, Zallouh is not ready to become integrated until she is like other Danes, and she will not prove that she is like other Danes until she is integrated.

### **6.2.2 Compensating for Parental Deficits**

In the responsibility discourse there is an expectation that parents take responsibility for their child's education. Here, the boundary between school and family is moved into the family (Knudsen 2010: 104). This is the case because it is anticipated that there is knowledge in the private sphere of the family that necessarily must be made a part of the schools' learning environment. As Knudsen expresses it:

"The family is therefore competently learning and willing and supplemental to the pupils learning in school. Simultaneously, it [the family] can disappoint in what case it becomes the school's task to make the family take responsibility. The family is a voluntary responsible learning environment, but if it does not take its responsibility the school must appeal to it that it does it the right way" (Knudsen 2010: 105 – My translation).

The problem is that in many cases the knowledge found in many ethnic minority families are not considered legitimate knowledge in the school. In other words, through the extension of the cooperation into the family sphere, all the families who do not conform to the Danish norms and values are being disqualified as eligible partners in the cooperation. Consequently, refugee and immigrant parents are forced to assimilate and 'do parenting' according to Danish standards in order to be able to "bring something to the table" in the cooperation. Otherwise, they are in a position where they are silenced by the institutional structures in the cooperation, which is the case with the Somali mothers in Matthiesen's research (Matthiesen 2016).

In school-home cooperation with refugee and immigrant parents where the deficit logic exists, two compensation models are according to Crozier and Davies (2007) applied: Either the ‘expert model’ where the teachers, as experts with the correct, scientific knowledge make decisions with regards to the child, or the ‘transplantation model’, where teachers transmits their expertise and knowledge onto the parents, who thereafter supposedly are equipped to live up to their parental responsibility (Matthiesen 2017: 497).

Following narratives from the teachers of this enquiry, they all articulate an understanding of how, especially in the beginning, the parents of this enquiry needed extra help in living up to the responsibility of providing an adequate learning environment for their children. The teachers felt that they had to make an extra effort. Both in order to ensure that the children did not lack behind and miss out on important homework and social arrangements, but also in order to ensure that the parents understood that they had to participate in parent-teacher conferences and check the school’s online communication platform for important messages with regards to the school and their children. In other words, the teachers felt the need to compensate for the inability of the parents to live up the expectations to parents in Danish schools.

Informed by the interlocutors, what is specifically important for the cooperation between the teachers and the parents is that the parents keep themselves updated on the schools’ online information platform ‘forældreintra’ where information regarding the school, activities, homework etc. is communicated. With regards to the cooperation with refugee parents, all the teachers express dissatisfaction with the level of engagement in this regard. Jane from Aakjærskolen elaborates:

(...) There is the thing about checking intra. We have decided on the school that this is the way we communicate, so it is here that all information will be communicated, and unfortunately, we experience quite often that they [refugee parents] simply do not open this [intra].

When Jane noticed that the parents did not keep themselves informed on intra, she invited them to the school and gave them instructions. Birgitte, Roudi’s teacher, experienced the same problems in the beginning. Fatma, Roudi’s mother explains to me that she was very confused in the beginning. She went to the school two-three times a week asking what her kids should do for homework, until she was informed that all this information was communicated on intra. Fatma was then invited to the school and was introduced to intra and got instructions. However, both Jane and Birgitte learned that this did not seem to help either, so they started to print out a weekly plan for these parents instead. Both teachers explain this effort as something out of the ordinary, where they attempted, firstly, to transport information about intra onto the parents, and, secondly, after the realisation that it did not help, they compensated for the parents’ inability to

live up to their parent responsibility, and the school's expectations to them. Jane expresses it as a breach of the school's regulations because she gives special treatment to some parents, when it is the school's policy that the communication runs through intra. Birgitte says that some might have believed it was the responsibility of the parents, but both Birgitte and Jane thought it was necessary to do that extra effort because otherwise it would affect the children's school. Jesper from Ådalskolen compensate by allocating the responsibility of delivering messages from the school to the parents onto the children. Here, Jesper completely devalues the parents' ability to live up to the responsibility and compensates by placing the responsibility on the children instead. These teachers all experience that the parents are unable to live up to the requirements of parental responsibility. Through the standards that are formulated with regards to how this cooperation ought to be the teachers all reproduce this reality in their every-day interaction with the parents resulting in the teachers' dissatisfaction and compensatory measures with regards to the parents of this enquiry.

Christian from Ådalskolen applies a different method in relation to the parents' perceived deficiencies. In his view, it is solely the parents' responsibility. He wants to "minimize the extra service" and instead he makes high demands to the parents' own effort in learning the language, orientate themselves with regards to their children's school and adjust and accept the norms, culture and standards of the school. He believes that these factors are all included in the general effort to become integrated. In other words, according to Christian it is the parents' own responsibility to compensate for their deficiencies with regards to their ability to participate on equal footing in the cooperation. In his narrative, the general understanding that "refugees need to make an effort" is reproduced as Christian's reality. According to him, the cooperation need to be "something for something" rather than in the case of Birgitte, Jane and Jesper, where they all provide the parents with extra assistance to help them live up to the expectations. In all cases, however, the parents are the receivers of little or more assistance to compensate for their perceived deficiencies in the cooperation with the school. In both instances, the teachers are positioned as experts, and they have 'the upper hand'.

Subsequently, the teachers' do not consider the parents to be able to live up to their parental responsibility, and the teachers are either compensating for the parents' perceived deficiencies, or are making demands that the parents compensate for their inabilities by making an extra effort and applying "something for something". Hence conforming to the Danish standards if they want to live up to the expectations to them in school and participate on equal footing in the cooperation. In this regard, the position the parents have left in the cooperation is to support and aid the teachers' work, and follow the teachers' and the school's terms. Through the logic of

the supportive discourse, the parents must to a larger degree function as assistants to the teachers rather than equal collaborators (Knudsen 2010: 255; Matthiesen 2015: 11). According to Karen Bergset (2017), the parents in her research have a wider range of positions available to them in the cooperation with the teachers and the school in contrast to the Somali mothers in Matthiesen's study, where there is little or no room to challenge and criticise the school if the parents are to keep their position as *supportive assistants* and *responsible parents* (Bergset 2017: 76). She argues that it can be a result of the smaller community the parents of her study find themselves in. The context of Skive can also be characterised as a smaller community where there is closer contact with the school. The parents similarly expressed satisfaction to the cooperation with the school and the teachers, and did not express apprehensions, which was the case in Matthiesen's study. The parents were in contact with the teachers in an informal way through text messages and showing up and contacting the teachers in school in cases of doubt and questions. The two mothers Roubin and Fatma respectively both narrate experiences of informal contact with the teachers, and they associate this contact with great appreciation and with supporting the children's school and the teacher's work. Birgitte likes this sort of informal communication in the smaller community because "(...) they [refugee parents] get to see that they are like I am, and we are no different. It generates trust". Jane and Christian, on the other hand, do not value this sort of informal contact between them as teachers and the parents. In their opinion, the parents need to respect the way that the school does things, and not "(...) expect that they can intrude and set the agenda for how things are done" as Christian expresses it. What these observations illustrate is that the small-scale community can in fact provide additional positions for the parents, however, it is important to include the perspectives of the teachers as to whether these efforts from the parents' side are recognized as legitimate, or whether these efforts further emphasise the deficit logic the teachers have with regards to the parents instead. Following Christian: "It is in a situation like that when you think that they [refugee parents] lack a little manners and general norms in relation to Danish culture". In other words, the legitimacy of the parents' efforts and support in a smaller or larger scale community is dependent on whether the efforts cohere to the standards of school and the overall Danish society. In her research Bergset refers to this tendency as instances of *thwarted agency* where the parents' efforts and suggestions to the teachers are not recognised and not complied with. One mother in Bergset's research finds it difficult to find the right balance in having a foot in both cultures. "They [refugee parents] consider the cultural price they are expected to pay for schooling in Norway as unnecessarily high." (Bergset 2017: 74). However, arguably, it is exactly the cultural price they need to pay in return for the situation in which their children can receive the benefits

of the free education in the Danish society and avoid situations where the deficit logic orientates the teachers' methods and attitudes towards them: Regardless of setting.

### **6.2.3 Practices of Exchange**

The parents of this enquiry all express great appreciation because their children can get an education in Denmark, as opposed to Syria. Simultaneously, they expressed awareness to the fact that they are inferior in relation to the teachers in their ability to assist their children in school and participate in the institutional work of the school. Therefore, they display great appreciation and gratitude towards the teachers. Moreover, they all voiced awareness to the fact that in Denmark they are in an inferior position in terms of culture, language, and refugee status, both with regards to the general society and within the school. Consequently, the parents of this enquiry were eager to compensate for their deficiencies, and adjust according to the norms and standards of the Danish society attempting to meet the requirements that the school put forth to them.

Zallouh relies completely on the teachers' ability to teach and provide her children with a good education, and she herself does not feel able to provide the same level of assistance because of language difficulties. In relation to the school and her children's education, she trusts the expertise of the teachers, and adjusts and follows the teachers' guidelines with regards to her children. Romme-Larsen argues that children's future prospects in the Danish society are decisive for the parent's own development of trust in the society (Romme-Larsen 2011a: 125). Consequently, Zallouh's trust in the school and the teachers reflects her overall gratitude with her children's ability to attend school in Denmark and get an education, contrary to Syria.

Nevertheless, both Christian and Jesper who are the teachers of her children express dissatisfaction with Zallouh and Omar's involvement in their children's education. In Jesper's narrative he describes an episode where he experienced challenges with regards to the cooperation with Omar and Zallouh. He says that he for a while had tried to explain an issue revolving around their son Juan to the Zallouh, but it was his experience that she did not understand how serious the matter was. In this case, he deemed it necessary to invite her to the school where he had the following message for her:

“Listen, now you need to get your act together. Now you need to make demands of this boy. You need to mark yourself as parents and make sure the boy comes to bed at a decent time. It is intolerable that he comes to school unrested lying across the table because he has been up till 2.30 in the morning. The next step is, if it does not change, that we are forced to notify the municipality.”

In this case, Jesper relies on the general assumption that refugees and immigrants are unable to live up to the Danish standards of parenting, and he reproduces the understanding that the prob-

lems he experiences in school must be a result of their inability to live up to their parental responsibility at home. Christian expresses the same concerns with regards to Omar and Zallouh, and he makes a cultural generalisation of how “they [refugees from non-western countries] do not rear their children before they are grown up, and this becomes very clear in a Danish school context”. Similarly, in Matthiesen’s study (2017) the deficit logic that the teachers draw upon in the cooperation with refugee and immigrant parents revolves around the idea that the parents do things differently because they have a different culture. In this way culture is understood as “having a stable nature with certain generalizable qualities and traits and is therefore perceived as a structural force, determining the values, beliefs and actions of those ‘within’ the culture” (Matthiesen 2017: 504). In relation to this deficit logic, “Danishness” is created as ‘neutral’, reasonable and correct, while others are positioned not only as different but also as problematic and insufficient (ibid). In Jesper’s narratives, he applies the ‘transplantation’ model and teaches Zallouh how to ensure proper circumstances for her child’s performance in school. Moreover, it clearly expresses that he has the power to make this sort of demand because he has the general understanding of what it requires to be a good parent in Denmark on his side. If Zallouh and Omar do not live up to this, it will have consequences. Consequently, Omar and Zallouh have little choice but to support the observations made by Jesper and adjust to this. Here, Zallouh and Omar are not able to participate on an equal footing because they are perceived of as inadequate in the parental responsibility. They are expected to adjust by Jesper, but they also do so willingly. Zallouh explains to me that after the meeting with Jesper regarding Juan she and Omar talked to Juan and adjusted their demands to him, clearly accepting and supporting Jesper’s assumption that he has the professional expertise and position to tell them how to improve their parenting with regards to their children’s school. In this dynamic it is evident that Jesper can make demands of Omar and Zallouh, and they are obeying willingly. They are doing so both because they feel appreciative to the fact that their children can attend school, so it does not matter that it must be on the premises of the school, but also because if they do not it will have consequences. Hence, to continuously ensure their children’s ability to attend school on a regular manner, they obey and adjust their parenting.

Fatma applies the same strategy of adjusting, however, to an even greater extent. She explains to me that because she and her family are Kurds, she has always felt like a second-range citizen in Syria in relation to Arabs. In Denmark, she explains, her children can get the education they want if they make an effort and try hard, something they were not able to in Syria because of their ethnicity. Therefore, she makes an extra effort to meet the requirements in school, so her children can be successful. She explains: “They should not feel different. If I have to work 24 hours I will teach them that they are like Danes. My children should not feel like

number two as I did in Syria”. She employs the strategy of complete assimilation and ensures that her children can do what Danish children can do. Last year she celebrated Christmas even though they are Kurds because she did not want her children to feel any different in their class when all the children tell about their Christmas Eve and the presents they have received. According to Birgitte, Fatma and her family is an exceptional case, and in her opinion an unusual family in relation to the general expectation and description of the cooperation with refugee and ethnic minority parents. Fatma and her husband have, according to Birgitte, never had any trouble with living up to the school’s expectation to them and they do everything right. As she notes: “They have different norms in some instances, but they always try to adjust them, so they are not discernible and collides with the norms of the school”. Here, the successful cooperation is expressed with how Fatma is adjusting her and her family’s norms insofar they do not collide with the school’s norms. Even though Birgitte also draws upon the general understanding that the cooperation with refugees and immigrants can be difficult, she uses this understanding to produce the reality that Fatma and her family are an extraordinary case. In other words, when there are no problems it is perceived of as out of the ordinary. Despite a few “special services”, Fatma is in many instances considered an equal participant in the cooperation with the school because she fully ‘plays the game’ of the school and minimizes and dissolves her own culture and identity to secure her children a prosperous future in Denmark. In other words, when the cooperation is perceived of as successful, the success is allocated to the parents’ ability to follow the standards formulated by the school and illuminate their differences and adhere to the Danish norms and standards.

In gift-theoretical terms, the school as part of the welfare state institutional apparatus gives the parents’ children an opportunity to get an education and a future, which was not possible in Syria because of war. The parents of this enquiry fled Syria because it was no longer safe to live there, but also because their children did not have a future there anymore. The parents expressed grievances over the loss of their home country on several occasions, but they were simultaneously grateful for being in Denmark in safety with future prospects for their children. In the gift given, that is the children’s education, the Danish state is ever-present, and it therefore continues to have rights over the parents. Consequently, because the education is given to the children of this enquiry through the redistribution of the taxes paid by Danish citizens, the Danish state and citizens are not alienated from this education. Informed by the principle of reciprocity, the Danish state is thus able to make demands of the parents, and moreover, it is the “power” that drives the parents towards meeting the requirements and expectations the state and the teachers have to them.



The teachers consider themselves as representatives of the institutions of the Danish welfare state and following the narrative that the Danish welfare state is summed up of experts, whose practices is based on scientific evidence and *best practice*, they understand themselves as ‘experts’ in contrast to the parents. Consequently, in the Danish welfare state, the teachers are able to tell the parents how to do parenting the ‘right’ way, that is, the “Danish” way, or compensate for the parents’ inability to live up to these expectations. Informed by the points made in the analysis in chapter five, there is an expectation of cultural assimilation in return for the benefits or gifts given to refugees and immigrants in the Danish society. In this way, the macro-level dynamics are reproduced in the every-day dynamics of the school-home-cooperation with refugee parents who in turn for their children’s education need to adjust their behaviour in accordance with the school and the Danish society. This relationship between the teachers and the parents can be understood as a ‘figured world’ between hosts and guests. Both teachers and parents of this enquiry understand that the parents are in an inferior position vis-à-vis the teachers in the context of the Danish welfare society, and it is thus acknowledged that what is expected and legitimate to require in return for education in Denmark is to submit to the values and norms of the Danish society, and ultimately pay the ‘cultural price’.

### **6.3 Sub-Conclusion**

Through the identification of different discourses on school-home cooperation in the narratives of the teachers of this enquiry, and by applying relevant concepts from studies contextualised in similar settings, some of the same patterns from previous studies have been identified in this present analysis. Specifically from the perspectives of the teachers, who all consider the cooperation with refugee and immigrant parents to be particularly problematic. However, the parents’ perspectives vary from the previous studies because these are not characterised by resignation and dissatisfaction to their position in the cooperation.

Informed by the analysis in chapter five, the patterns from the teachers’ perspective in many cases stem from the fact that the welfare state is being predicated on a correlation between equality and sameness, which results in that the cooperation with refugees and immigrant parents who do not follow Danish norms and standards concerning family relations are considered particularly problematic, and the parents are perceived of as unable to participate in the cooperation on equal terms. In other words, refugee and immigrant parents are forced to assimilate and ‘do parenting’ according to Danish standards to be considered eligible partners in the cooperation. Through the standards that are formulated with regards to how the cooperation between parents and schools ought to be the teachers all reproduce this reality in their every-day interaction with the parents resulting in the teachers’ dissatisfaction and compensatory measures

with regards to the parents of this enquiry. As representatives of the welfare state and *best practice*, the teachers view themselves as ‘experts’ who legitimately can compensate for the parents’ deficiencies or make demands of them. Although, by analysing the cooperation between the teachers and refugee parents as practices of exchange, an interesting perspective on this dynamic is uncovered. Since the school is part of the welfare state’s institutional apparatus that gives the parents’ children an opportunity to attend school, and because the teachers understand themselves as representatives of this institution, the teachers rely on the macro-level sentiment that it is legitimate to make demands of cultural assimilation of refugees and immigrants in return for the education the children receive. The analysis has argued that this legitimacy stems from the macro-level power mechanism that structures the relationship between Danes and immigrants and refugees that can be understood as a ‘figured world’ between hosts and guests. This figured world clearly demarcates “the Family of Denmark” from the rest who in return for their presence in Denmark and the benefits they receive need to follow the rules and norms of the Danish society. Correspondingly, the parents also understand that they are in an inferior position vis-à-vis the teachers in the context of the Danish welfare society, and they are grateful to the fact that their children have a future here. It is thus acknowledged from both sides that what is expected and legitimate to require in return for education in Denmark is to submit to the values and norms of the Danish society, and ultimately pay the ‘cultural price’. The parents of this enquiry do not narrate any apprehension to this fact, but rather they express gratitude because their children are able to attend school contrary to Syria. In gift-theoretical terms, the power of the gift and the compliance with reciprocal expectations can explain the parents’ adaption and willingness to do so in active terms and as a strategy to return the gift of their children’s education, as well as a strategy to avoid the humiliating aspects of the downside to reciprocity, that is, to be categorised as inferior and problematic in the Danish society.

# CHAPTER VII

## 7. Conclusion

Drawing upon Marcel Mauss' conceptualisation of the gift and reciprocity in social exchange, and supplementary theoretical considerations by Annette Weiner and Maurice Godelier, this thesis has explored the school-home cooperation with refugee parents in a Danish welfare state context. By viewing the cooperation through this theoretical lens, different aspects of the cooperation have been presented.

In Denmark there is a universal welfare state, where social benefits must cover the entire population. In order to legitimise the political project of a universal welfare state, Denmark has through political discourses been constructed as a homogenous nation, a family with specific cultural norms, values and language. In the Danish welfare society equality is closely associated with sameness, and equality, solidarity and social trust within this society is associated with being similar, and sharing the same culture, ethnicity and language. The consequences for refugees and immigrants in the Danish welfare society are that they are perceived as a threat to the solidarity and trust within the society, and they are disturbing the social stability because of their foreign origin and cultural differences. Therefore, the welfare state engages in a tremendous effort to integrate and even out the differences through a wide-spanning institutional apparatus, effectively categorising refugees and immigrants as a group of people who do not belong in society until they are similar to majority of the Danish population. Additionally, in order to maintain the solidarity within the welfare state, the universalism of the welfare state does not extend to refugees and immigrants, who need to prove their right to receive the same amount of benefits and rights as native Danes. Aside from expecting that they make an effort, participate, contribute and pay taxes, the state also demands cultural assimilation in return for public relief and equal access to social benefit. Consequently, the Danish welfare state works through the principle of "something for something" and demand cultural assimilation of its ethnic minorities in return for public relief and equal access to social benefits. These tendencies are further accentuated in the school-home cooperation, where the cooperation with refugee and immigrant parents is characterised as particularly problematic both in public – and political discourse. Consequently, this connection between equality and sameness influences the teachers' perception of the parents' ability to participate in the cooperation. As a result, the teachers' attitude towards

the parents is guided by a deficit logic where they either compensate for the parents' inabilities or demand that the parents adjust their culture insofar it coheres to Danish standards. This dynamic can further be explained through the understanding of the relationship between Danes and refugees and immigrants as a 'figured world' between 'hosts' and 'guests' that clearly demarcates the "family of Denmark" from those who do not belong. Here, the hosts are in a position to demand that the guests follow and obey the norms and rules of their society in return for their presence in society, and the benefits that they receive. In the school-home cooperation with refugee parents, the teachers rely on this macro-level sentiment that refugees need to apply the principle of "something for something", so that it is legitimate to expect cultural assimilation of refugees and immigrants in return for the education their children receive. Simultaneously, the parents also understand that they are in an inferior position in relation to the teachers in the context of the Danish welfare society. Clearly, both sides accept that what is expected and legitimate to require in return for education in Denmark is to submit to the values and norms of the Danish society, and ultimately pay the 'cultural price'. The parents of this enquiry do not express any resistance or frustration to this fact, but rather they voice gratitude because their children are able to attend school contrary to Syria. Through the theoretical lens of the gift and social exchange, the parents' adaption and willingness to do so can thus be understood as a strategy to return the gift of their children's education, and the strategy explains the adaption in active terms rather than a passive moulding by the welfare state. Subsequently, the theory of the gift and reciprocal expectations can shed a light on the teachers' expectations of cultural assimilation in return for education, as well as provide a different perspective on the refugees' eager attempt to adapt and contribute because if they do not, they will continue to be categorized as problematic and stay in a morally inferior relationship in the cooperation with the teachers, and ultimately in the relationship with Danes and the Danish state.

Although, the question is whether the cultural price is enough to equalize the relationship between the Danes, the Danish states and refugees and immigrants living in Denmark. Or whether the Danish state and its citizens will continue to set up new 'symbolic fences', demarcating the group of 'real' Danes from 'not-quite-real' Danes. In practices of exchange social rank and prestige are crucial elements. If refugees and immigrants were able to erase the debt to the Danish state it would be equivalent to becoming a legitimate part of the Danish society. Therefore, arguably, the Danish state's inalienable possession is withheld from exchange manifesting the hierarchy, social rank and demarcation between Danes and refugees and immigrants in the Danish society, and the prospects of becoming a part of the "imagined community" of Denmark and escape the 'host' - 'guest' sentiment are arguably very limited.

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## **Appendix**

Appendix 1 "Declaration on integration and active citizenship in the Danish society".

Appendix 2: "Overview of interviews".