

Producing casework strategies in the social welfare effort with unaccompanied refugee minors

Exercising discretion between law as a
universal structure and a situated practice



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Copenhagen, 15th of October 2018

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Abstract

Recent years have seen a rise in unaccompanied refugee minors (UMIs) arriving in the Danish municipalities from where their cases are administered by caseworkers applying different legal frameworks. These caseworkers have a wide discretionary space for identifying the social needs and solutions for the UMIs which is carried out through certain cultural and social processes of constructing problem identities. Through approaching the caseworker as a street-level bureaucrat (Lipsky, 2010), I present two institutionalised strategies of how caseworkers apply techniques mirroring normative rationals and aspirations. I argue that the caseworker effort is produced through strategies as ways to navigate in the tension between law as situated practices and universal structures. The bureaucratic strategy covers casework techniques, such as creating distance to clients and deferring responsibility, and aims at providing equal treatment to all citizens in an efficient and economic manner. Caseworkers would to a higher extent relate to what I termed as the individual need strategy, which is concerned with providing the best possible services to the UMI. It will be demonstrated how caseworker practices and strategies reflect wider social welfare sentiments, rather than solely deriving from laws and administrative guidelines. This thesis ultimately argues that the caseworker effort with UMIs is produced through strategies grounded in categorising the UMIs in unstable liminal stages in between childhood and adulthood and 'integration' and what one of my interlocutors refers to as 'self-integration'. This categorical ambiguity enforces caseworkers to apply techniques and strategies, which reflect cultural rationales on links between integration, youth and family, which are shaped by a welfare state agenda aimed at augmenting the notion of cultural cohesion and imagined sameness.

Introduction

In light of the relatively high amount of unaccompanied refugee minors (UMIs), who have obtained temporary protection and been allocated to Danish municipalities in recent years¹, I find there is a particular lack of knowledge about how laws are implemented and administrated in relation to this particular group. The broader group of unaccompanied minors can be legally defined as individuals under the age of 18 years of age, who leave their home country and live without parents or legal or customary guardians (Sedmak *et. al.*, 2018) and the specific category of UMIs refers to the group who have obtained protection outside of their country of origin. This group is considered as vulnerable and exposed and due to their separation from parents and close kin they hold particular rights (Kanic in Sedmak *et. al.*, 2018: 38) guided by international responsibilities and the principle of serving the ‘child’s best interest’ (UNCRC, article 3.1). When offered temporary protection in Denmark the UMIs are legally defined as *refugees*, in terms of their asylum claim, and as *children*, in terms of their age. The Danish Appeals Board has previously drawn attention to how the two legal statuses, of viewing UMIs and children and refugees, enforce the application of different intersecting laws and disparate casework practices with UMIs (Ankestyrelsen, 2010). This thesis sets out to explore what produces the caseworker effort with UMIs.

Municipalities are in Denmark responsible for receiving and accommodating refugees and immigrants through welfare services and interventions. The particular group of UMIs are commonly placed (*anbragt*) in pedagogical institutions or foster care² until they are no longer ‘unaccompanied’, meaning they turn 18 or apply for and receive family reunification with their parents. While carrying out an internship in the Danish Red Cross, I initially found it difficult to comprehend why public administrations seemed unable to adhere to legal requirements and deadlines. I for instance encountered deadline transgressions on case decisions and lack of social measures (*foranstaltninger*)³ and actions plans (*handleplaner*)⁴. From a scholarly point of view, this sparked my interest in further exploring the rationales behind the caseworkers behaviour and actions of not always following legal require-

¹ From 2015-2017 1103 unaccompanied refugee minors (UMIs) were recognised as refugees and allocated to Danish municipalities (Danish Immigration Services, 2018).

² With the word placement I am referring to the Danish legal concept of *anbringelse*. A placement is established through the law on social service § 52, part 3, nr. 8 and refers in this context to allocating the UMI to a foster care family or pedagogical institution until the 18th year or longer if the support scheme of *efterværn* is established by the caseworker.

³ I have added my informants’ emic expressions in brackets as the meanings do not necessarily translate well from Danish into English.

⁴ This observation is backed by a report from the Citizens Advisory Service (Borgerrådgivningen) that in 2017 uncovered how 100 pct. of the total amount of 77 investigated cases did not live up to all of the legal requirements of the law on social service.

ments. Rather than going into a normative discussion on whether or not rigorously applying law is positive or negative, the aim is to empirically explore and analytically conceptualise how caseworkers make sense of these legal transgressions and apply meaning to their role. In other words, this thesis explores caseworkers' aspirations when carrying out cases with UMIs in the tension between rigorously following law as a written universal structure and a situated practice.

Though laws and administrative guidelines instruct casework behaviour they do not account for the specific circumstances and life-stories of citizens. Enacting decisions, and thereby acting at one's own *discretion*, is therefore a core responsibility for the caseworker and is in this context understood as the complex task of assessing and enforcing social services to citizens in need (Ebsen, 2018: 2). Discretion translates in this context into the Danish expression *skønsmæssig vurdering* and describes the space of the caseworker's autonomy for decision making and occurs "*whenever the effective limits on [the public officer's] power leave him free to make a choice among possible courses of action and inaction*" (Davis, 1969: 4, cited in Gilson, 2015: 4). In regards to the cases with UMIs, caseworkers only have a limited knowledge about the UMI which provides restricted foundations for making professional decisions in a social work context. I propose that the law on social service is considered as an open and flexible framework allowing caseworkers an extensive space for discretion in which they are able to apply their own interpretations and personal experiences, which in some cases challenge legal requirements and administrative guidelines. The wide space for interpretation, when making professional decisions regarding UMIs, is for instance expressed in a quote from one of my interviews where a caseworker states that: "*They [the UMIs] have to be integrated into the Danish society, but that is pretty damn broad*" (Bodil, Ajstrup Municipality, Appendix A, p. 28). The caseworker articulates frustration with the lack of correlation between 'integration', in this case considered as the overall objective of the social welfare effort⁵ with UMIs, and the available approaches and solutions to accomplish this aim. Here it is interesting to note that my interlocutors generally view laws as instruments and not as objectives in themselves. In order to conceptualise this empirical finding, I build on Michael Lipsky's theoretical framework of viewing public administrations as *street-level bureaucracies*. This allows us to understand how policies are shaped through interactions between street-level bureaucrats and their clients, rather than solely deriving from legislatures (Lipsky, 2010: xiii). Lipsky argues that the combination of ambiguous laws and substantial discretionary authority ultimately can result in a troubling gap between the intended purpose of a law and the actual outcome. Following Michael Herzfeld's research on viewing national bureaucracy as a social phenomenon, I found it interesting to explore what, if not the formal

⁵ The social welfare effort is translated from the Danish word *velfærdsindsats*, which in this context covers welfare institutional services and support schemes offered by the caseworker to the UMI.

laws and administrative regulations, shapes the caseworkers' aspirations and engagements with UMI cases. A central question raised in this project is: How do strategies and rationales operate within, alongside, and counter to, official laws and administrative guidelines in a welfare context of caseworkers exercising discretion in UMI cases?

This thesis proposes that to understand what produces caseworkers' aspirations we need to explore how law and discretion is exercised through caseworkers' skilled techniques and strategies guided by cultural and value-based rationales. The initial part of the analysis presents my empirical contribution; my interlocutors' practices connected to three key events articulated by the law on social service. These events entails a high degree of decision making and covers the processes of opening the case; involving family and closing the case by transitioning it to the job centre. Based on this empirical material, I will in the second part of the analysis unfold my analytical contribution by assembling some of the recurrent caseworker techniques I observed during my fieldwork. By identifying these techniques on how to exercise discretion in relation to the concept of *institutionalised strategies* (Jonsson, 1998: 28), we are allowed to apply strategies as analytical tools to elevate our understanding of what produces casework aspirations. The aim of the final part of the analysis is to further explore the link between caseworker strategies and rationales in relation to the overall caseworker effort with UMIs. I will unfold and discuss how strategies are produced through legal and social categories of viewing the UMIs as children, adults and ethnic minority members in order to explore what characterises the dynamics and negotiations of the contested terrain of the notion of serving the 'child's best interest'; are caseworkers mainly attempting to enforce the continuity of UMIs background and identity or it is more obvious to understand the caseworker effort as evoking notions of 'integration' and 'assimilation' within a social welfare context? My ambition is not to engage in a normative discussion on the outcome of these aspirations but rather to unravel what elements produce the caseworker effort with UMIs by contextualising casework strategies as ways of exercising discretion in the sphere between viewing law as universal structures and situated practices. Based on empirical findings and my analytical contribution I argue that the objective of the caseworker effort with UMIs predominantly reflects wider value-based rationales on links between 'integration', youth and family, which do not derive from the law on social service applied by caseworkers in the children and youth department.

Delineating the field

This thesis explores how caseworkers in the children and youth departments apply meaning to their role in the municipal case processing with UMIs. I shall therefore in the following outline and establish the wider social welfare context influencing caseworkers' aspirations and how they interpret laws and administrative guidelines. This contextualisation will serve as a frame of reference for understanding my empirical findings while also informing my analytical contribution on how to grasp caseworkers' ways of exercising discretion. I will briefly touch upon the fundamental principles of the social welfare state project of initially securing the rights of vulnerable children and secondly receiving refugees and the particular group of UMIs.

The welfare project of implementing and securing child rights

The social welfare project emerging after World War Two is based on the solidarity principle, meaning striving for equal opportunities for all citizens in society (Møller & Larsen, 2016: 87). In Denmark this is predominantly carried out through income and service distribution administrated by the local councils. Though municipalities have a certain degree of self rule, which reflects diverse ways of administering laws, the state controls the municipalities through policies and regulations such as reimbursement (*statsrefusion*), meaning the money the state allocates to the municipalities' provision of services (Ibid.: 481). Reimbursement rules, and other types of economic regulations, have a significant effect of how municipalities establish social services and support within the law on social service. Some of the central social responsibilities of the welfare state is to provide for children, refugees, elderly and people with learning difficulties, and the operational responsibility for these services is decentralised from the state to the municipalities. The solidarity principle of the welfare state is, however, subjected to changing internal circumstances, such as a growing elderly population, but also external formations such as immigration and the impact of globalisation, the fact that the world to an increasing degree is connected through politics, technology, economy and culture (Mik-Meyer & Villadsen, 2007: 147).

The notion of childhood is in a western context a relatively new and dynamic phenomena created by societal reforms in relation to the development of the modern welfare state (Møller & Larsen, 2016: 301). From a welfare state perspective, it is key to uphold societal order by supporting the family as a unit while also protecting the individual right to childhood in order to hinder that so-

cially deviant behaviour is inherited to future generations (Ibid.: 301). By societal order, I am referring to the normative boundaries and social mechanisms producing certain norms, roles and expectations (Day, 1981: 29). In accordance with the expected societal norms, socially deviant behaviour is identified by social welfare institutions, such as day-care centres and schools, and reported to the caseworker in the children and youth departments in the local municipality. The clarification of a reporting (*underretning*) will be operationalised in a web of caseworkers, managers, laws, regulations and ways of acting on one's discretion. The instructions of the law on social service, which is the primary law for caseworkers in the children and youth department, reflects the societal orders' standards and values concerning what is perceived and negotiated as a 'proper' childhood (Panther-Brinck & Smith, 2000, in Engebrigtsen, 2003: 194-195). These standards are culturally situated in a moral discourse that is normatively grounded in certain considerations according to class, gender and ethnicity (Møller & Skytte, 2004: 21). In the case of where a caseworker would not perceive a child as having a tolerable childhood, the state would be held responsible for intervening, or not intervening, in time. The right to childhood is specified in the law on social service and derives from international agreements.

Since the 18th century, the perception of child rights has become universalised through a range of reforms and regulations, which culminated in 1991, when Denmark ratified the human rights treaty United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Møller & Larsen, 2016: 304, Skytte, 2002: 48). This determined the social, cultural, political and economic rights of any individual under the age of 18 (UNCRC, article 2). The age of 18 is thereby stated as the universal commencement of adulthood. Though the UNCRC is not formally incorporated in Danish legislation, the aforementioned principle is implemented in for instance the SEL § 46, where it is stated that vulnerable children and adolescents must have the same opportunities for personal development, health and an independent adult life as their peers. In the case of a minor arriving in Denmark, to seek protection without legal guardians, the Danish state has certain obligations in relation to the UNCRC.

Receiving unaccompanied refugee minors in Denmark

During the aftermath of 2015, when more than a million asylum-seekers arrived in the European Union, immigration has been increasingly restricted through national laws and policies. This 'refugee crisis' has resulted in a temporary increase in refugees arriving in the Danish municipalities⁶ as well

⁶ In 2015 Denmark received 21.316 applications for asylum and 10.592 asylum seekers were recognised as refugees (Danish Immigration Services).

as a rise in legal and policy restrictions concerning immigration, active occupation and social services⁷. The Danish population has, among other populations in Europe, become more concerned with the increasing impact of globalisation and the assumed cultural differences between immigrants and refugees on the one side and the Danish population on their other (Hervik 2004, in Olwig & Paerregaard, 2001: 14). Among the aforementioned refugees arriving in the European Union, about 90.000 asylum seekers were considered to be unaccompanied minor migrants (Sedmak *et. al.*, 2018: 1). From 2015-2017 1.103 UMIs were allocated to Danish municipalities from where many of them continues to be placed according to the law on social service. I will in this study delimitate the focus to how caseworkers in municipalities carry out cases with the particular group of UMIs, which defines individuals under 18 years of age who leave their country of origin and obtain temporary protection without legal guardians according to the law on immigration § 7., parts 1, 2 and 3 or § 9 C, part 3, nr. 1 and 2. I will therefore not touch upon the UMIs previous status as asylum seekers or their future cases in the job centre.

The UMIs who arrive in Denmark is a diverse group of individuals from different countries, family patterns and backgrounds. What characterises the group is the past experiences of being alone in unsuitable places and situations, especially for a person under age. The UMI have to resume life in a new country without parents and when they turn 18 they may have their residency permit revoked. The UMIs are furthermore often affected by violent and traumatising experiences during their flights. UNICEF has among other organisations highlighted that adolescents and youth are at particular risk of being exposed to trafficking and or exploitation⁸. According to the UNCRC, the receiving countries are responsible for processing asylum and family reunification applications from UMIs in a positive, humane and effective way, as they, according to the Human Rights Convention, have the right to be with their family. In article 3.1 of the UNCRC, it is stated that:

“In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration”.

I find it interesting to explore how this concern is interpreted and put into practice by my interlocutors as the assessment of what is considered in the ‘child’s best interest’ seems to be somewhat negotiable and contested (Sedmak *et. al.*, 2018: 38; Engebrigtsen, 2003: 199; Skytte 2002: 250). The prac-

⁷ In the period from 2002-2016 the law on immigration has for instance on average been amended more than every third month (<https://www.information.dk/indland/2016/12/udlaendingelovgivning-aendres-hyppigere-hver-tredje-maaned>).

⁸ A 2017 report has for instance shown that 8 out of 10 adolescents and youth have reported exploitation on the central Mediterranean route towards Europe.

tices and interpretations of this principle is particular interesting to explore further in the latter part of my analysis, as it corresponds with one of the two caseworker strategies identified in my empirical material.

State of the art

While research has provided important insights on the links between welfare institutions and refugees (Belabas & Gerrits, 2017; Olwig *et. al.*, 2013; Romme Larsen, 2018, 2011; Gullestad, 2002; Jonnson, 1998), the particular social welfare effort with UMIs remains overlooked as a subject of study. Attention has been put towards encounters between welfare states and unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (Sedmak *et. al.*, 2018; Andersson, 2017; Dumbrill, 2009; Engebrigtsen, 2003; Jones, 2001), and how this group is administered in the intersections between the law on immigration and the law on social service (Danish Refugee Council, 2018). Little research has thus been undertaken on what produces the social welfare effort with the particular group of UMIs who have obtained temporary protection. The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate how caseworker strategies, and their underlying rationales, allows us to further our understanding of the caseworker effort with UMIs. I shall in the following outline the central theoretical approaches applied in the analysis in order to explore how we empirically and analytically can grasp caseworkers' ways of exercising discretion in the tension between viewing law as universal structures and situated practices.

Approaching the street-level bureaucrat

Policies and services are interpreted and delivered by relatively low-level public servants subjected to work settings consisting of; *“chronically inadequate resources; an ever growing demand for services; vague or conflicting organisational expectations and policy goals; difficulties in measuring their performance; clients who do not voluntarily choose the services”* (Gilson, 2015: 2). Rather than understanding policies as made in legislatures, Michael Lipsky proposes that street-level bureaucrats' working practices, beliefs and interactions with clients effectively constitute social policies (Lipsky, 2010: xiii). Street-level bureaucrats interact directly with the public and thereby represent the frontline of government policy while carrying out the “hard, dirty and dangerous work” in the ‘coal mines’ of the welfare state (Bovens, 2002: 174-184). In light of this theory, the relationship between the street-level bureaucrat and client is characterised as inherently unequal and particularly if the client is poor, uneducated or part of a minority with a different socio-economic and racial background than the caseworker (Gilson, 2015: 3). The street-level bureaucrat is furthermore knowledgeable concerning the rules and routines and the authoritative part of their role enables them to control resources and opportunities for people being dependent on their decisions (Maynard-Moody, 2000: 335). The client accessing welfare services is thereby put in a

dilemma between claiming individual rights and enacting the expected behaviour forced upon them by the public agencies (Lipsky, 2010: xvi).

According to Lipsky, the combination of ambiguous laws and substantial discretionary authority can ultimately result into a substantial and troubling gap between how welfare policies are intended and carried out in practice. To fill out this continuum, caseworkers exercise discretion, meaning the space between the legal rules in which caseworkers exercise choice in relation to their own senses of identity and self-esteem (Gilson, 2015: 4). This human judgment places the street-level bureaucrat in dilemmas from where they have to ensure equal rights for all citizens while simultaneously appropriating decisions to individual clients needs (Lipsky, 2010: xii). As Janet Vincant and Lance Crothers have noted, “*workers operate in a context established by law, or organizational rules, and so forth, but they interpret what these influences mean in specific cases*” (Vincant & Crothers, 1998: 10). Whereas “street-level” indicates a decentralised implementation, “bureaucracy” refers to laws and regulations instructed from the centre of the welfare state. Street-level bureaucrats are expected to carry out the two-fold function of their role as both supporting but also controlling the citizens they are in direct contact with (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2012: 13). By remarking the limits of central control and the inadequacies of law as a universal structure, Lipsky notes that, “[*Public policy*] is not best understood as made in legislatures or top-floor suites of high-ranking administrations, because in important ways it is actually made in the crowded offices and daily encounters of street-level workers” (Lipsky, 1980: xii). Through this perspective, we are allowed to explore caseworkers as productive policy makers (Winther & Nielsen, 2008: 131).

When being confronted with daily conflicts and dilemmas caseworkers adopt *coping-mechanisms* enforced by their broader work conditions and environment or ‘corrupted world of service’, as Lipsky phrases it (Lipsky, 2010: xv). In other words, coping mechanisms should not be considered as random acts of individuals but rather as systemic ways to ration and automatise welfare services in order to reduce the overall demand for services and activities (Winther & Nielsen, 2008: 118-120). Lipsky argues that the routines, devices and other coping behaviours established to interpret ambiguous laws “*effectively become the public policies they carry out*” and may ultimately “*widen the gap between policy as written and policy as performed*” (Lipsky, 2010: xiii). Following this argument I will explore the coping behaviour of my interlocutors as this allow us to understand how discretion is exercised in the sphere between universal law and regulations and individual needs and services. Whereas Lipsky’s favourable reading of the street-level bureaucrat’s behaviour is described as creating ways to mass-process client demands and services, allowing them to handle cases in regards to aspirations about fairness and appropriateness (Ibid.: xiv), I found that my interlocutors’ ways of making decisions based on individual intentions and abilities were not captured by Lipsky’s concept of coping mechanism. Rather than

looking at mechanisms structuring caseworkers' behaviour, I found that my interlocutors would also strategise by using law as an instrument to work the system in favour of the client, and not simply to cope with inadequate resources and heavy case loads. In order to analyse the productive behaviour of my interlocutors, we can turn to Tola B. Jonsson's ethnographic findings on encounters between immigrant clients and welfare representatives. While drawing on Lipsky, Jonsson shows how individual casework techniques are dependent on negotiable social mechanisms: the client's ability to consent to the organisational ideology and the cultural filter through which caseworkers perceive their clients (Jonssons, 1998: 29). Rather than simply looking at coping mechanisms, Jonsson proposes us to explore caseworkers' ways of exercising discretion as *institutionalised strategies* meaning patterned ways of acting in accordance with social mechanisms of organisational ideology and cultural filters (Johnson, 1998: 28). By identifying institutionalised strategies we are allowed to analyse the interplay between social interactions and individual behaviour through caseworker techniques following certain rationales and aspirations. Rather than applying Lipsky's framework as a fixed model, I shall approach it as a tentative analytical framework which I will reflect upon and supplement with my own empirical findings exploring how street-level bureaucrats operate within the boundary between the state and its citizens.

When studying how street-level bureaucrats operate, Michael Herzfeld allows us to elevate our understanding by viewing national bureaucracy as a social phenomenon. Whereas many scholars have explored national bureaucracies through an analytical distinction between political intentions and administrative implementation (Rohr, 1987: 113-59), others have critiqued this as a normative, and non-empirical, description of how bureaucracies work (Maynard-Moody, 2000: 337). Rather than following this path of viewing bureaucracies as rational and functional entities I will explore public administrations as embedded in symbolic everyday values and practices in order to grasp the relatively high degree of input into policy-making (Herzfeld, 1992: 2). Following Herzfeld, we shall explore the representations and justifications of instruments of public administrations, for instance the ways of identifying needs of clients receiving social services authorised by caseworkers. Rather than isolating clients and bureaucrats as "(...) *two separate classes of human beings, separated by some Manichean division of good and evil*" (Ibid.: 5), I view them as participants in the same conflictual arena. Through my fieldwork, I have traced many similarities between clients and caseworkers such as the human reaction of deferring responsibility towards a complex system with changing laws and regulations, policy goals from the government and so on. As Herzfeld quotes: "*The most basic goal of any bureaucrat or bureaucracy is not rational efficiency, but individual and organizational survival*" (Britain, 1981 in

Herzfeld, 1992: 4-5). Street-level beliefs and the productive institutionalised culture are therefore essential prisms for understanding the caseworker effort with UMIs.

Constructing problem identities

This thesis is grounded in a research field exploring encounters between ‘the system’ of welfare representatives and ‘clients’ meaning social service receivers. The asymmetric power relation between system and client is enforced by certain institutionalised norms and values (Mik-Meyer, 2018; Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2012; Mik-Meyer & Villadsen, 2007; Vitus, 2013; Skytte, 2002). Rather than solely looking at individual caseworker behaviour, the analytical focus is turned towards the “institutional identities” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001; Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2012) framing the shared ideals and rationales in the social welfare effort.

“From this perspective, if there is a personal self it is not a private entity so much as it is shared articulation and traits, roles, standpoints, and behaviours that individuals acquire through social interaction” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001: 6).

Identity is hereby viewed as constructed through cultural norms and values manifested in the interplay between individuals and social conditions. By applying the analytical term of institutional identity, we are allowed to explore how practice is defined by which identities a given institution will include and exclude (Holstein & Gubrium, 2001; Vitus, 2013: 39). In other words, the concept of institutional identities allows us to explore how the welfare state establishes certain conditions shaping the caseworkers’ behaviour, but also their sense of self and the overall objective of the social welfare effort (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2012: 14). Caseworkers thereby develop institutionalised categorisation and marginalisation patterns through social and communicative processes from where they mirror certain rationales (Vitus, 2013: 12). Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein introduces the term *troubled identities*, which defines identities transgressing the boundaries of what in the social order can be recognised as ‘normal’ (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001: 9). A way to further explore the notion of troubled identities is through Mary Douglas’ structural approach to how institutions define the values of its representatives while simultaneously being constituted by the representatives’ norms and values.

“Any institution that is going to keep its shape needs to gain legitimacy by instinctive grounding in nature and in reason: then it affords to its members a set of analogies with which to explore the world and with which to justify the natural-”

ness and reasonableness of the instituted rules, and it can keep its identifiable continuing form” (Douglas, 1986: 112).

Institution in this context is understood as a legitimised social grouping and when applying the term to a public administration, certain conventions will be institutionalised, meaning that “*all parties have a common interest in there being a rule to insure coordination”* (Ibid.: 46). Human identities are thereby constantly formed and changed through the interaction with institutions.

“The Institution offers categories to think through, establishes premises for self-assurance and fixates identities” (Douglas, 1986: 110).

Social work, as identifying needs and solutions to social problems, is thereby constructed through ‘normalization’ processes determining the contrasting depictions of what exists and what ought not to exist (Douglas, 1966, in Miller & Vitus, 2009: 745). According to Douglas, caseworkers’ ways of defining clients’ problems, and the solutions to these problems, does not only mirror rationales within an institution but furthermore reflects more general social and cultural processes in society (Vitus, 2013: 9). By viewing categorisation as a fundamental part of social life, these empirical studies have explored the logics behind institutional categorisation and marginalisation situated in the interactions between economic, political and bureaucratic rationales and wider notions of normality and deviation in the Danish society (Ibid.: 11-12). The social welfare effort of securing children rights and accommodating refugees are thereby carried out by ‘problem treating’ institutions developing certain definitions and categorisations of different forms of social problems with the goal of shaping and fixating identities (Ibid.: 39). In these processes *problem identities* are identified and produced within the frames, objectives, and authority of a particular institution and its representatives’ actions, thoughts and emotions. By institutionalising problem identities, welfare representatives carry out what Kathrine Vitus terms as *identity work*, which means attaching certain explanations to clients’ behaviour and thereby associating them with problematical and marginalising categories (Vitus, 2013: 39). Though institutional logics are not determining the caseworkers individual identities, there is a limit to how much individual behaviour can deviate from the dominating institutionalised logics and identities (Douglas, 1986: 47). The concept of institutional identities can thereby be applied in order to gather individual clients’ complex lives into patterned and action-orientated identities structuring how caseworkers understand clients and their needs (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2003; Espersen, 2010: 69).

Methodological positioning

I conducted my empirical material in the spring of 2018 by applying a qualitative approach. This allows us to understand human beings in relation to their social contexts and therefore includes considerations on my own positioning in the field. Following this approach, the analytical prism is viewed as unstable and shaped in the encounter between the researcher and the research object (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2005: 9). Hence, the meaning of individual behaviour is considered as a relational phenomenon dependent on the particular context and the perspective being applied.

“The anthropological sensitivity to immediate context - ethnography - helps to shift the focus from perspectives that are already, to some extent, determined by institutional structures they were set up to examine” (Herzfeld, 1992: 15).

As Michael Herzfeld touches upon in the above, writing ethnographic field notes while being emerged in the field can allow us to gradually suspend our preconceived knowledge patterns. Rather than reducing my view on caseworkers as representatives of a rational bureaucratic order, I will explore how bureaucracies are not merely dominating their societies but are to a vast extent bounded by and thereby mirroring societies and their values (Peters, 1989: 40 in Herzfeld, 1992: 18). Hence, this study is fundamentally exploratory in the sense that I examine connections through analysis that is inductively derived from the empirical material (Aggergards Larsen, 2010: 254). The coding process consisted of making sense of the empirical material and identifying themes and concepts serving as vehicles for the analysis. This process is therefore taking place in the intersection between the researcher’s prior understanding and tendencies in the material (Thagaard, 2004: 138). As my understanding of the informants’ narratives was strengthened every time I went through my material, this was a continuous process throughout my analysis. I found it useful to apply both *inductive* coding, meaning themes informants brought up themselves, as well as *deductive* coding, which refers to analytical concepts derived from other empirical or theoretical studies (Ibid.: 140). When initially accessing the field I had no preconceived ideas about the ultimate direction of my analysis.

Accessing the field

In the aftermath of an internship I conducted with the Danish Red Cross in the fall of 2017 I was left with an urge to further explore the motivational forces of caseworkers working with UMIs in

children and youth departments. During my engagement in the Danish Red Cross I encountered how a range of different municipalities cooperated with voluntary legal guardians (MFIs)⁹. My positioning as a researcher in this field is therefore informed by my previous engagement with caseworkers, which has elevated my understanding of how they view their work situations and conditions (Thagaard, 2004: 189). The empirical material, which this thesis builds upon, indirectly draw on research conducted during my internship. This background research was carried out with UMIs, contact persons (*kontaktpersoner*)¹⁰ and caseworkers from both the children and youth department and the job centre. This material will not be referred to directly in the analysis but merely serve as background research. During my fieldwork I was furthermore presented with case files but as I was not able to systematically go through these files with my interlocutors, I did not find it relevant to apply document analysis as a method. After conducting this research on behalf of the Red Cross, I approached casework coordinators in the municipalities whom I had identified as the key gatekeepers (Ibid.: 67).

Sampling & preliminary interviews

I conducted fieldwork in six both small and large municipalities in city and country areas in Jutland and Zealand. In my research I have demarcated the group of interlocutors based on *convenient sampling* (Berg, 2001). This way of sampling refers to choosing informants on a strategic basis, as they possess certain positions or attributes relevant to the research quest (Thaagard, 2004: 56). As the point of departure of my fieldwork I conducted six more formalised interviews with nine caseworkers working in six different municipalities. I found it relevant to carry out both semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Aggergaard Larsen, 2010: 254) with caseworkers in order to make them explain their practices while also reflecting on their role. Prior to the interviews I had a set of themes and questions ready but I found it relevant to also follow what my interviewees were interested in talking about. As the interview setting is shaped by both the interviewer and the informant, it is necessary to dwell on how the narratives of the informants have been influenced by the mutual personal connection, trust and confidentiality established in the interaction (Thagaard, 2004: 86, 101). This occurred to me as particularly important, when one of my informants slowed down our conversation by saying, “*as long as that thing [the dictaphone] is switched on, we are not going any further [laughing]*” (Bo, Grerum, Appendix A,

⁹ A MFI is an adult who until the minor turns 18 will be appointed to obtain the legal guardianship by the state authorities.

¹⁰ A contact person is a professional support worker paid by the municipality to carry out social support by helping UMI's with daily practical and personal issues.

p. 55). Though the interview setting inherently is based on an asymmetric relationship where the researcher is dominating the procedure (Aggergard Larsen, 2010: 263) I found that conversing with my informants about their work and their interests often would result in them expressing appreciation after the formal part of the interview had ended. All interviews were transcribed into Danish (see Appendix A). Though these preliminary interviews allowed me to gain valuable insights into how casework is put into practice, my analysis is particularly generated based on ethnographic material conducted through daily participation in the work life of one municipality.

Ravnsborg Municipality

After several written and verbal exchanges I was allowed access Ravnsborg¹¹, which became my main field site. I thereby started viewing the caseworkers as my partners in order to enable the best possible access and cooperation (Aggergard Larsen, 2010: 255). It was in these prior negotiations that it was decided that I could take part in all relevant meetings and view case files as long as I signed a declaration of full anonymity, which is why all names of people and places in this thesis are made confidential (Thagaard, 2004: 24-25). I conducted fieldwork for about three months in Ravnsborg Municipality where I took part in meetings between caseworkers and UMIs, their MFIs and the pedagogical institutions. As I had already been in contact with two caseworkers and the head of the children and youth department, I had some prior knowledge about the organisational structure of this particular municipality, which enabled me to request attendance in relevant meetings both in- and outside of the municipality.

Cases with UMIs are in Ravnsborg Municipality carried out according to the law on social service, which would not necessarily be the case in all municipalities. When an UMI is referred to Ravnsborg an initial screening will be conducted in order to assess whether the child's needs can be embraced by § 11, a preventive version of support, or there needs to be a support arrangement (*foranstaltning*) put into effect through § 52. According to my informants, all UMIs are placed according to § 55, which enables the municipality to obtain full reimbursement from the state three years from when the UMI's asylum claimed is recognised. In Ravnsborg municipality the child is then referred to the centre of social effort, the team from where I did my fieldwork. This entity not only carries out cases with UMIs but also with Danish children and adolescents whose families for various reasons are not able to appropriately take care of their children. The centre of social effort is located

¹¹ In agreement with my interlocutors, all place and personal names are referenced as pseudonyms.

in the same building as the department for job and integration, where the UMIs are typically transferred after they turn 18 years old, and they are also in charge of administrating aftercare (*efterværn*), the support scheme for UMIs in the age of 18 to 23 years old. The two departments each have a head of department along with an administrative finance officer who provides financial advice to the managers. The frontline caseworkers in the centre of social effort engage in a range of meetings where authority decisions, budgets and new law enforcements are presented and discussed. The department has one legal officer who is specialised in administrative guidelines and amendments to the legal frameworks applied in the department. In Ravensborg municipality I spend time with several different caseworkers, but the primary part of my research was conducted with one interlocutor in particular.

Participant observation

While spending time with caseworkers, and taking part in both internal and external meetings when relevant, I approached my field through the method of *participatory observation*, which can be considered as the core of ethnographic fieldwork. This technique sets out to enhance the researchers awareness towards alternating “*between the insider and outsider experience, and having both simultaneously*” (Spradley, 1980: 57), or in other words to participate alongside the informant, while also keeping a distance by observing and writing down field notes if appropriate. Though I prior to my fieldwork had familiarised myself with fieldwork techniques such as how to write good field notes (Spradley, 1980; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), I found it difficult to balance between taking active part and retrieving myself to write up my observations. One example of this was when my interlocutors would be interested in hearing my opinion on a decision making process, as it was important to me as a researcher to establish and maintain my role in the field as a participating researcher (Espersen, 2010: 34). As Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson has noted: “*Ethnographers, then, must strenuously avoid feeling ‘at home’. If and when all sense of being a stranger is lost, one may have allowed the scape of one’s critical, analytical perspective*” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007: 90). The main part of my observation material stems from being part of the everyday life as I was interested in exploring the social processes and institutionalised interactions between caseworkers and their clients. A regular day as a participant observant would typically begin with having a coffee with Mads, my main interlocutor in Ravensborg Municipality, followed by a meeting. I found participant observation extremely relevant in meetings between caseworkers and UMIs, as observations during these meetings enabled me to witness how caseworkers would relate to the UMIs and their own role as an authority. This form of par-

ticipation allowed insights that were not initially articulated by my interlocutors but served as valuable background information when asking follow-up questions.

Representation and ethical considerations

While undertaking my fieldwork in Ravnsborg municipality, I was aware that some of my informants were potentially still associating me to my previous position as a Danish Red Cross intern. Some of the caseworkers I interviewed for this thesis I had met before, while undertaking an internship for the Danish Red Cross, and others I met for the first time. In order to reposition myself as an independent researcher, I spent time before each interview introducing and framing my research as being independently conducted. When stressing that I was interested in hearing about the caseworkers' perspectives and experiences, one informant turned to me and said, "*finally someone wants to hear what we have to say*". This perspective, of feeling crushed between the system and the client was very common among my informants, which meant that I had to be very aware not to align myself with the caseworker, as it from time to time seemed appealing to acknowledge their frustrations. Another ethical consideration throughout this project has been to handle the process of interpreting my empirical material with close proximity to the actual situation from where the usages were conveyed. In other words, it has been important for me to constantly reflect on my own presumptions to ensure that my biases did not inform the analytical movements of my research in ways that I was not aware about. This was done through the process of reading through my material, while still being in the field, which allowed me to follow up on my interlocutors responses next time I would meet them.

The process of constructing and analysing empirical material has entailed a reduction of the complexity of my interlocutors social worlds, as my empirical material is dependent on the particular settings of time and place, shaped by me as a researcher, my informants and the given social surroundings. The aim has thereby been to produce material corresponding to my interlocutors' experiences (Hammersley, 2002: 66). The empirical findings are therefore not representative of the overall caseworker effort with UMIs. Based on the findings we are, however, able to draw out analytical generalisations relevant to understand how law in this field is implemented and interpreted by street-level bureaucrats working in welfare institutions. My aim has therefore neither been to map out caseworker practices with UMIs, nor to compare caseworker practices across municipality border, but rather to present an empirical and analytical contribution to the caseworker effort with UMIs.

Casework practices: between law as written and performed

Based on preliminary studies and my own my ethnographic findings, I will now move on to the analysis exploring three chronological central events through which caseworkers are legally required to exercise discretion in relation to the law on social service. By exercising discretion I am referring to the activity of adapting laws to the particular needs and circumstances of a client. The discretionary space refers to the scope between a centralised written law, and its administrative regulations, and the decentralised implementation happening at street-level. The events of opening a case on the UMI, involving family and transferring the case to the job centre are characterised as involving many decision making processes, and thereby also a high degree of space for individual interpretation.

Opening the case: “A lot of freedom to decide yourself”

When an UMI is transferred from the asylum centre to the municipality, the welfare state takes on the role and responsibility of a ‘surrogate parent’ by appointing a foster care family or pedagogical institution, offering professional care and support and appointing a MFI. A caseworker in the children and youth department opens a case on the UMI in order to coordinate the care and support surrounding the UMI. The placement can be viewed as the embodiment of this form of institutionalised upbringing of the UMI. When opening the case, my interlocutors would consider their most important task as carrying out the §50, also known as the child specialist examination (*børnefaglig undersøgelse*), with which the child’s conditions and relationships are accounted in details. As one caseworker explains to me: “*the first thing for me is absolutely the examination and getting to the bottom of things*” (Kirstine, Grerum Municipality, Appendix A, p. 45). This indicates a perspective among the caseworkers from where they view themselves as experts screening the UMI in order to identify resources and problems in relation to school, health, family, language and social (Randi, Værnedam Municipality, Appendix A, p. 39). The identified personal and social needs are often categorised in relation to the available social measures within the law on social service. Caseworkers will therefore not go into details with issues outside of their jurisdiction but rather focus on welfare institutional ways of supporting the UMI. Some caseworkers would touch upon the intersections between the law on social service and the law on immigration as the law on integration in some ways would be interpreted as counteracting the purpose of the support schemes established in accordance with the law on social service. Caseworkers are therefore not only obliged to navigate in the schism between law as

written and implemented but also within unfortunate intersections between different laws which, in some cases, could result into constraints on the intended outcome of social support schemes. A common example of this among my interlocutors was when a suitable placement for an UMI was found but the UMI would continue to worry about the restricted residence permit in need of renewal by the 18th year at the latest. Caseworkers carry out the §50 examination mainly based on the social reports (*socialrapporterne*) delivered by the asylum centres before or when the UMIs arrive in the municipality. One caseworker for instance says that:

“(...) it depends on how the social report from the asylum centre is written; what content and how detailed the report is. It is important we get all conditions disclosed and that the young person’s stay in the asylum centre is written down in details” (Randi, Værnedam Municipality, Appendix A, p. 39).

The above quote demonstrates two important points: the dependence on other actors when assessing the appropriate care enforcements and more importantly, the lack of information and experience with the UMI. In “regular cases”, as one caseworker refers to it (with ethnically Danish children being placed), there will be accounts from the upbringing of the child but with UMIs there may not be any relevant records to build on. Hence, when caseworkers open the case, it is often done on a limited and fragmented basis which demands the caseworker to fill in the blanks with their own interpretation of the situation. This could for instance be to decide whether the UMI would benefit from being placed in a Danish foster care family or a pedagogical institution with contact persons from the UMI’s own ethnic and cultural background. Despite research arguing that children from ethnic minorities should be placed in surroundings enabling them to recognise themselves according to culture, language and religion, studies have shown that Danish authorities predominantly place children from ethnic minority families in settings exclusively with ethnic Danes (Møller & Skytte, 2004: 19). One of my interlocutors explain how momentum with the UMI can quickly be lost if the caseworker does not “get to the bottom of things” and find out “what they [the UMIs] are bringing with them”.

“As quick as lightning we are behind and if we do not get to them in the beginning then it will all drift away. Then they become too self-integrated and they will start only minding their own business” (Kirstine, Grerum Municipality, Appendix A, p. 45).

The caseworker outlines two parallel processes; one where the UMIs are “self-integrating” and “minding their own business”, and another where the caseworker is “getting to them” in time. The notion of self-integration is interesting as it plays on the imaginations of what constitutes a ‘successful integration’, which can be considered as “(...) *an ideologically loaded concept, linked to Danish ideas of equality and belonging, which in turn are related to notions of cultural similarity closely associated with the Danish welfare state*” (Olwig & Paerregaard, 2001: 2). By viewing the notion of integration as a “social problem”, refugees and immigrants are understood and treated as a “problem” group in the need of help and special attention in order to become recognised as full citizens (Ibid.: 16). The notion of integration builds on the idea of an “imagined community” (Andersson, 1991), a nation consisting of a homogeneous *majority* population sharing the same cultural values, of where newcomers are supposed to merge into. The concept of a majority population rests on a *minority* population and these concepts are useful to understand how social deviant behaviour is identified and constructed within asymmetric relationships between for instance caseworkers, as belonging to the majority population, and refugees as being part of an ethnic minority population. Ethnic minority refers to the analytical terms minority and majority describing the relationship between the perceived Danish majority population and the ethnically non-Danish minority population (Rytter, 2018: 14). Based on a minority-theoretical approach Zygmunt Bauman allows us to explore how modernity and the technological annulment of time and space has a tendency of polarising different kinds of citizens. Bauman introduces the distinction between *the waste* and the *elite* (Bauman, 2004: 88-89). Whereas the strong position of the elite is living in a borderless time, by being privileged and mobile and freely choosing to move around, the human waste is bounded by fortified borders and space and is moving around because of need. The waste is institutionalised as a problem identity that must be steered in a certain direction by social welfare services (Vitus, 2013: 30). The caseworkers are using integration as an emic term to ‘problematise’ the UMIs behaviour as being ‘different’ and potentially posing a threat to the social cohesion of the welfare state if not culturally and socially ‘absorbed’ by taking active part (Rytter, 2018: 8).

Caseworkers would often make favourable distinctions between working with the law on social service compared with administering other laws.

“I would never be able to do casework according to the law on social benefits (bistandsloven), I would not be able to administer social benefits (kontanthjælp) because I think it is so unjust, I would not be able to go to work” (Anja, Ajstrup Municipality, Appendix A, p. 18).

The law on social service is viewed by many of my interlocutors as allowing the caseworker to “*have a lot of freedom to decide yourself*” (Appendix A, p. 18). Hence, the law is seen as a resource, and not an objective in itself. One caseworker for instance explains how she will always find a way to legitimise a support scheme to an UMI if she decides that there is a significant need (Anja, Appendix A, p. 20). Another caseworker refers to one of the paragraphs as the dustbin (*skraldespanden*), which refers to an all-encompassing paragraph which can contain costs that do not fit anywhere else (Bo, Grerum Municipality, p. 55). This legal paragraph is used as a resource by the caseworker in particular contexts in order to legitimise reimbursement payments from the state to the municipality. The above quote furthermore cements how caseworkers create strong connections between their individual compass of what is considered just and unjust and their ability to perform their role as a public authority. This can seem somewhat contradictory to other points when caseworkers argue for a clear distinction between being professionally and emotionally involved in a case. In line with this, I encountered some interesting views on how caseworkers expressed normative assumptions on how close kin, and other realms of relatedness, should be viewed and involved.

Categorisations of relatedness: “I have not cooperated with parents”

In order to analyse what characterises the assumptions behind the logics shaping my interlocutors’ interpretation patterns when exercising discretion, I shall explore how realms of family relations are categorised in order to what roles they should and should not obtain in the UMI’s life. The starting point of implementing the law on social service is the unit of child and family. This can for instance be seen in the § 1, part 3, nr. 2, where it is stated that “*help based on this law builds on the responsibility of the individual and one’s family (...)*. When making decisions and taking measures to help and support children or adolescents, according to § 47, the caseworker is obliged to “*systematically involve family and network*”. This legal obligation stems from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) where it is specified that children’s national, ethnic and other origin including family relations must be respected: “*States Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognised by law without unlawful interference*” (UNCRC, Article 8, 1). Though the family of the UMI is not physically present to elaborate on the upbringing and state of the child, the caseworkers are legally obliged to involve close kin prior to the establishment of social measures such as a placement. When asking my interlocutors how they involve close kin in the UMI cases, they seemed surprised to be confronted with questions regarding involvement.

“I have not cooperated with parents. I know that the young person might be speaking on the phone with mum, or skype once in a while, and is happy to do so, and some of them are very worried especially with Syria right now. But I have not had any dialogue with them [the parents], and they don’t meddle in anything. And I have not heard that they wanted to do that. Also, I have experience with them coming here and being a bit like ‘all right good, you’re in control of everything’” (Anja, Ajstrup Municipality, Appendix A, p. 7).

The above example demonstrates how caseworkers produce generalised assumptions about intentions and reactions ascribed to the parents rather than focusing on what potentially could be good for the child (Winther & Nielsen, 2008: 119). The quote could on the other hand also be interpreted as it being in the interest of the child that there is no “meddling” from the parents, which can seem paradoxical based on the legal obligation to involve close kin. By identifying the engagement of UMI parents from the country of origin as meddling the caseworker ascribes negative connotations to the family who is categorised as problematic and unwanted. Rather than performing an active part in the UMI’s life, the family should rather stay fixed in a passive position in the country of origin. By positioning family as distant and passive, it becomes easier for social workers to identify the deficits of UMIs (Dumbrill, 2009: 147). The implication of this clash between welfare state norms and the UMIs family is, however, that family seems to be overlooked as a potential strength and source of knowledge about the UMI. It does, however, serve the institutional concern of stabilising the UMI’s status as unaccompanied. Because the family in the country of origin does not fit into the bureaucratic process they are not recognised as a legitimate notion of family, and therefore they are not being involved. This exemplifies how certain notions of family are restricted according to institutionalised processes and fixed categories that do not stem from the law on social service. One could argue, however, that these interpretation patterns could derive from other laws such as the law on immigration, which instructs that caseworkers are not obliged to, and therefore in practice does not, assist the UMI when applying for family reunification. This is another example of how the different laws intersect and have spill-over effect on the situated practices performed by caseworkers.

“I walk into the office where already a couple of caseworkers are sitting, ready for the meeting. The office is small and long with a long desk with a double-screen placed further away from the door by the window. To the right someone has tried making some sort of conversation-table with a chair on each side. On the table there are small milk cartons, a couple of overly used crayons and a small plastic car. Over the table a big white board is hanging with magnets with the words: child, mother, father, sister, brother, grandmother and grandfather. The caseworkers explain how they will put a

case “up on the board” if it is very complex and there is a need for a visual overview of the situation. The magnets are marked ICS¹² (Integrated Children’s System)” (Field notes, Ravensborg Municipality).

Based on these field notes we can see how family is categorised in terms of biological kinship patterns. One example of this was interviews when I asked how caseworkers would normally involve the UMI’s family and they would reply by talking about the UMI’s parents and or siblings. This approach to family reflects a wider trend where the dominant cultural construction of ‘family’ is considered as a married couple taking care of their own children. Following Janet Carsten’s concept of *relatedness*, we are allowed to explore the concept of family as ties that are not distinguished as being either social or biological.

“The attempt to shift the definition of kinship away from the enframing division between the “biological” and the “social” is welcome, and echoes previous discussions—for example, my use of the term “relatedness” as a way to sidestep the biological/social dichotomy and the particular baggage that “kinship” carries as an analytic term”
(Carsten, 2000, cited in Carsten, 2013: 2013).

By moving away from the analytical binary between biological and social, we are allowed to understand more complex and fluid ways of relating to people, groups and places. An example could be the MFI. One caseworker expresses the option of writing the MFI into the action plan under the section of family relations if it is wished by the UMI (Appendix A, p. 27). This exemplifies how caseworkers also look towards other realms of relatedness in the cases when the UMI for instance is not reunified with close kin from the country of origin. In the absence of parents, the MFIs can therefore serve as legitimate surrogate parents, as they are considered as belonging to what Mikkel Rytter has stated as ‘the family of Denmark’ (*Familien Danmark*). The kinship image of ‘the family of Denmark’ builds on public imaginations of viewing the homogenous Danish population as a nuclear family clearly demarcating the Danish population as included and the non-Danish population as excluded (Rytter, 2010: 308). In other words, through Rytter’s concept of an imagined sense of community, we can understand how my interlocutors’ categorise the MFIs as legitimised surrogate parents who can enable UMIs to be symbolically ‘adopted’ into the ‘family of Denmark’. In the absence of close kin, the welfare state suspends the parents’ legal custody of the child, as they are not physically present to take care of the child. This exemplifies how caseworkers shape and demarcate certain categories of what constitutes a legitimate notion of family and what is considered as outside of the family catego-

¹² The ICS is a conceptual framework that enables practitioners and managers to undertake key tasks of assessment, planning, intervention and review.

ry. My interlocutors would for instance view the UMI's contact person as excluded of the realm of relatedness. The contact persons are expected to perform a merely functionalist and replaceable role in case of change in the organisational set-up, new job openings, child leave etc. The majority of the caseworkers I spoke to were concerned about contact persons transgressing the professional codex of their role. If a contact person for instance was identifying oneself as being within the family realm of the UMI, it would be assessed as *“the wrong type of contact person”* (Appendix A, p. 25) by the caseworker. This way of rejecting the contact person as a legitimised notion of family can be seen as a way to protect the local consensus on how the world is organised. The contact person is viewed as an extension of the caseworker; a public authority and paid professional, and not an altruistic volunteer. The caseworkers I spoke to seemed disturbed by contact persons transgressing the boundary between the realms of professionalism and relatedness.

Anja: We have had to do work on some of them [the contact persons] who have said that they are actually like their [the UMIs] mother or father and there we have to say, no you are not (...).

Bodil: Or they [the contact persons] have written in a report that ‘she called me mother, which I take as a great honour’.

The caseworkers do acknowledge that the contact persons serve an important role when the UMI initially arrive in the municipality, but according to the caseworkers, the pedagogues ought to gradually let go of the UMI in order to make the transition into adulthood as easy as possible for the UMI, as the contact person typically can no longer work with the UMI after the 18th year. It can thereby be argued that it is in the interest of the welfare institution to make a clear and efficient cut between the contact person and the UMI, rather than it being based on the individual need of the UMI. One caseworker viewed it as part of her role to cut the ties between the UMI and the contact person:

“It feels like an apron string you have to cut with violence. That is how it feels (...). If the contact persons [kontaktpersonerne] cannot cope with the situation, because they are too involved with their feelings, then we have to be the voice of reason” (Bodil, Bovby Municipality, Appendix A, p. 17).

This comparison to the image of a doctor cutting the umbilical cord between mother and child demonstrates how a contact person can be categorised as a negative form of family by ultimately being viewed as an obsolete entity in the need of being forced away allowing the UMI to transition into adulthood and independence in a conventional manner.

Projecting norms: “You have to move away from mom and dad”

When the UMI turn 18 the case is generally transferred from the children- and youth department to the job centre from where they will be treated in accordance with the law on integration, which has a different purpose compared to the law on social service.

”We have two different approaches to youngsters. It is also two different legal frameworks we are administrating them [the young refugees] based on. In the job centre there is big focus on sanctions in case the youngsters do not live up to the demands that are put on them. Sometimes we think they lack an understanding of why they are not able to live up to the demands. Why it is that one does not come to school. So it can be a big challenge that we look at it so differently how hard one should be towards the young ones. We see that a lot. And we have different approaches. There are very often good reasons to why one can not hold a traineeship. And if you lose your money then you’re just put even more under pressure” (Bente, Bovby Municipality, Appendix A, p. 37).

Whereas the law on social service ensures the UMI with universal rights for all minors, the law on integration secures certain employment and integration advancing initiatives to the UMI turning 18¹³. The purpose of the law on integration is to support the young refugee to integrate by learning the Danish language and becoming self-sufficient through help and support from the municipality offering schemes such as the integration contract, integration declaration and integration program¹⁴. These legal declarations enables the municipality to cover support, such as language school and employment advancing initiatives, to the young refugee. At the age of 18, the availability of social support and care according to the law on social service is reduced or removed depending on whether the young refugee has a significant need for receiving aftercare (*efterværn*), which is a particular social support scheme. Aftercare is an offer to 18-23 year old individuals who are in need of extra support in order to have a successful transition into adulthood defined as entering into employment or the educational system. For the UMI, whose case has previously been carried out according to the law on social service, there is a range of circumstances that changes after the 18th year. One example is that the majority of the young refugees have to move to their own flat and thereby away from the 24 hour care institution or foster family where they have been placed. If aftercare is installed, the caseworker may keep the case on the UMI open and the case will thereby be partly administrated under the law on social service in the children and youth department and partly according to the law on integration

¹³ When referring to individuals who have previously been categorised as UMI, but have turned 18, I will articulate them as young refugees.

¹⁴ The integration programme is described in chapter 4 § 16- §20c in the Danish Act on Immigration.

in the job centre. This joint effort inaugurates a spill-over effect where my interlocutors for instance would ask the job centre to take the young refugees particular vulnerability into consideration. On the other side, I found examples of how my interlocutors' view on the UMIs would be altered by the agenda of the law on integration.

“After we arrive to the place where the UMIs live we meet a tall young guy in the entrance hall. He is greeting the caseworker in a warm manner but the atmosphere seems somewhat tense as we are taking off our shoes. The caseworker later tells me that he previously was the caseworker of the young guy who turned 18 last year. He [the caseworker] had made the decision that the young guy had to move to his own studio apartment but the young guy and the MFI filed a complaint to the Appeals Board and the case was decided in favour of the young guy and his MFI. This is why he is still living in the pedagogical institution even though he has turned 18, the caseworker informs me” (Field notes, Ravensborg Municipality).

As the above quote demonstrates, the question for the caseworker is not whether aftercare is necessarily given, but rather what kind of aftercare that is relevant to establish. According to the law on social service §76, point 1-4, the caseworker can maintain the placement, appoint a permanent contact person (*fast kontaktperson*) to help the young refugee establish a re-entry arrangement or offer other kinds of support. Besides from looking at the individual need of support, some caseworkers explain, that they also glance at the reimbursement rules: *“There is no reimbursement on placements after the child turns 18. And we sometimes have some [UMIs] who could benefit from being kept in a placement but where it is not possible because of the budget. And that of course is frustrating”* (Bente, Bovby Municipality, Appendix A, p. 38). Hence, on the one side caseworkers identify the particular need for aftercare but they furthermore anticipate and follow systemic rules, such as how the municipality will secure the cost according to the reimbursement rules. Two caseworkers emphasise this as a continuous dispute as they find that economic considerations in some cases come to counterbalance the identified needs of the young refugee. One caseworker mentions an example where she went straight to the coordinator to personally explain why a young refugee needed to stay in the institution after the 18th year.

“What I wanted was for him to wait [to move] until early July and preferably until August. Because a lot of things are happening with him right now. And that was an agreement and then it was changed because someone else needed an apartment later so he had to move the 1st of June (...). And that can sometimes be a real dilemma because sometimes it goes quickly because the apartment is there, so off he goes. And I know some of the young ones have felt dumped even though there was support on them and even though we have written in their action plan for a year that they had to move

out, it still comes as a shock, and in that respect I have had many dilemmas on how quickly you can do it and what is fair and just” (Bodil, Ajstrup Municipality, Appendix A, p. 15).

As indicated in the above, there are an increasing number of actors and interests at play when the young refugee becomes connected to the job centre, which means a decrease in my interlocutors opportunity for influence. As one caseworker told me, there are a lot of different interests at play within the municipality, and it can develop into a significant power struggle. This could for instance be the case when the city and home office (*by og bolig*) needs to receive rent for their supply of the municipalities’ apartments. If an apartment is free and the UMI is turning 18, it is expected by the city and home office that the UMI will move there so the monthly rent can be covered. This is one example of how the caseworker can experience cross-pressure between the periphery, their client, who is not satisfied with the limited authority the caseworker has; and the centre, the management level and the overall political aims (Winther & Nielsen, 2008: 114). The reimbursement rules thereby come to influence when an UMI should move away from the placement and into an apartment.

When analysing what characterises the assumptions shaping how my interlocutors would exercise discretion, I found it interesting how some caseworkers would base their decisions on arguments comparing the situation of an UMI moving away from a pedagogical institution to a Danish child growing up and moving away from home. I for instance attended a meeting between a caseworker, the UMI and the MFI and the care institution where he was placed according to the law on social service. The meeting was about the decision of aftercare and the caseworker was to present his view on what type of aftercare the young refugee should receive. In the conversation the caseworker explained to the UMI that: *“one day you have to move away from mom and dad, that is the way it goes”* (Field notes, Ravensborg Municipality). This finding indicates that interpretation is contingent with and justified in comparison to how my interlocutors have brought up their own children (Bodil, Ajstrup Municipality, Appendix A, p. 27). This reflects a wider social value in Danish society where young people aged 18 are expected to act as adults by moving away from home. This way of grounding a social value on the legal category of adulthood can seem ambiguous and problematic as young people’s abilities varies from person to person. It can furthermore seem contradictory to remove the special support for individual UMIs solely due to their shift in legal status and one could argue that the state is more concerned about the notion of childhood, as a protective period in life when a state can not sanction or prosecute the child, rather than the UMIs in themselves (Dumbrill, 2009: 164). Exercising discretion in this case therefore seem to reflect social values and personal experiences aligned with the legal categories, which was also the case when a caseworker would establish aftercare in accordance

with whether or not the reimbursement rules would allow the municipality to claim the costs covered by the state.

Preliminary conclusion

As the first step in my analysis, I have in the previous presented my empirical contribution of exploring casework practices within the tension between viewing law as universal structures and situated practices. While casework when opening the case is understood as “*having the freedom to decide*”, there are several other agendas and interests in play when the UMI is expected to transition into adulthood at the age of 18. Casework practices and interpretations of law seems to be related to considerations on equity and notions of legitimate family relations and assumptions of adulthood and independence. One example of this is when a caseworker view the engagements of UMI families from the country of origin as “meddling” indicating a preference for maintaining the UMI’s status as ‘unaccompanied’ as a fixed category. Though this could be interpreted as acting in the interest of the child, it is an indicator of contrasting perspectives on the role of the welfare state as a surrogate parent protecting the UMI while also serving its own institutional interests. A recurring dilemma my interlocutors would face in their casework with UMIs was how to deal with the tension between considering the unique circumstances of each individual while addressing the need for standardising services to accommodate the solidarity principle of treating clients equally. In order to further our understanding of this dilemma, and the aforementioned example of how the establishment of aftercare embodies a continuous dispute between administrative and social considerations, I shall in the following chapter demonstrate how caseworkers strategies can be applied as analytical tools to explore how my interlocutors both cope and strategise when balancing between bureaucratic and care professional concerns.

Exercising discretion as casework strategies

As indicated in the previous, caseworkers' daily work conditions are characterised by power struggles, cross-pressure from different departments, an extensive amount of cases while working in a “*permanently under-funded department*” (Mads, Field notes, Ravnsborg Municipality). As a response to these structural conditions, and for other purposes I shall unfold in the following, the caseworkers I spoke to develop certain skills and techniques allowing them to ascribe meaning to their role. I use the term techniques to describe caseworkers' patterned ways of exercising discretion when for instance coping with dilemmas. The next step of my analysis is to understand how discretion is exercised through two identified strategies each reflecting certain rationales and aspirations operating within, alongside and counter to laws and administrative guidelines.

Creating distance to a client

Based on my fieldwork I found that caseworkers would remind each other to establish and maintain the distinction between being professionally and emotionally involved in a case. Being emotionally involved is considered as getting too close to an UMI by forming moral judgments of the law being implemented. Being professionally involved was explained by caseworkers as not “going into the case with your heart” by avoiding to apply your personal opinion but merely sticking to what the law prescribed. I found through my fieldwork that caseworkers seem to move between these two positions in a continuum depending on how much they identified with the case and what the implications might be if a case for instance was published in the media. One example of this was when I took part in a staff meeting where caseworkers were discussing a case where a MFI had made a written concern (*underretning*) to the municipality about an UMI who had been granted family reunification. The concern was that the family was living in a small apartment and so the MFI phoned up the caseworker to complain on behalf of the family.

- *So I said that it has been decided by law and it is a condition for all municipalities but then he said that Ravnsborg is a rich municipality and should be able to provide better conditions than that. And the MFI name was ringing on a famous politicians surname so I am a little scared she might be related to the politician..*
- *So you're thinking you're put in a dilemma there, or what?*

- *Yes, I believe we should help the family and I would rather not have this case in the press. I mean, the kitchen is very small and not particularly family-friendly but I think the rooms are nice..*
- *They [the family] seem disappointed with their family reunification.*
- *But you have to stop going into the case like that. It is important we separate ethical discussions and the professional ones - we give what we are obliged to do and you should not start discussing with them - close it down* (Field notes, Ravensborg Municipality).

By law, the municipality is not obliged to find a more suitable home for the family, who have been reunified in Denmark, and therefore the caseworker is advised to “close down” their personal opinions. This expresses Lipsky’s notion of viewing the street-level bureaucrat as a *state agent*, which refers to a common way for street-level bureaucrats to categorise clients and their needs, based on certain generalisations built on previous experiences and legal instructions.

“[Street-level bureaucrats] invent modes of mass processing that more or less permit them to deal with the public fairly, and appropriately and thoughtfully. At worse, they give in to favouritism, stereotyping, convenience, and routinizing – all of which serve their own or agency purposes” (Lipsky, 2010: xiv).

Defining the street-level bureaucrat as a state agent is a dominant view within the scholarly literature separating politics from administration (Rohr, 1987: 113-59). The above quote from my fieldwork shows how closing the case down enabled my interlocutors to distance themselves to moral judgments, and thereby also to their clients, by only considering the information needed to enact their responsibility according to law. The technique of creating distance to a client can therefore be identified as what I term as the *bureaucratic strategy*. The bureaucratic strategy is defined by caseworker behaviour and decisions aspiring to rigorously follow the formal laws and guidelines of equal treatment to all clients. When a caseworker administers casework aligned with legal procedures and routines, rather than basing it on the individual clients’ needs, it reflects the bureaucratic purpose of consistently following law as an objective in itself. The bureaucratic strategy seemed somewhat institutionalised among my interlocutors as their practices were shaped by certain conventions and norms ascribed to the law on social service and bureaucratic ideals. This strategy would enable caseworkers to cope with the complex circumstances of a given situation, as the caseworker could unfold the bureaucratic argument of saying, “we give what we are obliged to” enabling an efficient case closure as an objective in itself (Maynard-Moody, 2000: 22). My interlocutors would, however, also demonstrate emotionally charged behaviour as this allowed them to enforce their role as a public authority.

“I once encountered a dad, that had been family-reunited in Denmark, who kept travelling from four children for weeks to go to Turkey to visit his girlfriend. At that point I slammed my fist in the table and said that he could not do that anymore or it could have consequences for his residency in Denmark” (Mads, field notes, Ravnsborg Municipality).

The above quote shows the other end of the spectrum where caseworkers can exaggerate their own individual authority when displaying the potential power privileges of the state to for instance withdraw a residence permit. Though this decision is outside of the caseworkers jurisdiction, he can use it to potentially apply more authority but also, he would argue, to build more trust and confidence in the relationship between the caseworker and the UMI, as the client would respect the caseworkers’ engagement rather than viewing him as a cold bureaucrat. Caseworkers would not identify themselves with the bureaucratic strategy, but their behaviour and actions would reflect bureaucratic logics. I for instance observed the technique of how caseworkers would create distance to the clients, but my interlocutors would mention this coping behaviour during interviews. This is an interesting finding, as it demonstrates how human beings can not account for their own behaviour as our decisions and actions do not always link up with our proclaimed and legitimised aspirations. The above example of where my interlocutor would represent himself in relation to the state as one coherent entity stands in contrast to another caseworkers applied technique of seeking to compartmentalise the needs of the client in order to allocate the responsibility to another bureaucratic unit.

Deferring responsibility

Another caseworker technique expressing coping behaviour is protecting oneself through deferring responsibility to other departments in the municipality. One example of how my interlocutors would allocate responsibility was when an UMI would turn 18. This would often result into that the help and support given to the UMI was moved from being anchored with one particular professional, the contact person, over to a range of different bureaucratic units. This would typically happen when the UMI turns 18 but sometimes before this cut off point. As one caseworker explained to me: *“If there is trouble with the SU (student grant), well then there is a counsellor at the SU-office who can help him”* (Anja, Ajstrup Municipality, Appendix A, p. 13). This shows how my interlocutors would define what was part of

their field of responsibility, and what was not. This is a good example of streamlining the bureaucratic order where the client is obliged to go to several specialised entities to have a problem resolved, which ultimately allows the caseworker in the children and youth department to close cases more efficiently after the 18th year. This technique expresses the aforementioned bureaucratic ideal of closing cases efficiently but it also demonstrates how the bureaucratic strategy was applied by caseworkers to make their work easier by solely processing rather than engaging clients (Prottas, 1979, in Maynard-Moody 2000: 339).

My fieldwork furthermore indicated another way of deferring responsibility where the caseworker would try to enhance the client's own responsibility. Since 1993 it has been a legal requirement to outline an action plan clearly stating the purpose of a placement, in for instance a foster care family or a pedagogical institution (Skytte, 2002: 109). The action plan is considered as an important tool to gather all important actors and making sure of the overall way of going forward with the services appointed to the UMI. According to a caseworker I spoke to, it is important to involve the UMI directly in writing up the action plan.

“It is an I-action plan (jeg-handleplan). Meaning that we [the caseworker and the UMI] talk about school as ‘I have to go to school every day’. And then we talk about it and about the different actions that need to happen, what has to be done, what do I have to be better at (...). I have sometimes given the computer to them [the UMI’s] so they can write it in themselves. They think that is pretty fun, then you engage them instead of them being passive” (Anja, Ajstrup Municipality, Appendix A, p. 28).

This technique, where responsibility is allocated to the client, reflects a wider tendency that is prevalent when ordering and streamlining welfare bureaucratic institutions (Mik-Meyer & Villadsen 2007: 9-11). By applying steering tools that defers the responsibility from the caseworker to the client, the service recipient is expected to act according to certain normative parameters constructed in the image of the ‘ideal citizen’. The action plan is used by caseworkers as a steering tool to make UMIs act responsibly by monitoring the individual's development and behaviour in relation to certain measures and policies regarding independence and economic self-sufficiency. If the goals in the action plan have not been fulfilled at the follow-up meetings, where UMI, contact persons and MFIs are present, the caseworker can legitimately ask for explanations on why a certain goal has not been met. According to my interlocutors the responsibility in this regards is appointed to the contact person, who is supposed to remind the UMI of the goals (Appendix A, p. 28). The expectations concerning the ac-

tion plan presupposes the rationale of viewing the UMI as an autonomous and rational entity capable of performing the ideal behaviour. By thinking through Mary Douglas concept of *thought styles*, we are able to explore the Western legal systems' demands for holding individual people responsible for their actions (Douglas, 1994: 217). By applying tools, such as the action plan, the caseworker attempts to instruct the UMI in a certain direction towards becoming a self-sufficient citizen with goal formulations such as "working to become independent" (Field notes, Ravensborg Municipality). This indicates a wider tendency in the welfare state where there has been an increase in the control and evaluation of professionals (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2012: 15). Some of the action plans I was able to examine during my fieldwork did, however, seem vague and arbitrary and in some cases, the action plan was not a priority.

"I don't think there was a single action plan written when we came. So it is difficult for them [the pedagogues] to know what to do with the young ones (...). Yes, they have to be integrated into the Danish society, but that is pretty damn broad" (Bodil, Ajstrup Municipality, Appendix A, p. 28).

This quote exposes the general lack of direction and cohesion in the effort with UMIs which I encountered during my fieldwork with caseworkers. As demonstrated in the above, Bodil explains how the municipality only started carrying out action plans one and a half years ago. Other caseworkers concede that the action plan is not always followed up after the binding three months (Field notes, Ravensborg Municipality). When I speak to my informants about not following legal foundations or deadlines, they seem to attach little importance to these glitches in a busy working week where they have various commitments to adhere to. Caseworkers I spoke to did not seem to necessarily find the action plan useful and in some cases, they seemed to view the plan as counter-productive to the overall goal. My interlocutors would for instance stress the need for the UMIs to take responsibility for their own situation rather than the caseworker having to control them. My fieldwork furthermore showed that the action plan was applied by caseworkers to monitor the contact person who is supposed to realise the aims of the action plan (Appendix A, p. 28), but also the caseworker who were supposed to overview the process, which could explain why caseworkers sometimes chose not to prioritise the action plan. This example reflects an overall discrepancy between how caseworkers on the one side were supposed to support and encourage UMIs while simultaneously controlling and monitoring them with tools such as the action plan. The technique of not following up on action plans can be considered as a way for the caseworkers to defy the legal obligations if they do not find the law

meaningful and applicable. This behaviour can therefore be argued to reflect what I have identified as an *individual need strategy* rather than the bureaucratic strategy.

Stretching the law

Inspired by Steven Maynard-Mooney and Michael Musheno's empirical work in which they introduce the term *citizen agent*, contrasting the state agent perspective suggested by Lipsky, I will in the following outline the second strategy, the individual need strategy. As mentioned in the previous analysis section, the caseworkers are compelled to make difficult case decisions based on incomplete information about the child due to for instance the absence of close kin and involvement of family from the country of origin. One way of responding to this challenge is to wait as long as possible before carrying out the child specialist conversation (*børnefaglig samtale*). The child specialist conversation is a tool to accumulate information about the UMI's situation; their weaknesses and their resources, prior to the placement in a institution or with a foster care family.

"(...) And then I try to stretch it as long as possible so right before you have to finish, then you will get as much out of the conversation as possible" (Anja, Ajstrup Municipality, Appendix A, p. 9).

This caseworker has positive experiences with getting to know the UMI through several meetings before carrying out the child specialist conversation. This is an example of a technique where caseworkers attempt to gather as many details about the UMI as possible in order to establish the suitable social support schemes, which stands in opposition to the bureaucratic strategy aiming at efficient case closure. This way of prolonging the procedure can be seen as a way to stretch the law in order to qualify the decision making process by responding to the limited knowledge about and experience with an UMI. This productive way of strategising is not captured by Lipsky's concept of coping mechanisms as this term refers to circumstances where street-level bureaucrats are not able to deal with clients on an individual basis. According to Lipsky, exercising discretion can be understood as a mass processing of clients and coping behaviour can be justified in relation to the unreasonable structural conditions (Lipsky, 2010: xiv). Though my interlocutors' ways of exercising discretion were shaped by structural mechanisms such as budget constraints and heavy caseloads, I find it relevant to further explore the technique of stretching the law through Jonsson's notion of institutionalised strategies. When extending the procedure as long as possible in order to qualify the decision on the

individual service, the caseworker acts in response to individual circumstances. If we view efficient case closure as a bureaucratic objective (Maynard-Moody, 2000: 22), we can grasp the technique of stretching the law as a way to deviate the bureaucratic procedure and potentially transgressing the legal requirement of a certain deadline from when the case was opened. Decisions are thereby based on normative preferences rather than necessarily being aligned with official laws and regulations. This strategy therefore serve the interest of the individual UMI. Another example of how my interlocutors would apply this strategy was in the aforementioned example when a caseworker consistently would find a way to secure the cost of a particular support scheme if there was a significant need for it. Hence, rather than allowing the reimbursement rules to dictate what support should be established, the caseworker would attempt to expand the legal paragraph also known as the “dustbin” to include the costs in the need for coverage. The legal framework is hereby viewed and applied instrumentally rather than being stated as the end goal in itself (Maynard-Moody, 2000: 21). Rather than following Maynard-Mooney and Musheno’s use of narratives on discretion, I found that strategies allowed my analysis to focus on the complex and productive ways of exercising discretion in the tension between viewing law as universal structures and situated practices. Though my interlocutors would relate more to the individual need strategy I did, however, also encounter casework techniques more aligned with Lipsky’s concept of coping behaviour meaning following bureaucratic rules serving to make casework more tolerable for the street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 2010: xiv). In the following, I shall unfold another technique associated with the individual need strategy which is not aligned with the laws and administrative guidelines.

Framing family and culture as weight

Whereas the UNCRRC clearly advocates for the involvement of close kin, some of my interlocutors identified family links from the country as origin as a problem identity. Problem identities are shaped within the frames, objectives, and authority of the particular institution and its representatives’ actions, thoughts and emotions. By constructing institutional problem identities, welfare representatives carry out identity work, which means attaching certain explanations to clients’ behaviour and thereby associating them with certain problematical and marginalising categories (Vitus, 2013: 39). The welfare projects of securing children’s rights and receiving refugees are thereby carried out by problem treating institutions developing certain definitions and categorisations of different forms of social problems with the goal of fixating or changing identities.

“He [the UMI] is very strongly affected by pressure from his family. And it is all about economy and money. They [the family] do not seem concerned about how he is actually doing, they are only concerned about him appealing the rejection of their claim for family reunification. According to their cultural customs, he will grow up to be an important man if he can make a decent earning - and it does not matter whether he does it the legal or the illegal way” (Field notes, Mads, Ravensborg Municipality).

In the above quote my interlocutor emphasises cultural customs as the realm for understanding the reasons why parents are identified as a problem identity. Rather than going into the particular circumstances framing the context of the family’s situation, the caseworker interprets the situation based on generalising assumptions about the family’s intentions with their child. It would for instance be indicated that families may have been sending their children to European countries in order to gain family reunification. This exemplifies how a problem identity is produced by ascribing negative and marginalising assumptions such as only caring about economy and money and potentially encouraging the UMI to indulge in illegal activities. It furthermore shows how caseworkers read their own cultural assumptions into the intentions of the parents as not being emotionally tied to their children and therefore not suited to act as parents (Engebrigtsen, 2003: 195). By producing this problem identity the caseworker makes a clear distinction between the UMI, who is included as a client for the welfare state to deal with, and the family in the country of origin, who is categorised as excluded from the social welfare effort. Later on in my discussion with the caseworker, he builds an argument about how it is therefore not necessarily preferable for the UMI to claim family reunification as the child will end up “carrying the weight of the family” (Field notes, Mads, Ravensborg Municipality). Rather than looking at how the municipality might be able to offer support for the UMI, the caseworker explains his reservation towards advising UMIs to apply for family reunification. The casework technique of framing family as weight can in some ways be viewed as an expression of the individual need strategy as it is applied by the caseworker to serve the interest of the child. The caseworker’s rationale is that the UMI is better off staying in Denmark as unaccompanied without the family, as the family is considered as a problem, a weight for the UMI to deal with. The caseworker thereby view their role as producing integrated Danish children from the foreign UMIs. In the following quote, a caseworker presents her experiences with family reunified parents who come to Denmark.

“I think the hardest is when they [the UMIs] get their families here. [Either as] accompanied or the ones who get family reunification. The school for instance finds it difficult to call in the parents, bring an interpreter, and explain them why

they are concerned for their son or daughter. And then the parents often think that the municipality has to do something. But then we stress that they (the UMIs) have to act like they were Danish children, because they do have parents, that should solve the problems. With the ones who do not have parents here, that is something else” (Bodil, Ajstrup Municipality, Appendix A, p. 7).

The above quote demonstrates how caseworkers anticipate that the UMI's behaviour has to mirror how Danish children act and it is expected of the parents who are reunified in Denmark to make them do so. The argument is that if the parents are present in the child's life, they ought to handle issues with the child by making them “act like they were Danish children”. Problematic child behaviour is hereby equalised with *not* acting like Danish children. And also somehow acting like Danish children means having parents who can solve problems without the municipality - when the family are more involved and you have children, family, and municipality, it seems to increase the sense of deviancy, because it deviates from ideal norm of a conventional well-functioning Danish family. The caseworker hereby have similar expectations for the family reunified parents, who do not speak the Danish language and do not understand the Danish school system, as they do for ethnically Danish parents. This exemplifies the aim of the social welfare project of ‘integrating’ refugees as social deviants through problem treating institutions (Vitus, 2013: 39). In the above, the caseworker identifies family reunified parents as the “hardest” to deal with and they are thereby considered as a problem identity, which is grounded in a rationale looking at parents as the guarantor of the child's behaviour. This rationale, about parents' responsibility to protect their children, extends to some caseworkers who indicate that if parents are not able to take care of the child in the country of origin, they would not be capable to be part of the decision making process in Denmark (Engebrigtsen, 2003: 195). Paradoxically, if parents are reunified with their child in Denmark they need to handle potential problems that might emerge on the same terms as ethnically Danish parents as indicated in the above. Hence, if the parents have been reunified in Denmark, they are supposed to have an active role of lifting the full responsibility of their children, and if the family are in the country of origin, they are expected to stay passive and uninvolved. The creation of family reunified parents as a problem identity could also derive from the political aims and policies concerning family reunification, which constrains public administrations' responsibility for family reunified individuals who are considered as having freely chosen to come to Denmark. A recent amendment to the law on immigration from 2016 restricts the support offered to UMIs when having family reunified in Denmark¹⁵, which initiated that municipalities are no longer responsible for allocating a suitable home as well as cover-

¹⁵ This is due to the legal amendment L87 enacted on 26-01-2016: <http://www.ft.dk/samling/20151/lovforslag/L87/index.htm>

ing travel expenses on behalf of the family reunified in Denmark. This legal amendment can ultimately leave the UMI responsible for covering travel expenses and finding a suitable home for the reunified family members. This legal deferral of responsibility seem to have an impact on the caseworkers' ways of viewing and categorising the family reunified parents as particularly problematic to deal with due to the fact that they do not have many options on how to provide the suitable social and financial support when an UMI has the family reunified in Denmark. This is a good example of how laws and policies from other departments in the municipality influences the interpretation patterns and applied strategies of the caseworkers in the children and youth department.

Several caseworkers moreover express concerns in regards to the connections between the UMIs and their ethnic and cultural background. My main interlocutor in Ravnsborg municipality, Mads, explains how it in the beginning can be beneficial for the UMI to be in close contact with people from the country of origin (Field notes, Ravnsborg Municipality). This can allow the UMIs to understand their background, their language and themselves better.

“The danger is if a contact person [from the same country of origin as the UMI] keeps them [the UMIs] in a form of parallel society where they will be maintained in their ethnicity. Then they will not be assimilated. Often the young ones end up asking for a Danish contact person because they think they are better at helping them” (Field notes, Mads, Ravnsborg Municipality).

The above quote highlights a paradox in the caseworker's reasoning. As it in the beginning is considered beneficial for UMIs to acknowledge and mirror their cultural origin and background (Skytte, 2002: 158), it later on can have a damaging effect as it is considered to prevent the UMIs from assimilating into Danish society. The caseworker's view on integration evokes on the one side assimilation as “the promised land of full integration”, while on the other the contrasting notion of failed integration as fragmentation and disarray (Rytter, 2018: 8).

“The Danish emic concept of integration has a racial bias since it offers a legitimate vocabulary to speak of ‘others’ in ways in which reified notions of culture, ethnicity, religion and race merge” (Ibid.: 8).

The widespread use of concepts such as assimilation and integration, and their multiple meanings, promotes dystopian images as if not succeeded, “then it will all drift away” (Kirstine, Grerum Municipality, Appendix A, p. 45) and “keep them [the UMIs] in a form of parallel society where they will be maintained in their ethnicity” (Field notes, Mads, Ravnsborg Municipality). Following Rytter, the

interchangeable use of terms such as assimilation and integration epitomise a growing ‘cultural anxiety’ (Grillo, 2003, in Rytter, 2018: 8), which legitimises and enforces the rationale of problematising the UMI’s minority background as a threat for the welfare state to solve (Olwig & Paerregaard, 2011: 10). Rather than solely looking at the law applied by the caseworkers in the children and youth department, we are thereby compelled to unravel the multiple meaning and effects of using concepts such as integration and assimilation to construct problem identities as ways for caseworkers to categorise their world and apply meaning to their work. As demonstrated in the above, the technique of framing family as weight can be stated as an individual need strategy as it is applied to serve the interest of the child. Rather than following the legal requirement, of involving close kin in decision making processes, the caseworkers justify their preference of not involving the family in the country of origin based on cultural and normative rationales about the family, and what is considered as good and bad influence of the UMI.

Playing the system

In my observations I found that caseworkers would exercise discretion with purposes that seemed somewhat contradictory to reimbursement rules and management instructions. In Ravnsborg municipality, from where I did my main fieldwork, I attended coordination group meetings (*koordinationsudvalgsmøder*) where the caseworkers would decide what kind of aftercare support schemes would be granted to an UMI. When taking part in these meetings, I observed how many different departments, agendas and interests needed to be coordinated when administrating one single client.

“We arrive a few minutes too late and the meeting had already kicked off. I try to get an overview of the 16 caseworkers sitting around the long table around me. As Mads told me before the meeting, all relevant actors are present today: the social benefit office, the job centre, the child and youth department, the town and home department and so on (...). Mads raises his hand and explains that he has an UMI that would like to postpone moving into a flat by himself. Several of Mads’ colleagues smile while the manager of the whole section is asking elaborative questions to challenge his inquiry” (Field notes, Ravnsborg Municipality).

The meeting mentioned above was interesting to witness as Mads had previously explained to me how these negotiations would take place. On one of my fieldwork days he for instance explains prior to a meeting that he has decided that an UMI should only have a permanent contact person as after-

care, and therefore not a maintaining placement at the pedagogical institution. At a meeting, which I attended, he presented the decision but quickly followed up with an explanation of how the UMI could appeal the decision to the Appeals Board and a recognition of the good chances for the UMI to win the case.

- Mads: *Our decision is that he is moving out in summer.*

- MFI: *Yeah, yeah.*

- Mads: *But you can appeal. And I would think that you have good chances of the Appeals Board deciding in your favour, if you choose to appeal..*

(MFI starts laughing)

- MFI: *That is something is it not. That you present it as.. I mean I do not understand why you make that decision, if you already know, that it will be decided in our favour.*

- Mads: *Nothing is certain.. Sometimes older cases will set a precedent [for future similar cases] but it is not certain that it will happen with this case.*

After the meeting, Mads tells me that he is certain that the UMI and the MFI will appeal and therefore he will have to re-evaluate his decision with his manager. Since the council has previously lost cases regarding aftercare in the Appeals Board, Mads explains how he can put pressure on his manager by saying that he is certain that the UMI will appeal their decision. This way Mads is able to play the system in order to enhance the chances of providing the most extensive support for the UMI.

“So you can see how we juggle with many balls in the air - there are a lot of interests at stake and it is my role to find head and tale in all of it” (Field notes, Mads, Ravnsborg Municipality).

In the above, Mads explains his experience with casework based on the metaphor of juggling in order to convey the various interests and agendas that caseworkers need to navigate between. As previously indicated, I would argue that it makes more sense to talk about how caseworkers navigate the conflictual arena of the municipality rather than how they cope with it. Caseworkers are not always coping, they are also strategising and playing their cards in certain ways to grease the system in favour of the UMI. It was furthermore interesting to note that several of the caseworkers I spoke to had at some point reached out to a colleague in the job centre to explain the context and reasons for

why a young refugee, after they turned 18, was having problems with for instance attending Danish class.

“Sometimes I go to the job centre and ask them to give the youngsters a little bit more leverage. It is important to keep an eye on their particular vulnerability” (Field notes, Mads, Ravnsborg Municipality).

A study for instance also shows that around one third of caseworkers generally do not cut citizens in social benefits the first time the citizen stays away from occupational activation schemes without a valid reason (Stigaard *et al.*, 2006 in Winther & Nielsen, 2008: 13). This shows how caseworkers prioritise the individual circumstances of a case rather than merely following laws and regulations. As Lipsky proposes, street-level bureaucrats give into favouring some clients over others (Lipsky, 2010: xiv) dependent on whether one can identify or mirror their clients’ situation or socio-economic and racial background. When deciding which type of aftercare an UMI should receive, the Appeals Board has given guidelines following certain development parameters (*udviklingspunkter*). One of the parameters concerns the willingness of the child to cooperate in alignment with the policy goals. Hence, the UMI’s willingness to become self-sufficient can also be regarded as a catalyst for the decision making processes regarding aftercare. When confronting Mads with the question regarding case bias, he explains the following.

“If there is a willingness then you will often go further in a case and fight more with the different challenges. Some cases you just have a bigger heart for than others” (Field notes, Mads, Ravnsborg Municipality).

The above quote shows how there seems to be a reciprocal relationship between the UMI’s motivation to cooperate and the caseworkers’ willingness to do an extra effort to secure the social services in the best interest of the UMI. This finding corresponds well with a study on how Dutch immigration and integration policies are implemented by local street-level bureaucrats. Warda Belabas & Lasse Gerrits explores how the combination of particular conditions seemed to motivate the integration coaches’ willingness to transcend their limited discretionary space. These conditions consist of a high client motivation, extreme personal distress of the client and a negative perception of the integration policies (Belabas & Gerrits, 2017: 147). Considerations about equitability is therefore a relevant component when exploring the configuration of factors motivating caseworkers to exercise discretion in a way that challenges the legal and administrative instructions.

Preliminary conclusion

I have in the previous drawn out patterns from my interlocutors' ways of exercising discretion by coping and strategising in the space between law as universal structures and situated practices. By employing strategies caseworkers operate at the boundary between the state and client from where they shape the categories and definitions of their actions and the social norms they invoke (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000: 332). As I have demonstrated, caseworkers develop certain techniques which reflect bureaucratic procedures and concerns about individual needs. I have combined Lipsky and Jonsson's concepts in order to explore how caseworkers apply different strategies of how to work the system in accordance with certain competing rationales which are either aligned with or opposing laws and administrative guidelines. I have focused on the productive behaviour of caseworkers and how they not only cope, but also strategise when encountering dilemmas in the conflictual arena of the municipal structure. I found that the choice of strategy was dependent on social relationships between the caseworker and the UMI and the UMI's motivation and willingness to conform. Caseworkers would to a greater extent identify with the strategy focusing on the individual needs of their clients, rather than identifying themselves as bureaucratic extensions of the state. An interesting finding was, however, that even though caseworkers would not identify themselves as bureaucrats, I did observe several techniques reflecting bureaucratic logics. My interlocutors did, however, not view themselves as bureaucrats following laws and regulations as an objective in itself, nor did they necessarily view their role as an advocate for their clients. Caseworkers legitimise their role through strong care professional arguments and expertise in order to secure what they interpret as being in the interest of the child, while "juggling" the different interests and agendas in the conflictual arena of the municipality. By following the individual need strategy, my interlocutors base their decisions and actions on normative choices that are situated, localised and particular (Maynard-Moody, 2000: 341).

What produces the casework effort with UMIs?

By viewing my empirical findings through the analytical prism of caseworker strategies, I have in the previous demonstrated two dominating currents of how caseworkers exercise discretion. Through my fieldwork I experienced that caseworkers would apply the bureaucratic strategy and the individual need strategy interchangeably dependent on a range of different factors, such as social interactions with UMIs and their will and motivation to conform. In the following I shall move on to the final step of the analysis exploring how the caseworker effort with UMIs is produced through categorisation processes and cultural rationals shaping the caseworker strategies and aspirations to follow and interpret what actions and decisions can be considered as being in the ‘child’s best interest’.

Normalisation and categorical ambiguity: “Skeletons in their closets”

When establishing social measures according to the law on social service, caseworkers would generally highlight the UMI as a child, and when talking about the relationship between the UMI and their contact person, caseworkers would draw out the need for treating the UMI not as a child, but a young adult. This resulted in caseworkers categorising UMIs within a fluid and transitional life stage between childhood and adulthood. Here it is relevant to note some of the circumstances characterising the UMIs situation, which some caseworkers would refer to and use as explanations for particular concerns. When UMIs arrive to a country in the European Union they are generally between 14 and 17 and are originally from countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, Eritrea and Somalia where they have witnessed armed conflicts and other forms of violence (Sedmak *et. al.*, 2018: 3). My interlocutors would describe the past experiences of the UMIs as incomprehensibly difficult, which in some cases seemed to result in caseworkers perceiving the UMIs as having transgressed the point of innocent childhood before turning 18. This transgressive slippage between categorical boundaries is interesting as it reveals how social and legal boundaries are contested and negotiable. The caseworkers’ perceptions of the UMI’s childhood thereby seems to be influenced by cultural assumptions about what a ‘proper’ childhood ought to be. By viewing it in relation to the Scandinavian model of an innocent and domesticated childhood, the UMIs can be considered as having ‘lost’ their childhood (Panther-Brinck & Smith, 2000, in Engebriksen, 2003: 194-195). Though the legal shift between childhood and adulthood is clearly marked by the 18th year, the caseworkers view the UMIs within the realm of young adults as their experiences and behaviour patterns are not consistent with caseworkers’ con-

ventional expectations of what children have and ought to have experienced in their lives. This is an interesting finding, as the perceived transgression of childhood does not relate to the bureaucratic strategy, as this would motivate the caseworker to consistently approach the UMI as a child until the 18th year. Through the lens of the individual need strategy, this indicates that caseworkers consider it in the UMIs interest to view them as young adults, as this is potentially more consistent with how UMIs generally view themselves. Caseworkers would find that if the UMIs did not view themselves as children, it would not make sense for caseworkers to treat them as children. The implications of viewing the UMIs as young adults, rather than children, could however be that caseworkers would not necessarily use the full supply of social services available for this particularly vulnerable group. The individual need strategy would therefore assess the need in relation to the UMIs behaviour and the caseworker's normative understanding of what is defined as within the realm of childhood, and what is outside of it. The finding could, however, also relate to yet another strategy more aligned with Lipsky's state agent perspective, which describes the caseworker as a public servant predominantly serving the state's interest, and secondly the interest of the citizen. Viewing the perceived transgression through this perspective means identifying the UMI as a potential threat to society. According to Catherine Panther-Brinck and Malcolm T. Smith, children who are considered as 'abandoned' can be viewed as posing a threat to the ideal of control and security (Panther-Brinck & Smith, 2000, in Engebrigtsen, 2003: 194). My interlocutors would express this concern by explaining how UMIs potentially would be carrying "skeletons in their closets" (Mads, Ravnsborg Municipality, Appendix A, p. 61), which indicates an expectation of problems gradually emerging, suggesting that the categorical ambiguity may be linked to a sense of latent dangerousness. UMIs are thereby considered as too young to handle their own experiences and thereby categorised as a 'population at risk' (Miller & Vitus, 2009: 746). On the basis of her anthropological work with classification systems, Douglas demonstrates Western societies' need for categorising abnormal behaviour as *risk culture*. The structural process of defining risk should therefore not be understood as neutral but rather as a thought style dependent on certain moral and cultural contexts (Mik-Meyer & Villadsen, 2007: 149). By viewing the articulation of risk as a social construct, we are allowed to explore why certain behaviour patterns are viewed at risk and therefore in the need of an intervention (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2012: 17).

"We actually have a pretty good joint effort with the job centre but with the weakest and most challenged youth we still do not have enough knowledge and some of them sometimes do not want our help. Then they start medicating themselves and end up in different addictions and that is a big problem. Then they may start some criminal behaviour and then they

are not far from a deportation. And in some cases we have not been able to get to the young ones (Lene, Snærum Municipality, Appendix A, p. 63).

This quote shows how a caseworker makes connections between how a few actions can push the “*weakest and most challenged youth*” onto a criminal track with deportation out of Denmark as the final outcome. The UMI’s particular vulnerability must therefore be considered in relation to their stage of ‘youth’, which can be viewed as a particularly transformative stage in life (Gladwell and Elwyn, 2002: 17). As caseworkers would often relate to UMIs as youth, and not as children which is their legal status, the UMIs would be perceived in between the category of a helpless child and an independent, responsible adult. The Western category of youth can be described as “*a time of intense formation of self-understanding, self-identity and world-views*” (Sedmak, 2018: 4). Youth can thereby be considered as an uncertain and transformational stage in life, where the individual is in constant development both physically and psychologically and can therefore be considered as “*matter out of place*” (Douglas, 1966). In her work *Purity and Danger*, Douglas argues for a social and cultural reading of matters considered as either clean or unclean in different contexts and historical periods. Applying this approach to my empirical context can allow us to understand “*the symbolic dangers of uncertainty and categorical lack of fit*” (Herzfeld, 2001: 210). This categorical lack of fit extends in particular to citizens in marginal stages, “*who are somehow left out of the patterning of society, who are placeless. They may be doing nothing morally wrong, but their status is indefinable*” (Douglas, 1966: 118). A categorical lack of fit is often associated with power and danger, and therefore in need of an institutionalised social ordering. The danger is controlled through rituals and separating categories, which the legal transition into the 18th year is a good example of. The fundamental aspect of the caseworker effort, of defining and treating social problems, is thereby grounded in constructing “*incompatible images of social reality*” marking out what should exist and what should not exist (Smith, 1978, in Miller & Vitus, 2009: 745). The caseworker effort thereby evolves around ‘normalising’ children considered as unsocialised and in need of professional supervision and guidance (Miller & Vitus, 2009: 745). By applying this structural approach to my empirical findings, we can understand how my interlocutors in the initial analysis section made a distinction between the UMIs who have become self-integrated by “*minding their own business*” and the other group of UMIs with whom there is still a momentum for the caseworker to “*get to them in time*” to find out “*what they are bringing with them*”. Douglas explains how rules on uncleanness help define a majority population and keep it together by distinguishing other groups as different to the majority population. The notion of self-integration is interesting as it plays on the imaginations of a successful integration as an achievable goal rather than a dynamic process. One

could also argue that some caseworkers would view the purpose of the social welfare effort as assimilation defined as a zero-sum game. This builds on the assumption that the UMIs to a higher extent can embrace the 'new' Danish culture, language and life style by letting go of the 'old' cultural heritage and family. Some of my interlocutors would thereby perceive UMIs as being more malleable and receptive to Danish culture and values compared to adult refugees. UMIs have for instance only been in their country of origin for a limited period of time and due to the absence of close kin from the country of origin they may not be able to mirror their cultural and linguistic background in their daily life. UMIs are thereby not only categorised as children but also within the notion of being part of an ethnic minority. Other empirical studies have drawn out the shifting legal statuses of unaccompanied migrant children, as in for instance Norway (Engebrigtsen, 2003) and the United Kingdom (Jones, 2001). Adele Jones states that:

“While official policy may declare, for instance, that ‘the child is a child first and an asylum seeker second’, the notion of child is mediated through the notion of ‘alien’ and this may have a bearing on the treatment the child receives. Thus the child who is regarded as an alien is not quite a child, in the sense that he or she does not carry the conceptualization of innocence and vulnerability attributed to children generally” (Jones, 2001: 266).

The UMIs thereby fall in between two different liminal stages; the transition between failed and successful integration and the liminal stage between child and adult. As Douglas' has noted: *“Ambiguous things can seem threatening. Taboo confronts the ambiguous and shunts it into the category of the sacred”* (Douglas, 1966: xi). Liminality is often associated with potential danger and can therefore be a time when the state will have a particular interest in taking part in shaping the individual UMIs' behaviour. Caseworkers therefore consider the UMIs as a potential social deviant from society in need of being helped and supported to assimilate into the 'family of Denmark' (Rytter, 2010). In light of the violent and traumatising experiences the UMIs have been exposed to, they are considered to continually be at risk until they are fully 'absorbed' socially and culturally into the Danish society. Though family from the country of origin at points is categorised as a problem identity, their absence seems, paradoxically enough, also considered as potentially destabilising. The particular status of being unaccompanied seemed to magnify caseworkers' perceptions of the potential for performing risky behaviour, adding to the categorical blurring between child and adult. Other caseworkers would however also remark how UMIs would be considered as easier to help, compared to refugee children arriving to Denmark with their families. By using the term to assimilate the caseworker stresses the need for the UMI to internalise Danish cultural values and not *“hang on to the absence of their family”*.

“Some refugee children might find it easier to take in the Danish society because they are alone. They get a lot of Danish friends, learn the language quickly, and therefore let go of all the old more quickly. And then there are of course some that are finding it very difficult and keep hanging on to the absence of their family, their country of origin and their original language” (Field notes, Mads, Ravnsborg Municipality).

These examples of categorical ambiguity within caseworker practices, highlight the importance of deployments of meaningful classifications within situated caseworker strategies. Where, for instance, the classification of subjects associated with the formal structure of one law, finds tension with the categories used to classify UMIs within the daily practices in which this law is applied and interpreted. As demonstrated in the above, caseworkers have a tendency of viewing the UMI as having transgressed the realm of childhood based on their exposure to traumatic experiences and the potential “skeletons in their closets”. Caseworkers thereby seem determined to treat this particularly vulnerable group, positioned within ambiguous liminal stages, with extensive support to implement the principle of the ‘child’s best interest’. How to interpret this principle is a complex terrain, intersecting with a range of signification processes, where the UMI travels through different categories according to particular discretionary practices of caseworkers.

In whose best interest - an effort to enforce diversity or sameness?

Based on the previous section, exploring the implications of how caseworkers view UMIs as positioned ‘at risk’ within liminal and transformative stages, I will in this final part of the analysis discuss how my interlocutors’ interpret the acclaimed principle of serving the ‘child’s best interest’. The goal of providing social services in the of interest of the UMIs is disputed as there are several different ways of considering what is beneficial for the individual UMI. For instance, some caseworkers would focus on the necessity for the UMIs to be surrounded by Danish culture and norms, as this would enable the UMI to be absorbed into Danish society, while other caseworkers would note the need for mirroring cultural and social values from the country of origin. The notion of what is considered to be in the interest of the child can be explored through both the bureaucratic strategy, serving to secure equal treatment to all clients, but it may be more appropriate to explore how the ‘child’s best interest’ principle is interpreted when the individual need strategy is applied. When analysing how my interlocutors interpret and practice the principle of the best interest of the UMI at least two significant perspectives should be considered.

The first perspective originates from caseworkers' understanding of the law on social service and considers the UMI first and foremost as an under age individual whose right to childhood is absolute and universal. In UNCRC article 3, part 1, it is for instance stated that the 'child's best interest' principle must be prioritised above all other matters. As the UMI is subjected to social measures (*foranstaltninger*) according to the law on social service, they are considered as children with particular needs for social support, which originates from an identified lack of safe surroundings and not individual predispositions. This approach legitimises the state to for instance ultimately remove the child from its legal guardians, the parents, if it is considered to be in the 'child's best interest' (law on social service, § 58). According to Lipsky, caseworkers in the children and youth department can therefore be considered as the ultimate street-level bureaucrat, as they have the mandate to remove children from their homes (Lipsky, 2010: 233). By approaching the UMI as a child, the caseworker practices of supporting the UMI is viewed as a social effort, rather than an integration effort, as this approach considers the status of the UMI as a child as any other child in Denmark in the need of support. In line with this, some caseworkers would relate the conditions for the UMIs comparable to vulnerable Danish children: "(...) it is actually a basically normal young kid, yes he is without parents and the language, but that is it" (Anja, Ajstrup Municipality, Appendix A, p. 13). From this perspective, the UMI will benefit from being treated more or less with the same demands and conditions as ethnic Danish children who are or have been placed within the law on social service. Based on this notion, the caseworker finds that differential treatment of viewing UMIs as an ethnic minority can have negative consequences for the UMI.

The second perspective applied by my interlocutors was to predominantly consider the UMI as a member of an ethnic minority. According to article 8, the UMIs hold the right to preserve their personal characteristics, relationships and histories, and the Danish state is therefore obliged to help UMI regain aspects of their identity that has been taken away from them: "*Where a child is illegally deprived of some or all of the elements of his or her identity, States Parties shall provide appropriate assistance and protection, with a view to speedily re-establishing his or her identity*" (UNCRC, Article 8, 2). Therefore, the purpose is to protect the personal characteristics, relationships and histories of children. Based on this perspective, the caseworker will seek to give equal status and opportunity to the UMI by applying a differential treatment. Attempting to secure equal status to the UMI presupposes viewing the UMIs as different to other Danish children in the social system. Dilemmas involved with this self-perpetuation of difference is recognised by several of my interlocutors and it holds an array of implications and consequences for the caseworkers' self-perception and motivation. Some of my interlocutors would outline a conflict appearing between the perceived 'new' and 'old' identity of the UMIs and how they

could feel trapped in between when assessing what type of support would be in the best interest of the UMI (Appendix A, p. 8).

Bodil: It can be difficult when an unaccompanied get family reunification after having been here for a couple of years and the parents come here and they need to move back home, that can be pretty complex.

Anja: Yeah, then the young person have been allowed to be really free, I had a girl who that had lived here and came by herself when she was 13 (...). I think the female contact person had told her 'now you had to be Danish, you are here now and you're free and you should not think too much about what you have left behind'. So, dyed hair, tons of make-up etc. And then her brothers came and even though they did not have parental rights and responsibilities, they would like to influence how she behaved and that was an enormous challenge."

Caseworkers explain the dilemma for them to both show respect for the UMI's family while at the same time considering what is in the best interest of the UMI now living in Denmark. Another example of this is a case where a UMI was reunified with his family in Denmark. His family who became family reunified was of Muslim heritage and was subsequently considered as not being able to take sufficient care of the child so the child. And so the UMI was placed by the council in a Danish foster family (Field notes from staff meeting, Ravnsborg Municipality).

- (...) *After he came into the foster family he has started eating pork and in summer he goes with the family to a church camp and his biological mother does not know anything about this (...). So now the child is in a difficult situation where he has to choose between his Muslim faith and the Christian identity and he feels like he needs to lie to his mother.*
- *That we can not close our eyes on.*
- *It should have been written in the contract that the child is not allowed to eat pork, shouldn't it?*
- *Yes, or should it, is it the biological or the foster family that should decide? (...) I would say that this is a clear example of a flawed placement (fejlanbringelse).*
- *Yes, how should the child be able to choose between the foster family and his own mother.*
- *But we have to remember that besides from this, the placement in itself is a success. The child is happy to live with the foster family.*

Despite research arguing that children from ethnic minorities should be placed in surroundings enabling them to recognise themselves according to culture, language and religion, studies have shown that Danish authorities predominantly place children from ethnic minority families in settings exclu-

sively with ethnic Danes (Møller & Skytte, 2004: 19). Following Marianne Gullestad, and her notion of *imagined sameness*, we are allowed to understand how equality in Scandinavian welfare states are often closely associated with sameness, meaning cultural and social sameness.

“In this way differences are concealed by avoiding those people who, for one reason or another, are perceived as ‘too different’, and by playing them down in social interaction with those who are regarded as compatible” (Gullestad, 2002: 47).

As the welfare state is attempting to enforce equality among citizens, caseworkers thereby come to subsequently invoke sameness by expecting the UMIs to take in the ‘normalised’ Danish culture (Gullestad, 2002: 46; Vitus, 2005: 21-22; Miller & Vitus, 2009: 745). The above example, of placing a UMI with a Muslim background in a Danish family, can therefore not be considered as one rare case but rather shows a more widespread tendency in the social welfare effort with UMIs. By viewing UMIs first and foremost as ethnic minority members, caseworkers attempt to address certain challenges they relate to belonging to a part of an ethnic group considered as ‘different’ compared to the Danish majority population. It can be viewed as problematic, when an UMI predominantly is understood based on his or her family, and their ethnic minority background, in relation to an integration agenda, as the UMI may have other identified needs for social support.

“They [the pedagogical institutions] are very different and they are not all geared to youngsters who have severe social issues. Not all of them can tackle this problem well. There is a big focus on that it is integration you work with in the institutions but most of the youngsters have trauma and other things that calls for more than merely an integration effort” (Bente, Bovby Municipality, Appendix A, p. 32-33).

The above quote demonstrates how caseworkers come to focus exceedingly on the integration aspect of their effort with UMIs, which can end up with them attaching too much emphasis on the ethnic identity of the UMI as being ‘different’ to the ‘normal’ Danish culture. Among my interlocutors there seemed to be an overall confusion about whether their effort with the UMIs should be seen as a social or integration effort.

(...) And I think that could be because we are unsure of which effort that is required. Is it for instance a social effort or an integration effort. And that insecurity can manifest itself as paralysis, especially if they [the UMIs] do not wish to receive help” (Lene, Snærum Municipality, Appendix A, p. 63).

In the previous quote, a caseworker questions whether the overall caseworker effort can and should be characterised within a social or an integration agenda, which I would argue is indicative of a wider uncertainty among the caseworkers I spoke to. Based on my fieldwork, I found a fundamental lack of clarity and cohesion with the caseworker effort with UMIs. My interlocutors for instance touched upon intersections between the law on social service and the law on immigration by referring to the fact that the UMIs are not permitted a permanent stay in Denmark until they are at least 18 years old, and are therefore potentially only in Denmark for a limited amount of time. The principle of the 'child's best interest' seems to be competing with other national policy agendas and restrictive amendments to the laws on immigration. One example of this in the Danish welfare state context is the confinement of the support offered to UMIs when having family reunified in Denmark due to a legal amendment initiating that municipalities are no longer responsible for allocating a suitable home as well as covering travel expenses on behalf of the family reunified in Denmark. Another example of this is the transition towards the 18th year when the UMI has two different cases carried out simultaneously according to the law on social service and the law on integration. The implications of the lack of direction does, as I have demonstrated, result into various paradoxes and organisational patch works, which ultimately results in caseworkers feeling disempowered and discontent with the overall caseworker effort and their own individual contributions.

As aforementioned, some scholars have drawn attention to the in-built dilemma in the double role of child care governance, as the welfare state aims to secure its own interest while also serving the 'child's best interest' (Møller & Skytte, 2004: 29; Engebrigtsen, 2003: 199). While I recognise this dilemma, I have encountered caseworkers who predominantly are motivated by securing the best possible services for the UMI. The interest of the child is interpreted by caseworkers based on cultural assumptions and normalised images of family and what constitutes a 'proper' childhood. The fundamental aspect of the casework effort seems to be predominantly generated by the ambiguous wish of supporting UMIs to be culturally and socially 'absorbed' into the Danish cultural and social norms. This entails to some degree that the UMIs have to take in the 'new' Danish culture and letting go of the 'old'. The law on social service, the primary legal tool for my interlocutors, is however not formulated as an integration agenda, which can be explained by the fact that the original purpose of the law was to accommodate vulnerable children in Denmark and not the group of UMIs as such. Nevertheless, my empirical findings show that the majority of my interlocutors would refer to their work as integrating UMIs in a way that is not necessarily aligned with the acclaimed purpose of preventing social issues and securing the child's continuity and involvement with close kin and cultural

background. Rather than neutrally applying legal paragraphs, the caseworkers interpret and practice law through strategies mirroring cultural and value-based rationales deeply grounded in and informed by a welfare state context. In other words, the caseworker effort predominately seems to be produced by a wish to make UMIs independent and ‘fully integrated’ citizens. This can however result in a reductive understanding of the difficult and ambiguous circumstances of the UMIs, as the effort becomes more concerned about social cohesion in the welfare state than the needs of the individual UMIs (Engebrigtsen, 2003: 197). In their daily work, caseworkers have to make choices according to their individual considerations of the best interest of the UMI; to help them assimilate, and internalise the Danish cultural values, or to offer social support while enforcing their affiliation with their family and cultural heritage. This thesis ultimately argues that caseworkers apply techniques and strategies, which reflect cultural rationales shaped by a welfare state agenda aimed at augmenting the notion of cultural cohesion and imagined sameness.

Conclusion

The combination of having limited information about the individual UMI and viewing formal laws and regulations as tools rather than objectives in themselves poses the question of how we conceptually can grasp, and what empirically produces, casework practices with UMIs. In this thesis I have demonstrated how my interlocutors apply meaning through exercising discretion in the tension between law as a universal instruction and a situated practice. Drawing on a further treatment of Michael Lipsky's theory on street-level bureaucrats exercising discretion, this study has explored how casework strategies, and their underlying cultural rationales, can inform our understanding of the overall caseworker effort with UMIs. Due to the flexibility of the law on social service, the lack of experience with the UMI, and the absence of legal guardians, a vacuum is created wherein the caseworker is expected to identify needs and solutions to the identified social problems experienced by UMIs. By viewing casework practices through this theoretical lens, I have shown how caseworkers manage administrative and bureaucratic responsibilities while also working the system in favour of the UMI.

With the objective of rigorously following laws and administrative guidelines, the bureaucratic strategy encompass practices such as creating distance to clients and deferring responsibility. On the other side of the spectrum, we have also seen how caseworkers play the system in order to secure the best possible services matching the individual needs of the UMIs. The individual need strategy informs practices such as stretching the law and playing the system. Rather than solely focusing on my interlocutors passive behaviour of coping with the system, the application of caseworker strategies as analytical tools has allowed a further exploration into productive caseworker strategies countering laws and regulations. Caseworkers would to a greater extent identify with the strategy focusing on the individual needs of their clients, rather than identifying themselves as bureaucratic extensions of the state. An interesting finding was that even though caseworkers would not identify themselves as bureaucrats, I did observe several techniques reflecting bureaucratic logics. My interlocutors did, however, not view themselves as bureaucrats following laws and regulations as an objective in itself, nor did they necessarily view their role as an advocate for their clients. Caseworkers legitimise their role through strong care professional arguments and expertise in order to address the best interest of the UMI, while "juggling" the different agendas in the conflictual arena of the municipality.

I would argue that there is a strong tendency among my interlocutors to view the UMIs as members of an ethnic minority, meaning that the objective of the casework effort becomes to support UMIs to become independent and 'fully integrated' citizens. Rather than solely looking at the law

applied by the caseworkers in the children and youth department, we are thereby compelled to unravel the multiple meanings and effects of using concepts such as integration and assimilation to construct problem identities as ways for caseworkers to categorise their world and apply meaning to their work. This finding is notable, as caseworkers would predominantly relate to the individual need strategy, which seemingly reflects wider social welfare norms and values rather than mirroring the caseworkers' central legal framework; the law on social service. The implications of the lack of direction combined with the high degree of decentralised space for discretion results into ambiguous practices and organisational patch works, which ultimately results in caseworkers feeling disempowered and discontent with the overall caseworker effort and their own individual contributions. A question for further research could be to explore the implications of these strategies and rationales by looking at the individual experiences of UMIs and their families in and outside of Denmark.

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