

Article

When Welfare State “Integration” Becomes an Intimate Family Affair: Ethnic Minority Parents’ Everyday Orchestration of Their Children’s Future Belonging in Denmark

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Abstract: Based on a qualitative interview study, this article focuses on the everyday organization of family life in Denmark among ethnic minority parents with Pakistani, Turkish, Palestinian and Iraqi backgrounds, with a particular view to the quotidian resource management of time and money within intimate parent–child relationships. Through this focus on how the parents prioritize their everyday time and financial resources from an intergenerational perspective, the article explores the motivations and reasoning behind such arrangements of family life—including how they reflect parents’ visions for their children’s future lives. While it applies a time-use and consumption perspective to examine mundane family lives, as opposed to, for instance, a social integration perspective, the analysis nonetheless reveals how Danish policy and public debate on the “integration” of ethnic minorities directly and in detail shapes the quotidian orchestration of family life and its intimate relations. This translates into a highly concrete, everyday concern with and attentiveness towards “integration” among the parents. This attentiveness towards the Danish integration debate haunts the parents’ sense of self. Moreover, I argue that it materializes in routinized family life practices, strongly shaping the innermost private sphere of mundane parental choices regarding the day-to-day management of time and money, and in the everyday strategies for the next generation’s future belonging in Denmark expressed in this management.



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1. Introduction

Following decades of relentless focus on ethnic minority and immigrant families and how their lifestyles may influence their possibilities for societal inclusion and belonging within government policies and public debates in Denmark, as elsewhere in Europe, it is vital to study how these families envisage their own future, including the various limitations and ambiguities that they encounter in this respect. Regardless of background, it is through the everyday management and structuring of our family lives that many of our ideas about who we are and where we belong are expressed—not only as members of a family, but also as members of society and a broader national identity. I, therefore, propose that a potentially fruitful approach as an academic to society’s preoccupation with ethnic minority and immigrant families is to focus on precisely the concrete, day-to-day organization of family life. This focus might include exploration of the frameworks and values of family life that parents in these families seek to maintain or transform in contrast with their own upbringing.

Based on a qualitative interview study¹ conducted among ethnic minority parents with Pakistani, Turkish, Palestinian and Iraqi backgrounds, and seen from within the intimate parent–child relationship, this article thus sets out to explore the intergenerational

considerations and day-to-day priorities that lie behind the mundane choices these parents make as they seek to organize and structure their everyday family lives within the Danish welfare state. In so doing, the article approaches family life as a social institution—here comprising households with two parents and their children—resting on an underlying structure of daily rhythms and routines. Vital to the daily tasks of organizing this structure are the questions of how to prioritize time and money (Mogensen 1990). These matters are of a universal nature, with families in all societies having to ask how to spend the available time and money, and these questions are tightly interwoven with the very considerations, values and motivations that simultaneously inform them (Mogensen 1990).

Hence, how parents with ethnic minority and immigrant backgrounds prioritize their time and financial resources during everyday life when raising their children speaks to how praxis and norms connected to family life change over time and across generations and to how such changes reflect the future that parents envisage for their children. Consequently, focusing on how ethnic minority and immigrant families in Danish society manage their time and financial resources not only makes it possible to map out these aspects of their current everyday lives, but also provides insights into the future lives and social identities the parents envision for themselves and for the next generation, their children. There are at least two reasons why it is particularly relevant to gain greater insight into the intergenerational expressions of such matters of belonging, nested in the quotidian organization of family life among families in Denmark with ethnic minority and Muslim backgrounds.

The first reason has to do with the persistent preoccupation in Danish society with the so-called “integration” of these population groups. Since the 1970s, the social inclusion of immigrants and refugees has consistently been a topic of increasingly heated discussion in Danish public debate and government policy (e.g., Hervik 2011; Rytter 2019). While politicians, researchers and regular citizens alike are preoccupied with questions about the integration of these groups in society, these questions are typically marked by two distinctive features. Firstly, both Danish government policy and public debate are characterized by what has been termed an “exceptionally unclear use” (Ejrnæs 2002) of the concept of integration (for examples of this critique spanning almost three decades, see Ejrnæs 2002; Jöhncke 2011; Rytter 2019). Moreover, as Olwig and Pærregaard (2011, p. 2) have highlighted: “‘Integration’ is not a neutral concept denoting the joining together of different population groups. It is rather 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”. Secondly, the Danish debate on integration is characterized by a certain problematizing tone whereby ethnic minorities are implicitly and explicitly contrasted with “Danish” culture and values, generating a fundamental categorical divide between “us” and “them” (e.g., Olwig and Pærregaard 2011; Rytter 2010). In this respect, researchers have pointed to 9/11 as a turning point in the Danish political and public debate on integration (Rytter and Pedersen 2014). Before this, ethnic minority groups were mainly referred to as “foreigners” or “refugees/immigrants”; since 9/11, these groups have primarily been referred to as “Muslims” (Rytter and Pedersen 2014). Today, two decades later, Islam and Muslims in particular are still often understood as being in opposition to “Danish values” (e.g., Borberg 2021; Nielsen 2019)—and, one might add, therefore, also in opposition to “integration”.

Against this background, the quotidian “time-use and consumption” perspective taken by this study allowed the participating Muslim and ethnic minority parents to shed light on their everyday family lives and intergenerational strategies for the future through a different lens than the one generally applied by the Danish state and mainstream society—the lens of “integration”. Put another way, the intention of approaching ethnic minority and Muslim citizens through a time-use and consumption perspective, as opposed to an integration perspective, was to allow the participants to speak in their own words about how they arrange and organize their everyday family lives and, in particular, how they, as parents, prioritize the time and money available when raising their children. As said, studying these parental prioritizations provides an insight into the central values

and considerations that inform them. This includes understanding how these values and considerations relate to the parents' intergenerational visions and strategies for their children's future belonging within Danish society—the key topic of this article.

The second reason why there is a need for greater insight into intergenerational matters of belonging and social identity, nested in the everyday organization of family life and its intimate relations among ethnic minority and immigrant families in Denmark, has to do with the specific interventionist character of the Danish welfare state. The Scandinavian welfare states are described as interventionist states (e.g., [Stenius 1997](#)) because they exercise far greater power over the private family lives of their citizens than those of other European states ([Gaunt and Nyström 1996](#)). In an analysis of Scandinavian political culture, [Stenius \(1997\)](#) discussed how the uniquely Nordic system of values—whose core principle is universality based on the assumption that the state is good and that it holds legislative power to ensure equality for all citizens—has entailed a strong, contemporary preference for cultural homogeneity (see also [Olwig et al. 2012](#)). A national discourse of uniting and homogenizing people of different classes, both urban and rural, provided legitimacy to the establishment of the Danish welfare state after the Second World War. Furthermore, the way in which contemporary Danish society is understood, structured and practiced as a community remains strongly tied to this process ([Jöhncke 2011](#); see also [Jenkins 2011](#)). Or, as [Olwig and Paerregaard \(2011, p. 16\)](#) put it: “‘Danishness’ and ‘the welfare state’ are inseparable”.

Because the welfare state has become so closely and tacitly linked to what is means to be “Danish”, the question of how to include immigrants and refugees within society has come to center around how to turn them into “proper members” of Danish welfare society ([Olwig and Paerregaard 2011](#)). In Denmark, [Rytter \(2019\)](#) explains, the welfare state is regarded as a system characterized by an ideal of lifelong “generalized reciprocity” ([Sahlins 1972](#)), where citizens, for instance, reciprocate the free education they receive in their youth by paying high income taxes during adulthood, before receiving a state pension and public care later in life. Thus, as [Rytter \(2019\)](#) points out, in recent years, there has been a heated debate under Danish governments across the political spectrum as to whether migrants and refugees should be entitled to the same welfare benefits as they might not have contributed to this generalized reciprocity over a full lifetime. [Olwig and Paerregaard \(2011, p. 3\)](#) argue that this “has had the ironic consequence that a substantial part of the immigrant population, despite having lived in Denmark for years, even generations, has become permanently categorized as not (yet) belonging in the society”. As a result, an increasing torrent of welfare state integration initiatives have been designed and implemented, and, as highlighted in my previous research among refugee families in Denmark, such integration interventions are often directed towards the everyday routines that take place within the innermost, private, domestic sphere (e.g., [Larsen 2011a, 2011b, 2018a, 2018b](#); see also [Bregnbæk this issue](#)).

Thus, what [Stenius](#) underlined when talking in general about the “interventionist” Nordic welfare states is, I might add, certainly no less applicable to inhabitants with refugee and immigrant backgrounds: “[In the Nordic countries,] ‘society’ knows no bounds. All the doors are open—to the living room, the kitchen, the larder, the nursery, not to mention the bedroom—and they are not just open: society marches in and intervenes, sometimes brusquely” ([Stenius 1997, p. 171](#)). Hence, the question posed in the introduction to this special issue of “how states and families entangle in modern societies” constitutes a particularly relevant line of inquiry in the case of Danish society. Through the lens of the quotidian structuring of family life among ethnic minority parents, and explored from within the intimate parent–child relationship, the analysis presented in this article precisely exposes this porous boundary between “state” and “family” in Denmark. In particular, I explore the ways in which everyday public and political debate on integration translates into an *intimate family affair* that directly and in detail shapes the innermost, private sphere of family life and its mundane practices and intimate relationships. As we shall see, this

also includes the various intergenerational matters of present and future belonging that these practices express.

The term “intimate” is rooted etymologically in the Latin *intimus*, meaning “inmost”, which suggests—as also discussed by Robbins (2019)—an underlying spatial imagery of insides and outsides. In the context of this study, firstly, such a spatial boundary between inside and outside (however porous it might be) obviously refers to the private “innermost” sphere of the family home *vis-a-vis* the public sphere of the Danish welfare state and society. Secondly, however, as Robbins (2019) proposed, the spatial imagery of inside and outside could also refer to “intimacy” as a matter of familiarity with the “inmost” part of a person—i.e., the part beyond all the social typifications and typified social role constructs others associate with a person in everyday life (Natanson 1962; Brodersen 1964). In this context, such typifications and constructs include those of “foreigners”, “refugees/immigrants” or “Muslims”. As Robbins (2019, p. 7) suggests: “[A]n intimate is someone who knows who one really is beyond all the standard social roles one inhabits”. Following this line of thought, this means that the “innermost” private space of family life can be viewed as a space of intimacy where—ideally—its members recognize one another for who they “really” are, moving beyond the various social typifications that otherwise structure daily life (Natanson 1962) and underlie self-understanding and social interaction in general (Kim and Berard 2009).

However, as this article will show, adopting a perspective from within this intimate family space, where family members see one another for who they “really” are, seems to reveal a paradox. Across the participating families, the everyday orchestration of this *inside* space seems to center around how to keep dominant *outside* social stereotypes of “foreigners”, “refugees/immigrants” and “Muslims” at bay—including how to protect the next generation, the children, from such stereotypes. To borrow a term from de Koning and Vollebergh (2019), these typified social figures, nested in Danish public and political debate on integration, come to function as “ordinary iconic figures”. While originating in public discourse, these figures are subsequently adopted far beyond the public spheres of politics and debate, shaping the everyday lives of the population groups in question by “haunting their sense of self as iconic shadows” (de Koning and Vollebergh 2019, p. 390).

The interventionist character of the Danish welfare state (Gaunt and Nyström 1996; Stenius 1997) is interwoven with its inseparability from an ideal of “Danishness” (Jöhncke 2011; Olwig and Paerregaard 2011) and with Danish integration debate’s many “ordinary iconic figures” (de Koning and Vollebergh 2019) that not only populate national narratives but also the daily lives of ethnic minority families. This combination of factors means that the fulfillment of so-called “successful integration” (Think Tank on Integration in Denmark 2001) in Danish society seems to require navigating a never-ending series of recurring “invisible fences”, to borrow a term from Gullestad (2002). Or, as Rytter (2019, p. 682) has framed it, integration in Denmark takes form as a “utopian horizon”—a set of ever-moving goalposts that prevent ethnic minority and immigrant families from achieving the goal of integration.

Meanwhile, as I will flesh out in this article, for ethnic minority parents and their children, Danish society’s preoccupation with “integration” leaves its mark on quotidian family life and its intimate parent–child relationships—and is, thus, not just an all-encompassing condition of life in the shape of a utopian, unreachable, and, thus, *abstract* horizon (cf. Rytter 2019). As I will argue, the welfare state’s preoccupation with integration translates into a very *concrete* concern that materializes within even the most mundane choices and routines concerning the intergenerational management of time and money in everyday family life. This *materialization* and *routinization* of the dominant political and public integration debate in the tangible day-to-day organization and orchestration of quotidian family life among ethnic minorities speaks to a gap in the debate itself. This same gap also exists in the research literature on migrant families’ lives—in Denmark and beyond. This article seeks to help fill this gap by analytically unpacking how even the most mundane choices and routines concerning intimate parent–child relationships within

such families are sometimes directly motivated by the parents' desire to distance their families and their children from what they see as the commonly accepted stereotypes about "immigrants" and "Muslims" in the Danish integration debate.

Hence, the analysis discloses how Danish welfare state policy and public debate on integration *directly* and *in detail* affect and intertwine with the parents' everyday intergenerational structuring of family life. They can be seen very palpably embedded in quotidian considerations of family relations and child rearing, down to the innermost, private sphere of daily routines for the children's hygiene, such as the amount of time allocated for bathing. I term this "integration attentiveness". Meanwhile, I would like to stress that this attentiveness among the parents in this study, and the ways in which it seems to form an integral part of their everyday strategies for both their *present* family lives and their children's *future* belonging in Denmark, was not an initial focus or theme when designing the research. Instead, it emerged as a central empirical finding following analysis of the study's qualitative interview material.

2. Methodology and Research Design

The article draws on a broader qualitative interview study of time use and consumption in ethnic minority families in Denmark (Larsen 2013). The study was initiated by an external partner, more precisely, the Danish Rockwool Foundation Research Unit, and was carried out independently by the author in 2012–2013 as a university researcher. The research was conducted with 10 families: three with *Pakistani*, three with *Turkish*, two with *Palestinian* and two with *Iraqi* backgrounds. Before I embarked on the study, these national backgrounds were preselected by the external research partner based on two main arguments concerning broader demographics in Denmark. First, these nationalities represent four of the largest so-called "non-Western" minority groups in Denmark (which, in Danish demographic statistics, include residents who migrated or fled to Denmark, as well as the next generation). Second, they include both those living in Denmark due to initial labor migration (i.e., the Pakistani and Turkish participants) and those who are resident because they or their parents initially came to Denmark as refugees (i.e., the Palestinian and Iraqi participants). As a research institute that usually conducts large-scale population survey studies using quantitative methods, the Rockwool Foundation Research Unit considered it important that the qualitative interview study I carried out for them was based on the same idea of demographic representativeness that characterizes the unit's own research.

The Rockwool Foundation Research Unit's initiation of the study was grounded in the general experience that ethnic minority citizens are proportionally underrepresented in the national surveys it regularly conducts on everyday life among the Danish population. The research unit wondered why ethnic minority groups in Denmark seemed more reluctant to participate in such national surveys than the so-called Danish majority population. The Rockwool Foundation Research Unit, therefore, wanted to try to gain better access to and, thus, insight into ethnic minorities' everyday family lives through smaller-scale, qualitative interview studies. Researchers at the unit wondered what was—as they put it—"deep within the everyday engine room" of ethnic minorities' family lives and what was it that seemingly distinguished them from the majority population—and I was tasked with finding the answers.

The study is based on 20 individual, semi-structured, qualitative interviews conducted with each parent in the 10 families, without the use of an interpreter. The interviews, lasting between one and three hours, were carried out during 2012 in the family homes, each of which I visited between one and three times. Although the interviews took place ten years ago, the data material remains highly relevant today. As the article will show, Muslim and ethnic minority families in Denmark already, at that point in time, felt subjected to intense public scrutiny as a result of the Danish integration debate. The fact that Danish integration policy has since become one of the most restrictive in all of Europe (see, e.g., Rytter and Ghandchi 2020) only makes the study's findings more relevant and topical.

The participant group ranged from 25 to 60 years of age, and the interviewees had between one and three children aged 0–20 living at home. The study involved an equal split between interviewees who came to Denmark as adults and interviewees who were either born in Denmark or came to Denmark as children with their parents and spent a substantial part of their childhood in Denmark. In this article, the former group will be referred to as “first generation” (comprising 10 interviewees who came to Denmark 5–40 years prior to the study either as refugees, as labor migrants or through family reunification), and the latter group will be referred to as “second generation” (comprising 10 interviewees whose parents came to Denmark either as labor migrants or as refugees). In three of the 10 married couples, both parents belonged to the second generation; in three more, both parents belonged to the first generation; and, in the remaining four couples, one parent belonged to the first and the other to the second generation.

While, as mentioned, the national backgrounds of the participants were already set by the external research partner prior to the study’s start, I selected and assembled the actual group of interviewees independently. In addition to the interviewees’ diversity in terms of national background, the basis for their residence permits (labor migrant/refugee/family reunification) and their status as first- or second-generation residents in Denmark, the interviewees were selected to reflect socioeconomic variations, such as level of education (ranging from unskilled workers to people with university degrees), connection to the job market (unemployed, employed, self-employed, in early retirement due to disability) and type of labor (e.g., cleaning assistant, schoolteacher, doctor). Furthermore, variation was sought in terms of geographical location of the home (rural, suburban, urban), type of housing (e.g., single-family house, apartment building), whether the families owned or rented their home and the age of the children living at home (toddlers, pre-schoolers, schoolchildren, teenagers).

The intention, by including such a socioeconomically diverse participant group, was to spark internal tension within the data and, thus, to open up the potential for various patterns, themes and tendencies to emerge more clearly as they could be traced across manifold living conditions and everyday circumstances, rather than just national backgrounds. This approach, thus, made it possible not only to generate qualitative insights into the various family lives internally, but also to identify a series of everyday experiences and strategies common across otherwise quite diverse families with ethnic minority and Muslim backgrounds in Denmark.

In migration research, ethnic minorities’ cultural and national backgrounds are frequently identified as the central variable that supposedly explains their “degree” or “lack” of integration, often without questioning the term “integration” itself (Ejrnæs 2002). Across diverse national backgrounds, this study’s alternative focus on “time and consumption” (i.e., as opposed to “integration”) opened a useful window into more general insights into the everyday private and intimate family lives of ethnic minorities in Denmark—and their own perspectives in this respect. In fact, the word “integration” deliberately did not appear even once in the interview guide. Instead, interviewees were asked to depict in great detail their everyday routines of family life, outlining how they, as parents, prioritize and structure the time and money available to their family, along with their thinking behind these routines.

During the interviews, accordingly, this alternative focus allowed the parents’ individual ethnicities and national origins to recede into the background as just one among multiple factors in the reasoning, reflections and motivations that inform any parent’s everyday organization of family life and its time and financial resources—including the mundane structuring of the next generation’s future nested in this organization. Additionally, rather than intending to in any way assess the “degree” of the involved families’ ostensible integration into Danish society, I designed the study based on a more open-ended research question. The question I set out to explore was *whether* being a parent with an ethnic minority and Muslim background in Denmark has an impact on the various time-use and consumption aspects of everyday family life—and, if so, how?

Throughout the analysis, I flesh out a series of answers to this question. As touched upon previously, even though the study focused on the families' mundane lives from a time-use and consumption perspective rather than an integration perspective, the analysis nonetheless reveals how the Danish public and political debate on integration directly and in detail shapes the quotidian orchestration of family life and its intimate relations. This translates into a highly concrete everyday concern with and attentiveness towards "integration" among the parents. As such, I asked about one thing but learned about another. Or, put differently: by *not* asking about "integration" and how the Danish integration discourse affects the interviewees but, instead, focusing on their mundane family routines, I discovered just how profoundly the Danish public and political integration debate is embedded in even the most ordinary routines of the interviewees' family lives and parenting.

The specific design of the research as an interview study may, in fact, have provided empirical depth to this insight. Had the study instead been based on longitudinal ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth participant observation, such as is much of my other research among refugee and immigrant families in Denmark (e.g., [Larsen 2011a](#), [2011b](#), [2018a](#), [2018b](#)), I may not have made this discovery. Ethnographic fieldwork typically calls (at least for a lengthy initial period) for a somewhat broad outlook, with multiple, fragmented focal points. Perhaps what proved to be a very direct link between, on the one hand, the parents' daily organization of their family life routines and, on the other hand, the intense scrutiny which the families feel subjected to as a result of the Danish integration debate would not have stood out as clearly with such an approach.

3. "They Must Become Decent People": Parents' Expectations for Their Children's Future

Within the frame of the nuclear family as an intergenerational social institution, in the following analysis, I shed light on two central themes within the study's interview material. *First*, I address the parents' future expectations for their children, and, *second*, I flesh out how, in the course of everyday family life, these expectations precipitate and materialize in the parents' quotidian management of time and consumption in relation to raising the next generation, their children. Across these two themes, the interviewees repeatedly and independently highlighted one prominent interlinkage. This concerned the relationship between, on the one hand, their everyday priorities in terms of the time and financial resources available and, on the other hand, their hopes and goals that their children would become what I term "properly enculturated" and—as an important part of this—become well-educated persons and citizens. I here understand "enculturation" as the process whereby a child is socialized to become a member of and participate in the normative practices of a given cultural community ([Kirshner and Meng 2011](#)), in this case, "Danish society".

That educational aspirations on behalf of their children can play a central role in the lives of ethnic minority groups in Denmark is not a new discovery (e.g., [Nielsen 2011](#)). However, what motivations and reflections lie behind such aspirations? Are they, for instance, rooted in the parents' own concern for their future financial security or are they expressions of an internal competition for recognition within ethnic minority communities (see, e.g., [Rytter 2011](#))? Neither of these possible motivations offers a full answer, as the parents in this study brought to light *three* different central considerations. All participants, no matter their national/ethnic affiliation, whether they were the first or second generation in Denmark, their grounds for residing in Denmark (labor migrant/refugee/family reunification), level of education or gender, raised these three considerations, which I will now present.

First, while the parents all stressed the importance of their children getting an education, preferably resulting in a university degree, at the same time, they also stressed the importance of education as an *inner*, personal affair (as opposed to an *outer* affair motivated by, for instance, gaining recognition or prestige). Thus, despite the parents' strong wish that their children pursue an academic education, the vast majority said that the most im-

portant reason for their children to choose an education should be that they are “passionate about it”, will “work hard for it” and that they “have a purpose with it”, regardless of its merits in length and content. Hence, the parents would generally support their children as much in learning a craft as in earning a university degree, regarding their children’s personal motivation and interest in a given education of greater importance than its length or academic standard. The following excerpt from an interview with Alim² (male, second generation, Pakistani background, graduate degree) illustrates this commonality across the interviewees:

“My father was really tough, and he wanted me to become an engineer or a doctor. I chose the education I did to satisfy him. It had to look good to the outside... I feel very differently about education regarding my own children. I do not care how it looks. To me, education represents self-confidence and a goal with life. So, if our son wants to be a doctor, he shouldn’t become one just to earn money, as our parents’ generation wanted—but because he sees a goal with it, like becoming part of Doctors without Borders, for instance. And if my daughter wanted to be a hairdresser, she just has to be *really* good at it then—and be *passionate* about it. What is important is that they have a goal in what they want to do, and that they stand on a solid foundation of self-confidence. It’s OK if it isn’t a university education; all I want is that whatever they become, they become really, really good at it!”³

The second commonality across the material is that the parents saw it as their duty to actively support their children in obtaining an education. Most stressed that they expected their children to become educated just as their own parents expected them to become educated (see also Rytter 2011) but underlined that they wanted to support those expectations in everyday family life rather differently than their own parents did. Especially in the second-generation group, the interviewees recalled how they received little support at home in living up to their parents’ expectations. Typically, their parents lacked the necessary academic experience and/or the Danish language skills to provide such support. Most remembered this as difficult and demanding, while stressing that they did not want to impose their expectations on their own children without ensuring that they were also able to provide the children with the support they need.

The third commonality across the participants is that they saw their children’s formal education as a path to becoming what the parents defined as “decent people” and “good citizens”. Amani (female, second generation, Pakistani background, high school diploma) elaborated on this link between formal education and what I have chosen to term becoming “properly enculturated”, as outlined above. She stated: “Education really wakes you up. I mean, you see the world in a completely new way, and you learn how to behave in the society we live in”.

In fact, one specific concern that all the parents emphasized as important in becoming properly enculturated was precisely “how to behave in society”, as Amani put it above. In this regard, it is striking how often the parents (always on their own initiative) brought up the topic of “correct behavior” and “behaving properly” in direct relation to the previously discussed dominant categorical gap between “us” and “them” in the Danish political and public integration debate (e.g., Olwig and Paerregaard 2011; Rytter 2010). For the interviewees, the issue of what constitutes “proper behavior” often proved to be directly related to the ability to think *beyond* the publicly and politically dominant “us/them” divide. As we will see, among the parents, this ability clearly seems to form a decisive element in the prospective “proper” enculturation they hope that their children will undergo by dint of formal education. As Gülistan (female, second generation, Turkish background, vocational training) explained:

“I want my children to get a good education. That way, they will become decent people [*ordentlige mennesker*]. People who do not hurt anyone. I mean, who do not—like many immigrant boys—have the attitude of ‘I’m Turkish, you’re

Danish,’ or ‘I’m a Muslim, you’re not a Muslim.’ All of that... I do not want that to be an issue *at all*. They should be above all that... as *well-educated, decent people*”.

This same tendency is further illustrated by Ruzgar (male, second generation, Turkish background, bachelor’s degree), who works as a teacher in a private school where all the students are from ethnic minority backgrounds. He described how he sees it as his personal responsibility that the students develop into “good citizens” who are capable of thinking beyond “us” and “them”:

“I often talk to the students about how they have to integrate, and that integration is not necessarily eating pork, but getting an education and *supporting* Danish society, rather than being one of those, quote-unquote, ‘losers’ or ‘Mujaffas’,⁴ just cruising around in BMWs and doing nothing but being a burden on the country. I tell them that they should take responsibility, educate themselves, and pay taxes. Often, they say, ‘Ruzgar, we cannot be like the Danes,’ and I tell them: ‘Yes, you can. *You* grew up here as well; *of course*, you can get the good jobs too.’ I tell them that we are all humans. A Dane is no better than a Turk, and vice versa. *All of us* are part of Danish society. We are *citizens*. Period. And they can learn to understand that—but it takes time”.

In other situations, however, where the theme of “correct/good/proper behavior” by children was brought up in direct relation to an “us/them” divide in society (and, again, always on the parents’ own initiative), the result was not a suspension or conflation of the two categories—as in the above example—but, rather, affirmation and reification. The following description from Rami (male, first generation, Iraqi background, unskilled worker) exemplifies this:

“Since my children were small, we have celebrated Christmas in Denmark—even though we are Muslim. I have always tried to do the same things with my children as Danish parents do—so that they will feel comfortable with the Danish way of life and not get into bad company among Arabs later on. This was the best way, I thought, to give them a good future—by teaching them to look at the *Danish* way of doing things. For example, when we were in the supermarket and some Arabs were speaking loudly, they would ask: ‘Dad, why are they behaving like that—why are they so noisy?’ I would tell them: ‘We are not like those people. You are going to get very bad ideas later in life if you act like them.’ So, I have a positive outlook on their future today. I believe that they are going to turn out to be decent people, just as I have tried to raise them; I am sure of that. Because I have always taught them: ‘Look at what the Danes are doing, and *don’t* do what you see many of the other Arabs doing!’”

The above descriptions support the general finding that the parents, both consciously and unconsciously, are trying to distance themselves from the social categories they find are ascribed to them in Danish society (“foreigners”, “refugees/immigrants”, “Muslims”, “Arabs”). As we have seen, one way of distancing oneself from these (often negatively connoted) “social typifications” (Natanson 1962; Kim and Berard 2009) and “ordinary iconic figures” (de Koning and Vollebergh 2019) is by attempting to suspend the categories of “us” and “them” and questioning the utility of such a schism. This is seen in the passage quoted from Ruzgar, where the only category that he accepts is “citizens”. Meanwhile, another contrasting method of distancing oneself is to acknowledge and reify the stereotypical descriptions of a person belonging to these same social categories, i.e., “us” and “them”. An example is the passage quoted from Rami, where he points out “Arabs being noisy in the supermarket” and contrasts this stereotype with its constructed counterpart, i.e., “Danes who are well behaved in public spaces”, who he has tried to bring up his own children to identify with and mimic.

However, a closer look at these diverse strategies reveals that the attempt to distance oneself from negative categorization is not always clearly aligned with one or the other—either suspending the categories of “us” and “them” or, alternatively, acknowledging and

reifying them. On the contrary, at times, the two strategies seem conjoined. For instance, when Ruzgar rejected the divide between “Turks” and “Danes” in favor of a single, unified category (“good citizens”), this is still defined in relation to another group that does not belong to this alternative and positive category. Without its negative counterpart, the new category of “good citizens” cannot function. As we saw in the examples of both Ruzgar and Rami, their narrative acts of distancing thus draw upon the rampant stereotypes of “refugees/immigrants”, here, in the shape of “Mujaffas cruising around in BMWs, being a burden on the country” or “Arabs being noisy in public spaces”. Distancing oneself from such typecasting hence entails a degree of confirmation of the very same stereotypes.

In any case, this shows how, in their everyday lives, the parents in this study have to actively and intently address stereotypical conceptions about ethnic minority and Muslim groups that dominate the Danish integration debate. Such stereotypical conceptions have, moreover, turned into “ordinary iconic figures” (de Koning and Vollebergh 2019), haunting and shaping the parents’ everyday orchestration of their quotidian family lives and parenting strategies. As I will further demonstrate below—the parents’ active and intense ways of addressing these stereotypical conceptions permeate large swathes of their everyday intimate family life, not least how they raise their children. In this regard, great importance is attached to their future belonging in Danish society through formal education and “proper enculturation”.

4. Anchoring of Parents’ Intergenerational Expectations in Everyday Family Life

As unpacked above, all of the parents in this study had particular expectations regarding their children’s future education, personal development and “proper enculturation”, including, above all, that they learn to think beyond “us” and “them”. I now shift focus towards the ways in which these intergenerational expectations, tied to processes of future belonging, crystallize and materialize in everyday intimate family life, with a particular view to how exactly they connect to the parents’ day-to-day priorities in terms of time and consumption as they raise their children. Hence, the following sections on time and money serve as brief exemplifications of how, in the course of everyday life, the parents’ visions for their children’s futures translate into practice, playing a crucial structuring role in the parents’ mundane organization and orchestration of their family life.

4.1. Spending Time with the Children

Timewise, all of the parents sought to structure their everyday family lives in such a way as to ensure their children the best possible foundation for living up to the expectations of becoming educated and properly enculturated “good citizens” within Danish society. On their own initiative, the parents all—and especially those in the second-generation group—told stories of how they themselves had experienced this foundation as less than optimal during their upbringing in terms of being able to live up to their parents’ educational expectations. In particular, they pointed to one area—temporal structuring—where they considered it essential to make an active and continuous effort and to be attentive to their children’s needs. By temporal structuring, I refer to the development of routines and frameworks for the children’s daily lives (e.g., bedtimes, meals, homework). This quote from Ruzgar (male, second generation, Turkish background, bachelor’s degree) exemplifies this:

“When I was a kid, within my family you just visited each other—without calling beforehand. You just knocked on the door: ‘Hello! We’ve arrived.’ Then everyone stayed until 11 at night, *even though* it was Tuesday and we kids had to go to school. We are not like that. My Danish friends grew up only visiting family on the weekends—because on weekdays the kids needed to get their sleep before school next day. *That* is how we are. Therefore, on weekdays, we almost never have guests—or at least we don’t *invite* them”.

Alim (male, second generation, Pakistani background, graduate degree) elaborated:

“Even though my parents had high educational expectations [on my behalf], our home did not at all provide the supporting framework, structures or calm that I needed to *live up* to those expectations—or even to just concentrate on homework. There was a lot of focus on how we appeared to the *outside*, but there were no structures or frameworks at home. The whole support structure that is needed to be able to concentrate on something just did not exist. Therefore, with my own children, I consider it *very* important that there is structure, because then I can make sure that there is time for *all* the important areas that exist for one’s children”.

Across the material, the parents’ deliberate strategies of temporal structuring in relation to raising their children were founded on a desire to give their children the best possible means to develop into the “good and decent”, “properly enculturated” people and citizens that they hoped they would become in the future.

4.2. Spending Money on the Children

How, then, do the parents’ hopes and aspirations for the next generation’s future belonging in society through education and “proper enculturation” relate to their everyday consumption priorities as they raise their children? This question includes exploring the sort of relationship the parents want their children to have with money so that they can develop into “good and decent” people. In this regard, all of the parents emphasized that it is important that their children “should neither have more nor less, but the same as other children” and, thus, that they should not “stand out”. Most of the second-generation parents grew up in Denmark in the 1970s and 1980s in an environment characterized by financial restraint due to their parents’ sparse resources. For instance, many recalled how they were teased for wearing second-hand clothes when they were young, and, thus, most looked back on their upbringing as a difficult time in relation to their Danish peers. These parents do not want their own children to have the same experience, which is why they are generally very attentive as to whether their children are “missing anything”.

At the same time, however, the parents are very conscious of *how* they spend money on their children, underlining the importance of a set of core values to guide this consumption. The following views on this matter were repeated particularly often: learning “to appreciate what you have”, “to understand the value of money” and “that you cannot, unconditionally, just get anything that you point at”. Although stated by all of the parents, the above views were emphasized more often among the second-generation parents than among those belonging to the first generation. Furthermore, in the families with parents from both groups (i.e., where one parent was raised in Denmark and the other had come to Denmark as an adult through family reunification), there were a number of explicit disagreements about consumption. Here, those who were raised in Denmark (second generation) often found that their spouse (first generation) spoiled the children in terms of material goods. This led to a general situation in which the second-generation parents felt that they had to teach both their children and their spouse the norms and values concerning consumption that they themselves had grown up with in Denmark. For example, Amani (female, second generation, Palestinian background, high school diploma) explained:

“The spouses who come from abroad are not used to the values one grows up with here in Denmark. Generally speaking, we now agree more on how to raise our son and how much and what to buy for him—but at first it was very difficult. Thinking back, I probably wouldn’t have expected it to be *that* hard to raise my children with someone from outside”.

While the parents, and especially those belonging to the second generation, generally underlined the importance of their children learning to “develop a sense for the value of money” and “to appreciate what they have” if they are to become “good and decent”, enculturated people and citizens, the data material suggests that this tendency, once again, has to do with distancing oneself from the rampant stereotypes of “refugee/immigrant”

that dominate the Danish discourse on integration. This is exemplified in the following description offered by Umay (female, second generation, Turkish background, bachelor's degree), who is a teacher at a private school for ethnic minority children:

“At my school, all the parents have minority backgrounds—and the kids who get anything they want, they are the kids we have problems with. I don't want my kids to be like *that*. They are *very* difficult and spoiled children. They just get all the expensive clothes they want because their parents don't have time. They may run a pizzeria or be a greengrocer, working all the time—so they just *pay* instead. And that is just not good enough! In the minority families where the kids become problematic, the parents *only* spend money on them—they don't spend *time* with them”.

5. Discussion: Keeping the Integration Debate's “Problem Children” at Bay

Umay's description above points to a view often expressed by the interviewees: that those they term as “the problem families” among the social category of “ethnic minorities” are those where giving their children whatever they point at is prioritized instead of spending time with them. According to the parents, it is in “families like this” that children become “problem children”—who are “out late without their parents' supervision” or “cruise around like Mujaffas in BMWs, being nothing but a burden on the country”. These children are, in other words, the types of people whom the interviewees, in various ways, are trying to prevent their children becoming. Correspondingly, the parents are very attentive to whether their children are unjustly associated with “those kids”, and, thus, it is central to their understanding of successfully raising children to become “good and decent” people and citizens in society that spending money on them should never trump spending time with them.

However, the parents' general and fundamental concern that their children might be associated with children who they themselves perceive as “the problematic ones” within the social category of “ethnic minorities” in fact reaches so deeply and concretely into the everyday structuring of their quotidian family lives and intimate relationships that it becomes more than just a question of spending time and money on the children in the right way and to the correct degree. In fact, it also permeates questions regarding the children's everyday physical and bodily appearance—not just in relation to matters such as tone of voice (cf. the quote from Rami about “noisy Arabs in the supermarket”), but also to personal hygiene, as illustrated in the following excerpt from an interview with Janine (female, second generation, Palestinian background, vocational training). I should stress that the question Janine is answering was not framed in terms of Danish public or political discussions of ethnic minorities or “integration”. Far from it, Janine was simply asked (as were all interviewees) to depict in detail how she allocated time between various activities inside and outside the family home on a typical day (cf. the study's methodology and research design). In her depiction, the amount of time she mentioned spending on bathing her children stood out as remarkable, and the passage below was her response to my follow-up question as to why this was the case:

“I feel like I have to be twice as good a parent as everyone else. Because generally, my children get noticed a lot quicker than children with Danish parents. So compared to them, I feel like my children have to be *twice* as hygienic, *twice* as clean, *twice* as well behaved, *twice* as quiet, behave *twice* as nicely in class. Otherwise, they will quickly be labelled “foreigners” [*udlændinge*]. It is tough, because there is a *huge* burden on me as a parent not to let that happen—it is important to me that my children grow up and feel comfortable in society. It takes a lot of energy, effort and self-discipline every day to have to raise them twice as well in every aspect—and to be this twice-as-good parent. But I can take it—for the sake of my children. I will keep on doing it *even* better than I already am”.

As we have seen across the material, there are recurring examples of how the Danish public and political debate on integration (and the resulting scrutiny that the families in this study experience) *directly* and *in detail* affects and intertwines with these parents' most mundane organization and orchestration of intimate family life. This includes the various domestic routines regarding the day-to-day management of the money and time available for raising their children—something that Janine's response above renders particularly concrete and tangible.

When the relentless focus on “integration” in Danish welfare state policy and debate so palpably precipitates and is embedded in even the most mundane considerations and parenting strategies of the interviewees (right down to the amount of time spent on their children's personal hygiene routines), what we see, I suggest, is the Danish welfare state as a relational construct enacted in the homes and quotidian lives of these families (Thelen et al. 2014; see also Larsen 2011a, 2011b, 2018a, 2018b). Furthermore, we see how this in-depth materialization and routinization of the Danish debate on integration and its “ordinary iconic figures” (de Koning and Vollebergh 2019), in many instances, result in somewhat nervous or “fraught parenting” (Johansen 2019). Once again, this is especially apparent in the above excerpt from the interview with Janine (see also Larsen 2018a; Bregnbæk this issue; Gilliam this issue).

This constitutive, everyday relationship between—and interweaving of—state and family (Thelen et al. 2014; Thelen and Alber 2018), as reflected in the palpable embeddedness and concretization of the Danish political and public integration debate in the families' day-to-day lives, was not a topic that the study set out to explore, as discussed earlier. Hence, it was not part of any of the interview questions; indeed, as stated, the word “integration” was consciously omitted from the interview guide. Even so, this embeddedness and concretization represent a crucial empirical finding that came to the fore during the qualitative analysis of the interviews and the parents' depictions of their everyday family life routines and their thinking behind these routines. As such, although the predefined research interest was not in “integration” but in these families' everyday “time and consumption management” from an intergenerational perspective, the material reveals how this quotidian management is, in fact, permeated by a fundamental concern for how the family will appear (both in its own eyes and in those of others). This concern is framed in light of—or perhaps, rather, in the shadow of—Danish welfare state policy and public debate on integration and its many (often negatively connoted) “social typifications” (Natanson 1962; Kim and Berard 2009) and “ordinary iconic figures” (de Koning and Vollebergh 2019).

In other words, while this study was not designed to examine the everyday lives of ethnic minority and Muslim families in Denmark with the goal of assessing the “extent” or “degree” of their ostensible integration (no matter how one might define and measure that), it must be acknowledged that any question concerning ethnic minorities' everyday family lives in the context of the Danish welfare state and society seems to inevitably lead to discussions of integration. For decades, integration has been and remains the fundamental political and public agenda with regard to so-called “non-Western” (and, since 9/11, especially “Muslim”) immigration to Denmark (Rytter and Pedersen 2014). Whether ethnic minorities, in a given situation, are referred to as a “problem” or a “resource”, the concept of “integration” is always central to the Danish public and political discussion of their situation and conditions in society (e.g., Larsen 2018a; Olwig and Paerregaard 2011; Rytter 2019). As discussed earlier, this is despite the fact that it is far from always clear precisely what integration refers to in these policies and debates (Ejrnæs 2002; Jöhncke 2011).

No matter how or whether the individual parents in this study try to live up to the requirements and expectations they encounter in Danish society as Muslim and ethnic minority citizens and parents, their social categorization as something *other* than “Danish” in public and political debate is a social factor of which all participants are constantly aware. It is a factor they must deal with as they organize and structure everyday family life and its intimate relationships as part of planning for their children's future belonging

in society. Ironically, at the very same time, the parents' focus and aspirations, which I unpacked in this article, are no different than those shared by most parents within the Danish mainstream (i.e., as opposed to something other than the Danish mainstream). Just like any other parents, they all share the expectation and hope that their children will develop into "good and decent", "properly" enculturated persons and citizens who do not get mixed up in "bad company", and—just as most parents do—they do what they can within the context of everyday family life to help reach that goal.

As such, it proves both straightforward and highly complex to address the question that led the external research partner to initiate this study. What is it "deep within the everyday engine room" of these ethnic minority parents' quotidian family lives that distinguishes them from the majority population? That was what the Rockwool Foundation Research Unit wanted to know. In the conclusion below, I attempt to carve out a composite answer.

6. Conclusions: When Welfare State Debate of "Integration" Materializes as Family Life Routines

As described, I embarked on this study by posing an open-ended research question of whether—and, if so, how—being a parent with an ethnic minority and Muslim background living in Denmark has an impact on the various time-use and consumption aspects of everyday family life seen from an intergenerational perspective. Based on the analysis above, the question of "whether" there is an impact must be answered with a resounding "yes", while the question of "how" led to several, perhaps surprising, answers. Essentially, the analysis highlighted how "ethnic minority" status impacted the families in *two* ways in particular.

The first point refers to the way in which the parents manage the time they spend with their children and money spent on their children during everyday family life. Among the interviewees, this quotidian management and its prioritizations seemed to differ between the first- and second-generation parents. This was not only apparent in how the parents in the second-generation group described their own upbringing compared to how they are trying to raise their own children, but also in the mundane conflicts regarding day-to-day child rearing that were often described by couples comprising one first- and one second-generation parent. Among the second-generation parents, having grown up in the Danish welfare society seems to be an essential factor in the organization and orchestration of their everyday, intimate family life. These parents' norms and values in this regard are closer to what they themselves understand as common "Danish" structures of quotidian family life and child rearing (for a general discussion of the civilizing and formative role of Danish welfare institutions in the everyday structures of family life and child-rearing in Denmark, see, e.g., [Gilliam and Gulløv 2017](#)). In this way, the parents' move towards what they themselves articulated as "Danish" domestic routines and structures of family life signifies both a pragmatic and value-oriented adaptation to, and sense of belonging within, Danish society (see also Gilliam, this issue).

The second point refers to the many examples of how Danish welfare state policy and public debate on "integration" influences the parents' daily lives directly and in detail. As the analysis has shown, this includes the various mundane choices the parents make about time use and consumption as they raise their children. What I termed the "integration attentiveness" among the interviewees—resulting from their experiences of scrutiny by Danish society as ethnic minority and Muslim families—seems to form an integral and deeply embedded part of the parents' self-understanding and of their concrete everyday strategies regarding their children's future belonging in society. In other words, right down to the innermost, personal and mundane daily routines, such as their children's personal hygiene and physical appearance, the relentless preoccupation with "integration" in the Danish welfare society is an important part of these parents' quotidian considerations and strategies about present-day family life and child rearing in a very real and tangible sense. This includes their considerations with regard to their children's future and belonging within Danish society. As I have explained, this was not a focus or a theme in the initial

research design, but later emerged as a vital empirical finding following analysis of the study's qualitative interview data.

Overall, the everyday family lives of the Muslim and ethnic minority parents in this study point to a specific interweaving of the Danish welfare state and intimate family relations. In the data material, this plays out as a negotiation of present and future belonging between the so-called Danish "majority" society and different groups of so-called ethnic "minorities". On the one hand, the analysis points to the role played by various prevailing stereotypes in Danish society about the social category of "ethnic minorities". On the other hand, it unpacks the self-perceptions, reflections and concrete, quotidian strategies among the interviewees and their families *concerning* these very stereotypes—and how they seek to distance themselves from them. Such distancing takes place, firstly, through particular ways of prioritizing the time and money available to them when raising their children. Secondly, there is a simultaneous suspension/affirmation of the dominant "us/them" divide in society around which these stereotypes are built. As shown, this latter dual narrative act of distancing (through its combination of suspension/affirmation) gives rise to the emergence of an alternate "us/them" divide, construed and put to use amongst and across ethnic minority citizens *internally*. Such "internal distancing" adds to and complicates the prevailing gap between Danish "majorities" and ethnic (Muslim) "minorities" in public and political debate—a gap that has otherwise been broadly examined and emphasized by migration scholars in Denmark (e.g., [Borberg 2021](#); [Hervik 2011](#); [Jensen 2008](#); [Nielsen 2019](#); [Olwig and Pærregaard 2011](#); [Rytter 2010, 2019](#); [Rytter and Pedersen 2014](#)).

Above all, however, in the context of what has been labeled an "interventionist" Danish welfare state ([Stenius 1997](#)) that holds far greater power over the private family lives of its citizens than that in other European states ([Gaunt and Nyström 1996](#)), the study brings to the surface how state policy agendas and public discussions about "integration" can *directly* and *in concrete detail* influence the ordinary lives and quotidian domestic routines of ethnic minority parents. This influence encompasses the parents' strategies for ensuring the next generation's future belonging in society as they are reflected in these routines. Such profound and palpable *routinization* and *materialization* of dominant public and political integration debate in ethnic minorities' everyday, intimate family life and its mundane and tangible organization presents a complex array of themes that are rarely touched upon in the political and public debate itself. Moreover, it speaks to a gap in the research literature on migrant family lives and their intergenerational, intimate relationships—in Denmark as well as elsewhere in Europe and the Global North. If the so-called "integration" that we all talk about (but cannot necessarily precisely define) is to continue in all of its many at once surprising and recognizable shapes and forms, I argue that the personal, parental and societal ramifications of this materialization and highly concrete routinization of welfare state integration discourse in the quotidian lives and futures of ethnic minority families and their intimate relations is a topic that must take center stage.

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Notes

- ¹ The article draws on a broader qualitative study of time use and consumption in ethnic minority families in Denmark (Larsen 2013), conducted independently by the author in close dialogue with Steffen Jöhncke, former senior consultant at the Center for Applied Anthropology (AnthroAnalysis) at which this study was anchored. This is a center at the Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen, for the development and conduct of research projects initiated and funded by external partners—in the case of this study, the Rockwool Foundation Research Unit, Copenhagen, Denmark.
- ² To ensure anonymity, all participants' names are pseudonyms, just as their ages are not disclosed.
- ³ All interview excerpts have been translated from Danish.
- ⁴ In Danish multilingual slang, the name 'Mujaffa' has come to serve as an umbrella term for a specific stereotyped and negatively connoted portrayal of young male immigrants (see Quist and Normann Jørgensen 2007).

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