

Article

'This Society Has Taken Me.' Intensive Parenting and Fragile Belonging among Second-Generation Minority Danish Parents

Laura Gilliam 

Department of Educational Anthropology, Danish School of Education (DPU), Aarhus University,
2400 Copenhagen, Denmark; lagi@edu.au.dk

Abstract: Based on life-history interviews and fieldwork among second-generation minority Danish parents from different ethnic backgrounds, this article explores changes in parenting norms and practices between first-generation and second-generation minority Danish parents. The second-generation parents generally experience that, compared to their own parents and contemporary first-generation parents, they have a more 'open' and 'engaged' relationship with their children and their schools, making them feel intimately shaped by Danish society. Contesting integration and governmentality approaches, the article takes an Eliasian figurational approach, illuminating the historical changes in and current characteristics of the relationship between state, school, children, and parents that shapes the Danish 'state-school figuration'. It explores how these second-generation minorities' entanglement in the interdependencies of this figuration—first as children and later as parents—makes it valuable and sensible for them to engage in the 'intensive parenting' applauded in Danish schools. Yet, due to these interdependencies, their intensive parenting involves both distancing themselves from and acting as cultural brokers for first-generation parents, as well as using their own insider knowledge to protect their children from negative influence, stigmatisation, and discrimination.

Keywords: second-generation ethnic minority parents; intensive parenting; Danish schools; state-school figuration; figurational theory



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1. Introduction

Faiza is laughing most contagiously, and I cannot help but laugh along. I am visiting her in the two-bedroom apartment where she lives with her husband and four children. She is telling me about her first visit to Somalia since fleeing the country as a 10-year-old girl accompanied by her mother and nine siblings, recounting how strange she found her relatives and other Somalis—and how strange they found her. Among the situations that Faiza recalls finding particularly strange and dreadfully irresponsible was how her relatives would let their young children play outside on the dangerous roads. In turn, they found her 'controlling' and her children 'stupid' because she guided them in everything they did; in the eyes of her relatives, the children '[couldn't] figure anything out [for themselves]' (this is where she laughs). She explains: 'They always say to me: "Why do you have to watch your children take a bath? And when your kids need to change clothes?"', and "Why do you tell them such things?"' Then I say: 'It's a habit of ours.' You know, in Denmark we say to the children: 'Have you washed yourself, or have you brushed your teeth, honey?' It has become a habit for us. And they do not understand. They say: "Are they stupid? Why do you have to tell him to wash his fingers? Why can't he do it himself?" Faiza interrupts her description of the visit, declaring: 'It made me feel more Danish. I don't know, I think more like a Dane, because maybe this society has taken me'.

Faiza is part of a new generation of minority Danish parents, who, in contrast to their own parents, were either born in Denmark or arrived as children. In the research literature, they are called descendants, the second generation—or the 1.5 generation if

they, like Faiza, were 6–12 years old when they arrived in the new country¹. While there have been numerous studies of second-generation minority children and youth, describing the challenges they encounter at school and within the majority society, as well as their identities and transnational ties (e.g., Gilliam 2009; Khawaja 2010; Levitt and Waters 2002; Rumbaut and Portes 2001), only a few studies have focused on this generation after becoming parents themselves and raising their own children (Handulle and Vassenden 2021; Aarset 2018; Aarset et al. 2021; Larsen in this volume). Meanwhile, these parents' experiences and practices are interesting as they, in contrast to the first generation, have lived their entire life or from their early childhood in the majority society and, like Faiza, may only have very limited knowledge and experience of their parents' original country. Faiza shows that growing up in Denmark may have had an impact on the way she raises and interacts with her children and that this makes her feel moulded by Danish society in intimate ways. While much migration research has stressed transnational relations and a sense of belonging maintained across generations (e.g., Basch et al. 1994; Levitt and Waters 2002), Faiza demonstrates another aspect of the migrant experience described in the research on second-generation youth: the possibility of experiential disjuncture, of feeling substantively tied to the new country due to changes in sentiments and practices.

I heard similar stories from the other second-generation parents I interviewed during my fieldwork in two neighbourhoods in and outside Copenhagen. While stressing their cultural ties to the country their own parents migrated from, these parents also describe a feeling of belonging to Denmark, that is, of being part of the social fabric (Anthias 2008), of 'being Danish' in a substantive way or 'shaped by Danish society'. While this is evidently a fragile and contested identity related to a 'conditional belonging' (Aarset 2018) due to their immigrant and Muslim background and their non-white skin, it is an identity that they assertively claim for themselves and their children. Explaining this experience of being Danish, like Faiza, they often stress that they bring up their children in different and 'more Danish' ways than their transnational kin, their own parents, and other first-generation parents in Denmark. In doing so, they emphasise what they consider a more 'open' and 'attentive' relationship with their children, allowing their children more 'freedom', but also being more involved in their everyday life and wellbeing, including monitoring their activities and whereabouts, engaging in their schooling and relationships with other children, and participating in parents' activities in institutions and schools.

In this article, I will explore these changes in approaches to parenting between first- and second-generation minority Danish parents and how they are linked to different relations to the state, the school, and other minorities. I use the term 'second-generation minority Danish' ('second-generation' for short) to avoid the contradictory and problematic 'second-generation immigrants' while maintaining a focus on the generational shifts that affect the experiences and conditions of ethnic and racialised minoritised Danish citizens. Parenting—bringing up a new generation—is an emotionally charged (re)production of the family's relatedness and position in society, as well as a key part of cultural reproduction and state citizenship, and it thus involves multiple stakeholders. Transnational family relations, close kin, minority communities, the parents themselves, and the majority society and state all tend to be highly invested in the way the new generation is brought up. Transnational relations and minority communities often regard upbringing practices as key to preserving cultural practices, religious values, a common identity, and internal solidarity. In the majority society, minority parents' way of bringing up their children is a locus of anxieties related to the safeguarding of national culture and societal cohesion (Lewis 2005). In the Danish case, as part of the general 'integration' endeavour (Rytter 2019), state employees such as teachers, pedagogues, social workers, integration consultants, police, and health visitors attempt to teach minority Danish parents to organise their family life, care for, bring up, teach, and engage with their children and the children's day-care centres and schools in ways these groups consider to be aligned with Danish values, positive for children's wellbeing, and supporting the smooth running of these institutions (Bregnbæk et al. 2017; Jørgensen 2019).

As the parenting form my interlocutors subscribe to resembles the ‘intensive parenting’ that is widespread among majority Danish parents (Dannesboe et al. 2018), it could indicate that the generational changes that they describe can be explained by integration theory, witnessing that, by the second generation, ethnic minorities have been absorbed into the dominant Danish culture. As seen, this interpretation is common among the parents in my study. Alternatively, it might be suggested that their parenting practices are mostly performative, ‘collective enactments of citizenship’ for the sake of the majority (including the fieldworker) (Nordberg 2020). Others might argue that the generational changes demonstrate how the Danish state, over time, succeeds in governing the subjectivities of ethnic minorities through its dominant discourses of ‘good parenting’, leading them to monitor and mould their children into ‘good citizens’ (Bloch et al. 2003; Nordberg 2020). When Faiza says that ‘this society has taken me’, is this in fact an accurate description? Has the Danish state infiltrated these parents’ inner selves, making them act as the surveilling and ‘responsible’ parents that the state needs? Or how should we interpret the parents when they, like Faiza, talk about their parenting practices as ‘habits’ or as something they strongly adhere to, and thus something habituated, embodied, and valued? As something in which they invest much of their identity, energy, and emotions and which leads them to criticise their own and other parents? Instead of explanations rooted in culturalist or governmentality approaches, I will employ Norbert Elias’ figurational theory to understand how minorities are placed in webs of interdependencies between the state, the school, children, and parents, and how this affects norms and practices in ways that cannot be understood as a mere transmission of national culture or as powerful state subjectivation.

In the next section, I describe the study’s methods and participants. I then review findings from Danish and Scandinavian studies of first-generation parents and their encounter with schools and child institutions. Next, I present Elias’ figurational theory and how it can shed light on the historical processes through which the Danish welfare state and schools have entangled parents in webs of interdependencies that come to shape their parenting. Turning my attention to the second-generation parents in my study, I discuss why their specific position within these interdependencies may have a more formative effect on their parenting practices than is the case for first-generation parents. Finally, I examine the consequences of these changes and show how second-generation parents often become an ‘established’ group (Elias and Scotson 1994), with some even acting as ‘cultural brokers’ for and ‘integrators’ of first-generation parents while using their insider knowledge to battle the challenges, stigma, and discrimination encountered by their children.

2. Methodology and Participants

The article is based on a research project studying the new family figuration of so-called ‘second-generation parents’ and ‘third-generation children’ with ethnic minority backgrounds in Danish society, conducted in collaboration with Steffen Bering Kristensen. In my subproject, I conducted four months of fieldwork in two social housing estates located respectively in inner-city Copenhagen and a western suburb of Copenhagen. Here, I undertook participant observation during social activities organised for families and parenting seminars including both first- and second-generation parents; visited family homes; and conducted life-history interviews with 20 second-generation parents. A third of the participating parents were found outside the two housing estates through snowball recruitment to include parents with more privileged socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Participants comprised eleven mothers and nine fathers; sixteen of them were born in Denmark, four arriving before the age of eleven. The parents have very diverse socio-economic, educational, and employment conditions and different ethnic and migration backgrounds. Their parents thus came as guest workers from Turkey, Pakistan, Morocco, Macedonia, and Syria, or as refugees from Somalia, Lebanon, Vietnam, and Afghanistan. All but one have a Muslim background. The article includes their ethnic and religious background as it is crucial to understanding their experiences. They were born between 1975 and 1991, and their children range from 6 months to 20 years of age. It is

noteworthy that, while ostensibly part of the same social generation in Mannheim's terms (Mannheim 1952), they grew up in different time periods characterised by different political environments and different attitudes towards immigrants and Muslims within Danish society. While all living in greater Copenhagen at the time of the study, they spent their childhood in different parts of Denmark—from small rural towns to urban neighbourhoods. At school, some had been among the only or part of a large group of minority Danish pupils.

Life-history interviews were chosen not as a biographic-narrative method but rather as a tool to collaborate with the participants in exploring specific topics in the lives of their families in their social and historical context (Rosenthal 1993). While themes changed from participant to participant, common topics were their family's story of migration, their own experiences in school and further education, and their ideas and strategies related to parenting and their children's schooling. In most cases, I established a good rapport with the parents through the fieldwork and by drawing on my knowledge from my previous fieldwork among second-generation children and youth in Danish schools. The use of life-history interviews also reduced the unequal power balance between participants and myself as a white majority Danish researcher, as this method gave the participants considerable control over the interview's direction and themes and an opportunity to narrate and interpret crucial experiences in their lives (Lim 2011).

3. First-Generation Minority Parents in Scandinavian Societies

Danish and other Scandinavian studies of first-generation parents' encounters with the efforts made by child institutions, schools, and state employees to mould their parenting show a very varied picture, reflecting the heterogeneity of these parents and their approaches to parenting and the majority society. Nevertheless, as they have generally migrated or fled to ensure their family and children a better future (Larsen 2018), these parents usually try to understand and adapt to what is required of them to help their children do well, adopting or adapting some of these new practices while rejecting others. In this way, a lot of small changes take place in the lives of first-generation families (Bendixsen and Danielsen 2020; Pedersen and Rytter 2006; Larsen in this volume). Meanwhile, the studies show that first-generation parents often encounter practices and demands in child institutions and schools that they do not understand or that they find incompatible with their values, everyday lives, or perceptions of school. This includes the requirement that parents do educational exercises at home and support social relations in their child's class by arranging play dates or throwing parties (Bendixsen and Danielsen 2020; Bregnbæk et al. 2017). While especially mothers are called upon to take responsibility for their children's schooling, Anne Hovgaard Jørgensen argues that migrant Muslim fathers with inflexible and time-consuming jobs are often depicted as 'absent fathers' if it is deemed that they do not participate sufficiently in activities for parents. Moreover, while the fathers she interviewed were highly invested in their children, they often felt redundant at meetings held at their children's school and uncertain of their purpose. At the same time, these fathers frequently encountered suspicions that they oppressed their wives and beat their children (Jørgensen 2019).

A recurrent picture is that many first-generation parents experience a loss of power, no longer able to bring up their children as they deem appropriate, due to the 'freedom' granted to their children by Danish society and the threat that the authorities will remove them if they suspect the parents of 'social control' or violence (Haga 2014; Jørgensen 2019; Larsen 2018). As shown by Mette-Louise Johansen (2019), however, some families whose sons are involved in criminal activities are closely monitored by the state authorities, who ask them to control and place limits on their children's whereabouts and relationships, and thus their freedom, in ways that apparently run counter to their condemnation of 'social control' and to the parents' and the local minority community's ideas about bringing up boys. The first-generation parents thus generally experience becoming entangled with new dependencies between the state, the school, and the family, as well as a radical shift in the

power balance between themselves and their children, centred on specific ideals about ‘engagement’, ‘freedom’, and ‘control’. From a figurational perspective, these relations can be understood as deriving from widespread changes in state, school, and family figurations, that may be especially pervasive in the Danish welfare society. I will now outline figuration theory and explain how it can help in understanding current parenting norms and practices in Danish society and the relation between parenting and the state.

4. Figurations—Webs of Interdependencies

Norbert Elias suggested the term ‘figuration’ to break with the idea of ‘the individual’ and ‘the society’ as two separate entities (Elias 1998). To understand social processes and social change, he argued, we must look at how individuals are linked to each other—biologically, emotionally, socially, and economically—and are thus inextricably interdependent. He described webs of interdependence between people as ‘social figurations’, which constantly change according to individual people’s movements, the tensions between them, and the more extensive webs of interdependencies with broader figurations, such as larger society or transnational contexts. To explain the idea of social figurations, he compared them to a dance:

The image of the mobile figurations of interdependent people on a dance floor perhaps makes it easier to imagine states, cities, families, and also capitalist, communist and feudal systems as figurations (. . .). One can certainly speak of a dance in general, but no one will imagine a dance as a structure outside the individuals or as a mere abstraction. The same dance figurations can certainly be danced by different people; but without a plurality of reciprocally oriented and dependent individuals, there is no dance. (Elias 1998, p. 131)

Families are thus both figurations in themselves and part of wider webs of interdependence that constitute the societal figuration. According to Elias, power, or rather ‘power-balances’, play a specific role in these webs of interdependencies as power is not something that can be possessed, but is rather a relationship between individuals who have different power ratios depending on how reliant they are on the other (Elias 2008). Persons or groups that other persons or groups depend upon economically, socially, and/or emotionally are more powerful and influential in terms of norms and practices due to this dependence. But as the more powerful always depend on the less powerful in a variety of ways, the latter have a degree of leverage and may also influence norms and practices. It is within these webs of interdependencies and along the constantly fluctuating power balances and individual movements that both individual habitus and the broader constellation of society are shaped and change over time. Like the later work of Bourdieu, Elias thus emphasises the embodiment of the social yet highlights people’s mutual dependencies as the key factor in this process. The ‘social constraints’ that our interdependencies place upon us are gradually internalised and habituated into ‘self-constraints’. These change when relations of dependence change at the same time as social or, I would add, cultural—if by ‘cultural’ we mean dominant and habituated—practices, norms, and power relations crystallise for a time before breaking apart again. While stressing the importance of power relations, Elias thus departs from ideas about one-sided or top-down dominance or subject formation and provides tools to understand historical and fluctuating changes in behaviour, moral norms, and sentiments as dependent on social relations in both local and wide, national, and transnational networks.

According to Elias, a central aspect of social figurations is that the groups that are at any time dominant and ‘established’—colonisers, upper classes, ethnic majorities, etc.—attempt to integrate those they consider below them or ‘outsiders’ into their idea of civilised living. This means that norms and practices developed in the dominant groups (such as those related to parenting) will typically spread within social figurations. Due to their dependence on these established groups, less powerful people will adapt to avoid negative consequences, social degradation, and ‘group disgrace’ and gradually internalise these new norms and practices (Elias 1994; Elias and Scotson 1994). Meanwhile, if power balances

change, interests, norms, and practices developed in other groups may gain influence. This occurred, for example, in Western Europe during the twentieth century when power imbalances between social groups were reduced, which fostered an informalisation of conduct (Elias 1994), an idealising of social equality, and laid the ground for ideas concerning redistribution and welfare state systems. As I will argue below, changes also occurred when the spread of schools changed children's role within families and mass education became a central tool of the state.

4.1. Interdependencies between State, Schools, and Parents

The figurational theory also offers a way of understanding the state and its influence on our most intimate spheres. As seen above, Elias views the state as a social figuration made up of individuals, and thus not an entity distinct from its citizens. In his historical study of the massive shifts in sentiments and norms of conduct in Western Europe from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century, Elias depicts how states societies were formed over a long period of conflict and increasing social integration, ending up with a monopoly on violence and taxation (Elias 1994). These monopolies gave the state extreme power and influence, demanding citizens' obedience to the state while decreasing intrastate and interpersonal violence. The increased integration led to greater division of labour and longer chains of trade, which made more and more people dependent on each other and the accountability of others. This demanded greater self-control and thus greater control over one's impulses, conduct, and appearance. With no underlying teleology or master plan, but through a multitude of individual acts, external social constraints were thus transformed into self-constraints and the fear of violence into fear of social degradation, making shame at transgressing social norms central to social interaction (ibid.).

Mass education in schools demonstrates how the greater focus on social conduct, the increasing integration, the division of labour, and the new nation-state imaginaries led to a growing dependency of emergent state-based societies and their influential groups on the upbringing of new generations—and thus the education of children (Gilliam and Gulløv 2022). In his analysis of historical changes in perceptions of children in Western Europe, Elias contended that this spread of schools defunctionalised parents. This happened, as the state gradually took control of children's time, as the education that had primarily taken place in the family home moved into the state-governed space of school and as children were removed from the public sphere and ceased to be a source of labour within the family (Elias 1998). Moreover, the categorical divide between children and parents increased at the same time as the remaining emotional relationship gained more importance. This emotionalising of the child–parent relationship and the altered dependencies within the family figuration created a new attention to or perception of children's special characteristics, needs, and vulnerabilities, as well as a more equal balance of power between parents and children (ibid.).

In all societies that have seen the rise of mass education (almost every country in the world), relations within families and between parents and children have changed in radical ways. At the same time, schools have acted as a spindle, entangling parents into state figurations the world over—perhaps especially in welfare states and knowledge economies such as contemporary Danish society. With the decline in manual work and the integration of diverse social groups, parents from all these groups have become increasingly dependent on their children's educational achievements and thus on schools and teachers. The everyday lives of especially mothers, but increasingly also fathers, have been tailored to the schedules of their children's schooling and homework. Meanwhile, schools also depend on parents to secure their reputation, to ensure children's engagement in school, and to support their authority and educational project both within and outside school.

4.2. The Necessity of Intensive Parenting

As a sign of parents' entanglement in the interdependencies of the state figuration, a parenting form that has been named 'intensive parenting' has evolved cross-nationally,

especially within the middle classes (Lee et al. 2014). This ‘parenting culture’ is characterised by a strong emotional and often also financial investment in children’s wellbeing, upbringing, and schooling and an intense effort to mould and optimise children’s skills and behaviour through careful ‘concerted cultivation’ at home, extra-curricular activities outside school, and engagement in school activities (ibid; Lareau 2003). The ideal of the child-attentive parent has different sources, including the development of professions within child psychology and educational science, which can all be connected to the heightened awareness of children’s particularities (Elias 1998; Rose 1999). However, the supplementary ideal of the responsible and surveillant parent demonstrates that parents are also increasingly called upon to engage in and contribute to the school—and thus the state project of citizen-making.

In the Danish context, since the establishment of public schooling, parents have been expected to cooperate with the public school. While this cooperation was previously framed as ‘having trust in’ and ‘supporting’ the school, during the 1970s–1990s, parents were increasingly required to ‘participate’ in school–home cooperation. Since the turn of the century, however, they have also been required to take responsibility for their children’s learning and wellbeing in school (Knudsen 2010). From a figurational perspective, this reflects the school’s growing dependence on parents, which has intensified since PISA tests portrayed Danish pupils as lagging in international rankings and growing concerns about children’s wellbeing in school since the late 1990s (Akselvoll 2016; Gilliam and Gulløv 2017; Kofoed and Søndergaard 2009). Ever since, parents have increasingly been called upon to act as pseudo-teachers at home, participate in activities in and outside school (such as parents’ breakfasts, communal dinners (fællesspisning)², various festivities, and online communication), and support the social relations in class by talking with their children about their experiences in school, as well as arranging ‘dinner clubs’ and ‘play groups’ for the children (Akselvoll 2016; Dannesboe et al. 2018).

The intensity of engagement, as well as the shame felt when failing to live up to the ideal of ‘a good mother’ or ‘the engaged father’, shows how norms and practices—which many parents may find meaningful but also have to adapt to due to interdependencies in the what I will call the state-school figuration—tend to become internalised, transforming from social constraints into psychological constraints, shame, and a predisposition for certain actions. As noted, in many societies, ‘intensive parenting’ is mostly an ideal in the middle classes who are especially dependent on the educational system for the reproduction of their economic and cultural capital. Yet, the extent to which Danish parents from all social backgrounds (Dannesboe et al. 2018; Gilliam and Gulløv 2017), including, as I will argue, second-generation minority Danish parents, engage in this form of parenting demonstrates how most parents are dependent on the education of their children in a post-industrial society. Meanwhile, it also testifies to how these parenting norms and practices have spread from privileged parents and teachers to become necessary and meaningful among parents more generally due to the interdependencies within the Danish ‘state-school figuration’.

5. Changes in Interdependencies across Generations

If we look at the first-generation parents described above using a figurational approach, we see that the dominant ideals of intensive parenting, promoted by state employees such as pedagogues, teachers and social workers, are less influential, with other and stronger interdependencies pulling them in other directions. As shown, first-generation parents are often keenly aware of the stigma of the ‘neglectful immigrant parents’ and, due to their dependence on the state and its employees and their fear of the tangible sanctions the state can enforce, such as taking their child away, they have to at least partly adapt to these norms. However, as exemplified by Johansen, many first-generation parents may be torn between different moral orders (Johansen 2019). Thus their social dependence on local minority or transnational communities in other social figurations may have equal or greater weight and, with Elias’ terms, take the form of internalised ‘self-constraints’. In contrast, one could argue that some aspects of the parenting norms presented by state employees

first and foremost enforce ‘social constraints’ on first-generation parents, who primarily observe such norms due to the social consequences.

Meanwhile, like many state employees, second-generation parents tend to interpret their parents’ choices and conduct as the result of wrong priorities and a lack of knowledge. When describing the difference between themselves and their parents, most of the second-generation parents in my study emphasised that their parents were caring and loving and wanted them to do well in school but did not have the necessary knowledge or understand the importance of playing an active role in their child’s schooling and wellbeing. As Kamil puts it (Turkish background):

They didn’t have much knowledge, and they didn’t have many social tools. They were illiterates who did not know much. For them, it was all about supporting the family and collecting enough money to go to Turkey and spend their holidays. And build their house and all that (. . .). At home they raised us just like everybody else: Don’t steal, don’t cause trouble, don’t do all the stupid things. Those ‘ten commandments’. (. . .) I never sat down to do homework with my father or mother. But I do that with my children. We are much more hands-on with the children. In conversations with their teachers, talking to our children, and spending time with them. And telling and explaining [things]. And trying to guide them or navigate them through life.

Hina (Pakistani background) points to the fact that she ‘participates’ more than her own parents but also to her knowledge of ‘the system’:

I attend parents’ meetings, and so does my husband. My parents never went to our parent-teacher meetings. We take a greater part in the life of the school. My parents didn’t do that either. So, we try to create relationships with other parents and children, right? My parents didn’t do that either. We have also been able to talk to the teachers and reach out to them. You do a lot. So, I have been able to do all that better. I have better conditions than my parents did. And I somehow know the school . . . know the system better than my parents did.

This focus on being engaged in their children and their school may imply that the second-generation parents are part of a contemporary cross-national social generation of parents shaped by the ideals of ‘intensive parenting’ as described above. The difference in parenting practices between them and their parents is thus also a matter of belonging to different social generations. Yet, while the period from the 1980s to the early 2000s during which their parents were school parents was not characterised by the same high demands for engagement in school, and many majority Danish parents did not perform this intense form of parenting either, the ideals of ‘participating’ and ‘attentive’ parents were present in the norm-setting middle classes and beyond (Knudsen 2010). Moreover, the second-generation parents describe the same difference in parenting forms between themselves and first-generation parents among their peers, just as the Scandinavian studies described above demonstrate this group’s ongoing struggle with the demands of parental engagement. This makes it palpable that the second-generation parents’ experiences and positions in the state-school figuration also explain the generational differences. It should also be noted that while the second-generation parents’ engagement in intensive parenting is evidently related to a drive towards ensuring social mobility for their children, the fact that my interlocutors have very different socio-economic conditions indicates that the generational changes are not just a result of second-generation parents entering the middle class and learning their cultural forms. Rather, it supports a more widespread conviction among parents in Denmark regarding what kind of parenting helps children thrive and get ahead.

Entangled in the Webs of the State-School Figuration

As we have seen, the second-generation parents in my study feel strongly invested in forms of upbringing that they perceive as ‘Danish’. There are many differences between

these parents: they have different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, and they have different ways of engaging with the school, their local minority community, and their transnational relations. Nevertheless, compared to the first-generation parents in my fieldwork and in the studies presented above, their social, economic, and emotional ties to their transnational kin and the local minority community are generally weaker. Moreover, it seems that their position and experiences in Danish schools during childhood and later as parents have entangled them in interdependencies within the state-school figuration that, and that the dominant ideals and the constraints these interdependencies produce, shape their sentiments, perceptions, and practices of upbringing. Listening to their life stories and memories from school, it is evident that the school has been one of their main social figurations, which they have engaged with, observed, and grasped the logics of through years of daily life. They are thus deeply entangled in the webs of interdependencies of the state-school figuration and both alert to and shaped by the norms of adult-child relationships and parenting that have developed herein. While many talk fondly of school, they also often recall episodes involving discrimination and being singled out as a racialised 'Other' by teachers and pupils. As I will return to, this seems to have had a great impact on their parenting practices, as it is partly from their position as 'inside-outsiders' in the Danish state-school figuration that their habitus, and thus norms and practices, is constructed.

It seems that their embeddedness and insights, including their awareness of the lurking stigma of being a 'neglectful immigrant parent', means that they quickly tap into the contemporary ideals and become aware of what is expected of them if they are to be considered 'good parents' (Handulle and Vassenden 2021, Larsen this volume). Yet, while their performance of good parenting has strong strategic elements, as Faiza shows, it also seems habituated, internalised, and perceived as necessary and meaningful. Danish schools are confined and tight-knit social arenas of close interdependencies, where you need to learn to decode and adapt to social norms in order to navigate social hierarchies (Gilliam and Gulløv 2017). Children quickly understand the role parents play in these relations and how their own position partly depends on their parents' behaviour and engagement (Akselvoll 2016; Dannesboe et al. 2012). It is evident that many of the second-generation parents observed their own parents' failure to perform the 'good parent' in school, such as Faiza, who says: 'School camps, trips, events, parents' communal dinners; I always participate. My mother did not. She always said no'. Although they understand why, they have a strong wish, in the words of Hina above, to 'do all that better'. As Hina also states, one aspect of this is 'knowledge'. From close observations during their own schooling, the second-generation parents, in a deep embodied and intimate way, 'know' the school, 'the system', and the ideal of engaged parenthood disseminated here—a knowledge that their parents did not have.

Yet, it is tangible that they have also habituated these forms of parenting and child–adult relationships, not only as strategic performances but also as highly valued forms, due to their own experiences as children in Danish schools and the social consequences these relationships had for their lives. When reflecting on his four-year-old daughter's schooling, Abdi (Somali background) points to his own experiences at school:

My mum and dad couldn't understand me. What concerns me is if she will be really different from the other children. She will probably learn Danish and then I can feel and understand how she feels. Then I will ask her about it, and I will be there, and I promise you, I will ... I will ... I want to be there, and I will sacrifice a lot. To feel that she is happy. Because I sure as hell did not feel happy.

Explaining why it is important to her that her son brings his friends home, Faiza says:

I want my kids to have friends. I want my children to feel good. And come home from school and tell me everything that has happened. What good and bad things happened at school. And I also want him to bring home a friend and show what he has: 'Here is my home and come in and welcome', you know? But not my mother, at that time. She thought it was nonsense to bring a friend home. And she still thinks so. I'm saying: 'We are going to have a guest today. I just

need to clean up and get the food ready'. Then she says: 'Why do you need a guest?' 'Because they (her children) want one!' I say, 'They want it'. She can't say anything to me. And I say: 'You know what, Mum, here we live by my rules. Your rules are done. Then she says: Well, I don't think it's good to invite other children into your home, and blah blah blah'.

Others recount how their parents never helped them with homework, how they were 'not allowed to do anything' compared to their majority Danish schoolmates, how their parents forbid them attending parties in high school, and how other parents, in contrast to their own, picked up their children by car or offered to drive them home after a play date. Saida (Moroccan background) describes how her father yelled at her when she arrived home at 11 pm after a birthday party in 9th grade and the feelings it still raises in her:

'It's so mind-numbing when you think back; it just makes me so angry today, I get infuriated, yes. Sometimes I get so completely emotionally affected by it.'

The second-generation parents' exposure to integration efforts and dominant discourses of 'good parenting' in Danish society is likely key to these emotional recollections of their childhood. However, we also need to consider the formative effect of experiencing relations and practices and their social consequences from a child's position within the interdependencies of school. My interlocutors' experiences of their parents' shortcomings, and their wish to do things differently and be attentive to their children's needs and feelings ('Because they want one (a friend)!', as Faiza says) thus also seems to be founded in their own embodied memories of feeling regret, shame, and frustration at school and the consequences of their parents' non-compliance with the forms of parenting that were practised and idealised around them. This exemplifies how the conduct and norms of the established group often spread to and are internalised by less influential outsider groups through the shame and social constraints generated when these groups do not live up to the dominant norms. It may also indicate how the position as children enforces this habituation, as they experience the central role of parents in school and the benefits for children with 'participating' and 'attentive' parents. As such, second-generation parents have seen how friends visiting, attending birthday parties, and receiving or lacking attention and assistance from parents were central for their own and other children's social relations in school. This seems to have made their parents' parenting practices a highly sensitive issue.

6. Mis-Interpellation and Cultural Brokering

Just as the second-generation parents are aware that they are tied to their own parents in ambiguous ways, their relations with contemporary first-generation parents are also ambivalent. On the one hand, they feel connected to them due to similarities in their cultural background and shared experiences of being discriminated and excluded from the category of 'real Danes' due to their common label as 'immigrants', 'black', and 'Muslims'. Yet, on the other hand, they also emphasise their distance and superiority vis-à-vis this group. As Berkan (Turkish background) states:

'We are smarter than them. Wisdom comes from knowledge. And when you experience and see some things, then you get a lot of knowledge. And that's where I think, I'm not Turkish, I'm f***** Danish.'

As Berkan exemplifies, the second-generation parents often position themselves as what Elias terms the 'established' in relation to first-generation parents, who they treat as 'outsiders' and distance themselves from. We can thus say that the second-generation parents' knowledge, experiences, and connections in Denmark tilt the interdependency and power balance in relation to first-generation parents in their favour.

It is noteworthy that those of my second-generation interlocutors who lived in the housing estates either did not attend the parenting seminars that they were invited to, felt miscast or talked down to by the speakers, or took it upon themselves to explain things to other parents. Being mistaken for a newcomer and told about the Danish system and good parenting practices, or expected to lack the necessary Danish language proficiency,

was a recurring annoyance for many of the second-generation parents, making them feel downgraded to an outsider position and excluded from the Danish community. Explaining this, Saida says:

I feel truly Danish. But then these elements go in and disturb things, and then you have doubts. So, it's kind of: 'Okay, but then you do not really see me as one of you anyway?' So yes, I think that wall (between her and the 'Danes') actually becomes . . . it becomes high.

Saida's experience can be described with Ghassan Hage's term 'mis-interpellation' (Hage 2010), that is, being rejected from a category and community one feels one belongs to. Hage finds this especially characteristic for second-generation minorities (see also Aarset 2018). By expressing their familiarity with the practices that are presented as ideal at the seminars, the second-generation mothers may challenge this mis-interpellation. However, another aim seems to be to inform less experienced mothers of the wisdom of these practices. In mothers' groups, mothers like Faiza and Nuur thus explain to first-generation mothers why allowing their daughters to attend school camps or wear tight jeans (in combination with headscarves) supports their social relations at school. To explain this, they refer to their own experience of the harmlessness of these practices, but also the problems they faced when excluded due to their parents' fears. Another example is Anoir (Moroccan background) who describes how he often explains to first-generation parents not to focus overly on their children having an Islamic upbringing:

So I say: 'Try to explain what an Islamic upbringing is. Say you have a one-year-old child. What does it mean?' 'Well, but it's like ...' They cannot really put it into words. So, I say: 'Isn't it about empathy and love and care?' 'Yes' (they say). Well, that's the same for the rest of the population, right?

Hence, some of the second-generation parents apparently take it upon themselves to be cultural ambassadors or brokers of the upbringing practices that they describe as 'Danish', explaining how they either align with 'Somali', 'Turkish', or 'Muslim' values or should replace them. As I will return to, this does not mean that they agree with everything that takes place in children's institutions and schools, but rather that they assume a position as the 'established' trying to integrate the 'outsiders.' Yet, as Saida and others show, in contrast to the established majority, these parents know that their belonging is fragile, their inclusion conditional, and that they can always be mis-interpellated and excluded (Gilliam 2022). They are very aware that the majority may disregard their indigeness and categorise them alongside first-generation parents according to racialised body signs, and thus as one of the outsiders. The centrality of this experience is seen in Faiza's response when I ask her about the differences between first- and second-generation parents:

Faiza: I'm second-generation, I'm really involved in what's going on in my children's school. Whether there is a parents' meeting. Whether we should invite a 'play group' home—you know, where five children are invited home to cook or something. Whereas the first-generation parent doesn't care and doesn't show up for parents' meetings and events. She closes her ears. We are two different people. Because I know many parents at our school who (are Somali) and don't know much Danish. (. . .) Where I say: 'It's good if you attend the parent-teacher meeting. And it's good if you participate in your children's activities. Whenever there's something, I'll call them.' (. . .)

Laura: Do you feel responsible for that?

Faiza: I think so. Instead of gossiping about them. Because when you are a parent and you do not show up at school, and when the contact parents³ meet, they gossip. They'll slander her if she does not show up: 'She doesn't know what her child is doing'. I have experienced that. Not only about Somalis, but foreigners in general. I have experienced it. You get slandered: 'She doesn't come to the events.' It's eating me up, you know? And I say, what does it matter to them?

She may not have the opportunity to attend. Maybe she has a bad husband. You cannot judge people, why they do not show up. If you have a lot of time, if you want to come, please do not speak ... But it's always the contact parents who slander (we laugh). So that's why I want to avoid it. I want to avoid being slandered. I say to my husband: 'You know what? If there's a parents' meeting and I cannot go, you should show up (...).'

Laura: But do you also feel bad if they slander the others?

Faiza: Yes, the others too. When they slander, whether they're Somalis or Arabs, right? It's something they just cannot let go. I feel some sense of responsibility, you know?

Laura: Do you also call those who have an Arab background?

Faiza: Sure. If we are in the same class. I say: 'Sister, are you not coming?' (we laugh). Maybe some have forgotten. Some cannot speak Danish and may not have opened the parents' website (and seen the invitation). And maybe it's good that I say: 'Do you know what's going on today? There is an event. Are you coming today?' So maybe she's waking up: 'I would really like to. I didn't know.' Then they say: 'Thank you. I did not know, I have not read it, my husband has not told me.' Maybe the husband is the one who receives the information online, who can read Danish, and does not tell the wife what is going on today. (...)

Laura: Do you explain other things to them?

Faiza: Sure. For example, I explain what is happening when we have communal dinners. They shouldn't think: Argh, you just eat together and then say goodbye. I explain that the classmates play and their siblings play together. And the parents talk together and have nice coffee. And talk about how things are going in class and the well-being of the class. Are the children doing okay? Things like that. Maybe the mother thinks: It's not a good idea to just sit there and stare at each other. I say: No, that's not it. You eat together and talk together. And if you cannot speak Danish, then I'm there.

Laura: Then you can help translate?

Faiza: Yes, translate. Sometimes. I know a little Arabic, but not so much. And to the Somalis I say, I'm always here, you're always welcome.

I have included a lengthy passage from this conversation as it shows Faiza's finely tuned sense of parenting ideals and the stigma that lurks for minority Danish parents in Danish schools, as well as her urge to distance herself from the first-generation 'outsiders' and her strategy of informing them of the validity and importance of participating in practices that they might consider strange or unimportant. Faiza's aim seems to be both to integrate the 'outsiders' and to disseminate her knowledge of norms and what she regards unfair pitfalls to fellow mothers who she sympathises and partially identifies with. Yet, she also tries to secure her own position as a 'good mother', knowing that it is highly dependent on the group image of 'immigrant mothers' because the majority Danes identify her with these mothers and disregard the generational difference that she considers so central.

Similarly, some of my male interlocutors have been employed as 'role models', pedagogues, social workers, and volunteers in fathers' groups to use their knowledge as established minorities to help others and do the integrative work of the state. As a young adult, Anoir was, for example, appointed by local social workers to use his relations with minority families in his neighbourhood, to reach out to their sons, persuading them to come to the activities for job seekers that they did not show up to.

7. Avoiding Pitfalls and Carving Out Safe Insider Spaces

While what I have described so far may demonstrate how second-generation parents employ their knowledge and experience to adapt to the school and the norms of intensive parenting, it is evident that their intense efforts also encompass a fierce struggle related to their children's minority position, helping them navigate an environment characterised by pitfalls and challenges (Vigh 2011). This is especially the case for the parents of boys living in housing estates. Whereas the better educated and better-off parents among my interlocutors have generally moved away from or avoided these areas to ensure their children a safer childhood and better schooling, the less privileged parents instead vigilantly choose schools without a reputation for 'trouble' and 'bad behaviour', out of concern for the academic and social impact on their sons. Like many majority Danish parents, this typically entails schools with a smaller number of minority Danish children. Faiza tells how she has chosen 'a not very foreigner school' across town, accepting that her four children have to commute every day, in order to avoid the local school, which she and her husband find has too many troublesome children. In addition, she and many of the mothers monitor their boys' whereabouts, constantly calling them when out of the house, and keep them busy with leisure activities that will keep them off the streets, or, like Nuur (Somali background) and Naima (Pakistani background), only allowing them to play with boys with 'Danish names'. These strategies may also be seen among first-generation parents, but the second-generation parents stress that their knowledge about life on the streets and the boys' relations makes them more alert and protective than their own parents and first-generation peers.

The stigmatisation of their neighbourhoods and of minority boys and parents is probably at play when these parents try to protect their sons against the 'bad influence' of others, yet it is apparent that they are keenly aware that this stigma may stick to themselves and their sons (Gilliam 2017). While they generally prefer schools with a predominance of majority Danish pupils to ensure their children's exposure to Danish language and culture, they choose schools which also have a large group of minority children to prevent their children from feeling alien or subjected to discrimination by other children or teachers. Many of the parents had moved their children to another school if they found the pupils too disruptive or thought the teachers discriminated against their children. Some mothers interfered in their children's relations in class or raised their experiences of discrimination or racism with the teachers in question. Others instruct their children to challenge others, whether majority or minority Danish, children, or adults, who tell them they are not Danish because they are 'black' or 'Muslim' or who try to tell them whether or not they should wear a headscarf. Some of the parents have chosen private 'free schools' to protect their children from the discrimination of Muslims, as well as from the liberal attitudes to sexuality and alcohol that they find characterise Danish public schools. However, they have also avoided Muslim free schools dominated by first-generation parents, critical of their 'strict discipline' and 'rigid' approach to Islam. Instead, they have chosen schools started by or attended by children of other second-generation parents who, like themselves, want to give their children a good mix of 'Muslim' and 'Danish values', including a child-focused and 'appreciative pedagogy.' As this shows, the intensive parenting of the second-generation parents differs from that practised by many majority Danes. It is rife with worries, alertness, and a readiness to protect their children and their own reputation that is informed by their own experience as minorities in Danish society. This includes carving out a safe insider position for their children, insisting that they belong to Danish society, and avoiding the stigma and negative influence of both minority and majority communities.

8. In Conclusion

In this article, I have explored changes in parenting norms and practices across first-generation and second-generation minority Danish parents that the latter associate with being 'more Danish' and an intimate but fragile belonging to Danish society. While these generational differences can be seen as an example of integration over time or of the Danish state succeeding in governing the soul of the second generation, I have argued for a

figurational approach that stresses the formative impact of interdependencies within social figurations. Placed within the Danish state-school figuration and shaped by a particular historical process of mutual entanglements of state, school, children, and parents, both first- and second-generation parents are exposed to rhetoric, policies, and practices aimed at their integration, including the norms of intensive parenting. The first-generation parents, who encounter Danish schools as adults, are also tied into interdependencies with transnational and local minority communities and tend to experience these norms as social constraints that they have to adapt to in order to avoid social sanctions and for their children to thrive. Meanwhile, having had a position as children in the state-school figuration, the second-generation parents are far more intricately entangled in its webs of interdependencies and observe and experience its norms of 'open' and 'engaged' child-adult relationships and parenting—and, not least, the benefits and the social consequences of transgressing these norms. As such, the social constraints and affordances of these interdependencies tend to become self-constraints. Yet, intensive parenting has also become a meaningful set of values and practices that helps them to navigate their environment and support their children in ways their own parents could not. Upon re-entering the state-school figuration as parents, engaging in their children's school and well-being and surveilling their relationships are thus both external norms and a deeply sensible and internalised practice that they and others understand as a 'Danish' approach to parenting.

We may call this integration, but while the term aptly describes minorities' entanglement in webs of interdependencies, it implies a harmonious cultural adaptation and does not capture the power, ambivalence, and fragile positions at play. However, describing it as a subjectivation by the Danish state grants the state a too omnipotent role. The webs of interdependencies link all citizens intrinsically to the state and make them subject to powerful state interference. Furthermore, institutions like the school tie minorities to the state in ways that becomes formative. Yet, this does not mean that second-generation parents are governed by the state and merely become compliant citizens. Other forces are at play in the interdependencies that may pull the parents towards other goals and make them challenge the subjectivating forces of the state. They are thus shaped by the dominant norms of intensive parenting and may align themselves with the state's integration efforts when bringing up their children and instructing other minority parents. But, at the same time, they use their first-hand experience to protect their children against and challenge the stigmatisation, discrimination, and exclusion from state employees and insist on their intimate, albeit fragile, belonging to Danish society.

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Notes

- ¹ Based on a large-scale longitudinal study of children of immigrants in the US, Ruben [Rumbaut \(2004\)](#) advocates for a finer categorisation of generational cohorts into 1.0 (foreign-born, arriving as adults), 1.25 (arrived aged 13–17), 1.5 (6–12), 1.75 (0–5) and 2.0 (US-born) generations, reflecting differences in language acquisition and educational achievement between these groups.
- ² At communal dinners all families in the class bring a meal and eat together.
- ³ In Danish school classes, a few parents are typically appointed 'contact parents' and initiate activities for parents and children to support the well-being of the class.

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