Parenting in exile: Refugee parents' multivoiced narratives

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Abstract

This article investigates how refugees' narratives of parental practices can be explored and conceptualised. Existing research approaches are critically discussed. Interviews are carried out with parents in 16 refugee families, resettled in Norway, and the narratives of their parental practices are analysed by applying the Bakhtinian concept of multivoicedness. The analytical results are presented by means of one couple's narrative. Several contradictory mother- and father-voices are identified. Multivoicedness proves to be a fruitful concept for understanding the complexities of refugees' parental practices and their meaning-making in a new host country. Our analyses may contribute to less discriminatory social work practices.

Keywords: refugee parents, multivoicedness, meaning-making, parental practices, analytical approach

Introduction

Numerous refugee families, including both former asylum seekers and quota refugees, have resettled in contemporary European societies. The number of asylum seekers seeking refuge

in Europe increased heavily in 2015. Political controversies, closed borders, and the accumulation of refugees in neighbouring countries of war followed. Refugee-related topics such as receiving systems, returns, and border control have remained dominating European public debates (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Tan, 2017; Farkas et al., 2018). However, the refugee situation also has important long-term aspects. Refugee families have to establish an everyday life in their host countries. To assist refugee families and support their integration, welfare state professionals such as social workers need to explore refugee parents' own perspectives. The current situation actualises the need for both new perspectives and new knowledge about parental practices after resettlement over time, not only as newcomers (Drolet et al., 2017; Gallagher Vongkhamphra et al., 2011; Cox and Geisen, 2014).

In addition, discourses on parenting in exile tend to fall into dichotomised categories such as 'here and there' or 'traditional and modern', as Brown (2005), DeSantis (2001) and Hermans and Kempen (1998) point out. Parental practices in refugee families are often seen as either traditional, modern, or somewhere on the way to being modern. As important as empirical findings on parenting in exile are, so too are researchers' analytical approaches. The chosen categorisation and the concepts applied to the empirical material are decisive for the knowledge offered to practitioners. This article transcends such dichotomies and elucidates aspects of family life in exile other than trauma and vulnerability. An analytical approach to refugee parents' everyday practices after resettlement is demonstrated, aiming to cover more complexity.

The article investigates the following research question:

2

How can the narratives of parental practices told by parents in exile be explored and conceptualised?

The paper builds upon a wider study that explores refugee parents' narratives and reflections about their parental practices. The data consist of interviews with refugee parents from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia who have been living in Norway for about ten years. The term *exile* describes the situation of persons in resettlement who came to the host country as quota refugees or asylum seekers or on the grounds of family reunification. When we speak of refugee parents, we are referring to all of these categories. Further, we define exile as a particular case of *migration,* namely involuntary, with both general and particular challenges due to the involuntary migration. The analytical results are presented mainly by examining a detailed case.

Dominating analytical approaches in research on parenting in exile

In this section, we present examples of dominating approaches in qualitative research studies on parenting in exile. We see a lop-sided focus on trauma and vulnerability when families are categorised as refugees, and this applies to research studies conducted within a variety of theoretical frameworks (Pham et al., 2016; Tingvold, 2012; Van Ee et al., 2016; Williams, 2011). When categorised as immigrants, we see a lop-sidedness of dichotomised cultural differences. This tendency is also visible in research on parents who originally immigrated as refugees, but who are categorised according to their country of origin. This is the case, for instance, in studies that have examined parenting in Somali families in different host countries, among them Norway (Engebrigtsen and Fuglerud, 2009), Finland (Degni et

al., 2006), Sweden (Betancourt et al., 2015), and the United States (Bowie et al., 2017; Nilsson et al., 2012).

When parents are categorised as refugees, approaches that illuminate trauma and other mental consequences of war and flight on parenting, are sometimes taken for granted, (e.g. Williams 2010), or they emphasise trauma and other mental disorders (Stewart et al. 2015). The effects of trauma on parenting are certainly important. However, as both Cox and Geisen (2014) and Westoby and Ingamells (2009) argue, focusing on trauma and vulnerability may lead to ignoring refugees' agency, among other consequences.

When researchers categorise parents as migrants and explore the influence of migration on parenting, most refer to challenges in the host country such as unemployment, housing, and other problems linked to poverty (Stewart et al., 2015; Williams, 2011), in addition to language barriers and the absence of help from extended family that used to be available in the country of origin (Deng and Marlowe, 2013). However, challenges linked to *cultural* differences in parenting between home and host societies are among the most frequently emphasised topics. Kim (2014) concludes her literature review on immigrant parenting by affirming that 'culture plays a major overarching role' (62). Cultural differences in parenting between home and host societies are also Renzaho et al.'s (2011a, 2011b) perspective. The emphasis on culture, especially when a static concept of culture is applied, tends to result in dichotomised categories, and may lead to ignoring other challenges resulting from voluntary and involuntary migration, as pointed out by Julkunen and Rauhala (2013) and Keskinen (2011).

Some studies (e.g. Busch Nsonwu et al. 2013; Morantz et al. 2013), highlight a wide range of challenges that parents in exile face, and also emphasise the parents' agency. Several researchers criticise the tendency in research to use dichotomised categories. Ochocka and Janzen (2008) construct a framework for understanding immigrant parenting using a dynamic concept of culture. Their conclusion, however, highlights differences in parental orientation and style between home and host societies and the cultural transition of immigrant parenting after resettlement.

De Haan (2011), explores parenting after migration and looks at 'the complexities of the transformations that take place when multiple cultural traditions come into contact with each other' (376). While she takes culture into account, the focus instead is on the agentic ways in which parents make use of multiple impulses in parenting. She shows how parents develop unique hybrid parental practices.

There is thus a general lack of research on parenting in exile that adopts a broader scope than trauma and dichotomised cultural differences. Our analyses aim to supplement de Haan's (2011) notions of multiple impulses, unique hybrid practices, and agentic ways by including the concept of multivoicedness, and thereby offer valuable insights for practitioners into refugees' parental practices.

Theoretical framework

This study builds on a socio-cultural framework (Bruner, 1990; Wertsch, 1991; Rogoff, 2003) that explores parenting as socially, culturally, and historically situated practices. We take as our premise that parents' goals for their children's development – 'what is regarded as

mature or desirable – vary considerably according to the cultural traditions and circumstances of different communities' (Rogoff, 2003: 18). Thus, in this perspective, the idea of a universal concept of 'good parenting' is rejected. On the contrary, parental practices are seen as directed towards children's anticipated future, which is culturally situated. Rogoff (2003) introduces the concept of *guided participation.* Parents serve as guides to the sociocultural community their children have to master in order to live a satisfactory life and to the sociocultural trajectories available for children in a specific community (Hundeide, 2005: 250).

The arena for parenting in exile is culturally complex. Geographically, the participants in this study can be categorised as non-Western refugees who moved to 'the West'. This taps into Hermans and Kempen's (1998) notion of a tradition of cultural dichotomies between the West and 'the rest'. One of the distinctions in this tradition is individualism versus collectivism. Several scholars (e.g. Kagitcibasi 2005; Keller et al. 2008; Tamis-Lemonda et al. 2008) have attempted to transcend that dichotomy in different ways. Hermans et al. (1998) seek to both transcend dichotomies and contribute to a more dynamic view of culture as 'moving and mixing' by conceptualising the global landscape as consisting of *contact zones*[1] (1117). Like Bhatia and Ram (2001), they draw on Bakhtin's concepts of *multivoicedness, hybridity,* and *dialogue* to provide a more sensitive analysis of a complex situation. We share the objective of transcending established dichotomies in our analysis. Notions that can include multiple voices are relevant for our analytical approach; therefore, we will use the notion of *contact zones* to describe the arenas for today's parenting in exile. Multiple

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[1] *Contact zone* is also a Bakhtinian concept (Bakhtin, 1981: 345)

complex interwoven elements influence both parental practices, the meaning-making of those practices, and the way in which they are reflected upon. Such complexity implies for our interviewees drawing on both global and diverse local discourses on parenting. This happens partly through digital technology. The parenting practices narrated by the participants and current solutions to parental challenges consist of elements from multiple sources. These practices and solutions can thus be called 'in between', 'multicultural', 'hyphenated', or 'hybrid' (de Haan, 2011). Our aim is to analyse the complexity in our participants' narratives. In this sense, our approach is compatible with Bakhtin's (1981) description of the multiplicity to which a certain word or utterance refers:

> The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgements and accents, weaves it in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse (....) The living Utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. (276)

This quote from Bakhtin applies to all utterances. What Bakhtin describes here is a way of viewing contradictions in talk simply as 'features of talk'. Our word is 'half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent' (Bakhtin, 1981: 293). To describe this active process of drawing on multiple impulses in talk, Bakhtin often uses several versions of the metaphor 'voices'. In the following, we will adopt Bakhtin's terms 'voices', 'multivoiced', and 'multivoicedness' and use them as analytical tools for exploring refugee parents' narratives. Even though his theory is relevant for all contexts, some researchers, such as Brown (2005) and DeSantis (2001), have pointed

out that these notions are particularly useful for analysing the experience of exile while avoiding the tendency to fall into dichotomised analyses.

In addition, our theoretical approach is inspired by Aveling, Gillespie and Cornish's (2015) methodological article 'A qualitative method for analysing multivoicedness'. Our use of their method is explained further in the next section. The concept of multivoicedness helps to make visible the complexity and variety in the reflections of the parents in our study; in so doing, it transcends dichotomised concepts.

Methodological approach

The participants in our study are mothers (13) and fathers (12) of 16 families. We wanted participants who had several years of experience as parents in Norway, hence we recruited parents who had arrived in Norway between six and twelve years before the first interview was conducted. Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia were chosen as countries of origin, because people of these nationalities accounted for the largest group of refugees throughout this resettlement period (2001–2007) according to Norwegian statistics (SSB, 2012). The participants' educational background reflects the enormous variety generally found among parents from these three countries who have sought refuge in Scandinavia (Behtoui and Olsson, 2014). They represent the full range of educational backgrounds, from illiterates to university graduates.

All interviews were conducted in Norwegian without a translator, and carried out by the first author. When possible, the mother and the father were interviewed together, usually in their family home. Interviewing the parents together allowed the possibility of eliciting

additional information beyond the individual's talk, such as how the couple communicated and interacted (Bjørnholt and Farstad, 2014). We gained some of the same benefits as achieved by participant observation. Most of the participants were interviewed twice, and all during 2013 and in early 2014. All participants gave written consent, and the project was approved by the NSD.[2] The topic of all the interviews was participants' experiences of parenthood in exile. The first interviews aimed at collecting narratives about the participants' time as parents in Norway in retrospect, from their arrival in the new country until that day (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009). Each interview was partly conducted as a life mode interview (Haavind, 2014). Within the framework of a narrative about the previous day's activities, parental practices were identified and the related meaning explored. According to this study's theoretical framework, both the interviewer and the interviewees are seen as actors in the process of meaning production during the interview (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004; Tanggaard, 2009). Thus, we have to bear in mind that the interviewer is positioned as a representative of the majority, which in various ways may affect the parents' talk. Reasons for and reflections on the parental practices were often given spontaneously, frequently directed towards developmental goals for the children. In addition, the interviewer explored in depth the parents' spontaneous meaning-making remarks, as the examples below will show.

The interviews were recorded and later transcribed and analysed as text. The first round of analysis identified narrative sequences describing parental practices directed at developmental goals for children in the narratives of most of the participating parents.

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[2] The Norwegian Data Protection Official for Research

These sequences were further analysed based on the reflections in the above-mentioned article by Aveling et al. (2015). Their aim is to develop a tool for analysing multivoiced *self* in qualitative data. Identifying voices of I-positions is emphasised in the article. Our main interest is in parenting; thus, we have specified I-positions for the mother-voices and the father-voices. Aveling et al. (675) developed several Bakhtinian concepts into analytical tools. In our analysis, we selected those most relevant for our purpose and asked the following analytical questions:

Which different voices are heard in the utterance?

Which dialogic threads from earlier conversations are woven in and out (Bakhtin 1981: 276) of this utterance?

How could the utterance's addressivity be understood?

What relation is there between the voices? Do they support or contradict each other?

The analysed voices were labelled as close to the empirical material as possible. Aveling et al. developed this tool for analysing individual interviews, and we interviewed most couples together. However, talk produced in a variety of ways may be analysed as multivoiced. Several voices are heard in both individual and joint talk. In this way, we developed the method further by adjusting it to analyses of parents' voices, and to joint interviews with parents. This analytical approach was not decided upon in advance, but was gradually developed in dialogue with the empirical material. The present work offers analytical tools for analysing multiple voices in parents' talk.

Results: Multiple voices on parental practices

We have already noted the socio-cultural premise that parental practices include guiding children to manage the life trajectories that are available in the society in which they live. Parental support is directed towards the parents' preferred developmental goals (Rogoff, 2003; Ulvik, 2012). In most accounts, the parents make their developmental goals explicit, or they could be explicated through the analyses. The parents are aware that their children will have to manage their lives as minority children, youths, and adults. In this respect, they rely on the means available to them to guide their children, without the help of most of their relatives. The analysed interview sequences contain a variety of issues. They are all analysed as multivoiced talk. Contradictory voices are prevalent, but this varies depending on the issue. To show the multivoicedness present in these narratives, it is necessary to look at longer sequences of text. We have thus chosen to examine one case at some length. Many different cases would be suitable for this purpose, but we selected this particular case because it appropriately highlights the analytical approach explained above.

The supportive and contradictive voices of Naima and Ali

The parents Naima and Ali managed to get some education in their country of origin and in exile in a neighbouring country[3]. Naima is a trained teacher, and worked as a teacher in these two countries. Ali began a university degree in child psychology, but this was interrupted because of the war. Compared with the entire sample, Naima and Ali are among the higher educated. However, from the perspective of multivoicedness, their case is not extraordinary.

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[3] Because they were moving back and forth between these two countries during war, we will use the term 'region of origin' instead of 'land of origin'.

The couple has four children. The two elder girls are seven and eight years old and came to Norway with their mother some years after their father's arrival. The two younger children were born in Norway, both during Naima's first two years in the country. Because Naima had to learn Norwegian during this period, the couple chose an unusual way to share parental leave. Naima started school again about a month after both births, and Ali, who got parental benefit, stayed at home the next several months caring for the babies. When the interviewer asked them what their extended family back home would think if they came to visit, Naima answered, 'They would become a bit angry. They would say, "There's something wrong here. The man is doing all the woman's job, and the woman is doing the man's job."' This way of sharing parental benefit is a rather radical arrangement in the Norwegian context, even though all employed fathers in Norway legally have the right to stay at home on paid leave to care for their infant children if the mother is working or following an introduction programme for new immigrants (NAV 2018). Naima and Ali's arrangement is an example of making use of the opportunities offered in a new society, despite these opportunities being contrary to their family traditions.

The first interview took place on a sunny day in June. In both interviews, Naima was dressed in a long, traditional dress and a hijab. The interviewer was still present when the two older girls came home from school. They were dressed like any other Norwegian schoolgirl on such a day: in T-shirts, leggings below the knee, and bareheaded. Earlier, during the interview with their parents, majority and minority values and practices were discussed and the girls' clothing was mentioned:

1. Interviewer: Now they [the girls] are in year one and two. Have they learned anything at school by now that you don't agree with? Things you do not want them to learn?

2. Ali: (laughing) Nothing.

3. I: No.

4. A: They are girls… They are Norwegian girls and we are not allowed to control them. Its Norwegian culture, and we know that, and we need [to respect] that. And … last week, my daughter asked me, she wanted … oh, what is it called…?

5. Naima: Shorts.

6. A: Yes, Shorts.

7. A: She asked me to get some shorts. 'No, no way, my girl, you are growing up now, no way. Now you are only seven, but in two years, you can't… you must manage everything. So – you must understand that you are a Muslim girl.' (…)

8. I: When you explain such things to her, does she understand?

9. A: Yes, she understands. But she asked: Why? (…)

10. I: She asked why.

11. A: She asked why, yes. And I said 'No, you are [nationality], and she is Norwegian. [referring to her girlfriend]'

12. I: Yes.

13. A: 'It's two different cultures, you must understand that. Other things are ok. You can go to school; you can do everything.' Sometimes I go on YouTube and show them some girls, you know, who are Norwegian-Pakistani or Norwegian-Somali. They talk Norwegian, they participate, and they wear modest clothes. I tell them: 'You must become like this girl. Yes, we live here, but we have a different culture, and we need to keep that boundary. You must keep that boundary. You cannot cross it. Actually, it must be like that. But you live in freedom, right.'

Different father-voices can be identified in this excerpt of Ali's talk: the father who positions his daughters as Norwegian, the father who positions his daughter as other than Norwegian,

the father who emphasises his daughters' freedom, the father who claims that boundaries must be kept, and the father who displays preferred role models for his daughters.

The voice proclaiming the girls' Norwegianness appears first (4). This voice asserts that 'they are Norwegian girls'. Then, Ali denies this Norwegianness by positioning his daughter as *other* than her girlfriend, and the girlfriend is positioned as Norwegian (11). These two voices proclaim Norwegianness and not-Norwegianness, and are contradictory, in the way Bakhtin (1981) regards as a feature of all talk. Staying with Bakhtin's metaphor (276), a thread of seeing his daughters as Norwegian weaves into his talk together with the thread of seeing his daughters as belonging to their parents' nationality.

The next father-voice identified emphasises his daughters' freedom, claiming that 'we are not allowed to control them' (4), and we also hear this voice on two other occasions. Ali mentions 'Norwegian culture', which he claims they need to respect, but we do not know whether being 'not allowed to' refers to culture or law.

Then Ali brings up a specific incident the previous week. The incident in question is the daughter's request to get some shorts. The answer is 'No, no way, my girl, you are growing up now, no way (7).' Here, the voice of 'boundaries must be kept' is identified, and it appears again later: 'You must keep that boundary. You cannot cross it. Actually, it must be like that' (end of 13). The expressed reason for this answer is that she is a Muslim girl (7) of a certain nationality (11); both religion and nationality are made relevant, whereas 'she' – which presumably refers to the girlfriend who has shorts – is Norwegian (11). The freedom-voice includes his daughters as 'Norwegian girls', while the 'boundaries must be kept'-voice

categorises them as non-Norwegian Muslims and draws a line between them and the other

girl, whom he categorises as Norwegian. Practically, the issue boils down to the difference

between leggings below the knee and 2013-style girls' shorts. These two father-voices

express different views that can be interpreted as contradictory. The 'boundaries must be

kept'-voice produces a 'no way'-answer to the request for shorts. This answer identifies his

daughter as a Muslim girl already at age seven, and thus subject to different boundaries than

her girlfriend who belongs to the majority culture (7). Age is made relevant, and the father's

reflections are future oriented. The 'freedom'-voice appears again in Ali's utterance about

the girls' future: 'But you live in freedom, right' (end of 13). We identified the freedom-voice

also in two other expressions: 'We are not allowed to control them' (4) and 'you can do

everything' (early in 13). We see the freedom-voice as a thread weaving in shaping an

interrelationship with other voices in the father's talk. The voice may represent several

meanings. At one level, we may assume that it is addressed (Bakhtin et al., 1986) to the

interviewer representing the Norwegian majority, to avoid a stereotyped interpretation of

Ali's talk. The term 'freedom' might also refer to the freedom of Norwegian society, which

still requires parents to set boundaries. However, the word 'but' indicates that the following

remark is contrary to the previous one, as if Ali is conscious that another voice is introduced.

The complex interrelationship of words and values in these voices of Ali's talk culminates in

his utterance about preferred role models for his daughters (13): 'Sometimes I go on

YouTube and show them some girls, you know, who are Norwegian-Pakistani or Norwegian-

Somali. They talk Norwegian, they participate, and they wear modest clothes. I tell them:

"You must become like this girl"' (13). This father-voice encourages his daughters to

participate. We do not know which kind of participation, but it is likely to be participation in

public discourse. The two biggest groups of non-Western immigrants and their descendants in Norway are currently from Pakistan and Somalia. Some teenage girls and young women from these and other Muslim countries actively participate in public discourses, often with critical remarks on their cultural origin. Ali categorises them with hyphenated identities (Norwegian-Pakistani and Norwegian-Somali), and stresses three of their features: 'They talk Norwegian, they participate, and they wear modest clothes.' Images of a hybrid identity seem to serve as an ideal example for his daughters' future identity. The narrative shows how the parents use everyday practices to make their children reach certain developmental goals. The request for shorts is used as a starting point for a conversation about the preferred future trajectory they want for their daughters.

Later in the interview, Ali and Naima talk about the consequences of children being beaten by their parents. Personally, they envisage other practices of raising children.

14. A: No, use of force to beat children, and such, it doesn't work.

15. N: It will only be stressful for the children.

16. A: It will be stressful for the children. (...)

17. N: Psychologically… it will be like… they will get a bit traumatised. (...)

18. A: Not now, but later, it will have great consequences for the child. You have to use other ways, right. The other way is 'no candy, no fun activities on Saturday'. But no beating and stuff.

19. N: You will have to explain it to them.

The interviewer asks further about how they have learned that violence may have these consequences on children, and Ali responds that it is from his education in child psychology from his region of origin.

Both Naima and Ali speak with voices asserting that violence in children's upbringing is harmful. They take turns making good arguments, and their voices support each other: beating doesn't work (14), beating creates stress (15, 16), beating may be traumatising (17), and the consequences of this may not manifest themselves before later in life (18). The source of the voice asserting that 'violence is harmful' is Ali's education in his region of origin, and so this is perceived as knowledge acquired before they came to Europe. Voices encouraging 'alternatives to violence' are also evident from both of them. Alternatives to beating comprise sanctions where benefits are withheld (18), and the reason for this is explained to the children (19). The voices emphasizing the 'Alternative to violence' are supportive of those arguing that 'Violence is harmful'. These voices appear to be based on experience. No uncertainty is detected when Naima and Ali talk about how alternatives to violence are to be practised, and these alternatives arise spontaneously from both of them. Ali goes on to explain how a violent upbringing is harmful:

20. A: But if they had this problem with their parents when they were young, (...) Because I have seen many, many of my mates, now they have problems. (...) So I don't want my children to experience that. (...) They may become criminals, right, may kill people, become, like, addicted to drugs. There are many consequences.

Ali's education contributes to this father-voice, which acknowledges the consequences that childhood experiences may have for mental health as adults. The voice also implies that good mental health is a future goal (20).

The interviewer then asks Naima about her experience with violence towards children, as a teacher in her region of origin:

21. I: Was it allowed to beat children when you were a teacher?

22. N: Yes. Usually, if those children did something wrong, right, and you talked to them. You couldn't beat them at first. First, you have to sit with the child and explain to the child: 'This was wrong, and that was wrong'.

Naima then outlines the procedures that teachers comply with: they should have a meeting with the parents, where they assessed whether there were health or poverty issues, or rather a case of bad parenting. If there were no such problems, and the child continued the poor behaviour, they talked again to the child but if they still would not obey:

23. N: Then eventually you had to beat them. Because if they feel pain, they will stop doing it. Because they know that if they do something wrong again, the teacher will beat them again, and that will be painful. (...) So, that's why we did it.

One voice asserting that 'violence works' weaves (Bakhtin 1981, p. 276) into Naima's talk here. This voice does not distance itself from the teacher's practice of beating children. Voices from conversations within the community of practice among teachers in her region of origin, argue that violence works, and the child will remember the pain, which prevents the child from repeating unwanted actions. This voice contradicts Naima's voice - evident just shortly before - about the futility of using force. It will be 'stressful for the children' (15) and there will be psychological consequences, such as trauma (17). The voices proclaiming that 'Violence works' and that 'Violence is harmful' are contradictive to each other, but are evident in these two consecutive utterances.

Contrary to public discourses on refugee parenting propounding that reactionary practices originate from 'there' and accepted practices from 'here' (Hollekim et al., 2016; Keskinen, 2011), both these voices are positioned as originating from the parents' region of origin. Ali's education from his region of origin is positioned as the source of his 'violence is harmful' voice, and Naima's voice echoes this idea just as convincingly. The 'violence works' voice

appears through Naima's story about her practice as a teacher in her region of origin. The 'violence works' voice may also be perceived as a way to explain the implicit rationale for that local practice – and not necessarily agree with it - and this interpretation would render those voices less contradictory.

Discussion

Our research question concerned how the narratives of parental practices told by parents in exile can be explored and conceptualised. To address this issue, we applied multivoicedness as an analytical tool to explore the narratives, and contact zones as a concept for the context of parenting. How can these tools contribute to improving social workers' collaboration with parents in exile? Applying the Bakhtinian concept of multivoicedness, we analysed the variety of voices in Naima and Ali's talk during two long interviews. The sources of the voices are both past and present impulses from region of origin, as well as present impulses from the host environment. The local sources involve, for example, peers in the exile community and persons from exile community found on YouTube, in addition to their children and their understanding of the demands of the host society concerning how they were allowed to behave as parents. The parents' different and seemingly contradictory remarks can be identified as 'brushing up against thousands of living dialogic threads' (Bakhtin, 1981: 276), and as 'half someone else's' (293). A unique hybrid set of parental practices and voices is displayed in Naima and Ali's narratives, with partly contradictory elements. The parents exhibit active, agentic ways of trying out hybrid parental practices in a culturally complex contact zone where multiple values are present. They do not copy practices in the host country or just adapt to the new environment. The hard work done by parents in exile to come to terms with the multiple impulses in their culturally complex contact zones can easily

be underestimated. The concept of multivoicedness helps to make these parental efforts visible.

The analysis of the entire material shows that the parents in this sample draw on multiple discourses and make use of multiple impulses. We can identify different father- and mother-voices that sometimes support each other and sometimes are contradictory (Aveling et al., 2015). Their talk can be seen as a case of 'both and' rather than 'either or'. According to Bakhtin (1981), this characteristic can be found in various kinds of talk. However, this analytical approach is especially relevant for one of our present goals, namely to transcend the dichotomies often inherent in descriptions of parenting in exile, and, in so doing, to avoid possible discriminatory and oppressive ways of describing cultural practices. Understanding the context as culturally complex contact zones (Hermans and Kempen, 1998) and using multivoicedness as an analytical tool (Bakhtin, 1981; Aveling et al., 2015) have contributed to this goal at the analytical level.

Concluding remarks

This article has shed light on parenting in exile by looking at parents' multivoiced narration of parental practices, in the context of culturally complex contact zones. Our work makes a methodological contribution by offering a conceptual discussion to this field of social work.

As applied in the present analysis, multivoicedness may serve as a tool for social workers in understanding and collaborating with refugee parents. In social work contexts as well as in public discourse, assumptions about reactionary parenting practices among refugees might arise from listening to only one of the parents' voices or to parts of their talk. If listening

solely to a single voice, that voice representing traditional parenting will often be the only

one heard by the majority. As an analytical tool, multivoicedness highlights parents' single

assertions as *one of several voices* embedded in multivoiced talk. Such analyses may help

overcome prejudice towards parental practices. Parenting is one of the main topics in social

workers' communication with parents in exile. Our analysis can contribute to making social

workers aware of the nature of multivoicedness in refugee parents' talk, and thereby

facilitate broader and more nuanced communication. This awareness may foster more

exploratory practices, in which social workers tune in and listen to parents' own ways of

accounting for and giving meaning to their parental practices. The perspectives of exiled

parents are important knowledge for social workers and other welfare state professionals,

and should be included in social work education. Our analyses may contribute to less

discriminatory social work practices.

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