When to whisper?
Moving refugee psychotraumatology beyond the clinic in welfare state Denmark

PhD Dissertation 2016 - Trine Brinkmann
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Introduction

Minnah and I are sitting in the family’s desert-colored living room, each in our soft sofa. I am about to conduct a life-story interview with her. Usually, when I spend time with the family, her daughter Badra is there too, but at this time of day she and her younger brother Musa are at school. Minnah is giving me the latest news about her husband, Habib, who has long been on sick leave, struggling with severe back pains and stomach problems. Lately he has also seemed more sad and withdrawn from his surroundings. As we begin the interview, Minnah takes me back in time, to when she and Habib fled the civil war in Lebanon in 1988 with their four children, to when they were waiting for asylum in different centers in Denmark, to their life as it has unfolded since and to the three children and several grandchildren who have been born along the way. At one point she returns to Habib’s current condition:

*Minnah: They say it’s PTSD. That it appears suddenly. You have a nice life and a job, but if something happens all of a sudden, it can appear again, and sometimes you become very, very sad.*

*Trine: Has he been diagnosed with anything like this before?*

*Minnah: No, this is the first time they have diagnosed him [with PTSD]. He used to get some tablets to relax. Now he takes some special tablets for depression too.*

*Trine: That’s a bit strange… This touches upon what Badra was told about at school…*

*Minnah: Does it?*

*Trine: She learned about it when they had that project about children and refugees. Do you remember?*

*Minnah: Yes… Did she write anything about it?
Trine: No, she didn’t write anything, but the teachers told the children about PTSD, about some refugees who may experience difficult times and about the diagnosis... She didn’t talk to you about this?

Minnah: No, she didn’t.

Trine: Well, they talked about it at school...

Minnah: I haven’t mentioned what is wrong with Dad, so maybe... well I tell them that he is not feeling good right now, but that it will be better.

***

In recent years the descendants of the men and women who have come to Denmark as refugees have emerged as a new mental health concern. Among professionals it is estimated that between thirty and fifty percent of refugees living in Denmark are traumatized (LG-Insight 2013). In addition to various forms of treatment for those who are living with trauma, a range of initiatives and interventions concerned with creating both professional and lay awareness about children growing up with parents suffering from trauma are being launched. This dissertation probes into one such intervention.

The above conversation with Minnah took place towards the end of my fieldwork on a February afternoon in 2012. For the preceding two years, at differing levels of intensity, I had conducted fieldwork on a set of psychosocial activities that were designed to introduce knowledge related to trauma, PTSD and the figure of the refugee into Danish public schools. The overall intention was to create a better understanding of what it means to be a refugee and what kinds of difficulties are implied by living in exile among classmates, teachers and other professional groups in the schools, as well as within and among refugee families themselves. These psychosocial practices were formulated and put together within a network of organizations and treatment centres and concerned children growing up in “exposed refugee families” in Denmark. In the period between spring 2009 and the summer of 2011, the practices developed from ideas and intentions into a set of project activities that, financially supported by the then Ministry of Integration, were carried out at two elementary schools in two Danish cities, which in this dissertation will be referred to as Nordby and Langebro. Through different actions to create
awareness, educate and facilitate children-groups, these practices were intended to reach out to children from families with a refugee background, as well as to those families, their classmates, their teachers and other professionals.

When the psychosocial activities came to Langebro School, Badra, then 10 years old, was encouraged to participate in them because of her parents’ refugee status. In the beginning it was not obvious to me in what ways the activities were of relevance to Badra and her family, but as my fieldwork progressed, Badra’s father Habib went through the process of being diagnosed with PTSD. Visiting Badra and her family during this stretch of time not only confronted me with the home as a particular social context for unfolding, or partially unfolding, knowledge related to mental illness. It also added to and supplemented a recurring observation, namely that my fieldwork had been made up of a long series of situations in which conveying knowledge about trauma, PTSD and refugeeness took many different and highly ambiguous forms. Prompted by this observation, throughout this dissertation I will unpack different ways of knowing refugee psychotraumatology, in public discourses, in a psychosocial intervention in the public school and in the realm of family life and the home.

As a socio-political category ‘exposed refugee families’ generally has a marginal position in Danish society, but they are increasingly included in the welfare state as an object of intervention (Johansen 2013). Often studies concerned with refugees living in Scandinavia pay great attention to the processes of everyday differentiation and stigmatization they are subjected to. In employing the analytical concept of ‘chronic homework’, developed by Cheryl Mattingly, Lotte Meinert and Lone Grøn (2008, 2011) I emphasize the psychosocial practices in Nordby and Langebro as practices of moving healthcare, more specifically mental healthcare, from “the clinic” to the school, and ideally into the home. The term “clinic” should not be understood literally. Rather, it represents a domain of experts and professionals who provide training or education with the aim of enabling other professionals and lay people to take upon themselves new kinds of health-care

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1 The term, “children-group” is translated from the Danish word børnegruppe. As I will explain, a children-group in this context refers to the use of the group as a method rather than to a demographic category.

2 I will return to how the children and families were selected for the project activities in Chapter 1.

3 I make use of the term “refugeeness” to denote the more general qualities of being a refugee, that is, the refugee as a universal subject (cf.: Fuglerod 1997, Lacroix 2004).
“assignments” – assignments that give rise to new openings, dilemmas and ambiguities for both professionals and families.

By focusing on the psychosocial practices as health care I encourage an analytical attention, which rather than a priori focusing on differentiation and stigma, captures such practices as part of a more comprehensive picture of welfare state interventions. Thus, I shall argue that exploring psychosocial interventions with children in exposed refugee families as examples of chronic homework practices, provides not only a productive prism for learning more about the distinctiveness of refugee psychotraumatology but also for understanding the ways in which the presence of the welfare state in intimate relationships is continuously questioned, assessed and negotiated within the actual social situations and relationships through which interventions unfold. As will become evident, the characteristics and effects of trauma and PTSD were explicated, or voiced, in some settings, while in others they were surrounded with much more hesitation, and whispering. The question of when to whisper, posed in the title of the dissertation, thus encapsulates an entire collection of questions concerning when, if and how to talk about trauma in relation to children. I shall argue that, figuratively speaking, the question of when to whisper emerges from intense situations entailing negotiations over the interventionist traits of the welfare state. The different acts of whispering, then, reflect the welfare state as a both generally accepted, appreciated but also problematized actor in intimate realms. This creates highly ambiguous roles and positions for those, who work in the welfare state, such as teachers.

In this introductory chapter I will present and discuss significant empirical and analytical concepts running through the dissertation. Thus I shall elaborate the concept of chronic homework and discuss it in relation to the psychosocial practises, which I have been studying. This entails examining the notion of “psychosocial work” as well as knowledge, and knowing, as a central aspect of health care. However, I will begin by introducing to refugees and their descendants as particular socio-political categories and sketch out the political and professional concerns this dissertation engages with.
Refugees and their descendants in public discourse

At the present day, refugees and their descendants are subject to increasing public debate and socio-political attention in Denmark.\(^4\) The record of refugees in Denmark goes a long way back in history, but the 1950s represent a political turning point. In 1952, in the aftermath of WW2, Denmark signed the Geneva Convention, which was ratified in April 1954 (Fenger-Grøn and Grøndal 2004). The Geneva Convention was, and still is, significant, as it introduced new ways of differentiating between “refugees” and other kinds of migrants, giving refugees particular legal status and rights.

During the 1950s to 1970s, refugees mainly came to Denmark from Hungary, Poland, Chile and later from Vietnam. Then, from the mid-1980s, the number of refugees grew significantly, with the 1990s standing out as the decade when the largest number of refugees applied for asylum in Denmark. Around the end of the twentieth century most refugees were coming from Iran, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Lebanon (mainly Palestinians), the Balkans and Somalia, while shortly after the turn of the century many refugees arrived from the war in Afghanistan (Olwig and Paerregaard 2011: 3, Fenger-Grøn and Grøndal 2004). At present thousands of Syrian refugees are finding their ways to Europe, some of them to Denmark. The number of asylum-seekers is continuously growing and thus, at the time of writing, yet another chapter is being added, not to the dissertation, but to a much larger story of refugees in Denmark.

Coming from a variety of countries, caught up in very different kinds of conflicts and political instabilities and arriving in a Danish society with a constantly changing political landscape, there has been a great variation in the kinds of attention refugees have received. Many things have changed since the 1970s, when refugees from Chile were generally received as political activists (and to some extent as heroes) and were granted asylum relatively soon after their arrival in Denmark (Fenger-Grøn and Grøndal 2004: 84). At that time the Danish asylum system was only emerging, but it developed in the years that followed, during the 1980s and 1990s, when the Red Cross set up asylum centers as institutions to administer and assist refugees while seeking asylum (Whyte 2009, Kohl 2015). Moreover, a wide range of laws and socio-political initiatives to promote the “integration” of refugees and other categories of immigrants in Denmark were launched (Olwig and Pærregaard 2007, Olwig and Paerregaard 2011). While these laws

\(^4\) By 2011 an estimated 106,838 refugees and 57,791 descendants were living in Denmark (Danmarks Statistik 2011).
and initiatives represent a great variety of political interests and ideologies, at least one tendency seems to cut across them all: gradually psychological, and more specifically psychotraumatological expertise has been increasingly incorporated into both professional and public understandings of refugees, both newly arrived refugees and people who, like Badra’s parents, came to Denmark decades ago (Fenger-Grøn and Grøndal 2004, Danneskiold-Samsoe 2011, Kohl 2015). This tendency does not only apply to Denmark. Numerous anthropological and sociological studies offer careful descriptions of how the psychiatric diagnosis of PTSD and related notions of trauma and secondary trauma have become pivotal in professional and public approaches to the lives of refugees as they flee war and conflict, as they spend years of their lives in camps (Malkki 1995a), as they apply for asylum (Fassin and d’Halluin 2007, Fassin and Rechtman 2009, Kohl 2015) and as they later settle down, creating new lives in new settings which become home (cf. Danneskiold-Samsoe 2011, Eastmond 2007). Thus, as I will explain further in Chapter 2, the general picture is one of a wide-ranging medicalization and psychologization of the figure of the refugee.

When it comes to the descendants of refugees, the above tendency is expressed in the widespread concern for children who grow up in families in which one or both parents are deeply affected by past experiences, and in which emotional, social and economic struggles are a part of daily life. A common view among health-care workers and politicians is that such problems in the family jeopardize the overall well-being and health of children, either by trauma being transmitted from parents to children (secondary trauma) or by children being affected in other ways by their parents’ health problems (cf. Montgomery and Linnet 2012, Montgomery 2011, Rydelius 2008). More recently attention has also been directed towards the connections between the parents’ refugee backgrounds, their potential traumatization and their children’s involvement in criminal activities or radicalized networks (cf. Johansen, Mouritsen, and Montgomery 2006, Christensen 2009).

A recent example of how such attention has evolved in the public discourse concerns the young Danish poet Yahya Hassan and his controversial collection of poetry (2013).

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5 These perspectives on how children are affected by their parents’ problematic health is relates to a much older interest in the relationship between children’s symptoms of ill health and their parent’s (mental) health problems and/or addiction to alcohol or drugs. Whereas this mainly was studies as a genetic phenomenon in the 1940-1950s increasingly it has been conceptualized as a matter of “social inheritance” (cf.: Rydelius 2008).
Hassan’s parents came to Denmark in the 1980s as Palestinian refugees. In his poems, Hassan describes and brutally criticizes his upbringing in a “ghetto” outside the Danish city of Aarhus. He accuses not only his parents but their entire generation for their, in his view, duplicitous practices of Islam, and he also portrays a childhood with a violent and traumatized father. Hassan’s book gave rise to fierce debates on Islam and cultural differences and the influence of trauma in families. Some regarded it as a “testimony” to what might be taking place in the homes of immigrants more generally: “Denmark lacks insight into the life that is lived in Danish immigrant homes”, a local politician from the Social Democratic Party wrote in the Danish newspaper Dagbladet Politiken in December 2013.6 During the months after Hassan’s poems had been published, everyone in touch with the media became familiar with the phenomenon of traumatized refugee families.

The issue of traumatized refugee parents was brought up in public debates once again when in February 2015 a young man by the name Omar Abdel Hamid El-Hussein shot and killed two men at a debate featuring the Swedish cartoonist Lars Vilks and at the synagogue in Krystalgade in Copenhagen. El-Hussein, who was himself shot and killed by the police the morning after the shootings, also grew up in a Palestinian refugee family.7 One of the questions that emerged in the days and weeks following the shootings concerned whether they could have been prevented if El-Hussein and his family had received more help and support over the years (cf. Thorup 2015). Both these events took place subsequent to my fieldwork. However, given the immense influence they have had on public discourses regarding the descendants of refugees in present-day Denmark, I find it important to refer to them exactly as ‘events’ - having added to a sense of immediacy with regard to identifying and accommodating the needs of children and young people growing up in refugee families.

At the present time interventions and strategies are being implemented to deal with refugees with trauma. Some interventions have a preventive character, whereas others respond to “existing” problems. In 2013 the consultancy bureau LG-Insight published a

6 http://politiken.dk/debat/profiler/Jan_Andreasen/ECE2162075/derfor-er-yahya-hassan-en-bombe-i-debatten/

7 After the first shooting at the debate, the then Danish Prime Minister, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, went public and condemned the shootings as acts of terror. However, in the time that followed, intense debates continued concerning whether to define the attacks as terror, or as murders committed by an angry and troubled man (cf.: Sørensen and Rasmussen 2015)
report mapping the general level of interventions concerning refugees with trauma in Denmark (2013). As the report states, it is difficult to acquire an exact overview, since some interventions take place within already existing intervention structures, while others are established with the specific and exclusive aim of assisting traumatized refugees. The report lists a wide range of areas in which municipalities or regions (and ultimately the welfare state) are responsible for managing and dealing with refugees with trauma. These areas vary from providing assistance to newly arrived refugees, to administering inclusive labour-market policies, to the social counselling and treatment of adults, children and adolescents and to handling the problems that emerge in schools and other institutions (2013: 31). Interestingly, the report points out how few professionals consider the existing interventions to be adequate for the problems they face in their work: 60 percent felt that they were adequate to only a minor degree, and 14 percent not at all (2013: 37). Moreover, as many of 72 percent of the respondents to the survey asked for more knowledge about refugees and refugee families with trauma among their collaborators (2013: 71). This report illustrates how, at present, the traumatized refugee family is emerging as a concern for the welfare state in an extensive range of areas, involving many different fields of expertise. Moreover, the report and the survey it was based on demonstrate the high status of knowledge for many professionals in the welfare state. There seems to be widespread agreement on the importance of generating awareness of the difficulties refugee families may face among the different kinds of front-line workers (teachers, pedagogues, social workers etc.) who meet children and adolescents in refugee families in their day-to-day work.

This increasing focus on refugees’ psychotraumatological problems has not gone unchallenged however. While much political attention and many resources are being put into the treatment and prevention of refugees’ mental health problems, a growing concern is that the widespread preoccupation with traumatization shifts attention from other problems, such as socio-economic instability or the lack of social networks, thus adding to the stigmatization of a group of people who already find themselves in marginal positions. Among others, the Swedish anthropologist Marita Eastmond has discussed the consequences of, as she formulates it, turning refugees into an “a priori mental health risk category” (2005: 152)(original emphasis). When this happens, she contin-

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8 In Denmark local government politics is structured around a division of labour and responsibility between municipalities and regions.
ues, “[r]efugees’ and ‘traumatisation’ both become discourses about abnormality, conditions which require interventions of correction and control” (2005: 152). Eastmond’s critique resonates with studies of more general integration practices in the welfare state, identifying them as sites where “normality” is negotiated (cf. Olwig and Paerregaard 2011, Sjørslev 2007a, Suhr Nielsen 2015, Olwig, Larsen, and Rytter 2012) and where inclusion in governmental categories implies effective processes of ‘Othering’ (Johansen 2013: 19). Moreover, often the criticism touches upon, or is framed in relation to, the notion of victimhood, which has long existed as a concern at the heart of anthropology (cf. Eastmond 2011, Danneskiold-Samsoe 2011, Johansen 2013, Jensen and Rønsbo 2014).

On the one hand, then, these debates bear witness to manifestations of an emerging problem and a generally expressed need to do something about it. On the other hand, they point to a stated concern that the interventions will only reinforce processes of differentiation and stigmatization – a concern which, as we shall see, is shared by professionals who encounter families with a refugee background in their day-to-day work. From the outset this study has been deeply embedded in this dilemma. However, during my fieldwork, it became evident that other important, and partly overlapping, dilemmas were at stake. As I shall explain these dilemmas were related to different perspectives on, what children should know about a parent’s mental illness, who should involve them and in what ways. I suggest that we understand these dilemmas as expressions of an ambiguity that seems inherent to the ways in which the Danish welfare state’s presence in intimate domains, such as the domestic realm and family relations, is both generally accepted, appreciated and widely problematized. Motivated by a fundamental interest in understanding better this amalgamation of dilemmas the dissertation probes into the social encounters and relationships that have emerged as the category of children in exposed refugees families has become an issue of psychosocial concern within the Danish welfare state, in this case in the public school.

In anthropological research on trauma and PTSD, there seems to be a widespread consensus that the notion of trauma and diagnoses of PTSD are products of our time, products that are given shape in a variety of social settings. Notably, the anthropologist Allan Young has been preoccupied with interpreting PTSD as existing (only) in “the practices, technologies, and narratives with which it is diagnosed, studied, treated, and represented and by the various interests, institutions, and moral arguments that mobilized these efforts and resources” (1995: 5). From this perspective, the process that Badra’s
father Habib went through up until the diagnosis was made, the treatment he received subsequently and the psychosocial initiatives in Badra’s school are all aspects of creating PTSD as a particular history-bound diagnosis. Following Young, the ethnographic task is to explore the practices, contexts and mechanisms by which PTSD is made real. The dissertation is inspired by this line of thinking, which is to be found more generally in newer anthropological literature highlighting the multiple ways in which PTSD and trauma are employed in various socio-political contexts (cf.: Young 1995, Fassin and Rechtman 2009, Bubandt 2008, Summerfield 2001, Argenti and Schramm 2010, Kirmayer, Lemelson, and Barad 2007). In Denmark the universal welfare-state model regulates many of the processes by which psychotraumatology is practised. Along with those of its Nordic neighbours, the Danish welfare state is known for its “extensive social service and national health programmes” (Olwig 2012: 2) and its widely accepted access to intimate domains, such as the domestic sphere and family relations (Stenius 1997). Hence certain social contexts are (made) available for psychotraumatology in the Danish welfare state. Importantly I am referring to both actual physical contexts, such as schools, seminars and homes, and non-material realms such as family life. In the following I shall provide more details to the psychosocial activities by presenting and discussing them in relation to the theoretical concept of chronic homework.

**Chronic homework: movements of health care**

With the conceptual framework of chronic homework, Mattingly et al. draw attention to a relatively new global need to treat chronic illness in the context of the home. The change in expectations regarding what should take place in the home and the family, they say, has evolved out of the increasing numbers of people who are living, and living longer, with chronic diseases, due on the one hand to new types of lasting, lifestyle-related conditions, and on the other to innovative medical treatments that extend life (2011: 348). These tendencies involve a variety of contexts and environments across the globe. As the three authors indicate, “homework” applies to “the kind of work that patients and families are expected to carry out in their home contexts in the treatment of their chronic conditions” (Mattingly et al. 2011: 348). This can entail patients and their family members “carrying out such tasks as taking (and giving) medications and injections, monitoring for signs of acute and potentially life-threatening escalations of chronic conditions that require immediate hospitalization, doing therapy exercises, changing everyday habits of eating and exercise, and social and sexual relations” (2011: 348). In their article, Mattingly, Grøn and Meinert engage with ethnographic accounts
of respectively a chronic genetic disease in the United States, overweight and lifestyle change in Denmark, and home-based AIDS care in Uganda (2011). In the three examples, what is anticipated from the families and from the home surroundings is fairly diverse and wide-ranging in character, pertaining to self-medication, specific physical exercises and eating habits. A central argument of theirs is that homes and family relationships are always already deeply embedded in routines and practices of taking care of oneself and others and that the approaches families take to caretaking, or homework, may therefore differ quite radically from those of health professionals and politicians (2011: 370). In that sense, their work resonates with a classic interest within anthropology, namely that of unfolding the various perspectives which are brought to the “same” problem by different actors (2011: 351) in order to unpack the paradoxes and dilemmas that arise, as patients and their families are instructed to take upon themselves new assignments of health care.

What is perhaps most important about the idea of chronic homework, then, is that it involves meetings between differently positioned people and their perspectives on care. With reference to the conceptual reinvention of culture as something which emerges in meetings between differences, rather than as products of wholes or totalities, Mattingly et al. suggest that homework practices entail spaces of encounters (2011: 352). In order to develop these meetings analytically, they make use of the notion of “the borderland”, which Mattingly also builds on in her book The Paradox of Hope: Journeys through a Clinical Borderland (2010). Thus borderlands are where diverse perspectives encounter each other and new ones emerge. In Mattingly et al.’s words: “[B]orderlands need not be visible on any map. They may also designate spaces defined by practices that bind people together who otherwise would not belong together, as may happen in many health care encounters, creating new borderland communities” (2011: 352). According to Mattingly et al., the act of practicing health care, which traditionally belongs to the clinic, in the home thus entails a move from one sphere to another and can thus be considered as crossing borders (Mattingly 2010, Mattingly, Grøn, and Meinert 2011). Their distinction between the clinic and the home relies on Kleinman’s distinction between “the professional” and “the popular” sectors. In Kleinman’s own words, the popular sector “can be thought of as a matrix containing several levels: individual, family, social network, and community beliefs and activities. It is the lay, non-professional, non-specialist, popular culture arena in which illness is first defined and health care activities initiated” (Kleinman 1980: 50). As Mattingly also stresses, although Kleinman emphasized the popular sector as “the largest part of any system”, at that time it was relatively

To sum up, the conceptual framework of chronic homework alludes to the manifold perspectives entailed in healthcare in the home and the dilemmas and paradoxes that arise whenever these perspectives confront one another in the borderlands. Mattingly et al. make use of predominantly phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches to the encounters they engage with (2011: 353). As will become evident in the chapters that follow, the analyses presented here also involve phenomenologically inspired theory. However, much as they engage with individual experiences – of practicing psychosocial work, of being dealt with as a child in a refugee family, of being closely related to someone who has been diagnosed with PTSD – the chapters are preoccupied with understanding seminars, psychosocial groups and family life as social contexts that generate certain kinds of social (inter)action and thus certain kinds of experience (Sjørslev 2007b: 198, 2015).

**Moving refugee psychotraumatology beyond the clinic**

Empirically the dissertation takes its point of departure in a set of psychosocial practices concerning the social and emotional well-being of children growing up in “exposed refugee families”. More specifically, the families were referred to interchangeably as “refugee families”, “exposed refugee families”, “vulnerable refugee families” and “traumatized refugee families”. The terms “vulnerable” (sårbar) and “exposed” (udsat) form part of political and public discourses concerning people affected by a variety of problems, such as socio-economic difficulties, crime, drug or alcohol abuse, poor health etc. (cf. Lausten, Hansen, and Nielsen 2010). Thus in general the terms “exposed” and “vulnerable” indicate a diversity of difficulties, and they are used to classify persons or groups at risk of becoming socially marginalized for various reasons (Johansen 2013: 13). However, as I have already emphasized, within the professional community that was carrying out the project activities in Nordby and Langebro, the terms “exposed” and “vulnerable” were normally associated with psychotraumatology. The field of psychotraumatology involves different fields of expertise – notably within clinical psychology and psychiatry – that come together around the cognitive, emotional and social aspects of being traumatized (cf. Montgomery 2011, Kirmayer, Lemelson, and Barad
2007). Subtracting and assembling knowledge from these often highly specialised disciplines, the project activities aimed to provide teachers and other professionals with an understanding of how trauma affects individual parents, individual children and families as a whole, as well as of how children’s resilience may be supported. The most prevalent understanding of how trauma affects families that was practised throughout the project activities was in the sense of how traumatized parents may have a difficult time in being exactly this, parents - and how this influence their children’s social lives and their premises for participating in educational activities and developing friendships.

A central underlying assumption in the project activities was that it is helpful and health-giving to share and talk about troublesome experiences⁹ and that it is problematic if children are confronted with their parents’ (mental) health problems without being provided with sufficient explanation. This, of course, raises the question of what a “sufficient explanation” is, but it also points to a more general dilemma, or paradox, related to perceptions of children as both robust and vulnerable. Anthropologist and psychologist Francine Lorimer has expressed this dilemma in the following manner: “It seems as if we are left with a contradiction. On the one hand, children are vulnerable. […] On the other hand, they need the truth and they need to be included in the grieving process” (2010: 7). Even though formulated in the entirely different context of a crisis intervention in a school class following a mother inflicting a violent injury on her daughter, the general qualities of the contradiction resemble other studies of children and childhood (cf. Lærke 1998, James and Prout 1997). First of all this contradiction can be related to the ways in which childhood, as a specific real as well as imagined period in a lifetime, is rooted in time and temporality. Children exist in the present as children, but they are also “adults in the making” (Vitus 2010: 27) and thus the category of children institutes senses of “being” as well as “becoming” (Uprichard 2008). These temporal dimensions of childhood are the fulcrums of debates on the agency of children that have influenced childhood studies in recent decades.¹⁰ Regarding children as always in becoming, and

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⁹ According to Catherine Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod, such interventions can be understood as an expression of the “growing importance of confession” (Lutz and Abu-Lughod 2008: 6), in which emotions and feelings are situated as absolutely central to the modern sense of self, perhaps most notably theorized by Foucault in The History of Sexuality (See also: Rose 1999, 1996).

¹⁰ Anthropologists and sociologists concerned with children and childhood often refer to a new childhood paradigm, representing altered ways of conceptualizing children and their positions in society (James, Jenks, and Prout 1998, Gulløv 1999). Allison James et al frame these transformed interests as an expression of an epistemological break between the pre-sociological and sociological child (1998: 23). In brief they point to a shift from a developmental psychological interest
“not-yet-knowing” (Lærke 1998: 3), intuitively implies that children are only potential future agents. But equally important the notions of vulnerability and robustness takes part of a comprehensive vocabulary for addressing “childhood subjectivity and its problems” (Rose 1999: 134) and thus point to an entire field of expertise in children’s lives. As stated by Nikolas Rose “the modern child has become the focus of innumerable projects that purport to safeguard it from physical, sexual and moral danger, to insure it’s ‘normal’ development, to actively promote certain capacities of attributes such as intelligence, educability, and emotional stability” (1999: 123).

A significant quality of the notion of trauma, secondary trauma and the diagnosis of PTSD is the insertion of “events” and “aftermaths” into human lives. Fixated in a connectedness between past events and enduring aftermaths, both within individual lifetimes and across generations (cf. Leys 2000, Buch 2010, Eastmond 2011), psycho-traumatology establishes a sense of chronicity, which, as we shall see, looks very different from the perspectives of clinical “experts” than those involved in family life. In a sense the introductory passage from my interview with Minnah encapsulates this point. When Minnah uttered the words, “They say that it can appear throughout your life”, she was referring to what the doctors had told her and Habib when the latter was diagnosed with PTSD. Obviously the doctor’s way of explaining Habib’s condition implied that there is a life-long risk of re-activating trauma and developing PTSD. However, Minnah did not pass on this information about the potential endurance of Habib’s condition to Badra and Musa. What she told them was that “He was not feeling good right now, but that it would be better”, thus focusing on the more immediate future of their lives together as a family.

Overall the dissertation adheres to Mattingly et al.’s ambition to shed light on the social and temporal implications of moving health care from clinics to homes. Importantly the purpose is not to evaluate or validate the project activities, nor to question the authenticity of PTSD or the pain felt by people who are diagnosed with it, as well as their close kin. Rather, by critically reflecting on the social situations and contexts generated by

in the processes of cognitive maturing to a social science focus on the child as developing socially (1998: 23-23). Importantly this shift is not absolute. Rather it should be understood as involving a continuum of conceptualizing childhood as a biologically given category and a social construct (cf. James and James 2004). Thus with wide-ranging variations childhood is recognized as an “actual” biological stage, which is then experienced, defined and constructed differently according to time and place (Cole and Durham 2007: 14-15).
psychosocial interventions directed at refugee families in and by way of the public school, the intention is to widen understandings of this kind of intervention as unfolding in multi-layered and complex situations and relationships.

**Engaging exposed refugee families in the public school**

Because of my ethical obligation to protect the anonymity of my interlocutors, I cannot identify and describe the specific project activities. Therefore, throughout the dissertation I will make use of very wide and “purposefully vague” (Vohnsen 2011: 31) formulations such as “project activities”, “psychosocial practices” or even just “practices” or “initiatives”. Moreover, I have had to conceal the organizational background to the project activities, again settling for imprecise references and descriptions. As I will deal with again in Chapter 1, Mattingly et al.’s notion of borderland communities is helpful in this regard, as it allows me to refer to and include a whole range of organizations rather than emphasizing specific ones, in which sense the notion of borderland communities becomes an ethical as much as an analytical issue. Thus throughout the dissertation I will refer to “a community of professionals” to describe organisations that work with refugees in Denmark in different ways, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), humanitarian organizations, and private as well as state-run treatment centres. With a variety of focus areas, such as employment, education, language skills, health care and treatment, these organizations provide assistance to both refugees themselves and to professionals who meet refugees in their day-to-day working lives. The Danish Refugee Council (DRC), including the Centre for Exposed Refugees (Center for udsatte flygtninge), henceforward CER, where I have been employed during my PhD studies, form part of this professional community.\(^\text{11}\)

As I will explain later, in practice, the category of children in exposed refugee families was widened to include all children in refugee families at the two schools in Nordby and Langebro. The parents and some of the older siblings in the families involved in the project activities came to Denmark during the late 1980s and the early 1990s from countries such as Eritrea, Iraq, Lebanon and Somalia. The various families’ stories are very different, but what they have in common is that they all have at least one family member with refugee status.

\(^{11}\) See Chapter 1 for further reflections on the methodological, analytical and ethical consequences of anonymity and an elaboration of the implications of being at least partly “employed by the field”.
The project activities entailed four different clusters of activity: 1) the “age-appropriate” education of children in the 4th to 6th grades on exile-related problems and PTSD; 2) group-based interventions for children living in exposed refugee families specifically; 3) home visits and the establishment of parent networks; and 4) training and skills development for the refugee children’s professional networks.\textsuperscript{12} As I shall explain, this dissertation mainly focuses on the children-groups and the skills development of teachers and other professionals. The activities were carried out in two schools situated in two neighbourhoods which socio-economically are quite differently positioned in Denmark. Nordby School is situated on the periphery of one of Denmark’s largest cities and accommodates a school district of great demographic variation. The children who attend the school come from high-end middle-class families, as well as socio-economically less privileged families. Langbro is also located on the outskirts of a large city, but in a neighbourhood often referred to as “a ghetto”.\textsuperscript{13} As we shall see (especially in Chapter 4), these demographic differences had a great influence on the ways in which the project activities were practised.

As stated in the outline of the project activities attached to the application to raise funds for them, the short-term objectives were to:

- “Contribute to a better school life (skolegang) and a well-functioning family life for the exposed children and their families, as well as to
- Generate knowledge, understanding and respect around the situations of the children and families, within the families themselves as well as among classmates, the different professional groups at the schools and the additional professional network of the children.”

From a longer term perspective, the project activities aimed to:

- Prevent problems being passed on from parents to children in the form of secondary traumatization

\textsuperscript{12} In a sense, there was also a fifth element: since the project activities were considered “method-developing” (metodeudviklende), an additional and perhaps more implied aspect was to develop methods and tools for use in other public schools.

\textsuperscript{13} I will return to the notion of “a ghetto” later, particularly in Chapter 4.
- Prevent children dropping out of education and becoming involved in criminal activities and/or “parallel societies”
- Supporting a dynamic integration process.\textsuperscript{14}

Taken together, these activities to create awareness, promote knowledge and provide psychoeducation form a portfolio of interventions which, in their holistic approach, involve a number of different actors, as well as implying a set of assumptions about family relations (Mogensen and Olwig 2013) and the welfare state’s roles and obligations towards the family. With all their different means and ends, the project activities were brought together within the framework of psychosocial work. In the following I will introduce “the psychosocial” and establish it as a genre of work that provides a productive, yet not very transparent framework for the movement of knowledge from the clinic to the home.

\textbf{Psychosocial concerns: multipurpose and productive}

Within the community of professionals that had initiated the project activities, these activities – sometimes as a whole, and at other times with more specific reference to the children-groups – were frequently referred to as “psychosocial”,\textsuperscript{15} and when they were formally presented at seminars, conferences and the like, they were always labelled as such. Occasionally the term “psychoeducation” (psykoedukation) came up as well. Psychoeducation literally denotes education in mental distress, this being stress, anxiety, depression or the like (See fx: Hansen 2010). The concept of psychoeducation has developed as an interdisciplinary field since the 1960s, at first especially in relation to patients diagnosed with schizophrenia (Encyclopedia of Social Work 2008: 453). Both

\textsuperscript{14} The passages have been translated from an outline of the project activities attached to an application to raise funds for the activities.

\textsuperscript{15} I use the direct translation from the Danish psykosocial to the English “psychosocial”, as I find it used similarly in the Danish and English literature. However, my colleagues at the Centre for Exposed Refugees were more cautious in using the English version of the term. In a focus-group interview they themselves initiated a conversation on how the connotations differ between the English and Danish translations. One colleague said that “[i]t works better in Danish (“Det går sig bedst på dansk”) and that it becomes so “psychosocial... psycho” in English. They seemed to agree that in English the term “psychosocial” indicates “something different”. This difference remained unresolved, but their pronunciation of “psycho” and the laughter that followed its use suggested to me that it had connotations of mental distortion as scary and creepy. Most likely Alfred Hitchcock’s horror movie Psycho from 1960 has colonized the word, making it nearly impossible to say it out loud without referring to the potentially horrendous aspects of psychopathology.
persons who themselves suffer from mental distress and their next of kin can be offered psychoeducation. Practices of psychoeducation and psychosocial work often coalesce and overlap. Within my field, psychoeducation refers to relatively more specialized activities compared to the label “psychosocial”, which seems to be used much more frequently and with wider orientations. Thus, consultants I met on a regular basis often talked about refugees as having “psychosocial problems”. For example, a recent literature review carried out by CER summarizes a vast amount of literature on “psychosocial interventions for children and young people with a refugee background” (Dansk Flytningehjælp 2011). And what is perhaps even more suggestive is that CER comes out of a small section in the DRC which until 2005 was called “the psychosocial unit” (den psykosociale enhed), and prior to this “the psychosocial project” (det psykosociale project). Thus, even though not necessarily articulated on a day-to-day basis, during my fieldwork there were countless references to “the psychosocial”. However, “the psychosocial” was rarely verbalized like this, on its own. Rather, it was conveyed descriptively, as an adjective describing a diversity of interventions and activities. Thus, when I refer to “the psychosocial”, it is to indicate that, due to the term’s prevalence and general acceptance, it may have attained a life of its own. In spite of (or perhaps rather because of) the many implicit and explicit orientations towards psychosocial ideas and concepts, it was far from clear what it meant to work psychosocially. Most often the term “psychosocial” was not explained, and when it was, the definitions given were broad and inexact.

Both as a theoretical term and as a normative practice, the idiom of “the psychosocial” somehow relates to the much more general idea that the social and psychological dimensions of human lives are interconnected (Williamson and Robinson 2006, Bernler and Johnsson 2002, Frosh and Baraitser 2008). Bernler and Johnsson, for example, describe psychosocial work as symbolizing professional recognition of the necessity for a

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16 See also the anthology From Counselling to Psychosocial Development (Olsen 2006) as an illustrative example of how “the psychosocial” is conceived both as an occasion to do something, i.e. “a psychosocial problem” or “psychosocial condition”, and as a reaction to these problems, i.e. “psychosocial assistance” or “psychosocial rehabilitation”.

17 Depending on how one interprets this interconnectedness between the individual mind and his or her social surroundings, it is possible to relate “the psychosocial” to a range of different disciplines. In their attempt to capture the diversity related to “the psychosocial”, Stephen Frosh, professor in psychology, and Lisa Baraitser, reader in psychosocial studies, situate this psychosocial genre within a vast variety of specialized approaches, namely “psychoanalysis, sociology, applied social studies and social work, critical social psychology, poststructural theory, social constructionism, queer theory and feminist social research”. Among others they point to Michel

Historically in Scandinavia, psychosocial work has matured within the professions of social work and psychology, while also being applied in other disciplines, such as teaching, nursing and medicine (Bernler and Johnsson 2002:15). Here the labels “psychosocial” (psykosocial) and “social” are frequently used indiscriminately (Bernler and Johnsson 2002:9), perhaps due to the manner in which psychosocial work has become an increasingly established way of practising social work (Heap 1992). Gunnar Bernler and Lisbeth Johnsson, who are Swedish researchers in social work, point to the early 1980s as the time when psychosocial work became established within what they refer to as “social and psychological treatment work” (behandlingsarbejde) (Bernler and Johnsson 2002:15). They suggest that in Scandinavia as well as in Northern America the term was introduced as an attempt to distinguish this genre of work from psychotherapy.

What I especially want to call attention to is how in practice “the psychosocial” has come to represent and embrace activities and interventions across the board, including therapy-like situations, “psychoeducation” and awareness-raising. In that sense I consider it to be a multipurpose and productive concept, creating possibilities, but also, as we shall see later, doubts and hesitations, among professionals. Steffen Jöhncke (2009) points to some of the same qualities in the concept of treatment. Clearly making reference to Foucault’s notion of governmentality, Jöhncke turns treatment into treatmentality. In doing so, he argues that treatment as a social technology of the welfare state involves a certain circular relationship between problem and solution in which the solution is just as defining for the problem as the problem is for the solution (Jöhncke 2009:15-16). Moreover, he portrays treatment as an ideology and a cultural value, suggesting that treatment is more than anything a moral concern. Thus, as is the case with treatment, the elusiveness of the psychosocial can be related to its substantial historical legacy and

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Foucault, Judith Butler, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Bruno Latour, Gilles Deleuze, Slavoj Zizek and Louis Althusser as some of the most influential theorists (Frosh and Baraitser 2008: 348).
the resultant diversity and prevalence with which it is being articulated, debated and
applied in various fields of research and practice. If we hold on to the concept of the
psychosocial as productive, the question that then arises is what it has generated in the
context I have been studying. In this dissertation I shall explore “the psychosocial” as a
space for intervention that consists of neither therapeutic nor “normal” schooling – a
space which, in accordance with the notion of chronic homework, may be explored as a
borderland of health care.

Importantly, while there are many similarities between the health-care practices studied by Mattingly et al. and the practices I have engaged in ethnographically, there are
also crucial differences. Obviously Mattingly et al. are preoccupied with homework as
practices, which unfold in the homes in relation to the treatment of people, or patients,
who are already diagnosed with a disease or a condition. In the case of the project ac-
tivities in Nordby and Langebro, the homework practices introduced by the project ac-
tivities did not concern those who had necessarily been diagnosed with PTSD. The pro-
ject activities were designed to evenly address families in which a parent had been di-
agnosed with PTSD, as well as cases in which a parent was considered to be at risk of
developing a mental illness, merely by being a refugee. Another important difference
between the examples brought up by Mattingly et al. and the project activities is that,
while the former explicitly suggested, or even prescribed, certain forms of treatment in
the home, the latter unfolded at school. In recent years new expectations have emerged
in relation to the roles of public school teachers, when children experience difficulties
in their families, for example when it comes to loss, grief or divorce (cf.: Kræftens
Bekæmpelse 2015).18 We may therefore understand the psychosocial practices in
Nordby and Langebro as part of a wider tendency to increasingly qualify teachers (and
pedagogues) to work with children’s family relations.

The public school as borderland

“Psychosocial interventions can be carried out in an easily accessible context
as for example the school, where the children are already to be found, just as

18 See also: http://politiken.dk/forbrugogliv/livsstil/familieLiv/ECE2158461/skilsmisseboern-skal-i-
krisehjaelp-paa-skolen/
they can be carried out by professionals with no therapeutic background, since it is not intended to be actual psychiatric or psychological treatment.\footnote{This statement is summarized and translated from a literature review of psychosocial work, carried out by the Danish Refugee Council (Dansk Flygtningehjælp 2011: 4).}

In applying the concept of chronic homework, I suggest the public school be thought of as an important border zone between homes and systems of health care (Mattingly, Grøn, and Meinert 2011: 349). The public school is a highly central Danish welfare-state institution, and in the following I will briefly touch upon some of its functions and responsibilities, its value base and the multifaceted roles of its teachers.

The development of the Danish public school rests on values of equality and on a sustained effort to create a society promising equal opportunities for all (Juul 2006: 96). This effort is not only sustained by strictly educative processes, but also in the formation and socialization of children as “whole” persons and citizens (Gilliam 2009: 61). The prominence of “inclusion” (inklusion) and “well-being” (trivsel), two concepts at the forefront of debates concerning the Danish public school, points to the plethora of functions assigned to it. In recent years both concepts have thematized the teacher profession in novel ways. Inclusion and well-being are institutionalized in the sense that, as “umbrella-terms”, they continue to frame a diversity of different political initiatives related to the public school.\footnote{For example, a massive well-being survey (trivselsmåling) has recently been launched as part of the school reform. According to the Danish Ministry of Education 470,000 Danish school children participated in the survey in 2015, and it is now mandatory for schools to carry out annual well-being surveys (Education 2015).} Perhaps most evident is the wide-reaching work of Pedagogical Psychological Counselling (Pædagogisk Psykologisk Rådgivning or PPR) and the introduction of Behavior, Contact and Well-being (Adfærd, Kontakt and Trivsel) teachers and advisers.

The Danish school system is divided into a “normal system” and a “specialized system” (cf. Rasmussen 2004, Gjerløff 2012). The normal system refers to what is offered within the institutional boundaries of the ordinary public school, whereas the specialized system denotes those initiatives that are incorporated in specialized classes, schools or institutions (ibid.). In this perspective the public school has always been a center of attention and negotiations related to “normality” (Gjerløff 2012: 10). Professor in education and philosophy Lars Qvortrup illustrates a historical move, from a period in time when
specialized interventions were idealized, to a new epoch in which the focus is on reducing the need for them.21 The concept of “teaching differentiation” (undervisningsdifferentiering) entered the law on the public school in 1993, laying down that all children should be taught relative to their individual capabilities (Gjerløff 2012:17). Among education researchers this is generally perceived of as an expression of how, little by little, attempts have been made to normalize the specialized (ibid.).22

In 2012 the Danish Parliament enacted a new comprehensive law on the public school, which irrefutably placed inclusion, and even “increased inclusion” (øget inklusion), on the agenda (Qvortrup 2012). The law states that pupils who can be taught in the context of a normal class with the assistance of an extra teacher or a pedagogue during no more than nine hours per week should be included in the normal system.23 Hence, the notion of inclusion involves an explicit political focus on increasing the number of children with special needs in ordinary schools. The notion of “inclusion” has spurred a great deal of debate, speculation and questions, such as whether it is a political strategy to save money, what inclusion entails, the extent to which the formulated goals are achievable,24 what kinds of qualifications and support teachers need in order to practice inclusion, and how pupils experience inclusion (as well as non-inclusion). The latter is often framed in relation to the rather hazy notion of “well-being” (trivsel), which in its dictionary form is defined as “a feeling of being comfortable, healthy and happy” (2009).25 In the context of the public school, “well-being” provides a wide framework, and a powerful discourse, for working with pupils’ sense of welfare and happiness, and in general for the more social premises for learning. In particular, the term has been applied as part of an increasing focus on bullying (Rabøl Hansen 2011).26 Or rather, perhaps, it has

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21 [http://vbn.aau.dk/da/persons/lars-qvortrup(1891c010-cc48-4f7c-928c-35255e5d7595).html](http://vbn.aau.dk/da/persons/lars-qvortrup(1891c010-cc48-4f7c-928c-35255e5d7595).html)

22 The so-called Salamanca statement of 1994 is also perceived as a turning point. In this declaration, representatives from 92 countries formulated a set of shared principles and intentions, pointing to the normal school system as the best place to be, independently of individual learning needs (www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA_E.PDF)

23 [https://www.retsinformation.dk/forms/r0710.aspx?id=163970](https://www.retsinformation.dk/forms/r0710.aspx?id=163970)

24 The ambition for 2015 is to increase the total number of “included children” in the Danish School system from 94.4% to 96% (http://www.uvm.dk/Uddannelser/Folkeskolen/Inklusion-og-specialundervisning/Inklusion/Omstilling-til-øget-inklusion)

25 I translate the Danish word trivsel into English as “well-being”, following practice in assessments, surveys and the like.

26 In 2004 the Ministry of Education, along with 23 school organizations, signed a so-called well-being declaration (trivsels-erklæring) committing school leaders and policy-makers to prioritize the social well-being of every pupil (http://dcum.dk/sammen-mod-mobning/erklæringen).
been introduced as an attempt to create a more optimistically loaded discourse, compared to the pessimistic associations implied by “bullying” (Rabøl Hansen 2011: 27).

Another interesting aspect of the Danish public school is how the school class (skoleklassen) is a constitutive unit (Anderson 2000: 53).\textsuperscript{27} From the 1\textsuperscript{st} grade (and prior to this, one year of pre-school) to the 9\textsuperscript{th} or 10\textsuperscript{th} grade, children attend a specific school class, and preferably they will have the same one or two class teachers during the first, second and third parts of their education (indskoling, mellemtrin, udkoling). In this manner, ideally teachers and pupils come to know each other well and develop social relationships that go beyond strictly educative purposes. The teachers are not only in charge of the scholarly formation of their pupils, but also of the social well-being of each child or young person, as well as the class as a whole (Anderson 2000: 55). Moreover, generally there is a strong tradition of close communication between parents and teachers in the Danish public school (Moldenhawer and Øland 2013: 411). Thus the public school and its teachers are already deeply involved in realms of family life, and in that sense the school is already always a borderland. While the new focus on children in exposed refugee families, entailed in the project activities in Nordby and Langembro, gave rise to questions and concerns among teachers, this was not the expression of a clearly defined teaching profession “suddenly” being challenged by having to carry out psychosocial work with a group of exposed children. Rather, the teaching profession is inherently multi-faceted, and teachers are already potentially involved in complications in families. Thus, when the DRC claims that psychosocial work can be practised in the context of the school, this is as much an expression of the composite expectations of the public school as it is an expression of the multipurpose and adaptable qualities of the psychosocial.

**Knowledge, understanding, empathy and action: a way of knowing**

By the formulation ways of knowing, I take my point of departure in an truisim within present-day anthropology, which is that knowing always entails a certain perspective and depends on someone who knows in a particular way (cf. Hastrup 2004a, Harris 2007). As I have noted already, the project activities involved elements of knowledge promotion or awareness raising, as well as psychoeducation. During my fieldwork within the professional community that was carrying out the project activities, I often came

\textsuperscript{27} This way of structuring the elementary school is currently changing at some schools, where, rather than organizing pupils in classes, they are simply organized with reference to their year.
across the idea, or underlying logic, that promoting knowledge would lead to understanding, to empathy, and preferably to empathetic action. Knowledge was therefore considered to be a quality, which ideally engaged and committed some people to act on other people and their problems. In the case of the project activities in Nordby and Langebro, teachers and other professionals were being educated in different aspects of what it is like to be a refugee, and potentially traumatized, in order to be able to recognize refugee children in their work, attune their teaching to these children and their specific needs, and potentially develop other appropriate ways of responding to these needs. Moreover, children and their families were educated in these subjects in order to help them relate to themselves and to each other in better ways. These both implicit and explicit expectations of knowledge are interesting, not only because they give prominence to certain kinds of knowledge, but also because, by associating knowledge with understanding, empathy and action, they accentuate knowledge as an intersubjective and highly social phenomenon.

Generally my informants in the DRC, like their colleagues in other organizations, referred to knowledge as something that could be communicated, transmitted, shared, deployed, learned and so on. Knowledge was talked about as something which one could both obtain and pass on in a way that resembles Fredrik Barth’s description of “[o]ur academic prototype of ‘knowledge’” (Barth 2002: 2). This kind of knowledge, Barth argues, denotes what can be found in textbooks, encyclopaedias and dictionaries and “simulates a knowledge without knowers” (ibid.). Barth himself approaches knowledge from a different, all-encompassing perspective, namely as referring to “all the ways of understanding that we use to make up our experienced, grasped reality” (Barth 2002: 1). To be specific, in Norwegian Barth makes use of the term kunnskap (cf. Eriksen 2004), which has slightly wider connotations than the English term “knowledge”. According to Barth, knowledge organizes social relationships and engagements between people in certain ways. While Barth recognizes that his definition of knowledge, as well as his ethnographic take on it, is very similar to how culture is defined and studied by

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28 Recently empathy, as a complex social and emotional process, has gained renewed interest within anthropology (cf. Bubandt 2009, Hollan and Throop 2011, Kirmayer 2008). While it has long existed as source of methodological controversy within anthropology (cf. Geertz 1984), it is starting to be used as a prism through which to understand social and cultural life in different contexts.
many anthropologists, he argues that the terms “knowledge” and “culture” point analysis in different directions. By focusing on knowledge rather than culture, Barth claims, it becomes possible to segregate knowledge and social interaction, as well as to compare different corpuses of knowledge and their trajectories of change (2002: 2-3). Thus he encourages anthropological studies of how (modern) knowledge is being circulated and deployed, of the interwoven processes whereby knowledge is produced, represented, dispersed and replicated, as well as of the applications of knowledge by situated actors (2002: 1). Barth suggests analyzing knowledge as an inter-related three-faced phenomenon. First he refers to “a corpus of substantive assertions and ideas about aspects of the world” (Barth 2002: 3). And further: “Secondly, it must be instantiated and communicated in one or several media as a series of partial representations in the form of words, concrete symbols, pointing gestures, actions. And thirdly, it will be distributed, communicated, employed and transmitted within a series of instituted social relations” (ibid.). Barth emphasizes agency and trajectories of change, but he also accentuates how congregations or bodies of knowledge are inherently social and connected to “patterns of actions” (Barth 2002: 2, original emphasis).

Attending to knowledge as generating understanding and empathetic actions certainly implies a trajectory of change, and it rests upon the idea of someone being knowledgeable about themes or dimensions of life which others are unaware of. “Knowledge” thus gives rise to a hierarchy that gives prominence to specialized or expert knowledge (Scott 1998, Rose 1999). Several anthropological and sociological studies are concerned with the formation of such areas of expertise within a variety of fields, such as social work (Jöhncke, Nordahl Svendsen, and Whyte 2004), practices of diagnosing diseases (Mol 2002, Martin 1994, Foucault 2003) and modern statecraft (Scott 1998, Herzfeld 1992). Hence there is nothing unique about how configurations of knowledge (Martin 1994) install a potentially unequal relationship between knowing and unknowing. However, I suggest that we may understand this way of engaging with knowledge as a matter of “expertise” and “professionalism”, as in itself an expression of “a corpus of substantive assertions and ideas about aspects of the world” (Barth 2002: 3). In his article “An Anthropology of Knowledge”, Barth bases his suggested framework for analysing knowledge on Baktaman rituals of “growth”. He argues that such ritual, in correspondence with his rather expanded notion of knowledge “provided people with a way to understand major aspects of the world, ways to think and feel about the world, and ways to act on it” (Barth 1994: 4). The kind of knowledge I am pursuing here is not easily pinned down to one word, like Barth’s “growth”. Rather, it has to do with ideas of what
a “good and healthy” life is; of how this is dependent on “professional” assistance and of how this should be made available in certain ways, seminars and psychosocial groups being among them. In other words, it has to do with how knowledge is being known.

To sum up, this dissertation concerns two distinct, yet completely interwoven expressions, or “faces of knowledge” (Barth 2002). As an embedded ingredient in homework-practices, knowledge is being passed around, on webpages, in newsletters, booklets, books, after-work meetings and seminars. In that sense, it can be said that knowledge becomes health care. Secondly, following Barth, we can also think of this passing around as in itself knowledge, as a way of knowing.

Structure of the dissertation: Encounters in the borderland

In this introductory chapter I have presented the concept of chronic homework as my main theoretical frame for exploring practices of creating awareness about trauma, PTSD and refugeeeness in the Danish welfare state. The movement towards the home, implied in chronic homework, also structures the chapters of this dissertation. Thus the dissertation is organized around an ethnographic investigation of different kinds of borderland encounters respectively the knowledge promoting seminar, addressing wider professional publics; the psychosocial group at school, addressed children themselves living in (exposed) refugee families as well as the home of a family where a father is going through process of being diagnosed with PTSD and for whom psychotraumatology thus has become a lived reality. The analytical approaches are very different. Drawing on diverging theoretical approaches each of the chapters examine these borderland encounters as practices of moving mental healthcare beyond the clinic; as particular kinds of social contexts and as meetings between particular people. Chapter 1 provides further insights into the ethnographic fieldwork, that lay the groundwork for the dissertation, including how the seminar, the psychosocial group and the home have emerged as especially interesting contexts to explore further.

Chapter 2, ‘Emergence in the Borderland’ complements the introduction in offering a historical and political contextualization of the increasing concern for the children growing up in exposed refugee families. It relates psychosocial work with (the descendants of) refugees in Denmark to a complexity of historical and political trajectories. Some of
these are connected to the figure of the refugee and the development of psychotraumatology, whereas others must be understood in the light of more general welfare state practices.

Chapter 3 examines two knowledge promoting seminars, carried out in Nordby and Langebro in relation to the project activities. Engaging anthropological literature on atmospheres, aesthetics, performance and knowledge, the chapter analyses “the seminar” as a particular societal context and performative frame for promoting knowledge in welfare state Denmark. It is argued that discursively, socially and materially seminars perform a certain aesthetic of knowledge, which has the potential to create an atmosphere of pertinence and applicability. The chapter concludes by raising the question if not the form and the persuasiveness of this knowledge aesthetic obscure the questions and concerns raised by teachers and other professionals in different contexts.

Chapter 4 is the perhaps most ethnographically explorative one, tuning in on the tendency that public school teachers are increasingly being encouraged to qualify themselves in working with children and their family relations both in relation to grief, divorce - mental illness. Taking its point of departure in teachers hesitation in doing so, the chapter explores the psychosocial children-groups as a borderland situation of particularly morally character in the context of the public school, due to their inherent therapeutic connotations.

Chapter 5 turns to the home and family relations, more specifically Badra’s home and family relations. In the opening vignette I indicated how Badra’s father Habib became increasingly ill during my fieldwork. Based on my experiences in the family during this stretch of time as well as my conversations, especially with Minnah, the chapter investigates the evasive practices of letting children know, or not know, about their father’s mental health problems. The chapter combines the conceptual frameworks of relatedness and subjunctivity and analyses evasive knowledge practices as expressions not only of how families respond to uncertainty, but also of family relations more generally. The chapter aims to show how whispering and partial disclosures of knowledge can be considered a kind of healthcare within families.
Chapter one

Practice as a point of entry: methodology and ethics
Chapter one

Practice as a point of entry: methodology and ethics

In the early spring of 2009 I was reaching the end of my maternity leave. My daughter had arrived rather abruptly nine months earlier, only a few hours after I had handed in my master’s thesis, and now I was pursuing different opportunities to reengage with my newly achieved profession. Prior to embarking on anthropology, I studied intercultural and international social work, and for a little more than a year I functioned as a social counsellor in a so-called “integration section” in a municipality just west of Copenhagen. During those years of studying and practising social work I built up a network, especially within social development work in Africa and integration and rehabilitation work in Denmark. As I began contacting people, I discovered that Tine, a consultant in the DRC, had recently started thinking about applying for funding for a PhD position at CER and that I had been mentioned as a possible candidate for the job. Soon Tine and I had a meeting at which I learned about Tine’s ideas, and from then on we started the process of applying for funding from the Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation, as well as internally at the DRC.29 I am initiating my methodological reflections at this point in time because it illustrates how research processes are sometimes a matter of coincidence and of seeking out opportunities as much as directed effort (Bruun 2014: 1). Moreover, I want to emphasize how my relationship to my field began not with ethnographic fieldwork, but long before that, with my other and now more distant professional base in social work.

In this chapter I will reflect upon the choices I have made, the choices that were made for me and the coincidences that all influenced the shaping of what have become my field and my objects of analysis, as well as my engagement with them. Ethnographic “field-making” is a process packed with methodological, analytical and ethical concerns.

29 My PhD has been carried out as an Industrial PhD. The DRC co-funds the research project together with the Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation.
In the following pages I will engage with some of these concerns, not as separate components, but as deeply interweaved with one another. In that sense I consider ethical considerations to be an integral part of the ethnographer’s methodological and analytical work when participating in the lives of informants, when engaging with these lives at one’s desk as part of the writing process and when making one’s ethnographic material and findings public (Fluehr-Lobban 2013, Hastrup 2009, Meskell and Pels 2005). I will begin by presenting my initial research interest and reflections on how they have shifted from paying attention to childhood perspectives to a preoccupation with borderland encounters and the interactions that take place there, both with and around children. Next I shall contemplate certain methodological and analytical implications of having to anonymize to the great extent that has been necessary in my research. The following part of the chapter is structured around a presentation of the different realms in which I have conducted fieldwork: the CER and the professional community of organizations involved in the project activities, the project activities as they were carried out in two distinct Danish schools, and the (family) lives of some of the children taking part in the children-groups. Finally I will reflect on some important aspects of anthropological engagement with a practical and politicized field.

**From children’s narratives to borderland encounters**

In the introductory chapter I described how refugee families affected by trauma are emerging as a relatively new concern in Denmark. Along with several other organizations and institutions, the CER, like the DRC as a whole, has a central role in working with refugees and their descendants, as well as providing knowledge for other actors, notably in the Danish integration sector (Olwig and Paerregaard 2011). The circumstance that CER is taking the initiative to host a PhD project thus reflects the general interest in learning more about children in exposed or traumatized refugee families. Many studies of children in refugee families adopt a clinical perspective, often with the purpose either of assessing children’s mental, emotional and social development following war and flight, or of investigating the transmission of trauma and PTSD between parents and children (Hodes 2000, Nader 2008, Rydelius 2008, Montgomery 2000, Montgomery 2005). The consultants at CER were interested in discovering more about the everyday social lives of children in exposed refugee families. My initial research questions reflect this interest. They have a dual focus. The first and most central focus was considerably influenced by phenomenological approaches to children. It enquired into how the children of traumatized refugees apprehend their lives, how they think
about their own, their parents and their families’ situations, and how, if at all, they identify with being refugees in their everyday lives. The other focus concerned the category of “children in exposed refugee families” itself and the implications of this category for social, pedagogical and educational work.

Early in the process it was decided that I should conduct fieldwork on a set of project activities that were about to be carried out in two public schools. Perhaps naively, I imagined that I would be able to investigate the experiences of those children who had been categorized as children in exposed refugee families. Motivated by a desire to let the children’s personal narratives challenge this category, I was curious to learn more about whether, and if so how, the children related to this aspect of their families’ stories and what they thought about the project activities. In time I learned that the conversations I had envisaged and hoped for were only possible and meaningful to a limited extent. As I will argue later in the chapter, the process of realizing this partly had to do with more general aspects of working ethnographically among children, namely that it does not always make sense to rely on dialogue when engaging with children as informants (Christensen and James 2008, Lærke 1998). But what was even more suggestive for the alteration of my interest was my experience of moving in and out of situations where the category of children in exposed refugee families and its inherent psychotraumatological models of explanation seemed to give rise to an immense diversity of questions and concerns for children, families and professionals. As will become evident, these uncertainties, questions and concerns unfolded both in between people and within and across different realms of the welfare state. Thus gradually my research has come to pay more and more attention to the category of children in exposed refugee families as a particular socio-political phenomenon offering interesting perspectives on how practices of moving psychotraumatology beyond the clinic give form to, and are formed by, different kinds of social situations and contexts.

Given the different characteristics of these contexts, they could be conceptualized as sites, thus taking my work in the direction of what George Marcus has famously labelled “multi-sited ethnography” (1998). Multi-sitedness is most often related to global flows, transnationalism and migration. However, if we think of multi-sited ethnography as being designed to “examine the circulation of cultural meanings, identities in diffuse time-space” (1998: 79), this embraces studies of phenomenon within smaller geographical scales. Marcus himself refers to Emily Martin’s study of the notion of the flexible body
in American society (1994) as an example of multi-sited ethnography. While I recognize many of the methodological and analytical aspects Marcus connects to multi-sited fieldwork, I find that, rather than being engaged with a collection of separate sites, my research enquires into one site, namely that of moving knowledge about psychotraumatology and refugeeness from clinics into homes within the Danish welfare state. In Ghassan Hage’s (2005) well-known critical reflections on multi-sited fieldwork, he proposes that we think of discontinuities rather than a multiplicity of sites. Hage points to geographical discontinuities. Following the idea of chronic homework, I suggest we think of a slightly different kind of discontinuity, not between different geographical places, but between a professional realm and a corresponding lay realm (Mattingly, Grøn, and Meinert 2011).

Before I move on to present and reflect upon the different realms or domains in which I have conducted fieldwork, I will deliberate on the issue of anonymity and the ethical questions that arise from the practice of concealing the identities of informants. Given the influence of concerns over anonymity for my fieldwork relations and my analytical choices, these considerations will be significant in reading the following parts of the chapter.

**Anonymizing the field: dislocating the analytical object?**

For some of the families I engaged with, perhaps most importantly for Badra’s family, anonymity was critical. Minnah, whom I introduced in the previous chapter, brought it up when I was doing an interview with her. “It will not be in a newspaper all of sudden, will it?” she asked. Minnah’s nervousness about being recognized was probably invigorated by the fact that relatively recently her son-in-law had been harassed, as he witnessed a crime being committed. In fact the repercussions of this incident were part of the reason why the family had found it necessary to move away from the city they used to live in and settle in Langebro.

Since disclosing the identity of other families, the schools and the neighbourhood would complicate and even compromise processes of anonymizing those families for whom

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30 The idea, and practical achievability, of multi-sitedness is radically challenged by Ghassan Hage in his famous article, “A not so multi-sited ethnography of a not so imagined community” (2005), where he argues that more than anything else the question of multi-sitedness is a matter of perspective.
anonymity was imperative, I found it necessary to anonymize all the people and the places I have engaged with, the only exception being the DRC and the CER. Thus I have changed all the names of my informants, including even my colleagues at the CER. I have also changed the names of the neighbourhoods and the schools, as well as blurring details in my descriptions of where my informants live. Furthermore, in my writings I am deliberately very indistinct about the exact connection between the CER, other organizations and the project activities I have been studying. Hence my references to a professional community do not just reflect an analytical approach. This also has an ethical advantage in the sense that it allows me to refer to a whole range of organizations, rather than emphasizing the specifics of each one.

Changing the names of people and places is a widely used ethical precaution among anthropologists. But anonymizing raises a number of new ethical and moral questions. Is it at all possible to render people unrecognizable with pseudonyms and distortions? (Schepers-Hughes 2000) Is it always our informants’ wish to be anonymous? (Schwartz 2009) How do anonymizing practices affect our analysis? Other important questions address the difficulties with and implications of combining thick ethnographic descriptions with systematic alterations of our data (Bickford and Nisker 2015). Practices of anonymity fade the contours of people and places, with the risk of making them disappear (ibid.). Looking back at my interviews and my first meetings with my informants, especially the children and their families, I consistently and almost mechanically assured them that they would only appear in my writings in anonymized versions. In addition to Minnah, a few returned to this promise during my fieldwork to make sure I would keep it. But I am not actually convinced that all my informants would have insisted on this had I asked them about it. When I assumed the importance of anonymity, it undeniably had to do with the previously mentioned status of anonymizing practices as a taken for granted solution to a sometimes imagined ethical problem. But my assumption also rested on certain ideas about my informants to be and about what I would learn about their lives during my fieldwork. Quite possibly I took it for granted that they would be vulnerable in particular ways (Oeye, Bjelland, and Skorpen 2007) and that anonymity would protect them.

Since my study has become well known within professional networks surrounding the CER, and since the children and teachers know who I have been spending more time with, it would be possible for some people to trace who I am writing about. Thus, one could argue that, in spite of the wide range of precautionary measures I have taken,
what I can promise at best is a certain level of discretion in relation to the outside world (Bickford and Nisker 2015:278). In that sense, the concealment of identities is always relative to different relationships. While it may be possible to conceal the identities of one’s informants from the wider public, it is more difficult to maintain the same degree of secrecy in relation to those who have taken part of one’s fieldwork on a regular basis.

Anonymity has thus proved to be a difficult premise to work with, and it has had considerable implications with regard to the kinds of analysis I have been able to conduct. Initially I regarded this simply as a complicated but feasible methodological concern. However, it slowly dawned on me how influential and wide-ranging this concern actually is. My research has been conducted in parallel to processes of documenting, evaluating and communicating the project activities. These acts of documenting, evaluating and communicating have been carried out by consultants and professionals related to the project activities. Since they have referred explicitly to the project activities and have published reports and pamphlets in which they openly write about the communities, schools and individual teachers involved, I cannot make reference directly to these documents. Moreover, I cannot offer a systematic analysis of the unique circumstances surrounding these project activities and their institutional backdrop, and I have therefore felt obliged to leave out some aspects which could have strengthened an argument, opened up other kinds of analysis, or simply added an intriguing touch. This has caused a great deal of frustration and has constantly obscured the object of my analysis. If I was not able to include the distinctiveness of the practices and the people I was studying, what, then, was I studying? Gradually realizing the extensive implications of anonymity has impelled me to dislocate my analytical focus from particular lives and practices toward the more general phenomena of seminars, children-groups and family life.

I continue this chapter by introducing the different social contexts in and with which I have spent time. Here I shall also reflect on the different kinds of relationships I have had with my interlocutors in those contexts, the character of the ethnographic material evolving from them and the analytical interests that have matured here.

The Centre for Exposed Refugees

The CER is a knowledge centre within the DRC. The consultants in the Centre provide different kinds of professionals, such as social workers, teachers and pedagogues, as well as employees situated in other parts of the DRC with expertise on exposed refugees
in Denmark. Furthermore they engage in advocacy work (fortaler arbejde) and policy work, as well as in research and public debates aiming at improving structural conditions for refugees.  

The DRC’s headquarters is situated less than two kilometres from the department of anthropology in the centre of Copenhagen, the street called Gothersgade more or less connecting the two institutions. To my colleagues I have habitually described this street as an extended corridor relating my two work places. By means of this image, I have referred both to the relative distance and the relative nearness of the other institution. On the one hand, the department or the DRC has been “just down the road”, allowing me to participate in meetings in both places. When the weather has permitted, I have slung pen, notebook and relevant documents into my bicycle basket and gone off, almost as I would have done if I were going to a meeting on a different floor. On the other hand, having to jump on my bicycle at all and move into the traffic indicates some distance between the two work places. Obviously there is a physical element to this space in between, but I have often thought of my bicycle ride as representing a move from one epistemological realm to another. Even though there are plenty of overlapping interests between the department of anthropology and the DRC, there is also a sense in which my countless trips up and down Gothersgade have come to symbolize a dialectical movement back and forth between applied and analytical interests.

During the one and a half years of my Ph.D. project I was based in the DRC, sharing an office with a consultant, who happened to be an anthropologist by education I planned things so that these eighteen months roughly coincided with the period in which most of my fieldwork was carried out. Thus, many of my field notes were written or transcribed at my desk there, and I had longer or shorter conversations with the consultants from the CER and other sections or departments in the DRC, if not on a daily basis, then at least weekly. When I was not doing fieldwork elsewhere, I took part in most meetings at the CER. I also took part in meetings and events involving the project activities in focus. These meetings were sometimes hosted by the CER and sometimes by one of the other

31 A good example of such a debate is the extensive political dispute over starthjælp, that is, social benefits for newly arrived refugees. Between 2002-2012 refugees received a reduced monthly amount compared to the social benefits given to the rest of the population. Starthjælpen was quite controversial and was heavily debated, often in relation to traumatization (Cf.: Tranberg 2003). The reductions in social benefits were restored in June 2015 by the newly elected government.
organizations from the professional community with which the CER cooperated. Involving myself in this community was essential for my understanding of the project activities. Moreover, it gave me a good impression of the kinds of interventions being initiated within the field more generally, as well as what was being debated and in what ways. I do not consider all of this to be part of my “core” ethnographic data. Rather, I think of the insights I made through my participation in this community as a means of recognizing the project activities as a particular kind of intervention, as well as of gaining insights into current tendencies as they drift in and out of this professional community.

Colleague/researcher: Colleague/informant?
Since I was employed by the DRC, and since the CER was part of the professional community carrying out the project activities at the centre of my attention, in some situations I was at once an employee, a colleague and an ethnographer. This inherently ambiguous position implied a range of questions and methodological dilemmas. The Danish anthropologist Morten Hulvej (2010) has observed how, during his fieldwork at the municipality of Copenhagen, his informants expressed some bewilderment over whether to consider him a colleague or something else. I believe that some of my informants experienced a similar kind of disorientation. An obvious dilemma related to this is the question of when, and to what extent, I counted in their work as data (Tjørnhøj- Thomsen and Hansen 2009: 229). We never made any explicit agreements about this, but I aimed to involve the consultants at CER in my empirical and analytical interests as they have developed little by little. For example, I arranged a focus-group interview with some of the consultants concerning the notions of “the psychosocial” and of psychosocial work. At another meeting I initiated reflections about the relationship between knowledge, understanding, empathy and action, which I introduced in the previous chapter and which has become my entry point into analysing practices of knowing in this context.

The indecisiveness with regard to relationships also works the other way around. For a long time while writing my dissertation, I used two words to refer to CER and DRC employees: “colleague” and “informant”. Implicitly this practice represents a sort of note to myself to make a choice one day between the two labels, which potentially imply two very different kinds of affinity. Quite late in the process, however, I realized that, rather than selecting one over the other, the two kinds of affinity were very much a matter of
situations. Sometimes the consultants and I would attend meetings together as colleagues. We would have lunch together as colleagues. We would share frustrations over some computer problem as colleagues. But when we attended meetings related to the project activities, my position as an ethnographer became more explicit and the roles shifted. This shift could also happen within conversations if something related to my research interest suddenly came up.

Another dilemma related to partially studying the practices of colleagues concerns the ways in which the mere presence of the ethnographer may challenge the professional identities of those (partially) being studied. During a meeting at the beginning of my fieldwork, it became evident that one of my colleagues at the CER was being affected by my position as a fieldworker. With her background in the social sciences, she was used to moving back and forth between analytical and applied ways of working and perceived this as an important and treasured facet of her professional identity. She explained how my presence as an ethnographer, and the ways in which I initiated conversations addressing some of the underlying aspects of the work she and others were carrying out, challenged her and sometimes made her feel insecure about her own roles and the work she was doing. Fortunately we were able to talk about this, and it never caused any conflicts or damaged our relationship. But it made it very clear to me how doing fieldwork in the CER as a workplace not only implied mediations of my professional identity as an ethnographer, it also affected the professional identities of the people with whom I was engaging.

My ethnographic material from the DRC and the professional community, having initiated the project activities, mainly consists of participatory observation of numerous meetings and seminars, informal talks in the corridors and a few more focused conversations or interviews thematizing “psychosocial work” and “knowledge”. Moreover, in a few cases I have myself participated in promoting knowledge of exposed refugee families in smaller seminars. Sometimes I have been asked to represent the CER and have made use of their Powerpoint presentations and materials, while at other times I have been asked to present preliminary insights from my research. These experiences of representing different kinds of knowledge have added to and spurred my interest in practices of knowledge promotion, which I develop further in Chapter 3.
A privileged, yet problematic position

Being employed by the DRC provided me with a privileged position in the sense that I was always already part of the professional community carrying out the project activities. This eased my access to the project activities themselves, an access that would probably have been difficult or even impossible without an institutional affiliation with the DRC or one of the other organizations involved. Additionally, it gave me insights into how such project activities come into being. On the other hand, as noted in the previous section, the requirement of anonymity implies that I am not able to include many of the observations made in this context. Moreover, as I shall explain, the fact that I was part of the professional community complicated my relationships with the children and the families with whom the project activities were concerned. I will elaborate on this in the following parts of the chapter, where I also describe the project activities as they were played out in the two different neighbourhoods. I will start by providing an overall account of the project activities as a whole in order to go into greater detail with the children-groups subsequently, since they are the centre of attention in Chapter 4, where I explore them as a particular borderland encounter, a particular way of knowing refugee psychotraumatology.

The project activities in Nordby and Langebro

As mentioned previously, the project activities were carried out in two public schools. To begin with, these two schools were among several in which the school management was presented with the project activities as a means to work in a more focussed way with children in exposed refugee families. When the management at Langebro and Nordby schools respectively showed an interest in accommodating the project activities, a framework for further cooperation was set up. Eventually specific teachers and school personnel were involved, and a team consisting of teachers, a social worker, a psychologist, a member from the school management and other relevant professionals was formed at each school. The project activities offered a structure, knowledge and some concrete methods for working with children in exposed refugee families, all introduced at an initial two-day seminar. However, from the beginning the consultants who were working to implement the project activities made it clear to the school management that both the structure and the methods were adaptable to different contexts. Thus, as I will describe in the following, the project activities took dissimilar courses at the two schools.
**Nordby School**

At Nordby School, the first project event involving the children took place in the beginning of April 2010. Sarah, one of the two bi-language teachers (to-sprogslærere), who had herself come to Denmark as a refugee approximately twenty years ago, had arranged for her friend Ghaada to come and tell all the children in the two fifth-grade classes about her flight from Iraq to Denmark. When I entered the big room, which I later learned was the school’s art room, all the children were sitting or lying around on the floor. Some of the girls were fiddling with each other’s hair. One girl looked up at me and asked curiously: “Are you the one who fled?” I could not help but smile. Of the many questions I had imagined having to answer when meeting the children, this was not one of them. Ghaada told the children how she had to leave Iraq very suddenly after it had been discovered that she and some of her closest family members had been involved in producing texts challenging the regime. She had to leave her two small boys behind. Later they joined her in Denmark. The children seemed captivated by her narrative and asked all kinds of questions, ranging from “How long did it take to go from Baghdad to Denmark?”, “Did you write in Danish?”, “Who taught you to speak Danish?”, “What do you do for a living?” to “Who took care of your children while you were gone?” and “He [referring to Ghaada’s son] couldn’t remember, but he could when he was dreaming, right?”

For the next two weeks, nearly all their lessons were reserved for the theme of “refugees”. They were presented with different kinds of fiction and non-fiction material related to refugees, both as a global phenomenon and in the Danish context. They were given assignments such as writing a poem about fleeing, imagining that they themselves had fled a country and now had to write a letter to their made-up grandmother, or thinking what they would put in their rucksacks if they had to flee all of a sudden. In this manner, the refugee theme was approached in a variety of different and instructive ways with the aim of making the children reflect on the fact that there are refugees in the world, as well as imagining what it might be like to be one. This all took place during the spring. The children-group sessions were carried out in the following fall, when the children had become fifth graders. Four children, three boys and a girl, participated in the group sessions. Initially all the children from families in which one or both parents had come to Denmark as refugees were invited to take part in the group sessions. Their parents were invited to individual meetings at the school, where one of the teachers itold them about the project activities and encouraged them to talk with their children
about participating in the group session. One boy and his family did not want to take part, and another three children moved to a different school over the summer.

The group sessions took place in a relatively remote room, normally used for extra tuition, and sometimes the art room was used for play or exercises that required more space. Nina, a psychologist, and Rakel, the class teacher in one of the classes, facilitated the children-groups. Nina normally worked in one of the organizations within the community that were cooperating with the CER, and she was experienced in facilitating children-groups. The group met seven times in the afternoon, immediately after school. An eighth session was planned, but as it coincided with Eid none of the children turned up. The different sessions were organized around a certain theme, such as “emotions” or “to be the child of a refugee in Denmark” and “important persons”. On each occasion the day’s program was noted on the blackboard. It might look like this:

- Welcome
- Since the last time
- Emotions
- Story: Ali from Iraq
- Colors/emotions
- See you again

In addition to these activities, a few events were arranged involving the parents. The first event was a meeting at which all the parents of the fourth-grade children were invited to hear about the project activities and to learn about some of the general conditions for refugees in Denmark. The following two events exclusively involved the parents of the children who took part in the groups. On these occasions, parents, children and the school staff involved met for a few hours in the late afternoon or early evening to play and eat together. For some of the time the children and parents were separated. While the children and their siblings were allowed to play in the library, Nina and Rakel talked to the parents about how trauma and living in exile can impact your life. Typically these events would involve other school personnel, such as the schools’ social worker, other teachers and the school’s principal and vice-principal.
**Langbro School**

At Langbro School the project activities were initiated by a double lesson that introduced all the children in the two fourth-grade classes to the topics of PTSD and secondary PTSD. The children were divided into four clusters, two for boys and two for girls. Sofia and Ingrid, who were both class teachers in the two classes, took it in turns to facilitate the lessons and observe them respectively. To begin with, one of them briefly told the children about how people who have experienced war and fled from it can suffer from PTSD and how it may affect their families. The children were handed a piece of paper showing the contours of a human body and told to color the body in a variety of colors, each representing a feeling. Meanwhile Sofia and Ingrid read aloud “the story of Fatme” to the girls and “the story of Ali” to the boys.\(^{32}\) These lessons were intended to familiarize all the children in the two classes with the topic of exposed refugee families. Following this, all fourth-grade parents were invited to a meeting at which they were informed of the project activities that were about to take place, as well as some of the general aspects of being a refugee in Denmark. The parents, who themselves had come to Denmark as refugees, were informed more thoroughly at meetings, either in their homes or at the schools. As was the case in Nordby, they were also invited to three “parent-get-togethers” (*forældre-komsammener*).

The children-groups were carried out from the early fall through to the end of the winter in the fifth grade. Ten boys and eight girls took part in the group sessions. The first four sessions were facilitated by Flora, a psychologist who had herself come to Denmark as a refugee in the 1980s. Poul, who coordinated the project activities in Langbro, knew her and had recommended her early in the process. These first sessions took place at a nearby museum for children. Henrik, a pedagogue, brought the children there by bus, alternating every second week between the girls and the boys. The relationship between Flora and the children was problematic from the beginning. After a few sessions it was decided that Sofia, as a well-known teacher, should be given a more central role in the group sessions, and eventually she took over facilitating the group sessions from Flora completely. This change was brought about by Flora herself, Sofia, Hedvig, Henrik and the other professionals involved in the project activities at Langbro School. When

\(^{32}\) The two stories were written in the early 2010s by a group of teachers involved in one of the first projects to deal with children in traumatized refugee families. They take the perspective respectively of Fatme and Ali, a sister and a brother growing up in a family in which the father has been deeply affected by past traumatic events in his life. The following chapter starts with the story of Fatme.
I spoke with them about this decision afterwards, they told me that it had not worked for Flora, since she and the children did not know each other. Flora fully agreed. During an interview she said to me, “And I thought, perhaps from the beginning, if I had known about these children, then I would have done it differently, right...?” Moreover, Flora and the others talked about how the change of scene from the school to the museum, where the group sessions were initially held, was confusing and just created unrest and turmoil among the children. While these reasons for changing the setting, form and facilitator of the group sessions all seemed to make sense, it was also apparent that the girls especially reacted negatively to Flora’s non-Danish background. Often, when she spoke, she made small mistakes or pronounced words imprecisely, making it difficult to understand what she was saying. The girls commented on it, corrected her and sometimes even made fun of her.

Already from the start the psychosocial groups emerged as that part of the project activities, which very explicitly effected, accepted and contested the category of children in exposed refugee families. But, while taking part in the group sessions, it appeared to me that, much though I was encountering a socio-political category, a particular genre of work was also at play. Thus, as I will describe further in Chapter 4, investigating “the psychosocial group” allowed me to explore situations in which the relationships, roles and positions of the children and teachers were being negotiated. Since I tacked back and forth between Nordby and Langebro, the project activities at the two schools emerged as being in continuous contrast to one another. The implicit and explicit comparative aspects that are inherent in this fieldwork situation have directed attention to the group sessions, both as versions of a social technology moving health care and promoting well-being, and as unfolding in particular places with particular people. As I will elaborate in Chapter 4, especially Langebro came across as an interesting example of how the socio-political surroundings can influence the ways in which children and teachers engage with each other in the context of the context of the psychosocial group.

With a few exceptions, I participated in all the project-related activities at the two schools: the lessons thematicizing refugees, the group sessions, the parents’ meetings and the school team meetings. Later I conducted more formal interviews with the teachers and psychologists involved in the project activities, and I also had the chance to be present at the interviews that consultants from the professional community conducted as part of the evaluation of the activities. In the following I shall reflect more thoroughly on my ethnographic involvement, particularly with the children.
**Being PTSD-Trine**

As I have emphasised already, both the category of children in exposed refugee families and the ways in which it was applied at the two schools stimulated a lot of questions and concerns for both the children themselves and the professionals who were taking part in the project activities. These questions and concerns, some more than others, were also brought out in my relationships with the children. In Langebro this became evident in a somewhat peculiar way. Here the children quickly began referring to the group-sessions merely as “PTSD”. “Are we having PTSD today”, I often heard them ask. Their teachers, Sofia and Ingrid, echoed them and also started talking about the project activities as “PTSD”. It may in fact have been one of them who introduced the label. As it happened, I became “PTSD-Trine” to the children in Langebro, and some of those who were most active in questioning the project activities were also very suspicious of my work. “If my name is on those pages, I will tear them out”, one girl said. Other children were sure that I was interested in conflicts and situations in which they acted rebelliously. “Trine, Trine, you should note this down”, they would say when some of their classmates were doing something they were not allowed to. As I will explain further in Chapter 4, I came to understand this as an expression of how the children in Langebro were used to being regarded as problematic within their environment and that their approaches to the project activities, and to some extent also to me, merged with these experiences.

Witnessing the children’s uneasiness with the category of children in exposed refugee families, as well as being the occasional objective of it, gave me valuable insights into the ways in which both children and professionals engaged with the psychosocial practices, their perspectives on them and the social contexts they were part of. In that sense my preoccupation with the ambiguous and diffuse qualities of psychosocial work with children in exposed refugee families springs not only from having listened to questions from children and professionals, but also from my own experiences of navigating the roles and positions available to me in the field. But being PTSD-Trine also served as a constant reminder of the dilemmas of my research project. Was I caught up in the very same assumptions of trauma and vulnerability that were inherent in the category of children in exposed refugee families? And how could I produce an ethnography that did not just echo the project activities? To some extent these questions and dilemmas are intrinsic to all studies of practices of categorizing people, but they have certainly been
reinforced by the fact that from the outset my research project was folded into professional interests that intersected with those I was studying and, more importantly, that I entered into the lives of my interlocutors along with these.

During and especially after the period of time in which the group sessions took place, I also participated in “ordinary” schooldays, partly to spend time with the children with whom I was conducting more extensive fieldwork, and partly to obtain a better impression of the context in which the project activities had unfolded. Playing ball with the children in the breaks and assisting them with their school work in class changed my relations with many of the children. Farida, one of the girls who had most actively and openly expressed scepticism about the children-groups and who had also distanced herself from me, gradually took me in. One day, asking me for help with spelling, she leaned towards me in way that took me by surprise. Many ethnographers working with children attempt to position themselves as “atypical kinds of adults” (Gulløv and Højlund 2006: 104, Evans 2006). However, that fleeting moment, when Farida turned to me for help in a way that indicated a kind of confidentiality that I had never encountered from her before, suggested to me that my status as a “typical adult” was somehow much less problematic than my identity as PTSD-Trine.

In the beginning I tried out numerous conversations with the children about the project activities, but usually these conversations ended very quickly, with the children curtly answering: “it was boring”, “it was fun” or “I don’t know”. To a certain degree these replies, in discouraging further conversation, can be understood as expressions of how children engage in conversation more generally, and thus of my slowness in realizing this. “My experience is certainly that children would not give interviews, but rather leave impressions”, Lærke wrote in 1998 (1998: 5), at a point in time when social science researchers were starting to include children in research in new and inventive ways.33 But the replies may also denote the previously mentioned insecurity about the project activities and my role in them. Nonetheless I realized that the observations I made during

33 Anna Lærke’s own significant ethnographic fieldwork is a good and perhaps also extraordinary example of this. Positioning herself among, and at the physical level of, English village children, she claims to “re-member” children into society (1998). When arguing for the necessity of this, she echoes many of her colleagues in their critiques of children and childhood being perceived mainly in the light of developmental psychology and educational approaches (ibid.: 3). Within these domains children are either looked upon as first and foremost in development and thus always in the process of becoming social or as less knowledgeable and therefore in need of adults to educate and socialize them (ibid.).
the project activities and on schooldays were much more valuable than those awkward moments of trying to talk about the children’s experiences of the project activities. However, towards the end of my fieldwork I did ask all the then sixth-graders in Nordby and Langebro to write an essay in which they should imagine their lives in their thirties. Moreover, in Nordby I also carried out focus-group interviews with most of the children in two classes in which, in different ways, I encouraged them to discuss subjects that could give me insights into their thoughts and ideas about what a good life consists of. While these essays and interviews have not played an explicit part in my dissertation, they served as important steps in demonstrating my interest in the children’s lives more generally and in contextualizing my experiences from the project activities.

**Children and families**

From the beginning, my hope was to engage myself with eight children outside school, that is, in their families and homes. However, gaining access to those parts of the children’s lives proved complicated. Moreover, as I have mentioned already, some of the children moved to other schools.\(^{34}\) I ended up with four: Badra and Samira in Langebro, and Yusuf and Salima in Nordby.

At both schools, the teachers involved with the project activities introduced me to the children and their parents, either at meetings at the school or on home visits. In each case I explained my interest in learning more about what it was like to grow up in a family with parents who have come to Denmark as refugees by taking part of the project activities and by spending time with the children during schooldays, as well as outside school. I asked the approval of one or both parents to ask their child if he or she would spend time with me both at school and afterwards. Generally the parents welcomed me and my project, but the children were more sceptical. As described above, many of the latter did not seem entirely comfortable with the children-groups and thus not with the idea of spending time with me either, whom they associated with the group sessions, at least initially. In one case I visited the mother of one of the boys from Langebro School.

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34 One boy, In Nordby School, with whom I had managed to enter into a fairly good relationship right from when I met the two classes there, just did not turn up after a holiday. A teacher told me that he and his family had moved to another municipality and that this happened relatively often. I tried to get in contact with him a few times, but without any luck. Moreover, two girls, twin sisters, moved away from the school quite suddenly.
I joined Ingrid when she met the mother to inform the latter about the group sessions. The mother welcomed us warmly and seemed very interested in my research project, as well as the project activities at the school. We spent a nice afternoon together in their living room and garden, and I left with the feeling that I would definitely be returning to the family. But as I started spending more time in the school, it became clear that her son was not interested in talking with me. I had similar experiences several times. Generally, when I experienced this kind of rejection from the children, I did not pursue their company any further. It is possible that time would have allowed me to get closer to some of the children who dismissed me in the beginning. As described above, the time I spent in Langebro School after the project activities had formally ended markedly changed my relationship with many of the children. However, to continue with this would have prolonged my fieldwork well beyond what was possible. In the end it was only when I felt that a child was interested in talking to me and seemed comfortable with it that I made arrangements to spend more time together, either in their after-school centre or in their home. Yusuf was the only exception to this. In the beginning he seemed happy with the idea of my visiting him and his family. But as this turned into a reality, he found excuses to do something else whenever I stopped by. I was in doubt over what to do about it and whether it would be better to back out of this fieldwork engagement. However, while hanging out in Yusuf’s living room waiting for him, Yusuf’s mother Munira and I developed a good relationship. She and Yusuf’s father were separated at that point in time, and she involved me in their history and asked me for advice with regard to her children’s future education. One day she told me that, while she liked the idea of the children-groups, Yusuf was not happy about them. He had told her that he would rather play football with the other children than spend time in the children-group with children who were not his friends. He had also told her that he felt shy about me talking with him. Thus I stopped reaching out to him, but I kept up my contact with Munira.

At Nordby school, Salima was the only girl who attended the group sessions. Salima’s father fled Iraq at the beginning of the 1990s, and her mother came later through family reunification after having married her father. Salima and I quickly got along. She was curious about what I was doing, welcomed my company and, having asked her parents’ permission, she and I started meeting regularly. Sometimes I would join her at her after-school centre, and at other times we would go for a walk or drink hot chocolate together at a café. On one occasion we went ice-skating. As with the other children, I was very cautious about how her relationship with me affected her relationship with the children.
in her class, but it did not seem to be problematic for her. One day, when we were out walking, we met two girls from the school. Having passed them in a greeting, I said that maybe they would ask her what we were doing, and Salima said that she would just tell them that “she is interested in my life”. Salima’s parents were also divorced, and I only met her father a few times. When I visited Salima in her home, often we would sit in the living room together with her mother. She was in the process of qualifying at the upper-secondary level of education and was often busy working on her school assignments. Sometimes she would ask me for help with regard to her own schooling as well as with other things, such as figuring out how to sign Salima up for the popular local soccer club she so eagerly wanted to join.

In Langbro, Badra and Samira, who were close friends, both showed an interest in me, so I decided to contact their families. I visited Samira in her home a few times, and when she spent six weeks at a school camp for children with weight problems, I visited her there. But the family I developed the closest relationship with was Badra’s. Ingrid, Badra’s teacher, had in fact informed me that I should not expect to get to know them, since this family was “very religious and very closed”. From my very first visit, however, Badra’s mother Minnah and I got along well. I recall Minnah’s hospitable and open-hearted reaction when I deliberately left my bag with its pen and notebook in their small hallway so that she and I could have our first cup of coffee together, without the implicit expectation that might be caused by a pen and paper lying on the table. “Don’t you want something to take notes on?”, she asked, and smiled charitably when I got up to fetch it.

From then on I started visiting Badra and her family on a regular basis. Often I would spend some of the day at school in her class, and then Badra and I would walk to her home together, typically in the company of Samira and Badra’s younger brother, Musa. Sometimes I only stayed for a few hours, but at other times I would stay until the evening, and a few times I was invited to sleep over. In many ways, spending time in Badra’s home was comfortable and unproblematic. Badra, her immediate family and her brothers, sisters and their families, who often visited, made me feel welcome. Badra happily told me about things that had happened at school, trips to the library with her brother, peculiar people living in the neighborhood or hanging out at the supermarket, or her dreams about becoming a clothes designer. She showed me computer games, drawings and the Taekwondo moves she was practicing. She was especially eager when I showed an interest in learning some Arabic words and in seeing how she and her family practiced
Islam. Still, our relationship did not develop in the same spontaneous and mutual ways as was the case with Minnah.

In retrospect I wonder why I did not attempt to conduct fieldwork in more homes, with the mothers as my central interlocutors. Both at my first meetings with the families and when I spent time with the children in these few families, it was obvious that the relationships between myself and the respective mothers involved an entirely different kind of reciprocity.

**Whispering with the mothers**

“The children come in and out of the kitchen. We cut up the ends of vegetables so that they can use them as block prints for painting; they bring their paintings for regular examination. [...] Malathi breaks off whenever the children enter, but there is no door in the kitchen and sound echoes through the house. Do they hear her? How do they come to understand the silences that are transmitted to them?” (Thiranagama 2011: 79)

In her book, *In My Mother’s House: Civil War in Sri Lanka*, Sharika Thiranagama (2011) offers an extraordinary ethnography of the civil war as it was experienced both within and across generations and of how it greatly influenced intimate relationships within families. She describes how most of her conversations with her interlocutor, Malathi, took place in the kitchens of the two houses in which Malathi and her family lived during the course of her long-term fieldwork. Recounting how these conversations were influenced by the coming and going of Malathi’s children, she reflects upon the pauses, and the possibility that Malathi’s children may overhear the story from the neighboring room, as subtle practices of “storing” memories and secrets within families (2011: 78).

In a similar vein, the mothers with whom I interacted, particularly Minnah, were my source of insights into families’ stories, as well as into processes of silencing those stories. As an adult, and perhaps also as another woman and another mother, I was involved in matters that the children were sometimes left out of. In that sense I came to play a part in the whispering too, and not only in the families. Throughout my fieldwork, I often found myself in situations in which a mother, a psychologist or a teacher lowered or softened her voice in what seemed like a deliberate attempt either to hide something
from a child or to indicate the sensitivity surrounding a particular subject of conversation. Thus my notebooks are full of hastily written down records of situations surrounded by a sense of delicacy. In Chapter 5 I will describe further how these experiences of being included, as an adult, have added yet another dimension to my understanding of the ambiguous practices of letting children know about trauma and refugeeness.

**Language barriers in the homes**

Nearly all the members of the families I visited spoke Danish, either fluently or at least well enough to make themselves understood. However, sometimes family members switched languages, and entire discussions would unfold in Arabic, Somali or Kurdish. One evening, when I was staying in Badra’s home for the night, her father Habib, sitting in the enclosed balcony, had an argument over the phone with his relatives in Lebanon. Minnah and their oldest son and his family were in the kitchen area, and I was in the living room with Badra and Musa, Badra’s younger brother. When no one else spoke, Habib’s phone conversation dominated the apartment, both the volume of his voice and the quietness as he was listening to what was being said at the other end of the line. Sometimes he was very loud, even shouting. He sounded very angry, and a few times it felt strange not to be asking about it. Neither Badra nor Musa made any attempt to comment on what was going on and just continued talking and joking. At one point I could not help asking “is he OK?” Badra and Musa just nodded. When, a little while later, we could hear more outbursts, I asked them to let me know if I should leave. Again they did not answer and did not seem particularly affected by the situation. I was hoping that my brief comments would cause them to tell me what Habib was upset about, but they did not. When Habib hung up the phone, an equally loud conversation evolved between him, Minnah and their oldest son. It sounded like they were in great disagreement. Later in the evening Minnah explained to me that Habib felt there was not much he could do about his illness and that it was all in the hands of God. I got the impression that the family in Lebanon wanted Habib to seek out a particular kind of treatment, which he refused to do. Certainly this was one of the situations in which not being able to speak or understand Arabic prevented me from understanding exactly what was going on, right in front of me. At such times my unease with a situation was not the result of quietly being included (Thiranagama 2011: 79), but rather of loudly being excluded.

Had I focused on families from a particular country, or had I known that Badra’s family would come to play such an important role in my fieldwork and dissertation, it would
have made sense to take Arabic lessons. Then I would have been able to get a sense of
the language, to be able to develop my Arabic language skills while spending time with
the family and to catch bits and pieces of their conversations. However, it is unlikely that
I would have been able to learn enough to fully understand what family members were
talking about, and in that sense I would still have to rely on their translations. Therefore
I have accepted the fact that I was left out of some conversations, and probably also
missed out on important exchanges of words that took place right beside me. In such
situations I took note of other things, for example, bodily gestures, expressions or tones
of voice. Often a family member would provide me with some kind of information about
what was going on. And in the rare occasions when I was left entirely in the dark, I could
not help thinking that they had their reasons and that being bilingual provided family
members with a means to keep things from me. After all, it was their home I was hanging
out in.

**Studying vulnerability in an applied and politicized field**

In a recent and much-debated article, Joel Robbins addresses the question of how an-
thropologists have been, and still are, preoccupied with studying the lives of people who
in one way or another are perceived as undergoing distress. He argues that, since the
1990s, what he refers to as the suffering subject, “living in pain, in poverty, or under
conditions of violence or oppression”, has replaced the previous focal anthropological
object, that of the radical other, the primitive or savage (Robbins 2013: 448). This pro-
fessional preference for studying the hardships of human lives has led to rich consider-
ations of the roles and positions of the anthropologist. Among these are debates on the
potential of anthropological studies to (mis)represent (Fabian 1983, Clifford 1983), ad-
vocate (Hastrup and Elsass 1990), politically criticize (Jöhncke 2002) or witness (Smith
and Kleinman 2010) the lives of our interlocutors and/or the premises of their living.

In enquiring into psychosocial practices among children in exposed refugee families in
welfare-state Denmark, this study is faced with many of the ethical dilemmas and con-
cerns raised in those debates. One important ethical concern revolves around not add-
ing to the marginalization and stigmatization of refugee families in Denmark while at
the same time not dismissing the care and attention that may prove important for some
individuals and families. This dilemma in particular is reinforced by the fact that in some
respects the dissertation is taking part in knowledge production within a highly applied
professional field, where knowledge of exposed refugees and of how best to assist them
is continuously being produced and passed around. A further complicating factor is that this production and passing around of knowledge happens within a highly politicized field, where intricate matters are often reduced in acts of what the Danish anthropologist Helle Bundgaard refers to as “discursive closure” (Bundgaard 2009). Bundgaard has conducted research among minority children and families in Danish kindergartens. Reflecting upon a range of dilemmas related to working within this field of particular political interest and controversy, she describes a tricky moral landscape in which the ethnographer’s accounts and arguments tend to become conflated with the dominant narratives, not only about minority families, but also about discriminatory professional practices (ibid.).

Much of the anthropological work I am inspired by can be understood as critiquing dominant discourses of vulnerability as they are coupled with victimhood. By pertaining to the multi-facetted and complex expressions and experiences of being vulnerable, they seek to bring agency into focus (cf.: Kleinman, Das, and Lock 1997, Kleinman 2006, Schepers-Hughes 2008, Das 2001, Jackson 2004, Grønseth 2013, Jensen and Rønsbo 2014). In the following chapters, I pursue analytical approaches that, without eclipsing the troublesome aspects of some children’s and families’ lives, demonstrate the composite and contradictory aspects of providing care and attention to those lives. The dissertation therefore aims to offer analyses which, with their critical edge to practice, can add nuanced reflections to (psycho)social work with refugees in particular, to welfare state interventions in general, and to central facets of the social lives of human beings.
Chapter two

Emergence in the Borderland
Chapter two

Emergence in the Borderland

Assembling the category of children in exposed refugee families

The story of Fatme

Fatme wakes up, it is totally dark in the room – she doesn’t like the dark. She lies in bed a bit and listens. She can hear the sound of the TV in the living room, so her father is probably in there. It is cold and wet in her bed, and she would like to go to the bathroom and take off her wet pajamas. There is a whole lake of urine in the bed – she thinks this is so gross, why can’t she just wake up when she needs to go to the bathroom? She lies in the bed a while and notices that her stomach is aching, she is afraid. It is strange – all of her siblings wet the bed, and her mother is so tired of it. Sometimes the bed is totally dry when she goes to bed and it still smells bad. Fatme creeps out of bed to the bathroom. She takes her wet clothes off and finds some dry pajamas and a towel to place over the wet mattress.

On the way back to bed, she tiptoes over to peek into the living room. Her father is sitting in front of the TV and looks tired. She can see that he has a headache again, she just hopes that he doesn’t begin to cry or throw things, because that will wake up her little brother, and then he will start to cry and then everything will get really awful. She is afraid and sneaks back to bed, but she can’t sleep. She has stomachache now and feels like she needs to throw up. If only she knew why she got so afraid when her father sat in the living room these nights. During the day he is very tired, and they all have to be quiet. He is mostly in his and mother’s his bedroom, and when he comes out the apartment falls totally silent. It is like everything happens slowly, like even the smallest noise creates a racket.

Mother is also tired, but she doesn’t say anything. If she isn’t doing well she is easily irritated, and it is hard for us to do things right. It is also dumb to wet the bed – if only
she could just stop doing it. She tries every night to convince herself to wake up when
she notices that she needs to pee – she just never notices anything until she wakes in a
cold wet bed. Her mother is so tired of it, there is so much laundry for her to do. Tomor-
row she will make her bed properly and not say anything about wetting it.

Fatme wakes up the next day, it is quiet – she looks at the clock. Oh no, she’s overslept.
She rushes out of bed and quickly gets dressed. She doesn’t manage to wash herself off.
She grabs her book bag from the hallway and runs out the door. Hopefully the teachers
won’t notify her parents about her lateness – she is often late. She can hear the school
bell ring. She runs as fast as she can and enters the classroom as soon as the teacher
calls her name. “Sorry I am late,” she says. She lands heavily in her chair. Her stomach
aches, she has not had any breakfast – for that matter she doesn’t have a lunch pack
either. Why didn’t they wake her up this morning? The teacher is standing talking; her
name is Grethe. Fatme likes the sound of her voice, but the words sound funny. She grabs
her ball out of her bag. It is yellow and nice to touch. She tosses it from one hand to the
other. FATME! The shout hits her like a blow. It is Grethe that is shouting. She is standing
right in front of Fatme. “Wha’, yeah!”, Fatme answered. “Do tell me, what is going on
with you? First you come in late – again – and then you sit and play with a ball in class.
Put your gym clothes on and hurry over to the gym, the others have already gone”.

In gym class the others have already started playing soccer. Fatme asks which team she
should play for. She has to borrow some old gym clothes that have been forgotten at the
school because she forgot to bring her own. She looks ridiculous. When she joins the
green team, there are a few other girls that say “Oh, no”. Fatme knows that the others
don’t want her on the team. She doesn’t like exercise, she can’t get her body to do what
she tells it, and today she has to be careful how close she gets to the others, or they will
notice that she smells like pee. “Ugh, something smells!” yells one of the boys. “You smell
like pee, don’t you bath?” All the others scream with laughter. It all spins around in
Fatme’s head, round and round and round, faster and faster. She charges at the boy who
yelled at her. Her hands and arms pummel him, knocking him to the ground, where she
continues to strike him.

It is quiet, too quiet – then the sound of a ringing telephone. Fatme is sitting in the
schools office. She can hear Grethe speaking with the principal: “It is the fifth time this
week. I can’t have her in class – she’s a danger to the other pupils”. Dangerous, is she
dangerous? It was the boy who started it. Oh, the whole thing is a mess, her head is a
mess. She smiled at the idea of being able to put her hands in her head and clean up. “You think this is funny?”, asked a voice that was the principal. What should she say, should she say: “Yes, I was just thinking about cleaning up in my head”. She starts laughing. The principal asks if she is aware that the boy is in the emergency room because his lip was split when she hit him. She shrugs, she didn’t know. She doesn’t know anything, not even how she ended up in the office or how her hands stop hitting.” Look at me and answer when I speak to you”, says the principal. His name is Hans and he has brown shoes – one shoe has chalk on it. She cautiously looks up and her stomach hurts and she feels nauseous. “I want to go home”, she hears herself say. “Yeah, well that was also the idea. We don’t want people who hit at school”, says Hans. “But there was no one at home where you live. You have to go back to class and behave the rest of the day”.

Fatme looks out the window in the classroom. It is raining and the last class of the day. I wonder if Ali is out of school by now? “Fatme, here is a letter to your parents. I want it back tomorrow with you mother’s and father’s signatures, so I can see that they have spoken with you about your behavior”, says Grethe. The bell rings. Fatme leaves the classroom and sees the boy’s friends, and they want to beat her up. She hides in the bathroom. She is hungry, nobody likes her, why is she even there? Fatme notices Grethe’s letter in her pocket. Her hands hold the letter and rip it into thin strips that she folds into small squares. The bits of paper fall into the water in the toilet. She flushes it. The pieces of paper swirl around in the toilet, and when the water becomes still again, all the paper is gone. It is all quiet in the hall now. Fatme carefully opens the bathroom door. Everyone has gone. She leaves the school and goes home.

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The story of Fatme is a short story, written at the beginning of the 2010s by a group of teachers involved in one of the first school-based psychosocial projects in Denmark dealing with children in refugee families in which one or both parents are traumatized. Fatme has a brother, called Ali. He is the central character in “the story of Ali” about a boy who, compared to his sister, is more withdrawn and thoughtful. Ali spends his time at school worrying about their father’s temper and sleepless nights and about their mother’s attempt to take care of the family and their home. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the two stories were written with the intention of being read out loud to children, providing both teachers and children with an account of an imagined family to
talk about. What is interesting about the stories is, that Fatme and Ali’s teachers are unaware of the difficulties the two children are experiencing in their home. Fatme’s teacher, Grethe is shouting at her and is complaining to her principal about Fatme’s aggressive outbursts. In the story of Ali the teacher, Karen, is more mild. Patiently, but without much luck, she is trying to figure out what makes Ali so sad. Especially the story of Fatme clearly indicates that Grethe misreads her pupil, because she does not know enough about Fatme’s life outside of school.

Dismaying and gloomy, nevertheless the stories about Ali and Fatme somehow summarize, or portray, professional and to some extent also public discourses about the conditions for children in trauma-affected refugee families. Like other representations of victims, the images produced by the narratives can come across as caricatures. As I noted in Chapter 1 and will return to in Chapter 4, the stories were negotiated and put into practice in very different ways by the teachers in Nordby and Langebro. But before moving on to the concrete practices and their social implications, I will explore the historical and contemporary circumstances that bring the stories about Fatme and Ali into the schools to begin with. Thus, this chapter concerns the overall questions of how refugees have become an “a priori mental health risk category” (Eastmond 2005: 152)(original emphasis) and how the lives and futures of their children have emerged as a recognizable and clear psychosocial concern in Denmark. Addressing these questions implies unpacking and contextualizing some of the central emic concepts running through the dissertation. Thus this chapter continues from, and elaborates on the introductory chapter by offering a historical, socio-political and conceptual framework important for the reading of the following chapters.

In order to set the scene historically, socio-politically and conceptually, I am inspired by Rønsbo and Paniagua’s (2014) use of assemblage theory as they unfold how psychosocial interventions have been practiced within what they conceptualize as “the Guatemalan postconflict victim assemblage” (Ronsbo 2014: 126). Their study is among the few anthropological inquiries into psychosocial work explicitly (See also: Segal 2014, Buch 2010, Pupavac 2001, 2004). Attentive of the encompassing qualities of “the psychosocial narrative” (135), they outline psychosocial practices as “those practices that accompany forensic, political, development-oriented, and legal work that target the relationship between the psychic and the sociopolitical environs, whether this takes place in the space of the subject, the family, the community or the nation” (Ronsbo 2014: 125).
The amounts of psychosocial assistance offered to survivors of the Guatemalan genocide are radically different from the practices addressed in this dissertation. Rønsbo and Paniagua describe them as some of the “most comprehensive and best funded of [its] kind” (2014: 125). The Guatemalan conflict and genocide affected the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, and psychosocial work in Guatemala is explicitly part of a nation-state narrative about reconciliation. The psychosocial practices I have been studying are much more of a niche in the sense that they concern a minority of refugees from foreign conflicts and their descendants. Still, in spite of the dissimilar context of a Latin American post-conflict society, Rønsbo and Paniagua’s approach to the comprehensive span of psychosocial interventions in Guatemala inform what is in many ways a similarly all-encompassing notion of psychosocial work in Denmark. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, from a wider perspective, and as a theoretical and practical phenomenon, psychosocial work can be understood as a currently very common way of attending to, or knowing, a great variety of social problems in Denmark. Moreover, even though concerning a minority, psychosocial practices with refugees relate to subjects of wide relevance, such as integration – immigration and social policy. The employment of assemblage theory allows a productive exploration of the co-existing circumstances that shape and constitute socio-political categories and psychosocial practices.

In their recent anthology, *Histories of victimhood*, the Danish anthropologists Steffen Jensen and Henrik Rønsbo (2014) conceptualize victimhood as an assemblage in the sense that they explore “how a variety of heterogeneous entities, objects, actors and relationships coalesce to form wholes of relative stability” (2014: 9). They find their inspiration in both Michel Foucault’s perspectives on how categories are the result of specific historical practices and in Gilles Deleuze and Manuel De Landa’s perspectives on assemblages as a way to comprehend a range of current formations of victimhood across the globe. In De Landa’s words, assemblages are “wholes characterized by relations of exteriority” (De Landa 2006: 10)(original emphasis). This should be understood in contrast to previous tendencies to conceptualize wholes as organic entities, defined by the sum of their parts or their interior relations. Thus, each of the components of an assemblage is potentially a part of others’ assemblages (De Landa 2006: 10). Another

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35 There are, in fact, many resemblances between traditions of psychosocial work across the globe. For example, Rønsbo and Paniagua mention the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire as a central figure in the development of psychosocial interventions in Guatemala. Having founded an entire school of “critical pedagogy” or “a pedagogy of the oppressed,” Freire and his work are also highly regarded in Scandinavia.
distinctive trait of assemblages is that, rather than consisting of parts which are “logically necessary”, assemblage-parts may relate to each other as merely “contingently obligatory” (De Landa 2006: 11). In other words, the parts co-exist, but are only brought together under certain circumstances.

De Landa argues that assemblage components can have a solely material role, an expressive role or, as often happens, be a mixture of both. He provides a few examples in which he mentions bodies, food, physical labour, simple tools and complex machines as material and talk, bodily postures and choice of topics as expressive\textsuperscript{36} (De Landa 2006: 12-13). Another distinction of his epitomizes how components can both stabilize and destabilize an assemblage, or, as more usually expressed, how components can have both \textit{territorializing} and \textit{deterritorializing} implications (2006: 12). This means that some components will reinforce the identity of an assemblage, whereas others will involve processes of change and transformation. Following this line of thought, children in exposed/refugee families can be understood as a victimhood category emerging through assemblages of co-existing phenomena. In this chapter I will emphasize some of the central components which, taken together, actualize and shape the ways in which children in exposed/refugee families have become a focus for psychosocial interventions. It goes without saying that this should not be considered an exhaustive analysis of what currently contributes to forming and defining psychosocial work with children in exposed/refugee families. Rather, echoing Rønsbo and Paniagua (Ronsbo 2014: 136), I make use of assemblage theory with the purpose of offering a historical and socio-political account of the ways in which psychosocial interventions with children in exposed/refugee families have become “plausible and credible” within a Danish context.

The chapter continues by briefly looking at the figure of “the refugee” itself, first globally, following the events of WWII, and then in Scandinavia. I then move on to describe how the notion of trauma and the psychiatric diagnosis of PTSD have gained ground in the different processes of identifying and caring for refugees and their descendants. This involves taking a closer look at the history of trauma and PTSD. Next, the chapter briefly touches on the growing alertness towards crime and radicalization that is influencing present-day Denmark. The chapter concludes by summarizing these observations and

\textsuperscript{36} In his book De Landa explains much more carefully how expressivity must be understood as more than language and symbols, and he emphasizes the importance of “nonlinguistic social expressions” (De Landa 2006:12-13).
briefly indicating how, in the context of the public school, the child in the exposed refugee family is becoming known as a counter figure to the in other ways problematized immigrant-pupil.

Refugees: out of place and time

In the stories about Fatme and Ali, their father is awake and alone at night. The TV offers him glimpses of war and conflict, perhaps from his home country, perhaps from other places. Everything about him is out of place and time. He sleeps during the day and is awake during the night. This father, and fathers like him, are often depicted in drawings like the one above,\(^{37}\) thus turning refugees, trauma and secondary traumatization into an image and given a shape, a visual reality.

A closer look at the term “refugee” quickly reveals that it does not label an entirely well-defined category. Rather, it embraces different definitions both globally and locally and points to a range of paradoxes, as well as diverse political interests and bureaucratic practices (Whyte 2009: 7-8). In legal terms, according to the 1951 Geneva Convention a

\(^{37}\) This image is a snapshot from a small animated film, produced for the webpage trauma.dk. http://flygtning.dk/danmark/center-for-udsatte-flygtninge/traumer-i-familien/ (accessed April 2015).
refugee is a person who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.” However, on a Danish national level a refugee is defined as a person, who has been granted asylum according to the 1951 Geneva Convention. Up until this moment formally the person having applied for asylum is an “asylum seeker” (Whyte 2009).

The majority of the world’s refugees live in refugee camps in countries bordering or otherwise close to their countries of origin. Among others, Lisa Malkki has described how camps have been influential in creating an understanding of refugees as a particular object for institutional interventions (Malkki 1995b: 497-498). While people have always been in need of refuge from war, conflict, natural disasters and other events threatening their lives, it was not until after WW2 that the figure of the refugee as we know it today became conceptualized and institutionalized (Haddad 2003). In the years succeeding the war, the refugee domain mainly consisted of practices of settlement, camp administration and the establishment of refugee law (Malkki 1995b: 498). Initially camps were a military concern, but gradually humanitarian organizations became increasingly involved in managing and enabling the lives in the camps. The founding of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1951 was of great significance in this conversion from understanding refugees as a problem, mainly in their capacity to be potential threats, to acknowledging the humanitarian and social aspects of refugee lives. And as Lisa Malkki reflects, “[t]he camps made people accessible to a whole gamut of interventions, including study and documentation, and the postwar figure of the modern refugee largely took shape in these camps” (Malkki 1995b: 500).

With reference to Malkki’s work, Eastmond has pointed to how refugees, regardless of whether they are living in camps or have settled in new homes in exile, are by definition perceived as uprooted and displaced. Refugees represent a deviation from a “normal”

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38 About 33.3 million people are estimated to be internally displaced (IDPs) and 1.2 million people are registered as asylum-seekers (http://www.dsfunk.dk/intetvalg/facts-om-flygtninge/) (accessed August 2015).
39 According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), at the end of 2014 there were approximately 16.7 million refugees in the world.
global order that to a great extend is defined in terms of nation states (2005: 152). Eastmond argues that this fundamental idea of uprootedness and displacement essentializes the refugee experience. Being a refugee, then, is inherently a matter of disorder, socially, politically and, as I will describe in the following, potentially also emotionally (ibid.).

The traumatized refugee

According to Didier Fassin and Estelle d’Halluin (2007), towards the end of the twentieth century a significant shift in the perception of refugees took place, greatly influencing European asylum systems. They describe how, during this period, the figure of the traumatized refugee gradually took over from where the asylum-seeking refugee lost its authority and authenticity, its social recognition. Regarded as a serious threat to demographic and economic stability in Europe, each individual refugee had to prove and legitimize the persecution and suffering he or she has been subjected to by exhibiting physical or psychological signs or symptoms (Fassin and d’Halluin 2007: 310). Along with trauma and PTSD, an entire field of psychiatric and psychological expertise has been introduced and given a vital role in deciding the status and the legal rights of asylum-seekers.

In a similar vein, Eastmond has explored how the notion of traumatized refugees entered the political vocabulary during the late 1980s and early 1990s almost simultaneously with a general increase in the number of asylum-seekers in Sweden.40 Describing how refugees (as well as immigrants in general) repeatedly appeared in the media during these decades as a challenge and a threat to Swedish welfare because of their numbers, their intention to take advantage of the benefits inherent in the welfare system and the poor morale of many immigrants, she argues that the appearance of the figure of the refugee as traumatized, victimized and “worthy of compassion rather than fear and distrust” (Eastmond 2011: 279) must be understood in relation to a quite different image of refugees, that of “the unwanted others”. Even though there are significant disparities in the conduct of politics and practices regarding refugees in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, there are also clear similarities (Olwig 2011), and some of these discursive tendencies cut across the Scandinavian countries. As several scholars have noted, one idea that seems to thrive passionately in Scandinavia is that the flows of

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40 Eastmond has especially been preoccupied with Bosnian refugees in Sweden.
immigrant from the 1960s onwards have interrupted a state of cultural cohesion or homogeny (cf.: Larsen 2011, Olwig and Paerregaard 2011, Moldenhawer and Øland 2013). Olwig and Paerregaard refer to different expressions of “cultural anxiety”\footnote{The expression, “cultural anxiety” is introduced by Ralph Grillo (2003).} influencing not only Scandinavian societies, but also Europe as a whole, a response to the general increase in immigration to European countries (2011: 1).\footnote{An illustrative example of the massive political attention paid to refugees and immigrants in general is provided by Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen and Zachary White, who refer to a chart depicting how the number of changes in the Danish Aliens Act climbed dramatically in the period between 1983-2009 (Gammeltoft-Hansen 2011:160).} Against the somewhat xenophobic backdrop in contemporary Europe, “the traumatized refugee” offers counterpositions and encourages more humanitarian and universalistic perspectives on refugees (Eastmond 2011: 279). Moreover, as noted earlier, it is important to understand this image in contrast to the men and women who fled Chile in the 1970s and who, more than anything else, stimulated respect for their political activism and courage (Fassin and d’Halluin 2007: 309). These very different imagined subjectivities (cf.: Appadurai 1996) are interesting because they come to shape every day, as well as political and legal, representations of refugees. Mentioning the work of Mary McCarthy (1994), Zachary Whyte draws attention to a public imagining of migrants, placing refugees at one end of a spectrum and “exiles” at the other (Whyte 2009: 20). Where the exile is associated with honor and self-dependency – a person who him- or herself has made the choice of moving – the refugee (at least contemporarily) is thought of as a hapless person who has been forced to move and whose life is in the hands of others. Whyte emphasizes how a person can easily appear as an exile in one context and a refugee in another, and he refers to an observation made by McCarthy: “If a group of Greek writers draw up a manifesto, they are writers-in-exile, but if we are trying to raise money to help them, they are refugees” (McCarthy 1994 cited in Whyte 2009: 20). Currently, then, the figure of the refugee is generally configured around on the one hand the pungent vision of a person in need of protection and health care assistance, as described by Malkki (1995a), and on the other hand an image of someone who is searching strategically for a better life in the more privileged parts of the world but who is also disturbing and threatening these very same societies.

\textit{The case of Denmark}

As is the case elsewhere the turn towards, understanding refugees from the perspectives of psychotraumatology has happened gradually. But it is interesting how, once the
concept of trauma had entered the vocabulary, it was applied retroactively. For example, in her very recent study, the Danish sociologist Katrine Syppli Kohl points out how the Danish Red Cross, in its anniversary address, When a refugee comes knocking (Når en flygtning banker på) from 2009, describes refugees arriving in the 1980s as traumatized or as affected by trauma, something that is not apparent in documents from the eighties. Thus in a memo from 1984 one finds expressions such as “particularly problematic (insane, nervous)” (Kohl 2015: 96). Kohl describes how the psychological discipline became more and more prevalent in the administration of refugees from the mid-eighties and onwards, initially mostly in relation to the challenges of conflicts between Red Cross staff and refugees, but eventually also to the individual problems of refugees (Kohl 2015). Since 2009 all newly arrived refugee children, and to some extent also their parents, have been offered psychological screening when they come to Denmark for the first time (Shapiro, Christiansen, and Nielsen 2010). As these examples show, “refugees” and “traumatized refugees” have come to preoccupy a particular status and a particular space for intervention within the extensive “integration-sector” (Olwig and Paerregaard 2011) in welfare state Denmark (See also: Danneskiold-Samsoe 2011).43

As I mentioned in the introduction it is estimated, that between thirty and fifty percent of refugees living in Denmark are traumatized (LG-Insight 2013). This very vague approximation has been published, among others, in the study conducted by the consultant bureau, LG Insight, which I mentioned in the introductory chapter. The authors of the study underline the methodological obscurities related to figuring out the number of refugees with trauma in Denmark. They relate the complications to the fact that not all refugees have been assessed and that others may have been given other diagnoses than “PTSD/trauma” (LG-Insight 2013: 11). In the following I will look more closely at the historical and political background to trauma and PTSD.

**A history of trauma and PTSD**

Among social scientists, both the notion of trauma and the psychiatric diagnosis of PTSD are conceived of as pivotal to contemporary ways of making sense of life in general and

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43 In a welfare state context, coming into view as a particular category among other things entails incorporation in funding structures. The project activities at the schools in Nordby and Langebro were funded by the then Ministry of Integration with funds earmarked for “a special intervention for traumatized refugees and their families” ("en særlig indsats for traumatiserede flygtninge og deres familier"). In daily speech within CER and the surrounding community of organizations, this fund was often described merely as the "trauma fund" (trauma-puljen).

Originally Greek and referring to a somatic wound (Kirmayer et al. 2007: 5) or “physical insult to the body” (Lester 2013: 755), “a trauma” has become a metaphor for human experiences of suffering. As a psychological notion, “trauma” embraces both the insulting event and the multifaceted responses to it (Lester 2013: 755). Conceptually it implies that events which are stressful beyond “the range of usual human experience” come to form part of our being, of our memory (Young 1995: 124). Kirmayer et al. (2007) point to the moral and clinical dilemmas that followed the twentieth century’s wars and the intensified professional and public alertness towards the enduring influence of childhood abuse as critical facets in the development of trauma as we know it today.

In the last chapter of their book The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood, (2009) Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman address what they call “the moral economy of trauma”. They explain how trauma must be understood not only as a psychiatric instrument, encapsulated in the diagnosis of PTSD, but also as an anthropological insinuation. When “the adult who was sexually abused as a child and the earthquake survivor, the war veteran who committed war crimes and the civilian whose family was massacred, the descendant of the captive rediscovering his or her history and the political activist tortured under an authoritarian regime” are all identified within the same conceptual framework, “trauma” can indeed be thought of as a crucial aspect of the ways in which we make sense of each other (Fassin and Rechtman 2009: 277). Fassin and Rechtman even refer to “trauma” as a “floating signifier” of the Lévi-Straussian kind (Fassin and Rechtman 2009: 276). Lévi-Strauss used this term to describe the Melanesian concept of mana. He argued that some concepts hold so many variations that they themselves become hollow and hence open to any interpretation (Fassin and Rechtman 2009: 276). By going to this extent, Fassin and Rechtman “elevate” the concept of trauma, claiming that it “speaks to us of our era”. In a somewhat similar vein, Nils Bubandt draws attention to the “constituent plasticity” that characterizes the psychological concept of trauma (Bubandt 2008: 276). In his article, “Ghosts with Trauma: Global Imaginaries and the Politics of Post-Conflict Memory” (2008), Bubandt shows how the
recent introduction of the globalized concept of “trauma” in Indonesia has fused with local ways of expressing violence and suffering. Here he argues that trauma is perceived as a matter of the relationships between human beings and spirits, relationships that are radically different from those that are historically implicated within the psychological context from which concepts of trauma derive. Adding to the multitude of “trauma”, Kirmayer et al. point to the phenomenon “at once as a sociopolitical event, a psychophysiological process, a physical and emotional experience, and a narrative theme in explanations of individual and social suffering” (Kirmayer, Lemelson, and Barad 2007: 1).

While the scope of trauma reaches far beyond any diagnosis (cf.: Kirmayer, Lemelson, and Barad 2007), contemporary representations of trauma are tied very closely to PTSD. Or, as Eastmond formulates it: “‘Traumatisation’ is a more composite term, with fuzzier boundaries. It includes PTSD but may also refer to less durable acute stress reactions” (2011: 157). PTSD was accepted as an authorized psychiatric diagnosis in 1980, when it was incorporated into the third version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III). Symptoms of PTSD have both somatic and emotional expressions. They include flashbacks, nightmares, hyperarousal, anxiety, depression, difficulties in concentrating and remembering, tensions and uncontrolled anger (Cf.: Young 1995).

Historically PTSD has developed from another diagnosis, classified in the 1860s, namely “traumatogenic shell shock” caused by railway accidents (Young 1995:5)(See also: Breslau 2004). Originally the shock was thought of as physical. However, later, other legendary psychoanalysts such as Janet and Freud insisted that such accidents could also leave marks in the mind. Then in the 1940s the American psychoanalyst Abraham Kardiner applied some of the same diagnostic characteristics on veterans from World War I (Young 1995: 5). It is still predominantly in relation to war veterans and refugees having fled war and conflict that PTSD is put into practice. However, there are tendencies to treat PTSD as a matter of wider concern, as well as creating a general awareness of it. An obvious example of this is the National Association for PTSD in Denmark (“Landsforeningen for PTSD i Danmark”), founded in 2012. The association’s stated aim

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44 Since then a fourth (1994), a revised version of the fourth (DSM-IV-TR: 2000) and a fifth edition have been published. In Denmark the official diagnosis system is the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10), established by the World Health Organization (WHO). However, researchers and practitioners of psychiatry often rely on DSM.
is to promote general awareness of PTSD among Danish citizens. On their webpage they explicitly give emphasis to PTSD as something affecting ordinary people who have not had the best conditions in life or who are suffering from a work-related event, and hence not only people who have fought in and/or fled war.\textsuperscript{45}

Importantly, the studies referred to above all give prominence to the encompassing, elastic and utilitarian (Fassin and Rechtman 2009:10) qualities related to trauma and PTSD. Thus one central point is that both take on new forms and new meanings depending on the context in which they are practiced. However, in general the notions of trauma and of the psychiatric diagnosis of PTSD imply an accentuation of the psychological aspects of suffering, of being a victim. In his significant anthropology of the becoming of PTSD, Allan Young examines how the type of memory known as “traumatic memory” depends on a modern sense of self – an “I” who is capable of reflecting upon one’s own situation (Young 1995: 3-4).\textsuperscript{46} And, as the chapters of this dissertation all more or less subtly show, trauma points towards a certain aesthetic form in which distress may be narrated and vulnerability understood.

Another important point is that in both in clinical practice and in their everyday, commonsense varieties, trauma and PTSD have very sound temporal implications (Fassin and Rechtman 2009, Kirmayer, Lemelson, and Barad 2007, Young 1995, Buch 2010, Lester 2013, Van Der Kolk 1998, Schepet-Hughes 2008). The inherent understanding is that there exists a causality (Kirmayer, Lemelson, and Barad 2007:2) between past events and psychological manifestations or symptoms in the present, and potentially in the future. Present-day psychotraumatology hints at a pretrauma life, an experience of a traumatic event and a posttrauma reaction (Lester 2013: 757). Thus there is a sense of temporal linearity, which is indicated by the traumatic event and its aftermath (Eastmond 2005, Young 1995). And, as the anthropologist Lotte Buch reminds us, it is not only within psychology that suffering is theorized in terms of events and aftermaths. As practitioners of anthropology as well, we seem to have a preference for constructing our objects around eventfulness and what follows. In this respect, many anthropological

\textsuperscript{45} \url{http://ptsdidenmark.dk/fra-krise-til-ptsd} (accessed in August 2015).

\textsuperscript{46} The phrase “traumatic memory” is much more debated and controversial than indicated here. With her background in psychology and history, Professor Ruth Leys argues that the concept of trauma is “fundamentally unstable” and uneasily shifting between two paradigms: one in which patients are believed to imitate events which are out of reach of “normal” memory; and another in which patients can be helped to remember (Leys 2000:298-299). In her book \textit{Trauma: A Genealogy} (2000), she shows the wide implications of these different versions of memory.
studies intersect with the psychological presumptions of lives forming around particular events and their aftermaths (Buch 2010: 26). This connection of past events with present (and imagined future) emotional states concerns more than individual selves: it relates people within and across generations, especially through the notion of “secondary trauma”.

**Secondary trauma**

Secondary trauma is a term for what someone close to a person suffering from trauma can undergo. Professionals, close friends and the immediate family are all at risk. But evidently in this context, the focus will be on secondary trauma in the relationship between parents and children. Generally two different versions of secondary traumatization are prevalent. Either secondary trauma is regarded as a *transmission*, i.e. children *taking over* a trauma or symptomatic behavior; or else it results from a problematic relationship between parents and children created by the former’s emotional hardship (Cf.: Kirmayer, Lemelson, and Barad 2007: 10, Wiseman and Barber 2008, Montgomery 2000, 2011).

Trauma “moving” within families, within generations, is a phenomenon which has perhaps been studied most thoroughly in relation to survivors of the Holocaust, their children and grandchildren (See for example: Wiseman and Barber 2008, Lurie-Beck 2007, Argenti and Schramm 2010). According to Edith Montgomery, the intergenerational aspects of trauma in the families of Holocaust survivors has been treated as a theme by health professionals since the late 1960s (2000: 66). And, as she states, research into the Holocaust has taught us the importance of employing a second-generation perspective when we attempt to understand the psychological consequences of traumatic experiences (2000: 68). Both in the context of the genocide of millions of Jews during World War II and in the more recent situation of refugees fleeing warfare and settling in Western countries, traumatic experiences are expressed as affecting future generations both as individuals and collectively. A good example of this is Wiseman and Barber’s writings on “the echoes of trauma” in Holocaust survivor families (Wiseman and Barber 2008). Here they refer to trauma as having to do with “interpersonal themes and child-parent dynamics[,] [...] modes of communication of the trauma and its ongoing verbal and nonverbal presence [and finally] the pitch and loudness of the echoes that we can hear [which are] highly variant and depend on many variables such as the source that transfers the echoes (the survivor), the individual at the receiving end (the child), and the surrounding environment (the sociocultural context)” (Wiseman and Barber
A possibly more familiar example is Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman and Margaret Lock’s influential trilogy in which they explore the implications of trauma on social as well as individual forms of suffering (Kleinman, Das, and Lock 1997, Das 2000, 2001).

Clearly secondary traumatization directs attention to the relationship between parents and children, to the intergenerational aspects of (refugee) family life. But as I mentioned in the introduction, at the present day there is a growing concern with regard to how troublesome childhoods in refugee families may affect Danish society.

Crime and radicalization
In 2008, Statistics Denmark published the first report in which refugees and their descendants were separated from persons with other types of residence (Denmark 2008). One of the report’s conclusions was that refugees break the law more often than other immigrants from non-Western countries and their descendants. This report stimulated increased and more explicit attention towards the relationship between refugees and the potential criminal involvement of their children. The criminal records of refugees, immigrants in general and their descendants are subject to debates on the extent to which Denmark should strive for a stricter or alternatively less strict immigration policy. But they are also related to considerations of the positions of immigrants in Danish society and processes of marginalization (Johansen 2013).

In Denmark, as in Europe and the West in general, much anxiety has been directed towards Arab and Muslim men and their actual as well as potential affinity with crime and radicalization (Johansen 2013). Radicalization is perceived as the ultimate threat to both the young men themselves and to Western societies (Pedersen and Rytter 2011). This collective fear has evolved especially since the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11th 2001 (Pedersen and Rytter 2011, Johansen 2013), a day which has entered the world’s memory as “9/11”. In Denmark the so called “cartoon crisis” (re-) actualized a sense of fear as the Danish nation and Danish citizens became an object of anger and resentment for Muslims all over the world as a consequence of the printing of a number of caricatured images of the prophet Muhammad in the Danish newspaper Jyllandsposten (Olwig and Paerregaard 2011:1). Moreover the previously mentioned “Copenhagen Shootings”, which took place in February 2015, when Omar Abdel Hamid El-Hussein shot and killed two people, added to debates about what kinds of risks the descendants of immigrants represent. The incident was immediately defined as a terror attack, among others by then Danish Prime Minister, Helle Thorning-Schmidt.
Since then public debates have revolved around how a young man growing up in Denmark could reach the point where he would commit such an act. Trauma is by far the most prevalent answer to this question. Nevertheless, growing up with traumatized parents is a factor that has been highlighted regularly, both by young men who have themselves grown up in refugee families and have become involved in crime and representatives of organizations working with refugees. On the one hand, then, second-generation refugees (especially young Muslim men) are identified as constituting a risk, while on the other hand they are perceived as being at risk of becoming, or perhaps rather continuing to be, socially and economically marginalized. The general message is that more attention should be paid to risk factors among children and young people growing up in traumatized refugee families, with the public school often being perceived as having a central role in this regard. For example, Mehdi Mozaffari, professor and head of the Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalization Processes, has recommended that radicalization should be addressed right from the first school grade (Politiken 2015).

In referring to radicalization as an influential theme, I do not mean to suggest that the category of children in exposed refugee families should be treated by precautionary measures in an attempt to prevent radicalization and ultimately acts of terror. But prevention is definitely part of the story, and it plays into the complexity surrounding the growing sociopolitical attentiveness being devoted towards children in exposed refugee families.

**Emergence in the borderland**

My aim with this chapter has been to add to and supplement the introductory chapter in indicating the current sociopolitical streams and tendencies bringing the category of children in exposed refugee families into the public school as a psychosocial concern. Clearly the themes, I have touched upon, are all complex and multifaceted and could be studied more thoroughly in themselves. However, by establishing the sociopolitical context by means of assemblage-theory, it is the co-presence and the connections emerging in this simultaneity that are essential. In this manner, I have argued, that when psychosocial work with children in exposed refugee families can attract, not only professional and personal engagement, but also political and financial support, it has to do with the

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47 Cf. [http://www.information.dk/527264](http://www.information.dk/527264)
48 Cf. [http://www.information.dk/525213](http://www.information.dk/525213)
ways in which the lives of children in refugee families are being problematized in present-day Denmark through a socio-political attentiveness towards ethnic minorities and refugees, a gradual turn towards psychotraumatology and a growing anxiety related to radicalization. Moreover, as I touched upon in the introductory chapter, in a public schooling context, these practices merge with others concerning inclusion and well-being as well as a teacher profession that is constantly transforming. All these assemblage components significantly contribute to, shape and mould psychosocial concerns for children growing up in exposed refugee families. Nonetheless, as I shall elaborate in the following, it is the conflation of the figure of the refugee and the notion of trauma, which is most defining in turning (potentially) all refugees and their descendants into a priori mental health categories.

The category of children in exposed refugee families, rests on the assumption that such children are or may be affected by their parent’s emotional hardships. Such an assumption installs a sense of chronicity, though not the kind of chronicity that Mattingly, Grøn and Meinert are concerned with (2011). The chronic conditions they study have become so due to life-style diseases and medical innovations that offer longer lives to people with life-threatening illnesses. The sort of chronicity entailed in the category of children in exposed refugee families is related to the notion of trauma and traumatic time, which conceives human lives and suffering in terms of “events” and “aftermaths” generations (cf. Leys 2000, Buch 2010, Eastmond 2011). This way of organizing lifetimes in pre- and post-trajectories has been widely criticized by different anthropologists (Lester 2013, Young 1995, Fassin and Rechtman 2009, Eastmond 2011, Segal 2014, 2016). Rebecca Lester formulates her critique of the status of the traumatic event as follows: “When we conflate trauma-as-moment-of-injury and trauma-as-ongoing-lived-experience, we forever loop present-day experience back into the past, affixing it to the original insult or injury and severely constraining our interpretive and therapeutic horizons” (2013: 755). Following this critical line of thinking, individuals who have experienced something traumatic will always somehow be perceived as vulnerable, and as vulnerable in ways that can be passed on, between people and between generations. Chronicity, then, exists, as trauma is perceived to multiply in space and time by means of social relationships, within individual lives and across generations. Thus, though strongly orientated towards the pasts and the futures of both children and their parents, implied in this kind of chronicity, is an equally strong focus on the present as always possibly wounded (Ronsbo and Paniagua 2014: 125).
It is in this form, as always possibly wounded, that the child in the exposed refugee family emerges in the public school. In a sense it is mental health risk figures like this child that turn the public school into a borderland of healthcare. In the opening chapter I introduced to the Danish public school as a comprehensive political and democratic project and as an outmost central component of the universalist welfare state (Juul 2006). In my reflections on the school as borderland I touched upon how, historically, the responsibilities of the school have moved far beyond the task of formal education. The public school, then, is an important societal institution for the formation of citizens and a highly politicised field, where different perspectives on what a good citizen is unfold in everyday practices and relations between children, teachers and families (Giliam 2009, Moldenhawer and Øland 2013, Sørensen, Giliam, and Waltorp 2010). Several studies have attended to how many of the historical and political developments concerning immigrants in Danish society as a whole are reflected in the context of the school. For example Moldenhawer and Øland have demonstrated how ethnic minority children historically have been constructed as ‘strangers’ and subjected to differential treatment in order to secure social cohesion (2013). Gro Hellesdatter Jacobsen (2012) has a similar point in her study of how ethnic minority children are being allocated to different schools on the basis of language tests. In that sense, as indicated by the story of Fatme – and as this dissertation will provide ethnographic examples of - in the same way that, the traumatized refugee has emerged as a counter figure to the immigrant, to some extent the child in the exposed refugee family is emerging as a counter figure to the problematized immigrant-pupil.

On a final, but important note, throughout this chapter I have included examples from political practices and public debates prior to, during – and also subsequent to when the psychosocial interventions in Nordby and Langebro took place. My fieldwork was conducted in 2010-2012 and in this field four to five years is a long time. Obviously some of the most recent debates were not influencing the practices, I have done research in. Still, by alluding to political and discursive courses since, I wish to suggest, that the category of children in exposed refugee families, understood as a victimhood-assemblage, presently is becoming increasingly more stable, or territorialized.

49 In a sense the child, who grieves due to his or her parents’ divorce or due to a parent’s death, can also be considered to take part of a mental health risk category, though not necessarily with the same chronic implications.
Chapter three

“We sincerely hope some of you will continue working with this”
Chapter three

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Seminars as affective welfare state moments

(Langebro community center, August 2011)

I have been in the community centre a couple of times before. The first time was when Poul gave me a tour of the facilities themselves and of the area. He seems very proud of the place, but especially of this particular room, with its white walls, giant flower images and the panorama windows offering a scenic view of the trees and the voluminous apartment blocks. Poul never misses a chance to mention this view, and today is no exception. “Out here we are a bit proud of this. It’s on purpose that we haven’t pulled down the curtains, so that you can all see that it is not so dangerous,” he says. I always get this feeling that together, he and the window, provide a ready commentary on the current debate about ghettos in Denmark by saying: “You think you know what this place is like. But we will tell you a different story”. As it turns out, Poul ends up telling the same story – about conflicts, about radicalism, about how “Al Jazeera is a player out here”. But he always begins with the view. Poul is the coordinator of the project activities in Langebro. As such he is a central figure in hosting today’s seminar, which will formally complete the project activities here.

Karen, my PhD advisor, is accompanying me, and when we arrive the room is nearly ready. Tables and chairs have been arranged so that the participants can sit in small clusters and still be able to see the podium. Thirty-three school nurses, teachers, pedagogues, social education workers and associated professionals from the surrounding area are attending the seminar. Including speakers, project workers from the school, the NGOs involved and the pair of anthropologists, rather more than forty people are present. For the next few hours different, speakers take the stand. With the local landscape, their Powerpoint presentations and two banners advertising the project’s activities and
the organizational backdrop to them, they talk about the ideas behind, the manifestations of and the lessons learned from these activities. Following Poul’s speech of welcome, Marlene, a consultant from one of the organizations involved with the project activities, gives a presentation on refugees, flight narratives (“flughistorier”), the symptoms of PTSD and the implications for family life. She also emphasizes how many refugees in Denmark live in difficult socioeconomic situations and that stress caused by living in exile (eksil-stress) is a well-known phenomenon. Helle, who has been involved as a teacher with school-based psychosocial work with children in refugee families for several years, then talks about her experiences and introduces a few methods of significance to her own practices.\(^5\) She describes the case of one boy in her class, whom she used to tell off for always being late. When she then discovered how difficult things were in his family, that his mornings were chaotic and left him without any kind of breakfast, she started welcoming him instead. She would even bring some bread and cheese to school so that she could give him a bit of breakfast. Sofia takes over from Helle, telling how she became involved with the project activities in the first place. Sofia makes everyone in the room smile, as she recalls her somewhat abrupt response to Moosa, who is part of the school management. He had approached her and told her about these project activities, “which you just have to take part in!” “Is this something I have to do, or is it something I can choose to do?”, she had asked him. But then, as she says, she came to think about the children in her classes, who often end up in conflict-ridden situations with their classmates and/or their teachers. “Therefore I was completely ready for these project activities from day one...or two-three-ish”, she says. Sofia continues talking about her initial worries and the questions that had been going through her mind: “But I am only a teacher... What do I do when the children start crying and when the parents become angry with me?” She explains how the relationship between the children and the psychologist facilitating the group had been problematic, so that she had had to take over. “Suddenly I was no longer the teacher...sit still, don’t tease, zip it...! And honestly, I admit that I found it difficult and also failed sometimes”. After Sofia, Moosa and Poul inform the audience of the kind of co-operation they had attempted to bring about with the parents and how this had been challenging”. Poul especially highlights one occasion in which a parents’ meeting on the theme of religious education had ended up in acute disagreement between some of the mothers present.

\(^{5}\) Among others she mentioned the Danish psychologist Jan Tønnesvang and his concept of “psychological oxygen” (psykologisk ilt), as well as the so-called “STROF-model”. “STROF” is short for Structure, Talk/Time, Organized play and Parents (forældre).
Finally, Marlene, Helle, Sofia, Moosa and Poul arrange themselves on the stage in a panel. During this last part of the seminar the listeners comment on the project’s activities and ask questions, some seeking clarification and some being more exploratory. “What are your experiences in approaching parents with an issue like PTSD?” a young man asks. “Do we risk PTSD ending up eclipsing other diagnoses within the normal system?” This question comes from a young female politician, a fairly well-known figure from the left-wing Red-Green Alliance (Enhedslisten). She accompanies her question with a statement: “It is really important that the focus is directed towards this.... That people are not just left to themselves”. “What about the costs? ... I would like to convince my principal to do this...,” a teacher from a neighbouring school says. The debate session continues until Poul and Marlene have to interrupt in order to finish the programme on time. “We sincerely hope that some of you will continue working with this. And please do not hesitate to contact us”, Marlene says just before people begin to collect their notes and the booklets and brochures that have been offered to them. Then they slowly leave the room, some of them engaged in conversation with one another. Karen and I stay behind. Together with some of the other participants and project workers from Langebro School, we talk about the day, pick our favourite chocolates from the small bowls on the tables, fold the tables up, pile them on top of each other on trolleys specially provided, roll them away, stack the chairs by the walls, roll up the banners and in different ways assist in arranging the room as it usually is, ready for another event to move in to.

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The final seminar marked a point in time at which the series of project activities had been completed and at which the ideas, knowledge and experiences embedded in the project’s activities should ideally be continued, perhaps by someone else than those involved in the project, and certainly in the form of something other than the structure, tempo and logic offered by a set of project activities. In overall, emic terms the closing seminar was an event transmitting (formidlende) the methods and knowledge on which the project activities had been based and which they had stimulated. Marlene’s concluding words, which serve as the title to this chapter, nicely explicate how the seminar was intended to motivate the present professionals to pay attention to children in exposed refugee families and work with them.
During my fieldwork I participated in several seminars, workshops, meetings, debates and events somehow thematizing and motivating the giving of professional attention to children in (exposed) refugee families. As I reflected on in my methodological chapter, on a few occasions I was even one of the presenters. Each event had its own unique context, spatial and material qualities etc. and embraced an assortment of unlike interests and agendas. If we take the seminar in Langebro as an example, Poul seemed to make use of the stage the project activities offered him to perform a (partly counter-) narrative about Langebro, rather than introduce the activities he had been coordinating. And Sofia’s remarks about the difference between required and optional tasks, the problematic relationship between the psychologist and the children and her own discomfort in approaching the parents and taking a different position in relation to the children raised some rather critical aspects of the activities. Still, as has struck me both before and since at other seminars, the afternoon in Langebro passed in a ambiance of *shared resonance* (Bille, Bjerregaard, and Sørensen 2015), of people having entered the same room, each with their individual reasons, which within a few hours reached a peak and turned into a collective sense of meaningfulness. The comments (“It is really important that the focus is directed towards this” and “I would like to convince my principal to do this...”), as well as the small talk I overheard from participants leaving the room, suggested that in both form and content the seminar created a shared feeling of being obliged to do something, to act on what one had just heard – at least to some extent, and perhaps only fleetingly. In some way, this indicates that the seminars actually worked according to their declared aims; that they did motivate, inspire and precipitate (changes of) action and that they in doing so exceeded themselves as temporal events and affected their contexts, as the Danish anthropologist Inger Sjørslev puts it (Sjørslev 2012: 222). Setting off from the assumption that seminars have the potential to influence and transform those who take part in them,51 in this chapter I explore “the seminar” as a particular genre of practising, or rather performing, knowledge within the welfare state.

In the introductory chapter, I brought up the association between knowledge, understanding empathy and action. I described it as an emic logic, or rationality, which is both implicitly present and explicitly expressed at the CER. In the present chapter I propose

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51 The chapter engages with studies of how both human and material subjects have the potential to transform others – and themselves to be transformed – when they are performed in certain ways. Consequently it is not only people, but also things (or as we shall see, stories), that transform and are transformed at seminars. Nevertheless the main focus is on how seminars have the potential to transform different kinds of professional (and thus human) subjects.
to think of this reasoning as an aesthetic, emerging through the ways in which knowledge is practised, socially, discursively and materially. Moreover, I suggest that this aesthetic generates a certain affective atmosphere of pertinence and applicability, which is an important aspect of (psycho)social work in welfare-state Denmark. I begin by going somewhat backwards chronologically, that is, by focusing on the final seminars, as they offer interesting insights into how knowledge is promoted, both to particular kinds of professionals and to wider publics. In other words, the final seminars are events at which the category of the children of (traumatized) refugee parents is being put “out there”, to be acted on.

My aim is not to explore whether and if so how the actual participants present at the seminar in Langbro in fact took away information from the final seminar with them to apply in their respective working practices. Rather, the chapter arises out of a curiosity in the seminar moment itself and in how a multitude of perspectives, interests, doubts, goals and ambiguities can come to resonate and make sense when performed in the context of a seminar. Moreover, I am also interested in the possibility of approaching welfare state politics as a matter of sentiments and “public moods” (Stoler 2008) as much as rationality. In other words, I wish to reflect upon the seminar as an event at which knowledge promotion is practised by means of affect. In that sense this chapter engages with, and seeks to combine, substantial anthropological bodies of literature on performance, atmospheres, affect and knowledge.

In the previous chapter I mentioned that one of the distinctive qualities of the notion of trauma is its inherent elasticity and plasticity (Bubandt 2008), labiality and aesthetic (Feldman 2004: 185) – in other words, its applicability to various problems, in various contexts. I have described how the notion of trauma has become increasingly essential to our understanding of the emotional life of human beings in general, as well as to professional understandings of particular categories of people, such as refugees. As I have explained, trauma implies certain ways of both problematizing and healing distress. Overall the chapters included in this dissertation share an interest in exploring trauma as a concept, which both adapts to and influences the social contexts in which it is being practised. Perhaps we can think of the seminar as a context in which it is the form as much as the notion of trauma itself which turns trauma into shared truth (Fassin and Rechtman 2009). I therefore begin by focusing on the seminar as a particular context and possible border zone in the welfare state, and as a framed event. This leads to
a discussion of the notion of atmosphere and of the seminar moment as having the potential to create affective atmospheres in a framed fusion of experience and environments. Next I turn to knowledge as it is being practised in the context of the seminar. I draw attention to how, when knowledge is being promoted, the presentations often rest on a differentiation between general, “scientific” knowledge and situated, “practical” knowledge, a distinction to be observed in both the material and discursive representations of knowledge. Finally I take a closer look at situated, “practical” knowledge as a particular phenomenon that is often conveyed in anecdotes. I suggest that anecdotes play a significant role in making more overall kinds of knowledge applicable and that, when performed in the context of a seminar, they contribute to an atmosphere of pertinence.

Seminars: seeds for future usage

Often, when embarking on fieldwork, the ethnographer needs to spend time learning how to take part in particular events or situations (cf. Hasse 2002). Throughout my fieldwork there were many moments when I felt estranged and when I had to make an effort to fit in. Participating in seminars, however, did not demand the same kind of ethnographic acclimatization. Along with the other participants, I knew how to attend a seminar, what to do when entering the seminar room, how to find a place to sit, what to do with the brochures, paper and pens arranged on the tables, how to greet the nearest persons discretely (if one did not know them; if one does, greetings are usually more heartfelt), how and when to be quiet, how and when to ask questions and engage in conversations, how to express criticism or raise a problem, and so on. In other words, generally we were all accustomed to the routines and procedures of a seminar.

As I discussed in the introductory chapter, the Danish welfare state is indeed structured around processes of producing and sharing knowledge, of knowing knowledge (Barth 2002). Disseminating knowledge is an expected and even required implication of receiving the funding to carry out projects or project-related activities. Seminars represent a conventional genre of doing so. Hence, as practitioners in the Danish welfare state, the participants of the seminar in Langebro had taken part in numerous seminars before, which, even though varying in theme, location, representation etc., had very likely followed a predictable script. The fact that a room, such as the grand room in Langebro, exists and is accessible to a variety of different events in a way signposts this fact. In continuing the framing of my analysis as a study of homework practices (Mattingly et al.
2011), I consider seminars to represent a border zone in which knowledge and ideas are moved between and redeployed in different spheres of society. Moreover, as I will explain shortly, analytically I approach the seminar as a context in which knowledge practices are framed in certain ways.

Etymologically the word “seminar” has two very closely related meanings, either “a class at a university” or “a conference for discussion/training” (Oxford 2009). It derives from the Latin “sēminārium”, originally “sēmen”, meaning “seed”. A seminar can be carried out within a few hours, but it can also be scheduled to last several days. The project activities in Langebro and Nordby were initiated with a two-day seminar for all the personnel involved from the two schools, and they culminated in a closing seminar (afslutningsseminar) at each school addressing other professionals in and around the area. Whereas the first seminar was fairly explicit in its educational form and purpose, the final seminars were more open-ended in the sense that they addressed a wider audience of relatively unspecified others, representing an entire range of different professional positions. Moreover, whereas the first seminars prepared the practitioners for a more or less specific series of activities, the final seminars were meant to be a source of inspiration for practitioners, who could choose to incorporate whatever aspects they found relevant into their day-to-day work. As the etymological meaning of “seminar” suggests, ideally this would result in a seed being planted for future use.

(Beyond) Resonance: approaching the event

Numerous anthropological scholars have reflected upon, not necessarily seminars, but public events at large as particular contexts for practising knowledge. In David Mosse’s work, disseminating knowledge, in the form of “manuals, national/regional seminars and workshops, audio-visual productions, training, [...] a bi-annual promotional pamphlet, [...] and several films” (Mosse 2005: 163), contributes substantially to the production of consistent representations of projects. In his book Cultivating Development (2005) Mosse is preoccupied with the social life of development work, with all the foreseeable as well as less foreseeable and subtle kinds of agency that are part of practice. He argues that “[development projects] are made successful by social processes that disperse project agency (Li 1999: 304), forge and maintain networks of support, and

create a public audience for their work of social transformation” (Mosse 2005: 181, original emphasis). Mosse’s general argument is that projects, regardless of their miscellaneous backdrops, are coherently narrated and represented within “supportive networks that constitute [their] interpretive community” (Mosse 2005: xii). In this perspective, seminars provide a context for stabilizing projects, as well as for creating and constituting communities. In some ways Mosse’s preoccupation with the stabilizing qualities of social processes, including different kinds of events, echoes classic anthropological interests in the relationship between public events and the social order (Cf.:Gluckman and Forde 1963, Handelman 1990). In particular, studies of bureaucracy have addressed the role of public events as order-making situations (Cf.:Herzfeld 1992, Handelman 1990). According to Handelman, the purpose of bureaucratic processes is to facilitate “controlled change” by means of a perpetual production of categories. Using this framework, he regards public events as “culturally constituted foci of information-processing” (Handelman 1990:76). Moreover, he describes public events as having the mandate “to engage in ordering of ideas, people, and things. As phenomena, they are not only cognitively graspable, but also emotionally liveable. Therefore, they are devices of praxis that merge horizons of the ideal and the real, to bring into close conjunction ideology and practice, attitude and action” (Handelman 1990: 16).

In recent decades, greater attention has been paid to the less controllable aspects of the changes, or transformations, that take place at events. Most remarkably, performance theory, often associated with Victor Turner and more recently also Edward Schieffelin, emphasises the altering characteristics of events (Sjørslev 2007b: 11). Whereas the more traditional anthropological approaches to events as rituals conceptualize them as upholding particular systems of meaning, performance theory is preoccupied with events as framed, as practised, as well as being under continuous formation as participants negotiate and add new meaning (ibid.). According to this line of thought, it is exactly in the open-endedness of events that the transformative potential exists (Sjørslev 2012). But how, then, can we understand the seminar as an event with the capacity to create change?

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53 Gregory Bateson has had an enormous impact on the notion of “frame”. According to Bateson, all interaction is dependent on a meta-communication of frame and context. In his perspective, frames and contexts are psychological concepts (Bateson 1987:192, Ølggaard 2004).
On the one hand, seminars are staged events. With a suitable room available, seminars can be unpacked and wrapped up again within a few hours. And as I have suggested, there is a sense of predictability at play at seminars, a certain way of the participants engaging with each other and with the information presented. On the other hand, much ambiguity and indistinctness is to be found in what is being communicated at seminars. In Langebro, for example, Sofia was very explicit about how she found it difficult to find her role in the project’s activities. If we imagine her telling the same story to her colleagues in a lunch break, it is very likely that Sofia’s words would have created more hesitancy than enthusiasm. Sjørslev posits a distinction between theatre performance as implying an unambiguous frame and performance in the streets (demonstrations, parades etc.) as implying a far more ambiguous frame (Sjørslev 2012: 213). Even though drawing such a distinction may be problematic in the sense than one risks overemphasising the theatre as a “closed space”, thereby losing sight of the multiple interpretations the audience leaves the room with, the differentiation it is productive to think with when contemplating the seminar as a particular performative genre. The important aspect here is whom “the theatre” and “the street” constitute as their respective publics. While the theatre play addresses an audience made up of people who more or less voluntarily choose to buy a ticket and see the play, expecting to be enriched by a “cultural” experience, the demonstration or parade turns anyone who is passing by at random into its audience, at least potentially. Perhaps we can think of the seminar as raising awareness about certain health-related problems, as a kind of event that constitutes both specific and potential publics. The people attending the seminars in Langebro and Nordby were invited via the professional and political networks in which the schools took part. In that sense, most participants were already constituted as a public, as an audience that already expected knowledge related to trauma, schooling and family life to be relevant. But at the same time, an implicit aspect of promoting knowledge is to constantly expand the audience, to make trauma-related knowledge relevant to more and more people. In that sense seminars take place not only within professional (interpretive) communities (Mosse 2005) but also beyond them, whereby new communities emerge (Mattingly, Grøn, and Meinert 2011).

In order to offer an analysis that pays attention to the seminar as an event that both reproduces and stabilizes certain perspectives of the world and implies less controllable aspects of change, or transformations, I have turned to the notion of *atmosphere*, and more specifically *affective atmosphere*. In the following I will introduce the concept of
atmosphere, first as existing in between the material and the subjective, and then as holding affective qualities.

Atmospheres: the overflow of things and thoughts

As a term in everyday speech, atmosphere traverses distinctions between peoples, things and spaces. It is possible to talk of: a morning atmosphere, the atmosphere of a room before a meeting, the atmosphere of a city, an atmosphere between two or more people, the atmosphere of a street, the atmosphere of an epoch, an atmosphere in a place of worship, and the atmosphere that surrounds a person, amongst much else. (Anderson 2009: 78)

Geographer Ben Anderson’s examples of how “an atmosphere” is voiced illustrate the at least potentially extensive usage of the term in everyday conversation. Etymologically the term “atmosphere” refers to a “physical phenomenon surrounding a planet or a star as a layer of gases” (Bille, Bjerregaard, and Sørensen 2015: 32). Within the social sciences, philosophy and architecture, among other disciplines, the notion of atmosphere has gained increasing interest as a phenomenon occupying a pivotal place in how we as humans realize the world surrounding us (ibid.: 31). It is especially within philosophy that “the nature of” atmosphere, and related terms such as Stimmung, ambience and mood, are reflected upon. For the purposes of this chapter I rely heavily on Ben Anderson’s and the Danish anthropologist Mikkel Bille’s readings of philosophical debates on the concept of atmosphere. I will not attempt to work towards a clear definition of “atmosphere”. I do not deny what seems to be indisputable, namely that atmospheres, both empirically and analytically, are tricky to objectify. Raising questions such as what an atmosphere is, where it begins and ends and how it impacts on the lives of people (Bille, Bjerregaard, and Sørensen 2015: 31) entails both ontological and epistemological ambiguity. Rather, I will leap right into Anderson’s and Bille’s explicitly indefinite interpretations of atmosphere and bring them into play in the context of seminars, knowledge promotion and welfare state policy.

Following Anderson (2009) and Bille et al. (Bille, Bjerregaard, and Sørensen 2015, Bille 2015), it is the very slipperiness that makes up not only the limitations, but also the potencies of the concept. Endeavouring to grasp the indistinctness of atmospheres, Bille

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54 Bille is especially preoccupied with staged atmospheres in relation to light, cosines, homes and neighborhoods (cf.: Bille 2015).
et al. refer to the German philosopher Gernot Böhme, who situates atmospheres between the objective and the subjective, the material and the immaterial: “Yet an atmosphere is never exclusively a psychological phenomenon, a state of mind, nor solely an objective thing ‘out there’, as an environment or milieu; atmospheres are always located in-between experiences and environments” (2015: 32). Or, as Anderson describes it, “[i]t is through an atmosphere that a represented object will be apprehended and will take on a certain meaning” (2009: 79). In other words, an atmosphere both links people, places and things (ibid.) and transcends the boundaries between them. It is in this sense that I find that “atmosphere” offers a constructive approach to interpreting what was going on at the seminar in Langebro. By looking at the seminar through the lenses of atmospheres, it is not the knowledge that is promoted, the people taking part or the physical establishment alone that defines the event. Rather, it is the combination, the hodgepodge, of it all that make up the seminar situation. And it is in the overflow emerging from this combination that atmospheres transpire (Anderson 2009: 79).

**Atmospheres: affective, staged and political**

Having located atmospheres in between the subjective and the objective, I will reflect upon the idea that atmospheres can be *affective*,\(^{55}\) that they can be *staged* and *shared*, and that in this sense atmospheres have *social power* (Anderson 2009, Bille, Bjerregaard, and Sørensen 2015, Bille 2015). Thus, besides from relating the material and the subjective, and traversing boundaries between those, an atmosphere can be thought of as a phenomenon potentially associating subjects in mutual experiences. In that sense an atmosphere is “[...] that which facilitates intersubjective attunement” (Bille, Bjerregaard, and Sørensen 2015: 32).

According to Anderson, among others, (affective) atmospheres are dependent on both a “perceiving subject” and an “aesthetic object” (2009: 79). In writing about the aesthetics of objects, Anderson draws widely on the French philosopher Mikel Dufrenne. Seeking to set apart objects that are aesthetic and those that are not, Dufrenne accentuated the sensuous, or affective, qualities of the aesthetic (ibid.). While Dufrenne maintained

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\(^{55}\) Within anthropology, more and more attention is being directed towards studying affect as related not only to the human subject, but also to sites and spaces. The anthropologist Yael Navaro-Yashin mentions how this growing interest, which is deeply inspired by Gilles Deleuze’s work, is being framed as an “affective turn” (2012:167). It is not only within anthropology that affect has become more predominant. For example, Helle Bjerg refers to a comparable shift within educational studies (Bjerg 2013:1172).
a narrower definition of aesthetic objects and concentrated on more absolute aesthetic works such as “sculpture, music [or] architecture” (ibid.), Anderson encourages a wider use of the concept. Although hesitant, he advocates thinking about, for example, cities or societies as having affective atmospheres (ibid.).

Yael Navaro-Yashin (2012) offers a good and thought-provoking example of how affect can be studied in relation to society, or in her case, state-making. In her study of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, she formulates the idea of a “make-believe space”, by which she intends to stress the equally imaginary and material or tangible implications of political practices. She argues that there has been a tendency to explore “the political” through subject-centred perspectives, paying little attention to the material world, environments etc. At the same time, many studies of the latter have neglected factors of power and the imaginary. In using the expression “make-believe”, Navaro-Yashin seeks to rise above contrasting the material and the imagined.56 While she does accentuate the distinctive “made-up elements” that are related to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus as a de facto state, she maintains that all state practices imply make-believing (2012: 28). Another writer who has taken this line is Ann Laura Stoler (2008), who emphasises the interrelatedness between “the political” and “private” feelings and “public moods” in her study of Dutch colonial rule in the East Indies.

Encouraged by these studies, I will reflect on how we may perceive seminars as ensembles of elements that stage knowledge in a particular way and that produce a particular aesthetic and a particular affective atmosphere. I suggest that taking into account the affective atmospheres that emerge from knowledge-promoting events may add to our understanding of welfare state practices. In other words, I propose that we study welfare states not only by seeking to understand the human subjects that participate in them, but also by including the concrete places and spaces in and around which these subjects move and the “public moods” that emerge from them. One such space is the seminar. As an implication of engaging with the atmospheres and affects created in seminars, I will focus on conflating two apparently different aspects or qualities of the seminar as a knowledge-promoting event, one addressing knowledge in its more abstract, discursive forms, the other having to do with the materiality surrounding knowledge

56 Importantly, the term “make-believe” is inspired by a local Turkish expression (uyduruk devlet), which means “the made-up state” (Navaro-Yashin 2012: 6).
promotion. But, as the conceptual framework of atmospheres strongly emphasizes, these seemingly unalike aspects are intimately entangled.

On an important note, even though I employ atmosphere as a phenomenon that can be staged and that affects people, I am not pursuing the argument that atmospheres are deliberately used as a means of creating a certain kind of political subject. Instead I suggest that atmospheres are the sometimes intended and at other times arbitrary by-product of how knowledge is organised in Denmark. As formulated by Bille et al., we can think of an atmosphere as “a space of political formation that underlies the realm of discursive politics, but cannot be controlled in any simple and unambiguous way by political agents” (2015: 34). In the following I will illustrate how knowledge, socially, discursively and materially, is given a certain aesthetic form, thus contributing to an atmosphere of pertinence and applicability.

Knowledge, understanding, empathy and action: An aesthetic of modern welfare knowledge

I have described how the seminar-room in Langebro was arranged with a stage from on which the presenters could speak and display their Powerpoint presentations and with clusters of tables on which were placed small, prepared stacks of pamphlets and other publications, as well as paper and pens for note-taking. Morten Hulvej Rod reflects on how this combination, which was also present at many of the meetings he took part in during his fieldwork, suggests that documents and meetings accompany each other in a complementary form. While some of the documents were displayed on the wall, others were created in the course of the meetings, as participants took notes, some of which were later converted into minutes (2010: 89). In a similar vein, but with a slightly different interest in mind, I suggest that the combination of Powerpoint presentations and handwritten notes indicates the co-presence of two different kinds of knowledge, one fact-based, scientifically generated and “objective” in kind, the other more centred around experience, intuition and sensitivity. As I will demonstrate, this distinction is also to be found in discursive representations of knowledge. But before doing so, I wish to develop my use of the term “aesthetic” in characterizing practices of knowledge.

I have already touched upon how Anderson (and in some sense also Navaro-Yashin, though she does not explicitly employ the term “aesthetic”) argues for a widening of immediate associations of aesthetics as something that is related to, and expressed by,
works of art and culture. Another example is Hulvej Rod’s approach to bureaucracy as aesthetic. With reference to Strathern’s (2004) observation of aesthetics as having to do with “the persuasiveness of form” (2010: 70), he argues that it is the bureaucratic effort to maintain a certain aesthetic form that shapes the interests of “the evidencelanguage” (evidensproget) (2010: 71). In line with other anthropological studies I have referred to, by thinking in terms of an aesthetic, Hulvej Rod wishes to move away from a more traditional focus on bureaucracy as relying on logic and rationality. Instead he prefers to study bureaucracy as practised in forms, both social and material (ibid.).

In the same manner, I argue that in my field knowledge is given a particular form, or aesthetic, and that this aesthetic directs the ideals and expectations of psychosocial practices. This form is to be found in the combination of different kinds of material representations of knowledge, comprising PowerPoint representations, booklets with fairly detailed descriptions of methods, pamphlets guiding professionals to the right kind of advice, and sheets of blank paper intended for noting down points or comments of specific relevance to each individual participant. But it is also to be found in the amalgamation of different verbal accounts of knowledge. This was apparent at the seminar in Langebro: where Marlene gave an overall, “factual” and contextualizing presentation of exposed refugees, Helle and Sofia shared more personal experiences of their involvement with children in refugee families. Similarly, the closing seminar in Nordby contained presentations representing different approaches to knowledge.57 Here, Marlene was also the one doing the introducing, and in doing so she was very explicit about the move from an overall and general approach to a more specific on to the topic of traumatized refugees:

This is our final [afsluttende] event [...], where we are going to pass on some of our knowledge to you. I should start by saying that what you find on the tables, namely our methodology booklet [metodehæfte], this is our palpable output [...], where you can read about what exactly it is that we have been doing and what kind of methods (redskaber), one can make use of. You will hear more about the methodology booklet during the day today.

We have chosen to organize the day... [technical problems with the computer]. Well, but here you have the program, for today and we have chosen to put

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57 Unfortunately I was not able to be present at this seminar, but a colleague from CER recorded it for me.
together a program where we begin somewhat generally, because probably, for some of you, it is a new topic, concerning refugees and trauma... So we begin with a more general presentation, and it will be me who provides a short talk on what trauma and refugees and PTSD are at all. Following this, we are fortunate enough to have Helle from the municipality of [X] with us. Helle has been working with refugee children in the public school for many years, and she will tell you more ge... Well, specifically about the children in the public school, but still at an overall level... how does one work with these children in the public school. And then, after a short coffee break, then we will hear from the teachers and the school team from Nordby school, a presentation on the very concrete activities they have worked on with this school. Naturally, you are welcome to pose explanatory questions along the way. But the more debating questions we will save to the end. I hope that you are OK with that.

From my conversations and meetings with consultants in CER and the professional community they work with(in), and from helping arrange small seminars (fyraftens-mader), I have become aware of the efforts to constantly involve and balance different kinds of knowledge. For example, for many of the people I have met, it is absolutely crucial to master the navigation of different areas of expertise (psychiatry, psychology, law, pedagogy etc.), as well as applying, or assisting others in applying, these kinds of proficiency in different “practical” contexts. Often this is addressed as a somewhat pedagogical concern – to make abstract and complicated knowledge more accessible and comprehensible to more people. The distinction between scientific knowledge and practical knowledge is practised in different ways. In the following I will reflect first, upon this distinction itself, and then return to how it is being practised in seminars as an aesthetic.

In order to understand the implications of differentiating between scientific and practical knowledge, I have found the anthropologist James Scott’s characterization of technical knowledge or “technē” and its distinction from practical knowledge or “mētis” to be valuable. In his book Seeing like a state (1998), Scott depicts the statecraft of high modernity and addresses this fundamental question: “[h]ow did the state gradually get a handle on its subjects and their environments?” (1998: 2). Scott is equally interested in knowledge as practised inter-subjectively and in between humans and materiality (1998: 314). Towards the end of his book he introduces the Greek notion of mētis as “a means of comparing the forms of knowledge embedded in local experience with the more general, abstract knowledge deployed by the state and its technical agencies” (1998: 311). Mētis is knowledge when it is implicit, experiential (315), contextual and
particular (320). Whereas techne, according to Scott, represents knowledge that is rational, can be simplified and turned into logical principles, métis denotes knowledge that is complex and inimitable (1998: 316). “Broadly understood”, Scott writes, “métis represents a wide array of practical skills and acquired intelligence in responding to a constantly changing natural and human environment” (1998: 313). He uses the ability to pilot a ship into a particular harbour as an illustrative example of how métis differs from techne. Navigating a ship in open waters can be considered a general competence, but steering it into a specific port demands experience, and it relies on situated and local forms of knowledge. “What the pilot knows are local tides and currents along the coast and estuaries, the unique features of local wind and wave patterns, shifting sandbars, unmarked reefs, seasonal changes in microcurrents, local traffic conditions, the daily vagaries of wind patterns of headlands and along straits, how to pilot in these waters at night, not to mention how to bring many different ships safely to berth under variable conditions” (1998: 17). This recognition of the importance of experience, of a familiarity with one’s occupation and the environment one practises in, is widely recognized in many professional contexts. Scott refers to various skills such as climbing, aviation, surgery, weaving and pottery, pointing to how, for example, a weaver must adapt his or her work to each new stock of thread (ibid.). It is easy to extend these anecdotes to include teachers, who (at least ideally) must modify general pedagogical and didactic perspectives according to the actual pupil(s) who are sitting in front of them.

We can think of this way of characterizing the knowledgeable person as someone who required her skills through formal education as well as experience as a truism, as one of those things that goes without saying. An illustrative example of this is the proverb comparing an education with a driving license. It can be expressed in different ways, but the essence is that, “Now that you have your education, your driving licence, then you have to learn how to drive”. Thus there is nothing new about characterizing knowledge as, in overall, relating to both scientific and practical processes. But what Scott repeatedly reminds us is that in some instances the combination of the two has certain unfortunate implications. He argues that techne, being settled, epistemic knowledge, is surrounded by imperialistic traits, which makes it impossible for métis to exist under conditions which are not always already rationally or logically defined (Scott 1998: 340). Quoting Blaise Pascal, Scott emphasizes how the error of rationalism is “not its recognition of technical knowledge, but its failure to recognize any other” (ibid.) (Scott’s emphasis). In other words, while the importance of experience, of situated and local knowledge, is often recognized, Scott maintains that paired up with techne, it will always be granted

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a subordinate position. “One major reason why mètis is denigrated, particularly in the hegemonic imperium of scientific knowledge, is that its “findings” are practical, opportune, and contextual rather than integrated into the general conventions of scientific discourse” (1998: 323).

While it would not make sense to equate the “scientific knowledge” practised in my field with the knowledge that is technè,58 Scott’s analysis of the implications of different modes of knowledge does shed light on similar dynamics at seminars in welfare state Denmark. Often, as was the case in Langebro and Nordby, a seminar is introduced by providing the participants with information about facts, figures and definitions about the topic of concern. Marlene, who is an experienced speaker in this field, typically begins her presentations by offering a definition of “a refugee” according to the UNHCR, an overview of the estimated total number of refugees in the world and the countries which most refugees derive from, as well as the estimated number of refugees and their descendants in Denmark. Then she goes on to talk about what separates refugees from other kinds of migrants, among other things the fact that they have been forced to move and that all refugees have a “story of their flight”. She emphasises how all refugees have experienced intense and extreme experiences, such as “war, persecution, torture, imprisonment and other kinds of violence and assault”, and she touches upon their social, psychological and neurological effects. Tine is very careful to “relativize” the knowledge she presents, for example by comments like: “It’s not like one can draw a line between what you have been exposed to and the symptoms or the suffering you develop afterwards. Many other considerations are at stake here. And of course it is important what kind of events you have been exposed to and the duration of them”. But, as she herself describes, her role is to provide the audience with an overall sense of what a refugee is, what trauma is and what PTSD is. Her presentation refers to “scientific” knowledge, such as statistics and psychological studies of refugees. In Langebro and in Nordby (as well as at other seminars) Tine’s presentations were intended to lay the ground for the following presentations, which were based on the speakers’ own experiences and unique engagements with children in refugee families. As I will elaborate further below, I suggest that the kind of knowledge that is brought to the fore by these presentations is comparable to what Mosse defines as mètis.

58 Scott is mainly preoccupied with practices of knowledge in relation to state-planning, especially cities and landscapes.
If we return to Hulvej Rod’s reflections on the complementarity of meetings and documents resulting in a particular direction-giving aesthetic, we can detect a similar complementarity at seminars, with which more overall, general and partly scientific knowledge was translated directly into practical situations. This was done very explicitly in Marlene’s speech of welcome, in which she introduced the programme, as well as through the selection of speakers, each representing different modes of knowledge. The co-presence of PowerPoint presentations, paper and pens also indicates this translation. The paper and pens encouraged each participant to note down what was relevant to his or her unique working life. The empty sheets of paper and the pens are perhaps the most manifest illustration of how seminars leave spaces open for interpretation, for “pure possibility” (Sjørslev 2012: 217). Additionally the different ways of framing social interaction throughout the seminar contributed to this aesthetic. First there were a few presentations, to which the participants were expected to listen, and then, in the following debate, they were urged to comment and ask questions, thus connecting what they had just heard with their own individual experiences.

Scott maintains that the bonds between scientific knowledge and practical knowledge are insinuations of “a political struggle for institutional hegemony by experts and their institutions” (1998: 311). He argues that the lack of general rationality related to métis prevents it from being “democratically distributed” (1998: 334). In fact, in some of the examples he draws attention to (art, craftsmanship, religiosity, specific communities etc.; ibid.), métis can acquire status as well kept secrets only available to the few. Scott relates the status, significance and availability of métis to the kinds of social structures that characterize a society. As I have demonstrated, experiential, situated, local and “best-practice” kinds of knowledge are certainly made available in the context of the Danish welfare state. Therefore, rather than thinking of métis as in itself “all but un-appropriable” (335), I suggest it be thought of as making general knowledge all but appropriable. As techne and métis are combined in the context of a seminar, general knowledge is related to specific situations and is made relevant.

Pursuing the argument that performances of situated, local and “best-practice” kinds of knowledge – what Scott calls métis – are crucial in making general knowledge relevant, I will end the chapter by reflecting on the role of métis itself. What is it that anecdotes about practical knowledge (can) do? Here I would like to draw attention to Helle as an interesting character.
**Anecdotes: pointing towards possible futures**

As indicated by Marlene’s introduction, Helle is much appreciated for her ability to make knowledge relevant and tangible. Helle is a storyteller who travels around with her stories. She speaks in elegant and captivating ways about her own experiences as a teacher in what she refers to as socio-economically troubled areas. Her presentations consists of anecdotes from her everyday working life as a teacher, supplemented with references to more established knowledge, such as Jan Tønnesvang’s notion of “psychological oxygen” (psykologisk ilt). One of the stories, which I have heard her tell quite a few times, is the one I refer to in the opening vignette to this chapter. It is about a boy in one of her classes, whom she used to reprimand for always being late in the mornings. When she realized that he had a troubled family life, she started welcoming him instead. Another story is about a boy who used to call her every night while his mother and sisters were away travelling. His father was in such a bad state that he could not help with his bedtime routines, so Helle, via the phone, made sure that he would brush his teeth and then told him a story and sang him a lullaby. Helle often frames her unique and rather exceptional involvement with some of the children in her classes as examples of the very different needs that children have. Her accounts are manifestations of how she has found it necessary and meaningful to relate to the children in inventive ways, beyond the ordinary school day.

Helle’s presentations are rich in material. During my fieldwork, I came to recognize and know some of her stories and the persons in them. While their narrative form is appealing as objects of more exhaustive analysis, my approach to them is slightly more general. As I have mentioned already, I consider them to be representations of practical knowledge, of métis. Obviously not just anyone could walk in to one of Helle’s classes and do what she does. Helle knows the children in her classes and their families in ways which go beyond what one can read or be told. Her relationships with the children (at least the relationships she has chosen to talk about in the seminars) rest and rely on involvement, familiarity and a feel for one another. The situations Helle refers to and the working context in which these situations unfolded can be understood as examples of what Scott describes as a “complex […] social task, where the uncertainties are so daunting that we must trust our (experienced) intuition and feel our way” (Scott 1998: 327). But if this “mode of reasoning” (ibid.) is a skill to be achieved through experience

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59 During my fieldwork Helle was often invited to speak at different seminars at various places in Denmark.
and practice, how can we understand representations of them in seminars? Inspired by Sjørslev’s reading of the British philosopher Raymond Tallis’s work on the notion of “pointing”, 60 I propose that we think of stories like those conveyed by Helle as simultaneously referring to themselves and to each participant, thus making others aware of themselves in new ways. In the following I will pursue this argument.

In her article, “The material subject as political: style and pointing in public performance”, Sjørslev draws attention to Tallis’s work on “pointing” as a “highly complex phenomenon [that] occupies a central place in human communication” (2012: 217). Sjørslev is interested in exploring how material subjects, such as spectacular hats, masks, banners, posters or giant index fingers, become political in the context of public manifestations. In order to pursue this question, she engages with Tallis’s work and reflects on pointing as a performative gesture. According to Tallis, the act of pointing involves “a sense of one’s self as an embodied subject, and an agent, and of others as selves with viewpoints different from one’s own” (Tallis 2010 cited in: Sjørslev 2012: 217). A pointing subject alludes to him-/her-/itself as the centre of attention while at the same time indicating something not present there and then, something which once was or potentially will be (2012: 218). Sjørslev suggests that we can think of masks, hats and posters as turning themselves into particular signs by suggesting indeterminacy and potentiality, rather than fixed meaning (2012: 210). This, however, does not take place “entirely without reference”, she adds (ibid.). Following this line of thought, material subjects become political in the act of pointing and in interaction with particular frames: “It is the framing which shapes the becoming of the material subject as political” (2012: 221). In the same vein, I suggest that we can think of anecdotes as pointers. Anecdotes are small accounts in their own right, but they also play on indeterminacy and depend extensively on a frame providing them with meaning and direction. If we imagine Helle’s stories about having bread and cheese ready in the morning, and about supervising tooth-brushing and singing lullabies over the phone, being told at a dinner party, they would have meant something entirely different. Told among friends and family, they could have been stories about how varied a job public school teaching is, how demanding it can be or how many different kinds of family lives one is confronted with as a teacher. In the context of the seminar, however, and related to knowledge about refu-

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60 More specifically it is the book Michelangelo’s Finger: An Exploration of Everyday Transcendence (Tallis 2010) that Sjørslev engages with.
gees, trauma and PTSD, they turn into stories about how trauma and “refugeeness” be-
come apparent in the context of a school class and about how it is possible to engage
with these problems as a school teacher. In that sense, we can think of anecdotes as
having the capacity to point by referring to themselves and others and by performing
indeterminacy as well as determinacy. Thus, whereas in Sjørslev’s work it is the material
subject that is shaped as political, in the seminars it is the anecdotes that are shaped as
(welfare state) political. They become political as larger stories are being told through
them (Sjørslev 2012: 223).

Returning, then, to the question of what it is that Helle’s anecdotes (can) do, I suggest
that they not only have the ability to represent and convey situated, experienced kinds
of knowledge, conceptualized as métis in this chapter. Helle’s anecdotes also have the
ability to point out the people present in the room and the situations they may come to
find themselves in. When anecdotes like Helle’s are being told within the frame of a
seminar and are paired up with more general kinds of knowledge, they direct and apply
both themselves and more general knowledge to a multitude of future situations and
relations. In that sense, anecdotes play an important role in extending the seminar mo-
ment beyond itself.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have pursued an understanding of the seminar as a particular societal
context and performative frame for conveying knowledge in welfare state Denmark.
Drawing on anthropological literature on atmospheres, aesthetics, performance and
knowledge, I have suggested that the seminars in Langbro and Nordby, discursively,
socially and materially, performed a certain aesthetic of knowledge, thus relating more
abstract, general kinds of knowledge with situated, experienced, practical kinds. In ap-
proaching the seminars as amassed aesthetic form, and in giving particular prominence
to practical knowledge, or métis, I have suggested that the seminars created an atm-
osphere of pertinence and applicability. This atmosphere rested on both the pre-set and
recognizable form of seminars and the ways in which they pointed to, and opened up,
“a realm of pure possibility, of generality” (Sjørslev 2012: 217).

With this chapter, I suggest that exploring the atmospheric qualities of seminars, and
the affective qualities of those atmospheres, can add to our understanding of the polit-
ical practices and social relationships through which the category of “children in exposed
refugee families” comes into sight. One question arising from this analysis is if the form and the persuasiveness of the seminars toned down or even veiled all the ambiguities that, for example, Sofia expressed? Bringing up her initial worries concerning how the psychosocial activities would change her relationship with the children and their parents, as well as her latter reflections on how “honestly it was difficult” and how it felt like she was “failing”, Sofia alluded to some quite critical dilemmas related to such interventions in the public school. However, in the context of a seminar, Sofia’s uncertainties seemed to slip away and become part of a coherent enactment of knowledge of trauma, PTSD and refugees as pertinent.

Finally, as much as this chapter is about how knowledge related to trauma, PTSD and refugees is communicated though seminar situations, the analysis draws attention to seminars as an essential welfare state practice. The grand room in Langebro community center can accommodate knowledge from various fields, on various topics. And the fact that rooms similar to this are to be found all over Denmark suggests that knowledge is commonly approached and practiced as something that can be promoted, wrapped up and moved on. If we think of seminars as generating atmospheres, perhaps we can also think of atmospheres as “more than merely fleeting moments” (Bille, Bjerregaard, and Sørensen 2015: 14). Perhaps atmospheres can be lasting, not in the sense of being continuous, but in the sense of being always latent, easily picked up on and performable.

In the following chapter I will pick up on some of the concerns voiced by Sofia in the seminar in Langebro. The chapter will delve into another kind of encounter involved in the project activities, namely that which takes place between children, teachers and psychologists in the context of the children-groups. In this and the previous chapters I have contemplated first, how the category of children in exposed refugee families, and its inherent notions of psychotraumatology, has evolved out of the combination of specific historical, political and moral landscapes and then how the category was conveyed at seminars. In the following chapter I will focus on psychosocial groups in the public school as another particular way knowing refugee psychotraumatology, of moving mental healthcare beyond the clinic. In contrast to the seminar (and the classroom) the psychosocial group did not offer a ready-made context to step into, neither for the children nor for the teachers. Thus whereas the present chapter has focused on the persuasiveness of the seminar form, Chapter 4 aims to shed light on psychosocial groups as a somewhat less persuasive practice, at least when it comes to implementing them in the public school.
Chapter four

“There is this cliché...”
Chapter four

“There is this cliché…”

Psychosocial groups as unsettled modes of being together

In January 2010 the teachers involved with the project activities in Nordby and Langebro were invited to a two-day seminar. This seminar was designed to prepare and teach them the skills necessary to carry out the general educational activities of the classes, as well as the more narrowly focused group sessions. The teachers quickly picked up on turning the subject of “exposed refugee families” into educational material and activities. However, when it came to the group aspect of the project activities, the teachers all expressed some unease, asking questions such as: “How far can you go?”; “When is it therapy, and when is it not?”; “As a teacher, what are you capable of, and what are you allowed to do?” One presentation at the seminar addressed the cognitive implications of trauma and secondary trauma. The speaker, Elise, a psychologist specializing in children and trauma, displayed a drawing showing the pre-printed contours of a human brain coloured by a boy she had worked with. Each colour represented a feeling. Elise had asked the boy to imagine different events in his life and then colour the brain, thus indicating the feelings he connected with the different episodes. Sofia asked: “There is this cliché that we [teachers] shouldn’t practice home spun psychology (lege lommep-sykologer). So is that [pointing at the drawing] something you can recommend that we do?”

Cliché or not, as I have emphasized throughout the dissertation, public school teachers are increasingly being encouraged to pay attention to and work with the problems children may experience within their families, whether in relation to grief, divorce or mental illness. The above questions, raised by teachers, who were about to engage themselves in psychosocial groups with children from their classes, clearly indicate that they felt
uncertain with regards to what was expected from them in the group session. And especially they verbalized their uncertainty in relation to the potentially therapeutic qualities of psychosocial groups.

Prompted by these questions, in this chapter, I set out to explore psychosocial children-groups as a particularly multifaceted and morally potent borderland situation. Compared to Chapter 3 and Chapter 5, dealing with the seminar and the home respectively, this chapter is more ethnographically explorative. By offering an ethnographic account of a variety of group situations, it aims to shed light on how, in the context of the public school, the category of children in exposed refugee families is caught up in a range of dilemmas, some of which concern the category itself and others the intricate task of engaging psychosocially with children's family lives in the context of the public school.

In order to begin exploring the psychosocial group as a particular kind of social situation in the following section I will demonstrate how “groups” have been contemplated, respectively within anthropology and within (psycho)social work. I will start by briefly outlining how groups, as an anthropological concern, are conceived as an essential dimension of being human. Next I will elaborate on how historically psychosocial group-work has developed as a method of both healing and empowerment. I shall emphasise the psychosocial group as a somewhat abstract kind of social situation in the context of the public school. In the next and most comprehensive part of the chapter, I will delve into a selection of group situations at Nordby School and Langebro School respectively. First of all I aim to show that the psychosocial group offers a wide span of engagements. I will discuss the varieties of group practices as unsettled modes of being together, both due to the all-encompassing ways in which the category of children in exposed refugee families was employed and to the elusiveness of psychosocial groups in a school context. I will also reflect on how this unsettledness in roles made it unclear how to engage with the group situation, while at the same time creating spaces and possibilities for children, teachers and psychologists. Finally I shall return to Langebro in order to show how, in this socio-political context, the category of children in exposed refugee families, seemed to be particularly controversial.

(Psychosocial) Groups: (out of) the ordinary

The study of human beings as social and cultural beings is the most central concern in anthropology and related social sciences (cf.: Hastrup 2004b: 22). Implied in this interest
is an attentiveness towards the kinds of social ties that human beings engage in. Indications of social coherence and social relations are often debated in relation to communities and fellowships (Amit and Rapport 2002) - or groups (cf.: Barth 1994, Latour 2005, Jenkins 1994). Much anthropological attention has been paid to shifting the focus from the group as a pre-existing entity to group formation. Fredrik Barth did this by emphasizing the continuous negotiations of boundaries between (in his case ethnic) groups as the pivotal element of group-making processes (1994). One implication of this is that groups, like any other kind of community, are created through processes of imagination as well as ascription (Amit and Rapport 2002: 20). Within a completely different context of social science, Bruno Latour focuses on how conceptualizations of groups are manufactured. He traces, and critically challenges, the ways social scientists have taken upon themselves, as their most significant task, to engage in arguments concerning which already defined group people can be ascribed membership of (Latour 2005: 28). Rather, he argues, social scientists should “follow the actor’s own ways and begin our travels by the traces left behind by their activity of forming and dismantling groups” (Latour 2005: 29). In spite of their general criticism of how groups are taken for granted, both Barth and Latour treat groups (or rather the idea of groups), groupings and group formations as basic ingredients in society. People group, re-group and form anti-groups as a premise for being human. In other words, in their most basic form, groups are what form the social lives of human beings. To be placed in or to place others in formal as well as informal groups is a common occurrence, though one that often passes unnoticed.

As a psychosocial phenomenon, “groups” connote very different qualities. Turned into a method or a social technique on the basis of a psychosocial category (Johnecke, Nordahl Svendsen, and Whyte 2004), the psychosocial group depends on and implies a relationship between some people intending something with and acting upon someone else’s life circumstances. This relationship is also implied in the rhetoric concerning groups under the aegis of social work. Here groups are articulated as something being established (etableret), held (afholdt) or facilitated (faciliteret) (Heap 2000). In that sense, a group is typically established in relation to a number of people who professionals and/or group members themselves perceive as having similar life conditions or problems. This could be “Alcoholics Anonymous” (Steffen 1997), “voice hearers” (Busch 2015), “wives of Palestinian detainees” (Buch 2010) or “children in exposed refugee families”. As I explained previously, such categories evolve out of specific historical practices and signify particular political and moral landscapes (Jensen and Rønsbo 2014).
An interesting aspect of the idea of establishing psychosocial groups is that, however “professional”, or “technical” an act this may be, it is an act that comes out of the idea that “the social” in itself holds some potentially healing capacities - that bringing people together in groups has the potential to generate something good in the form of a sense of connection and of mutual understanding among its members. This is illustrated very well in the way in which Ken Heap, researcher in social work, relates the potential of the group as a social work method with the strength and the potential inherent to everyday social life (2000: 13-14). In that sense the psychosocial group is in itself an abstract idea, which nonetheless create very real social situations.

**Towards participation and empowerment**

In his analysis and characterisation of group work Heap explains the growing popularity of the group, as a method, with a number of historical traits. First he points to the change in both the degree and kind of political consciousness and commitment during the 1960s. According to Heap, early theorizing in social work idealized political neutrality. But he argues that the profession underwent a transformation based on a collective recognition of “the political and socio-economic forces in society [and of the realization that social workers] do in fact have a political role” (Heap 1992: 14). Realising that social work had (and still has) a potentially very vital political position in society, social workers changed their attitudes to both their own social responsibility and the critical perspective of their work. This “movement into political awareness” (ibid.) also impacted on the relationships between social workers and their clients. The formation of political identities, anti-hierarchical and critical of centralized power, caused a more general attentiveness towards power and powerful positions, including those of themselves. Heap connects these changes and concerns with a professional eagerness to “abrogate power, to be in fact, and not merely theoretically, oriented towards egalitarian alliance with the client [causing] more and more caseworkers to group mode, to experiment, to learn by doing and then to look at theory” (ibid.). Implicitly Heap refers to the group as a less hierarchical method, removing some authority from the traditionally powerful position of the social worker in one-to-one meetings with a client. Ideally group work contributes to a sense of responsibility, capability and agency among its members.61 Secondly, Heap links the gradually extensive use of group work with the development of more therapeutic and clinical components of social work, especially within medical social work.

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61 We can understand Heap’s reading of history as an example of how psychosocial practices have been connected with redemptive potentialities. (Jensen and Rønsbo 2014: 4).
Heap ascribes this to both holistic and psychosocial perspectives: “Thus not merely the ‘whole person’ but the ‘whole person in his or her social context’ is increasingly the focus of medical programmes” (Heap 1992: 15). Finally Heap calls attention to group work as a necessary response to the disparity between the financial resources available and the nature and magnitude of contemporary social problems. As he argues, the group can respond to these difficulties both through its ability to encompass more people and by functioning on a “collective and interactional level” (Heap 1992: 15). In this perspective, practising social work in groups potentially adds more value for the resources available. Elsewhere Heap also explains the general professional appeal of working with people in groups through an increasing focus on the resources of “ordinary citizens” (Heap 2000: 21-22). The group is praised as a method with the potential for involving these resources and, to a certain extent, for emancipating people from an omnipresent professionalism. In that sense, psychosocial group work is part of a general movement within social work towards principles of participation and empowerment. The increased emphasis on psychoeducational aspects is a good example of this development (cf.: Walsh 2008). Moreover psychosocial group practices are closely tied to the modern subject and ideals of how one should deal with one’s problems through acts of analyzing, acknowledging and sharing feelings (Foucault 1988, Lutz and Abu-Lughod 2008).

In the introduction, I touched upon how another, yet complementary movement has taken place since the 1960s in relation to perceptions of children and of childhood. From thinking of and acting on children as the passive recipients of adult’s socializing practices, children are now, politically as well as theoretically, considered to be active and knowing individuals partaking in their own development and lives (James and James 2004, Gulløv 1999, Olwig and Gulløv 2003). These changes in perspectives on children mean that it has become meaningful to involve children in new ways, for example, as “experts in their own lives” and as resourceful participants in (psycho)social group work.

A school-in-school or something-close-to-but-not-quite-therapy?

In their outline of the concept of homework, Mattingly, Grøn and Meinert briefly mention the alterations of roles implicated by homework practices. According to them, the homework perspective suggests an educational relationship between clinical experts who become teachers and patients who become pupils (Mattingly et al. 2011: 348). As I have mentioned, the concept of homework springs from their interest in shedding light on the complexities related to these changes in social roles and relationships. In the case
of psychosocial work in schools, children-groups too invoked a more or less subtle mod-
ification of roles for both children and teachers. However, here there was already an
educational relationship, which was now encouraged to incorporate a more explicit psy-
chosocial component. In the beginning of the dissertation I introduced psychosocial
work as a multipurpose and productive genre of work, comprising therapy-like situa-
tions, “psychoeducation” and awareness-raising. This elusiveness of psychosocial work
was also brought out in an interview with my colleagues at CER. When I asked them
about their understanding of “the psychosocial” and of psychosocial groups, they
moved verbally between therapeutic, educational and “social” frameworks. Having dis-
tinguished psychosocial work from “strictly social activities”, Tine, referring to psycho-
social group practices at her previous workplace, said: “If one were then to list [mean-
ings] to the other side, to the psychological, that is why it is not therapy [...] I would say
that the delimitation lied in the fact that the psychosocial groups entailed a larger el-
ement of some kind of education, that is... or at least input of knowledge, [which] was
contemplated”. Hannah, supplementing her, said: “Basically I regard it as activities,
which both encompass social persons, that being groups or individuals, the persons’ so-
cial life, relations to other networks, family and the surrounding society and then the
psycho-part, the inner in some way, how you think and how you feel. In general it is
those two elements.” Vera described her understanding of psychosocial group work to
me in a clarifying e-mail, referring to it as an act of “bringing people together around an
activity – but includ[ing] a therapeutic element – without that being treatment”. Along
with the questions and concerns raised among the teachers at the initial seminar, these
responses show how in general, “therapy” is a form of intervention, which different
kinds of professionals within my field spoke of as comparison and contrast when sketch-
ing out the genre of psychosocial group work. Their perspectives on how and where to
draw the line between therapy and children-groups were diverse, but they all agreed
that the role of facilitator of the children-groups was not of a therapeutic kind.

Generally therapy can be defined as “medical or psychological treatment of patients
with physical or psychological problems with the intention of removing or alleviating
those ailments and sufferings caused by the problems” (Hansen 2012: 506) (my transla-
tion) or “treatment of mental ailments or sufferings by means of psychological meth-
ods” (Schnack 2002: 336). Obviously, being a pupil, a teacher or a psychologist provides
you with very different perspectives on where to draw the line between therapy and
non-therapy. Furthermore, a study of therapeutic relationships would undoubtedly re-
veal a wealth of differences in forms and engagements. Thus importantly, when referring to “therapy” as a specific genre of work, I do not mean to imply that only one such well-defined genre exists. Nonetheless, “therapy” was constantly brought up as something the psychosocial group work should not be, nor should turn into, in the context of the school; it was something that belonged elsewhere. What is interesting, then, is that the distinction was repeatedly made and that it influenced what kinds engagements the teachers and psychologists pursued in the children-groups.

In order to tune in on this tension in relation to therapy I have found inspiration in the British anthropologist Gillian Evans’ (2006) preoccupation with different forms of participation. In her study of, what she refers to as “educational failure” among white working-class children in Britain, British anthropologist Gillian Evans’ (2006) looks into the ways in which children are encouraged or required to participate in different situations, both at school and at home (2006: 7). Doing so, she argues, will reveal much about the quality of social relationships and their structure (ibid.: 6). One concern of Evans is to understand how some of the boys in her study have a difficult time living up to these restraints. She identifies a tendency to dismiss kinds of sociality that are not considered appropriate in middle-class environments, which she challenges by arguing for the importance of comparing and juxtaposing the kinds of participation that are expected from children in the different contexts in which they live their lives. I certainly recognize many of her observations in this regard, but it is her sensibility towards forms of participation vary from situation to situation, and from context to context, that I find relevant to my study.

Evans refers the school as “a distinctive social situation” (ibid.: 7), but she is also preoccupied with the variety of social contexts to be found within the school. She describes how there is a friction between the diverse ways in which learning is structured relative to different times and spaces at school (Evans 2006: 81). Evans writes compellingly about how children and teachers move together through a “spatio-temporal rhythm” (ibid.: 82). Each temporality and physicality implies different expectations of them both. One example is the contrast between how the children can move around freely, playfully and relatively loudly in the playground at break time, while quite different and distinct modes of behaviour are demanded of them during classes. Here, “[t]he requirement is first of all a bodily disposition, a restraint that embodies order and readiness for concentrated application to work, which demands conceptual thinking” (Evans 2006: 82). Following Evans, we can understand the psychosocial group as a new social context at
school, adding to the line of others, and entailing new ways of engaging with one another. In short Evans’ notion of participation centres attention on expected modes of engagement in the contexts of the children-group.

Importantly, the kinds of engagements I look into primarily concern conversations. As I have mentioned, the group sessions involved different forms of play and exercises. At the moment, within the field of childhood psychology there is a great deal of focus on how play can be exercised in therapeutic ways. This focus is related to the notion that play can help children build social relations, as well as improve their ability to regulate affect and recognize emotions. At Nordby School Nina was inspired by these ideas, and in Langebro Flora also attempted to exercise play with particular psychological foci. It could have been interesting to include these psychosocial practices of play, their inherent notions of psychology and neurology, and the kinds of involvement related to them. Nonetheless, it would go beyond the scope of this research to do so. As I conducted fieldwork in the group sessions, I was very attentive towards the verbal engagements, the conversations, between children and professionals. Thus, when I in the following part of the chapter explore a selection of situations and conversations at Nordby School and Langebro School respectively, my focus is on how children, teachers and psychologists negotiated and balanced talking about themes related to their families, trauma, PTSD and being a refugee within the context of the group.

“More time and more space”: The case of Nordby

In Nordby the group sessions were all facilitated by Nina and Rakel in collaboration, except for one where Nina was prevented from being present and Rakel took over. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, being a psychologist, Nina was experienced in facilitating children-groups, however primarily in more explicit therapeutic settings within the treatment organization she normally worked in. The group, consisting of three boys and one girl, met seven times in the afternoon, immediately after school. At the sixth children-group session Nina and Rakel had planned to do an exercise, called “the river of life”:

After a break, we all move to the more spacious art room. The separation between two floors has been removed, and the room is high-ceilinged. Along the walls on “the second floor”, there is a kind of landing, used for sewing and

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62 Cf. joyful play:  
other kinds of needlework. We are about to do an exercise, called “the river of life”. And so we help each other arrange a long, turquoise blue piece of velour fabric on the floor to represent a river. At one end a fern is placed to imitate vegetation. A couple of life jackets and a larger number of fist-sized beach pebbles are placed here and there. Life jackets and pebbles are also depicted on pieces of paper, spread out on the river.

Rakel asks who would like to begin, and Yusuf says that he would. Immediately afterwards, he changes his mind. Rakel, gently holding him to his first decision, asks him to tell us what he has written. Yusuf reaches for one of the stone images, the one he knows is his. He turns it around and reads out loud: “When my mom and dad were angry at each other, I became angry”. From the reverse of his life jacket illustration he reads: “Then I told them to stop, and so they did”. Yusuf then tells us that his father lives somewhere else in town now, but that he visits often. He says that his parents used to quarrel over something about his father’s work. “But they don’t do that anymore”.

Now it is Salima’s turn. She reads aloud, first from her pebble-decorated paper sheet: “When my mom had a headache, it was difficult to help her”. And then from the life jacket: “But I managed to help her and then she felt better”. Rakel and Nina ask her how she supported her mother, and Salima describes how she would help around the house so that her mother would not have to do those things. “Then she would sit and relax, and then she would feel better”, Salima explains, going on to talk about her mother’s migraine. She is hesitating and searching for the word “migraine”, and Rakel helps her find it. Salima says that she would vacuum, do the dishes and clean up. “But I did not do the worst part”, she says. “What is the worst part?” Rakel asks. “Sometimes, when it has been years or months, then the worst part is to clean up underneath the sofa, because then there is a lot of dust!” We all laugh a bit.

Rakel turns her attention to Amin, who reads from the back of his pebble-picture: “When my mom and dad were divorced, then I didn’t know what to do, and I felt bad”. On his life jacket, he has written: “But I saw him [his father] often, and that made me feel better”. Amin pauses and then adds: “Now he has left”. I am not sure whether the last sentence is on his paper sheet or if it just comes to his mind. Rakel asks: “Is it a long time ago”. “Well, yes”, Amin says. As he does not invite any further questions, Rakel and Nina do not ask
any, but move on to Özk and, following the same model as the other children, first reads aloud his version of something which has been difficult or problematic in his family and then how they solved it. “When my mom and dad had to find a name for my baby brother, they were all confused”, he says. “We decided to call my grandparents...” Özk continues with a voice so faint that I cannot hear the last bit. No one says anything for a while, and then Nina asks: “Where there many names at issue?” Özkan nods and Nina asks him if he had a favourite name. “No, I was only three years old, so I cannot remember”, Özkan replies.

A brief conversation follows. We talk about our experiences with picking out names and what this has meant to us or someone close to us. “One can either cope with a situation oneself or get help from others”, Rakel remarks before we help each other put the pebbles and life jackets into bags and fold up the river.

Everyone present in the room knew that Özkan’s father was not well. On several occasions he had been in deep affect when attending meetings at the school, and he had told Marwan’s teachers and I about his emotional problems and the economic difficulties the family was going through. Therefore, we were all aware that Özkan and his parents had been struggling with much more complicated and sorrowful issues than finding a name for Özkan’s baby brother. Still, Nina and Rakel acknowledged what he was saying in the same way as the parental disputes, divorces and headaches brought up by the other children. Situations like these made me wonder what kind of conversations and topics Nina and Rakel found relevant within the group context. When I interviewed Nina, I asked her how she perceived the purpose of the children-group:

*Nina: “Yes, what is the purpose of them... I intend to create a smaller space and a safer space where the children have the chance to have more time and more space and to receive more information and then share what they felt like sharing. It is a balancing act, also in the classroom. And there are both advantages and disadvantages...on the one hand perhaps the feeling of being safe may be more prevalent when you collect children from the same class, but one disadvantage may be that there are some things you do not want to talk about. There is a limit to how exposed you wish to be”.*
Trine: “Do you have the feeling that you could sense this being an issue sometimes?”

Nina: “Well, I have been thinking about it, and there have been some occasions, if the question has been very directly addressing problems at home or problems in relation to the parents, then there have been many differences in what the children have been sharing or in what has come into their minds. I imagine that it is the children’s way of protecting themselves, that [that is] the identity they wish to have in the class...they do not want it to be completely overshadowed by the problems they have at home”.

Trine: “In the interview Katrine [a consultant related to the project activities] conducted with you, you mentioned that it could be difficult to maintain a balance between therapy and something not being therapy. Can you tell me more about what you think of as therapy and what not, and where the limit is?”

Nina: “Well, I consider children-groups, or such groups, to be somewhere in between, because in some sense you draw on something therapeutic, something with group knowledge. I think the balance lies in, that if you sense resistance...how much you then push the children. I think that the setting they are in, they have not decided themselves that they have a problem they would like to work with. Then you have more, well, there you have agreed on a different framework for the conversation, and then I can ask more accurately about...and then people can chose to say no thanks or I do not want to talk about that right now...then they still have control. It’s not what I mean, but ehm...”

Trine: “When you mention this self-chosen problem, have you ever experienced children at this age choose something which they have brought to you to work with?”

Nina: “I do not think that they themselves have had the thought that it would be good to talk to a psychologist, because I believe that the clients I attend to, they do not know what a psychologist is before they see one. But they may have a problem, perhaps they are very, very anxious, and that means that they are restricted in what they can do. And children who have experienced, have witnessed killing at close hand or have seen family members being blown to pieces, well those are some of the experiences they bring with them. And you can say that part of coming to me, the first conversations, are about what can
I do, what can we work with here, and why you have come here. Because it is important that it is the children’s own choice to come here and that they themselves feel comfortable bringing something up”.

Trine: “So in the children-groups, where that is not the case, then what you are saying is that, if you feel resistance, then you treat it differently than you would have done if it had been a therapeutic situation?”

Nina: “I think about it [...] and it is different from a children-group, where what is common is that they have these problems and that they can choose to share [them], but they can also choose not to”.

This fairly long extract from my interview with Nina clearly illustrates that Nina was very preoccupied with adjusting the children-groups to the context of the school. It also shows that for Nina it is a complicated matter to identify the genre of psychosocial children-groups, and she points to particular challenges in doing so. First of all, she alludes to the therapeutic framework as offering a situation, which is generally more agreed upon, compared to the children-group situation. Secondly, she raises a concern related to the fact that children in the same school class have relationships, which go beyond the group situation. Therefore they cannot just choose to leave and never see each other again: they will continue to be a part of each other’s lives. She implied that this could both add a sense of safety and a sense of feeling exposed. Notions of “choice” and “resistance” appear to be significant guidelines in her distinction between the kinds of practices she pursued in therapy (including with children who had themselves experienced war) and in the children-groups in Nordby School. Nina seems to be dedicated to working with a child’s resistance to the therapeutic relationship, whereas in the children-group children are “freer” in their choices of what to talk about. This was obvious in the river-of-life exercise, where Nina and Rakel welcomed and accepted all the answers offered by Yusuf, Amin, Salima and Özkan.

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63 The psychological notion of “resistance” is closely related to Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic work and refers to the ways in which human beings, deliberately as well as unconsciously, avoid talking about certain experiences or topics (Cf.: Freud, McLintock, and Haughton 2003). Thus, in bringing up resistance, Nina was alluding to a complicated conceptual trope, which could be pursued further than I have done here. For example, it would be interesting to explore how resistance is identified and distinguished from other verbal accounts, utterances or ways of being present in different contexts.
In a different way, Rakel also expressed attempting to find a balance in the ways in which she and Nina thematized and talked about the potential gravity of having parents who came to Denmark as refugees. After one group session, she, Nina and I were cleaning teacups and small plates in a miniature tea kitchen next to the room where the group session had taken place. I asked them why, in today’s session, they had chosen to read out loud a *rewritten* version of “the Fatme story”, from which they had removed the passage about Fatme peeing in her bed. Rakel explained to me that she and a colleague had changed the story because they felt a great deal of resistance towards this part and thought that the children would do so too. She wanted a narrative that was more pertinent (*nærværende*) to the children, she said. Rakel found the story very dense: every imaginable aspect of being a child in a traumatized refugee family was packed into it. Also, she would have preferred the story not to have ended with Fatme flushing the school inspector’s letter down the toilet but for something positive to have happened at the end instead, something that would leave you with a feeling of hope. As we continued our conversation in the teakitchen, Rakel expressed a concern with regard to the atmosphere during the previous group session. The atmosphere had been very intense, and Rakel was wondering if we could do anything to put some energy into it. “There must be limits to how quiet and soft one’s voice needs to be”, she said.

Along with Nina’s very explicit reflections on the differences between therapy and psychosocial groups, Rakel’s alteration of the Fatme story and her remark about how there must be limits to the need to speak with softness and quietness in one’s voice show that both of them were very careful not to overstep the children’s personal boundaries. Where both of them were relatively clear about what the children-groups should *not* be (therapy, too intense, too despairing, it was less evident what they *should* be. Often the group sessions at Nordby were nice and cozy, and sometimes the children would spontaneously tell tall tales. Once, while working on creating a “network flower”\(^{64}\) in colorful paper, Amin was reminded of his grandparents:

> Amin: “I did not get to see my grandfather (farfar) and grandmother (mormor). My grandfather died last Sunday.”

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\(^{64}\) A common exercise in psychosocial groups with children is to ask each child to create a “network flower” out of paper. Each leaf represents a person or a community of great importance to the child. The idea is to make the child reflect upon the persons they have around them and the ways in which they can expect to receive support from these persons.

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Rakel: “Oh, is it that recent? ... Didn’t you feel sad, even though you did not know him?”

Amin: “Yes”.

Rakel: “I think that I want to add my grandmother, even though she is dead. She meant a lot to me”

Amin: “I have been told this story about my grandfather. It was something about him fighting two lions.”

Yusuf: “There are also crocodiles there! I have seen them eat human beings.”

Rakel: “On television?”

Yusuf: “No, my mom has told me about it”.

Both Rakel and Nina were attentive in letting the children decide what they wanted to bring up in the group sessions. To them it seemed less important what they said, and more important that they said something, took part and were given attention. Moreover, as Nina also mentioned in my interview with her, it was important to give the children a good experience: “more time and more space”. In Nordby this resulted in a fairly unspecified space for conversations. As I will show in the following, in Langebro Sofia responded very differently to the tales brought up by the children here.

“Had I only been a psychologist... ”: The case of Langebro

The first four group sessions in Langebro took place at a local children’s museum, whereas the last two sessions were carried out at the school. At the museum Flora facilitated the groups while Sofia took over in the school. As I have mentioned already, Sofia was brought in to the third group session as a “well-known person”. It was obvious that she had a different take on the children than Flora and that she knew them well. Often I would see her correcting the children, but just as often she was just moving around, placing herself next to, or gently stroking the back of a boy or girl who was interrupting or seemed to be restless. During my later fieldwork at the schools I would learn that this was a characteristic of Sofia’s (as well as several of her colleagues) way of engaging with the children. When she eventually took over facilitating the group solely, she seemed very enthusiastic about implementing psychotraumatology and to do so in a way in which she very explicitly used PTSD as a point of reference and an entry into talking to the children about their parents. Sometimes, as in the case of the first of the
group sessions with the boys after Flora had left, she would make use of PTSD almost as a didactic instrument:

*Sofia talks to the boys about how they constantly refer to the group session as “PTSD”. “Are we going to PTSD today?” and the like. “But what exactly does PTSD mean?”, she asks. She says that she completely understands if the boys find it difficult to remember and that she has brought a piece of paper on which it says what it means. Adrian reads out loud, “post-traumatic stress disorder”. He pronounces “post” in the same way that “mail” (post) is pronounced in Danish. Sofia corrects him, and Hasshim says: “It makes me think of a broom (kost). Sofia continues to the word “trauma” and asks: “Is it a trauma to lose your cellphone in the toilet?” Several of the boys shake their heads and say “No”. Haamid also shakes his head and says: “That, you will forget”. Then Sofia asks if being involved in an accident counts as a trauma. Many of the boys say “Yes”, and one boy burst out loud: “Coma”. Sofia says that “trauma” is a noun and that it can become a verb and then is expressed as “being traumatized”. “What does that mean?”, she asks. Hasshim: “You are stressed out about something which is annoying”. Sofia: “Yes, you are stressed out. What is stress?” Hasshim: “You think about things that you cannot get out of your head”.

Sofia continued talking with the boys about how PTSD can affect people who have been in war. Later, during the same group session, she asked the boys to draw while she read the Fatme story out loud. When she had finished reading, Sofia and the boys talked about the drawings. As we shall see, she emphasized very different aspects of their accounts compared to the boys:

*The boys are drawing, many of them drawing war situations. One boy, Marwan, has been drawing a rather skilled illustration of a man, shooting from a sitting position. Another boy laughs and says, “That’s Abdul’s father”. A third boy claims that “It’s Amir’s father!”

*Marwan says: “It’s my father”.

*Sofia: “Can I ask...has your father been a soldier?“

*Marwan: “Yes”.

*Sofia: “Where?”
Marwan: “Iraq”.

A great deal of talk stirs among the boys. Sofia holds on to the conversation with Marwan and asks: “Is this something he has told you about?”

Marwan: “Yes, he has been at war for eight years. They fought over a lake”.

A boy: “A lake?!”

Sofia: “Has he told you anything else?”

Marwan: “Yes”.

Sofia: “... What?”

Marwan: “I don’t want to tell you that. It will take two hours”.

The dialogue is once again interrupted, but Sofia quickly returns to it.

Sofia: “Marwan, do you feel like telling us something now, or would you rather wait until the next time?”

Marwan: “Now”. He speaks fast, talking about something like a strategy and that they were fighting all night. “But my father did not have an AK”.

Some of the other boys are laughing, and Sofia addresses them by saying: “Do you think that Marwan’s father found it funny to live like that for eight years?”

A boy: “How did he survive?”

Marwan shrugs his shoulders to demonstrate that he does not know.

The boys start talking, and Sofia says: “Listen, we will stop now! The way you are receiving what Marwan is saying is simply not OK”.

From the brief exchange between the boys initiating this vignette, it seems as if the drawing Marwan had made could have been of anyone’s father. The boys related to the shooting soldier as someone familiar. The boys wanted to know how the depicted soldier, who turned out to be Marwan’s father, survived this precarious situation and if it was really true that he had been fighting over “a lake”. Sofia, on the other hand, wanted the boys to realize the gravity of Marwan’s father’s experience. She urged the boys to reflect on the connections between their fathers’ pasts and their present state of mind. Marwan’s drawing had the potential to do just that – creating a linkage between Marwan’s father’s past and present. A short while after this episode Sofia ended the group session, and the boys packed up their bags and left the room. Sofia and I stayed for a
little while, and Sofia told me that she strongly sensed how one boy, Mahmoud, was all quiet and attentive and how she was certain that much of what they had been talking about in the group session corresponds very well with how things were in his home. Sofia was very alert to what the boys may have been thinking and feeling. In that process, some things became more evident to her than others. Getting Marwan to tell the story about his father was the first important matter. Secondly she tried to lead Marwan and the other boys to talk about the father’s sufferings. Sofia’s somewhat direct, and perhaps more utilitarian approach to the category of children in exposed refugee families and its inherent notions of psychotraumatology must be seen in the light of more general approaches to teaching at the school. At Langbro School among the teachers many children, including some of those who took part in the group sessions, had a problematic reputation and the teachers were constantly trying to structure their work in ways that could cater to the very different needs of the children. For example, once, while visiting the school having been absent for a while, I learned that the two classes had been rearranged and divided into an “I-class” and an “Y-class”. The “I” stood for “inner” (indre) and the “Y” for “outer” – in Danish ydre. According to this principle, some children needed help “on the inside”, in this case in carrying out their schoolwork, while others needed “outer” control, for example, if they had difficulties in sitting still, being quiet etc. To my knowledge this division did not last very long. As the following extract from my interview with Sofia shows, for her the category of children in exposed refugee families offered a new perspective on the children and reminded her that there were “reasons behind” the children’s behavior:

“But it is the same children being sent to other classes every time, because they cannot behave properly in the class. But it is also the same children who need adult time and need attention and who feel bloody awful [ad helvede til] at home. I have said that I don’t want to send children to other classes anymore, that’s it, I am not doing it. You have to find some other way of doing it and including them. [...] And when something occurs, then I have in mind how to take things more easy and that I should think one extra time about how to say things and how to do things, because there is a reason behind it. And it is easy out here to burn out. It’s easy, if you want to shout and scream all day, then you could justify doing that. You just don’t get a damn thing out of that, and not at all with these children. And if you write this down...well you have also

65 At Langbro School, the teachers relatively often sent children to sit and work quietly in a different class if they made too much noise or disturbance in their own class.
been close to them for a long time and you would also be able to mention the children who are being send to other classes. So it’s the same children, and it’s them who have special needs, for support that is”.

Sofia really came to find meaning in the project activities. For her, the knowledge about the conditions of families in which one or both parents are affected by trauma offered an explanation of the children’s struggles at school:

“And we have so many unsettled (urolige) children, who find it difficult to concentrate and who carry so much with them, which perhaps they are not even aware of themselves. So I definitely see these project activities as something that can give us an understanding of why we have so many children popping up all the time. And it’s the same children who pop up and who struggle so much in receiving schooling in the same terms as others”.

Trine: “When you say ‘popping up’, what does that mean?

Sofia: “It’s the same children getting into conflict. And it’s the same children not being able to use words to solve conflicts, but who resort to physical confrontation with others, and it is the same children not having breakfast. [...] And there I believe that these project activities can make a difference”.

Sofia was dedicated to the children who were living marginalized lives, “out here”, as she often said when referring to Langebro. She regularly talked about what it was like to go on excursions outside Langebro with the children, explaining how they were teased, shouted at and ridiculed because they were from Langebro. On several occasions she had invited some of her pupils of ethnic minority background home with her to celebrate a birthday or a festive season. Sometimes Sofia talked about how she felt provoked by the fact that some of her family members voted for the nationalist Danish People’s Party (Dansk Folkparti). She also involved some of the children in a small café project on which she worked outside school for a period of time. Before she became engaged with the project activities, she did not specifically think of the children as descendants of refugees. She just thought of them and referred to them as bilingual:

“We were not even aware that there was such a high percentage of war-traumatized residents in the area [...] I know that sounds like a complete failure in
keeping up with things (bagom dansen), given that I work out here, but I have never thought along those lines...”

Trine: “So, when you said that thing about wanting to work with bilingual [children], you thought of it as...?”

Sofia: “Well, as a group who had a hard time in society and was isolated out here, and who found it difficult how to get on in the split world they often live in. But it was a split related to culture and religion. I have never been thinking that they could suffer from secondary traumatization, for example. Never”.

Thus, for Sofia, the project activities implied a removal of responsibility from the children, making it obvious that the latter were in need of help rather than additional control and reprimands. Moreover, for her the category of children in exposed refugee families offered a much appreciated alternative to the processes of “othering” (Khawaja 2009), the stigmatization, based on ethnicity and their lives “in the ghetto”, that Sofia so often witnessed her pupils being subjected to, a stigmatization that had originally motivated her to work in this specific neighborhood. In spite of her initial discomfort with the idea of psychosocial groups, eventually she voiced the feeling that facilitating a psychosocial group need not change her perception of her role as a teacher. As she remarked, “If you only want to be a schoolteacher, then you shouldn’t be out here. Out here you should be prepared to be a schoolteacher thirty percent of the time, and apart from this you are a social worker, a social pedagogue, a psychologist, practically a psychiatrist, except for the fact that you cannot prescribe medicines”. Sofia made use of the same pedagogical and didactic approaches as she employed in the classroom, expecting answers from the children and bringing the policy of “zero tolerance” into the children-groups. In the beginning of the last group session with the girls, enacting this policy of zero tolerance, she dismissed five out of seven girls because they were making too much noise. Afterwards she told me that it would only confuse the girls and their relationship with Sofia if they were allowed different things in the group sessions and in the classroom respectively. Still, several times she expressed that working with her pupils in psychosocial groups gave her a feeling of not being sufficiently qualified. One day,

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Jöhncke, Svendsen and Whyte (2004) point to how problems emerge as public concerns due to how what they refer to as “professional problem solvers” identify problems that people are not always aware they had. Prior to these specific project activities, Sofia was not aware that she needed knowledge of psychotraumatology.
after a group session while we could still hear the boys disappearing down the hallway, Sofia looked at me with both resignation and determination in her eyes and said: “Had I only been a psychologist, then I would have known what to do today”.

Together the group situations and interview passages clearly show that Sofia was ambiguous in her ways of depicting and practicing being a teacher. On the one hand we can understand Sofia’s shifts in how she related to her work as a demonstration of the many actual and potential aspects of being a teacher. On the other hand, it was also clear that the category of children in exposed refugee families, with its intrinsic psychotraumatological explanation models, confronted her with a dilemma. Inherently elastic and flexible, trauma provides a framework for understanding human emotions and behavior in contexts that go far beyond the therapeutic relationship (Young 1995, Kirmayer, Lemelson, and Barad 2007, Fassin and Rechtman 2009). But at the same time it places parts of humanity in a world, which is only completely comprehensible to people with specialized knowledge. These equally plastic and specialized qualities left Sofia in a contradictory position, one in which she found herself more informed and clearer about the children she worked with and cared for, but also alienated from them and uncertain about her own abilities. The indefinite character of the psychosocial group seemed to underpin this contrary position. While Sofia pursued certain aspects of the children’s family-lives as well as certain ways of sharing and listening, she also corrected the children, and required answers from them, in ways similar to those she practiced in the classroom.

**Unsettled modes of being together**

As the foregoing pages have made evident, the genre of psychosocial work offers a wide span for engagements between teachers, psychologists and children. At Nordby School, Nina and Rakel sought to balance intense moments of sharing, or choosing not to share, difficult experiences from the children’s family lives with relaxed, cosy situations where the children talked about their grandparents fighting with lions, crocodiles eating human beings or amusing Baghdad malls. At Langebro School Sofia took it upon herself to teach the children about PTSD and about how wars can affect the mental and other health of those, who experience them and openly pursued talking with the children about their parents’ potential bad tempers or feelings of melancholy. Still, she regularly expressed both uncertainty regarding her “mandate” and frustration over not knowing
enough about psychology. Being a psychologist, Nina was used to working therapeutically. For her the children-groups were a “field in the middle (mellemfelt), and as she explained to me in the interview, “Somehow, you rely on something therapeutic”. In light of her answers, to Nina the difference between the children-groups and therapy existed in the questions of “choice” and “resistance”. Taken together, this variety of group situation involve different modes of communicating, from a type of conversation that could have taken place in the classroom or in a break to an exchange of words comparable to what takes place in a therapeutic relationship. This diversity actualizes a range of questions. As a child, when posed a question, are you expected to provide your teacher with an answer as if it had been a classroom situation? If so, is there such a thing as a correct answer and/or are you allowed to make one up? And are you expected to share details about your family? As a teacher or as a psychologist, are you supposed to teach the children about expressions and impacts of traumatization? Or are you supposed to facilitate processes of sharing feelings, thoughts and potential difficult experiences?

These undefined situations, however, also generated the potential for the children to take charge of the sessions and to define them, either by refusing to engage in conversations about certain things or by directing conversations in self-chosen directions. In Nordby this was expressed in the ways in which the four children cooperatively took part in the activities during the group sessions, though they drew fine lines concerning what they wished to talk about. In Langbro the lines, drawn by the children were less subtle. As I will elaborate in the following here the children’s way of engaging the group sessions were often more pointed, seeming to challenge the very project activities. However, after fieldwork, while revisiting my field notes, it struck me that the same kind of pointedness was at play in many other situations. Therefore I shall suggest that while for Sofia, taking in the category of children in exposed refugee families became a way of creating an alternative to the marginalization she constantly witnessed her pupils being subjected to, for the children this category did not seem to offer an alternative. Rather it seemed to become conflated with their general experiences of being marked out as different.
Revisiting Langebro

During my fieldwork in Langebro I repeatedly heard the children relate the group initiative to their being of different ethnic kinds. For example, the girls initiated the fifth group session by debating why they were there in the first place:

*Israh:* “Why are we here?”
*Muna:* “It’s just because we are Iranians, Iraqis and Kurds…”
*Sofia:* “Is there something in it?” Sofia asks and then refers to the fact that there is or has been war in those countries.
*Israh:* “There has also been war in Denmark!”
*Kamila:* “Have our parents told you that they have experienced that?”

Several of the other girls also wondered why they were there. Sofia told them that they were there because their parents had experienced war. Some of the girls protested and said that their parents had not experienced war and had not fled. Out of this Muna’s voice came out loud and clear: “What does this have to do with us?!”

At a following group session with the boys, Sofia told them that several of the girls were uncertain to why they were participating in the groups, and she asked the boys if they knew why:

*Hashim:* “It’s so that we can learn about those who have fled”.
*Hamid:* “The same”.
*Sofia:* “Yes, but try saying so in your own words”.
*I was not able to hear Haamid’s reply to Sofia.*
*Hashim:* “It’s because our parents cannot speak Danish”.

Several of the boys laugh and make jokes about their parents not being able to speak Danish.
*A boy to Hasshim:* “Your mother knows how to speak Danish”.
*Hashhim laughs and says:* “Yes, but my dad is not very good at it”.

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The children taking part of the children-groups in Langebro have grown up as the children of immigrants on the outskirts of one of the largest Danish cities, in an urban neighbourhood often referred to as “a ghetto”. Throughout my fieldwork, I was constantly reminded of the bad reputation and low status of the area by the children, their families, their teachers, the other professionals and by my own family, who advised me to be careful when going there. As an emic and political term (Johansen 2013: 12), “ghetto” has grown increasingly controversial in Denmark in recent years. Since 2010 the government has annually announced a so-called “ghetto list”, stating which Danish neighbourhoods fall under a set of specific “ghetto criteria”. These criteria concern the number of immigrants from non-western countries, the unemployment rate among citizens between the ages of 18 and 64 and local crime rates. Hence, labeled “a ghetto”, Langebro is a highly controversial neighborhood, not only in the regional media, but also in national public discourses. Already in 1969 Ulf Hannerz identified “ghetto” as a relative term, stating that it tells us something about “the community and its relationship to the outside world” (Hannerz 2004:11, See also: Wacquant 2008). The notion that Langebro and the residents of Langebro were different from “the outside world” was conveyed in various ways. One example of this was when, during one of my fieldwork visits, two police officers came to the school to talk with pupils in the fourth, fifth and sixth grade classes about crime. It struck me how the police officers – Morten from the local police and Bjarke from the youth division – seemed to have a very specific agenda. Whereas the children asked relatively naïve questions, such as “Can you cross against the red light if there is no one else?”, “Do you need to be twelve years old to walk your dog?” or “How old are your children, and do they go to bed early in the evening?” the police officers’ answers addressed more critical issues. When asked the question, “Will you be fined if you make trouble (ballade) on the bus?”, Morten replied: “If you are below thirteen years, you cannot be punished. At the most you can be removed from your home by force (tvangsøjernet)”. Bjarke added: “But prior to this, perhaps your parents have become really sick of you making trouble on the bus or perhaps even harassing your neighbor, so my advice is that you do not bother anyone”. Suddenly a teacher from the school said: “Can I ask why is it that we cannot call you a pig (pansersvin)?” Morten replied: “Girls don’t want to be called whores and boys don’t want to be called faggots. And inside you become angry, and perhaps then you say something about the other person’s mother. And then you become more and more furious, and in the end you always end up fighting. I really don’t care how you speak to each other as long as you

67 http://www.sm.dk/data/Dokumentertilnyheder/2011/ghettoomr%C3%A5der_pr_1_januar.pdf
do not fight. But I can tell you this: if you want to work in a store, then it simply does not work to speak like that. Bjarke added that it is all about different habits: “On the other side of town, they will assume that you are from Langebro, and then you will already be marginalized or pushed out”. The session with the police lasted for more than an hour. Morten and Bjarke, as well as some of the teachers, raised different matters such as bicycle theft, producing counterfeit money, involvement in crime and so on. At one point Farida, who I referred to in Chapter 1 as one of the girls who had most had most whole-heartedly expressed her suspicion about the children-groups, asked Morten: “If someone is below thirteen and calls you a racist, what happens then?” As the debate continued, I saw how Sofia’s close colleague Hedvig was gently massaging Farida’s shoulders, most likely to keep her calm.

Morten and Bjarke’s answers and comments clearly indicated that, in their work, they had experienced many young people from Langebro becoming involved in criminal activities and that they almost expected that some of the children at Langebro School would turn into criminals. Reaching out to children in the schools was one strategy to prevent criminal behaviour. The children seemed to be used to being talked to like this, but they responded very differently. Farida was in opposition. Quite elegantly she managed to call Morten a racist in a straightforward, yet oblique way. Badra instead distanced herself from what was being said, relating the police officers comments to some of the other children. As we walked to her home from school that day, accompanied by Samira, I asked the girls what they thought about the police’s visit. Badra said that it was all right and that it was “good that the others were told about this”. “They have a habit of speaking badly to the teachers”, she said. Then she added: “I think they have been born like that”. Samira quietly remarked that “maybe they have grown up with it”. This example shows that it was not only normal for the children to reflect on and talk about how living in Langebro was different from living elsewhere, but also that they were very much aware of how Langebro was associated with badly behaving and troublesome children and young people.

As a schoolteacher particularly committed to the children of Langebro, Sofia welcomed the category of exposed refugee families as a more appropriate supplement, or even

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68 Probably without realizing the precision with which they did it, in their two statements Badra and Samira were referring the well-known nature-nurture debate. As I got to know Badra and her family better, I learned that her father often talked about all the badly behaving children and youths running around in Langebro.
alternative, to the discriminating practices she often saw these children being exposed to. Nonetheless many of the children were reluctant to identify with it. During the group sessions, they either objected to taking part or found their way out of talking about their parents as refugees or as traumatized. Especially the boys liked to talk about their fathers as adventurous and heroic rather than as victims of their own past. Thus there is a divergence between, on the one hand, how Sofia, along with many other professionals, think of the category of children in exposed refugee families and treat it as having the political potential to challenge processes of othering, stigmatizing and marginalization, and, on the other hand, how the children themselves perceive it. When many of the children in Langebro expressed skepticism about taking part of the children-groups and about talking about their parents as traumatized, this suggests that for them the project activities, rather than challenging processes of othering, actually merged with them and perhaps even reinforced them.

There is an intriguing parallel here between this situation and Poul’s enthusiasm over the large window sections in the Langebro community center described in the previous chapter. Like the project activities, Poul wanted to tell a different story about Langebro and about those who lived there. But in a sense both end up repeating other stories about immigrants in Denmark. The psychosocial groups became yet another site in which normality needed to be negotiated, and renegotiated (Eastmond 2005: 150, 168). As Eastmond remarks in relation to traumatized refugees and the Swedish labor market, “[...] ‘trauma’, like ‘culture’, becomes a marker of significant difference that feeds into other processes of social exclusion of refugees and immigrants” (2005: 168).

On an important note, when I particularly draw attention to the socio-political context of Langebro I do not mean to imply that the children-groups in Nordby did not meet the same kind of skepticism as they did in Langebro because the children in Nordby did not experience social exclusion by an outside community labeling their neighborhood “a ghetto”. Nordby school is also located in one of Denmark’s largest cities, but in comparison to Langebro, Nordby is characterised by greater socio-economic and ethnic diversity. Nordby School belongs to a school district consisting of different kinds of neighbourhood. At the south end the school premises border an area with townhouses and apartment blocks built at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Generally people living here belong to the middle class or upper middle class. West of the school is an area consisting of housing blocks, built later in a very different and more minimalist style. In this area most people have relatively low incomes, and there are many families of non-Danish ethnic backgrounds. In recent years another
neighbourhood, not physically bordering on the school, has been included into the school district. This neighbourhood is often referred to as a ghetto, and to a great extent its reputation is just as problematized as Langebro’s. Children from this area commute to the school. Thus Nordby School and the children and families attending it are socio-politically very multifaceted and include low-income families, partly from “a ghetto-area”, as well as families from a higher income middle-class area. Even though it was not as prevalent as in Langebro, some of the children in Nordby undoubtedly experienced being stigmatized due to their ethnicity and/or the area they were living in. Still being invited to take part in the group sessions did not seem to stimulate the same feelings of marginalization as was the case in Langebro.  

Conclusion

In this chapter I have brought attention to the psychosocial group as an, in itself, abstract idea which nevertheless has substantial influence on social relations. In essence, the act of bringing together children in psychosocial groups rests on the supposition that such groups have the potential to enhance children’s well-being by generating a sense of connection and shared understanding among them. As this chapter has shown, engaging in psychosocial groups in the context of the public school is a complicated matter, both for teachers and psychologists.

The chapter has taken its point of departure in the wariness of the teachers in Nordby and Langebro as they engaged in the new initiative of psychosocial groups as a way of working with the category of children in exposed refugee families. By demonstrating how the children-groups practiced at the two schools in Nordby and Langebro involved very different modes of being together, the chapter has emphasized the diffuse qualities of psychosocial group work in the context of the public school. Thus, the central concern of the chapter had been to depict the psychosocial group as a somewhat undecided

69 Nonetheless I do find it important to mention how Sanne, one of the teachers who was involved with the project activities but who did not take part in the children-groups, took in the category of children in exposed refugee families. Sanne was the class teacher (klasselærer) for one of the classes, the one with the most “unruly” children. At Nordby School, Sanne was famous for being the only teacher who could really handle this class. Several times she voiced her appreciation of how knowing more about refugees and trauma had changed her perspectives on and relationship with some of the children. The following quote is from an interview with Sanne (and her colleagues), conducted by a consultant evaluating the project activities: “But also that I, as a teacher, did not necessarily have the information required to know, is this a refugee child?” Thus, Sanne’s interpretation of the category resembled Sofia’s.
genre of work in the environment of the public school, pending between intentions to offer the children a different situation from the classroom and a stated concern that this situation should not be of a therapeutic kind.

Another central concern of the chapter has been to show how being categorized as a child in an exposed refugee family had certain problematic implications for the children in Langebro - a neighborhood in which children are often exposed to stigmatization and marginalization related both to their ethnicity and to the area they live in. In this socio-political context the category seemed to be conflated with the children’s general experiences of being marginalized and Othered as well as with the teachers’, here especially Sofia’s attempts to challenge and mediate processes of marginalization.

As I explained in Chapter 2, from the outset the category of children in exposed refugee families is a mental health risk category. It includes families in which a parent had been diagnosed with PTSD, as well as families in which a parent is considered to suffer from past experiences and being at risk of developing a mental illness, merely by being a refugee. As it has been implied in this chapter, this muddle too contributed to some confusion concerning the grounds on which the children were taking part in the group sessions. In the following chapter I shall move attention to the context of the home of a family for whom a father’s depression and PTSD-diagnosis became a reality during my fieldwork. By exploring the subtle and indirect practices of (not) letting children know about a parent’s mental illness the chapter will shed light on how practicing know-ledge is far from only a professional health care concern. It is also a concern that unfolds in the relations between parents and children in their homes.
Chapter five

“We are still a good family”
Chapter five

“We are still a good family”

(Refugee) Families in the subjunctive mood

Once again I find myself in front of the greyish door with the Palestinian flag. This time I am not here to spend time with Badra, but to interview her mother. Minnah opens the door, and I give her the pink tulips I have bought on the way. She repeats her thanks and places the tulips, still wrapped in plastic, in a vase. Minnah leads us into the living room, where the table is set. Cups, coconut cakes, chocolates, biscuits, and a small plate with cashews, raisins and sugar-coated chickpeas. Badra and her younger brother Musa are at school. Their father, Habib, is asleep. He wakes up shortly afterwards. We can hear him blow his nose and cough. Then he walks into Badra’s room, where one of his favorite chairs is placed, a black swivel chair. I cannot imagine ever sitting in it. Or anyone else for that matter. The few times I have spent the night on a mattress on the floor next to Badra’s bed, the chair has been removed. But the next morning, practically as a continuation of getting dressed and making the bed, the chair has been placed there again, with its back against the wall and so close to the window so that Habib can rest his arm in the window frame. His hand can then support his chin so that his eyes can overlook the parking lot, the road and the forest-like expanse beginning across the road.

Minnah excuses herself and walks into Badras’s room, returns to the kitchen and a few minutes later carries a tray across the dining area and serves Habib his lunch. She comes back into the living room and we sit in silence for a while. Then I ask her how things are. “Hvordan går det?” can be pronounced in a variety of ways and encourage rather swift and insubstantial answers, as well as indicate one has the time and inclination to listen to an extended version of how things really are. From the expression on her face it immediately becomes clear that she understands my question as more than an exchange of politeness. “It... I don’t know...”, she says, tears already beginning to show in her eyes. She tells me how Habib is not feeling well and is mostly just sitting there, doing nothing. Minnah also tells me that Habib had started treatment at a health center for immigrants.
“Have any of you ever received treatment at such a place before?”, I ask. “No”, Minnah simply says.

When I last visited the family, during Badra’s and Musa’s Christmas break five to six weeks earlier, Minnah told me that Habib had been hospitalized in a psychiatric ward in the autumn. She spoke of how she had felt powerless and how she had called their doctor and told him that “something had to happen”. She described Habib as both sad and depressed and referred to him in different ways indicating that his sense of masculinity, of being a man, was suffering from all of this. It never became completely evident to me what “all of this” was, and I did not feel comfortable asking with Musa sitting by the computer in the corner of the room and Badra walking in and out of the door in the background, obviously aware that a conversation was taking place that she was not supposed to be part of. Minnah’s voice was low and soft and indicated confidentiality. She also mentioned that Habib’s condition was part of the reason why one of their older sons, on that very day, received the keys to his and his family’s new apartment in the same building on the 7th floor. “Then he will be there if something happens during the middle of the night”, she said. Partly whispering, I asked Minnah what Badra and Musa knew about this, and she replied that they had been told that their father had been hospitalized due to problems with his intestines, as had actually been the case before.

I clearly remember my conversation with Badra afterwards. Left alone in the sitting room, and to let Badra know that I knew she had overheard part of what her mother had told me, I remarked: “What a shame with your father... That he has been hospitalized”. “I can hardly remember anything from this year... I don’t know what is happening to me”, she replied. Her voice was in a monotone and mechanical, and it was obvious that she was dismissing my attempt to learn more about what she was thinking. Then we talked about school, and Badra showed me that she had crocheted a long red string.

Now Minnah, full of pain, tells me how angry Habib had been with her in the beginning, after he had been admitted to hospital. How he had blamed her and told her that he thought she only wanted to get rid of him. “You took me here and then just went home. Why did you do that?”, he had said. “He wouldn’t even talk to me, and he wouldn’t allow me to help him”, Minnah recalls. I ask her how long this had been going on, and Minnah replies: “For three days. He didn’t understand.” “Do you think he understands now?”, I ask. “Yes. They [the doctors] say that he is suffering from PTSD... They say that it can appear throughout your life...”
Minnah and I talk about what the children know and what they do not know. Again she explains that they have been told that their father has been hospitalized because of a disease in his intestines. I ask her how she feels about this, and she quietly replies: “Just because someone is not feeling good... It should not go on the children [gå på børnene]. I act...” Minnah puts her hands up to her face and with two fingers guides the corners of her mouth upwards, forming a smile that does not reach her eyes. I ask if she remembers Badra having been taught about PTSD at school. “About PTSD?” she asks. I nod, and Minnah says “Oh...” We continue talking. Several times Minnah reaches for the kitchen roll on the table, blows her nose and dries her eyes. After a while I ask Minnah if I can turn on the dictaphone sitting between us. I explain to Minnah that I am trying to get a cohesive picture of her and her family’s story. Minnah nods, smiles a bit and then begins: “I was born in 1965 in a refugee camp in Lebanon”. At one point, during the interview, Habib walks by the door. I lean forward and say “Hi”. “Hi”, he replies. Minnah sends me an apologetic smile and says: “He will come back and talk later. He knows you well. I have told him that you are here and that’s perfectly alright”. As it turns out I neither see Habib nor talk to him again while I am there.

After a good one and a half hour interview, Badra comes home from school. Minnah is just telling me about their family living in different countries... Australia, England, Lebanon, Palestine... I ask her if we can turn off the dictaphone and continue some other day. Badra joins us in the sitting room, and I tell her that her mom has been telling me about her extended family living all over the world. Badra smiles. I ask her about her day, and she tells us that during music classes she and Samira were told off by their teacher for something they did not do. Then she tells me that they have just been given their grades. “Do you want to see?” she asks eagerly, and as I nod she runs to her room and gets them.

Later in the afternoon Minnah and I are sitting in the couch together. Badra is by the computer. She has forgotten to bring home a list of fifteen words which she is supposed to practice for dictation the next day, and she is calling some of her classmates in order to ask for them. Habib is visiting one of their older daughters, who lives with her family just across the hall.
I spend the afternoon with Badra and Minnah. Badra and I talk about this and that while preparing for her spelling test the next day. Minnah seems worried about Habib, who is spending more time than usual in their daughter’s home. I do not know when to leave. At the end of the afternoon, I decide to go home. Badra and Minnah are waving by the
door as I walk down the stairs. On my way down, I hear someone on their way up. On the second floor I meet a boy, a girl and a woman who is not their mother. The girl cheerfully asks me: “Have you been to our place?” “No”, I reply”, “I have been on the fifth floor”. Like yet another person with an errand in the homes of the tall buildings.

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In this chapter I return to the same February afternoon from which the dissertation departed. Standing out as one of those critical fieldwork moments that are instantly experienced and recognized as a turning point, or later looked back upon as one, this particular visit not only provided me with new information about Badra’s family and the problems they were facing. The afternoon, with all its admittedly uncomfortable and confusing situations in which Minnah involved me in Habib’s problems, in a low voice and with Badra and Musa walking in and out of the room, also directed my attention toward evasive knowledge practices as a central aspect of caring in families.

Before continuing, I will pay some attention to why Minnah’s whispering made such a strong impression on me. For more than a year I had been a well-known figure in Badra’s school class, I had visited Badra and her family regularly, and prior to this I had been introduced to the family by Badra’s teacher as an anthropologist with a particular interest in the new psychosocial initiatives and the families involved. Minnah and I had both participated in a meeting at the school, where she was not only informed about the idea of speaking to children about emotional issues associated with their family backgrounds, but also openly questioned it. Moreover, Badra knew that I was participating in every event connected with the project activities, which she and her classmates often simply referred to as “PTSD”. She had even overheard how I was often called “PTSD Trine” by some of her classmates. I did not particularly enjoy being PTSD-Trine, so I was partly relieved by these indications that I was no longer associated with this rather bizarre nickname, at least in the eyes of Badra and Minnah. But as my train followed its route back to Copenhagen, I was puzzled by the fact that, in spite of having been brought together by activities highlighting trauma and PTSD, Minnah, Badra and I seemed to have no common ground from which to speak despite this gradually becoming more and more pertinent to the family. Or at least not the common ground one could have imagined. Instead I found myself taking part of the same kinds of whispering, silences and sudden, uncomfortable changes of topics that the project activities were problem-
atizing. This day, then, left me wondering how I could understand those awkward situations in which, in a lowered voice, Minnah told me about Habib in the presence of Badra and Musa. The following analysis takes its point of departure in this question. Whereas in the previous chapters I have focused on how psychotraumatology was conveyed and practiced in the contexts of seminars and psychosocial groups respectively, I now move attention to how knowledge related to a father’s increasingly poor mental health was passed on in doses, or by whispers, in the home of one of the families affected.

**On the whispers and the dosing of knowledge**

From the beginning of the dissertation I have made use of the conceptual framework of chronic homework (Mattingly, Grøn, and Meinert 2011). By the notion of chronic homework, Mattingly, Grøn and Meinert set out to capture the movement of knowledge and health-care practices from clinics to homes as a way of helping patients and their families live with chronic diseases. They are particularly interested in exploring “the social and temporal complexities that arise when homework assignments are undertaken in the realm of everyday life” (2011: 348). As I came to know Badra and her family, I learned how they related to Habib’s difficult situation. When her father was diagnosed with PTSD, Badra did not use the project activities as a vantage point from which to talk to her mother (or me) about what was going on. In fact, what I witnessed and took part in in her home was exactly one of the things that had been problematized by the psychosocial project activities, namely that children were provided with very incomplete explanations regarding a parent who was not feeling well and were left alone with their thoughts. In this sense perhaps the homework practices did not actually enter into Badra’s home and did not cause, or contribute to, any social and temporal complexity, as was the case in the homework practices examined by Mattingly, Grøn and Meinert. As I pointed out in the introductory chapter, there is an important difference between the examples brought up by Mattingly, Grøn and Meinert and the homework practices in Nordby and Langebro. The antiretroviral and tuberculosis medication, the school for patients addressing problems related to overweight and diabetes, and the therapy and exercises meant to enable a young girl to walk again after a stroke (Mattingly, Grøn, and Meinert 2011) were all prescribed homework practices. The psychosocial practices offered at the two schools in Nordby and Langebro, however, were of a different character. The group sessions did address social relations in the children’s homes and families, but they did not involve the family and the homes as explicitly as actual treatment does.
In fact they took place in the school and as I argued in the previous chapter, the aim of these groups in this context was not always clear. In other words, whereas the psycho-social activities had immediate implications for the relationships between the teachers and the children at the school, it was not given that the activities changed the ways in which the children engaged with and related to their parents, nor, consequently, that the homework practices changed the homes as intended. However, it was clear that intricate processes of relating to the parents’ past and present hardships were already unfolding in their homes, not only Badra’s, but also those of some of the other children I met during my fieldwork. Thus, to the extent that the psychosocial practices “entered” the homes of the children, they merged with a whole range of other homework assignments and activities (Mattingly, Grøn, and Meinert 2011), some in the form of prescribed treatment or therapy, others consisting of more indirect ways of caring for one another.

As I will show, Habib’s health had been a recurring concern for the family for many years, even prior to their flight to Denmark. Thus, while Habib’s health problems were intensified during my fieldwork, they were an integral part of the family, and had been for a long time. Badra’s family responded to Habib’s increasingly problematic health in several ways, some of which were developed over years and others more recently “invented”. To begin with, it was obvious that the family found comfort and enlightenment in Islam. Given the integral role of Islam in the family, religious practices and theological reflections can hardly be perceived as a response. Rather, and more accurately, they were a permanent quality of their lives, “a way of life” (Sedgwick 2015:3). However, Habib especially said he found consolation in the Quran when he felt sad. One day, early in my fieldwork, he said to me: “If I feel sad... like the other day with that message from the doctor.... Then I listen to recitations of the Quran all day, and that makes me feel better”. This suggests that his difficult situation altered and strengthened his religiousness. Another important aspect of handling Habib’s condition was that the family moved closer together physically. Two of Badra’s adult siblings, along with their families, moved into the same apartment block that Badra, Musa, Habib, Minnah and Badra’s older sister were already living in. They might have done so in any case but, as indicated in the vignette opening this chapter, Minnah clearly linked her son’s moving in with him being within reach “if something happens during the middle of the night”. Generally Badra’s grown-up siblings were deeply involved in helping their mother and father do everything from taking Habib to the hospital, the doctor or the mosque, assisting with the daily shopping or just sitting with them in the apartment. The nature of their positions and
responsibilities in the family diverged significantly from those of their younger siblings, Badra and Musa, who at that time were nearly twelve and eleven respectively. In their cases Minnah often withheld information about Habib’s condition, passed it on in doses or spoke about it in a lowered voice in their presence. Minnah was carefully selective in passing information to her youngest children, but also relied on their knowing more than she told them. While I consider religious practices and living close to each other as significant and often interwoven components of how Badra’s family dealt with Habib’s health problems, the center of attention in this chapter is the evasive practices of conveying knowledge in the intimate sphere of the home and the family.

In applying Susan Whyte’s concept of “subjunctivity” (2005), I attend to the whispering and the dosing of knowledge as the way in which the family members dealt with the uncertainty of Habib going through the process of being diagnosed with PTSD. In this perspective, the whispering and dosing of knowledge are to be understood as situated practices and concerns related to the uncertainties of not quite knowing what will happen with Habib and to attempts to hold the family together in the midst of this. Whyte’s work attends to how individuals and families in eastern Uganda combine divination with western medicine in their dealing with HIV/AIDS. In Uganda HIV/AIDS affects entire populations, and the sorrow, suffering and uncertainty are all-pervasive. But Whyte suggests that we think of subjunctivity as an inherent part of subjectivity whenever “people are negotiating uncertainty and possibility” (Whyte 2005: 251). By supplementing Whyte’s perspectives on the explicitly uncertain and suffering aspects of human lives with Janet Carsten’s notion of “relatedness” (2000), I seek to capture the interconnect- edness between Habib’s problematic health and the family’s ways of maintaining and being a family over time. According to Carsten’s notion of “relatedness”, families are always in the making. Critiquing the historical dominance of biology in defining kinship and family ties as givens, she introduces “relatedness” as a means to apprehend (and compare) how families are fundamentally the products of processes by which their members continuously “become connected” to one another (Carsten 2000: 16). Thus family and kin are not something we are simply born into. Families are made, every day, through acts of people relating to one another as family, as kin (Carsten 2000: 17-18) (see also: Mogensen and Olwig 2013).

On a final introductory note, to a great extent this chapter is based on ethnographic material gained from my conversations and time spent with Minnah. It was she who told me what was happening in the family and who provided me with an overview of the
family’s history. In many ways it is her narratives that have enabled me to acquire a somewhat coherent understanding of their family. In that sense, Minnah’s experiences have become more central to my analysis than I intended at the outset. In Chapter 1, I reflected on the fact that not only Minnah, but also the mothers in the other families, were often the most obvious conversation partners when I spent time in the homes of the children participating in the children-groups. As I pointed out, there is a range of methodological implications related to this. But Minnah’s significant position in my ethnographic material also focused the attention on homes, families and “the domestic” as especially gendered sites (cf.: Das 2007, Buch 2010, Thiranagama 2011, Faircloth, Hoffman, and Layne 2013). As Habib’s wife and Badra’s and Musa’s mother, Minnah was a central figure in the home. Of the two parents, it was she who had the most contact with the (younger) children. Moreover, she was responsible for many of the routines and practices involved in maintaining a home. And, as will become evident in this chapter, she was also essential to the practices of dosing and whispering knowledge. This suggests that, even though the notion of relatedness is intended to challenge essentialized conceptualizations of the family as well as particular positions within it, navigating a family through the uncertainties of illness actualizes certain facets of womanhood and motherhood (Buch 2010: 185).

To sum up, through the case of Badra and her family, this chapter explores the subtle and indirect practices of (not) letting children know (in their case, about their father’s depression and diagnosis of PTSD) what is taking place in the home and family. My aim is twofold. First of all I wish to demonstrate how conveying knowledge in oblique ways is both an integral part of relating to each other as a family and related to attempts to maintain stable relationships in the family during periods of uncertainty. Secondly, I wish to use this analysis to point out that a family with a mentally distressed parent does not come into existence in a moment. Instead this happens gradually, unfolding in the often mundane situations and relations that make up family life. The chapter will proceed by giving an abbreviated account of Minnah and Habib’s lives in Lebanon and in Denmark. Next I will enquire into the seemingly contradictory ways in which Badra and Minnah communicated about Habib’s health problems in both words and actions, and relate the

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70 For example, in her engagement with Veena Das’ work on recovery and the ordinary (2007), Danish anthropologist Lotte Buch argues that, in the case of the families of detainees in the occupied Palestinian territory, recovery “appears as a potential that may unfold through actualization of particular aspects of womanhood” (2010: 185).
evasiveness that resulted to the importance of “still being a good family” and holding on to Habib as “still being dad”.

**Growing up in Lebanon**

Minnah and Habib both grew up in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon. Minnah was born in 1965 as number eight out of a family of eleven brothers and sisters. Habib is four years older and number three out of nine siblings. Eventually their families managed to move out of the camps and into the city of Tripoli, the second largest city in Lebanon situated in the north of the country. They were married early in their lives. When Minnah was thirteen, she moved in with Habib and his family. As Habib’s wife, she had to take on new responsibilities related to cooking and housekeeping. Once, while Minnah was showing me how to make falafels, she told me that she had acquired all of her cooking and housekeeping skills from her mother-in-law during the first years of her marriage. Minnah and Habib had their first child, a daughter, five years into their marriage. In the following years, while they were still living in Lebanon, they had three sons. During those years Habib provided for the family by selling vegetables and other groceries from a small van, as well as by assisting in the transportation of cars to the western part of Lebanon. The civil war in Lebanon from 1975 to 1990 (Fenger-Grøn and Grøndal 2004:225) made life increasingly difficult for stateless Palestinians in the country. Minnah always had a bag with a few clothes for the children, a thermos of hot water, food and identification papers prepared for when, as they often did, they had to run to the nearest emergency shelter situated roughly five hundred meters from their home. After having to live like this for a few years, one day Habib’s father disappeared. Minnah recalled:

“It was a terrible time. I remember that my father-in-law went to work. It was the fourth day of the Ramadan, and he went to work. He was supposed to be back around noon. But he didn’t return and we waited. Perhaps he went somewhere else... But he never returned. My husband, my mother-in-law and my husband’s brothers have searched for him in many places. We still don’t know if he is alive or if he died many years ago. We don’t know. I remember that my husband went with a friend of my father-in-law’s. “There has been a massacre on the mountain. You are coming with me, perhaps we can find your father and bury him”, the friend said. When he came home, I remember, he was all pale. He had seen so many dead people. They had been shot. Some were lying with their faces towards the ground so that he had to turn their heads to see
if it was his father. It was terrible for him. And it was not only one time. He did it so many times.”

After Habib’s father disappeared, Habib began talking about moving to another country, thoughts that soon turned into actual plans. Advised by friends and acquaintances, they went to Libya in 1988. There they got hold of travel documents for Sweden, which to them at that time was “just some place in Europe”. During their journey they found themselves in transit in Copenhagen when their daughter suddenly started vomiting. Somewhat spontaneously they asked for asylum at the airport and ended up staying in Denmark. Thus, as is the case for many other Palestinian refugees now living in the country (Kublitz 2011), Denmark was not their planned destination.

Life in Denmark

In the years that followed, the family lived in four different asylum centers in Denmark. At the beginning their then youngest son was taken seriously ill and was hospitalized for several months. Minnah recalled that sometimes she was so frustrated with living in a center, spending countless hours at the hospital and missing their families that she just wanted to return home to Lebanon. One evening a security officer mistakenly denied her access to the asylum center, causing her to tear her identification card into pieces and asking Habib to travel back to Tripoli with her and the children. Soon she realized how impossible that would be: the war was still going on, they had sold everything, and their son was seriously ill and in need of medical care. She had to be patient and accustom herself to the thought of waiting and hoping to be able to settle down in Denmark in the not too distant future, Minnah told me. She also described how Habib too had been affected by the uncertainty and by living in an asylum center surrounded by people:

“You think about the future, about what will happen to us. Will we be sent back, or will we stay up here, will we obtain residency in this country, or will something happen to us? So he was tired all the time... All the time he was so tired. We went to a psychologist. We were supposed to move. He was sitting in his room all the time, doing nothing. Even though many men were in the shared living room, playing cards and things like that, he did not want to. So
we moved to another center, where we had our own kitchen... a small apartment with three rooms, a kitchen and a toilet, and it was a little bit better than the other place.”\textsuperscript{71}

After more than two and a half years, the family was granted asylum and moved into their first “real” home after they fleeing Lebanon. For many years they lived in a house in a larger city in Jutland, where they had additionally three more children, Badra, Musa and their big sister. Apart from them, only two other immigrant families were living in this neighborhood. Minnah took Danish language courses and worked as a seamstress, but during her pregnancy with Musa she became sick and was diagnosed with arthritis. Unable to work, she was granted an early retirement pension. Since then a few times she has attempted to become involved voluntarily in a second-hand shop, but her unreliable health has made it difficult for her to commit to the responsibility of working regular shifts.

Habib worked as an auto mechanic for some time. But when the owner of the garage that employed him decided to sell, he found himself without a job for almost a year until he was offered the opportunity to upskill and become a bus driver. He worked as a bus driver for several years, both in and around the city the family lived in, before they moved to Langebro, as well as in and around Langebro itself. His work was one of the reasons the family moved. As I briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, another reason why they felt they had to move was that Minnah and Habib’s son-in-law witnessed a crime and no longer felt safe in that area. At the time I started fieldwork, the family had been living in Langebro for approximately two years. Habib’s back problems were increasing, and he was prevented from working. Thus he spent much of his time sitting in a chair, which comfortable and supported his back, usually by one of the windows in the apartment. During one of my first visits Habib told me that his doctor had just informed him that he should not expect to return to work and should be grateful not to be sitting in a wheelchair. I also learned that he was in the process of applying for an early retirement pension.

\textsuperscript{71} There may have been a range of other reasons for the family moving around between asylum centers – and it is very likely that Habib’s health was given a more central role in Minnah’s narrative due to the acute and uncertain situation Minnah found herself in at the time I conducted my interview with her. Nevertheless Minnah’s recounting of events tells us that Habib’s health was also a concern then.
Habib did not seem particularly happy about the neighborhood. He dreamt of moving into a small house in another area close by. While sitting by the window he often commented on young men driving too fast or on how the young people in Langebro were ruining the area for the remaining residents through their reckless behavior. Nonetheless, not only Minnah and Habib, but also their children and their families were settling in the area. In fact, except for two of Badra’s brothers, both of whom were living very close by with their families, all Habib and Minnah’s children, children-in-law and grandchildren were living in the same building (see kinship diagram below).

As I began spending time with the family, I soon discovered that consulting doctors was taking up a substantial amount of time for both Minnah and Habib, and from the beginning I gained the impression that Badra and Musa were used to their parents’ frequent doctor’s appointments. These appointments were often mentioned and scheduled around other activities, and generally they did not seem to cause much worry. For example, once, when I visited the family and stayed for the night, in the morning I found that Minnah and Habib had already gone out, leaving breakfast ready for Badra, Musa and myself. After waking up in Badra’s room, I went to the dining area, where Musa was sitting on a sofa watching television. Musa explained that Minnah and Habib had gone to a see the doctor. As I joined him in front of the TV, I asked whether it was his mother or father who had an appointment. Uninterested he mumbled that he did not know, indicating that he had not given the matter much thought.
On the basis of this concentrated overview of the history of Badra’s family, I will turn to events that unfolded during my fieldwork as Habib’s health problems worsened and changed their nature.

“Sometimes they ask me and my brother to take a bicycle ride”

When I initially was told about Habib’s hospitalization, a little less than a year had passed since the last children group session had taken place. At this session Badra’s teacher, Sofia, spent some time summarizing some of the main themes brought up in previous sessions. Except for Samira and Badra, all the girls had been dismissed from the classroom, so the focus was solely on the two girls. Referring to a conversation at the previous group session, Sofia asked the girls if they could remember why they had been brought into the group:

Badra: “It is because our parents have experienced war and watch a lot of television, and then perhaps, we are thinking about this...”

Sofia: “What you have in common is that you attend this school, that you live in Langebro and have parents who have fled. What do you think of that?”

Badra: “I don’t know if my parents have experienced war. They don’t talk to me about it. Sometimes they ask me and my brother to take a bicycle ride and then return”.

This was one of the very few times I heard Badra speak about her own family in the group sessions. When she engaged in conversations there, it was mostly on a more general level, distanced from her own life. Badra’s first comment, or response to Sofia’s question, referred very explicitly to the image of the traumatized father watching television during the night with which the children had been presented several times during the group sessions. Badra replied as if she was trying to provide a “correct” answer to Sofia’s question. When Sofia then summarized the reasons for the children being brought together in groups (in a slightly different way than Badra had just done) and then urged the girls to share their immediate thoughts about this, Badra replied in a quite direct, yet ambiguous way. While saying that she did not know whether or not her parents had experienced war and that they did not discuss such issues with her, she also said that sometimes she and her brother were asked to go for a bicycle ride. In saying this, she showed that she clearly linked her parents’ request that she and her brother
leave the home for a while to her parents being able to talk about the war or something equally serious and important. Thus on the one hand Badra knew that she was only told a fraction of the truth about her father, but on the other hand she acted as if she did not know how incomplete the information she received was. The ambiguity in Badra’s answer points to an interesting aspect of family relations and knowledge practices, namely how intimate knowledge in families involves acts of withdrawal as well as disclosure. The German sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel (1906) was preoccupied with how knowledge, in both its present and absent forms, is essential to all human relationships. He wrote:

"Since one never can absolutely know another, as this would mean knowledge of every particular thought and feeling; since we must rather form a conception of personal unity out of the fragments of another person in which alone he is accessible to us, the unity so formed necessarily depends upon that portion of the other which our standpoint toward him permits us to see". (Simmel 1906: 442)

As he continued, Simmel discussed how some “fragments of another person” are made available, while others are kept secret, and he argued that nescience, or the absence of knowledge, is just as vital to social relationships as is knowing (1906: 444). In the case of Badra, it is interesting how she insisted that her parents did not involve her, while indicating that she was well aware of what they would be talking about in her and her brother’s absence. As we shall see, the way she expressed knowing what she did not know about illuminates how practices of making knowledge available and holding it back were very much a part of her everyday life at home. After the group sessions had ended in late January 2011, her father’s health problems intensified. In July Minnah told me that, in addition to Habib’s severe back problems and the chronic obstructive pulmonary disease he had been diagnosed with a while back, he was experiencing problems with his intestines and had to undergo surgery. She explained that he was going through a difficult time and often felt sad. “This is why we don’t let him sit by himself that much... we want to be near him”, she said. When I returned to the family in the Christmas break,22 I learned about their rather dramatic autumn during which Minnah

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22 In autumn 2011 I had to suspend my fieldwork due to teaching and other commitments. In this period of time my contact with Badra was limited to text messages and a few phone calls.
had consulted their doctor and asked for help and Habib had subsequently been hospitalized in a psychiatric ward. Then, in February, Minnah told me, that Habib had been diagnosed with PTSD. She also explained that Habib had been really angry with her for contacting their doctor and “allowing” him to be hospitalized:

“But he was really angry with me. When he and I were together, he didn’t want to talk to me, he didn’t want my help or anything. When he had a doctor’s appointment he said, “I am not going with you. I will call my son and will go back with him”.

Minnah’s words not only express Habib’s frustration with her — they also describe how the older children were deeply involved in taking care of their father and that they were well-informed about his (mental) health condition. In our conversations about Habib, Minnah clearly distinguished between her older children and Badra and Musa. “But the grown-up children, they understand what’s wrong with dad”, she would say. Most often it was one of Badra’s older brothers who took Habib to the doctor, and frequently they stopped by Habib’s home, with or without their own families. It was obvious that they were playing an important part in the strategy of “not letting Habib sit by himself that much”. When it came to Badra and Musa, it was different. In the following I will describe Minnah’s reflections on how she involved her two youngest children in Habib’s condition, as well as avoiding getting them involved. As I will explain, she verbalized an ambiguity similar to Badra’s.

“I think they understand more than I think”

When I interviewed Minnah, I asked her what Badra and Musa’s responses were when she told them that their father was not feeling well but would get better:

Minnah: “They just say that it is a shame, but they understand. And when they see him feeling a little bit sad, then we tell them that it will be better. [...] Then they show that they understand, that he is not feeling too well and that now we should talk or now we should stop and not do anything wrong... even though I feel sorry for them. But I make sure that they understand what is wrong with him so that, yes, if something happens, they know that everything will be good again.”

Trine: “What is it that you want them to understand...?”
Minnah: “Yes, that even though some things happen sometimes, we are still a
good family and we want to help each other, and mom is here and dad is here...
even though sometimes he is feeling tired and not in the mood for talking. But
he is still dad, and it is a good thing that we still have him. I think that they
understand more than I think…”

In her replies to me, Minnah was very concerned about what her youngest children understood of their father’s condition, and her words pointed in several directions. She talked about how she was sure that Badra and Musa understood, how they showed understanding and how she made sure that they understood. Obviously for Minnah understanding was a very crucial aspect of the family’s situation. It was something she strived to create, but it was also something she imagined Badra and Musa capable of being on their own. In saying, “I think they understand more than I think”, she expressed an ambiguity parallel to Badra’s. It was as if she divided herself into two. One part of her “thought” that her youngest children only understood, and thus only knew, what she had selectively decided to tell them, whereas the other part of her “thought” that they knew and understood more than this. And the way she said it suggested that the idea of them knowing and understanding “more” was comforting to her.

Recalling Carsten’s perspectives on kinship as a result of processes of relatedness (2000), mothers, fathers, sons and daughters are perpetually in processes of becoming through acts and statements in which they relate to one another as a family. In their contribution to the book, Cultures of Relatedness, Edwards and Strathern (2000) reflect on “closeness” and “distance” in relation to kinship. They allude to closeness as a spatial matter as well as a matter of affection: “closeness’ may evoke the quality of affective ties: mutual support and the ability to confide in, depend upon, and trust” (Edwards and Strathern 2000: 160). Distance, on the other hand, is described as being defined by infrequent interaction, a minimum of obligations and an unlikeliness to share confidences (ibid.). Thus Edwards and Strathern make a connection between being close, trusting one another and confiding in one another. In Badra’s family, not everything was disclosed to all its members, but that did not necessarily mean that they did not trust in

73 While I am aware that the relationship between “knowing” and “understanding” is complex (cf.: Hollan and Throop 2011: introduction), I draw a line between the two for the purposes of this argument and because Minnah seemed to refer to modes of knowing and understanding interchangeably.
one another or that they were not close. The ways in which the family navigated in and around information about Habib raises the question of whether closeness may also grow in situations where family members trust each other not to confide in one another?

To take this question and the seemingly paradoxical in Minnah’s words further, I turn to the Danish anthropologist Trine Mygind Korsby (2013), who has applied Simmel’s work on secrecy in family relations that are quite different from those in this study. In her study of young women from Romania being trafficked into prostitution, she shows how one woman living in Italy and having succeeded in breaking away from her pimp and the extremely abusive relationship he held her in avoids letting her mother in Romania know about her painful experiences. The relationship between mother and daughter is loving and close, and Korsby suggests that, rather than compromising their intimacy, the daughter’s stern editing of what she tells her mother is in fact productive for their relationship (Korsby 2013: 139-140). When the mother moves to Italy and her daughter’s tragedy is disclosed to her, neither of them talk about it afterwards. They merely continue their relationship, apparently unaffected by this new situation in which both know about the daughter’s past. This prompts Korsby to raise the question of whether concealing the daughter’s history could be a shared project maintained by them both in a silent, unspoken agreement (Korsby 2013: 140). In the same vein, we can ask whether Badra, Musa and Minnah (and the rest of the family) had in fact consented silently to the very probability that they all knew more than what had been explained in their relationship? When Badra insinuated that she knew more than she knew, and Minnah though that her children understood more than she thought, they both implied the existence of such a silent consent. And perhaps it was not merely a matter of a silent agreement: perhaps it was a committed and engaged way of being a family, of trying to hold a family together “with the means at hand” (Whyte 2005: 263) during difficult times. When I asked Minnah to elaborate what it was she wanted her youngest children to understand, her immediate response was “that even though some things happen sometimes, we are still a good family”. In what follows, I will reflect on the ambiguous practices of knowledge in Badra’s family as acts of subjunctivity, by which the members of the family strove to uphold being “a good family”, even though, as Minnah expressed it, things happened sometimes.
“We are still a good family...”

“The concept of subjunctivity alerts us to moods of action: explorative, worried, doubtful, hopeful. Starting this way allows us to appreciate how people use the means at hand to try to manage their uncertainties”. (Whyte 2005: 263)

In February 2012, when Minnah explained to me what had happened in the preceding autumn and about Habib’s diagnosis, she too was trying to make sense of what was happening with her husband. As she talked about PTSD, she referred to what “they”, the doctors, had said, and it was clear that she was on unsteady ground and unsure about what these latest developments meant for Habib and the family. In other words, Minnah was right in the middle of absorbing what had taken place and what was still taking place. In that sense, while she said she made sure that Badra and Musa understood what was wrong with their father, it is very likely that she herself did not entirely understand. It is in this light that we can apprehend statements such as, “If something happens, they know everything will be good again”, and “We are still a good family, and we want to help each other” as expressions of how Minnah attempted to maintain control over and create stability in an uncertain situation (Whyte 2005). Whyte accentuates how timing is a very crucial aspect of understanding the ways in which people undertake to deal with a problem. As she writes, in Uganda, when “someone has died, when there is no more trying, then it might be said that she died of AIDS” (2005: 257). But up until that moment more often people will say that a sick person is under the influence of bad spirits. Such an explanation leaves open a space for divination, for action, for doing something, rather than just accepting that someone will die. Even though being diagnosed with PTSD in Denmark does not have the same fatal implications as being diagnosed with HIV/AIDS had in the poor, rural parts of Uganda, Whyte’s attention towards what people do and say while they are in the midst of uncertainty is illuminating for the purposes of the present analysis. Badra and her family were all confronted with the very fundamental insecurity related to the question of whether Habib would ever come to feel better. With varying intensity this was an uncertainty the family had lived with for some time, one that had become folded into their everyday lives. But, as I have described, in the ensuing autumn, Habib’s health problems worsened and changed their nature, giving rise to new questions and concerns.
“... even though things happen sometimes”

Towards the end of my fieldwork, it was obvious that Habib had withdrawn into himself. “You have seen him... how he was. But now he is just sitting there, depressed”, Minnah said when she told me about his hospitalization and the fact that he had started treatment for PTSD. Habib, sitting there depressed, was a clear, tangible sign that something was wrong, a sign that caused Badra and Musa to ask a lot of questions. This brief portrayal of Habib’s health problems as being manifested in him just sitting there emphasizes the home as a context in which family members and next of kin are confronted with illness in ways that are often neither desirable nor controllable. In Korsby’s work, at first mother and daughter are separated by the physical distance between Italy and Romania. Even though Korsby ponders whether or not gossip and rumors had revealed the young woman’s misfortune to her mother before she moved to Italy (2013:140), she suggests that it becomes even more difficult to maintain the level of secrecy in their relationship when mother and daughter suddenly end up living in the same apartment in Italy. What may or may not have been a secret before now becomes shared, but silenced knowledge. This suggests that, when family relations unfold in a home, the shared physical space of this home influences the premises for sharing and silencing interest in knowledge (See also: Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995, Thiranagama 2011). In this perspective, the sharing and silencing of knowledge is as much an embodied practice, existing in the ways in which family members move around each other, as it is a discursive one unfolding in what is (partly) talked about. This was also clear in my interview with Minnah, especially in that part of our conversation where I pursued the question of what Minnah withheld from Badra and Musa:

Trine: Is there anything that you would prefer them not to know about... things that you believe are too difficult for them to understand?

Minnah: Well, maybe... why he is running around all the time, why he takes all these pills... Sometimes they make sure that he takes them.... Or sometimes, when Musa and I read, then I tell him that I will be right back when I have given these to dad, and then he asks, “But why does he need all this medication? Is something wrong with him? He is sitting up, he is not lying in bed...is he that sick then?”.... Well, if he does not take these tablets, he will feel worse, that’s why. But I don’t say that he has this... depression or PTSD.

Trine: Why don’t you?
Minnah: I don’t know... I don’t know.

Trine: I am not asking because I don’t understand [that it is difficult]... Many times I have thought about what I would tell Esther [my daughter] if Mikkel [her father] fell ill...

Minnah: He [Habib] doesn’t say that I should tell them this and not tell them that... But he does say that they shouldn’t think that dad is spastic or anything... They do not understand what it is... When he has been hospitalized in the psychiatric ward... I told them that Dad is not feeling so good and when he has not come home with me... it’s because he is not feeling too well and he should stay at the hospital. “What is wrong with him?” they ask. Well, as every time... this problem with his intestines. And then when he comes back, then they ask why he does not want to talk and then I tell them that it’s because he is feeling pain, but that they are welcome to sit with him and talk to him. And even though he is not feeling well, he is good at showing... he doesn’t say anything bad or something like that, refuses to see them or refuses to talk with me. Not when the children are there. Then he says that he want us to act normal.

Following Mattingly et al., the situations Minnah described are good examples of the kinds of complexity that can occur when family members become responsible for health care in the home (2011: 348). In the interview passage above, Minnah explained her thinking about the things she did not want her children to know or understand, either because she imagined that it would be too difficult for them to understand it, or because Habib had expressed a concern about what they would think of him if they were told that he had been hospitalized in the psychiatric ward. In doing so she alluded to the different situations that led Badra and Musa to ask questions. One example was the small, fleeting but recurring situations of bringing Habib his medicine. Another was the

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74 I do not believe that Minnah literally meant “spastic”. The way she said it suggested that she was not even sure what “spastic” means. I do not know the exact word that Habib originally used. Still it was clear that he had expressed being worried about what Badra and Musa would think if they knew about his depression and hospitalization in the psychiatric ward.

75 This concern of Habib indicates that taboos related to mental illness influenced his experience of being hospitalized and diagnosed with PTSD and thus also affected what is disclosed to Badra and Musa, at least explicitly.
already mentioned and perhaps more durable manifestation of Habib not feeling well, namely that he spent much of his time sitting by the window, emotionally withdrawn. I have already reflected on these situations as clear expressions of Habib’s illness, expressions which, in Minnah’s perspective, necessitated her explaining things to Badra and Musa, but only partially. But in Minnah’s descriptions there were also signs of her efforts to sustain bonds between Habib, Badra and Musa. This is perhaps most obviously expressed in Minnah’s encouragement of Badra and Musa to sit next to their father and talk to him, without expecting him to actively engage in what they were saying. By encouraging Badra and Musa to join their father and by guiding them in what to expect from him, she facilitated them spending time together. In that sense, what she said adds another dimension to the kinds of understanding or knowing that were important to Minnah. It suggests that, besides knowing that “everything [would] be good again” and that they “were still a good family”, understanding entailed knowing how to behave and what to expect from their father in different situations. Moreover, Minnah mentioned that sometimes Badra and Musa made sure that Habib took his pills. Involving Badra and Musa in bringing their father his medicine was most likely not necessary. Perhaps, in line with encouraging Badra and Musa to sit and talk to their father, having them bring him medication can be perceived as a way of maintaining a bond with him, to show him that “he is still dad”, as Minnah put it. Pills can contain any kind of medication, and without the packaging they often do not in themselves reveal the kind of ailments they are treating. Hence, Minnah could let Badra and Musa bring their father his pills, and Habib could receive them, without making it known to Badra and Musa that the pills were anti-depressants. Thus the act of bringing pills represents yet another way in which Badra and Musa were partially involved in their father’s condition. In sum, the situations mentioned by Minnah imply a more or less inevitable disclosure of illness related to living closely together, though combined with the selectiveness with which Minnah and Habib attempt to keep some information from Badra and Musa while providing them with enough information to keep them involved with their father. In other words, Minnah’s recounting of some of the episodes which have triggered Badra and Musa’s concerns about their father points to how illness unfolds through sometimes arbitrary and sometimes committed situations of living together and of being a family in continuous making.

In the beginning of the chapter I raised the question of how I could understand the situations I came to take part in in Badra’s home, where Minnah passed on information about Habib in a whisper in the presence of Badra and Musa. In pursuing this question,
I have suggested that secrets and partial and ambiguous disclosures of knowledge are part of general processes of relating to each other as family and kin, as well as of creating stability in these family relations during periods of uncertainty. I proposed to understand the whispering situations as resting on a shared agreement between Badra, Musa and their mother, entailing that all of them knew that the others knew more about Habib’s condition than what was verbally discussed between them. Moreover, I have brought attention to the home as a shared space in which ambiguous knowledge practices are part of often fleeting, mundane situations of living together. In the case of Badra’s family, it was in their home that Habib sat by the window with little energy to converse with his children, that Minnah sometimes involved Badra and Musa in giving their father his pills, and that loud telephone conversations were taking place and being overheard (see Chapter 1). It was from the home that Badra and Musa were sent off cycling and from which Habib was absent when he did not return from the hospital with Minnah. On the one hand, then, their home was a place where Habib’s illness unfolded and was made known in ways that were not always desired by all family members. On the other hand, sharing the space of their home also entailed active, committed ways of relating to one another. This was obvious in Minnah’s reassurances to her youngest children that they were still a good family and in her attempts to maintain, or sometimes recreate, balanced relationships within the family. If we interpret the process of holding together a family as a concerned act of subjunctivity, the whispers and the doses of knowledge, as well as the silent shared agreements, can all be thought of as elements in this hopeful process.
Conclusion

The above image is a snapshot from the Japanese animation movie *My neighbor Totoro*, from 1988. It takes place in Japan in the late 1950s. Along with their father, the two sisters, Mei and her big sister Satsuki, move into an older house inhabited by soot spirits. Their mother is hospitalized, recuperating from a longstanding illness. Throughout the film, we follow the girls’ engagements with spirits, both the small dust spirits and the oversized Totoro, who live in the surrounding forest. A magical universe is created. But parallel to this, the story touches upon how the girls constantly worry about their mothers’ health condition. Towards the end of the film Satsuki receives a phone call from the hospital, which is meant for her father. She is told that her mother cannot come home as planned, and she panics, frightened that something is threatening her mother’s life. Mei too is terrified and ventures out to visit their mother by herself. After some drama, and without their father’s knowledge, the sisters find their way to the hospital. The movie ends with the two sisters (accompanied by a large spirit) sitting in a tree outside their mother’s ward listening to a conversation between their parents, which lets them know that the reason their mother could not come home for visit is a cold – nothing more. She is not dying, as they had feared. As the scene shifts and we enter the mother’s
room, we hear her tell their father: “I think they worry much more than we think. Especially Satsuki, because she is so bright and sensitive.” 76 There is a striking resemblance between the words of Mei and Satsuki’s mother, and those of Minnah. Dividing themselves into two parties, with one “thinking” differently from the other, they both imply an ambiguity concerning what their children know or do not know – what they worry about or do not worry about.

At the beginning of the dissertation I drew attention to a contradiction, inherent to notions of children and formulated by Francine Lorimer, in how children, vulnerable per se, need to be both protected from and familiarized with “the truth” when that truth is troublesome (Lorimer 2010: 7). Lorimer reflects on this contradiction as implying a professional dilemma related to the extent to which children should be involved. As I have mentioned, this dilemma also exists in the psychosocial practices of concern in this dissertation. What this chapter has shown is that this dilemma too is folded into family relations and caring in the home. And in a sense the final scene in My neighbor Totoro is a reminder that dilemmas related to children as both beings and becoming, as both vulnerable and robust, may unfold within all families.

Taking its point of departure in a family in which the father and husband is becoming increasingly ill, the chapter has explored evasive practices of letting children know, or not know, about their father’s worrying health problems. By combining the conceptual frameworks of relatedness and subjunctivity, I have given emphasis to these practices as expressions not only of how families respond to uncertainty, but also to family life in general. Thus in this chapter I have suggested that Minnah’s whispers and Badra’s and Musa’s pretending not to hear or know can tell us something important about how limited and contradictory disclosures of knowledge play a part in the complex constellations of being a family over time, and thus also of being a family affected by the problematic (mental) health of a husband and father. Practicing knowledge, then, is not only a professional concern, it is also a concern that exists within families, one in which both children and parents actively engage. Importantly I do not mean to imply that children are not affected by the silences, the whispering and the secrets. What I have aimed to demonstrate is that whispering and dosing of knowledge can be considered a kind of

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76 Translated into English from the Danish version of the movie: “Jeg tror, at de bekymrer sig meget mere end vi går og tror. Især Satsuki fordi hun er så klog og følsom”. 

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healthcare carried out by people who care and worry about something specific, over time (Whyte 2005: 247).

This leads to another important point, namely that a family with a traumatized father and husband does not come into existence at once, in a moment. Rather, it happens gradually (see also: Lester 2013, Das 2000, Thiranagama 2011). More than twenty years after Habib’s and Minnah’s flight to Denmark, Habib, in a mature age and with health that had declined over years, was diagnosed with PTSD. As I have mentioned earlier, from a wider perspective, the process Habib went through up until the diagnosis was made, the treatment he received afterwards and the psychosocial initiatives in Badra’s school can all be considered as elements shaping the notion of trauma and the diagnosis of PTSD as a specific moral and history-bound way of conceptualizing and diagnosing suffering and victimhood (cf. Young 1995, Fassin and Rechtman 2009). In this light, when Habib’s health problems were problematized and interpreted as trauma (Fassin and Rechtman 2009: 278), and when Badra was attended to at school as a child at risk of becoming affected by her parent’s traumas, if not already affected by them, deep-rooted notions of victimhood were at stake. However, having paid close attention to a family for whom trauma and PTSD were becoming a reality, I suggest that families go to great lengths to continue to relate to each other not as victims, but as fathers, mothers, sons and daughters. What Badra’s family cared and worried about, at least in Minnah’s eyes, was to be “a good family” in spite of everything that happened in their home.

Each of the families I engaged with during my fieldwork, both those I got to know well and those I met more fleetingly, had their own stories and their own ways of narrating them across generations. Samira, who lived a few minutes away from Badra, initially told me that her father was from Kenya and her mother from Somalia. Later I learned that both her parents were from Somalia but that they had lived in a refugee camp in Kenya for four years prior to their arrival in Denmark in 1996. When I told Samira’s father that her daughter thought he was Kenyan, he just said: “Yes, but she cannot understand... How do you explain to children about war and about fleeing to other countries?” The way he said it suggested that it was more a statement than an actual question.

In Nordby, Yusuf’s parents were divorced. At the end of my fieldwork his father moved back to their family again, and Yusuf and his siblings were transferred to a private school. Yusuf’s mother often asked me about the Danish education system, trying to figure out
the best choices for her children. When I last met her, she had succeeded in getting a driving license for buses and was working as a bus driver. Before the group sessions at the school, Yusuf’s mother had not told her children much about her life in Somalia, how she grew up in circumstances of war, how she was sitting under the dinner table when her father was shot and killed in their home, how she had fled the country. But now Yusuf had started to ask about her past, and she had told him and his brother and sister some things. Not that she had watched three men kill her father, but that there had been war and that their grandfather had died. She did not talk about these things before, she explained, because she did not want her children to feel sad, or to see her feel sad. But now she had changed her mind and she felt differently about involving her children in her life in Somalia: “I have told them a little bit. But I also save some... that I saw my father get killed”.

In mentioning these other families, I do not mean to imply that the analysis of Badra’s family developed over the foregoing pages is applicable to all families. Unpacking the processes of dosing knowledge in each family would without doubt reveal different premises and different strategies for involving children in difficult matters, however related they may be to their parent’s past or present hardships. However, I do wish to suggest that, in a variety of ways, ambiguous practices of partially and selectively disclosing knowledge are fundamental to all families and that, while taking part in delicate processes of concealing and disclosing knowledge is something family members undergo, it is also something they undertake in order to care for their family relations.

37 Among others, Romme Larsen (2011) has shown how providing their children with a “better” life and with an education is a great concern for many parents who come to Denmark as refugees.
Chapter six

Conclusion
Chapter six

Conclusion

_A time being is someone who lives in time, and that means you, and me, and every one of us who is, or was, or ever will be._

*Ruth Ozeki, A tale for the time being*

The somewhat common sense understanding of human lives as undecided until they end, so beautifully captured by Ruth Ozeki (2013), is an indispensable premise for doing ethnography and has been subject to considerable reflection within anthropology. Thus a fundamental anthropological concern regards the question of what kind of conclusions we can claim to make with our ethnographic material (Dalsgaard and Frederiksen 2013: 56). In their article, “Out of Conclusion: On Recurrence and Open-Endedness in Life and Analysis”, Danish anthropologists Anne Line Dalsgaard and Martin Demant Frederiksen (2013) reflect on the question of conclusions in relation to their long-term fieldwork among youths in Brazil and Georgia respectively. They argue that anthropological studies, notably those concerned with youths, are disposed to point to the future in ways that are “either too pessimistic or too optimistic because we wish to determine the future or come to terms with it in a very literal sense” (2013: 58). Engaging with, but also adding to, Fabian’s famous critique of how anthropologists have historically created a temporal gap between their scientific selves and their studied others (1983), Dalsgaard and Frederiksen reflect on the more or less basic fact that our informants’ lives continue when we leave our field situations and spend time writing our analysis. They problematize a narrative style, common to much anthropological literature, by which we indicate conclusions, or endings by grammatically freezing our informants’ lives in time in pasts or in presents, and/or by implying prospects about the future (ibid.). Prompted by the experience of repeatedly having had their conclusions, or implied endings, “put to shame by the course of events” (2013: 58), they pose the question of how we as anthropologists can capture this continuance of life in our analyses.
The February afternoon when Minnah updated me about Habib’s health problems was one of many fieldwork moments in which I was confronted with the dilemmas of conclusions and continuances. Had I left my field a few months earlier, I would not have been made aware that Habib had nightmares about looking for his father in piles of dead bodies, was suffering from depression and had been diagnosed with PTSD. From my time spent in the family, I would have known that he was troubled, both physically and emotionally. But most likely I would have related this to his retirement, to his back pains and a melancholy related to his no longer being able to work and provide for his family. Furthermore, had I stayed in the field longer, I would have learned more details about how problems in the family intensified after my fieldwork and how Badra was away from her family and home for a period of time. Now I am only familiar with the rough details about these courses of events from my e-mail correspondence with Badra, in which we have agreed to see each other again when time is available for both of us.

Moving attention away from individual lives to emerging socio-political concerns and health care interventions does not make the question of conclusions less pertinent. I have mentioned how at present refugees are arriving in, and travelling through, Denmark every day. These new migratory developments are influencing political practices, not only with regard to the refugees who are crossing borders at this point in time, but also the perspectives on those who have lived in Denmark for decades. When I recently participated in a national conference about refugees in the public school, I met Helle. She told me how she is currently working on composing some written material to help teachers recognize and work with the particular problems of children in refugee families. She and others at the conference raised the concern, that generally, among teachers, there is a fear of engaging (berøringsangst) when it comes to children in refugee families. The conference offered yet another window into how fields of specialized knowledge and expertise concerning refugees and their descendants continue to take on new forms and meanings, ones that the foregoing chapters do not capture. In that sense this dissertation too, in Ozeki’s graceful words, is a tale for the time being. However, the questions and concerns raised at the conference also pointed to more enduring facets of knowing refugee psychotraumatology in the context of the Danish public school. They suggested that attending to children’s family relations and lives at home continues to be an at the same time important and delicate matter for teachers and other professionals in the welfare state.
In this dissertation I have proposed to pay attention to the different kinds of questions, hesitations and concerns that emerge alongside practices of moving refugee psychotraumatology beyond the clinic, both as a way to study this particular mental health care phenomenon and as means to shed light on the ways in which the presence of the welfare state in intimate relationships is continuously questioned, assessed and negotiated within the actual social situations and relationships through which interventions unfold. In the following I will summarize my observations and arguments from the foregoing chapters. Next I shall reflect on the further potential of for studying welfare state interventions, and welfare state aesthetics, through the metaphor of whispering.

In this dissertation, I have explored different ways of knowing refugee psychotraumatology, generated by and shaped in realms of psychosocial interventions with the socio-political category of children in exposed refugee families in the Danish public school. The chapters spring from an overall interest in studying how psychotraumatology, as a relatively new global mental health phenomenon, unfolds in the context of the Danish welfare state in relation to another new emerging factor of socio-political concern, the descendants of refugees. An underlying assumption running through the foregoing chapters is that the emergence of these concerns is giving rise to new constellations of expertise, new fields of knowledge, new professional roles and positions, and new subjects for intervention within the welfare state. As I have argued exploring such social innovations offers a productive prism for studying the ways in which the Danish welfare state’s presence in intimate spheres, such as the domestic realm and family relations, is both widely accepted, welcomed and highly criticized.

By employing the conceptual framework of chronic homework, I have investigated the psychosocial practices as mental health care, and more specifically as movements of mental health care, from clinics to homes. The notion of chronic homework emphasizes health care as cross-border-activities, that is practices moving between clinics and homes (Mattingly, Grøn, and Meinert 2011: 150, Mattingly 2010). In this perspective the public school comes into sight as a borderland of healthcare, where different kinds of expertise and different kinds of homes meet in the “realm of everyday life” (2011: 348). A fundamental point, inherent in the notion of homework, is that homework practices have profound implications for everyday routines and social relationships (2011: 370). However, rather than contrasting clinical discourses with experiences of living with some form of health problem, focus is on how homework practices are constantly reimagined, redirected and assigned new meaning “in local contexts simply to be implemented at all” (2011: 351).
Thus, as I have made clear from the beginning, this approach has not emerged from an interest in accessing the achievements, failures or inadequacies of the psychosocial practices (Mattingly, Grøn, and Meinert 2011: 351). Rather, the dissertation adheres to a more classical anthropological concern. By exploring different ways of knowing refugee psychotraumatology, I have sought to shed light on the multiple perspectives of interventions and on what takes place beyond, beneath and around interventions, in other words, the surplus of effects and perspectives (Jøhncke, Nordahl Svendsen, and Whyte 2004: 400).

In the previous chapters, I have probed three different kinds of borderland situations. First, I explored the seminar as a particular context for promoting knowledge and thus for making psychotraumatological knowledge available to a wider field of professionals beyond the clinic. Secondly, I explored the children-groups, in and by which psychotraumatological knowledge was applied and the category of children in exposed refugee families brought into effect. Finally I delved into the knowledge practices of a family for whom the diagnosis of PTSD became a reality during my fieldwork. In different ways the chapters have demonstrated the social and affective qualities of knowledge, whether performed at a seminar, causing unsettled situations in children-groups or whispered and partially disclosed within the context of the home and family relations. As I stressed in the beginning of the dissertation, I do not mean to imply that these borderland situations comprise the field I have set out to study. Rather, I have approached these social contexts, or sites, as “windows” into the complexity (Candea 2007: 179) entailed in psychosocial work with children in refugee families in the public school as well as in living with trauma in the family. Still, as I have argued, the seminar, the psychosocial children-group and the home are social contexts of a significant, even emblematic, character in the welfare state.

Drawing on some of the observations made in the introductory chapter, Chapter 2 provided a historical and socio-political context for understanding the emergence of the category of children in exposed refugee families in the Danish welfare state, and more specifically in public schools. In order to stress this phenomenon as emerging and in a constant process of change, I explored the category of children in exposed refugee families as a victimhood assemblage. In this perspective socio-political categories are the transitory products of the co-presence of the components of the assemblage and the connections between them. The chapter drew attention to practices and discourses con-
cerning the figure of the refugee, integration policy, psychotraumatology, anti-radicalization, inclusion and well-being as important aspects of current ways of problematizing the lives of children growing up in refugee families. Moreover the chapter specified, that when children in exposed refugee families emerge as a mental health concern in the public school, they do so as chronically at risk of being affected by their parents’ emotional hardship, and thus as always possibly wounded.

Chapter 3 explored the seminar as a distinctive societal context and performative frame for practising knowledge. In combining anthropological literature on atmospheres, aesthetics, performance and knowledge, the chapter demonstrated how the seminars in Langebro and Nordby performed a particular aesthetic of knowledge discursively, socially and materially. I argued that an atmosphere of pertinence and applicability was generated during the seminars, an atmosphere that rested on the relatively predetermined and familiar form of the latter. I also identified the merging of more conceptual and general kinds of knowledge with situated, experienced, practical kinds, as well as the ways in which the performance of situated knowledge especially pointed towards, in Sjørslev’s words, “a realm of pure possibility, of generality” (2012: 217). In the seminar situation, Sofia’s reservations seemed to slip into the background and become part of a sound representation of knowledge of trauma, PTSD and refugees as both important and applicable. The chapter thus raised the question of whether the form and persuasiveness of seminars tend to take over and eclipse the ambiguity related to the introduction of “new” knowledge, for example, in relation to the different kinds of expectation of how to act on this knowledge.

In Chapter 4 I focused on the primary “social innovation” related to the project activities, namely the psychosocial children-groups. By relating “the group”, as a psychosocial phenomenon, with “groups” as an inherent part of human sociality, I started out by bringing attention to the psychosocial group as resting on the idea that “the social” in itself holds healing qualities that can be brought into play in a psychosocial group setting. Departing from the question and concerns raised by the teachers in Nordby and Langebro as they engaged in the new initiative of psychosocial groups with children in exposed refugee families, I set out to demonstrate how the psychosocial group form an unclear form of intervention, both due to the elusiveness of “the psychosocial” and the all-encompassing ways in which the category of children in exposed refugee families was applied. I particularly emphasized a tension in relation to therapeutic work, arguing that this tension caused unsettled expectations of how to engage one another in the group session.
Moreover the chapter showed how, in Langebro this unsettledness was also influenced by children’s everyday experiences of being Othered as well as Sofia’s attempts to challenge and mediate the very same processes of othering.

Chapter 5 probed into Badra’s family. The chapter examined the evasive embodied and verbal practices of letting Badra and her younger brother know, or not know, about their father’s mental health problems. Bringing together the analytical concepts of relatedness and subjunctivity, I drew attention to evasive knowledge practices as both inherent to family life in general and to situations or periods of time, where families deal with critical uncertainty. Taking my point of departure in Minnah’s whispers and Badra’s and Musa’s pretending not to hear or know, I thus argued that limited and inconsistent disclosures of knowledge play a central part in multifaceted constellations of being a family over the course of time, and of actively holding a family together in troublesome periods. In this way, I argued, whispering and dosing out knowledge must be understood as more than social errors, as they take place when families suffer distress.

In posing the overall rhetorical question of when to whisper, I have sought to ethno- graphically and analytically tune in on, and emphasize, the questions and concerns occasioned by moving refugee psychotraumatology beyond the clinic and into the public school as well as by living with a parent’s trauma within the family. As I have demonstrated, these questions and concerns revolve around different perspectives on what children should know about their parent’s past and present hardships, what they should be protected from and what role the public school and ultimately the welfare state has in this. Whispering, then, denotes a nexus of metaphors, comprising doubts, hesitations and indecision, as well as acts of actually lowering one’s voice in more deliberate, pragmatic attempts to tackle a particular situation.

My emphasis on the questions, doubts and hesitations could easily be read as an attempt to criticize the very same welfare state moment, which I portray in my analysis of the seminar - Criticize it for its persuasiveness in form and for its capacity to eclipse the ambiguity so strongly expressed by teachers, psychologists and other professionals as they work with children and their families. I cannot deny somewhere down this analytical road having had that thought. However I suggest that a more interesting potential of the metaphor of whispering lies in the understanding that acts of whispering tabs into knowledge aesthetics thereby prolonging the seminar moment. Following this idea the questions, doubts and hesitations raised by teachers and their colleagues come to take
part of a wider welfare state aesthetic, stretched out in between, on the one hand po-
litically voiced and individually experienced needs, requirements and mandates to en-
gege with children’s family lives, and hesitations, worries and doubts about doing so on
the other.
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Summary

This dissertation springs from an overall interest in studying how psychotraumatology, as a relatively new global mental health phenomenon, unfolds in the context of the Danish welfare state in relation to another new emerging factor of socio-political concern, the descendants of refugees. An underlying assumption running through the chapters is that the emergence of these concerns is giving rise to new constellations of expertise, new fields of knowledge, new professional roles and positions, and new subjects for intervention within the welfare state, in this case in the context of the public school.

Empirically the dissertation takes its point of departure in a set of psychosocial interventions with the category of “children in exposed refugee families”, carried out in two public schools in 2010-2011. By creating awareness in schools and families about the difficulties refugees experience in connection with their flight from their home country and about how disturbing past experiences might affect their present-day lives, the psychosocial practices were intended to help schools and families recognize these problems and develop appropriate ways to deal with them in order to support and strengthen social ties both at school and in the home.

By employing the conceptual framework of chronic homework the psychosocial practices are theorized as mental health care, and more specifically as movements of mental health care, across borders, from clinics to homes. Throughout the dissertation three different kinds of borderland encounters are explored respectively knowledge promoting seminars; psychosocial children-groups in the public school and the home of a family where a father is going through process of being diagnosed with PTSD and for whom psychotraumatology thus is becoming a lived reality. A fundamental point, inherent in the notion of chronic homework, is that homework practices have profound implications for everyday routines and social relationships. Following this line of thinking the dissertation poses the overall, rhetorical question of when to whisper? Proposing to think of whispering as denoting a nexus of metaphors, comprising doubts, uncertainty and bewilderment, as well as more deliberate, pragmatic engagements in tackling particular situations, the dissertation ethnographically and analytically tunes in on the questions and indecisions that are produced as psychotraumatology is practiced beyond
the clinic, in the context of the public school and of the home. It is argued, that different acts of whispering come to take part of a wider welfare state knowledge aesthetic, stretched out in between, on the one hand politically voiced and individually experienced needs, requirements and mandates to engage with children’s family lives, and hesitations, worries and doubts about doing so on the other. In this manner the dissertation sheds light on the ways in which the presence of the welfare state in intimate relationships is continuously questioned, assessed and negotiated within the actual social situations and relationships through which interventions unfold.
Danish Summary

Denne afhandling udspringer af en overordnet interesse i at studere, hvordan psykotraumatologi, som et forholdsvidt nyt fænomen indenfor global mental sundhed, udfolder sig i en dansk velfærdsstatslig kontekst i relation til et andet frembrydende social-politisk fokus på efterkommere af flygtninge. Afhandlingens kapitler hviler på en underliggende antagelse om, at fremkomsten af disse nye fænomener giver anledning til nye konstellationer af ekspertise, nye vidensområder, nye professionelle roller og positioner samt nye subjekter i den danske velfærdsstat, her i en folkeskolekontekst.

Det empiriske afsæt er et etnografisk studie af en række psykosociale aktiviteter med kategorien ’børn i udsatte flygtningefamilier’, der fandt sted i to danske folkeskoler i 2010-2011. Intentionen med de psykosociale aktiviteter var at skabe øget opmærksomhed omkring de barske oplevelser, flygtninge har med sig samt hvordan disse oplevelser potentielt præger deres liv i dag samt at udvikle meningsfulde metoder til at adressere disse problemer og ultimativt støtte og styrke sociale relationer i skoler og hjem.

Hermed kaster afhandlingen lys over hvordan velfærdsstatens tilstedevær i intime sfærer kontinuerligt udfordres og forhandles i de konkrete sociale relationer hvorigennem interventioner udfolder sig.
TRINE BRINKMANN

When to whisper?
Moving refugee psychotraumatology beyond the clinic in welfare state Denmark