

CHAPTER 3

Family Ruptures and Un-Belonging: Discomfort in the Norwegian Child Welfare and Migrant Minority Families

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Abstract: This chapter responds to a heated political debate on the Norwegian Child Welfare Services, with a focus on migrant minority families who report fear that child welfare will ‘steal’ their children and ruin their family, thus violating a sense of belonging and wellbeing. Based on in-depth interviews with parents and child welfare workers, and inspired by critical phenomenology, the chapter reveals experiences of discomfort and un-belonging. Feelings of discomfort, as well as feelings of belonging and wellbeing, are not only products, but also ‘do’ things in child welfare as they mobilise actions, decisions, and interpretations, and are thus lively actants in the service process. Keeping in mind the assessment management guiding childcare workers, making and sustaining family and home are at stake here, and yet a sense of discomfort and un-belonging is created among migrant families because their views, narratives, and truth are largely neglected. In addition, many childcare workers experience a ‘gnawing feeling’, which in turn plays a role in many child welfare workers’ experience of discomfort in their practice. I suggest that turning towards a concern for affections and feelings can be a way forward to gain migrant minority families’ trust, and to support central experiences of family, home, and belonging, as well as to sustain social justice and integrity in future child welfare services.

Keywords: migrant minorities, child welfare, affections, discomfort, (un)belonging, social justice

Introduction

This study was initiated in part as a response to a heated social and political debate on The Norwegian Child Welfare Services, relating to overall issues of how decisions and interventions are justified with reference to the 'best interest of the child'. The debate is particularly hot in terms of the relationship between migrant minority families and child welfare and forms the scope of this chapter. The experiences of migrant minority families are characterised by a 'fear that the child welfare might steal our children' (see Oslo Economics, 2019; Norwegian Immigrant Forum, 2013). To understand such fear and what appears as a kind of mismatch in the relationship between migrant minority families and childcare workers, I take an approach exploring emotions and affections to appreciate and explain reported experiences of insecurity, distrust, and discomfort on both sides. Here, emotions and affections are employed as analytical concepts to capture an important and often neglected emotional meaning in what is communicated during interviews, and in the expression 'fear of the child welfare'.

A report (Ipsos, 2017) made on behalf of The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir) states that 41 per cent of the immigrant population have great trust in the child welfare, against 55 per cent among the total population. Furthermore, more than one out of ten in the immigrant selection report no trust in the child welfare. The experiences of The Norwegian child welfare workers, migrant minority families, and interest organisations indicate a conflicted relationship between migrant minority families and the child welfare characterised by distrust, misunderstandings, problems of cooperation, and a fear that the child welfare discriminate and might 'steal our children' (Oslo Economics, 2019; Fylkesnes et al., 2015; Paulsen et al., 2014; Vike & Eide, 2009; Norwegian Immigrant Forum, 2013; Kalve & Dyrhaug, 2009). It should be noted that these experiences are also partly valid for the child welfare cases involving the majority population. However, in a migrant minority context these experiences are accentuated and deeply precarious (see Söderström, 2012).

Studies show that not only are migrant minority families insecure and reluctant in their contact with the child welfare, the caseworkers may also be insecure and reluctant in taking on cases with minority families

(Bø, 2010; Qureshi, 2009; Rugkåsa, 2008). Research tends to interpret the difficulties resulting from misunderstandings and distrust in the child welfare services as being related to conceived cultural values due to different ethnic origins and concurring understandings of family life, childrearing, and the best interest of the child (Eide et al., 2015; Paulsen et al., 2014). Differences in cultural values, norms, and practices as an explanation is, in many cases, argued to culturalise social differences, and thus conceal a social reality of economic, educational, and social differentiations and problems (Ålund, 1997).

While acknowledging these issues, I underline a need to recognise the relationship between the child welfare and migrant minority families as both fluid and flexible, since it depends on and varies with concrete social relations and contexts. Exploring the meeting between migrant minority families and the child welfare workers, I seek beyond culturalisation and social differentiation, and take a critical phenomenological view, which understands social relations and cultural values as embodied (Bourdieu, 1989), and crucial to our affections and emotions, as these are intersubjective and occur in social contexts (Jackson, 1989). Thus, affections and emotions are seen to be formed in social contexts, while also understood to form practices and meanings (Ahmed, 2014). Through such an approach, I point out that different bodies experience and inhabit the world differently, and thus oblige us to understand these experiences in terms of power and social justice.

In the following I present a short background, placing the child welfare as a disputed socio-political and science-based profession. Then I introduce an analytical approach inspired by critical phenomenology and feminist theory, with attention to embodied sentiments and affections, followed by a note on the actual context of the study and the method of face-to-face interviews. From the interviews with migrant minority families involved with the child welfare and the child welfare workers, I present two narratives: one narrated by a refugee family, and one by a child welfare caseworker. These narratives were selected because they are seen to represent common features in most of the child welfare cases investigated here, and demonstrate how affects are a crucial dimension in the migrant minority families' experience, and the decision-making process of the child welfare casework.

Sketching a child welfare-scape

Across Europe there tends to be an understanding that childcare is largely and foremost a private and domestic affair not to be disturbed or governed by state interference. In Norway, as in the other Scandinavian countries, this tendency is challenged by the policy of a strong state and municipally governed the child welfare service, holding the individual child's best interest and lawful rights as its core concern. The governmental service is at one and the same time praised for rightful actions of protection, criticised for neglecting to act when needed, and for untimely interference when not needed. While child wellbeing and children's rights are vital values in Norwegian society and politics, the child welfare is harshly criticised, both nationally and internationally. In eastern and central Europe there have been large protests, demonstrations, and several political initiatives to influence The Norwegian child welfare (Weihe, 2016a). The perception among social workers in eastern and central European countries is that Norway steals, not just from the family, but from the entire nation (Skotheim interview with Weihe, 2020). In the spring of 2016, over 8,000 people demonstrated in eleven countries in connection with a case concerning a Norwegian-Romanian family (Bragdø-Ellenes & Torjesen, 2020). In autumn 2019, over twenty cases were appealed to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

One study estimates that more than 400 children and young people settled in Norway were taken abroad against their will between 2016 and 2018, and the fear of the child welfare was the single most important reason (Oslo Economics, 2019). Based on the municipalities' feedback, 84 per cent of the children being moved abroad were fully or partly a reaction to the fact that child protection had become involved. Other important motives for emigration, which municipalities have experienced, are to prevent the children from becoming 'too Norwegian' (40 per cent), or to 'strengthen religious or cultural identity' (36 per cent) (Oslo Economics, 2019). Also, a number of media reports document migrant minority families' fear and difficulties with the child welfare services (see Utrop, 2021; Olsen, 2018a, 2018b; Stokke, 2013).

In casework with migrant minority families, standards of what is assumed to be a 'normal family' are not only regarded to be better than any others, but also close to the historically and cross-culturally universal, thus almost like a 'natural' institution offering the essential definition of

family (Stacey, 2011). Holding on to images of a universal ‘normal family’ and ‘healthy child’ – largely informed by disciplines of medicine, psychiatry, psychology, and criminology, often called the psy-complex (Ingelby, 1985; Rose, 1985) – the child welfare may be seen to (unintentionally) contribute to social injustice through the risk of ignoring how different peoples emphasise differently what is important for family relationships’ sense of belonging and wellbeing. Distinct societies expect different kinds of development and profiles of children, and they employ various behaviour patterns to attain the skills and competences important for survival in their culture and the wider world (Roopnarine & Gielen, 2005). Categorising societies as having a ‘collectivistic’ or ‘individualistic’ orientation, is not sufficient to describe the many childrearing practices within a given culture.

Despite the authorities’ efforts to inform and educate involved parties in the child welfare cases (targeted higher education for the child welfare workers, and the introductory programme for refugee and minority families run by the Directory of Integration and Diversity), the child welfare services still cause a high level of insecurity, misunderstandings, fear, and conflict (Fylkesnes et al., 2015; Paulsen et al., 2014; Kalve & Dyrhaug, 2009). When the child welfare services intervene with measures of guidance and coaching, many migrant families tend to experience ruptures and fragmentation in family relations, intimacy, and spontaneity (Brighthouse & Swift, 2014). Such alteration and fragmentation challenge the family’s identity and closeness, ways of doing and displaying family (Strasser et al., 2009; Finch, 2007), which are crucial in the family’s quest for family life, since it includes transnational relations, multiple global locations, and expectations in places of origin, diasporic locations, and the host country of Norway (Seymore & Walsh, 2013). While families with migrant minority backgrounds are over-represented in the child welfare, this applies to supportive interventions only, and not to overtaking custody (Berg et al., 2017, p. 117). As appears in a report by Berit Berg et al. (2017) registered data show that the proportion of overtaking custody is on the same level for families with migrant backgrounds as for the non-migrant population. For children born in Norway with migrant backgrounds, the proportion of overtaking custody is lower than for children with non-migrant backgrounds. Thus, the debate on migrants and the overtaking of custody is based more on a myth than a reality of over-representation in custody takeovers (Berg et al., 2017). However, we know

that many minority families in which childcare is overtaken by the child welfare service experience not only the loss of custody of their children to another family, but also that these children tend to be estranged from their original social and cultural identity, and adjust to an identity which stands apart from their biological family (Aarset & Bredal, 2018; Paulsen et al., 2014; Skytte, 2006).

Embodying the child welfare: Affects and emotions

As described above, many families experience uncertainty and fear that the child welfare services will ‘steal’ their children, split, and ruin their family, and thus challenge and diminish migrant minority families’ sense of belonging and wellbeing. In response to such fear, migrant minority families sometimes take steps to ‘escape the child welfare’. There are examples of families who send their child(ren) to be taken care of by relatives in their country of origin or to a ‘third’ country, or one or both parents move and bring their child(ren) with them (Oslo Economics, 2019). Stories about families who have their child(ren) in the child welfare custody circulate among migrant minority families, creating images of an ill-intentioned child welfare service.

The assistance, support, and interventions introduced in migrant minority family life by the child welfare workers interplay and affect what is understood as acceptable familial structures and, I suggest perhaps as importantly, include acceptable processes of familial intimacy and identity. Having said this, I hasten to add a need to recognise the importance of trauma, rupture, fragmentation of family relations and everyday family life caused by migration and refugee processes in themselves. Nonetheless, I emphasise here the processes that take place after (escape) migration travel and in the phase of resettlement, since these may include contact with the child welfare services. From a critical phenomenological approach, there may seem to emerge a pattern developing into experiences of social injustice, discomfort, and un-belonging. Here, experiences of social injustice are seen to apply the same principles to all persons – such as holding on to images of a universal ‘normal family’ and ‘healthy child’ informed by the psy-complex disciplines – regardless of their particular social position and background, thus not paying sufficient attention to group differences and justice for minority populations.

From this view, I suggest that the child welfare service (and also the health and welfare services in Norway in general), in spite of working towards cultural sensitivity, may tend to ignore such differences and thus enact a practice that contributes to reducing experiences of family intimacy, home attachments, and a sense of belonging for migrant minorities. Seeing human beings as family and homemakers, because we construct our families and homes, I argue that how we experience ourselves, and function as persons, is linked to how we create a family and a home, and how we are able to do so. Considering family and home as constituted by intersubjective relations, family and home become crucial to practices of family relations, parenthood, and childrearing. This is all interwoven in feelings of discomfort and comfort, since it includes the sense of self, (un)belonging, (un)wellbeing, marginalisation, estrangement, and mental health.

Here, discomfort is conceptualised as an embodied experience and practice, which expresses both a deep inner and relational intensity, feeling or sensation. Drawing on Sara Ahmed (2014), Rachele Chadwick (2021, p. 557) points out how feelings and affects are not attributes of individual selves, but responses to moving sets of relations between persons, bodies, discourses, and locations. As such, emotions become a source and force that produce the effects of the boundaries between an inside and an outside (Ahmed, 2014, p. 10), and I add, as the distinction between us and them. Exploring affects, we can then potentially recognise ways that differences and power relations interplay in what Clare Hemmings (2012, p. 152) observes ‘not only draw us together, whatever our intentions, they also force us apart’ (see also Chadwick, 2021, p. 559). In this view, I suggest that the child welfare can be seen as an affective practice, in which the affects circulating in the service – such as (in)security, (dis)comfort, empathy, antipathy, anger – are understood to be the results of connecting relational, embodied, discursive, and intersubjective dynamics, in other words, how emotions and affects move and form bodies and worlds. Accordingly, affects and feelings are not only results or products, but also ‘do’ things in the child welfare service as they mobilise actions, representations, decisions, meanings, and interpretations, and are thus lively ‘agents’ in the protection service production process. As Rachele Chadwick argues, bodily sentiments and ‘affects “turn us on” or “turn us off” to certain lines of thinking, conceptualizing, knowing, and making sense’ (2021, p. 557). Thus, affects are epistemic sources for knowledge production and decision making. In this line of thought, the child welfare workers are affected by and affect

decision making and intervention processes, and consequently also affect the families and children in casework, and face-to-face encounters.

Context and method: Migrant minority families, practitioner involvement and face-to-face encounters

At the time of the study, the actual municipality, located on the Atlantic west coast, had already in the previous three decades received and settled refugees of different nationalities. The first refugees arrived in 1987/88 from Iran. Later, the municipality settled refugees mainly from Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia, Kongo, Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Syria. While not examining the details here, the overall purpose of the Child Welfare Act is understood to ensure that children and youth do not experience care failure or other harmful conditions while growing up. If there is a need for relief measures the child welfare service shall, as far as possible, offer measures within the home. Central tasks are to investigate the child's care conditions, implement voluntary relief measures, and if needed propose measures to be decided upon by the county board. The child protection service is to implement and follow up the county board's decisions. In all measures pursuant to the Child Welfare Act, emphasis shall be placed on what is best for the child. Contact persons present the child welfare services and actual issues in the various kindergarten and school parent and staff meetings, and other relevant fora.

In shaping and developing this project, the researchers-initiated dialogue and discussions with employees of the actual child welfare service office ensured the project's relevance to the practitioners, and incorporated their observations and experiences. When recruiting migrant families who were in contact with the child welfare, we relied on the childcare service's assistance. Of course, this raises issues of which families the office chose to select for us to contact. To secure a range of families with various reasons for contacting and receiving different kinds of assistance and interventions, we discussed and supervised the selection of families. All in all, we interviewed seven employees and twelve migrant minority families. The families represent both labour immigrants (from Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Bulgaria, Albania, Colombia) and refugees (from Syria, Bosnia, African countries, Afghanistan). We conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with

both employees and the families. The interviews with employees were conducted in their office, while the interviews with families were conducted in their homes or places of the interviewees' own voluntary choice. The interviews with employees focused on their experiences and challenges in working with migrant families, if they had specifically relevant competence, and what basis and reasons their decisions tended to rely on. Interviews with the families focused on how they came to know about the child welfare service, their experiences with the service, if they felt sufficiently informed about their own case and the child welfare work, and what they felt to be most important in childcare and rearing. During interviews with both employees and families, there was a high degree of emotional expression, which is understood to indicate deeply sensed affects, experiences, meanings, values, and feelings. This is revealed in the content of what is verbalised, the words that refer to emotional experiences, and non-verbal expressions of tone of voice, of throat clearing, appearance of tears, and various facial and bodily expressions.

In the following, I introduce two illustrative cases that together elicit challenges and contradictions in the mutual aim of securing the child's best interest. The first case illustrates the experience of precarity of the migrant minority position, family rupture, and un-belonging from a father's perspective. The second case illustrates challenges in the child welfare position, competence insecurity, and discomfort from an employee's perspective. The case stories are constructions based on actual persons' narratives, though their narratives and details are modified to secure anonymity and confidentiality. Names are pseudonyms.

Case 1. 'We are afraid to lose our children, lose our family, lose everything'

Dawit, a father involved with the child welfare had lived in Norway for about four years when his daughter Senait came to Norway, somewhat younger than school age. Dawit explained that when he applied for family reunification, only his daughter came. His wife had fled their country of origin, and her visa had expired before she managed to come to Norway. Initially they lived happily together. As Senait grew older, she started to watch television, and neglected her school homework. Dawit explained that he unplugged the television to stop her from watching. He continued:

My daughter had several problems. She was involved in fights and beat up children at school. I am told that she tells others that she does not like African people, only white people, European people. Before she respected me, but not any longer. She only sits with her telephone. African children and Norwegian children cannot be together. We Africans struggle with finances, everything costs money. In Norwegian homes they have Play Station and all kinds of things. Our children visit Norwegian children, and they meet a completely different world. This is when the conflict starts, I lose all respect.

Dawit explains that Senait had a friend whom she visited quite often. He said:

The mother in the house said that Senait told them that I beat her, that Senait was afraid of me. One day, now Senait being ten years old, the child welfare took Senait and put her in a foster home. The child welfare called me on the phone and summoned me to a meeting. They treated me as if I were a violent man. I only have one daughter. If I did not want her to be with me, I would not have brought her here. I treat her well.

Dawit continues:

The case came up in the county board (fylkesnemda). I was in shock and totally confused. The conversations with the child welfare were bad. I had a very sore and aching feeling inside me. I was reported to the police and had no chance to speak freely and in a normal manner. We have a residence permit in this country because of bad treatment in our home country, but it is all being repeated here. I am committed to my religion. The state, both here and there, failed me and my people. I cannot trust the state anywhere, my family is ruined, my daughter is taken away, and I am left alone. My religion keeps me going. I set limits as to what Senait could do. The child welfare says I did wrong, I should not deny her the things she wants to do. I should have set her free.

Once every month a psychologist visits Dawit and Senait for six hours. At one point the psychologist asked to see a family picture. Dawit expressed deep sorrow when he realised that Senait did not recognise her grandmother in family photographs:

I wanted to cry. I was very sad. I was not happy that Senait had come to Norway, she should have stayed in our home country. If I had known that the child welfare would take her, she would have stayed home. It is me who is in jail now.

Dawit cries and cries.

My family calls me all the time and asks how we are doing. Family must stay in contact. But I have to contact my lawyer if I want to talk with my daughter. The child welfare lady understands me and talks with me. When I meet my daughter, I can feel that she is happy. If not, she would not come to see me. My child is everything, I live for her. If something is important to her development, I will cooperate. We have come from a very beautiful country, but we did not have rights as human beings. We have these rights in Norway, but not in the child welfare. In our country family and parents take good care of children. When here in Norway, we are afraid to lose our children, lose our family, lose everything. What am I without my daughter, my family?

The child welfare wants to know if I have beaten her. I cannot say yes, since I have not. There was a white man, a neighbour, he said that he had seen me beat Senait. We have a different religion, and he does not keep his family together. What is important to the child welfare? What do they take into account? I agree that children should not be beaten, it says so in the Bible. They should help children to be self-confident while they live with their family. I must be the interpreter when Senait speaks with her mother on the phone. Our love is still strong, but we do not live together. We live in different countries and different worlds.

Case 2. 'Maybe we should think outside the box. I have this gnawing feeling'

Tanja told me it was very exciting to work with people from other cultures, though also very demanding and difficult. She referred to the 'challenges of cultural differences', 'use of interpreters' and 'how different people think and speak very differently about things'. Also, she noted that in many of the cases she had worked on she realised the significance of an extended family, since it includes close family members and more distant kin of different generations, who live in the home country or a third country. She recognised the parents' concern that their children should understand and speak their mother tongue, learn traditional practices and rituals, and not engage in what is often phrased as 'Norwegian behaviour', such as digital playing and gaming, smoking, drinking, staying out late, and having a boy/girlfriend. She further explained: 'The extended family is very much part of the smaller family. They [the family in the child welfare] do not want the extended family to know that the child welfare is involved with their family'.

Tanja emphasised that 'here locally, also other people from the same ethnic group, are not to know about the contact with the child welfare. It brings shame and stigma on the family'. Tanja continued:

I am worried they [migrant minority families] do not understand me. I always need to double check with them, even then it is still hard to be sure. Working with minority families is much more demanding than working with Norwegian families. There are so many things to be considered and explained. We struggle to coach them on family life, parenting, and child needs. We focus on how to set limits, engage, and respond to their children, and how to stimulate and secure healthy child development. We know that in many families fear and violence is part of childrearing. In kindergarten, children tell about punching and beating by parents. Commonly the parents deny any use of violence. Shall we then pressure them for a confession? Or let the issue of violence rest and keep working with the family? Often, the parents withdraw from contact and shield themselves as far as possible. They are concerned about not worrying the extended family, and are anxious to sustain family relations. Sometimes, if they feel that the pressure from us is too hard, they send their children to their extended family in their country of origin or elsewhere.

It is very difficult to explain how we think and work in the child welfare. So much of our work is based on discretionary assessment, it is in our bodies. Our thoughts and assessments come spontaneously, often at once and automatically. We do what we have been taught is best for the child. Maybe we do not pick up on the actual strengths and resources in many of the immigrants since we are used to arguing and explaining in reference to normal Norwegian family life and child development. Maybe we should create a pause in each individual case, make room for creativity and difference, think outside the box. I often have this gnawing feeling.

They have another ethnic and cultural background, and their conceptual understanding is not sufficient, or one might say different. I am uncertain if they understand. I often guide visitations [visits when biological parents are granted time together with their child in foster care]. This is very demanding, as the parents often use the opportunity to tell their children about what they see as wrong, and expect them to do as they believe to be right and best. They want their children to behave, dress, speak their mother tongue, and think like themselves. They cry, and sometimes tell the children off. This is not a good way to use the visitation. Sometimes it works counter effectively and troubles the child. I really feel uncomfortable at times, a sense of inadequacy, not really knowing what to do, not knowing if they understand when I prepare them and guide the visitation. Many of my colleagues hesitate to take on minority cases, but I take them even though it makes me feel insecure and troubled. It makes me realise a lack of competence. At times it is really distressing. Sometimes, I wonder if we make things even worse, but our focus is on the individual child,

the best interest of the child. It is hard to explain, but it is exciting work. It keeps me alert. I am always learning something new. Makes me wonder. Though, I have this gnawing feeling that we sometimes work against the family, and are not really doing the best for the child.

A discomfort speaking of un-belonging and social injustice?

The above narratives show how both Dawit and Tanja, like my other research interlocutors, experience discomfort, uncertainty, and insecurity: such as Dawit's 'sore and aching feeling inside', 'sadness', 'loss of control', 'shock and confusion'; and Tanja's 'distress', 'worry', 'not knowing what to do', and a 'gnawing feeling'. While Dawit and Tanja inhabit distinct and asymmetric social positions, in which Tanja holds the stronger and more powerful position, I suggest they both – as also appears in other narrations of casework – experience a child welfare service that tends not to sufficiently pay attention to individual and group differences in social position and background, as well as feelings of distress and discomfort in both parties of the casework.

The child welfare workers are acknowledged as experts, and thus exert considerable influence in the practices and development of the welfare state, and by extension, gain power over the lives of families and children. Keeping in mind the thoughts and assessment management guiding child-care workers' practices, making and sustaining family and home are at stake here, and I suggest that a sense of discomfort and un-belonging is created among many migrant minority families since their views, narratives, and truths do not receive sufficient attention. Also, among the child welfare workers there appear to be strong feelings of insecurity and discomfort, to which I will return below.

Feelings of discomfort and un-belonging among migrant minority families are revealed in their narratives including experiences of ruptures in family relations (not only from the migration itself), children that detach themselves from family relations and bonds, and become alienated from the family's cultural background and mother tongue. Additionally, as Dawit and other families narrate, they experience not being heard and respected, and a loss of human rights and human worthiness. As Dawit states: '... we are afraid to lose our children, lose our family, lose everything'. Not only was Dawit's daughter removed from their home and family,

Dawit is moreover told that his daughter 'no longer likes African people, only white European people'. Dawit says he feels that he has lost all respect, even his daughter's respect.

Recognising how experiences of self and belonging are not necessarily foremost experiences of an autonomous and inner essence, but rather intersubjective experiences of relations with a significant other, I suggest that removing Senait from their shared home and family, and the loss of respect, cause Dawit to feel that he is 'losing everything', even himself. One may also question the effect of time on Senait's identity formation and sense of belonging, when placed in foster care in a majority family. Here she easily loses touch with her extended family, her family of origin's culture and traditional practices, and experiences a tendency to ambivalence and devaluation of these things.

Considering the casework processes, Dawit states that he experiences 'not being heard' and 'a loss of human rights'. When referring to the first meeting with the child welfare, in which the police were also present, Dawit speaks of being 'treated like a violent man'. He was reported to the police and 'had no chance to speak freely and in a normal manner'. The following meetings with the child welfare 'were bad', and left Dawit with a 'very sore and aching feeling inside'. When his case came up to the county board, Dawit was in a state of 'shock and totally confused'. As Dawit narrates his case and the hurt he experiences, he underlines his religious commitment. His faith is what 'keeps him going'. He agrees with the child welfare that 'children should not be beaten', and points out that this is in accordance with his religion and the Bible. Dawit points out that his neighbour, who testified that he had seen Dawit beat his daughter, has a different religion, and that the neighbour does not keep his family together. It seems here that the issues of 'different religion' and ability to 'keep family together' contribute to Dawit's questioning of 'what is important to the child welfare', and 'what do they take into account?' It becomes clear that Dawit struggles to understand the premisses of the child welfare's assessment and intervention, and feels himself and his people to be discriminated against and worth less.

Turning to the case of Tanja, she also describes the child welfare work as provoking insecurity and feelings of discomfort. Tanja admits to 'challenges of cultural differences', and that 'different people think and speak very differently about things'. She also refers to several factors – such as language, traditional practices, significance of extended family, dislike of Norwegian behaviour, and stigma – which she understands to cause tension

and discomfort in her work. While recognising such issues as creating difficulties, Tanja, and also the other caseworkers, are left with a feeling of insecurity in the relationship and communication. It seems that childcare workers, as Tanja expresses, pick up on something that goes amiss. Tanja says that she is uncertain if the family 'understands' her, and explains that 'their conceptual understanding is not sufficient, or one might say different'. Whatever 'wrongfulness' or 'truth' there might be in what Tanja describes in relation to migrant minority families' 'conceptual understanding', the statement brings attention to a place or moment in the relationship and communication that awakens in Tanja 'a sense of inadequacy, not really knowing what to do, not knowing if they understand', while she also recognises her own 'lack of competence'.

Here one may ask, what kind of competence do Tanja and many child welfare workers lack? What is it that Tanja refers to as 'competence'? Even though Tanja has broad experience in working with migrant minority families, and realises a need for cultural competence and sensitivity, Tanja feels incompetent, insecure, and in discomfort. Tanja stresses that it is 'difficult to explain how we think', and says that 'thoughts and assessment come spontaneously come automatically' based on what they as child welfare workers are 'taught is best for the child'. Tanja questions if the the child welfare workers pick up on the families' actual strengths and resources, 'since we are used to arguing and explaining in reference to normal Norwegian family life and child development'. Tanja's reflections here can be seen to affirm the earlier reference to the child welfare service that tends to do what the 'psy' disciplines construct, and distribute as a universal and normal family and healthy child. However, Tanja takes a step back, and suggests that childcare caseworkers should 'create a pause', 'make room for creativity and difference' and 'think outside the box', and says she has this 'gnawing feeling'.

From this, I understand that Tanja and other childcare workers experience a 'gnawing feeling' and discomfort related to how the the child welfare services may tend to ignore migrant minority families' social position and background. Thus, they are inclined to employ the knowledge they are taught and expected to operationalise in the the child welfare service. As such, I suggest, that the child welfare runs the risk of contributing (unintentionally) to social injustice, which in turn plays a role in the many child welfare workers' experiences of discomfort in their practice. As a possible consequence, and as Tanja explains along with the other caseworkers,

the child welfare workers often seek to avoid working with migrant minority families.

Contemplating the two narratives, both of which show feelings of insecurity and discomfort in similar and different ways, I suggest such experiences may have a shared source in the experience of social injustice and its consequences. Acknowledging how the child welfare – in spite of the awareness of a need for a cultural-sensitive approach – may contribute to migrant minority families' loss of family intimacy, home attachments, and a sense of belonging. Holding that a sense of discomfort (Ahmed, 2014) comes from embodied practices and relations that connect intersubjective and sociomaterial dynamics, I propose to understand such feelings as producing boundaries between inside and outside. In this sense, the child welfare may be seen to 'automatically turn on' certain lines of making sense and decision-making, which respond to 'what is learnt to be in the child's best interest', while (unintentionally) discriminating against the migrant minority family as a group, and placing them outside what is understood as a 'normal family'. In this dynamic, it seems that the migrant minority family suffers from a sense of 'being in jail' and a 'loss of everything', while the child welfare caseworker suffers from 'a gnawing feeling'. In response to such suffering, many migrant minority families, such as Dawit, turn to religion and God to keep them going, and caseworkers tend to avoid the challenges of migrant minority families. Nonetheless, some caseworkers, such as Tanja, find that the challenges and discomfort 'keep her alert' and that she is 'always learning something new'. As it is the child welfare services' fundamental responsibility to stretch towards a practice that secures children's best interest in both minority and majority families, I see a need to pay attention to and explore the feelings of discomfort, because they may reveal un-belonging and social injustice. Exploring affects and feelings in the child welfare practice is thus proposed to be a fruitful guiding path for future the child welfare service, which may help to reduce migrant minority families' fear of their children being stolen, and rather enforce crucial capacities and senses of family, home and belonging, in the new place migrant minority families have come to stay.

Concluding remarks

By way of concluding, I recapture the chapter's aim to explore possible links between migrant minority families' fear that the child welfare might

steal their children, and how the child welfare reason and justify interventions. By looking into embodied knowledge and practices, as these are connected to feelings and affects, I propose a realisation that the child welfare creates a sense of discomfort stemming from an intersubjective and social dynamic, producing social injustice. While acknowledging the child welfare services' focus on cultural sensitivity and socioeconomic disadvantages, many migrant minority families still experience a deep sense of group discrimination, and losing rights and worth as human beings, which also reinforces a loss of trust in the state both 'here and there'. I suggest that turning towards a concern for affections and feelings can be a way forward to counter (unintended) discrimination and create a pathway to support migrant minority families' central experiences of family, home, and belonging. In so doing, chances for gaining migrant families' trust might increase, as well as enhancing the integrity of future the child welfare services.

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