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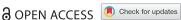
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Svenskt medborgarskap genom multikulturellt föräldraskap: föräldrastöd som lärande praktik för föräldrar som migrerat till Sverige

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of a civil society organisation that offers parental support to migrant parents with regard to meanings of parenthood and citizenship. It is based on the results of an action research study of a civil society organisation. The material consists of notes from participatory work in a local centre for children, youth and their parents, and of interviews with professionals, a project manager of the local organisation, and a public servant and a social worker who both work for the district council. Additional material is taken from notes of study visits to organisations working with the same target group. The results highlight four central themes. The first two themes, *difficult parents in a precarious place* and *a place with a future?*, revolves around parental needs in relation to place, the suburb. The third theme, *civic parenting practices*, focuses on parenting practices as civic practices. The fourth theme, g*endering parent citizens*, discusses the gendered meanings of the parent citizen as both an object and an agent of integration.

ABSTRAKT

Syftet med denna artikel är att undersöka en civilsamhällsorganisations roll som erbjuder föräldrastöd för migrerade föräldrar i förhållande till betydelse av föräldraskap och medborgarskap. Artikeln är baserad på resultaten från en aktionsforskningsstudie i en frivilligorganisation. Materialet består av anteckningar från deltagande arbete i en lokal organisation för barn, ungdomar och deras föräldrar samt intervjuer med professionella; projektledaren för den lokala organisationen samt en offentlig anställd och en socialarbetare som båda arbetar inom förvaltningen. Materialet består också av anteckningar från studiebesök till organisationer med samma målgrupp. Resultaten visar fyra empiriska teman som från olika vinklar undersöker de yrkesverksammas perspektiv på medborgarskapets olika uppgifter med betoning på de yrkesverksammas roll att lära ut betydelsen av ett aktivt medborgarskap medan medborgarna ska vara villiga, passiva och lärande. Centralt är

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problemberättelser bland yrkesverksamma om olika hinder för en bra relation till medborgarna definierat av de yrkesverksamma. Det första temat; Svåra föräldrar på en osäker plats, utvecklar föräldrabehov i förhållande till förorten som plats. I det andra temat; En plats med en framtid, belyser vi på vilket sätt barn i risk beskrivs, uppfattas och hanteras i förhållande till eventuella risker i förorten. Det tredje temat; Civilt föräldraskap, fokuserar på föräldraskapet som något centralt i medborgarskapet. Det fjärde temat; Könade medborgare, diskuterar betydelsen av föräldrarnas kön och föräldern som både ett objekt och en integrationsagent.

Introduction

The Swedish national strategy on strengthening parenting, 'National strategy for developed parental support: a win for all' (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2009) emphasises the importance of in-depth parenting knowledge about children to strengthening parents in their parenting role. Children's needs and children's rights are also emphasised. Embedded in this concept is the idea that in-depth knowledge about parenting promotes the positive development of children, which can have socio-economic benefits for individual families as well as society (Lupton, 2011). It should also be understood as part of a 'risk discourse' (cf. Beck, 1992) on parenting, which stresses the responsibility, first and foremost of mothers, to make risk conscious choices and to seek professional guidance on and support with their parenting. This casts parents who are reluctant to seek professional guidance as risky parents who are risking the health and development of their child (Lupton, 2011; Rooth et al., 2018; Svärd, 2016).

The original idea behind providing parental support was based on the concept of being available to all parents, but especially the most vulnerable (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2009; cf. Fretwell et al., 2018). Among the groups deemed to be more vulnerable are migrant parents. The Swedish national strategy on strengthening parental support is clear that parents with non-Swedish backgrounds need to develop knowledge of Swedish society, that parental support can contribute to integration (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2009, p. 64) and that this can be achieved through cooperation between different organisations.

This article is based on the findings of an action research study that explored meanings of voluntary sector social work interventions to families and its value creation in relation to ideas about place and the people in that place (Elmersjö, 2020). Value creation is defined as work that is based on the needs expressed by the target group of an organisation. The context of the study is a suburb in Stockholm. The suburb is one of the poorer communities in Stockholm with low levels of civic engagement in the local community and a high degree of population mobility. Central among the findings from the action research study was the ambiguous position of the civil society organisation, situated between the needs of formal welfare society and needs of the local citizens. This ambiguity was particularly visible in the case of the parenting support services provided by the organisation. This paper explores this ambiguous position further in relation to the function of parental support as a learning practice, as a tool for civic integration and as a way to foster citizenship in a multicultural Swedish society. Dahlstedt and Lozic (2017) have demonstrated the difference between formal citizenship and the possibly subject positions that are available in the citizenship that takes place in the meetings between parents with migrant backgrounds and grassroots bureaucrats. Following Dahlstedt and Lozic (2017), we analyse the dynamics between organisational structures, material resources and welfare workers' roles in (re)producing the ideal parent citizen. The article therefore contributes to the discussion on professional roles and practice, positioned between civil society social work practice and formal welfare state social work practice.

Background: performative citizenship

The starting point is to consider citizenship as performative; that is, as an ongoing process in which individuals and groups create themselves as citizens, and where citizenship in a substantive sense is conditioned by the social context (Dahlstedt, 2009). The dominant notion of this performative, or active, citizenship can be represented as the worker citizen, notably the fully employed economically independent citizen (Turner, 2001). Civic participation through reproduction remains important in relation to the worker citizen, despite the massive changes that have taken place in marriage and the family as institutions. It is associated with a temporary use of service provision, such as a temporary parental leave schemes for citizen workers, from which the citizen worker is expected to be in a position to return following parental leave (cf. Siim, 1998).

In recent years, Sweden has undergone population changes linked to increased international migration. This migration and changed ethnic relations have led to changes in views on who the citizen is and how the citizen should be, transforming Swedish citizenship into a markedly paradoxical multicultural citizenship involving tensions between different meanings of citizenship (Ålund, 2007; Kokkonen et al., 2010). Among these tensions are a tension between what we choose to refer to a citizens' rights discourse and a citizen difference discourse (Nouf-Latif et al., 2019). Within the rights discourse, civic practices may be heterogenous and new citizens for example have a right to reinterpret forms of care (cf. Ghasemi, 2015). The difference discourse, by contrast, stresses homogenising civic practices, positioning new citizens as national *Others* (Monforte et al., 2019), or *would-be* citizens that need to pass various kinds of factual or symbolic tests in order to become full citizens (Turner, 2014). Within the latter discourse, would-be citizens are asked to 'better themselves', 'to prove their worth' and perhaps most central, to undertake 'citizen responsibility'. Passing the test may be understood as part of a neoliberal discourse on the responsibilization of (new) citizens, which stresses the importance of learning as a feature of the 'worth' of the would-be citizen.

The tension between the citizens' rights discourse and a citizen difference discourse illustrates the wider tension between a national and a transnational conditioning of multicultural citizenship, meaning the nationalised conditions that people are awarded when they are part of activities, practices and relationships that extend across national boundaries. These conditions constitute both opportunities and limitations but, above all, they are concerned with creating belonging, meaning and context in relation to different national spaces, where some national spaces are given priority over others. Homogenising civic practices are expressed by homogenising culture and ethnicity in collective expressions, and social and cultural rankings between 'Swedes' and 'immigrants' (Ålund & Alinia, 2011). For example, Bredström (2008) and Bredström and Gruber (2015) explore how immigrant Swedes, through information provided about sex and cohabitation in Sweden as part of an introduction to Swedish society, create beliefs about us and them in which Swedish values are made desirable and universal. Bredström (2008) conceptualises this as a neo-assimilation into Swedish values and Swedish culture through lectures on Swedish equality, views on gender, and so on. In a similar way, Mulinari and Neergard (2004) have described how welfare state nationalism and the creation of us (Swedes) and them (immigrants) take place through 'inclusive subordination' of the immigrant population (see Mulinari & Neergard, 2004, pp. 210–211), where the cultural self – the (dominant) white native Swedish 'we' – adopts a 'parental fostering attitude' towards the cultural other, the non-whites and the migrants. Parental training is also a target of this sort of fostering (cf. Fretwell et al., 2018).

The national strategy strengthening parental support seeks to prevent ill-health among children and to support parents with children's upbringing (Bremberg, 2004). Examples of arenas where parental support is provided in Sweden are maternity care, childcare centres, and preschool and school settings, as well as in Swedish language lessons for migrants and in refugee reception centres and asylum seekers' accommodation. Both public sector and voluntary sector actors operate within these arenas. Voluntary organisations have become more important in welfare policy debates over time and now help to shape both the content and the goal formation of various types of welfare services

(Knutagård, 2016). The presence of civil society organisations in Sweden has increased in recent years as part of a municipal strategy to reduce costs in times of cuts to welfare services to parents. Cooperation between different actors and sectors is seen as an important goal, where civil society organisations offer services together with district and county municipal entities. However, the development of a more pluralist welfare state has weakened the position of civil society organisations as critical voices (Arvidson et al., 2018). Organisations vary in terms of what type of professional is leading the activity and what the focus of the organisation is. Maternity and child healthcare services employ medically trained personnel and the focus is on medical issues, while groups working within the social services focus on social problems (Bremberg, 2004, p. 330; Dahlstedt & Lozic, 2017; Fahlgren, 2009). Social workers and volunteers can offer parental support within civil society organisations but the focus of civil society organisations and how organisational values influence the activities provided is often unclear. Which narrative of parenthood becomes a 'success story' and why can also be unclear (Webb, 2010). It is therefore important to learn more about role of civil society in different integration processes (cf. Hodgson, 2011).

Fostering virtues such as independence, personal responsibility and self-reliance favours the notion of a residual welfare state (Turner, 2001; Turner, 2014). The parental support provided by the welfare state can be seen as a specific context of civic subjectification (Homanen, 2017). It is arguable that welfare reform is a disciplinary system that aspires to be pedagogical and expects new citizens in particular to be teachable (cf. Turner, 2014). Like the information aimed at new citizens about sexuality and cohabitation in Sweden (Bredström, 2008), parental support may be understood as a neo-assimilation learning practice. Rather than a focus on socio-economic inequalities and differences in civic power between different groups of citizens, this sort of learning practice focuses on cultural assimilation into certain Swedish values and Swedish culture through ideas of an idealised parent figure within dominant discourses of good parenthood (cf. Arendell, 2000; Homanen, 2017).

Methods

This study is based on data collected in relation to the above-mentioned action research project. The action research project was initiated by the civil society organisation and the research questions were formulated by the first author together with professionals at the local service provision in the suburb. The research process has sought to integrate the different forms of knowledge and interests of the researcher and the professionals according to the traditions of action research (Kemmis, 2009). This has included active participation by the first author as a volunteer in the activities of the organisation. This active participation in the organisation was an essential part of the data collection, which was carried out in line with action research methods in a dialogue with the participants in the study (Pajalic et al., 2014). The data consists of notes on the participation work and interviews with three professionals: the project manager of the organisation, and a public servant and a social worker working in the district council. The material also consists of notes from study visits undertaken to gain more knowledge about the work of other organisations working with the same target group. This article focuses the analysis on the interviews with professionals, but these should be understood as part of a wider dialogue within the whole data set. All the professionals interviewed had experience of meeting parents and providing or recommending the provision of parental support. The social worker had explicit experience of parental counselling, where parents can come to the office and talk about their need for help and support. The social worker also had experience of home visits, in which a children's nurse, a social worker and a parent counsellor work together to offer parental support.

The interviews

The interviews were conducted either in the interviewee's workplace or in a space at the university campus of the first author. They were conducted in Swedish and had the character of a conversation involving active listening by the first author. This means that the first author was concentrating on

the task, displayed calm and open body language, and made encouraging comments. The conversations also included reasoning parts where questions were used to move the interview forward and were posed in different ways. The first author was also careful to use simple and clear language, and to create room for both parties' silence. The interviewees are referred to as the project manager, the public servant and the social worker. They all have solid work experience and have different educational backgrounds. The interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and then sent to the interviewees by e-mail. The transcriptions were treated as working documents, meaning that the interviewees were free to change, delete or add new text to the documents.

Data analysis

The interviews were analysed collectively by the authors using thematic content analysis (Bryman, 2018, pp. 242–247). In the first stage, the interviews were carefully read by all the authors, and all the authors made preliminary analytical notes. This was followed by an author group workshop where all the individual preliminary analyses were brought together in a mapping of themes in the data. These were then connected to the theoretical concepts which were considered relevant. Based on this workshop, the group of authors decided to focus on the overall theme of parental support for migrant parents. In the next step, the interviews were analysed separately and in relation to each other in a first writing round, where each author contributed to the analyses in progress. During this first round, the data was coded, and four empirical themes began to crystallize: the parents and place, citizenship and parenting, women and integration, and children and integration. This process was followed by a second workshop and a new writing round where the analysis of the empirical themes was deepened, and we noted the interaction between parenting, place, citizenship and integration in the case of parental support aimed at migrant parents. This then became the main focus and the conclusions began to emerge. Theoretical concepts such as active citizenship and neo-assimilation are used in the analysis in order to scrutinise how risky parenting and Swedish parental support practices operate within a difference discourse, in line with the analyses of Turner (2001). The analysis was performed on the original Swedish data so that important nuances in the data were not missed (Nikander, 2008). When writing up the paper, the quotes from the interviews were translated into English.

Findings: active professionals and passive citizens in a learning practice

The welfare workers in the study offer the parents an opportunity to develop their parenting skills. By defining parental support programmes as welfare services and referring to user involvement and knowledge development, the disciplinary strategies applied by welfare workers can be presented and disguised as tools for empowerment (cf. Fretwell et al., 2018). The findings are grouped into four empirical themes that explore professionals' perspectives on the various duties and tasks of professionals and citizens from different angles, stressing the duty of professionals to be teachers of active citizenship while citizens are expected to be willing and responsible, but passive citizen-learners. Central to this are problem narratives among the professionals about the different barriers to good professional-citizen relationships as defined by professionals. The first two themes, *difficult parents in a precarious place* and *A place with a future?*, revolves around parental needs in relation to place, the suburb. The third theme, *civic parenting practices*, focuses on parenting practices as civic practices. The fourth theme, g*endering parent citizens*, revolves around the gendered meanings of the parent citizen as both an object and an agent of integration.

Difficult parents in a precarious place

Different ideas about the parents who live in the suburb and their needs are a central theme of the data. All three professionals formulate problem narratives of parental needs that become the starting

point for identifying and arguing for professional interventions in the suburb. The problem narratives work as ways of casting parents in the suburb as risky and as objects of professional interventions (through parental skills training), but also stress the ambiguous situation of the professionals as subjects of change but with limited power to resolve the (housing) problems of the parents.

The high level of population mobility is defined by the professionals as an overarching problem that is associated with an insecure housing situation.

> Because then we have so many people in this small area who have insecure housing conditions. And then maybe you choose not to invest as much [in the place] and in becoming involved in what is happening in the area because you are just going to stay here for three months and you may not even have a rental contract. But how many there are, it is so difficult [to know] without any statistics. We don't really know. (The public servant)

The interviewees' problem narratives often include different sources of knowledge, such as statistics or the experiences of other professionals working in the area, but also some uncertain data or knowledge gaps as in the above quote. Rumours and guesswork also contribute to creating an image of how it is to live in the suburb and what the problems are:

> I think that is because many, now I guess more and more, but I do not think that you choose to move to [the suburb] … but you end up there because you do not have anywhere else to go. It is also seen from this that so many moves, it creates very big difficulties in the schools as well. (The project manager)

Although the housing situation is identified by the informants as a significant problem, no specific efforts are made in this area, as it is considered impossible to resolve within their scope of authority. Instead, efforts and support interventions are focused on parental skills and parents' access to parental support.

> (…) It is when they are being evicted from their homes we step in. But we can offer our services because we provide child and parent education, where people can come and talk about their help and support needs [with parenting]. But we cannot look for housing. (The social worker)

In the data the, albeit small, proportion of children not participating in the Swedish non-mandatory preschools in the suburb is recurrently presented as a problem by the informants. For example, the public servant connects the low participation rates in preschool with precarious housing conditions:

> And it [insecure housing conditions] also contributes to the fact that you do not have children at the preschool, or I think so anyway. (The public servant)

Parental support groups are seen by the professionals as a solution with a dual goal: an opportunity to increase the participation and inclusion of children in the local preschools and an opportunity to monitor and shape parental practices. Not placing their children in the non-mandatory Swedish preschool makes the start of mandatory elementary school more difficult in the eyes of the professionals, as the parents and children are not as prepared as other families whose children have attended preschool. The proffered solution is to invite parents to come and talk about their presumed help and support needs with their parenting. Referring to a previous social intervention project aimed at providing early parental support, the social worker noted:

> … this project meant that we spent an hour a week sitting in different maternity care centres trying to make contact with parents. We were dependant on the nurses who were booking the meetings and had recommended us to the parents. There was no one who came to us by themselves. But still it was pretty good because the parents had an opportunity to meet us. (The social worker)

The social worker told how it is not easy to make contact with the parents, and the contact is conditional on other occupational groups. The outreach activity that the professionals describe is an opportunity to talk about parenting and the various issues that parents might have, but can also be understood as a disciplinary practice with regard to the parents' parenting skills and a fostering of certain ways of performing citizenship.

The risky parents are perceived as a target group for proactive interventions. This stresses the importance of participation in activities led by professionals, in which parents' non-participation,

or difficulty to contact, is framed as problematic. For example, the parents are described not just as hard-to-reach, but as difficult to convince to participate in activities arranged by the municipality. The value of voluntary parental civic participation, which includes parental civic participation on the professionals' terms, is further expressed by the project manager. In the quotes, it is stressed that parental civic participation by 'the families' is important to ensure good quality activities, but it is also described by the project manager as a precondition for changing their own situation in life, and thereby meeting expectations to become an active citizen and a responsible parent:

> Families that I have met in [the suburb], both parents and children, I find very unlikely to appreciate the importance of really participating; not just attending an activity but participating in the design and being encouraged to express thoughts and ideas on what may mean a change in their [own] lives. (The project manager)

By referring to the democratic influence that can be linked to citizenship, the project manager adds:

> I did not want to start an organization that looked like our other organizations, I wanted to create a place in [the suburb] that was built based on what the citizens, the families in [the suburb] wanted. (The project manager)

In this quote, the professional is formulating the task of 'the families' as to express what they 'want' to the professionals, and the task of the professionals as to provide activities to the citizens. This illustrates how from the professionals' perspectives, voluntary parental civic participation is made a prerequisite for change in the community as a place.

A place with a future?

Different activities aimed at children and child development were represented by the professionals as a vehicle for integrating the parents and reducing the rate of mobility. Central to the arguments of the professionals is the impact of meetings between different types of residents, on the one hand, and professionals and other residents, on the other. The professionals expressed fear about various possible barriers to such meetings. Among the barriers mentioned was the pattern of school participation, which depended on the socio-economic position of parents in relation to their residency status.

> Most [parents with a migrant background] live in high-rise buildings and have low incomes, and then there are those parents here [parents with an ethnic Swedish background] who have huge capital and incomes. And these two groups do not meet. Because it seems that the well-established group does not move around the shopping centre and thereabouts. They have no business there. It may also be that they do not have children in schools in the local community. Without that, the children go somewhere else after school, so they do not meet. (The public servant)

As the quote illustrates, the public servant believes that there are different income and ethnic groups in the suburb that 'do not meet' because many ethnic Swedish children do not attend school in the suburb but instead choose to attend schools elsewhere in Stockholm. Another example, which is discussed above, is the project manager who believes that the fact that professionals do not meet the children from migrant backgrounds until the first year of mandatory schooling is a problem. She stressed that 30 per cent of the children from migrant backgrounds are not enrolled in preschool.

One suggested solution was that the parents with migrant backgrounds need to meet professionals through getting involved in local issues and to be encouraged to contribute to resolving local problems. Such involvement should be encouraged by professionals. Attempts have been made to reach out to both parents and children with outreach activities that take place in the suburb. The importance was stressed of children and young people taking their place in the suburb, experiencing the suburb as a good place and fostering a sense of positive we-identity connected to that place, rather than the suburb as a place to move away from. The importance of these 'we-fostering' activities for the children was argued for the youth in the suburb at the moment. For example, the project manager argued:

> I met some young people in [the suburb] and asked the same question and it was really half and half. Some said: 'I will stay in [the suburb]; my children will grow up in [the suburb]'. But many thought completely differently and argued with those who said it: 'how can you say that you will let your kids grow up here? There is nothing in [the suburb]. If anyone gave me a ticket, I would leave here right now'. (The project manager)

The way in which future children at risk are described, perceived and managed in the above quote stresses young people's concerns. In the light of the possible risks of the suburb, staying in the suburb or not, and parenting one's own children there can be understood in relation to broader meanings of the organisation of risk management (Beck, 1992). This positions the young people as responsible future parents. At the same time, the possible decision to stay is framed as an example of a possible success of professional interventions, which could be interpreted as a process of inclusive subordination of the immigrant population (see Mulinari & Neergard, 2004, pp. 210–211).

Civic parenting practices

Who are the parents and the recipients of parental support? In the professionals' narratives, the group of parents consists of different subgroups of parents with migrant backgrounds. Among them, some are newly arrived in Sweden, commonly referred to as 'newcomers' in the data, and some have been living in the suburb for a long or shorter period of time. The immigrant parents are recurrently defined as cultural others in relation to an imagined ideal, ethnic Swedish, white cultural self; and as risky parents with an inability to seek or accept assistance or adapt to Swedish society. It is the latter that results in risky ways of parenting (cf. Monforte et al., 2019). A common starting point for the public servant, the social worker and the project manager is that the immigrant parents lack basic knowledge of both Swedish society and the Swedish language, which makes it difficult for them to fulfill both their citizenship and their parenting obligations. To overcome this problem, parents are offered a chance to participate in parental support groups. By participating in the norms and values of mainstream society, they learn how 'good Swedish citizens' and 'good Swedish parents' are expected to behave.

> We had a [parental support] course this spring and it was really great. Everyone was very interested, and it was great fun because you sit and discuss different issues, such as Sweden's history of women's voting rights, compulsory schooling and all that. And about gender roles, school, social services, and also the rights and obligations of parents. (The social worker)

The parental education courses aimed at migrant parents mentioned above illustrate how images of good Swedish citizens and good Swedish parents are recurrently invoked in the learning practice for migrant parents in Sweden. In the social worker's narrative, parental education is about inducting parents into certain valued ways of citizenship, which it is stressed are both Swedish and long-established (cf. Bredström, 2008).

In the public servant's narrative, parents' inadequate contact with the Swedish welfare society appears as a lack of knowledge that is best addressed through pedagogical efforts. Indeed, in line with the difference discourse, power is introduced and presented as a form of non-mandatory guidance, and professional guidance is provided through encouraging practices of self-government (Turner, 2014) among new citizens.

There seems to be an understanding among the professionals that a newly arrived immigrant will initially approach fellow migrants, but over time this understanding decreases and is replaced by demands for increased assimilation into Swedish culture and Swedish society.

> When you are new to a country you are naturally looking for your own group, and that is quite ok. But then as the years go by and the children grow up and you have the support of your own group, that is when you have to step out and interact with others. And maybe some need help with that. (The public servant)

According to the professionals' narratives, migrant parents are expected to become active and responsible citizens, or to make 'the right choices' under the control of professionals. Citizens are

expected to be in need of empowerment 'to take action' but at the same time these actions need to be 'the right actions' (Hodgson, 2011). This initially includes parents' participation in parental support groups and in the long run their children's participation in pre-school. Thus, to be independent from the Swedish welfare state is no longer seen as empowering. Hence, parental education programmes become a learning practice, encouraging parents to become active parent citizens not only by making parental choices, but by making parental choices associated with notions of good Swedish citizenship and good Swedish parenting.

Gendering parent citizens

In the professionals' narratives, parents are commonly synonymous with mothers, which positions the mother as the primary object of parental intervention. The public servant in particular stressed the importance of reaching the mothers in the suburb. The mothers are described as important integration agents, at the same time as parenthood among women is stressed as a secondary civic task after paid work.

> There are considerably fewer children [in the suburb] who go to preschool compared to other areas and the problem with this is that starting school becomes more complicated. It is perhaps the children who do not have Swedish as their mother tongue, so they end up behind. They cannot cope with the routine either: how to behave in a group, wait their turn, and so on. So, in any case we want to try to reach out [to the mothers] with that knowledge. (The public servant)

In line with the citizens' rights discourse, the public servant stressed that it is important that the parents clearly choose for themselves how to divide up the parental tasks within the family. At the same time, in line with the citizen difference discourse, s/he also stressed the possible negative effects that this choice can have for the children:

> Yes, but then you can perhaps participate in the open preschool or in something else in forums that are still supportive. And then you should know that the children can find it trickier with the start of school [if they don't participate in preschool]. And when you reach out with such information then … well, all parents want their children to become doctors and lawyers, so it is clear that they want their children to have a good school start. And then an activity like [the organization] is very important, where there is an educational activity for children and where the parents can get to practice Swedish and gain knowledge of different social issues. (The public servant)

The above quotes can be seen as illustrative of two different and competing motherhood and female citizenship ideals. Ideas of mothers as primary nurturers and carers for dependent children (Arendell, 2000, p. 1192), and as educators of future generations, are contrasted with ideas of working mothers, women as primary worker citizens, where the day care of the child after a certain age is the task of professional child carers. According to the public servant, the hope is that by reaching the mothers, the problem of the children's segregation can be reduced; and that through the children, the problem of the segregation of the parents, at least the mother's, can also be resolved. In other words, the mothers can help to integrate the children by, for example, taking them to the open pre-school, and then the children can help to integrate their mothers into becoming working mothers. During the interview, notions of integration also brought out certain notions of Swedishness that can be seen as practices of cultural neo-assimilation. In order for the children to be successful and positive members of society (cf. Ghasemi, 2015), the mothers in the professional's narratives are partly posed as a barrier to professional nurturing and caring, and to the education of the citizen child as a future citizen/citizen in being.

In line with notions of self-government as individual empowerment, ordinary preschool, or alternatively the less structured open preschool, is emphasised as an important route into Swedish society. The responsibility of the parents is to make the right choice of childcare. Fully professionally led ordinary preschool is promoted by the professionals as the right choice for a parent aiming for a successful integration into Swedish society for their children, expressed as an image of future higher education and a class-privileged occupation for their children. The open preschool, which is a

professionally led activity in which parents participate with their children, is deemed a good enough choice, or as sometimes the only possible choice for professionals who try to reach parents with their childcare interventions. In relation to these professionally led child care choices, the mothers who choose to take care of their children at home are positioned as risky parents, and as barriers to their children's successful integration into Swedish society, and possible transition for both children and women to a more secure and privileged socio-economic position as worker citizens.

Fathers are only explicitly mentioned in the data in what can be referred to as 'success stories' (cf. Webb, 2010) of parental support and parent/citizen fostering. For example, in a narrative by the social worker about how hard it has been to get parents to come to professionals for parental advice, the social worker says:

> But sometimes it has been that: 'my child does not listen, what can I do?' Then it has actually been a few times that dads have come and taken the initiative, but in such cases, they will have been here a long time and spoken good Swedish and so on. It is not the newcomers. (The social worker)

Here, the attendance of fathers indicates the success of the intervention. Demands for and use of professional advice on parenting are also considered signs of successful integration processes. At the same time, however, the inability to reach newly arrived and non-established parents is looked on as a failure. From a professional perspective, the symbolic value of present fathers serves as proof of successful integration that has already occurred, whereas mothers are positioned as keys to the future integration of their children, the citizens in being.

Concluding discussion

The findings identify empirical themes that explore professionals' perspectives on the different duties and tasks of professionals and citizens from different angles, stressing the duties of professionals to be active citizen-teachers, while citizens are expected to be willing and responsible, but passive, citizen-learners. Central to these themes are the problem narratives among the professionals about the various barriers to good professional-citizen relationships as defined by professionals. Our findings touch on one of the major aspects of professionals' power and authority: the mandate to determine what constitutes a problem. Since there are no resources to address the material problem of inadequate housing in the suburb, the professionals construct a problem that focuses on non-physical resources such as professionally led parenting support groups. The professionals' problem construction includes lack of parenting skills and lack of knowledge of Swedish society, which ultimately results in an inadequate assimilation into Swedish society. The problem construction justifies the interventions available to the professionals and supports the arguments for why they are being offered to the parents even when the parent is viewed as reluctant and is asking for something else.

In the suburb, the support available is framed as value-creation, and value-making participation that adds value to the place and to the citizens who inhabit the place. Hence parenting support groups are framed as empowerment – creating opportunities for migrant citizens to co-construct and belong to a place. However, while the involvement of immigrant parents is sought, user choice and user involvement are limited in practice. The professionals want to involve the immigrant parents but at the same time, their involvement is conditional on 'making the right choices'. The immigrant parents are expected to actively seek support, accept the solutions provided by the professionals and ultimately adapt their behaviour in line with the suggested solutions, which implies a passive consumer role disguised as support.

In this sense, parental educational programmes constitute a technology for transforming immigrant parents to good and responsible full citizen parents. The success of this strategy would be measured by the transformation of the habits of the parents with migrant backgrounds from risky parents into stable and responsible citizen parents. This can be understood in terms of neo-assimilation where the focus is on increased cultural assimilation of certain imagined Swedish or 'universal'

values, rather than on social inequalities (see Bredström, 2008; Bredström & Gruber, 2015) At the same time, however, it could also be understood as diminishing the impact of socio-economic inequalities between groups of parents, as expressed in material effects in the suburb such as insecure housing and high levels of transience.

Our analyses highlight the impact of the idea of the responsibilization of new citizens as well as the idea of the risks of multiculturalism. Both ideas are invoked to argue the importance of cultural homogeneity (Turner, 2014) in the context of Swedish welfare support. Hence, parenting support has the covert goal of producing responsible, self-disciplined parents who act freely in accordance with normative expectations of what constitutes 'good parenting' and effective parental support (cf. Weinberg, 2016, p. 157). This also illustrates the conflict between the 'worker-citizen' and the 'parent citizen' – where responsible parenting is associated with placing your child in professional childcare and becoming a working mother – but also how the responsibility for civic participation in society and the co-creation of the suburb in which you live is becoming part of a gendered parent citizenship.

Disclosure statement

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