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Introduction Special Issue "Paradoxical orders: Parenting encounters, the welfare state, and difference in Europe"

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Abstract

This special issue examines welfare programs as sites where Europe's increasingly diverse societies are being shaped and negotiated. It zooms in on parenting as a central governmental domain where concerns about, and hopes for, the future of society intersect with notions of citizenship, family care, welfare, and deservingness of public resources. In this introduction to the special issue, we draw out three paradoxical orders that shape the encounters between migrant parents and welfare actors we have studied. One is concerned with the tension between the universal and difference, the other with the re-articulation of the public and the private, and a third with irreconcilable social and institutional demands. This helps us understand how Europe's diverse societies are being shaped on the ground, beyond the often strongly racialized, nationalist rhetoric that has come to dominate public debates.

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Introduction

Anxieties about social cohesion and the future of the nation have increased across a Europe struggling with a combination of economic crises and state retrenchment, increased migration flows, and the diversification of national populations. These anxieties have fueled racialized public discourses about the threat posed by non-native others to the nation, reinvigorating nationalisms, and inspiring increasingly strict integration policies (De Koning and Modest, 2017).

Such fears of social disintegration and anxieties about society's future are largely addressed in the broad governmental domain of the social (Cruikshank, 1999). This domain is similar to what Pierre Bourdieu (1998: 2) calls "the left hand" of the state, which is made up of "social workers" in the broad sense of the term, from youth workers, teachers, and family counselors to private organizations, volunteers, and individual citizens. The governmental domain of the social has also gained importance in the context of the restructuring of the welfare state in Europe. It is tasked with the responsibility of producing welfare and social cohesion while it is also expected to help decrease dependence on public resources.

In the context of welfare state reform and budget cuts, these tasks are increasingly delegated to assemblages of state and non-state actors, professionals, and volunteers, which are supposed to facilitate welfare services and social programs and activate recipients, rather than simply providing for them (Muehlebach, 2012; Newman and Tonkens, 2011; Vollebergh et al., 2021). State and non-state professionals, volunteers, and "activated" citizens thus find themselves entangled in the work of repairing, maintaining, and reweaving a social fabric that is understood to be torn or in danger of fraying from the pulls of overlapping challenges—a diversifying public, state retrenchment, the influx of refugees, and, in Southern Europe, prolonged economic crisis and debt. This special issue asks how Europe's contentiously diverse societies are shaped in concrete encounters between welfare actors and welfare recipients.

Studies of Europe's contemporary political moment have often focused on the persistent othering of those considered non-native or non-European (Silverstein, 2005). In related fashion, various authors have analyzed the culturalization (Duyvendak et al., 2016) and the moralization of citizenship (Schinkel, 2010) that spell out racialized forms of belonging in Europe today (Lentin and Titley, 2011).

Our focus on the welfare state as an arena for the negotiation of everyday citizenship draws attention to rather different dynamics. Most European welfare

states are committed to serve citizens irrespective of background, at least nominally. Such equal treatment is not merely a legal duty, but also an ethics that informs the practices of many welfare actors. At the same time, these welfare actors are confronted with a diversifying client population, and many are expected to deal with problems that are presumed to be related to this growing diversity, for instance, the growth of so-called parallel societies, a lack of social cohesion or presumed inadequate parenting. They, moreover, do so in a political climate in which migration and diversity are highly politicized, amidst debates about who is entitled to the state's care and, concretely, its welfare provisions. These debates often differentiate between the rights of "real" nationals and those of others, whose claims, some maintain, put an illegitimate and unsustainable burden on welfare resources. Welfare programs thus provide a primary ground where contradictory conceptualizations, ethics, and politics with regard to citizenship in Europe come together. Our ethnographic studies flesh out how welfare actors deal with these contradictory political exigencies and sentiments.

This special issue zooms in on parenting as a central governmental domain where concerns about, and hopes for, the future of society intersect with citizenship agendas (De Koning et al., 2015) and notions of family care, welfare, and deservingness of public resources. We focus specifically on programs concerned with migrant parents and migrant parenting, since this allows us to draw out how concerns over the fabric of national society are addressed in and through the welfare state.

All contributions examine "parenting encounters," encounters that people have in relation to their parenting with a variety of institutional and non-institutional actors. These may be state actors like people in the helping professions or welfare officers, state-funded community organizers or volunteers, but also other parents, family members or, for instance, neighbors. Such parenting encounters can be seen as moments in which various actors negotiate issues of belonging, citizenship, and the role of the family in the shaping of community and society. They are embedded in a landscape of relationality that encompasses complex institutional and social worlds, and are often marked by contradictory welfare rationalities and practices.

These parenting encounters represent dilemmatic spaces (Hoggett et al., 2006) in which professionals and parents figure out what is best for a family, for children, the community, or even society, amidst competing and often paradoxical orders. Parenting encounters thus allow us to chart the affective, practical-cum-ethical concerns, doubts, and deliberations that go into the making of Europe's increasingly diverse societies.

This Introduction draws out the paradoxes at the heart of the parenting encounters we have studied. These paradoxes, we argue, are key to understanding how diversity is negotiated in and through the social domain and the welfare state in Europe. Three interlinked paradoxical orders are particularly prominent. One is concerned with the tension between the universal and difference, the other with the re-articulation of the public and the private, and a third with irreconcilable social

and institutional demands. In the following sections, we elaborate our understanding of and approach to these three paradoxical orders, while introducing the individual articles and their contributions to the special issue. We end this Introduction by returning to the ambiguous, negotiated shaping of diverse European societies in and through complex and often contradictory welfare landscapes.

This discussion is taken further by Nitzan Shoshan in his afterword to the special issue. Shoshan argues that while parenting encounters play out against the background of nationalist resurgences and racist political discourses, they also unfold in a context marked by general demographic fears and public concerns about reproduction and declining fertility rates. He emphasizes that the entanglement of such demographic tropes with debates about migration statistics, and the national futures that they herald, has come to serve as one of the drivers of white supremacism and far right extremism in the global West. Such public and political imaginaries about the dangers of the Other shape the context of welfare work and parenting encounters explored in this special issue. However, as Shoshan also highlights, parenting encounters work in much more complex and contradictory ways, and can be seen as "sites for experimentations in the governance of the social, for perfomances of divergent narratives of citizenship and belonging, and for crafting futurities of social healing in a post-colonial Europe."

Ethnographies of parenting encounters

This special issue consists of a series of ethnographies of parenting encounters. At the institutional level, we examine how the rearing of children is subject to persistent, sometimes mandated, governmental interventions and an elaborate institutional infrastructure: public health, educational and family services assist in the upbringing of children, while simultaneously also serving to monitor families, particularly those considered marginal or problematic. We focus on parents parents with migrant backgrounds, who may well be approached as problematic on various grounds, and who are compelled to engage in a range of encounters on account of their children, from meetings in welfare institutions, schools or neighborhood centers, to encounters with families or neighbors in the home and neighborhood. In this context, we see that parenting presents a dense interface between welfare actors and their target groups where policy worlds intersect, clash, and interweave with a variety of social worlds and their own logics, norms, and allegiances. The focus on this domain thus brings into view the interplay between ethical projects, affective and material investments, and notions of the good (Bear and Mathur, 2015; Mattingly, 2014; Muehlebach, 2012; Robbins, 2013) that institutions, professionals, and parents bring to parenting and child rearing.

The various contributions to this special issue document encounters between migrant parents and professionals in the context of welfare programs that seek to govern

and support families (De Koning and Ruijtenberg, 2022; Johansen, 2022). While the governing of parenting and childhood has been studied as a site for the deployment of the disciplinary state (Faircloth et al., 2013; Gilliam and Gulløv, 2017), in these ethnographies we encounter far more unsure, ambiguous, and paradoxical forms of governance. Oftentimes, state actors are but one of the many parties involved in welfare landscapes, which also include private and nonprofit actors as well as activated citizens. The professionals in our studies have to work through such heterogeneous assemblages to achieve the particular public goods promised by their program or service (Bear and Mathur, 2015). Some of them also understand their parenting interventions as a way to achieve even bigger goals: regenerating the social fabric through relationality (Marchesi, 2022) or improving the working of Republican institutions (Vollebergh, 2022).

This special issue shows us highly ambiguous attempts at governing that are situated at the intersections of institutional and non-institutional worlds. We see actors, professionals and volunteers, as well as parents, straddle conflicting orders and logics, going back and forth between various social and institutional worlds and the demands they impose on them. Parents may be torn between government agendas and conflicting social norms, which may take professional interventions in unexpected directions or challenge the reach of the state (Johansen, 2022). A focus on such encounters thus takes us beyond the study of street-level bureaucrats that highlights discretionary space (Lipsky, 2010), and state governance and its social effects. It, instead, highlights the negotiated, ambiguous, and paradoxical nature of attempts at governing family and social life.

The universal and difference

Many anthropological analyses of contemporary Europe have taken their lead from the highly acrimonious public discourses that spell out racialized visions of national and European society, and articulate a clear national/European self against a range of others, most notably Muslims (Lentin and Titley, 2011; Vertovec, 2011; Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010). Public discourses that outline the nation by explicitly naming its others in ethnic, religious or racialized terms are indeed prevalent in many of the sites that appear in this special issue: Amsterdam (De Koning and Ruijtenberg, 2022), Aarhus (Johansen, 2022) and Milan (Marchesi, 2022). In Paris (Vollebergh, 2022), where the Republican project does not allow for such upfront articulations of difference, policies instead use spatial nomers like "sensitive urban areas" to designate risky subjects and problem areas (Van Breugel and Scholten, 2017).

While such public debates certainly provide the context in which the parenting encounters we study take place, these parenting encounters foreground rather different logics than the clear-cut discursive othering that many have observed. In welfare encounters in the social domain, we see an emphasis on equality, for instance in the forms of universalist or generic approaches, and the professional ethics that derive from such approaches.

The notion of equality inaugurates its own hierarchies and forms of exclusion. As Iris Marion Young (1989) observed, the sign of the universal often allows for the perpetration of less obvious, yet powerful forms of inequity. Numerous authors have pointed to the dark side of an ostensibly progressive and inclusive notion of equality, which has been elaborated as part of the development of liberal democracies in the age of empire (Mehta, 1999; Stoler and Cooper, 1997). They point to the racial hierarchies instituted through the figure of the rational, enlightened subject.

Anthropologists have critically examined the notion of equality as a key concept in the welfare state in the Scandinavian context, where homogeneity—understood as socio-economic and cultural sameness or alikeness—has become the norm, and difference constitutes a threat. In these contexts, vernacular notions of sameness produce a politics of difference, and construction of the nation through a constant invocation of its others (Gullestad, 2002, 2006; Johansen and Jensen, 2017: 301; Olwig and Paerregaard, 2011). Similar critical views have emerged in scholarship on France's Republican approach, which refuses to differentiate among its citizens, while hiding the exclusionary nature of that neutral Republican citizen (Fernando, 2014), as well as its racializing effects (e.g. Stoler, 2011; cf. Epstein, 2011).

Our attention to parenting encounters builds on this literature, but brings a different dynamic into focus. We see how the universalist logic of the welfare state spells out generic forms of citizenship, which by-and-large seem to preclude thinking systematically about diversity and the challenges it may pose to citizenship and belonging. Yet in contexts framed within such universalist language and protocols of citizenship, difference comes back as an insistent subtext to the generic institutional practices. The subtext of difference floats in and out of focus in fluctuating, elusive ways. Where difference resurfaces, it is often deeply politicized, either as unacceptable and dangerous excess, or as an inequality that questions the state's legal and ethical commitments to citizens' equal treatment. In that light, familiar national models—multicultural versus Republican—can be seen to overstate differences between national sites (Bertossi and Duyvendak, 2012). We argue that, instead, the universalism haunted by difference that we document in this special issue might well be a key condition of European welfare states.

Anouk de Koning and Wiebe Ruijtenberg discuss the interplay between universalist ethics and the specter of difference in their analysis of parenting encounters in Amsterdam. They argue that a Marshallian sense of social citizenship, particularly concerning the care of the state vis-à-vis its citizens, is central to parenting encounters between Egyptian migrant parents and youth care professionals in Amsterdam. Generic policies and a humanist ethics infuse the work of professionals. Ostensible assumptions of the universal, the generic, and equality that structure parenting encounters in this context are punctuated by incidents, evaluations, and doubts through which difference and inequality resurface. This happens in inconsistent and often elusive ways, with ethnic background/race being simultaneously present and absent. This absent presence (M'charek et al., 2014) can be seen in professional discussions of client families, or in professional resistance to

imposing Dutch norms against the background of the persistent, yet unacknowledged whiteness of the institution.

While this absent presence of "difference" and the racialized dynamics of encounters are largely unacknowledged by professionals, they are key to the way parents understand professionals' practices. In line with Young's argument, parents sense that the supposedly universal and equal treatment actually produces inequality and discrimination. They worry about possible unequal treatment and racist evaluations and practices, and discuss such possibilities at length with other parents. They avoid, however, addressing their fears of discrimination directly with state actors. In the Dutch context, charges of racism present a most egregious moral accusation, one that parents fear will damage their relationship with these actors, and ultimately worsen their children's situation.

In other situations, like in Mette-Louise Johansen's study in Denmark, expectations of unequal and punitive treatment are so habitual and built into the relationship between immigrant parents and institutions that it becomes an unspoken condition upon which both parties base their actions. In her analysis of parenting encounters between Palestinian parents and welfare workers in Denmark, Johansen argues that the potential of punitive action and harm entwines with immigrant parents' prolonged experiences of crisis and determines their ways of seeing and being as parents, including how they relate to people in their closest social and institutional surroundings.

Such "universal" approaches are punctuated by sings of unassimilable, troubling otherness. This may be in the form of recurring tropes like smacking in the Amsterdam case (De Koning and Ruijtenberg, 2022), delinquency in the Aarhus case (Johansen, 2022), or the so-called *communautarist* identifications and socialities in Paris (Vollebergh, 2022). Such tropes function as icons of troublesome difference in these contexts. Rather than assuming that these manifestations of difference impact the understanding and practices of welfare actors in a straightforward way, our case studies draw attention to the conditions for such icons to be activated in parenting encounters, and to how and when they come to frame the way professionals perceive their cases.

The discussion groups in impoverished parts of Paris studied by Anick Vollebergh take up the failure of the universal promises of the Republic. These groups are founded in the hope to amplify the collective voice of marginalized parents and affect institutional change. However, they also reproduce certain normative Republican prescriptions for civic life. Vollebergh argues that they do so by "trying to craft the group as a public sphere that is 'neutral' because it is properly mixed, and where citizens deliberate with one another, not as communities, but as individuals capable of transcending their private differences and interests." By way of such civic language and goals, these projects institute a racialized, gendered, and classed division of labor in mending the Republic by changing exclusionary institutions. Like De Koning and Ruijtenberg, Vollebergh's contribution shows that the seemingly neutral notion of the "citizen" that is inherent in the logic of

universalism, institutes forms of hierarchy and inclusion and exclusion. It, however, also carries the seed for contestations of the norm, especially with regard to rights, and ideas about what and who constitutes the national "we" (Fortier, 2008: 4) and "our" way of life and upbringing (Johansen and Jensen, 2017).

The public and the private

A second paradoxical order concerns the public and the private. Following Gal (2002), we may understand public and private not as distinct domains, but as co-constitutive oppositions that receive their meaning from contextually meaningful distinctions. These terms may be used to make such distinctions in a wide range of domains, for instance between public as state and private as market in the case of service delivery, or between a public realm of the social and private realm of the family. In all such domains, public and private are the product and object of intense boundary work (Thelen et al., 2018).

Our ethnographies document an insistent reworking of boundaries of private and public, which includes their deliberate blurring, in attempts to govern parenting at the intersection between state and family. Most of this blurring comes about in the context of attempts to create an intimate state presence, with state actors endeavoring to create close, horizontal relations with their clients in order to achieve more democratic forms of service delivery that are also able to "empower" and "activate" clients. Paradoxically, such an intimate state presence is often realized through a denial of stateness on the part of these state or semi-state actors (cf. Vollebergh et al., 2021).

One manifestation of this re-articulation of private and public is in the type of relations professionals seek to establish. Professionals and volunteers work by creating affective ties that will generate rapport and bind a particular public to their services. These ties are often woven out of personal stories related to parenting, and may be fostered by socializing with clients and their families. Through these personal interactions and narratives, they build intimacy that often crosses into private domains and sentiments, while they seek to assert a role for the public in their clients' lives. Such affective labor is a crucial means for professionals working in the non-profit organization studied by Milena Marchesi in Milan. As Marchesi argues, the affective labor that is key to how professionals interact with participants can easily be mistaken for dis-interested friendship, and the professional for a peer. Moreover, such welfare relationships can, at times, become as binding for professionals as for the mothers they wish to involve.

This also becomes evident in the case of the association professionals in Paris followed by Anick Vollebergh. For these professionals, a receptive, warm attitude is both a goal in itself, in order to provide an opportunity for otherwise marginalized people to speak up and be heard, and a way to draw people into their programs. Such intimate parenting encounters foreground the personal/non-institutional body of frontline workers, professionals, and volunteers, over the

professional body that takes center stage in more formal state encounters (Dubois, 2010).

This re-articulation of the private and public is furthered by the affective labor of migrant parents, as Johansen and De Koning and Ruijtenberg have found. The Palestinian migrant mothers in Aarhus, Denmark, with whom Johansen worked, seek to meet professionals' notions and requirements of "good moms" in order to gain institutional trust and to manage professionals' involvement in their families. Similarly, the Egyptian parents in Amsterdam with whom Ruijtenberg worked seek to compel professionals to treat their children fairly. To do so, they try to create intimate ties, without disclosing family dynamics that can trigger more coercive state involvement. In both cases, parents ultimately try to manage the role of public services within their private lives.

The private and public are also rearticulated in a spatial sense. Marchesi discusses how, in Milan, policies have put forward the concept of "relational welfare" as a way to regenerate welfare through the revitalization of community in times of austerity. Relational welfare focuses on facilitating social relations and networks with the ambition that they will become a resource to its participants. Programs informed by this relational logic, Marchesi shows, hinge on the creation of intimate publics: spaces that are public, yet retain some of the closeness and intimacy that is imagined to characterize the home. This is meant to draw women out of what is imagined as the limiting privacy of their homes into a homey public.

Vollebergh also documents the importance of such safe, in-between spaces, where public life can be practiced. In her case, professionals' goal is not to create an alternative to state welfare, as in the relational welfare programs described by Marchesi, but for marginalized parents to learn how to speak out as citizens and take up a more assertive position vis-à-vis public institutions. Vollebergh shows that the function that professionals imagine discussion groups to have is that of a "social transistor," intended to activate and recover the voice of marginalized parents and amplify it in order to be heard in the public sphere, so as to reconstitute assumedly "muted" mothers into "participative citizens."

Johansen's case similarly involves the regulation of clients' public and private presence. Interventions against delinquency and youth crime in Aarhus involve the direct regulation of children's whereabouts between private homes and public spaces in so-called high-risk urban neighborhoods, drawing on spatialized notions of safety. These interventions move the state close to the private routines of everyday family life by imposing professional agendas on gendered spatial practices. Attempts are made to pull young male adolescents away from the streets and into the family home and to pull female adolescents out of the house and into the public.

What we see across these sites is work that often takes place at the boundaries of public and private. This work thereby reconfigures these terms in practice, and creates peculiar forms of intimacy that defy such distinctions. This interweaving of public and private requires constant affective labor. This is most obviously so in attempts at making the public seem human, close-by, relatable. Such efforts at

creating a near-by, relatable state presence also personalizes the state, with very real effects for the provision of services. Affective labor is thus key to the transforming modulations of public and private in the governing of the social (Vollebergh et al., 2021).

This reworking of public and private draws on gendered, raced, and classed understandings of social life. We see such readings at work, for instance, in attempts to draw migrant, Muslim women out of their homes in Milan, or in the attempts to regulate the movements of Palestinian youths through their mothers in Aarhus. The spatial reconfigurations and ambiguous in-between spaces that we document are based on, and perpetuate, racialized and gendered connections between particular types of people and particular spatial domains, aiming to nudge some into the civic public spheres, while trying to anchor others in the private space of the home.

Irreconcilable social and institutional demands

A third paradox that characterizes the governance of the social is produced in the meeting between governmental framings, goals and demands, and the understandings, aims and social allegiances of their target groups. In all cases and sites discussed in this special issue, professionals hope to enroll citizens into their work and objectives, to create horizontal relations with their publics or clients, and to facilitate a collaborative search for solutions, rather than imposing answers. Against the background of a longstanding critique of authoritarian professionals, and in the context of attempts to activate and responsibilize citizens (Newman and Tonkens, 2011), a more disciplining and hierarchical professional presence has come to be seen as undesirable on ethical and political accounts.

The stress on horizontal relations also reflects more pragmatic considerations: without a modicum of consent, welfare interventions cannot work. Yet, welfare programs also seek to secure particular outcomes, on which, in turn, continued financing often depends. The contradictory desires to employ collaborative models and reach particular outcomes inevitably produce considerable friction. Such wills to empower (Cruikshank, 1999) do not produce clear-cut effects and are not simply able to direct social life. They require the intense affective labor that we discussed above, and create a tentative, entangled state presence.

While collaborative models have become standard to many welfare services, the contributions to this special issue illustrate the diversity of contexts in which they are applied and the different uses to which they are put. As De Koning and Ruijtenberg note with respect to the Amsterdam case, collaborative models and protocols, while prescribing horizontal professional–client relations and foregrounding the client's perspective, may also work to obfuscate contrasting viewpoints and opinions and hide power differentials in such relations. In cases where welfare services can command concrete benefits and sanctions, as is the case with welfare professionals in Amsterdam and Aarhus, horizontal collaboration is inevitably shadowed by the all-to-real powers that these professionals can unleash. In the

Milan and Paris cases, where such benefits and sanctions are largely absent, power works rather differently in and through relations between professionals and their publics. In programs situated at the margins of the welfare state, with limited means and disciplinary power, affective labor takes on a far more crucial role in ensuring particular results.

The work of professionals in the supposedly private domain of family life embeds these actors in complex social worlds with diverging and often contradictory social norms and ideologies. A third paradoxical order thus emerges when state injunctions intersect with other, often conflicting, demands in parents' social environments, which includes other norms and allegiances in local communities and family life-worlds. The complex social worlds of parents and families introduce an irreducible plurality of social norms into parenting encounters. This plurality produces recurrent quandaries without solution for professionals, but even more so for parents.

Johansen's contribution in particular illustrates what irreconcilable demands mean for the actors involved. As she argues, state injunctions may produce insistent social and moral double-binds and a continual sense of impending crisis for parents. Knowing that they will invariably fail some of the expectations and moral demands placed on them, these parents have to weigh the consequences of such failure. By invoking the importance of the migrant community and significant others in the life of parents, Johansen shows that the lived experience of marginality is produced at the intersection between competing norms and allegiances.

Welfare professionals may be unaware of the social context toward which parents are oriented and of the competing demands they must negotiate. As a result, professionals may assume that institutional goals can be easily adopted by the families with whom they work. As both Johansen and De Koning and Ruijtenberg show, parents rarely let professionals in on their uncertainties and negative expectations toward them, yet these uncertainties and fears are productive of how they approach the services on offer. Johansen's paper demonstrates how, in a similar way, parents may be excluded from knowledge about the broader aims and objectives of professionals' interventions into the family's affairs.

Both professionals and parents find themselves straddling diverging social norms as they navigate conflicting institutional and social realities. At this interface, a variety of normative registers and logics are taken up and produce unexpected outcomes. State injunctions are filtered through concrete local interactions, as well as through other social orders and interfaces, like that of the family, the community or friends. Welfare professionals meet and negotiate with individual clients in the context of their social worlds, and they are—directly or indirectly—confronted with persistent predicaments, logics, and allegiances that can hardly be reconciled with state interventions or demands. In this respect, the encounter itself becomes a potential space for multi-directionality, change and transformation, and a driver in the reconfiguration of the governmental domain of the social.

Such moral pluralism is also part and parcel of the bureaucratic system itself, as well as of the landscape of volunteers, civil associations, and semi-state

organizations that engage in welfare programs, as Vollebergh's analysis of the critical, anti-institutional goals of the Parisian parenting programs makes amply clear. Policies, action plans, legislation, and local doctrines work as ethical, economic, and political tropes that do not necessarily make sense when brought together (Vohnsen, 2018). When navigating complex systems, such as health care, security or the civil services, the actual practices, negotiations, and ethical decision-making of welfare professionals, policy-makers, and administrative managers are often marked by moral pluralism (Johansen, 2018; Li, 2007; Rapport, 2009; Shore and Wright, 1997). Thus, both professionals and parents are left with conflicting propositions (Sweder, 2016: 11) and in a condition of incompletion, irresolution or inconsistency in the negotiation over, and practices of, citizenship and the welfare state.

Conclusion

This special issue examines how Europe's diverse societies are shaped on the ground, in encounters in which all parties, parents, community and state actors, are deeply invested. These encounters take place in the context of heated, often racialized debates about the fate of European societies in light of migration and growing ethnoracial and cultural diversity. They, however, show us a more complex dynamic than the rhetoric of nationalist othering that has dominated public debates, and an ethical conversation different from the one articulated around allegiance to what are propped up to be European values of gender equality and secularity. The ethnographies in this special issue instead show unstable, frictional assemblages as characteristic of the governance of Europe's diverse societies.

Two of the main and most heated issues in Western Europe intersect in the welfare programs, practices, and encounters examined in the various contributions: the reconfiguration of the welfare state, and the growing diversification of the population. While these two developments intersect in formations of the public, citizenship, and the state, they are hard to think together, not only for policy officials and practitioners, but also for academics who often foreground one of these dimensions at the expense of the other (e.g. Muehlebach, 2012 or Fernando, 2014). This is due to the clashing logics of these developments: whereas one is founded on notions of the neutral citizen, the other prioritizes difference and defines its target through a culturalized and racialized logic.

The contributions to this special issue show that we cannot collapse transformations in European welfare states and the diversifying of their publics, but rather have to trace how they articulate in varied ways in different national and institutional sites. What we encounter in the governance of (migrant) parenting in our various European sites are unstable combinations of generic protocols and universalist ambitions with racialized understandings of the citizen and fears of difference that cannot be accommodated. We also see parents strategizing in their dealing with a welfare state that holds out promises of care, social mobility, and dignity, but that they fear will fall short of these commitments. While parents hold

on to these promises, they also expect that same welfare state to reproduce inequality or even become a punitive presence in their lives. In these settings, the desire for a welfare state is not questioned (see also Jöhncke, 2011). Rather, we see how welfare actors and parents alike work to enhance, change, cope with or navigate the various contradictions they experience within its framework.

This type of governance involves many actors beyond the state, including activated citizens and the parents themselves. It is done at the intersection of public and private, and seeks to interweave and rework both in an attempt to provide more intimate and more effective governance, especially with respect to marginal families at a remove from state institutions. The professionals employed in these programs invest heavily in relationality with their publics to realize that intimate interweaving of private and public. Parents, in turn, expend considerable effort in navigating these intimate relationalities in order to control intrusions into, and impact on their family life and relationships.

This special issue sets out the complex and compelling entanglements between professionals and parents, welfare states and their various publics that such intimate programs create. These entanglements are all the more volatile because of the meeting of irreconcilable demands and allegiances in parenting encounters that are supposedly no longer hierarchical. Parenting encounters take place on unstable ground, pulled between the desire to collaborate on an equal basis and a desire to reach particular results, while parents ponder how to deal with the clash between state injunctions and the demands and ethical imperatives of various significant others in their social worlds. In their pursuit of good lives, the parents, professionals, and volunteers who feature in our ethnographies thus navigate dilemmatic spaces and negotiate deeply paradoxical orders.

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