

# The politics of emotion in a parenting support programme for refugees in Norway

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## Introduction

Enhancing social skills among citizens who are considered at risk is one of the ways in which a welfare state handles marginalised groups (Prieur et al., 2019). Universalised programmes represent a common way of strengthening the social capabilities of groups deemed in need of such skills (i.e. Pettersvold & Østrem, 2019). In this article, we show that emotions perform a political role in such programmes, as they provide participants with signals as to the social practices that should be followed in their specific context.

To substantiate our point, we present a study of the role of emotions in a universalised programme called the International Child Development Programme (ICDP). The data we analyse are taken from observations of interactions between ICDP mentors and a group of Syrian parents attending ICDP training sessions in a medium-sized Norwegian municipality. The ICDP is a standardised programme aimed at strengthening parenting capacities. The programme emphasises that parents need to be emotionally competent, caring, and socially skilled enough to help their children develop self-confidence, a 'natural' emotional life, enhanced social skills, and an ability to handle difficulties in life (Rambøll 2020, p. 3). The ICDP targets all parents but is specifically recommended for parents who are considered vulnerable. The Norwegian government assumes that parents in families with migration experiences might face specific challenges that affect children's development, and that it is therefore important to offer them parenting support (Barne- og likestillingsdepartementet 2018, p. 11).

Norway's new law on integration states that all newly arrived immigrants shall be offered training to enhance their parenting skills (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2020, par. 1, 2).<sup>1</sup> This means that most refugees coming to Norway will participate in the ICDP.<sup>2</sup> The inclusion of mandatory parenting training as part of the introduction programme for newly arrived migrants underscores how this specific group is understood as being specifically in need of this type of skill (Levernes Solberg 2020, p. 8; Kunnskapsdepartementet 2020, p. 2).

We use Candace Clark's (1990, 2007) theoretical lens to establish how emotions underline political values in ICDP training sessions. Clark (1990) posits that emotions serve as 'place claims'. Place claims are messages about where we want to stand, and they are signals about the position we want to have in a relationship of two or more parties. Place claims involving emotions mean that we signal where we stand through displaying or withholding emotions (Clark 1990, p. 305). In our study we looked for emotional place claims by determining how mentors responded emotionally to the participants. We discuss these findings using Clark's theory that emotional responses can be place claims, aiming at

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<sup>1</sup> All immigrants shall receive life-skills training, and parents shall undergo training in parenting skills in addition to this (pkt 1, 2).

<sup>2</sup> In a mapping carried out by the Norwegian Ministry of Children and Families, the most commonly offered parenting support programme is the ICDP (Rambøll 2020, p. 2).

signaling the position the sender wants to take in a relationship. We show how ICDP mentors in charge of the training use positive other-emotions, withhold other-emotions, use sympathy, and argue that these can be seen as place claims (Clark 2007, pp. 6, 8). We suggest that the emotional responses of mentors place them in a position of superiority over the attending refugee parents, and suggest that through these signals they are holders of valuable knowledge about parenting. Through emotional place claims, the mentors underline that the refugees are invited to take part in ICDP values, but they also signal when the parents are deviating from the intentions of the programme.

Ahmed's (2014) theoretical perspectives on the cultural politics of emotion shed light on the political context of integration in which the trainings take place. Rather than viewing emotions as emanating from within, Ahmed makes a case for seeing emotions as coming from without and moving inward (Ahmed, 2014, p. p.9). In our study, seeing emotions as 'political' means that we explore how emotional responses by mentors towards participants can be understood as promoting and encouraging commitment to the political ideas of the ICDP programme.

## The ICDP

A comprehensive introduction to the ICDP is found in the handbook for ICDP supervisors, published by the Directorate for Children, Youth, and Family Affairs<sup>3</sup> (Barne-, Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet, 2016). The ICDP builds on developmental and cultural psychology and aims at strengthening the conditions for the upbringing of children through the supervision of their caregivers (Barne-, Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet 2016, p.15; Bråten and Sønsterudbråten 2017, p.7).

The ICDP model emerged from a friendship between psychology professors Henning Rye and Karsten Hundeide in the 1960s. They were preoccupied with attachment theories proposed by John Bowlby and drew upon research from developmental psychology. Rye and Hundeide developed what they called in the early days a psychosocial intervention programme (Barne-, Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet 2016, p. 12). The programme was tested in Norway and later in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Today, the ICDP is implemented in more than 30 countries worldwide (Barne-, Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet 2016, p. 12).

The default setup of the ICDP consists of eight sessions, but for minority groups, a specific extended version consisting of ten to twelve sessions is recommended. In this version, two certified mentors work together, with one mentor representing the majority group in Norway and the other being fluent in the minority language of the participants (Bråten and Sønsterudbråten 2017, p. 7). In the sessions, the participants are expected to reflect on their roles as parents (Bråten and Sønsterudbråten 2017, p. 7). Even though the parents draw upon their own experiences, the ICDP still presents ideal ways in which caretakers should relate to their children. The ICDP presents three types of dialogue aimed at strengthening the development of the child. *Emotional dialogue* is the basis for a good parent-child relationship. *Meaning-making dialogue* describes interactions in which the caretaker supports the cognitive and moral development of the child. *Regulative dialogue* allows the caretaker to engage in positive boundary making and the strengthening of the child's self-regulation (Bråten and Sønsterudbråten 2017, p. 8). The ICDP values are presented through an elaborate framework of components often referred to as 'the house' (Barne-, Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet 2016, p. 53). The house symbolises the child (Barne-, Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet 2016, p. 18). The basement of the house is emotional dialogue, and this topic is covered in the first four sessions (Barne-, Ungdoms

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<sup>3</sup> This directorate is placed under the Ministry of Children and Families and is a state organisational body that offers expertise within the fields of child protection, children, upbringing, adoption, violence in close relationships, and equality ([https://bufdir.no/Kontakt/Om\\_Bufdir\\_og\\_Bufetat/Om\\_Bufdir/](https://bufdir.no/Kontakt/Om_Bufdir_og_Bufetat/Om_Bufdir/)).

og Familiedirektoratet 2016, p. 60). The floors of the house symbolise meaning-making and expanding dialogues. The roof of the house represents regulative dialogue, in which boundaries can be set and situations contained.. In the analysis below, references to ‘the house’ and ‘the roof’ are made by both mentors and participants during the ICDP training.

Research studies on the effectiveness of the ICDP have, in different ways, underlined the usefulness of the ICDP for parents and its positive effects on parent-child relations (i.e. Clucas et al. 2014; Hundeide and Armstrong 2011; Solheim Skar et al. 2015). This research has, however, been criticised for being imbalanced as it evaluates the effectiveness of ICDP without asking critical questions (Sundsbo 2018, p. 433). Some more critical studies have been conducted by social scientists and we will mention two that shed light on the values that are proffered when refugee parents attend a universalised programme like the ICDP.

In Erstad’s (2015) study of how Pakistani mothers experience ICDP training, she found that they are seen by mentors as lacking something and being in need of training. Erstad states that ICDP mentors are ‘imbued’ with national integration ideals, and they see the collectively oriented parenting culture that the Pakistani mothers represent as something less civilised (Erstad 2015, p. 170). This suggests that even though the ICDP is supposed to be dialogue-based and a forum in which participants activate their own experiences, the programme still builds on an established set of values of what good parenting entails. We align with this as we assume that ICDP is not neutral but political and that the programme proffers specific ideals of parenting.

In a study conducted by Bråten and Sønsterudbråten on the ICDP as a tool for parents of children at risk of being radicalised, the authors suggest that even though participation in the training was supposed to be voluntary, the participants might have felt obligated to attend. As many of the parents were new to the Norwegian context and had information that Child Protection Services (CPS) might intervene if they saw that families were dysfunctional, they might have felt an obligation to attend the ICDP to appease CPS (Bråten and Sønsterudbråten 2017, p. 20). The sense of obligation to attend a programme with an expectation to share emotions, accentuates the importance of studying how emotional responses underline political values in ICDP.

### The politics of emotion as an analytical lens on the ICDP

Current literature reveals an increasing focus on the emotional aspects of migration and integration. Emotions amplify sentiments of belonging or being a foreigner, and emotional constellations underline the thickness of boundaries between the foreigner and the native and between majority and minority populations (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015, p. 77). Several studies highlight the vital role emotions play when welfare practitioners work to integrate refugees into a new national context (i.e. Eggebø, 2013; Graham, 2002; Moldenhawer, 2017). We contribute to that conversation by investigating the political dimensions of emotion during a universalised, mandatory training programme.

As mentioned initially, Clark’s (1990) theory on the micropolitics of emotion and her theory (2007) of the role of sympathy will be applied to understand why mentors respond emotionally to participants in the way that they do. Clark (1990) argues that emotions serve as ‘place claims’, meaning that we send messages to others about where we stand (Clark 1990, p. 305). When Clark outlines ‘place’ as a micro-level position, she means that place is not fixed but rather situational, overlapping, and changeable (Clark 1990, p. 306). Understanding the places of oneself and others involves continuous self-evaluation and the evoking of feelings (Clark 1990, p. 308). It also involves continuous cues interpreted by the involved parties (Clark 1990, p. 316). Humiliation, shame, gratitude and admiration help people to know and feel their place in interpersonal encounters. Emotions are not only place

markers, but they can also be used as place *claims*. Actors might negotiate their places and try to ‘move up’—or sometimes down—through emotional place markers (Clark 1990, p. 314).

Clark describes five techniques through which an actor might trigger the emotional place markers of others to ‘assert, maintain, usurp, upset or deny a social placement’ (Clark 1990, p. 305). The first technique entails displaying negative other-emotions such as disgust, hate, impatience, or doubt towards the other person. This is done to comment on the other person’s negative attributes, signalling that they are of less value than the person displaying the negative emotion (Clark 1990, p. 317). The second strategy is expressing positive other-emotions to indicate our own inferiority or equality (Clark 1990, p. 320). This positive strategy aims at gaining acceptance from others through displaying admiration, liking, or love. The third strategy entails controlling the balance of emotional energy (Clark 1990, p. 321). This means evoking emotions in others while displaying superior, more contained ‘self-emotions’. This can be understood as the ‘principle of the least interest, in which the lack of emotional display or response puts one in a superior position’ (Clark 1990, p. 322). The fourth strategy is eliciting obligation through giving and taking in everyday interactions. This creates a system in which participants feel that they owe each other gifts, emotions, time and energy. The fifth strategy is of particular interest to our analysis, as it entails expressing positive other-emotions to establish one’s own superiority (Clark 1990, p. 325).

Clark (2007) argues that sympathy is a crucial emotion that provides glue for social bonds and therefore is one of the most important emotions to understand as it creates connections between people (Clark 2007, p. 5). Sympathy connects people asymmetrically, as there is a giver of sympathy and a receiver (Clark 1990, p. 21). As such, the giving and receiving of sympathy becomes a part of the micropolitical emotional economy understood as behaviour aimed at getting, keeping, and sometimes giving up interpersonal power (Clark 2007, p. 233).

To understand how the micropolitical strategies of emotions in the ICDP context can be linked to the larger emotional-political context of integration, we have found Ahmed’s (2014) theory on the cultural politics of emotion useful. Ahmed emphasizes that emotions are created in response to the social contexts around us. Rather than seeing emotions as emanating from within, with more or less individual and physical signs, she makes the case that they ‘come from without and move inward’ (Ahmed 2014, p. 9).

Emotions have, according to Ahmed, an ontological flare; they move us, and they therefore also give us directions in terms of what is possible and what holds us in place (2014, p. 11). If emotions orient how we perceive others, they might simultaneously enforce social structures and political values and help to preserve and, at times, challenge social boundaries that exist between groups. Ahmed suggests that emotions demarcate boundaries between those who are on the inside and those who are on the outside (2014, p. 10).

Ahmed argues in favour of investigating how emotions are produced and what values they uphold (2014, p. 11). Her theoretical perspectives provide a basis for an empirical analysis tracing how emotions are political in that they construct and maintain social boundaries. We will, in what follows, show how positive emotions are used to both accommodate and discipline the refugees with regard to the accepted Norwegian values for parenting transmitted through the ICDP logic and framework.

## Methodology

As part of a larger study of refugees' encounters with Norwegian kindergartens<sup>4</sup>, we were performing observational studies in a kindergarten with mainly refugee children. During our time there, the preschool teachers often referred to, praised, and spoke warmly of ICDP courses. We instantly became curious, and we asked the teachers why they thought the programme was so wonderful and beneficial for the parents. In response, we were given a handbook and invited to join the training sessions as researchers.

The group we were invited to follow consisted of ten individuals who were all newly arrived Syrian refugees. Before we started attending the sessions, the participants were asked if we could conduct research on the group. They were well informed of the possibility of withdrawing from the study at any time.<sup>5</sup> The attendees were invited as couples, but in many instances, one of the partners was hindered from attending. The age of the participants spanned from mid-twenties to mid-forties. Not all of them attended all the sessions. The group was led by two mentors, one who communicated in the Norwegian mother tongue and one who spoke both Arabic and Norwegian.

We followed five of the sessions. During these sessions, we sat at the end of the table, which was set up as a horseshoe. Often, there would be rounds of questions, and at times, we were involved to share our parenting experiences in relation to the questions asked. We took verbatim notes of the dialogues that took place among the participants. Participants spoke in Arabic, and what they said was translated into Norwegian by the minority language mentor. We noted our observations of the bodily expressions of the mentors<sup>6</sup> and participants and gave the parents pseudonyms in our notes to ensure anonymity.

After each training session, the two mentors held a debriefing session, which we were invited to join. In these sessions, we asked some questions and noted down their reflections. These sessions were specifically meaningful and valuable to our upcoming analysis. In addition to data from these sessions and debriefings, we followed a full-day seminar with trainers, who were discussing their ICDP experiences.

We draw upon various empirical sources as we describe the performativity of emotions in the ICDP context. Emotions might have more or less obvious physical signs, such as a high pulse rate and sweaty palms (Poder 2009, p. 331). As we did not have access to these physiological data, other than through observations in group sessions, we studied visible physical and verbal signs of emotion, such as smiles, tears, laughter, and what could be called 'strictness'<sup>7</sup>—meaning that smiles are replaced by a high voice and more assertive body language. There are also verbal signs of emotion, such as expressions of sympathy. We assume, like Poder, that emotions are states that link events to what is of concern to the people who are experiencing them and that they work as evaluative signals that help us and others orient ourselves to what is at stake in the interaction (Poder 2009, p. 331).

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<sup>4</sup> Granted by Aust Agder Kompetansefond.

<sup>5</sup> The project forms part of a larger project aimed at understanding how refugee children and their parents are accommodated to Norwegian society and has been assessed as in accordance with national ethical guidelines by The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). We recognize, however, that the participants might have had difficulties expressing reluctance to participate in the study given the mandatory nature of the training. To address this, we reiterated several times during the training that we were not ICDP staff and that participation was voluntary. We also provided them with our e-mail address in case they wanted to contact us about withdrawing without the knowledge of the mentors.

<sup>6</sup> See previous point on how minority sessions of ICDP are organized.

<sup>7</sup> Strictness is similar to what Ahmed calls 'hardness'. She states that hardness is not the absence of emotion, rather it represents an emotional orientation towards others (Ahmed, 2014, p. 4).

There is an obvious limitation to our access to data, as we relied on the minority mentors' translations of what the parents said. The minority mentor plays a double role as mentor and translator, which might have affected how she chose to translate what the participants said. In that sense, the minority mentor might have taken on a role between being a translator and an interpreter. Interpreting can pose a threat to internal validity (Storey and Leslie 2003, p. 133). However, Kapborg and Berterö note that it is helpful if the interpreter not only has the necessary linguistic skills but also is trained in the research field. They also claim that internal validity is strengthened if the interpreter is part of the culture in question (Kapborg and Berterö 2002, p. 56). In light of this, the use of a mentor as an interpreter, with her deep knowledge of the language and culture of the participants as well as the ICDP logic, could have contributed to rich data from the sessions.

We applied a thematic analysis of the material inspired by Ryan and Bernhard (2003). During our analysis we looked for repetitions, similarities and differences, transitions, and theory-related material (Ryan and Bernhard 2003, pp. 89–94). When identifying repetitions, we first noted that emotions were repeatedly visible in the interactions between mentors and participants (Ryan & Bernhard, 2003, p. p 89).<sup>8</sup> As we looked for similarities, we started comparing these instances of emotional responses with each other. We found that the mentors displayed positive other-emotions to welcome the participants to ICDP and to confirm the participants' inputs when they were in line with ICDP. However, the emotional expression of the mentors was different in situations where participants seemed to deviate from the ICDP agenda. This suggests that emotions can be seen as political in that they underline the values of ICDP. During our analysis we also systematically looked for transitions. Transitions are "naturally occurring shifts in content" (Ryan & Bernhard, 2003, p. 90). We found such transitions when mentors changed their emotional response from positivity to a more strict attitude. This finding suggests that emotions are used differently as a response to different situations during the training, and we use this finding to emphasise our point that emotions underline the political values of ICDP.

Our analytical strategy also allowed for identifying theory-related material. We applied Ahmed's (2014) theory on the cultural politics of emotions as well as Clark's (1990, 2007) thinking on emotions as micropolitical place claims. This allowed us to make sense of emotional interactions as expressions of political values. In this paper we have chosen some of the interactions which were repeated in the data, and which illustrate the themes that we found through our thematic analysis.

### Positive other-emotions as micropolitical place claims

In this section, we suggest that the ICDP mentors use positive other-emotions to signal equality (Clark 1990, p. 320). We propose that they do this in an attempt to invite refugees into the ICDP training as equals. The ICDP is based on the idea that all parents come with resources and that the ICDP is a place of dialogue where these experiences can be shared (Barne-, Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet 2016, p. 16). This display will, as we shall later see, be replaced by other forms of emotional place claims as other situations arise throughout the training. At the beginning of the training sessions, however, positive emotions are abundant, and refugees are cordially invited to take part in the ICDP.

When the participants first arrived at the ICDP training venue, a classroom in an old school building, the door was closed and locked as the mentors were making the room ready. Some participants tried to open the door carefully but withdrew when they realised that the door was locked, even though there were voices inside. The mentors placed the tables and chairs in a horseshoe and set the table

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<sup>8</sup> Here they refer to Guba (1979, p. 53)

with tea and cookies. In most sessions, they played Syrian music and showed a picture on the screen on the wall of the artist who was singing. Then one of the mentors opened the door and let the whole group in at once. They were greeted with smiles and handshakes. The mentors asked participants how they were and said they were happy to see them. The participants would often smile and nod towards the Syrian singer as a sign of recognition and an acknowledgement to the organisers who had chosen a singer from their country of origin to welcome them.

This is an extract from our fieldnotes that shows how staging the room, sharing greetings, participating in small talk, and performing gestures play an active role in creating positive emotions:

One couple enters the classroom. The mother greets the mentor with one kiss on both cheeks. She smiles and immediately looks at the table and points to the seat where her name is written. 'Yes, here is your seat, as last time', says the mentor, and continues, 'How is Asif<sup>9</sup> doing?' 'He is better. He has asthma, so the cold is hard for him. His father has asthma too', the mother says and points at the father who has served himself with a couple of cookies and is about to take a seat. He smiles at them both and nods, waving a cookie in the air. They laugh, and the mentor confirms: 'Yes, asthma is hereditary.'

The mentor greeted the young couple with smiles and kisses as they entered the room. The written name of the participants glued to the table made it clear that they were expected, carefully prepared for. The small conversations established a common goal and community, and humorous gestures, like the father waving the cookie, created a mild and happy atmosphere.

After the parents were seated around the table and the mentors placed themselves at the end, the presentation of the ICDP theme of the day commenced. At first, the mentors initiated a round-table session in which the participants told the mentors how they tried to solve their homework. Here also, we as observers were struck by the positivity, the smiling, and the laughter. Here is one example in which the mentor acknowledged one of the inputs from one of the parents:

Mentor: That is a very good way of taking the child's perspective. (She has a mild voice and smiles and nods as she is talking; the mother smiles back at her.)

All through the round-table session, the mentors acknowledged and recognised the parents with words, a mild tone of voice, and gestures such as nodding and smiling. They were praised for working on their relationships with their children.

We suggest that the display of positive emotions from the mentors can be seen as a place marker inducing equality (Clark 1990, p. 320). The mentors, by displaying signs of positive emotions towards the participants, introduced the ICDP as a setting where all are equal. This is in line with the dialogical ideal of the ICDP, in which the training is supposed to be conducted as a conversation in which all perspectives and experiences are welcome (Barne-, Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet 2016, p. 16). However, a point worth noting is that even though the aim of the mentors might be to induce equality, the mentors still have the right to assess the parenting style of the participant. So, even though equality might be the intention of this emotional place claim, inequality between participants can occur as the mentors are in the position to judge whether the inputs from the participants are worthy of praise.

The positive atmosphere that greeted the ICDP participants can also be read as a part of a positive psychology regime, in which happiness is taken as a sign that one is on the right track. When the participants entered the ICDP room, there was a strong demand to respond in the same manner, with

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<sup>9</sup> The name has been changed in order to protect anonymity.

positivity, smiles, and happy greetings. Ahmed refers to Carr as she posits that positive emotions tell us that something good is happening—and that being happy is closely associated with being privileged (Ahmed, 2010, p. pp.10-11). Mastering the methods of ICDP, into which the parents are invited, can indeed be aligned with positions of privilege.

Joanne Warner points out that middle-class respectability, including a willingness to manage and regulate emotional expressions, might be a gold standard towards which other forms of parenting are assessed. Drawing upon other studies<sup>10</sup>, she claims that middle-class respectability is constructed in relation to other class identities, and on the basis of rejection of other class practices (Warner, 2015, p. 94). According to Warner, a society-wide anxiety about parenting and childhood has paved the way for the the middle-class way of parenting, because middle-class parents, who are willing to self-regulate and contain their own emotions when parenting, are considered less risky and hence politically acceptable (Warner 2015, p. 17, 104).

### Controlling the balance of emotional energy as micropolitical place claim

In this section, we suggest that the mentors balance the emotional energy as a place claim during the ICDP trainings (Clark, 1990, p. 321). We suggest that they do this when the participants deviate from the original logic or plan of the training, and we propose that this is a micropolitical act which places the mentors, and thereby the ICDP principles, in a position of authority. This place claim is used when someone evokes another person's emotion while controlling their own. It can be read as a sign of superior self-emotions (Clark, 1990, p. 322). The mentors do not, however, seem to be evoking emotions among the participants intentionally; rather, they control their own emotions as the participants become emotionally agitated over topics that matter to them.

The instances in which mentors controlled the balance of emotional energy through the display of superior self-emotions took place in cases when the refugee parents wanted to discuss how to discipline their children. In these cases, the refugee parents referred to the Norwegian parenting context as being new and confusing, and they worried that CPS might intervene in their family lives.<sup>11</sup> A topic of particular worry to the parents was that the ways in which the parents would normally discipline or set boundaries for their children were unacceptable to CPS. These methods of sanctioning could at times contain elements of physical discipline. The mentors were reluctant when questions about boundaries and disciplining arose, as they seemed cautious to follow the ICDP logic, in which boundary setting is addressed towards the end of the course. In addition, physical disciplining is not an accepted practice in the ICDP. Setting boundaries is only taught towards the end of the training when discussing the roof of the ICDP house. According to this logic, it is necessary to build the ICDP house through 'emotional' and 'meaning-making' dialogues between caretaker and child before boundary making<sup>12</sup> can be discussed.

The specific discussion we are referring to took place midway through the house/course and started with an exchange about when a mother had tried to leave the kindergarten after having dropped her daughter off there. The child had cried a lot over being left by her mother. The mentor followed up and said, 'It is important to acknowledge the feeling of the child without giving her all that she wants'. One father then said:

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<sup>10</sup> i.e. (Steph Lawler, 2004; Stephanie Lawler, 2005)

<sup>11</sup> This topic came up several times during the sessions that we attended, and it is also well known as a topic of interest and concern among refugee parents in Norway (Fylkesnes et al., 2018; i.e. Tembo et al., 2020).

<sup>12</sup> In the ICDP terminology, 'boundary making' is used rather than the word 'disciplining'.

These children come from different cultures. It is easy for the small children who come into the system, but for the older children, it is difficult. The children have been told that if your parents yell at you, you can call CPS, and we are terrified of that.

Mentor: Do you remember we talked about this in the meeting with all the parents? CPS actually wants to help you so that the children do not decide everything.

One mother: But the children are deciding everything now!

Shortly after this, the mentor stopped the conversation. She pointed to the house on the wall, with firm movements and a serious expression on her face. She turned towards the participants and said, in a voice that was higher pitched and louder than usual:

We are going to talk about setting boundaries for children. We are still in the basement (points to the house), and we are building it up (pointing to the floors). I understand this is important to you, but we will eventually have the necessary tools to talk about boundaries.

We see here that the warm and accommodating atmosphere is replaced by a firmer, more disciplinary emotional interaction introduced by the mentor. This is done as a response to the refugee parents' engaged and heightened emotional energy. The refugee father in question leaned over the table and spoke in an intense manner. It seemed like he really needed a response to his statement that the children decide everything. In response to this, the mentors displayed strict body language. The previous smiles and laughter were replaced by a high-pitched voice and a contained and firm bodily expression. An interpretation of the mentors' emotional display is that they, through being controlled, composed, and strict, balanced the emotional energy and claimed a place of superiority for themselves as guardians of the ICDP logic (Clark, 1990, pp. 321–322).

Ahmed's perspective on the politics of emotion can also shed light on this interaction. According to her, emotions demarcate boundaries between those who are on the inside and those who are on the outside of groups (Ahmed, 2014, p. 10). Through controlling the balance of emotional energy towards the refugee parents when they started to ask challenging questions, the mentors demarcated the difference between the two groups. The mentors held the authority on what good parenting entails and signalled this authority through an emotional response of strictness when the refugees moved outside the boundaries of what are desired parenting practices.

### Sympathy as micropolitical place claim

In this section, we will depict situations in which sympathy is used as a place claim by the mentors. In her work on sympathy, Clark does not depict it as a 'place claim' explicitly but states that it is a social emotion and that the interaction between givers and receivers of sympathy sheds light on their relationship (Clark, 2007, p. 31). We suggest that while the mentors' expressions of sympathy in the following situations connect them with the refugee parents, they simultaneously depict the mentors as more fortunate. This, we claim, underlines the superior position of the mentors who master the ICDP logic over the refugee parents who are less fortunate due to the trauma they have endured. The refugee parents are, after all, a group that according to the Norwegian authorities might have experiences of migration that could affect their children's development (Barne- og likestillingsdepartementet 2018, p. 11). This position is the reason why refugee parents are invited to attend ICDP training.

We will provide one example in which sympathy is used as a response to traumatic experiences shared by the refugee parents. The following took place as participants and mentors discussed 'meaning-

making and expansive' dialogues<sup>13</sup>. A mother cautiously asked the mentors how she should explain difficult things to her children. She said:

I lost a child right after childbirth, and it is still so difficult to talk about it with my child who asks why this [other] child is in heaven. It is very hard to explain.

Norwegian mentor: Yes, we have discussed this in the ICDP before. We have very different cultures regarding this. In Norway, we are usually very open, and we take children with us to funerals, for example. (...)I have a question regarding expansive dialogue.<sup>14</sup> When the children get older and ask why you moved here, how will you answer them?

A few minutes later in this discussion one father said that the children have not asked about what happened in Syria and that he does not want to 'wake this up' until they get older.

At this point, the Norwegian mentor probed the rest of the group regarding how they felt about this topic, and she asked what they thought about explaining to their children why they came here. She opened the floor to share negative life experiences. One of the mothers described how her daughter experienced bombing and remembered everything. She said:

My daughter experienced bombs, and she remembers everything that happened.

Minority mentor: Does she ask about it?

Mother: Yes, she sometimes asks if the war is still going on. She cannot forget it.

At this point, several parents started crying. There were sounds of sobbing, and people dried their noses with the colourful, Christmas-themed napkins lying beside the trays of biscuits on the table. The mentors were looking at the participants with sympathy. They did not say much but nodded at the inputs from the parents. They had warm, acknowledging expressions on their faces.

A father added (sobbing):

My son, who was one-and-a-half years old, died. When the other children hear sounds that remind them of this, they become scared.

Norwegian mentor: This is horrible to hear.

At this point, one of the mothers ran out of the room crying. Another mother followed her outside to comfort her. The father who was talking about his son continued to cry and said:

My son was small, but he understood that it was dangerous. The children must know more about this when they grow older.

Norwegian mentor: This is recent and brutal, but children do not need to know everything.

The Norwegian mentor went on to console the father. She lowered her voice and asked if he was okay talking about this. She acknowledged how hard it is for him to talk about these difficult experiences. The father continued to talk about the pain and the casualties. Another father joined in and described how he and his family had to run from planes and bombs.

At this point, the Norwegian mentor said:

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<sup>13</sup> Floors 6 and 7 in the ICDP house.

<sup>14</sup> An ICDP term denoting a caretaker-child dialogue that expands the understanding of the child.

For many, what we are doing now is excruciating. It is hard to stop, but I believe that we have to. I think we have to conclude that we can tell the children some things but not everything. Providing children with all the details is too much for them to take in.

She reminded the group that they were supposed to be talking about floors six and seven in the ICDP house and that they wanted to show some films about this topic. They then moved on to show an animated film in which a grandfather explains the laws of gravity by showing his grandchild vegetables, oranges, and apples (mimicking planets).<sup>15</sup> One of the mothers watched the film while continuing to cry, dabbing the napkin to her eyes. She added, smiling through tears, 'My child also likes bell peppers'.

Clark's (2007) theory of sympathy gives us a tool to understand this interaction. Both in words and through warm facial expressions, the mentors expressed sympathy towards the refugees. This can be understood as a cognitive, emotional, or physical way of reaching out to the parents. At the same time, it also divides them into categories of the fortunate and the less fortunate (Clark, 2007, pp. 6, 8). This emotional boundary might have been made even clearer as the Norwegian mentor in the first part of the interaction continued to teach about 'how things are done in Norway' when faced with the parents' existential grief linked to their loss. When interacting with the participants' displays of grief, the mentors displayed sympathy but simultaneously made a pedagogical point of mentioning how grief is handled "here". The mentors were situated in a superior position, as they could give sympathy but also decide when to make a pedagogical point and when to close the flow of sympathy. The emotional performativity in this situation underlines positions of privilege, and there is a clear division between the unfortunate refugee parents, who need to adapt to new ways of parenting, and the mentors, who have already mastered ICDP logic.

## Discussion

The analysis has shown that the mentors utilized a variety of micropolitical emotional place claims to underline the importance of ICDP ideals. They invited the refugee parents to take part in the ICDP but also signalled when they deviated from ICDP logic. It is possible to see these micropolitical place claims in light of the political context of integration. In this context, refugee parents are seen as particularly vulnerable to social challenges and in need of strengthening their parenting skills to become an integrated part of Norwegian society (Barne- og likestillingsdepartementet 2018, p. 11). The emotional signals the refugee parents received throughout the training indicated that if they were to adhere to the ICDP provisions, they would be choosing a more politically accepted practice as parents.

Helping vulnerable groups adhere to accepted norms for parenting in their new context of habitation is a political project. In Norway, this is achieved through making participation in the ICDP or similar training mandatory for newly arrived refugee parents (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2020, pt. 1, 2). Warner shows how the respectable middle-class parent, who can manage and contain her own feelings, is featured as a norm for good parenting (Warner 2015, p. 17). The middle-class, respectable parent is capable of self-regulation in other ways than riskier 'other' parents (Warner 2015, p. 97).<sup>16</sup> Working with the ICDP to target refugees can be a similar political discourse, in which a group that does not use an acceptable way of parenting is offered competence to amend this shortcoming. The intention of ICDP is found in the introduction to the programme, which states that the government supports ICDP trainings in order to, among other things, prevent violence and transgressions in

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<sup>15</sup> This is an animated informational film made by The Directorate for Children, Welfare, and Equality. In the film, a caring grandfather meets the child and expands the dialogue by introducing learning elements.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDVgQj5ubng&feature=youtu.be>.

intimate relations (Barne- og Likestillingsdepartementet, 2018, p. 46). The ambition of teaching refugee parents good ways to parent is possibly an emotional project for the mentors, as they gauge that something is at stake when they do so. The goal of the mentors is to reduce risk and to enable refugees to become good parents who are emotionally contained enough to cause no harm to their children. In the political context of risk reduction, a micropolitical emotional arsenal is set in motion to lead the refugee parents in the direction of becoming good parents in line with ICDP ideals.

For the refugee parents, the emotional layer put on top of the training might indicate that something good is waiting if they adhere to ICDP standards. According to a positive psychology regime, happiness could be read as a sign that one is moving towards a more privileged position in society (Ahmed 2014, p. 10). Following ICDP ideals is therefore encouraged through the micropolitical strategies of showing positive other-emotions, suggesting more privilege and more happiness. The positive and welcoming atmosphere set at the beginning of the training could be what Prieur et al. have labelled a 'soft form of state power' that works through people's minds, making them realise that they have deficits, that they need to amend their ways of being (Prieur, Jensen, and Nielsen 2019, p. 3). The micropolitical emotional strategies practiced in the ICDP can work towards that end, being understood as a form of soft power in which emotional responses underline when the refugee parents are in line with the dominant understanding of being a socially skilled parent.

Warner suggests that there is a division between the risky parent and the acceptable parent. She aligns this to processes of political and emotional processes of 'othering' (Warner 2015, p. 49). This fits with Ahmed's assumption that emotions orient us as they help to preserve social boundaries that exist between different groups (Ahmed 2014, p. 10). Emotions reify social structures, and studying these in the context of the ICDP shows that emotions are political. They work alongside and solidify ICDP values. Emotions in the ICDP setting suggest that the politically desirable parent is one who leans in and follows ICDP logic. The micropolitical strategies of the mentors signal to the parents when they are in line with ICDP values and when they stray. The parents are accommodated in their grief, which arises in the training through sympathy, but then after a time they are pulled back into ICDP thinking. All this seems to underline what Ahmed might have understood as the politics of emotion, inviting the refugee parent into the ICDP—suggesting that they can join in the politically endorsed parenting practice if they accept the ways offered to them through the training.

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