

Making Traditions in a New Society

Middle Eastern Immigrants' Celebration of Calendrical Rites and the Negotiation of Belonging to Danish Society¹

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In Danish public debates on the integration of immigrants it is often assumed that in order truly to belong to Danish society newcomers need to adopt Danish traditions. This article discusses how Middle Eastern immigrants themselves relate tradition and cultural practice to notions of identity and belonging. Based on a study among Muslim families affiliated with a day-care institution in Copenhagen the article examines how parents through the performance of different traditions related to three Muslim and Christian calendrical rites negotiate notions of identity and belonging to Danish society. Against the background of two cases it is argued that the participation in different calendrical rites in some ways includes immigrants in local society while simultaneously in other ways excluding them. Therefore it is necessary to question the assumption that immigrants' performance of either Arab or Danish traditions constitutes an unequivocal expression of their degree of belonging to different places.

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In response to increased immigration to Denmark in recent decades, the notions of “culture” and “tradition” have become salient issues in public debate. The challenges encountered in integrating immigrants in Danish society are often explained by differences in culture, independent of other social or economic factors. In particular, so-called first-generation immigrants are portrayed as burdened by static traditions and old-fashioned cultural practices that impede their adaptability to Danish society. In this way, cultural traditions also become associated with notions of identity and rights of belonging to society. Until immigrants totally transform their cultural practices into more “Danish” practices, in public discourse they continue to belong to their “real home”, i.e. their country of origin with whose culture, people, and traditions they are supposedly so deeply familiar. Conversely, if immigrants adopt Danish practices and, for example, start participating in Christmas activities, they are conceived as well integrated (cf. Gullestad 2002:63). In sum, the performance

of different traditions and practices in daily life are often used as a scale to evaluate the extent of integration of immigrants.

The purpose of this article is to examine in what ways first-generation immigrant parents themselves may relate tradition and cultural practice to notions of identity and belonging. The article is based on a small study carried out with 10 Middle Eastern Muslim families all affiliated with one day-care institution in Copenhagen². In order to narrow the field of inquiry, the study has focused on the celebration of traditions related to social aspects of the three Muslim and Christian calendrical rites ‘*Id al-fitr*’³, Christmas and *Fastelavn*⁴. In this article I will use an analysis of how Muslim parents at the day-care institution approach their children’s participation in the three rites as a spotlight on how immigrants through the performance of different traditions may establish, negotiate or challenge their families’ inclusion in or exclusion from Danish society. Although the data material does not lead to general conclusions, through the presentation

of two cases I will argue that, on the one hand, participation in different traditions may include immigrants in local community and create a sense of belonging to the present place of living. On the other hand, the sense of belonging is seemingly limited to present social relations, not extended to the historical community that is otherwise implied in traditions. The data thus question the assumption that immigrants' performance of either Arab or Danish traditions constitutes an unequivocal expression of their degree of belonging to different places.

Understanding Tradition

Unlike the notions of custom or ritual, the concept of tradition implies a sense of historical continuity. Whereas the Latin word *traditio* simply refers to the action of handing over, in modern popular usage tradition refers to both the act of handing down from one generation to another and that which is handed down: information, beliefs, and customs (Otto & Pedersen 2000:1). Hence, when we term something tradition, we lend it authority by underlining its historical significance (Frykman & Löfgren 1996:16). This point seems to explain at least part of the crucial role attributed to tradition in Danish immigration debates. Perhaps more so than most other European countries, Denmark has a long history as a very small and homogeneous society. Even though the meaning of "Danishness" is seldom defined, a strong notion exists of well-founded traditions representing certain Danish values and ways of living that, although modern, have endured in Danish society over centuries. Supposedly, these traditions are now threatened by the foreign and seemingly static or old-fashioned cultural practices celebrated by immigrants who not only prioritise their belonging to other places, but also attempt to reproduce these notions of belonging to their children. This normative perception of immigrant traditions has not really been challenged in Danish academic literature. Instead, studies have mostly treated the interrelation between tradition, place/history and belonging on a very abstract level that seldom explores how traditions are actually carried out in everyday life. In addition, such

studies have mainly dealt with questions of tradition in relation to generational conflicts where second-generation immigrants attempt to manoeuvre between the demands of very traditional parents and the demands of Danish society (for example, see Mørck 1998). Consequently, the question remains open as to how first-generation immigrants actually relate to issues of tradition and belonging.

However, as argued by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), even though traditions are ascribed historical importance, they are often newly invented in response to changed societal conditions. Whereas Hobsbawm and Ranger discuss this issue in relation to the making of nation-states, it seems evident that also individuals, families and communities continuously re-negotiate and re-invent traditions, thereby ascribing them new meaning and perhaps giving them new forms of practice. Furthermore, in a globalised world where people, goods, and information flow across borders, traditions are increasingly removed from their location in time and space (Hall 2002:9). Several studies have shown how the experience of living in a different society affects migrants' socio-cultural practices and, in particular, their notions of belonging to different places (Pedersen 2003, Salih 2003, Stefansson 2000). Previously taken-for-granted customs and traditions are seen in a new light, and upon return to the former home many find that they have changed their ways of life. In this respect, the negotiation of identification and belonging to different societies often takes place in relation to cultural practices and traditions. On the one hand, families may perform traditions in order to express identification with a specific social and historical background and make statements about membership in a particular community. On the other hand, traditions may also be used to challenge this membership or to establish a sense of belonging to a new place of living (cf. Werbner 1990). Hence, it is perhaps in the context of movement that it is most apparent that traditions are not just passively transmitted from one generation to another. On the contrary, families only carry on or adopt those traditions that appear to be relevant to them – and which they are able to carry on. A case in point is

immigrant families' celebration of calendrical rites in public and private spheres of society. Belonging to a minority in a new society not only poses the challenge of finding ways to create and re-create traditions, but it also implies the necessity of deciding how one wishes to relate to the traditions and calendrical rites celebrated by the majority population and thus often encountered in public space. As an example of the celebration of calendrical rites in Danish public space, let us now look at the situation at the day-care institution *Blomsten*⁶ in Copenhagen.

Encountering Calendrical Rites in a Danish Day-Care Institution

The Danish day-care institution for 3-6 year old children is one of the places where immigrant families most extensively encounter Danish festival traditions. In addition to their most obvious function – taking care of children – day-cares operate as sites for the making of new Danish citizens by teaching children to function as social individuals, introducing them to a number of Danish customs and traditions, and preparing them for life in school (cf. Handelman 1998:162ff). The day-care *Blomsten* in Copenhagen, which houses approximately 30 children, is an example of one such institution. Activities in the institution are planned according to a yearly cycle that includes the incorporation of new children, learning about autumn, celebrating Christmas, *Fastelavn* and Easter, practising language skills, etc. Being situated in a central part of Copenhagen, the day-care has a large number of children from mainly Arab or Pakistani families. In spring 2003, only one third of the children were from ethnic Danish families.

I visited *Blomsten* regularly during four months in the winter of 2002/2003. The main purpose was to establish contacts with parents from the Middle East, but I also participated in the activities taking place during the preparations for Christmas and *Fastelavn*. Since the majority of children at the day-care are of Muslim background, I was curious to observe the extent to which the Muslim calendrical rite of *Id al-fitr* would be celebrated at the day-care in December.

However, despite children being absent for the feast and returning with new clothes and sweets to share, the occasion was not marked. In comparison, Christmas traditions made up a large part of the December activities. Children and staff made a Christmas calendar (*julekalender*), on which every day a different child painted a drawing. They also burned a piece of a special candle (*kalenderlys*) every day, and the children spent many hours cutting Christmas ornaments out of paper (thereby also practising their motor function skills). The staff told Christmas stories and they taught the children Christmas songs. The children furthermore listened to Christmas music on CDs and they read books with Christmas tales. One day the children were served rice pudding (*risengrød*) and they later engaged in baking Christmas cookies. The Christmas preparations finally culminated in a Christmas party, where parents were invited to make clay decorations, eat *æbleskiver*⁶, and watch the children perform the *Santa Lucia* procession,⁷ which the oldest children had practised for a few weeks. Later the children, staff and some parents danced around a Christmas tree placed in the yard while singing Danish Christmas songs. The party ended with the arrival of Santa Claus, who distributed bags of sweets to the children.

It is apparent that the festival activities at the day-care in December symbolically represent “Danish” behaviour, although the children were only taught the practices related to Christmas and not the religious origin of the festival. One effect of the prioritising of Danish and Christian calendrical rites over Muslim rites might be that already at this early stage it is transmitted to the children (and their parents) that you cannot be Muslim and truly Danish at the same time. Upon my query why Muslim calendrical rites were not celebrated, the Danish staff expressed hesitation due to their lack of knowledge of Muslim festivals. They had not been raised with these traditions and hence did not feel that they would be able to hand them over correctly to the children. Moreover, some staff expressed a clear perception that the day-care is located in Denmark and therefore needs to introduce children to the traditions that are celebrated in Danish society. In this way, the

choice of practice at the day-care exemplifies the hierarchical relationship between majority and minority traditions in public space.

In the subsequent interviews that I conducted with the mothers of ten Muslim children at the day-care, most parents found it reasonable that the day-care did not in any way celebrate *‘Id al-fitr*. Being aware of their status as minority, several mothers found that they should teach the children Muslim festival traditions in the home. Along the same lines, all of the interviewed mothers wanted their children to participate in the Danish festival activities at the day-care.⁸ Yet to argue that parents completely agreed in their attitudes to Danish or Arab festival traditions would not provide an adequate understanding of the situation. In fact, the mothers attributed different meanings to Danish and Arab traditions, and they gave different importance to the children's participation in the various festival events. In order to provide the reader with an understanding of these variations, I will present the cases of two mothers, Ayse and Samira.⁹ The relatively thorough description of the two families' own celebration of Arab/Muslim and Danish/Christian calendrical rites serves to illustrate, firstly, the process of establishing family traditions in a new society, and secondly, how the two mothers interpret the interrelation between notions of tradition, identification, and belonging. By ritualising certain festival traditions, they attempt to locate their children in different "fields of belonging" (Olwig 1999).

Ayse's Story: Establishing Tradition and Identity in a New Society

Ayse is a Palestinian mother of two in her late twenties. She grew up in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, where she lived with her parents, until in 1994 she came to Denmark through family reunification with her Palestinian husband, Samir. He arrived in Denmark seven years earlier, works in an Arab grocery store and only speaks little Danish. In comparison, Ayse, who has completed high school, has put an effort into learning the Danish language, so that she can soon start training to become a medical secretary. In order for her to follow the

relevant courses, both children have been placed at the day-care, until next year the oldest will start in an Arab school. The family does not expect to move back to Lebanon because the couple thinks that as Palestinians the children will have much better opportunities in Denmark.

Ayse is a practising Muslim, and the celebration of Ramadan and *‘Id* is important to her. During the fast she explains to the children why the parents do not eat, and she slowly includes the oldest by letting him try fasting for a few hours at a time. At the end of the Ramadan she prepares the forthcoming *‘Id al-fitr* by cleaning the apartment while her husband has the responsibility of smartening up the children by taking them to have a haircut. Whereas her mother used to bake the traditional date cookies herself, Ayse chooses to buy them. Likewise, she does not engage in extensive cooking activities but asks Samir to take the family out to dinner on the first evening. The three-day holiday thus begins with the family staying at home in the morning to speak on the phone with relatives and friends in Denmark and abroad. During the afternoon, they go out to a shopping centre, where the children play and the parents have dinner. On the second and third days, the family has visitors, or they go to visit distant relatives or friends. However, neither Ayse nor her husband has any close relatives in Denmark, and during the first three or four years in Denmark, the occurrence of Muslim festivals therefore made her feel very lonely. Samir frequently works late, so during Ramadan, Ayse had to break the fast by herself several times – an otherwise very social event. During the three days of *‘Id*, Samir was also at work several times, and Ayse did not know anyone with whom she could celebrate. Since the rest of society did not seem even to be aware of the festival, the event not only made Ayse feel separated from her family, but also reaffirmed her status as part of a minority in Denmark. In order to counter this feeling of exclusion, she called her relatives in Lebanon and also spent one holiday there. However, with time Ayse has gained a few female Arab friends, and last year they together arranged an *‘Id* party for women and children.

The story illustrates how Ayse and her

husband confront the challenge of ritualising *ʿId al-ḥajj* as a holiday in a country where it is otherwise not celebrated. As argued by Bell, “ritualisation [is] a way of acting that distinguishes itself from other ways of acting in the very way it does what it does; moreover, it makes this distinction for a specific purpose” (Bell 1997:81). In other words, ritualised practices differ from everyday practices in the meaning that is attributed to them in a specific context. Ayse here makes special preparations for the holiday by cleaning the flat and making the children look nice. During the festival, otherwise casual visits to shopping centres gain meaning as recurring holiday events. However, Ayse initially experienced problems because she did not know anyone with whom to celebrate. The fact that her husband works makes the fasting period or the holiday resemble every other day. In this respect, Ayse’s case illustrates a general point, namely that the possibility of reproducing traditions to some extent is dependent on the number of relatives living nearby. It is not uncommon that the size of family networks and acquaintances is much smaller in Denmark than in the country of origin, and consequently the social aspect of visiting a large number of relatives and friends is often heavily decreased in Danish society. Among the families with extended relations in Denmark, *ʿId* was celebrated in more traditional terms with cooking, visits, and specific family traditions, whereas those families with few or no relatives found it necessary to invent new spheres of celebration. For Ayse, female friends gain importance as fellow Muslims to visit. The lacking presence of relatives, however, does not imply a reduced importance of the family as such. For instance, nearly every interviewed family reported making phone calls or corresponding on the Internet with relatives abroad during the festival. Some travelled to spend their holidays with relatives, whether in other European countries or in the country of origin. However, both travel and communication demand a certain amount of resources that are not available to everyone.

Whereas Ayse attempts to ritualise *ʿId*, she does not make any Danish festivals into events that differ from the everyday. Her little

knowledge of Danish calendrical rites stems from a Danish language course and the activities at the day-care. Tellingly, it was not the Danish staff, but the other Arab mothers who first introduced her to the rite of *Fastelavn*. She recounts:

“The first time I heard about *Fastelavn* was when Mohammad started at the day-care. The other Arab mothers asked me ‘What is Mohammad going to wear?’ When I told them that I didn’t know *Fastelavn*, they said ‘You don’t know *Fastelavn*?!’ They explained to me that the children have to wear different clothes. So I bought some clothes for Mohammad. When I came to pick him up after my language course, on the day when the children had tilted at the barrel, one of the staff came and told me ‘Mohammad was king’. And I didn’t know anything at all and she said to me ‘Mohammad became the cat-king’ (*kattekonge*)¹⁰ and I thought ‘Has he misbehaved again?’ I only understood a little bit of Danish, but after a while I found out that it was something about beating down the barrel.”

The other Arab mothers’ surprise about Ayse’s lacking knowledge of *Fastelavn* shows the importance attributed by immigrant parents to the children’s participation in local traditions. The quote also demonstrates how parents, like their children, are introduced to the practices related to the Danish festivals, but not to their historical origin or religious meaning. Ayse immediately bought an outfit for Mohammed, just as she lets him participate in other events at the day-care. Like many of the other parents, she wants her children to participate in Danish festivals because she does not want to isolate them. However, she does not bring them to any Christmas or *Fastelavn* activities outside of the day-care, and she also does not observe any Christmas traditions at home. In fact, she refuses to buy Christmas artefacts such as chocolate calendars for the children and she also refuses to pretend that Santa Claus exists, although the children had been told so at the day-care. The first year when Mohammad was at the day-care, Christmas and Ramadan overlapped, and therefore she did not want her child to participate

in the Christmas party. She recounts the situation:

“The year before last Mohammad didn’t go to the Christmas party at the day-care. They invited us, but I didn’t want him to celebrate Christmas because it was Ramadan. When I brought him to the day-care the following day, Mette [a staff member] asked me why I didn’t bring Mohammad to the party. I told her that Mohammad doesn’t understand anything about Christmas or *‘Id*, and so I want him first to get to know our own festival. Mette asked whether I was afraid that they would affect Mohammad [with Christian beliefs], but it was not like that. I just wanted him first to learn our own traditions.”

To Ayse it is important that the children learn to respect Danish traditions, but it is also necessary that they know that these are not their own traditions. In this way, Ayse reproduces an understanding of traditions as a symbol of historical origin and religion. She distinguishes between celebrating traditions in public and private space, because to Ayse, bringing Danish Christmas traditions into the home would imply a choice to celebrate Christian traditions. Like several of the other mothers who have arrived in Denmark within the last decade, Ayse equates being Danish with being Christian and consequently makes a distinction between being Danish and being Muslim. Therefore she also distinguishes between the practices of adults and of children. Whereas children’s participation in Danish festival traditions only represents the child’s social inclusion in a community, the active participation of adults would imply a religious or cultural *choice* to become Danish. Hence, Ayse’s practises both establish a sense of belonging to a Muslim community and challenge the family’s inclusion in “Danishness”. In comparison, Samira, whose case we shall now examine, is a mother with a different standpoint.

Samira’s Story: Inclusion into Local Community

Samira is an Iraqi mother of four in her mid-thirties. She grew up in Baghdad, where she

completed a BA in Business. Afterwards she studied abroad for a few years before marrying Mahmoud, a distant cousin who had come to Denmark as a refugee, in 1994. Although Mahmoud also has a bachelor degree, in Copenhagen he carried out construction work, and now he is unemployed due to health problems. Despite having learned Danish and attended different university courses, Samira is also unemployed. She uses her time to run the household and take care of the children, of which one is at an Arab school, one is in day-care, and two twins are nursed at home. Her social network mainly consists of Middle Eastern neighbours, although she occasionally meets with her brother and his family, who live in a Copenhagen suburb. Despite several attempts, she has found it difficult to make friends in Copenhagen, because Danes “are always busy”, and other female immigrants often cannot challenge her intellectually.

According to Samira, she finds it very important that her children learn Danish and participate fully in Danish society, including learning about Danish traditions. She is convinced that just as Iraq is her homeland, so Denmark will be the homeland of the children, because this is where they spent their childhood. Therefore Samira lets the children participate in all festival activities at the day-care, just as she brings them to other public events such as visiting Santa Claus in a shopping mall or tilting at the barrel at the *Fastelavn* event arranged by a local toy-store. Unlike Ayse, Samira and Mahmoud also participate in the Christmas and *Fastelavn* parties at the day-care, often videotaping the children’s games. At home, the children watch Christmas movies and eat chocolate from Christmas calendars, and Samira makes a “Christmas tree” by putting ornaments on a large green plant.

The children gain their knowledge about Christmas and *Fastelavn* traditions both from the kindergarten and from Samira. As already discussed, the activities at the day-care teach them the practices related to different festival traditions. At home, Samira tells the history of Christmas by explaining to the children about Mary and the birth of Jesus Christ. She finds that celebrating Christmas is not a problem for

Muslims, because Jesus is a prophet in the Islamic faith and the celebration of his birthday is thus one holiday where Muslims and Christians may celebrate together. Regarding *Fastelavn* and Easter, she (like many Danes) does not know the full history or the meaning of the activities. She has mainly gained her knowledge from commercial advertising brochures, local community newspapers, television programs and the Danish language course. However, Samira's story shows how active participation in traditions common to the new place of living may have the effect of creating a sense of belonging to a local community. By ritualising the actions that are part of the *Fastelavn* and Christmas festivals (e.g. making a "Christmas tree"), she gives the festivals new symbolic meaning in the life of the family. They become recurring events that are associated with the particular place of living. Samira does not fully adopt Danish customs since, for example, she does not actually buy a tree, but re-invents one herself. Nevertheless, she prioritises the social aspects of traditions, and although she also thinks that Christmas is a Christian and Danish festival, the crucial point for her is not so much what the various activities mean or signify, but that the children are active participants. Moreover, to Samira, being Muslim is about how you think, believe, and act towards others, independent of whether you adopt other people's traditions. Finally her attitude also seems to be based on her recognition of some Danish practices as being contiguous with her own traditions. Compare her acceptance of Santa Claus with the following narrative of 'Id traditions in her family:

"When I was a child, in the night before every 'Id my father came to my brothers and me with toys or chocolate or money. He would put the money in an envelope and write 'this is to you from Uncle 'Id'. So my parents told us that the 'Id comes while we are sleeping and therefore we need to go to bed early on the night before. And [they said] the 'Id would come from the window. And I remember that every 'Id I was waiting to see what I got. So now I do this for my children also. I ask them whether there is anything they want or I watch them when they look in the toy

magazines so that I know what they want. Then I buy it, and at 4 am I put it under their pillows. Last year my daughter got a Barbie book, and I gave Karim a Ninja. They were very happy, they told everyone about it. [...]"

When Samira lets the children believe in Santa Claus and takes the children to see him in a shopping centre, she simply adapts to a new form of the 'Id tradition that she herself grew up with. Contrary to Ayse, Samira does not find the belief in Santa Claus strange, because she used to believe in *Uncle 'Id*. When her son Karim once asked her whether there is a difference between Santa Claus and *Uncle 'Id*, she nevertheless replied by saying that *Uncle 'Id* is dressed as an Arab sheikh whereas Santa Claus wears a red outfit and a long white beard. In this way, she manages to use the differences between the two characters to relate her children to different cultural backgrounds.

While Samira wants her children to know Danish traditions, at the same time she is concerned that if she does not teach them her own religion and traditions, a gap will arise between herself and her offspring. Although she does not consider herself or Mahmoud particularly religious, the couple nevertheless try to remember all the important occasions in Islam. They have placed their oldest daughter in an Arab school for a few years in order for her to learn the language, thereby making it easier for her to understand the religion. Mahmoud used to pray at the local mosque, but he has recently started praying at home so that the oldest child may learn the practice of praying. Hence, Samira reproduces her own upbringing in her home. Nevertheless, the celebration of 'Id differs from what she experienced in her childhood. Samira talks about the last 'Id *al-fitr* that the family celebrated in Copenhagen:

"In the morning on 'Id *al-fitr*, my husband goes to the mosque. It is a special prayer for 'Id. It is supposed to be at 7 or 8 am, but here they do it at 9 o'clock, because people should have a chance to come from all over the country. My husband always goes there, and also my brother. Later in the morning we went to *Fisketorvet* [a shopping centre] to see this movie, *The Jungle Book*. My

husband took the children while I was shopping. They also went to see *Harry Potter*, they saw two movies. The next day I think we went to McDonalds, I took them to this *Nørrebro Centre* [a different shopping centre]. That's most of what we did."

By re-casting previous traditions into new practice, Samira and Mahmoud attempt to ritualise the 'Id holiday in a new country. It is particularly important that the children experience the occasion as something special and so the couple take them to see children's movies. As also exemplified in the case of Ayse, shopping centres gain meaning as sites where the social aspects of existing 'Id traditions are re-created in a new context. In a cold Danish winter shopping malls offer a place where children can play in controlled surroundings while families dine at affordable prices in the company of other Muslim families.

In contrast to Ayse, Samira does have close relatives in Denmark. However, asked about her social activities during the holidays, she says that she did not meet up with her brother. Since he owns two shops in Copenhagen, he no longer takes time off during the holidays. Instead his wife came by one day to offer presents to Samira's children, but otherwise the family did not share any activities. Samira is embarrassed to admit that her family does not live up to the ideal image of holiday relations. As a substitute for the elaborate visiting rituals between relatives that Samira experienced in her childhood (where elders were visited first), Samira meets and exchanges presents and sweets with neighbours. She is happy that the number of immigrants in Copenhagen has increased, because this makes the holiday more special. She says:

"[...] now it is much better, because there are more immigrants. Before we didn't feel 'Id very much, because we didn't know so many families that we could visit. Now there are more immigrants, so it is much better. You feel the occasion."

In Samira's case, 'Id traditions have changed from relatively structured to more varied events.

The focus has moved from extended family relations and elaborate cooking rituals to making activities within the nuclear family and including relatively new social relations in the holiday celebrations. In this way, the performance of rituals away from the original home may not only enforce a sense of longing for or belonging to a previous home, but can also imply the creation of social bonds to the new local community (Werbner 1990:152). Although families continue to maintain relations with their place of origin, with time they establish more valued social relations in the new place of living, and these relations become practised in the domestic and public rituals that families carry out.

Calendrical Rites as Sites for the Negotiation of Identity and Belonging

The construction of belonging is an inherent part of the celebration of calendrical rites, because the performance of festival traditions inevitably evolves around processes of inclusion and exclusion. In the two cases presented, participation emerged as a central means of gaining inclusion. Both women imagine the future of their children in Denmark, and by allowing them to participate in public Christmas and *Fastelavn* activities, the mothers wish to include them in the day-care community. Since the day-care community also represents a Danish community, the two women's efforts to make their children participate may in more general terms be regarded as efforts to make the children feel like and become equal citizens in Danish society. At the same time, the women celebrate Muslim calendrical rites in the home and thus also relate the children to their own cultural background. In this respect the cases show that, whereas practices of tradition may differ and relate to distinct historical trajectories, the idea of tradition itself does not establish or represent notions of difference. On the contrary, Middle Eastern parents seemingly accept the celebration of Danish Christmas traditions at the day-care on the basis of their own experience with Muslim calendrical rites as constructing inclusion and belonging to a society. Furthermore, if we distinguish between the

religious and the social communication implied in calendrical rites (cf. Rappaport 1971:66f), we see that in its social meaning and organisation, Christmas is very similar to the rite of *‘Id al-fitr*. Christmas and *‘Id* celebrations both evolve around the ritualisation of family relations. During *‘Id* celebrations in the Middle East, it is common that families gather, special foods are prepared, children are dressed in new clothes, and they receive money or gifts from elders. In Danish Christmas celebrations it is common that families gather in the evening of 24 December to share a special meal, dance around a decorated Christmas tree while singing songs, and exchange gifts. The two subsequent days are often also spent with relatives. Hence, both Christmas and *‘Id* celebrations express normative ideas of ideal family relations, and they invoke a moral economy in which expectations, obligations, demands and wishes are negotiated (cf. Löfgren 1993:218). Likewise, in public space, both kinds of calendrical rites are marked by special activities and street decorations as well as by changes in the general atmosphere in society during the preparation and celebration of holidays. In this sense, the encounter with Danish Christmas traditions constitutes a symbolic meeting point where immigrant parents recognise their own socio-cultural values practised in a different context.

Yet, whereas Gerd Baumann argues that in Southall, London, nearly every Hindu and Sikh family celebrate some kind of Christmas at home (1999:129), the case is still different among Muslim immigrants in Copenhagen. As demonstrated in the above cases, parents disagree in terms of the extent to which their children and the family as a whole should participate in Danish festival activities. In comparison to Britain, Danish society has not yet recognised its emerging multi-cultural character, and negotiations over practice may be more strongly pivoted in relation to identity and notions of belonging. In this process, boundaries between private and public spheres of life become blurred. Both cases exemplify that even when celebrations take place in the domestic sphere, a wide range of “others” are implicated as categorical referents (Baumann 1992:102). Practices and traditions are negotiated in relation to

family, neighbours, friends, the day-care, relatives abroad, the religious community and Danish society. Ayse’s choice not to bring Danish Christmas traditions into the home communicates to an external audience that she remains what she considers a “good Muslim”. Conversely, Samira consciously acts to include the family in the social space of those who celebrate Christmas, and it therefore seems that this domestic ritual is partly directed towards “the invisible other” (Baumann 1992: 105) that is made up of “the Danes”. However, the two women’s practices should not only be seen as a product of their position as minorities in a Danish context. Their own beliefs constitute a strong factor in the choice of practice. Life experience and education may here play a role, but choices also cannot be separated from the two women’s different interpretation of Islam and its contents. The content of calendrical rites has a meaning to Ayse that she cannot separate from its form, and thus she only wants to participate in festivals in which the content is meaningful to her. Samira is less concerned with the religious meanings of her actions, and therefore she has more freedom to play with different kinds of calendrical rites in the negotiation of belonging to Danish society.

If we return to the assumptions of Danish integration debates that were outlined in the beginning of this article, the question subsequently emerges: Does Samira’s choice of participation in Danish calendrical rites imply that she is now becoming Danish? To answer this question it may be helpful not only to examine the traditions that parents choose to adopt, but also those aspects of tradition that are not adopted. For instance, it is relevant to return to the activities taking place at the day-care. For the parents who choose to let their children engage in the day-care activities, the children function as cultural mediators through whom parents are introduced to a range of Danish traditions and customs. When parents also choose to participate in events such as the Christmas party, the day-care staff includes them in the category considered “active and well-integrated” parents. Yet, when examined more closely, it becomes apparent that their participation may only be partial. Samira, for

instance, comes to the Christmas party, but like the other Middle Eastern parents, she does not start making clay decorations. Whereas many Danish parents recognise this practice from their own childhood, it does not mean anything to Samira. Likewise, she joins the dance around the Christmas tree, but she does not know the lyrics of the songs. In this way she is present and included in the day-care community, but she is excluded in the sense that she does not relate emotionally to the traditions that are carried out (cf. Frykman & Löfgren 1996). This exclusion is not necessarily a problem for Samira or any of the other parents. On the contrary, the party may still be enjoyable, and she is happy that the children have fun. The point here is rather that the multi-vocality of calendrical rites allow some participants to fully associate themselves with the historical significance of the tradition, i.e. a sense of inclusion in a specifically Danish community, while at the same time others like Samira can participate without relating to the historical background, but by simply “using” the traditions as a road to inclusion in the present community. The previously presented example of Ayse’s introduction to *Fastelavn* practices rather than meaning is another case in point. In other words, through participation Ayse, Samira and the other Middle Eastern parents relate themselves and their children to the local, lived community, but not to the “imagined” Danish community, the historical nation (cf. Anderson 1983). In this sense, they do not necessarily become “Danish”.

Concluding Remarks

When analysing calendrical rites as one example of first-generation immigrants’ relationship with tradition, it is safe to conclude that traditions do not remain static. On the contrary, the Middle Eastern parents in my study used and re-constructed calendrical rites in many ways. Firstly, celebrations of Muslim calendrical rites inherently change simply due to the shift of context. Secondly, both Arab and Danish calendrical rites are actively used in the negotiation of belonging to Danish society and other fields of belonging. In this process, some traditions are appropriated, re-constructed and given new

meaning whereas others are discarded. Two cases have shown how parents may use the ritualisation of traditions to include their children as citizens in Danish society while simultaneously establishing a sense of belonging to their own cultural background. Since the interviewed parents perceived knowledge of traditions as one part of the construction of identification with a society, they let their children take part in Danish festival traditions. However, the extent of the participation varies in relation to factors such as, for example, parents’ own experience, ideology, education, and perceptions of religion and “Danishness”. Moreover, parents’ own possible recognition of Danish traditions as meaningful and equivalent to previously known traditions has an impact on which traditions they hand over to their children. In this sense, new traditions are not invented from scratch; they are based on established social principles and previously known forms of practice.

When emphasising participation in the public celebration of calendrical rites, the parents’ attitudes are in line with the official Danish integration discourse that underlines the importance of participation in order for immigrants to gain the right to belong in Denmark. The data thereby point to the necessity to critically question the common approach to cultural integration as a process that has not yet taken place (cf. Preis 1998:12). On the contrary, parents seemingly carry out intensive, but relatively invisible, labour to incorporate their children into Danish society. Yet, the celebration of calendrical rites only makes up one small aspect within a broader field of cultural encounters. Further studies are needed to document the processes of change and continuity taking place in the everyday practices, customs and traditions of first-generation immigrants.

When parents and children participate in Danish festival traditions, they may gain some inclusion into a social community, and they can even construct a sense of belonging to the local place of living. Yet parents adopt practices, but not necessarily meanings. Even though parents have created a well-functioning daily life in Danish society and perhaps imagine their own

and/or their children's future in Denmark, they might not relate to the historical sense of "Danishness" that ethnic Danes imply in the practising of traditions. While they may adopt local practices, they do not necessarily feel or become "Danish". Future studies will need to discuss to what extent immigrants relate notions of "Danishness" with the possibility of functioning as capable citizens in Danish society. Moreover, what are the possibilities of making "Danishness" comprise many different kinds of living, and what is the role of public institutions such as the day-care *Blomsten* in this process? The complex interrelation between practices of tradition, notions of identity and negotiations of belonging illustrated here supports the assertion that the social and cultural integration of immigrants does not take place as a linear process of inclusion into Danish society.

Notes

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2. The analysis is based on fieldwork carried out in the winter and spring of 2002–2003. During this period I conducted 15 interviews with the Middle Eastern mothers (in one case both parents) of ten children in a day-care institution in Copenhagen. The families were all Muslim. Four of the mothers had lived in Denmark during part of their childhood, while the rest had immigrated to Denmark within the last decade. The interviews were (with one exception) carried out in Danish and took place in the family homes or at the day-care. In addition to the interviews, I carried out participant observation at the day-care at 'Id al-fitr, Christmas, and *Fastelavn* in order to establish, firstly, how traditions related to the calendrical rites were handed over and celebrated at the day-care, and secondly, the extent of the parents' participation in the different rites.
3. 'Id al-fitr, the Feast of Fast-Breaking, falls at the end of the Ramadan, the fasting month. The festival lasts three days.
4. The approximate English translation of *Fastelavn* is Shrovetide. However, since Shrovetide refers to a medieval festival that is no longer celebrated, I prefer to use the Danish term. To some extent, *Fastelavn* is comparable to the American Halloween. The feast of *Fastelavn* originated as a heathen festival, but was later combined with

the commencement of the 40-day fast before Easter. Today it is a small event which is celebrated in children's institutions and schools, but which is not a holiday. It mainly implies that children dress up as different characters (e.g. clown, princess, Superman, etc.) and gather to tilt at a barrel filled with sweets (*slå katten af tønden*). In combination with the festival, particular kinds of sweets are served and special decorations are made.

5. *Blomsten* is a pseudonym. Likewise, all informants have been anonymised.
6. *Æbleskiver* are small cakes of batter cooked in a special kind of pan.
7. The *Santa Lucia* procession is originally a Swedish tradition, where children/girls dress in white clothes to resemble Saint Lucia, the "Saint of Light". The procession is enacted on 13 December, and children carry forth candles while singing a special song.
8. Only one set of parents at the day-care refused to allow their child to participate in Danish/Christian calendrical rites. Unfortunately, they did not agree to an interview.
9. Since in nine out of ten cases I only interviewed the female parent, I am unfortunately not able to discuss how gender may influence parents' attitudes to the performance of different traditions.
10. *Kattekongen* is the title given to the person who makes the barrel break and the sweets fall out.

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