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Contextualities of gender in Eritrean immigrant households: Exploring empowerment through integration in Norwegian society

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ABSTRACT

The article presents a contextual understanding of immigration and integration in Norwegian society from a gender perspective by capturing the experiences of Eritrean immigrant households when adapting to social change and an unfamiliar gender regime. Theories of empowerment and social integration are used to interpret the gender dimensions, and to examine Eritrean families' post-migration gender relations and the interaction between conventional and egalitarian norms in expectations regarding the roles and social participation of women and men. A qualitative research design was used, involving in-depth interviews, participant observation, and informal discussions. The findings revealed that Eritrean immigrants' gender relations in Norwegian society were dynamic, due to the opportunities and constraints they faced in the private and public spheres. Women's ability to challenge patriarchal power relations was due to their adoption of Norwegian mainstream norms that determined their agency and empowerment in society. Also, social inclusion for Eritrean immigrants was often dependent on social networks that aided their integration into society and was differentiated by gender. The authors conclude that the realities of women's empowerment were heterogeneous and subjectively influenced by male gender ideologies, relevant education and language skills, access to desirable social networks, satisfactory paid work, and decisive welfare regulations.



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Introduction

Family reunification and integration represent integral features of social development, as they constitute gendered practices and shape the experiences of individuals diversely. Gender is inextricably linked with integration, creating diversity in the interactions between immigrant households' and the host society. The migration and integration literature has generally focused on labor market participation, language, educational achievements, and social networks of immigrant groups (e.g., Kofman 2004; Spencer & Charsley 2016; Badwi et al. 2018). Family migration studies have comprehensively entailed investigating the practices of transnational marriages and the lives and experiences of immigrant families (e.g., Charsley 2005a; 2005b; Constable 2005; 2012; Grillo 2008). In Norway, family migration research has extensively explored the political,

economic, and, to some extent, the social aspects of immigrants' integration (e.g., Hagelund 2002; 2008; 2010; Eggebø 2010; 2012; 2013; Staver 2013; 2014; 2015). Such studies pertain to the subject of refugees and their familial relations integration, as well as the problems that emerge from their cultural practices. Eggebø & Brekke (2018) argue that studies of integration often focus on labor market participation and compare the performance of family migrants with other migrant categories, such as refugees and labor migrants.

An intersectional analysis of family migration and gender has been explored in multiple studies of migration (e.g., Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000; Kofman et al. 2000; Baluja 2003; Charsley 2005b; Strasser et al. 2009). Kofman (2004) notes that many women migrate as family members and that most family migrants are women.

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Although these migration patterns are significant, the significance should not discount the fact that women also migrate as laborers, and that men migrate as spouses and family members. Furthermore, family migrants immigrate to receiving societies characterized by specific gender and welfare regimes that impose the structural and social basis for integration (Eggebo & Brekke 2018). Accordingly, it is relevant to analyze the gendered facet of migration patterns, family relations, and integration process to comprehend immigrant household's social inclusion. A focal point within family migration research is linked to an intersectionality of gender with other forms of social differences, such as class, race, and ethnicity in family migration patterns (e.g., van Walsum 2008; Wray 2008).

This article contributes to the literature on family migration and integration by exploring the experiences of Eritrean immigrant households in Norway and how they adapt to social change and integrate into the society. Specifically, it examines how typical gender norms and ideologies in Eritrean immigrant households interact with mainstream norms to define the performance of the roles and participation of both women and men in Norwegian society. This involves addressing the main research question: *In what ways are gender relations in Eritrean immigrant households influenced when they settle in the Norwegian society?* As the authors of several studies argue, both family migration and integration in Norway is shaped by gender (e.g., Eggebo 2012; Sandnes 2016; Enes 2017).

Norwegian context

Eritreans form a relatively large group of immigrants living in Norway with a refugee background and they represent a significant share of refugees granted asylum in Norway—93% in 2013, 95% in 2014, and ca. 100% in 2015 (Røsberg & Tronvoll 2017; Statistics Norway 2020). Most Eritrean women migrate through family reunification with their spouses, making them among the highest number of migrants to enter Norway in accordance with the family reunion regulation (Strøm 2018). Most Eritrean refugees are young males who request family reunion with their spouses (Røsberg & Tronvoll 2017). Eritrean immigrants have been the subject of research in Norway concerning their refugee/asylum process and family-related migration (e.g., Røsberg & Tronvoll 2017; Statistics Norway 2021). However, little research has been undertaken on Eritrean immigrants' family life course and integration experience in Norwegian society.

Moreover, in the Norwegian context, integration is prescribed as a strategy whereby “equal opportunities,

rights, and obligations for everyone irrespective of origin are combined with the protection of immigrants' specific cultural and religious identities within certain limits” (Hagelund 2010, 81). As outlined in a White Paper on integration in Norway, integration entails immigrant's adaptation to Norwegian society in terms of social norms, language, and active participation in the workforce and community life (Meld. St. 30 (2015–2016)). Immigrants must be familiar with their duties and rights, as well as values that are central to Norwegian society, and they must assume a great deal of responsibility for creating a life for themselves. Accordingly, this study contextualizes Eritrean immigrant households' integration as the relationship between gender norms and social inclusion, and we aim to understand the households' active participation in Norwegian society, given the cultural distinctions and their patterns of interaction in society.

Gender perspectives in family migration

Gender is a constitutive element of family migration that encompasses several possibilities for family life and conditionalities for individual expectations in the receiving society (Baluja 2003; Palriwala & Uberoi 2008; Charsley 2014). Women are central to family migration, as their agency is vital for the socialization of the family in the receiving society, as well as for ensuring that decisions regarding family roles are fulfilled in the host society (Baluja 2003; Kim 2010). Women are responsible for socializing children and providing the ideological linkages between the origin and destination cultures, and for helping their family members to navigate the integration process (Baluja 2003). However, women are confronted with mainstream norms in the receiving society that characterize a different gender regime, one that ascribes changes to conventional gender role expectations and encourages egalitarian relations (Baluja 2003). Tyldum (2015) identifies family migration outcomes as entailing two contrasting experiences, dependency and empowerment, with both eventualities dynamically shaping the migration experience. On the one hand, the issue of dependency indicates perpetuating traditional gender norms that seek to bolster men's power within gender relations in the new society (Kofman et al. 2011; Tyldum 2015). On the other hand, empowerment indicates the transformation of hierarchical power relations, supporting the conditions for women to gain some measure of social and economic position compared with men (Palriwala & Uberoi 2005; 2008).

Several studies have explored the shifting conditionalities that occur in the migration process and have underlined the opportunities for empowerment

whereby women are able to improve their social status post-migration and challenge culturally expected roles in the family (e.g., Foner 2002; Pessar & Mahler 2003). Paradoxically, some scholars view migration as both challenging and reinforcing normative gender norms, as well as including other social structures such as class and race (e.g., Espiritu 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999; Pessar & Mahler 2003; Jones & Shen 2008). These conditionalities are indicative of Eritrean immigrants' households in terms of gender roles, decision-making, and the gender relations in their interactions.

Empowerment theory

In migration studies, empowerment highlights the dynamics within gender relations that are indicative of the differential effects of migration within a patriarchal gender structure. This approach within the migration discourse demonstrates whether migration reimagines gender hierarchical relations towards gender equality or reinforces patriarchal gender relations (Parpart et al. 2002). Although the empowerment perspective has conventionally focused on women and girls, with less recognition of men's role within gender relations,¹ it is important in the case of family migration in order for men's behavior to be inclusive in the context of women's empowerment, as gender relations either constrain or facilitate the immigration and integration of both women and men (Pessar & Mahler 2003). Pessar & Mahler's analysis of the context of empowerment (Pessar & Mahler 2003), which is relevant to immigrants' circumstances, underlines the interactions between women and men's participation, both in the private and public spheres, where their performance of roles and attitudes facilitate social cohesion.

Scholars have often used the notion of empowerment to portray change and the achievement of power to effect that change (e.g., Collins 1990; Held et al. 1999). Collins (1990) views empowerment as realized in the private and personal spaces of an individual woman's consciousness, referring to the process of participation as a way of challenging hegemonic systems to stimulate self-understanding and action in women's private and public lives. Other feminist theorists have contested this notion, suggesting that participation involves differential burdens, whereby women's involvement in decisions is affected by economic, social, and political factors that hinder their participation in collective action towards empowerment (e.g., Phillips 1999; Parpart et al. 2002).

Critical understanding of empowerment in gender discourse (e.g., Rowlands 1997; Kabeer 1999; 2005) builds on Lukes' notion of power as "basically not just control over institutions and resource[s], instead power is exerted by controlling the agendas and institutions of others" (Lukes 1974, 23–24). Rowlands (1997, 14) describes empowerment as beyond "power over," not just participation in decision-making, and it must include the process that leads people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions. Rowlands' concept of empowerment combines "power to" and "power from within" in recognizing the full range of human abilities and potential in the empowerment process, which involves three central dimensions: personal, collective, and close relationship (Rowland 1997). Similarly, Kabeer (1999) describes empowerment as the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability and can make a change. Her empowerment process involves three dimensions—resource, achievement, and agency—that are indivisible and essential to change through power (Kabeer 1999, 452). We draw upon both notions of empowerment to assess Eritrean immigrants' household relations and to determine women's process of gaining power through integration.

Welfare-gender regime

The interaction of welfare systems and gender shapes social relations and impacts the enactment of conventional gender roles, both individually and institutionally. Some scholars have revealed a positivist assumption regarding welfare regimes in challenging hierarchical relations of power, thereby promoting egalitarian relations (e.g., Orloff 2006; 2009; Jenson 2009; 2015). Other scholars have explored how certain welfare regimes structure gender-differentiated domains that support specific types of households and regulate gendered activities through welfare entitlements (e.g., Pateman 1988; Orloff 1993; O'Connor et al. 1999; Jenson 2004). Such scholars have outlined how welfare states relied on women's caregiver roles and reduced involvement in unpaid work, which made possible men's full-time participation in the workforce. Lewis (1992) implies that there exists a strong relationship between the state and its involvement in family life in both the public domain and the private domain. Historically, welfare states perpetuated the male breadwinner model as a feature of capitalism that strongly designated women to the home and their motherhood status.

¹Paper by M. Silberschmidt, titled 'How to achieve gender equality and empower women when men are increasingly disempowered?' presented at the international seminar 'Gender and empowerment in the 21st century in Africa' on 22–25 August 2009 in Nairobi, Kenya.

In such conditions, the gender division of labor was unequally positioned, as women became dependent on men for welfare entitlements within the family, thus justifying their gendered status (Lewis 1992).²

Some scholars have explored the gender issues and inequalities that are represented in welfare states (e.g., Orloff 1996; Coltrane 2000; Esping-Andersen 2002; 2009; Folbre et al. 2013). Orloff (1996, 51) states that gender relations are “embodied in the sexual division of labour, compulsory heterosexuality, gendered forms of citizenship and political participation, ideologies of masculinity and femininity greatly embodies the welfare state.” Welfare states consist of social provision and public service that affect gender relations and challenge the inherent unequal division of gender roles of caring and housework, and to a greater extent, social devaluation (Orloff 1996). In the domain of care work, women continue to perform the bulk of roles, even when they are employed due to deeply gendered normative guidelines characterizing such tasks (Folbre et al. 2013). While there are state interventions through the provision of policies that promote women’s employment and family economic support, with the aim of facilitating men’s and women’s involvement in both care and paid work, the redistribution of household labor continues to persist, even in egalitarian societies (Coltrane 2000). Studies in the Nordic countries—Norway, Denmark, and Sweden—have revealed some welfare challenges where an accumulation of welfare problems, specifically economic dependency and social exclusion, is strongly evident among immigrant groups, ranging from weak interpersonal relationships to long-term unemployment (e.g., Djuve & Kavli 2007; Brochmann & Hagelund 2011).

Social integration and participation in the public sphere

Social integration refers to the inclusion of immigrants in a system, the creation of relationships among individuals, and their attitudes towards society (Bosswick & Heckman 2006, 2). It also addresses the social exclusion of minorities and marginalized groups, putting migrants at the forefront of integration (Spencer & Charsley 2016). There are two main axes in social exclusion in immigrants’ integration: social inequality and social differentiation. These axes are characterized by different patterns of social relations along socially relevant lines in the division of labor and immigrants group formation (Bosswick & Heckman 2006, 4).

Several studies have explored social integration in the context of social inclusion of immigrants, and they have distinguished between several dimensions: legal/political, socio-economic, and cultural/religious (Penninx 2005); acculturation, placement, interaction, and identification (Bosswick & Heckman 2006); and structural, social, cultural, civil/political, and identity (Spencer & Charsley 2016). These distinct dimensions of social inclusion describe immigrants’ integration as a continuum and an ever-changing process shaped by multiple factors that are either implicit or explicit to the migration process (for in-depth conceptualizations of integration dimensions, see Penninx 2005, Bosswick & Heckman 2006, Ager & Strang 2008; Spencer & Charsley 2016). In this article, we adopt Spencer & Charsley’s integration typology and concept of social inclusion (Spencer & Charsley 2016).

Studies of social integration have determined that factors such as language and cultural knowledge, safety, and security are vital for immigrants’ inclusion (e.g., Bosswick & Heckman 2006; Ager & Strang 2008; Spencer & Charsley 2016). These factors, with their different terminologies (e.g., indicators of interactive immigration, and facilitators and effectors), are derived from the concepts of inclusion and exclusion (i.e., the dynamics in immigrants’ processes of gaining insider positions and becoming part of the host society). In terms of the interaction between gender and integration, Anthias & Pajnic (2014) argue that immigrants’ integration is shaped by gender ideologies that tend to structure the different patterns of men and women’s inclusion in the host society. Likewise, Spencer & Charsley (2016) add that such differences create distinct experiences, opportunities, barriers, and vulnerabilities for migrant men and women in the integration process.

Several studies of immigrants’ integration have measured the integration process based on the immigrants’ levels of labor market participation and educational achievements, and language acquisition between the different migrant admission categories, such as family migration, labor, asylum seeker/refugee (e.g., Chiswick et al. 2006; Elrick & Lightman 2014; Bratsberg et al. 2017). Such studies have reported that the rates of family migrants’ labor market participation and educational achievements tend to be lower than for other categories, specifically labor migrants. Eggebø & Brekke (2018) suggest that there is a considerable variation according to the family migrants’ gender, age, country of origin, and length of stay, and the sponsor’s characteristics regarding levels of integration.

²Lewis conceptualized a typology of welfare regimes focused on the different breadwinner models of the welfare state. Norway has gradually shifted from a strong to a weak breadwinner regime through policy changes matching other Scandinavian countries (Eggebø 2010).

In this article, we explore the integration outcomes experienced in Eritrean immigrants' households and their performance gender roles in relation to their integration and participation into the labor market, social networks, and society in Norway. It is necessary to understand the extent to which normative gender ideologies influence immigrants' social inclusion, which shapes their social practices in both the private and public spheres.³

Data collection

This article is based on data produced from ethnographic methods of data collection, including in-depth interviews, participant observations, and informal discussions over the course of three months between July and September 2019 in Bergen, Norway. Before commencing the fieldwork and research process, we contacted the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) as part of the ethical procedure to obtain clearance to conduct the research. As part of ethically informed consent, all study participants agreed to participate as volunteers. The identity of the participants was kept anonymous, and the names of all participants in this article are pseudonyms. A qualitative research design was considered suitable to capture the dynamics in gender relations and the process of empowerment in Eritrean immigrant households following family reunification and integration into Norwegian society. A total of 19 participants was selected (11 women and 8 men); additionally, one native Norwegian was selected as a key informant due to her involvement with immigrants' integration process in Norway. The key informant provided an expert outsider perspective regarding immigrant women's participation in the introductory program for immigrants and corroborating the findings from the interviews with participants, which increased the trustworthiness of the study. To conform with ethical procedure, her involvement in the study did not include sharing personal information pertaining to participants. A total of 12 interviews were conducted face-to-face and audio-recorded (5 with both spouses present and a further 7 with individuals, of which 4 were with some of the aforementioned spouses and 3 were unmarried individuals). A multitude of issues were discussed in the interviews, including gender norms and gender relations in Eritrea, family reunification in Norway, and the integration process, specifically language, social networks, and labor market participation.

The discussions also included the participants' experiences of household relations and the negotiation of participation in the private and public spheres, as well as family decision-making. Participant observations involved gaining access to and being immersed in the Eritrean community, where we observed interactions and social practices through the roles and activities performed by participants both in the private and public spheres. These included participant-as-observer observations of a multitude of interactions and activities, including Eritrean immigrants' during Eritrean church services and in their homes, to understand their external social practices and household interactions. During these observations, notes were recorded to present a valid account of the interactions as part of the ethnographic data collection process.

The 19 participants were selected through both snowball and convenience sampling. All participants had arrived in Norway as refugees and through family reunification. Most of the men who were married had arrived as asylum seekers and later requested family reunification for their spouses. All of the participants belonged to the native Tigrinya ethnic group from Eritrea. Of the 19 participants, 15 (8 women and 7 men) were married, 2 (both women) were divorced and had arrived in Norway as asylum seekers, and 2 (one woman and one man) were unmarried. The two unmarried individuals were included in the study because they were currently in a relationship with each other and living together, which was significant for the study.

All participants were chosen based on certain categorizations, including age (i.e., 21 years⁴ or above), year of immigration between 1990⁵ and 2015, educational background (ranging from secondary education level to professional qualification), and employment type (full-time, part-time, or unemployed). All participants needed to have completed the Norwegian introductory program for immigrants (Norwegian language and civic education), which is usually between three or four years after migrating to Norway. Thus, individuals who arrived in Norway after 2015 were excluded (Table 1). In categorizing the immigrants' type of education (Table 2), the focus was on their educational level in Eritrea, as the majority of immigrants had moved to Norway as adults. In Norway, more men than women had enrolled in bachelor's or master's degree courses, in common with the situation in Eritrea, where more men than women enroll in higher education. The participants' employment included working as cooks,

³Eritrean immigrants labor market integration in Norway illustrates a gender distinction, as in 2021 with the average employment rate for men was 77.4%, while for women it was 56.6% (Statistics Norway 2022).

⁴The age of 21 years was chosen because they were expected to have more knowledge about gender relations in Eritrean society than younger people.

⁵Eritreans generally began migrating to Europe (including Norway) in the late 1980s and 1990, hence the choice of 1990 as the start date.

Table 1. Year of immigration of the Eritrean immigrants

Year of immigration	Men	Women	Total
1990–1999	1	1	2
2000–2009	4	3	7
2010–2015	3	6	10
Totals	8	11	19

waiters and waitresses, taxi/bus drivers, health workers, engineers, housekeepers, work in hospitality service, and administrators. Labor conditions in Norway prescribe the types of employment based on the number of working hours (37.5 hours equates to 100% or full-time employment) and therefore the categorization of the participants' employment was based on their working hours (Table 3).

Data analysis was done by coding, whereby data were rearranged both by hand and using computer software (NVivo) as a way of structuring the content of the data. The coding process was descriptive coding, which involved organizing information into category labels through transcribing interview recordings into text, which helped us to identify and represent themes and patterns in gender relations among Eritrean immigrant households.

Eritrean immigrants' context-specific gender relations in their home country

In exploring the changes in gender roles and household relations that occur in Eritrean immigrants' households, it was necessary to understand the contextual gender ideologies and norms. Interpreting the gender norms in Eritrean immigrants' social practices revealed that in the Eritrean context gender constitutes culturally normative role expectations and sexually differentiated roles that separated women and men socially.

Initial discussions with Eritrean immigrant women living in Norway shed light on the structural gender differences in Eritrean society, highlighting that Eritrea is a dominantly patriarchal society in which women are constantly limited in social practices due to culturally specific norms that define women's performance and position (for a discussion on such norms, see Awoonor-Williams 2020). This assumption was elicited when we were attempting to gain an in-depth description of the gender context. Eritrea has a long history

Table 2. Educational level of the Eritrean immigrants

Educational level and professional qualification	Men	Women	Total
Basic level (usually up to 10 years in Eritrea)	–	5	5
Secondary level	–	2	2
Higher level	2	1	3
Professional qualification	6	3	9
Totals	8	11	19

Table 3. Employment details of the Eritrean immigrants

Type of employment	Men	Women	Total
Unemployed	0	2	2
Part-time employment	3	6	9
Full-time employment	5	3	8
Self-employed	0	0	0
Totals	8	11	19

as a gender-segregated society. According to Campbell (2005, 278) "Eritrea before independence was classified as a feudal or semi-feudal society with stringent gender distinct roles." Therefore, women faced numerous challenges in terms of "gender differentiation and gender roles in pre-colonial Eritrea, which [were] exacerbated and re-enforced under Italian colonial rule" (Campbell 2005, 383). Consequently, gender difference became embedded in societal structures such as education, employment, and marriage, with men having leading roles in those domains and women being relegated to the domestic sphere (Campbell 2005).

Throughout our exploration of the gender context in Eritrean society, the Eritrean immigrants described Eritrean society as generally representing a culturally dominated sphere with gender differences produced and maintained through a variety of social structures, ranging from household division of labor, education, and early marriage to sociopolitical practices, including compulsory national service. Eritrean national service, although initially created to improve gender relations by encouraging women and men to work together in government reconstruction projects, in efforts towards gender equality, has perpetuated some gender differences through cultural resistance among certain population groups. This has led to families forcing young girls into early marriage and early motherhood to avoid them enrolling in the service. In these circumstances, women are forced to take on roles as wives and mothers, and they face extreme pressure from both their husband's family and society to meet such role expectations and are denied participation in the public sphere (Campbell 2005). This finding supports previous ethnographic studies of Eritrea that have indicated that Eritrean society follows a traditional family division of labor (e.g., Zerai 1994; Asgedet 1997; Smith 2001; Favoli & Pateman 2003; Campbell 2005; Advameg 2022) (for an in-depth description of gender in Eritrea, see Zerai 1994; Asgedet 1997; Campbell 2005). Men perform the dominant roles in society via the public sphere and gain power to influence household gender relations. Women's position in Eritrean society is shaped through cultural ideologies and ethnic identities, which produce women's unequal status compared with men in terms of roles, duties, and rights.

Eritrean immigrants' entry and integration into Norwegian society

Eritrean immigrants' initial entry and integration into Norwegian society involves the interplay of social, cultural, political, and economic elements. Specifically, for the immigrants who were interviewed in our study, their arrival and familiarization with Norwegian societal norms presented cultural nuances that influenced their immigration and integration—experiences that have been described as cultural shocks (for a theoretical and empirical discussion of the cultural shocks, see Awoonor-Williams 2020). The process played immensely into the study participants' perceptions and apprehension of normative differences following their immigration. The following cases illustrate the cultural differences (cultural shocks) that preceded the integration experiences of the Eritrean immigrant men and women.

Case 1a: men's perspective on cultural shock

One male participant, Yonas, described his introduction to Norwegian culture and society as follows:

When I arrived in Norway 29 years ago, I was 19 years old, and my first experiences of the Norwegian society was culturally shocking. During my first time out in the city, a young woman offered me a cigarette and I was surprised because I have never known women to smoke in public. Even back in Eritrea, smoking is considered immoral and young boys who smoke are labelled as street kids because it is culturally inappropriate. On another occasion, I attended a summer party and I saw girls bathe in the sun without clothes and I was surprised [at] seeing this because girls are not supposed to behave this way in public.

Case 1b: women's perspective on cultural shock

Salma, a 24-year-old Eritrean woman who had been living in Norway for eight years, disclosed that after she arrived in Norway, she realized that she had equal rights and opportunities as men, and the realization of women's social status as equal to men's social status in Norwegian society impressed her. In her perception of her status, she recognized that in Norway she had equal rights, and that Norwegian society had made her more of a woman. She added that Norwegian society gave her more power to make her own choices due to egalitarian norms that promote gender equality.

With regard to Salma's statement that Norwegian society had made her more of a woman, she identified as a Norwegian woman and, as such, experienced the same rights and freedom as a native Norwegian

woman, and she could perform similar roles to those of men based on the mainstream egalitarian norms. Thus, gender differences were apparent in the participants' experiences of cultural shocks: the experiences had led to their different perceptions of the gender relations in Norway, which were based on the different social structures underlying gender norms and gender ideologies that in turn influenced roles and behavior in Norwegian society. While Eritrean women value the egalitarian norms in Norway because they support their improved status in society, the Eritrean men principally perceived the distinct gender norms as challenging their patriarchal ideologies in society.

Egalitarian relations and decision-making in the private and public spheres

Underlying the study was an exploration of Eritrean immigrant households' adaptation to the mainstream gender norms in their gender relations through integration into Norwegian society. In the following cases, we describe the interviewed Eritrean immigrant households' experiences of navigating mainstream gender norms in Norwegian society towards enacting egalitarian relations both in the home and outside the home.

Case 2a: Haman and Sarai's household

Haman (male, aged 38 years) and Sarai (female, aged 35 years) were an Eritrean couple who had been living in Bergen for 10 years and had two young children. Haman worked as a social therapist and Sarai as a health worker. They were married before migrating to Norway and both were in paid work in Eritrea. It is quite common for some couples to have paid work in Eritrea, especially in urban areas, where women have paid work but are still very much expected to adhere to gender norms regarding women's domestic labor roles. In the case of Haman and Sarai, having paid work in Eritrea was never an issue for their household. In Norway, they both agreed that household division of labor (housework and childcare) was a matter of negotiation between them, due to the country's mainstream gender norms. When they both returned from work, Haman would go to the kitchen and prepare food, while Sarai tended to their young children and relaxed. Haman noted that in Eritrea, a man in the kitchen is culturally inappropriate but that he did not hold the same view; he supported his wife in the home, in the same way as men in Norway are expected to do. Regarding decision-making, they both consulted each other about household decisions, such as their children's education and upbringing, and household finances. They agreed that

decision-making regarding the family was a matter of negotiation and that neither of them had more control over the choices they made as a household. The case demonstrates the arrangement of egalitarian relations in an Eritrean immigrant household where positive attitudes to mainstream norms in Norwegian society had enabled a reconfiguration of gender relations.

Case 2b: Mikal and Lulia's household

Lulia (aged 24 year) was an Eritrean immigrant woman married to Mikal (aged 25 years), an Eritrean immigrant man who had been living in Norway for eight years. Lulia described the experience of their household's adaptation to mainstream norms in Norway. She explained that her husband did not involve her in household-decision making, even though he was familiar with the mainstream Norwegian gender norms. Although Lulia was pursuing higher education in Bergen, her husband decided that they should relocate to another city far from Bergen, without consulting her. However, she stated that ideally, they both had to consult each other in the decision-making process in Norway, which was contrary to the situation in Eritrea, where men had the power in make decisions. She demanded equal participation in household decision-making. Thus, considering the Eritrean immigrants' acceptance of the prescribed gender order and their renegotiation of gender roles, which often differed based on gender differences in dyadic relations and gender-related attitudes in immigration, their adaptation to egalitarian relations in Norway was dynamic.

Integration and participation in the public sphere

Eritrean immigrants' integration includes to their entry into the labor market following their successful completion of the Norwegian introductory program for immigrant groups (i.e., refugee/asylum seekers and family migrants). In this article, participation in the public sphere implies enrollment in higher education and/or participation in paid work. Eritrean immigrant women who had paid work indicated that their level of participation in employment (i.e., full-time or part-time) involved negotiations with their spouses. In the case of the women engaged in full-time paid work (3 out of the 11 women), their spouses often played a vital role in their work involvement by providing support in the form of household labor. This allowed the women to contribute to the household income, and to participate in household decision-making due to the lack of spousal dependency. As a result, patterns of

spousal dependency were eliminated, allowing for changes in gender relations.

With regard to Eritrean women in part-time employment (6 out of 11 participants), their position in the labor market was influenced by several factors, including having childcare obligations, family reorientation, having low requisite skills for skilled employment and relevant work experience, having low educational background, and lack of wider social networks. Among these factors, having a low educational background, lack of relevant work experience, and lack of wider social networks were the major barriers to the women gaining full-time paid work. Linked to the problem of relevant qualifications and experience was competition with the native Norwegian population for similar employment opportunities, coupled with immigrant women's low social capital, which made it difficult for them to gain suitable employment.

By contrast, the Eritrean immigrant men's participation in paid work differed from that of the women, as most of the men were in full-time employment. A vital aspect of men securing full-time employment in Norway was their ability to pursue higher education more often than women. Also, the Eritrean men often engaged in menial jobs to gain work experience and form wider social networks with native Norwegians, and thus increase their chances of securing better jobs. A few of the women (4 out of the 11) who had experienced difficulties in gaining better job opportunities in Norway had decided to pursue higher education to improve their chances in the labor market.

Case 3: "My familial networks shape my participation in Norwegian society"

Saron, an Eritrean immigrant woman (aged 32 years), migrated to Norway in 2012 to join her husband in accordance with the family reunification regulation. Her husband, who had been living in Norway for a few years, had arrived in Norway as a refugee who was seeking asylum in Norway. While in Eritrea, the couple were Protestants, but after the husband settled in Bergen, he joined the Pentecostal Church, which included several other Eritrean immigrants and non-immigrants (including Christian native Norwegians) among its members. After joining her husband in Bergen, Saron was introduced to the Pentecostal Church by him and she soon became a member. Through her membership, she formed social networks with other Eritrean immigrant families and was actively involved in Eritrean church services organized by the Eritrean sect. Through her social connections, Saron was informed of employment opportunities and was

supported in gaining paid work. The social networks she had formed also served as her source of knowledge about Norwegian society and culture, and they enabled her to practice using the Norwegian language. Although she had become proficient in the Norwegian language, she insisted that she was not very fluent and that this prevented her from interacting and socializing with native Norwegians. For that reason, she usually socialized with her known Eritrean social networks and interacted with other Eritrean immigrants.

Welfare rights versus gender roles

Eritrean immigrants' integration through the social intervention of Norway's welfare provisions to support immigrant families' well-being is relevant to the study findings. Such welfare provisions included child welfare services, which were crucial to family integration. The provisions highlighted the diversity in Eritrean immigrant households' gender relations through the transformation of gender roles and reconfiguration of typical norms influenced by welfare institutions. In the Eritrean immigrant households, welfare rights directly informed child upbringing and childcare, and decisions regarding childcare involved negotiations regarding gender roles.

Eritrean immigrant women in the study perceived a vast distinction in child upbringing in Norway compared with in Eritrea. Norwegian welfare rules played a significant role in transforming normative gender ideologies that described culturally ascribed roles for women regarding reproductive practices, and the existence of welfare rights supported women's desired control over their reproductive choices. The Eritrean immigrant women insisted that their rights to decide their reproductive choices influenced their decision-making about sexual reproduction in their negotiations with their spouses.

Most interviewees in households with children had joint involvement in decisions regarding child upbringing, which was shaped by welfare conditions that prescribed the attitudes and demands of egalitarianism in parenting and participation in childcare. Paradoxically, welfare provision also reestablished the unequal division of roles in parental labor. Most of the female participants (7 of the 11) who had children explained that they were responsible for the main part of childcare and that their spouses only supported them when they were obliged to do so in accordance with Norwegian law and regulations relating to childcare. An apparent cause of this behavior was discerned in an interview discussion with a male participant, who described how child welfare benefits provided by the state to the

household were designated to women, thereby making them the primary actors in childcare roles. The men who resisted balanced participation in childcare roles usually imposed the allocative arrangement of child welfare provision as a motive for their nonconformity. As such, the men challenged mainstream norms concerning childcare roles due to social policies that regularized child welfare as mothers' responsibilities, thereby legitimizing women's irregular performance of caring roles. Although this situation was not observed in detail due to complexities in interpreting household gender relations, it provided an intriguing insight into power dynamics.

Contextual boundaries of empowerment in Eritrean immigrants' gender relations

The theoretical foundation of our study involved feminist perspectives of gender in migration and integration. From our exploration of the conditionalities in gender relations as a result of migration and integration processes, we identified the differences in forms of negotiations and power structures that embody gender and social relations. In particular, in gender relations, power was unequivocally established in the distinction between social practices in both the private and public spheres, which aligned gender roles that determined the categorization of the status of men and women in Eritrean society. As succinctly asserted by Wood & Eagly (2002), gender differences are perpetuated in the role of socialization. However, there exist some distinctions in the household gender relations between women and men, which define their role expectations in varied ways but are strongly influenced by gender ideologies. With regard to case 2a, the Eritrean couple described the distinction in their gender relations in Eritrea, where the woman participated in paid work yet still maintaining her normative gender roles in the home. The finding reveals gender as a diversity of roles between women and men based on their social differences (Marchbank & Letherby 2014), and the influence of gender ideologies in structuring gender relations through the continued performance of typical roles (Lorber 1994).

The Eritrean immigrants' perceptions of gender norms in Norwegian society were evident from their descriptions of their initial integration process, when they experienced distinct attitudes and behaviors in gender interactions. As demonstrated in cases 1a and 1b, the Eritrean immigrants' gender attitudes in different social interactions were dominated by normative gender ideologies pertaining to culturally prescribed behaviors for women and men. The men's

understanding of the gender relations in Norwegian society highlighted the influence of patriarchal gender ideologies that consider women as principally designated to the private sphere and as having limited agency outside the home. By contrast, the women's interpretation revealed the condition of increasing access to agency in the public sphere and the performance of nonconforming behavior regarding typical gender norms, which encouraged their active involvement in society. For instance, case 1a revealed the perception of contested power relations in the position of men and women as described by the Eritrean male, which involved the rethinking of gender ideologies in social interactions and their relative position in the gender order in Norwegian society. Case 1b explained a woman's ability to change power relations, and disclosed women's participation in the public sphere as agency to challenging hierarchical relations and transform normative gender norms, thereby transitioning towards egalitarian relations.

In the study context, decision-making represented power in effecting change, which determined the rights and capacities of the Eritrean immigrants to engage in making choices and controlling resources (Rowlands 1997; Kabeer 1999). The decision-making process among the Eritrean immigrant households reflected the power dynamics related to gender ideologies and the performance of normative gender roles, as well as Norwegian mainstream conceptions of appropriate norms in dyadic relations. The interviewees' decision-making processes in the home concerned domestic labor and childcare, which in turn influenced the women's participation outside the home. Based on gender norms in Norwegian society, the immigrant women, like all women in Norway, were encouraged to participate actively in the public sphere and to have equal access to resources as men, which would lead to a more egalitarian society. The Eritrean immigrant women had the agency to participate in the public sphere: by taking higher education courses and engaging in paid work, the women caused a reshaping of household gender relations and transformation of the patriarchal gender ideologies that determined their position in relation to men in their household.

The study revealed that the Eritrean immigrant women's agency was influenced by the gender norms in their households, where changes to normative gender roles occurred due to their participation outside the home, where they gained access to resources such as education and income. In turn, education and income enabled them to influence the household decision-making process. This finding supports Grasmuck & Pessar's claim that women's participation outside the

home translates into gaining the power to change their position in the household and decision-making patterns (Grasmuck & Pessar 1991). For example, in case 2a, the woman's involvement in paid work in Eritrea and subsequently in Norway had improved her position in her household by enabling the reconfiguration of gender relations towards an egalitarian practice in household decision-making and relations. An understanding of the process of women gaining power in decision-making reflects Rowland's concept of "power to" (Rowlands 1997), which implies that women can generate power through various forms of engagement involving their agency, enabling them to resist or maneuver against domination.

Men's role in gender role renegotiation and reconfiguration of gender relations is linked to women's participation outside the home. The Eritrean women immigrants who had experienced egalitarian relations in the household and active participation in the public sphere relied on their spouses' understanding and support to gain a more equitable position in decision-making and gender relations. In certain situations, when the men were hesitant to renegotiate gender roles and challenged the women's agency in rights and choices for egalitarian relations, the women were quick to demand their rights and contested men's power in household relations. Such behavior usually hinged on the women's understanding and adoption of the mainstream norms in Norwegian society, which shaped their agency and enabled them to contest patriarchy. In case 2b, the female participant insisted on an equal decision-making process that would involve the man acknowledging her right to choose whether to move rather than him deciding for the household. Her noncompliance with his choice to change the household's place of residence illustrates her understanding of gender relations in Norwegian society, which supported her position in that regard, allowing her to contest his patriarchal ideology.

The Eritrean men's involvement in the women's integration stemmed from the time before their immigration into Norway, when they had considerable power to control resources and make decisions for the household. Consequently, most of them were better integrated into Norwegian society compared with the women and could pool their resources to aid the women in widening their social networks, Norwegian language proficiency, and acquiring adequate knowledge of the Norwegian labor market. This was demonstrated in case 3, as Saron's active participation in Norwegian society was facilitated through her husband's established social networks, which in turn supported her integration. Through the women's improved position in the household, some of the men enhanced their power in household gender

relations through their involvement in women's empowerment process. For example, some of the men supported the women's efforts to gain paid work, thereby eliciting a "dual breadwinner household," improving the household income, and eliminating the ideological burden of the "male breadwinner." This finding supports Hondagneu-Sotelo & Cranford's claim that the contradictions in women's status that follow migration, namely that even when women gain higher status than men in some respects, men often benefit from their status due to their gender (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Cranford 2006).

The Eritrean men whose position in household gender relations and decision-making process were challenged (two out of the eight participants) adopted strategies to reassert their power in the household. This situation often emerged as a consequence of the welfare provision for households. In Norway, which is seen as an egalitarian welfare state, immigrant households are supported by welfare provisions in the form of childcare benefits and individual social security supplements, complementing the household income. Welfare policies encourage women's empowerment through improving their participation in paid work and their access to social services and resources, as well as supporting their position in the household by challenging the unequal division of labor such as childcare. Although this can be interpreted as a process of empowerment for women—the significance of women's access to resources enables their empowerment (Kabeer 1999)—an issue of men's resistance emerged in a few instances when they reinforce their dominant position in the household.

In our study, the Eritrean immigrant men were expected to participate actively in childcare and parental labor, and to take equal responsibility in caring roles. In cases where that happened, the men directly aided women's agency outside the home. This finding supports Coltrane's argument that welfare regulations influence the renegotiation of gender roles around "care work" and paid work, which allows migrant men and women to share more of the housework (Coltrane 2000). The immigrant women benefitted from the regulations that aided their empowerment process, as they gained bargaining power in household relations. However, some of the Eritrean men developed strategies to offset the women's bargaining power that resulted from the women's entitlement of childcare benefits. Those men challenged the sharing of care work, insisting that childcare was women's responsibility. In resisting the sharing of care work, the men reinforced their dominance in the household, which prompted the women to yield and become subordinate. This finding

supports the assumptions made in previous studies of gender roles post-immigration (e.g., Orloff 1993; Espiritu 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Cranford 2006; Donaldson & Howson 2009; Spencer & Charsley 2016; Laperrière & Orloff 2018).

Women's negotiations regarding roles with men in the private sphere, and their participation in the public sphere were asymmetrically structured, based on the gender difference in access to resources in the Eritrean immigrant households, which generated the dimensions of empowerment and dependency. We found that access to resources depended on the family and household structure, which prompted social cohesion among Eritrean immigrants and their achievement of social inclusion (i.e., desirable social networks and labor market participation) in Norway. The female immigrants' access to social networks was often shaped by their familial relations, which influenced their process of empowerment. Strong social interactions with other Eritrean immigrants reflected normative gender ideologies concerning the expectations of women and men regarding their roles that reinforced patriarchal relations in the household. The Eritrean immigrant men and women were positioned differently in their access to resources, which translated into the traditional gender role ideology that shaped their social practices. While the women could adopt strategies and agency to gain power relative to men, it was generally easier for men to gain better access to resources, due to their social networks and employment. Men's normative gender status improved their social capital through their ability to overcome barriers to participating in the public sphere and to create their competitive patterns of social inclusion.

The Eritrean immigrant women faced differential access to resources because they had to overcome certain barriers involving the impact of their age in terms of increasing their proficiency in the Norwegian language, which would enable them to enroll in higher education courses and to secure better employment opportunities. The women with lower education and little work experience were less likely to gain better employment compared with women with higher education qualifications and previous work experience. Within the labor market, the Eritrean immigrants faced an intersectional experience involving gender, race, class, and religion, which often had negative and positive impacts on their integration and social inclusion. The Eritrean women's response to such experiences engendered their patterns of dependency due to their inability to adapt to the circumstances. The above-discussed instances collectively shaped the immigrants' integration process, which in turn determined the gender power relations and the dynamic

patterns of the Eritrean immigrant households' social differentiation.

Conclusions

In explaining the influence of gender in the immigration and integration process, we have explored the case of Eritrean immigrants' household organization of gender relations to determine the contextualities of gender relations through social change and the associated outcomes. In looking at how social structures shaped the arrangement of gender roles and interactions involving women and men, as well as their relative position, we have sought to reveal contextually the distinctions in the continuation of family life course and its affective outcomes for a specific group of individuals, which emerge when viewed through a gender lens.

Specifically, the eventualities of immigration and integration for the Eritrean households involved gender differences in experiences in outcomes regarding their adaptation to mainstream norms and rules of negotiations regarding roles, attitudes, and behaviors in interactions that determined the reconfiguration process of gender relations. Our study highlights elements that influence the outcome of gender relations in terms of generating the boundaries to change in household structures and gender statuses, namely immigrant women's ability to gain power relative to men in household decision-making processes versus men's ability to reenact patterns of patriarchal relations to dominate women's agency in pursuing egalitarianism.

As our findings revealed, through migration the Eritrean women achieved diverse levels of empowerment in gender relations and social practices, such as power in the household decision-making process, and control of their agency in participation in the public sphere. However, they were undeniably confronted with various barriers in Norwegian society that reproduced patterns of dependency. Pertinent to this interpretation, empowerment can be theorized as diversity in patterns of social change. The Eritrean women's accumulation of power in gender relations was enabled through their actions and perceptions underlying their migration to a different social context that provided structures that encouraged them to adopt strategies to transform gendered patterns of behavior. The women's empowerment was discursively influenced by the men's gender status and their perceptions of power in gender relations, which was realized in their role in the conditions that were conducive to change in their gender order. To summarize, migration definitively generated the process of empowerment, which was facilitated by conditions indicative of gender norms as well as by recreating

patterns of dependency through structural barriers in the process of social change.

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