

UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN



Experiences and Perspectives of Immigrant Mothers in Norway

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Master's Thesis

Master's Programme in Child Welfare

Faculty of Psychology

Hemil Centre

Spring 2018

## Acknowledgements

The time I have spent working on this degree and on my thesis have, altogether been an interesting period of personal growth for me. I am thankful for the support of the institution of Statens Lånekassen, without which I probably would not have been in this program.

This research would have not been possible without my informants and their willingness to give their time and to speak openly about their experiences. I am grateful to them and to the researchers of the “Refugee resilience” project at the Hemil Centre for giving me the opportunity to use the data from their project.

Thank you to Klementina, who established contact with the gatekeeper. And thank you to Nazanin for being so positive and trying to recruit informants.

I was fortunate to have two good supervisors -Ragnhild Hollekim and Paul Kellner. I am extremely grateful to both of them for their feedback and guidance.

Additionally, the monthly group meetings in the beginning of the writing process were quite helpful. A big thank you goes to all involved. It made the writing process much more enjoyable.

My friend, Lumberto, has been a great support by sharing his experience and, at times, office with me and by teaching me to approach the writing process like meditation. Especially during the last months of writing, I often felt like a terrible friend and I want to thank my friends for understanding why I have been so absent.

A special thanks goes to a special person: Pål, thank you for all your support, your patience, and the countless dinners.

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## List of Abbreviations

CRC - The Convention on the Rights of the Child

CWS - Child Welfare Services

NAV - Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

NSD - Norwegian Social Science Data Service

### Abstract

In just one generation, Norway has witnessed a five-fold increase in its immigrant population. Along with the increase in the immigrant population, the number of immigrant children who receive child welfare measures has increased disproportionately.

Social work in a multicultural society demands different skills from practitioners than work within a more homogeneous society. In order to understand their ethnic minority clients, workers must be aware of the difficulties these clients face on a daily basis.

This research aims to hear and represent the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers from a strengths-based perspective, and thereby provide a stronger evidence base for social work practice.

A qualitative phenomenological design was chosen for the study. Data from two focus group interviews and two in-depth individual interviews has been used. Theoretically, the research was framed by concepts of parenting, acculturation, cultural translation and resilience.

Findings revealed that informants faced challenges related to them both as individuals as well as in their role as mothers during their integration process. They dealt with these challenges by using both their individual resources and resources in their environment. The differences between the collectivistic oriented home society and the individual oriented Norwegian society, the loss of their social network, the authoritarian ways of child raising versus a democratic family structure, and children acculturating faster than parents were all salient themes next to language barriers and challenges related to the bureaucratic system. At times, the differences between cultures led to the emergence of new traditions or ways of raising children, which demonstrates that neither culture nor child raising is static, but is instead influenced by the social environment.

*Keywords:* immigrant, refugee, mother, motherhood, mothering, parenting, parenting beliefs and practices, acculturation

## Introduction

“Raising a child is a complex and daunting task; it is a process that encompasses both tradition and the contemporary Zeitgeist.”  
(Nguyen, Chang & Loh, 2014, p.48)

The forces of globalization have caused greater migration of people to Western societies during the last decades, which has led to social, cultural, economic, and political changes (Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006). In just one generation, Norway, historically a homogenous society, has witnessed a five-fold increase in its immigrant population. On 01 January 2018, there were around 916 625 people, 17,3 % of the population, who either immigrated themselves or were born in Norway to parents who had immigrated (“Immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents”, 2018). Moving from one’s usual environment to another means leaving what is familiar and adapting to an environment that is different in many ways. Migration is associated with a range of challenges, such as the loss of support from extended family and other social networks, change in socioeconomic status, having to find employment, cultural changes that are disorienting, language barriers, racism, and gender and generational role reversals within families (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007; Este & Tachble, 2009; Renzaho, McCabe, & Sainsbury, 2011).

Along with the increase in the immigrant population, the number of immigrant children who receive child welfare measures has increased disproportionately (Hollekim, Anderssen, & Daniel, 2016). Immigrant children are therefore overrepresented in the Norwegian child welfare system. In 2012, for example, first generation immigrant children were 2,7 times more likely to be placed in out-of-home care than children of Norwegian born parents. Immigrant children with parents originating from Asia and Africa were more likely to receive such measures. Conversely, there was no significant difference between immigrant children with parents from EU countries and children of Norwegian-born parents (Dyrhaug & Sky, 2015/16).

Social work in a multicultural society demands different skills from practitioners than social work within a more homogeneous society (Bø, 2015). Social work is based on ideologies and values concerning family life, childrearing, and gender roles. In Norway, Western culture shapes these values, emphasizing individualism, independence, and anti-authoritarian relationships between parents and children. These are often viewed as universal



values and left unquestioned. Social workers interviewed in a study by Bø showed little awareness of these underlying ideologies, which was found to lead to social work practice characterized by paternalistic dominance (Bø, 2015). Social workers identified knowledge gaps in their work with minority parents and children, yet they showed little initiative in seeking out information or in simply asking their clients about issues such as immigration laws, the home country situation, or their experiences of everyday life. As Bø points out, in order to understand their ethnic minority clients, workers must be aware of the difficulties they face on a daily basis. Issues such as racism and discrimination are often invisible to the majority population, but they shape the daily lives of immigrants (Bø, 2015).

Križ & Skivenes found that Norwegian child welfare workers demonstrated an oversimplified view of racism and structural oppression and how such issues can shape immigrant parents' and children's ability to integrate. Workers assumed, for example, that the parents were able to access the resources the state provides to support parenting without giving consideration to structural oppression and language barriers (Križ & Skivenes, 2010). This is in line with studies on ethnic Norwegian families in contact with the child welfare services that showed that they differ from the majority population in income, education level, housing quality, ability of social network etc. and that social workers often do not consider structural problems for these families as well (Andenæs, 2004; Christiansen & Anderssen, 2010). The professional focus seems to lie on the psychological relationship between mother and child and the quality of care the mother provides. Shortcomings in care are blamed on the mother alone, her mental health or ability, which thereby limits the scope of the problems by pathologizing and individualizing them. Thus, the child is seen as a product of the mother's ability (Andenaes, 2005; Andenæs, 2004; Christiansen & Anderssen, 2010).

One reason for this focus on individual culpability is that, in policy and practice, classic psychological development theories, such as attachment theory, have strongly influenced child social work in Norway. These theories are based on Western ideology, within which the nuclear family - especially the mother-child relationship - and individualism share a central role. The Western middle class child is depicted as the blueprint for children's development along uniform goals and stages. Place, cultural background, and circumstances are not taken into account. These theories have therefore been criticized for not being able to explain the full spectrum of a child's development, especially in regard to children with a non-western background or belonging to a different societal class (Andenæs, 2005; Salole 2013). Institutionally anchored Western values are seen as neutral and true, which means that other cultures views on childrearing are viewed as wrong. This incapacitates parents of other

cultural background (Fylkesnes, Iversen, Bjørknes, & Nygren, 2015). It has led to a homogenization of parenting and fixed standards of what can be considered right and wrong parenting. Here, the majority culture is considered as right and there is little space for dialogue about practices considered to be wrong (Hollekim, et al., 2016).

### **Research Questions**

This research makes space for the voices and perspectives of minority mothers and for an open dialogue on the issues presented.

The main objective of this research was to gain an understanding of the “Experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers in Norway”.

Research sub-questions were:

- How do immigrants/refugees experience life in Norway?
- How do they perceive being a parent in their new environment?
- How do they negotiate parenting in their integration process?
- What strengths and resources help them in their integration process?

The research was part of a project led by a research network at the University of Bergen, which has conducted a pilot study on refugee resilience and the sociocultural resources for refugee children, youth, and families.

### **Aim and Objectives**

Beyond the usual challenges encountered in childrearing, it is common for immigrant parents to also face traumatic past experiences, the changing of family roles, social isolation, and poverty. Research on refugees and migrant parents is therefore often focused on the vulnerability of this group and the problems associated with their vulnerabilities (Tingvold, Hauff, Allen, & Middelthon, 2012).

Following Hollekim, Anderssen & Daniel’s (2016) argument that “to promote equality and inclusion in a society which is becoming increasingly more diverse, there is a need for professionals to explore alternative pathways that are strength-based, affirmative, and that follow more curious and dialogue-based approaches ” this research aims to hear and represent the experiences from a strengths-based perspective, and thus provide a stronger evidence base for social work practice. This approach is further informed by Trevithick’s model of the knowledge-based social work that emphasizes the importance of practice knowledge and including the experiences of service users (Trevithick, 2008). The research is also in line with

the main objectives of the Master in Child Welfare program, which aims to promote students' knowledge and insight on children, childhood, and parenting in different societies and contexts, as well as provide knowledge and insight about challenges related to migration for children and their families ("Objectives of the Master in Child Welfare", 2018).

Findings from this study provide evidence of the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers.

In order to provide services aimed at assisting immigrant families, one needs to gain a good understanding of the experiences and needs these families have (Lewig, Arney, & Salveron, 2010).

### **Theoretical framework**

The following chapter will outline the important concepts and theories that framed the research. I have selected parenting, acculturation theory, cultural translation, and resilience because I consider them to be useful in explaining the experiences and perceptions of my informants.

#### **Parenting**

In the following section, I will outline the main characteristics of parenting in individualistic societies and parenting in collectivistic societies. I acknowledge that these are broad distinctions and that there are a variety of different ways of parenting within and between these categories. I do not want to imply that all parents coming from one country parent the same way, because individual perspectives differ across cultures and persons (Ochocka & Janzen, 2008). The participants of this study, as well as the rest of the population of Norway, are diverse in regard to parenthood and parenting practices. However, for the purpose of this study, it is helpful to make the distinction between parenting in individualistic and collectivistic societies, because these orientations reflect experiences described by the participants. Therefore, I will articulate my theoretical approach to these categories and their characteristics.

Ideals of parenting, parenthood, mothering and motherhood, and gender roles are neither natural nor random. Rather, they are socially constructed and are thus influenced by culture, class, ethnicity, identity, and public policies reflecting the interests of states at a given time (Hays, 1998; Holloway, Yamamoto, & Suzuki, 2010).

Similarly, notions of parenting, as they can be seen today in Western individualistic-oriented societies, started to develop in the USA in the 1950s. After the Second World War, an ideological shift took place that returned women to the home sphere and freed the workplaces they had occupied for the returning men. Raising children became to be viewed as deeply meaningful and important, increasingly time-consuming, and in need of expert guidance from psychologists, pediatricians, books, and television programs (Charlotte Faircloth, Diane M. Hoffman, & Linda L. Layne, 2013a; Jaysane-Darr, 2013; Raffaetà, 2016). Good parenting has therefore become more and more associated with a certain social, educational, and cultural background (Raffaetà, 2016).

**Parenting as an occupation primarily done by mothers.** Gillies (2011) points out that behind generic references to parenting lies a gender-specific focus on mothers and mothering. Idealized versions of a “good mother” are often similar across cultures and include the idea that the mother promotes the wellbeing and development of children and is patient, protective, and nurturing towards her child/children. Yet, there exists a wide range of conceptualizations of motherhood across cultures. These conceptualizations range from the exclusive, biological mother to situations in which all women in a society are seen to be mothers by obligation, over to societies in which the biological mother is not considered as the best social mother. Due to this diversity in viewpoints, the subject of mothers or mothering often elicits strong opinions (Barlow & Chapin, 2010; Picot, 2013).

Parenting, in this Western view, is a complex skill that is seen as too important to be left to parents themselves, so it must instead be based on scientific knowledge. Today parenting is a “job”, no longer just a relationship. It is an occupation to which primarily mothers are expected to be emotionally devoted, and from which they should gain personal fulfillment. The interests of the child should be put before the mother’s (Edwards & Gillies, 2013; Charlotte Faircloth, Diane M Hoffman, & Linda L. Layne, 2013; Gillies, 2011; Layne, Faircloth, & Hoffman, 2013). The mother is seen as indispensable in her role as the primary caregiver of the innocent and priceless child (Hays, 1998; Sevón, 2012). The child’s needs have foremost priority and the mother’s life should revolve around the child using time, energy, and material resources. Thus, it is also called “intensive parenting” (Faircloth, et al., 2013a; Hays, 1998).

**The influence of psychological theories on views of parenting.** These concepts of parenting, parenthood, mothering, and motherhood cannot be separated from concepts of the child and childhood (Haukanes & Thelen, 2010).

Since the 1950s, concepts of children and childhood have been influenced by the theories of developmental psychologists such as Bowlby and Ainsworth. Bowlby and Ainsworth stressed the importance of middle class norms for child development. For example, the biological bond between a child and one primary caretaker –preferably the mother because she is the one that can breastfeed –with whom the child can establish a stable relationship (Haukanes & Thelen, 2010; Layne, 2013). According to Bowlby (1969), children have an innate need for love and protection, as well as for the development of autonomy. According to attachment theory, these needs are best met by emotionally warm and supportive caregivers (Johannesen & Appoh, 2016) who should strengthen attachment to their

children by spending large amounts of time with them. Delegating too much care work to other people was believed to weaken the attachment between mother and child, creating a risk for psychological damage to the child (Jiménez Sedano, 2013). Attachment theory continues to influence the Western conceptualization of childhood. In particular, these perspectives can be observed in expert advice on how to raise children, public discourses, and policies, and are consequently present in the everyday lives of parents and their children (Haukanes & Thelen, 2010).

Developmental psychology characterizes the way children and adolescents are viewed in Norway, and it is seen as important that parents have knowledge and understanding for the different developmental phases their children go through (Hennum, 2002). A significant aspect of the developmental psychology perspective on childhood is the focus on the development of self-esteem. Having low self-esteem is seen as the root cause for why children develop problems. Self-esteem, in this view, is based on one's self worth and self worth is built through a good relationship with and love from one's parents. Parents should therefore establish good relationships with their children (Hennum, 2002) and make sure that their childhood is carefree and happy (Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006). The quality of parental care is viewed as the determining factor for a child's development and future life outcomes. The child is seen as vulnerable, especially during the first months of its life (Faircloth, 2013; Hollekim, et al., 2016; Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006). Thus, a child's development is simultaneously viewed as universal, but also as a fragile achievement that involves certain stimulation and protection from stress (Gillies, 2011). Parents should try to avoid exposing their children to difficulties and feelings of frustration or sadness (Hennum, 2002). Biological parents and the nuclear family are considered to be the best environment for raising a child (Alber, 2003; Haukanes & Thelen, 2010).

**Democratic family structure and the child as rational social agent with individual rights.** Individualistic societies, such as the USA, Western Europe, and Scandinavia, value autonomy, independence, individualism, the right to privacy, and the right of children to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Since the 1990s, a "new" view of the child and children's rights has developed, where emphasis is given to the participation and contribution of children. Children started to be viewed as rational social agents with individual rights, and no longer the property of parents or society (Hollekim, et al., 2016; Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006). Participation of children has become an important issue on the international level with the adoption of the international Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which has

been, in its entirety, integrated into Norwegian law (Hollekim, et al., 2016; Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006).

Complementing this idea of children as rational actors, the Norwegian ideal for parenting is child-centred and based on interactions and dialogue between parents and their children. Parents are expected to assist their children with pursuing their interests and activities. The relationship between parents and children should be characterized by dialogue, negotiations, and compromise, as well as love, affection, and a high sensitivity towards the emotional needs of the children (Hennum, 2002; Hollekim, et al., 2016; Johannesen & Appoh, 2016). Parents and children are viewed as equals (Moshuus, 2014). Individuality and independence are among the most highly valued attributes in Norwegian society and parents are expected to support their children in growing into independent, self-confident, and creative adults. The democratic, symmetrically organized, and negotiating family is seen as the best method for realizing these parenting goals, whereas discipline and hierarchy in the family structure have little value in Norwegian society (Hennum, 2002; Hollekim, et al., 2016).

**The role of the welfare regime.** Norway is a social democratic welfare regime that provides a wide range of state-sponsored support and services to families and society at large, such as educational and child welfare services. The support and services are offered as an effort to secure a certain standard of living for children, and are based on expectations and standards of how good parents should act. Thus, the state has influence on the private lives of families. The wellbeing of children is considered to be a broad societal matter, in which the wellbeing of society is closely connected to the quality of parenting practices. The state enjoys high levels of trust and state-involvement in the family life is common (Gillies, 2011; Hollekim, et al., 2016; Johannesen & Appoh, 2016).

At the centre of the modern welfare state stands family policies that entail the regulation and surveillance of family life, childbirth, and childcare (Haukanes & Thelen, 2010). According to Foucault, the knowledge that the state chooses to promote is not neutral. To understand why certain knowledge is constructed as legitimate, and not others, one needs to look at power relations (Picot, 2013). Since the beginning of the welfare state, policies have focused on dysfunctional families and concerns have shifted from a focus on the absent working mother to the present focus on absent fathers (Haukanes & Thelen, 2010). From campaigns for breastfeeding, the public influence on parenthood changed into a more subtle intrusion into family life through the presence of expert knowledge in the daily lives of

families rather than direct state intervention. Parental behaviour can also be monitored through infant controls and parental support systems (Haukanes & Thelen, 2010). In Great Britain, for example, the family as a problem has long been the topic of public, political, and academic debates. Poor parenting is given as the reason for a whole range of social problems, including poverty, crime, irresponsibility, and selfishness. Furthermore, there exists a consensus across political party lines that parenting is in decline, and that there is a need for early intervention programs by the state, despite the lack of scientific evidence (Edwards & Gillies, 2013). The failure of parents is drawn in as an explanation for problems such as the obesity crisis, anti-social behaviour, and education failure. Social problems are believed to be inherited from the previous family generation (Faircloth, et al., 2013a).

Parenting is in a moral context in the light of public and often political debate. What parents feed their children, when they put them to bed, what they read to them, how they discipline them, how they play with them at home and how they let them play outdoors have all become contested and politicised questions.

(Faircloth, et al., 2013a, p. 8)

Underlying this, lie power relations and questions of democracy and about what is good for children, parents, and society as a whole (Faircloth, et al., 2013).

**Parenting in Collectivistic Societies.** In collectivistic societies, which can be found in parts of Southern Europe, large parts of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, collective identity, emotional dependence, sharing of duties and obligations, and group solidarity are emphasized (Bø, 2015; Javo, Rønning, & Heyerdahl, 2004). These values are reflected in the way people parent. In contrast to parenting in individualistic societies, collectivistic-oriented societies tend to have parenting practices oriented towards kin and guided by collectivistic thinking. A greater emphasis is often placed on obedience, control, conformity, respect towards elders, and protection of the family reputation (Bø, 2008). Child raising is often more authoritarian (Bø, 2015; Levi, 2014) and can involve corporal punishment as a normal and accepted way to discipline children (Bø, 2015; Foner & Dreby, 2011; Jiménez Sedano, 2013). The responsibility of childcare is divided within caregiving networks that can ease the burden on parents (Jiménez Sedano, 2013).



### **Acculturation Theory**

Immigrating to a country where the majority of the population has a different cultural background leads to the meeting of different cultures. Acculturation refers to the reciprocal processes of cultural and psychological change that occur when two or more groups of individuals with different cultures come into contact over a long period of time (Sam & Berry, 2010). Berry (1997) differentiates between cultural groups according to three factors: voluntariness, mobility, and permanence. Immigrants, for example, are faced with acculturation voluntarily, while other groups like refugees or indigenous peoples are forced into it. For some groups acculturation occurs during a limited time frame, for example international students or asylum seekers who are eventually deported. For others it is permanent (Berry, 1997).

Acculturation describes how immigrants accommodate themselves socially, psychologically, and academically in their new society and acculturation theory is therefore useful in understanding some of the experiences the informants in this study describe. Acculturation happens on group and individual levels, and groups and their individual members have dynamics that influence each other. In order to understand acculturation processes, one needs to consider the main characteristics of the respective cultures as well as the nature of their relationship. For example, one should consider whether the meeting of two cultures occurs based on the domination of one group over the other, whether there is hostility between the groups, or whether the relationship is based on mutual respect (Sam & Berry, 2010).

**Emotional, behavioural and cognitive aspects of acculturation.** According to Ward (2001, cited in Sam and Berry 2010, p. 474), the acculturation process has emotional, behavioural, and cognitive aspects. The stress and coping framework of acculturation focuses on emotional aspects. It is concerned with psychological well-being and life satisfaction. Acculturation brings with it major changes and life events. If a person feels that she lacks the ability to cope and the social support needed to deal with these changes and events, the associated experiences can result in acculturative stress. Whether acculturative experiences bring on a stress reaction therefore depends on how the experiences are appraised by the individual, as well as mediating factors like personal characteristics and the available social support.

The cultural learning approach deals with the behavioural perspective on acculturation and the skills people need in order to engage with members of another culture, such as verbal and nonverbal communication skills and knowledge of rules, conventions, and norms. If

essential skills are lacking, everyday social life and adaptation can be difficult (Sam & Berry, 2010).

The cognitive perspective focuses on how individuals think about themselves in relation to their cultural group and the larger society during intercultural encounters (Sam & Berry, 2010). According to Sam and Berry, the way people acculturate is influenced by the degree to which they wish to interact with the new culture, the larger society, and the degree to which people are willing to give up their own cultural identity.

**Assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization.** Culture maintenance and contact with the new society can be balanced in different ways. Sam and Berry developed a taxonomy of four possible outcomes depending on this balance: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization (Sam & Berry, 2010). So, immigrants either maintain their own cultural identity or adapt in varying degrees the cultural identity of the new society. The degree to which immigrants stay the same is set against the degree to which they become like members of the new culture. The chosen strategy is not merely a matter of independent choice, individuals or groups are also influenced by public policies and the attitudes members of the new society have towards them. Discrimination has been shown to have an influence on which strategy is employed (Sam & Berry, 2010).

Assimilation occurs when individuals decide not to maintain their own cultural identity and instead adopt the values, norms, and traditions of the new society. Separation, on the other end of the spectrum, happens when individuals avoid contact with members of the new society and hold on to their original cultural identity. Individuals that adopt the integration strategy maintain their cultural integrity, while also having close contact with members of the new society and participating in the larger society. The marginalization strategy is characterized by a lack of possibility or interest in maintaining one's original culture. For example, enforced cultural loss or having little contact with the dominant culture due to discrimination or exclusion. None of these four strategies are static or end points. They can change over time and be influenced by situational factors (Bhatia & Ram, 2001; de Haan, 2011; Sam & Berry, 2010).

The above terms change slightly when these ideas are placed on a higher socio-ecological level – society. When considering a society's enforcement of acculturation or of limits on the choice of acculturation strategies for groups or individuals, the following terms are used: Multiculturalism, Melting Pot, Segregation and Exclusion (Berry, 1997).

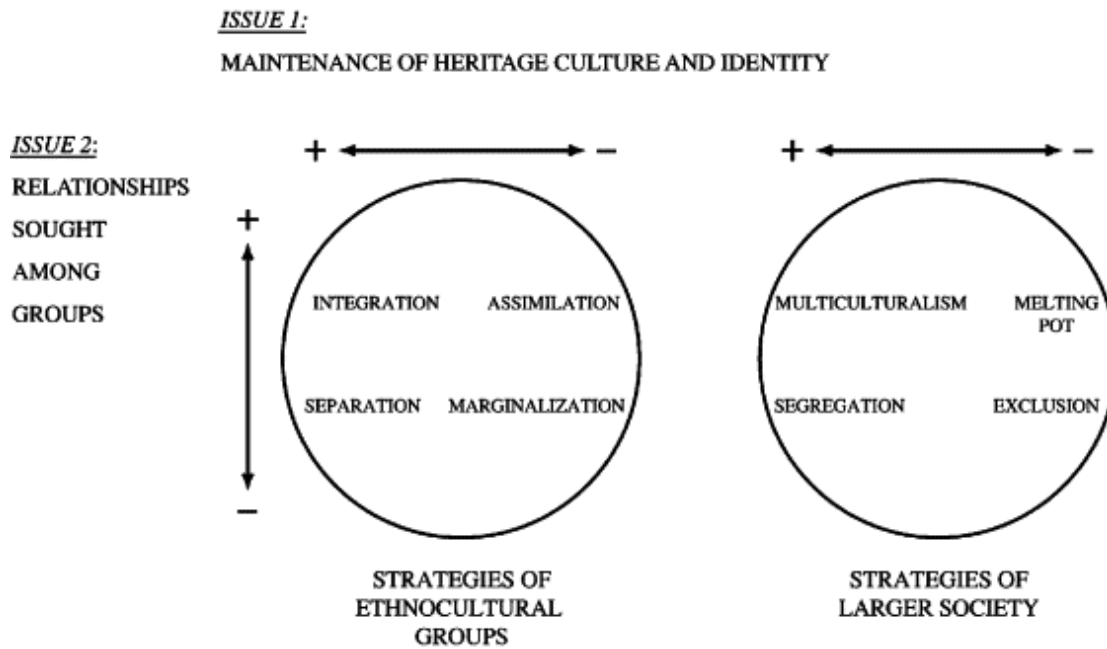


Figure 1: Acculturation Theory  
(Berry, 2005)

In this model, integration can only be successful when the new society is open to it. Preconditions for this are a widespread positive view on multiculturalism, low levels of prejudice, and a positive mutual attitude towards different cultural groups (Berry, 1997).

There is a correlation between the way people acculturate and how well they adapt (Sam & Berry, 2010). Psychological adaptation refers to a person's emotional or psychological well-being. Sociocultural adaptation describes how well a person learns the sociocultural skills that are needed in the new society. Integration has been shown to be the strategy that is associated with better psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Marginalization, on the other hand, has been shown to be the least adaptive (Sam & Berry, 2010).

### **Cultural Translation**

Bhatia and Ram (2001) have criticized acculturation theory for taking on an overly universalist stance, which assumes that the psychological processes that occur during acculturation are the same for all cultural groups. Moreover, they argue that the acculturation model does not adequately take into consideration life circumstances such as race, gender, and history of these cultural groups (Bhatia & Ram, 2001).

De Haan (2011) provides a constructive criticism towards acculturation theory - as it is used by most researchers - and in it he aims to not to discard the theory, but to extend it

with the concept of cultural translation. According to de Haan, the changes that occur in migration settings are

Neither as the appropriation of the guest culture according to the frame of the culture that is brought along nor as the incorporation of the culture brought along into the frame of the guest culture. Through their confrontation, both frames are transformed so that their result is by definition not a perfect translation but basically a reformulation of both frames. (de Haan, 2011, p. 393)

Ideas of change based on a move from one's original culture to a new culture, or on the balance between culture maintenance and interaction with new culture are hereby challenged. Instead the confrontation between the cultures leads to tension that can create energy that has the potential to create new practices. Instead of turning to the original culture or adopting the new one completely, both are considered and new practices might emerge that are qualitatively different from ones that existed before. These cannot be described along the taxonomy of maintaining or adopting the original or new culture more or less, instead these practices might combine elements of both (de Haan, 2011). Some of the experiences described by the informants in this study cannot be explained by with the sole use of acculturation theory. Therefore, I will employ the theoretical lens of cultural translation as well as acculturation theory.

### **Resilience**

The term resilience refers to an individual's ability to adapt well or thrive in life despite being exposed to adversity or stressful life events. To adapt well, or in other words, positive adaptation means the absence of psychopathology, age appropriate development, and subjective well-being. A person's adaptation can change over time, from maladaptation to resilience or the other way around and it might vary across outcomes. For example, the same person may be competent in their work but have no relational competence (O'Dougherty Wright & Masten, 2015). Moving to another country and setting up one's life in a new environment can be challenging and stressful. This leads me to the conclusion that the mothers in this study who have managed this and other challenges exhibit resilience. One of the aims of this research was to find out what has helped and strengthened these mothers in their integration process, or in other words, what has contributed to building their resilience.

**Resilience as a socio-ecological concept.** There are three types of resilience models: person-focused, variable-focused, and hybrid models. Person-focused models focus primarily on the individual person. Variable-focused models focus on risks, resources, and potential mediators of risk factors. Hybrid models combine person- and variable-focused models (O'Dougherty Wright & Masten, 2015).

Ungar (2008) proposes a hybrid model of resilience. He understands resilience as context dependent and proposes a socio-ecological concept of resilience described as the individual's ability to make use of the psychological, socio-cultural, and physical resources they need to deal with adversity and sustain well-being. These can be individual resources like personality traits, intelligence, or motivation to succeed, for example. They can also be relational or collective, for example, attachment to a caregiver or extended family or a sense of belonging to a community, respectively. Resilience as a socio-ecological concept thus comprises the qualities of the individual and the individual's environment that interact together in a way that result in opportunities for personal growth, not just individual traits or characteristics (Ungar, 2008, 2015; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011). Understood in this way, resilience is complex and contains the multiple levels within a person's ecology, including cultural processes (Theron & Liebenberg, 2015). Thus, the individual's ability to make use of resources and opportunities that are present becomes important and, at the same time, the resources and opportunities play an important role.

While individual agency is a component of one's ability to navigate to resources, it remains the role of families, communities, and governments to make those resources available in culturally meaningful ways that reflect the preferences of those who need them. Therefore, resilience is a shared quality of the individual and the individual's social ecology, with the social ecology likely more important than individual factors to recovery and sustainable well-being for populations under stress. (Ungar, 2012, p. 17)

In line with Ungar, I view the individual's environment or social ecology as highly important in supporting integration into the society of a new country. The socio-ecological model of resilience will therefore be used to explain the experiences of the informants.

### **Literature Review**

I have searched the Web of Science and PsychInfo databases in order to find relevant literature with key words such as: immigrant, refugee, mother, motherhood, mothering or father, parents, parenting, parenting beliefs and practices, family, acculturation, and parenting, mother or mothering, father, and Norway or Nordic countries. I have also used the reference lists of relevant articles in order to find more literature.

To my knowledge, the empirical research on experiences of refugee mothers in the Nordic countries is limited. Therefore, in the following chapter I will review studies on parenting in immigration conducted with various immigrant groups in Norway. Additionally, I will consider literature from Western countries that are culturally similar to Norway.

The second part of the chapter will review studies on views of parenting and childrearing in the Nordic context.

### **Migration as a Parenting Decision**

Two common reasons for migrating are to look for better economic opportunities and a better standard of living and to live in social, political, and religious freedom and stability (Este & Tachble, 2009). For some groups of migrants, migration alone is a parenting decision. Parents decide to emigrate because they have hopes and values for their children's future that they feel cannot be fulfilled in their home countries, due to societal factors like poverty and war (K. Perreira, M. Chapman, & G. Stein, 2006). A good example of this observation is Yakhnich's (2016) study with 17 parents from the Former Soviet Union who had emigrated to Israel. She used in depth interviews to elicit parents' perceptions of parenting, the way their perceptions were influenced by their immigration, their relationship to their children and the way they coped with their changed way of life. Their decision to emigrate was made based on the belief that emigration would be beneficial for the children, which made them feel responsible for their children adjusting well to the new life. Participants emphasized that parental responsibility and the difficulty in fulfilling this responsibility in immigration left them with feelings of helplessness and uncertainty. They felt the need to control what happened in their children's lives, to be accessible for their children, and to give them guidance. All participants reported that their children learned Hebrew before they did and were then able to socially interact with others before they could. The majority felt that Israeli parents did not set limits for their children. They reported that they felt helpless and did not know how to deal with the parental challenges they faced. They realized that their educational

methods, which were based on control and discipline, were not applicable in the new environment. Yet they continued to use their traditional methods of parenting despite feeling like they might risk losing a close relationship with their children (Yakhnich, 2016).

### **Change in Social Position**

Migration involves moving from one's usual environment to another, and this, in turn, means leaving what is familiar and getting used to an environment that is different in many ways. Migration is associated with a range of challenges, such as a change in social position or class status, the loss of the support networks in form of extended family, and other social networks. A change in socioeconomic status, having to find employment that is below one's education level, disorienting cultural changes, and racism can lead to levels of economic and social segregation that many immigrant families did not experience in their country of origin (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007; Este & Tachble, 2009; Foner & Dreby, 2011; Maiter & George, 2003; Perreira, et al., 2006; Renzaho, McCabe, & Sainsbury, 2011)

Underemployment and unemployment were central themes in the study by Este & Tachble (2009) for which they conducted interviews with 20 refugee fathers from Sudan inquiring about their experiences as fathers living in Canada. Many respondents had formal education but their qualifications were not recognized in Canada, which forced them to work in low-skilled jobs. Fear that their children would lose their cultural background, the lack of discipline, social isolation, and lack of support from extended family were other important themes that emerged. It was found that these factors led to more involvement in childrearing by the fathers. The men reported that they were very committed to and actively involved in their children's upbringing (Este & Tachble, 2009).

Also, in the Aldoney & Cabrera (2016) study with Mexican parents, it was reported that it was difficult to find a good work-life balance, and that they felt that their low education and ability to speak English limited their chances to find better jobs. Their wish to do the best for their children motivated them and gave them strength for handling the adversity. Many believed that being optimistic would help them and their children in difficult times. They wanted their children to become bi-cultural and to learn values that reflect both American culture as well as their home country's in order to socialize into American society and have a good life. Parents transmitted their values and beliefs by talking to their children and being a good example (Aldoney & Cabrera, 2016).

The confrontation with racism is often part of an immigrant's daily life, and so it was for the informants in the study by Dumbrill (2009). They wanted welfare workers to

understand their hopes, challenges, and fears in order to work with them on the development of child welfare policies and services in Canada (Dumbrill, 2009). Many informants could only afford housing in poor neighbourhoods where they and their families were confronted with crime, drugs, and gangs. These parents used close supervision of their children's activities outside the home, taught them to have respect for others, and to do well in school. The use of strict discipline to enforce rules appeared to be a direct relationship to the degree to which parents believed their children faced danger. Participatory action research was employed to generate these findings (Dumbrill, 2009).

This aligns with findings from a study with Mexican immigrant fathers in the U.S., by Behnke, Taylor, & Parra-Cardona (2008), that found that parents actively tried to protect their children from negative environmental influences like drugs. Both parents needed to be more involved in parenting in order to do so. Fathers expressed concerns about their youths having too much freedom and that legal issues limited their ability to discipline them. They were worried that their children's wish for more freedom would lead to the loss of respect for elders and parental authority, as well as a disregard for central cultural values like family cohesion and closeness. Behnke, et al. identified common characteristics, such as strong family values and work ethics, among these fathers that helped them to deal with the challenges they were faced with.

### **Acculturation Gap**

The process of acculturation, in which norms, customs, and values of the host country are acquired, can create a gap between parents and their children (Levi, 2014). During the in-depth interviews Levi had with 17 Sudanese mothers of teenagers in Australia, four main concerns were voiced: the transition from parenting in an interdependent society with family and community support to parenting alone, fears of losing the children, both symbolically through the children's adaptation to Australian cultural norms and literally because the children left home early and mothers were afraid for them. As children questioned parental authority more, the women reported they felt a loss of sense of self and power in relation to their children. They felt alone and isolated and were lacking the shared responsibility that was part of childrearing in Sudan (Levi, 2014). Stories of child protection services removing children from family homes and a lack of knowledge of the acceptable disciplinary practices in Australia led to fear and confusion. But many also reported that they had adapted their parenting styles and found new ways of relating to their children, such as talking and using



reasoning rather than physical forms of discipline. The local Sudanese community was their main source of social support (Levi, 2014).

The gap between parents and children can occur because children often adjust more quickly to the new social environment than their parents. This is due to the fact that children are often more adaptable and immersed to a higher degree in the new culture in schools or daycare facilities (Yakhnich, 2016). This can lead to an intergenerational acculturation gap and creates conflict within a family. Parents may start to feel like they are losing control of their children and that the culture of the receiving country is interfering with the transmission of their cultural value system to their children (Shariff, 2009). As they children acculturate faster, parents can suddenly become dependent on their children to be cultural brokers for translation and interpretation. (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007; Este & Tachble, 2009; Foner & Dreby, 2011; K. Perreira, et al., 2006; Renzaho, et al., 2011; Yakhnich, 2016). Parents often report that they can no longer help children with their homework because they do not speak the language. In addition, in the study by Perreira, et al. (2006), informants representing first generation Latino parents in North Carolina reported that, due to long working hours, they have less time for their families than they did before migration. The study found that parents responded to the challenges and fears they faced by employed positive coping strategies, such as displaying high levels of empathy towards their adolescent children and increasing open and safe communication with them. Simultaneously, the parents taught their children about their Latino heritage and methods for counteracting racism and discrimination. (K. Perreira, et al., 2006).

Another example of the acculturation gap can be found in the experiences voiced by parents in the study by Lieber, Nihira & Mink (2004). In this study, parents expressed that they felt there was a conflict between the Western individualist thinking and the Asian collectivist perspective that places responsibility towards the family before oneself. The majority reported obedience issues and referred to examples of their children demanding explanations and reasoning from them. These parents were concerned that their children's levels of aspiration was far lower than their own and that their children were willing to settle for the mediocre. They reported ambivalent feelings towards the American education system, culture, and the lack of respect for elders (Lieber, Nihira, & Mink, 2004).

### **Loss of Parental Authority**

Renzaho, McCabe, & Sainsbury (2011) interviewed Arabic speaking immigrants in focus groups to learn about cultural values, behaviors, and practices concerning family

dynamics and how the participants negotiated these in their new environment. The main findings were that the parents experienced a loss of authority over their children due to Australian legislation that limits the way parents can discipline their children. This loss of authority led to a loss in confidence in their parenting abilities (Renzaho, et al., 2011).

Similar findings have been made in the study by Lewig, et al. (2010). The refugee parents in their study reported feelings of disempowerment, sadness, and frustration by the increasing independence of their children. Just like participants in Levi (2014), they were uncertain about their rights as parents in Australia and lacked information about accepted parenting practices and disciplinary methods for children.

### **Change of Parenting Practices**

Adapting to the new environment also means reorganizing one's life and questioning one's values, expectations, norms, and behaviors including one's parental role (Este & Tachble, 2009). Major differences between immigrants childrearing goals and methods from home and those prevalent in the host society may lead to parental stress and conflict in the family (Yakhnich, 2016). Both acculturation and parenting are dynamic processes, and immigrants report that, as a result of exposure to the host culture and the loss of the social structures that supported their parenting beliefs, they started to question their parenting style and the values it was based on and changed their childrearing practices to varying degrees (Nesteruk & Marks, 2011; Ochocka & Janzen, 2008). Ochocka & Janzen (2008) therefore stress the importance of an ecological approach that takes the context of immigrants into account when trying to understand immigrant parenting. Yakhnich (2016, p. 5) states "Given the great importance of the parental role in the individual's life, believing in one's own ability to be a successful parent is necessary to normal adjustment to a new cultural environment".

Parents in the Tingvold, et al. (2012) study found it challenging to balance different child raising methods. The Vietnamese parents reported that, during their years in Norway, they changed their style of parenting so that it included practices that taught their children to be more autonomous. Fathers felt they were lacking the language needed to help them talk to their children about emotional issues the way Norwegian fathers did. These parents also often felt that their adolescent children were more competent about Norwegian society, which indicates an acculturation gap. Both immediate and extended family members were used as resources in parenting. Parents saw the freedom and the educational and economic opportunities available for their children in Norway as positive (Tingvold, et al., 2012).

Parents in the study by Aldoney & Cabrera (2016) reported that they had adopted American disciplinary methods like time-out, for example.

In another study, mothers and fathers from Eastern Europe raising children in the US mentioned that lack of respect for parents, elders and teachers in US culture was one of the main difficulties of raising their children in the US (Nesteruk & Marks, 2011). At the same time, they acknowledged the benefits of democratic parenting that values children's individuality and self-esteem and lets them interact with adults on equal footing so that they can openly express their opinions. This is in contrast to the authoritarian way they were raised that, in their opinion, makes children inhibited and shy. Parents reported that they changed their parenting style and took their children's opinions into consideration more than they used to. They selectively adapted elements of the US culture while, at the same time, rejected others like giving children too much undeserved praise (Nesteruk & Marks, 2011).

Although cultural values such as respect for elders, humility, discipline, and a sense of belonging to their own culture were important to the Asian mothers raising their children in Canada, Maiter & George (2003) also found that their focus group discussions revealed that these values were not static but rather mediated by social context.

### **Views on Childrearing and Children in the Nordic Context**

Norway, like the other Nordic countries, is an individual rights-based society that is guided by an ideal of autonomy rather than community. Parents negotiate with their children instead of exercising physical control over them or directing them. Verbal and face-to-face interaction between parents and children is high and parents are sensitive to the emotional needs of children. Norwegian parents place high value on showing their children that they love and respect them (Johannesen & Appoh, 2016).

A study by Trifan, Stattin, & Tilton-Weaver (2014) with three cohorts of adults in a suburb of Stockholm, Sweden explored how authoritarian parenting practices based on control had changed over a time span of 53 years starting in 1958 (Trifan, Stattin, & Tilton-Weaver, 2014). Results showed two major changes of parenting practices: The directive control over children's feelings or behaviour had almost completely disappeared and fathers and mothers shared authority. The authors assume that social and legislative changes are reflected in the changes of parenting practices. The ratification of the CRC and laws against corporal punishment are assumed to be related to the vanishing of directive control. Social and legislative changes were made that favour more democratic family relations, such as a higher employment rate for mothers, laws for gender equality, and laws and public policies promoting the involvement of fathers in childcare (Trifan, et al., 2014).

According to Hennem (2014), children are closely associated with the Norwegian

national self-image. Norway promotes itself internationally as an egalitarian democratic society and one of the best places for children to grow up. It prides itself as a pioneer in the welfare of children and children's rights. Norway was the first nation in the world that established a child protection system in 1896 (Hennum, 2014) and the first country that outlawed corporal punishment of children. It also was the first country that established the office of an ombudsman for children, whose task it is to make sure that interests and needs of children are safeguarded on different levels of society. And, as mentioned earlier, Norway adopted the entire CRC into Norwegian law (Hennum, 2015). Public policies favour the equal sharing of parental responsibilities and the involvement of fathers in the care of children. Children are viewed as citizens with own rights and this is reflected in the legislation. For example, children have the right to be heard in cases that concern them from 12 years old and, in exceptional cases, even younger. The welfare of children is not only the responsibility of the parents, but also of the welfare state and society at large. Children are seen as vulnerable and in need of protection. Their position in society is lower because of their age, so accentuating their rights as individuals and citizens is needed (Hennum, 2015).

Moshuus (2014) asked a nationwide sample of Norwegian parents and their teenage children what they consider important characteristics of good parents and compared the findings with data collected in Israel. He concluded that the relationship between parents and children in Norway is based on the idea of equality in contrast to Israel where it is believed that youth are different from adults. Both Norwegian youth and parents share the notion that family relationships should be democratic and that good parents need to be caregivers and bosses at the same time (Moshuus, 2014).

This supports Nicole Hennem's findings of a comprehensive study on the relationships between Norwegian adolescents and their parents. The stories Hennem collected from both parents and their teenage children showed that their relationships are characterized by love and affection, as well as authority. Norwegian childrearing is based on dialogue and it is emphasized that children should understand why they are asked to do or not to do something (Hennem, 2002). The affection and love between parents and children is built during the early childhood years and is seen as essential for a good childhood. A good childhood starts with the parents planning the pregnancy and making sure that they have the material means in order to give their child an optimal start to life. Love is hereby materialized, but also showed through the sacrifices parents, especially mothers, make for their children (Hennem, 2004).

Parents are responsible for guiding their children through their complicated society by

giving them various social experiences and protecting them from experiencing harsh realities like poverty or illness (Andenæs, 2004). The relationship between mother and child should be characterized by continuity, love, intimacy, awareness, understanding, and care (Hennum, 2004). Childhood should be a relatively carefree period in life when parents handle problems. The interests of mothers should come after the interests of their children, and mothers should always be available for their children. Therefore, mothers often reduce their working hours in order to be able to take care and spend time with their children, because a good childhood is also characterized by parents following their children to activities (e.g. football matches) (Hennum, 2004).

Parents in Norway are therefore faced with the challenge of respecting their teenage children as equals and, at the same time, to fill an authoritative role (Moshuus, 2014).

### **Methodology**

This chapter will first describe the study and its methodological approach. The study site and sample are described, and details of the data generation and relevant epistemological issues are discussed. Thereafter, issues related to data analysis are discussed. Finally, the quality assurance, my role as a researcher, and ethical considerations are addressed.

This master's project was part of a larger project led by a research network at the University of Bergen, which has conducted a pilot study on refugee resilience and the sociocultural resources for refugee children, youth, and families. The objectives of the pilot study were: to learn what customs and practices are used in immigrants' cultures of origin to strengthen and support children who have experienced adversity, what resources have been used by young people that have successfully integrated into Norwegian society, and what resources are used by children, youth, and parents to cope and adapt to their new environment.

The research group conducted six focus group interviews for the project, two of which are also utilized in the findings of this thesis.

### **Objectives of the Study and Research Design**

This thesis aims to explore the experiences of immigrant mothers in Norway. The main objective was to gain an understanding of the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers in Norway.

The research sub-questions were

- How do immigrants/refugees experience life in Norway?
- How do they perceive being a parent in their new environment?
- How do they negotiate parenting in their integration process?
- What strengths and resources help them in their integration process?

For the "Refugee resilience project", the use of a qualitative research design in the form of focus group interviews was decided prior to my thesis. The two focus group interviews with parents that I used in my research were done before I chose the topic for my thesis and the NSD approved the sharing of these data with me. Focus group interviews were decided on in order to gain access to the experiences and reflections around the phenomena the pilot study sought to explore.

Before moving on, in brief, a focus group is a small group of people that share certain characteristics and are asked to informally discuss a particular topic or issue. Facilitators of these group discussions often start the discussion by asking broad questions and encouraging the interaction of group members. Interaction between group members is meant to lead interviewees to explore both individual and shared views and experiences. Focus group discussions are usually recorded, transcribed, and later analyzed. An advantage of focus groups is that they are a cost and time effective means to gain knowledge about insufficiently researched phenomena (Silverman, 2013; Tong, Sainsbury, & Craig, 2007).

Because the research undertaken for this thesis aimed to explore the social world from the perspective of the informants in more detail, a qualitative phenomenological design was also chosen. Specifically, the phenomenological design was chosen to describe the meanings and the significance the informants ascribe to their lived experiences of being a mother and an immigrant in Norway from their perspective (Creswell, 2014; Silverman, 2013; Tong, et al., 2007). The study needs to be read in light of my constructionist world-view as our theories of knowledge “guide our decisions about topics, research questions, theories, methods, analyses, and conclusions” (Gringeri, Barusch & Cambron, 2013, p.55).

In social constructionism, emphasis is placed on the rhetorical and constructive aspects of knowledge. It is believed that individuals are trying to make sense of their world and give meaning to it by constructing a reality in their mind. Subjective realities are shaped through interaction with others and the social and historical context of our environment. The meanings that are developed are therefore individual, varied, and complex, and need to be seen within their social and historical context. That means multiple equally valid realities can exist; a single objective reality does not exist (Creswell, 2014; Ponterotto, Hansen, Haverkamp, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2005; Silverman, 2013; Thagaard, 2009). Based on these aims and my theoretical perspective, I decided to conduct in-depth interviews, together with my supervisor, Ragnhild Hollekim. These in-depth interviews used unstructured and open-ended questions in order to gain an understanding of the views and opinions of the interviewees (Creswell, 2014)

The original plan was to do two sets of two interviews with mothers from Afghanistan and Eritrea, in order to expand on the topics that had emerged in the two focus groups already conducted, which were with mothers and parents from Afghanistan and Eritrea, respectively. However, in the end, the data set used for this thesis consisted of the two aforementioned focus group interviews and two individual interviews done by me. The recruitment of

informants was more difficult than anticipated for reasons that are explained in more detail below.

### **Study Site and Sample**

The research was done in Bergen, a city situated on the west coast of Norway. With 278.556 inhabitants (as of 01.01.2017) it is the second largest city in the country. In Bergen 17,1 % of the population are immigrants (Bergen Kommune, 2017).

The sample was composed of mothers from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Somalia, and Syria. I chose to interview mothers, because as (Faircloth, 2013) has found, parenting is still gendered in a way that the larger share of the parenting is carried out by mothers, and because I have a personal interest in different life experiences of women, including different experiences of motherhood.

### **Sampling Strategy**

Purposive sampling was the sampling strategy I used for both focus groups and individual interviews. This involved selecting informants based on certain shared characteristics, which can potentially provide rich and relevant data (Tong, et al., 2007). It was chosen because all the informants were supposed to share the characteristics of being a mother and having come to Norway as a refugee.

### **Recruitment Criteria**

For participation in the individual interviews, I set the following recruitment criteria: mothers should have come to Norway with at least one child, they should have been living in Norway for a minimum of one year, and they should be able to speak either Norwegian or English. Informants should have come to Norway with at least one child so that they have had comparative experiences between mothering in their home country and in Norway. They should have been living in Norway for at least one year as this was assumed to be the minimum amount of time needed to have gained an insight into and been in contact with the Norwegian way of childrearing. The interviews needed to be done in either Norwegian or English, because I was not able to communicate in the informants' mother tongues.

The sample size was originally limited to four mothers, because the focus of the study was on selecting rich descriptions during in-depth interviews. However, only two mothers agreed to participate in the study. Originally, the plan had been to interview mothers from Afghanistan and Eritrea only, following the recruitment criteria of the focus groups. However, it became clear that in order to find informants that matched all the recruitment criteria, the



nationality had to be changed so informants from other countries could participate in the study.

Focus group participants were recruited through resource persons in the community, snowballing, and NGO's (e.g. Kirkens Bymisjon). In my initial research planning, I considered the challenges for recruitment, but thought I would be able to find four mothers who would be willing to participate because I had several contacts working in Kirkens Bymisjonen. I also had contact to an Eritrean interpreter who knew many Eritrean families through her professional role and to a refugee consultant for a nearby municipality. Recruitment proved to be much more difficult than anticipated.

Only two informants who met the recruitment criteria were found. Many women seemed to be reluctant to participate due to the fact that I studied child welfare. The Norwegian child welfare system, "barnevernet", has a negative reputation, especially amongst immigrants because of the media coverage of cases involving children being taken from immigrant families. Barnevernet was publicly accused of stealing children. I made efforts to get more contacts beyond the ones I already had by contacting the Red Cross in Bergen, refugee consultants in Stord municipality, and telling everyone I met during the recruitment months that I was looking for mothers to participate in the study. The Eritrean interpreter put me in contact with a woman working for the "Ny sjanse" program. "Ny sjanse" is a program from the municipality of Bergen that helps immigrants qualify for work life. The woman became very interested in the study and in helping me find suitable informants. Information about the project and recruitment criteria were sent to her via e-mail and one informant was recruited through her. Contact with the second informant was established through one of the researchers working on the main project. Both informants were introduced to the project and gave their consent to participate before I contacted them.

## **Methods**

Various themes related to childrearing and what makes children and youth thrive were addressed during the two focus group interviews and informants were able to reflect freely on the topic.

I chose to use in-depth interviews as method of data collection because my aim was to learn more about the topics that were already discussed and to explore others further. One of the focus group discussions had an emphasis on problems and difficulties that were experienced by the informants, despite their efforts to keep a focus on strengths. My hope with the individual interviews was to learn more about the strengths and resources informants

used in their integration process. Using a loose interview guide made it possible to follow the interviewees' story, but also to ensure that the information collected was relevant to the research themes for the study. This method leaves room for topics to emerge that the researcher has not anticipated and to follow up with questions (Thagaard, 2009). The aim was to let the interviews take on a conversational style so informants would feel comfortable speaking personally and in detail about their views and experiences. I tried to let the informants guide the conversation while, also keeping in mind certain questions or topics that I wanted to address. I developed an interview guide (see Appendix A) as a point of reference (Creswell, 2014; Kvale, Anderssen, & Rygge, 1997).

### **Interview Setting**

The context in which data is collected can have an influence on why informants respond in a particular way (Tong, et al., 2007). The first interview was conducted at the premises of the "Ny sjanse" project; a setting the informant was familiar with. I met the participant in the office of the gatekeeper. We were introduced and had an introductory discussion together with the gatekeeper to make sure the participant felt comfortable with me before the interview. After about 10-15 minutes the participant and I went to another room where we could talk without being interrupted. The interview lasted for 55 minutes. For the second interview, I went to the house of the informant. This was the most convenient location for her because she was home with her two children. Before we started the interview I played with her younger child while she helped the older one with homework. Being at her home and having the children around helped to establish a relaxed and informal atmosphere. This interview lasted for one hour and twenty minutes.

Both interviews were done in Norwegian and recorded with the voice-recording tool of my phone after the informants had agreed to being recorded. With the first informant, there were some challenges concerning the language, so I rephrased questions and repeated her answers back to her in order to make sure that she understood what I meant with my questions and that I had understood her accounts correctly.

I also shared some of my personal experiences as an immigrant in Norway, which, I believe, helped them feel more comfortable with opening up to me.

### **Data Management**

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using Microsoft Word, 2011 (Version 14). In order to ensure data quality, interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after they were conducted. Pauses, sighs, and laughter were included in the transcription. The identity of

the informants was anonymized during the transcription process. Personal details such as surnames and addresses, as well as other associative information about the informants was not transcribed.

According to Kvale, Anderssen, and Rygge (1997) a verbatim transcription of oral language can, for outsiders, appear patchy and as an indication of low intelligence, so I chose to write what had been said in a more coherent form in the report, if necessary. Close attention was given to maintaining the meaning of what had been said. Both the audio recordings of the interviews and the written transcriptions were stored securely on my password-protected computer so that only I had access to them. Finally, in accordance with NSD guidelines, the audio recordings will be deleted at the end of the project.

### **Data Analysis**

To structurally analyze the data set, I used thematic network analysis. Thematic network analysis is a method for systematically organizing a thematic analysis of qualitative data (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Data analysis began with listening to the recordings of the interviews and transcribing them. One of the focus group interviews and both individual interviews were transcribed by me. To analyse the data in a systematic way I followed the steps of thematic network as described by Attride-Sterling (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Interview transcriptions were read and reread multiple times. Salient themes in the data were identified at different levels and thematic networks were used to structure and outline these themes. Coding was done both manually and using Nvivo software to manage the data. A hybrid inductive (“bottom-up”) and deductive (“top-down”) approach was used during the analysis process and the construction of the coding framework, allowing for codes to emerge from salient themes in the data (“inductive”), as well as from the background of the research questions and theoretical framework (Attride-Stirling, 2001). I had no coding framework prepared when initially starting to code. During the next step I went through all the codes and grouped them together in basic themes. The manual coding was used to physically reorient codes, group them in one way, and to re-evaluate their grouping to make necessary changes according to what made the most analytical sense. After having physically produced these basic themes, I read and reread them to find commonalities and then organized them under a more interpretative organizing theme. After having found the organizing themes, I created the overarching global theme that is representative of the main information in the data. Even though I have described this process in steps, which gives the impression that it is fairly linear, it is important to mention that it is an iterative process -- a back and forth of rereading, renaming, combining or deleting, and reorganizing of codes and themes.

## Coding Chart

Codes	Basic themes	Organizing themes	Global theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Norwegians are reserved and busy</li> <li>-Norwegians are afraid of foreigners, especially Muslims</li> <li>-Norwegians do not have respect</li> <li>-Norwegians help when they know you better</li>   <li>-Norway is a safe place, we do not have to be afraid here like in our home country</li> <li>-my daughter can choose who she wants to marry</li> <li>-I can study what I want now</li> <li>-climate – isolation, lots of clothes. . .</li> <li>-loneliness and feelings of isolation</li> <li>-sadness because of the situation in home country</li> <li>-the challenges we have are not related to the children, they are related to the new culture and the bureaucratic system</li> <li>-adjusting to new culture</li>   <li>-we should keep our good values and adopt the good values from this society – take the best from both worlds</li> <li>-I would like my children to have both cultures</li> <li>-we make our own traditions</li> <li>-I want to live the way I want, not be judged by others, that's why I am careful with people from my culture</li> <li>-you should show other people that Islam is peace</li> <li>-we need someone to guide us</li>   <li>-Introduction program</li> <li>-work</li> <li>-colleagues , neighbours, teachers</li> <li>-Organizations and institutions: Red cross, Home Start, Ny Sjanse</li> <li>-child welfare services lady</li> <li>-luckily I could speak English and could take contact with people</li> <li>-I tried to find things that make me happy and keep me busy</li> <li>-if I have a problem I ask for help</li> <li>-childrens success in school</li> <li>-the mosque</li>   <li>-children acculturate faster than parents</li> <li>-you have to be a strong parent in Norway, the children's needs come before your own</li> <li>-no support from family or community, you have to manage on your own</li> <li>-it is important to have a person that knows you well and supports you</li> <li>-it is important take time for oneself</li> <li>-education in Norway is different</li> <li>-I have good contact with my childrens teachers</li> <li>-in Norway you do not shout at or hit children</li> <li>- being affectionate, communicate with children and respect them</li> <li>-I advise my daughter to stay positive and take initiative – it takes time to make friends</li> <li>-my daughter has chosen this religion, she is secure in her belief</li> <li>-I don't want to teach religion to my children - religion is just a fairy tale</li> <li>-you are the role model for your children</li> <li>- I don't want to force my children, it is their life, they can choose what they want to be</li> <li>- hope my children will get higher education</li> <li>-I want my children to learn Norwegian and find a job</li> <li>-I hope my children will become nice people, happy and content with what they have</li> <li>-a job is the key</li> <li>-learning Norwegian is the key: if you know the language you know the system</li> <li>-learn about Norwegian culture and laws</li> <li>-you are the role model for your children</li> <li>-mothers should educate themselves here</li> <li>-try different jobs, find out what you like, you can learn everything</li> <li>- have a plan and goal for the future</li> <li>-focus on your children and take your positive energy from your children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perceptions of Norwegian Culture and society</li>   <li>Advantages of Living in Norway</li>   <li>Challenges of Living in Norway</li>   <li>Acculturation Strategies</li>   <li>People, Institutions, Strategies and Personal Resources that helped during the Integration Process</li>   <li>Parenting in Norway</li>   <li>Hopes and Aspirations for the Children</li>   <li>Advice for other Immigrant Mothers Coming to Norway</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiences and Perceptions of Life in Norway</li>   <li>Experiences and Perceptions of Motherhood in Norway</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiences and Perceptions of Immigrant Mothers in Norway</li> </ul>

Figure 2

### **Quality Assurance**

To address issues of quality I will use the terms suggested by Lincoln and Guba (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) concerning quality of qualitative research: credibility, trustworthiness, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Malterud, 2001).

According to Creswell (2014), validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research. Validity in qualitative research is concerned with the credibility and trustworthiness of the research and whether results are correct from the perspectives of the researcher, the informants, and the readers (Creswell, 2014). In qualitative studies, validity then refers to whether one has studied what one intended to study (Krumsvik, 2014) and whether the researchers interpretation of the data is valid (Thagaard, 2009). Qualitative research is situation-specific and not aimed at producing generalizable results (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2005). A key concept related to validity is the validity threat, or the way one's explanation or result might be wrong and an alternative explanation valid. Maxwell identifies two validity threats: researcher bias, the researchers own ideas and theories, and reactivity, i.e. the researcher's influence on the research setting (Maxwell 2005). Both are especially strong in qualitative research as the researcher is the main instrument for data collection and also the one in charge of data analysis. In order to secure validity, the researcher needs to employ strategies to deal with validity threats (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2005). To ensure validity or credibility, trustworthiness, and authenticity in qualitative studies, Creswell (2014) suggests employing different strategies. Such strategies include: the triangulation of data sources; using rich, thick descriptions; presenting discrepant or contradictory information openly; and identifying the researcher's biases. To make results reliable he suggests checking transcripts for mistakes made during the transcription, comparing codes and data back and forth, and writing memos of codes and their meaning to ensure that meanings of codes do not change during the coding process.

I have tried my best to employ all these methods throughout the research process. To provide rich data I have, in the findings section, used long quotes to ensure that the participant's own words are presented so the reader can independently form an opinion and see if there is contradictory information. I have described my standpoint and below I describe my role as researcher so the reader can see my biases, as well as how I might have influenced the research process. Transcripts, codes, and emerging themes have been checked and reorganized several times.

### **Role of Researcher – Reflective Review**

In qualitative research the researcher plays a central role. She influences the collection, selection, and interpretation of data. One can say that qualitative research is a product of the interaction between participants, the researcher, and the relationship between them, including power differences (Finlay, 2002; Thagaard, 2009). The researchers background, previous experiences, beliefs, motivations, and preconceptions influence what is investigated and how. Therefore, it is important that the researcher takes a reflective and critical stance throughout the whole research process, so that she is aware of how her preconceptions and social inputs influence the research process (Gringeri, Barusch, & Cambron, 2013; Malterud, 2001; Thagaard, 2009).

I am a woman and an immigrant to Norway, which means I have some commonalities with the informants. I do not have any children, however. Unlike the informants, I made the choice of my own free will to come and live in Norway and I can return to my home country at any time. My home country, Germany, is in many ways culturally different to Norway, however, there are also many similarities. Unless people hear me speak Norwegian I might not be identified as a foreigner. I am a student at the University and, therefore, part of a Norwegian institution. The fact that I am also an immigrant and can share certain experiences of meeting Norwegian society as a foreigner might have facilitated the open discussions with the informants. However, being a part of a Norwegian institution might have been a factor that created some distance.

### **Ethics**

Because qualitative research involves human subjects, it is especially important to consider ethical problems (Silverman, 2013). Tracy (2010) differentiates between two categories of ethics: procedural ethics and relational ethics.

**Procedural ethics** are universal ethical guidelines, which refer to ethical actions seen as universally necessary and that are encompassed by institutions, such as the national review board. Informed consent and ensuring confidentiality and the anonymity of participants are examples of procedural ethics. Informants were given information about the purpose of the study by my contacts before they met me. Before each interview began, I explained the purpose of the study once more. Informants were given a copy of the Informed Consent letter (see Appendix B), which we read together and then I answered any remaining questions they had. All informants signed the Informed Consent letter and returned it to me. They were

informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the process at any time.

In Norway, the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD) reviews procedural ethics and my project required NSD approval (NSD, 2017). I received NSD approval for my project in September 2017, reference number 55353 (see Appendix C). The research respected the guidelines of the NSD and the general research ethics. All informants were given written information (see Appendix B) describing the aim of the research, their role as informants, and how the information given would be used and handled after the interviews. This was also verbally explained to each participant before the interview. Written consent was collected and it was emphasized that informants could withdraw their participation at any time (see the Appendix B for the consent form).

**Relational ethics** refer to the ethical self-reflection of the researcher on their role and actions in relation to the participant. Mutual respect and dignity should characterize the relation between researcher and participant (Tracy, 2010). There exists a power imbalance between the researcher and the participants, and the researcher should be mindful of that (Creswell, 2014). One way to balance the power in the relationship is to allow participants to assist in defining the research, for example, by letting them choose the location for the interviews (Creswell, 2014), as I did for this project.

Creswell also points out that researchers need to anticipate that harmful, intimate information could be disclosed during the interview process. Because I was interviewing refugee women who possibly had traumatic experiences in their home countries and were maybe victims of racism in Norway, I tried to mentally prepare myself for the possibility of this kind of information being shared with me (Creswell, 2014).

After the interviews, I sent a message to the informants to express my gratitude for their participation, to underline that the interview went well, and that the information they shared would be treated confidentially as suggested by Kvale, et al. 1997 (Kvale, et al., 1997). As a gesture of reciprocity, the finished research report was sent to all informants and the gatekeeper (Creswell, 2014).

### Findings:

#### Experiences and Perceptions of Immigrant Mothers in Norway

##### Overview over Informants

Following is an overview over all my informants, including how long they have been in Norway and how many children they have. Focus group 1 consisted of both mothers and fathers. Since the objective of this study was to gain an understanding of the experiences and perspectives of mothers the voices of fathers have only been included when they resonated with the ones of the mothers.

##### Focus group 1

Name	Gender	Time in Norway	Number of children
Gebre	male	4 years	4
Hanna	female	6 years	3
Wegatha	female	4 years	3
Ergaalem	female	4 months	2
Solomon	male	2 years	2
Jasmine	female	7 months	3
Anbessa	male	2 years	3

##### Focus group 2

Name	Gender	Time in Norway	Number of children
Shirin	female	7 years	5
Nahida	female	5 years	3

##### Individual interviews

Name	Gender	Time in Norway	Number of children
Feynuus	female	7 years	5
Aya	female	6 years	2

Figure 3



### **Experiences and Perceptions of Life in Norway**

The findings present how the mothers experience and perceive both their life as an immigrant in Norway and being a mother in Norway. In the following I will present my findings according to the aforementioned organizing and basic themes.

#### **Perceptions of Norwegian Culture and Society**

**Norwegian people are reserved and busy people.** All of the informants talked about how Norwegians, in general, seem reserved and that it is difficult to come in contact with people. Some described Norwegians as cold.

Shirin: You know Norwegian people are a little bit cold people. I have neighbours and I have lived here for three years and we don't know each other. Sometimes we say hei, sometimes we don't say hei to each other. And it is a little bit difficult.

Others, like Feynuus for example, had more of an impression that Norwegians are very busy and that they do not have time to talk to people they meet on the street.

Feynuus: Norwegians are so busy all the time. Busy with their phones. For example, I met my neighbour outside and said: Good morning! No answer. Too busy. And when you take the bus everyone sits by themselves. And, in the beginning, I thought why are they all sitting alone? I thought it was weird, but now I understand.

Or, as Aya suspects, that it is has something to do with the climate. Regardless of the reasons they think might be behind it, all informants commented on the Norwegian society being closed. Aya told me how she sometimes gets tired of always being the one that needs to make the first step when wanting to socialize.

Aya: It is not easy. You try to take contact. You try and try and try to get to know the culture. Why they don't approach you. Why they don't come to drink coffee... Maybe it also has to do with the weather.

**Norwegians are afraid of foreigners.** One mother mentioned that she feels that Norwegians are reluctant to open themselves up to foreigners.

Shirin: For example when I go to a parent`s meeting, the parents should approach me. We should have good contact with each other, especially with us foreigners, because we should integrate in this society. It`s a good way that we become or that I become integrated into society, but the people, Norwegian people, they hold themselves a little bit back and they don`t want to welcome you in a very warm way.

Other informants have the impression that Norwegians have a fear of foreigners, especially Muslim foreigners. They expressed that, because of this fear, it was hard to become friends with Norwegians.

Shirin: Maybe the Norwegian people don`t like to be friends with foreigners. And they are afraid from foreigners and it takes a long time to be friends. They think that they (Muslims) are radical people or they are not open minded people. My daughter wears a head scarf and sometimes I think that it causes problems, that people avoid to get to know her.

**Norwegians do not have respect.** Feynuus explained how she feels that there is little respect in Norwegian society compared to in her home country. Feynuus: “And people do not have respect here! No respect! No respect!”

She gave an example of younger people not offering their seat to older people or little children on the bus, as it is custom in her home country.

Feynuus: Norwegians do not have any respect, because when the bus is full the young people just sit there, even though there is an older lady or man. They do not get up and offer their seat. I get up and ask: would you like to sit? The young ones just sit. In my home country, when there are older people or women with children, one has respect, one gets up. But not here, here they just sit and look!

### **Advantages of Living in Norway**

**Norway is a safe place - we do not have to be afraid here.** Several women mentioned that they were happy to be living here now, because they don`t have to be afraid of

bombs anymore. Nahida: "And also the situation in our home country is not good. As we see each night on tv. Things are exploding, everything is exploding."

Living in Norway means that they can sleep soundly through the night without any fear. Feynuus: "I sleep very well here, I am not afraid. In my home country there were bombs and after a bomb exploded I was awake."

**My daughter has the freedom to choose who she wants to marry.** One mother, Shirin, saw it as an advantage that her daughter can now choose who she wants to marry and when, in contrast to if they were still living in their home country.

Shirin: And I say, for example, to my daughter if you would be in our home country you would be married with a man at the age of 18 or 19. But here you have your choice, you can choose when you are going to marry and who you will marry.

**I can study what I want now.** Shirin also enjoys the freedom to study what she would like to study and chose to take another career other than the one her parents made her choose when she was young.

Shirin: I studied architecture back home, but it was not my wish to be an architect. My parents forced me to study architecture. So when I came here, I saw that now I can study something else. I went to the high school. It is for two years. And after two years I will have the papers from the high school that I need to study at university here.

### **Challenges of Living in Norway**

**The climate.** One of the biggest challenges for living in Norway that was expressed by everyone is the climate and the resulting need to dress oneself and one's children appropriately. It was also one of the first things mentioned when asked about the differences between their home country and Norway. Feynuus: "You have all the weather challenges in life here. You need to wear a lot of clothes. It is very difficult with the weather. Very difficult."

But also the isolation caused by the weather, because people retreat to the privacy of their homes, was something that most informants reflected upon.

Aya: And it is very difficult with the weather. Very isolated. Because in this weather, who could you meet? It is difficult to find people. And when you go to the playground you meet someone today and tomorrow someone else and the day after someone else again. They smile, they smile, they are really nice, but they don't invite you to come to their house and you can't invite them to come to yours. You don't get to know them. In my home country it is always good weather, people are always outside. I do experience this here in the summer. During summer you see all the neighbours outside, you say hi to everyone. But during winter you get isolated. During summer we meet people outside in a way, we talk to the neighbours.

**Loneliness and feelings of isolation.** The feelings of isolation and loneliness became so extreme for Aya that she decided to have an abortion after having another unplanned pregnancy. At that time, she couldn't face the idea of having to stay home alone with a baby for yet another year.

Aya: In the beginning I was alone. Just with my husband, but he worked a lot and studied. I was very much alone with my children. One year in the reception centre and one year on maternity leave. That was two years at home. After a while I got pregnant again. And I felt very alone and stressed and tired. That I should have three children. It was a mistake by me. I don't know how this could happen. I went to the hospital and decided that I couldn't be responsible for another child, I didn't manage at the time to see how I could manage. Where was I going with my life? I didn't have a job, I didn't have friends here. I felt I had nothing. I felt very down. And I couldn't accept that I should have another child and stay home another year.

**Sadness caused by the situation in the home country.** One mother, Aya, told me about how hard it was for her to be here while her family and friends were back home in a war zone. She is at a point where she doesn't want to talk about the situation in her home country with people who ask her where she is from because it makes her too upset.

Aya: During the first months, maybe the first year I talked about the situation in my home country. And some periods, for months, I was very sad and I didn't want to talk about it, because I missed home so much. And I didn't manage to express my feelings.

I just started to cry and cry like a baby when someone asked me a question about the war. And especially during that time, the situation in my country was extremely difficult, a lot of war.

She also tried not to talk too often to the people back home because she felt the news was draining her of energy that she needed to continue her life here and for taking care of her children.

Aya: Every time I talked to my family I felt it was very sad, very sad. It changed my days, when I heard something from there or found out someone died. A friend I lost, lost, lost. I didn't want to talk to them back home too often. I got so tired, sad and depressed. I have two children. I need energy to take care of them.

**The challenges we have are not related to the children.** In focus group one it was emphasized by everyone that the main challenge with living here in Norway is related to unfamiliarity with the bureaucratic system and not with the children.

Solomon: ... and when you ask someone in NAV they refer you to the contact person and vice versa. So it was difficult, they didn't know whom to ask what. That is our main challenge. The challenges we have as persons are not related to the children.

The informants felt that they were being sent back and forth between NAV and their contact person and that, often, no one could properly help them.

Solomon: We have a contact person who is in contact with us, but even if we go to him he cannot solve it. As I have told you he sends you to NAV with a piece of paper. The NAV sends you back to the contact person. They make you go back and forth. And they don't solve our problems. We face a number of problems that we didn't expect. How can we find a house? Where do we search for it? Is it in finn.no that we have to search for or do we have to ask people? That both requires language skills. The problem is in such cases what do we do when we don't know the language? And how can we find a house without language?

Not being able to sufficiently communicate in either Norwegian or English, and not having the knowledge on how to start, makes finding a home a seemingly impossible task.

**Adjusting to a new culture.** In addition to not being familiar with the system and not being able to speak the language, interviewees in the same focus group mentioned that it was challenging to come to an unfamiliar culture and having to adjust to it.

Hanna: The challenge is that you as parent are coming to a new society, so it is not only a challenge to your child, but also to you because you are coming into a new culture. You have to make new friends and are totally separated from your culture. And you are moving into a new culture, so it is both a challenge for the parents and the children, but you have to find out what the challenges are that you have to face and go on further.

### **Acculturation Strategies**

**We should keep our good values and adopt the good values from this society –** take the best from both worlds. Many informants talked about the good values they brought with them. They reported that it is important for them to hold onto these values as well as adopting good values from Norwegian society.

Shirin: Everyone that comes from his home country and has their own values. Everyone has values and it is important that we should keep your value and you should keep the good value from this society to have a good life. We should take the beauty from every side. We should not think: no they are European people we have a different religion. But the important thing is that we are human beings. We should find a balance and we should keep our values and integrate.

These informants pointed out that they could not only learn from Norwegians, but that they can also could teach Norwegians some good things.

Hanna: We have our own gifts that the Norwegians can learn. We have also values that the Norwegians should learn from us. I mean, we don't only learn from them all the time. There are things they can learn from us and we also get thought from theirs.

**I would like my children to have both cultures.** All participants said that they would like their children to have both their own and the Norwegian culture.

**We make our own traditions.** Aya explained that, after moving here, her and her husband started to question some of the traditions they had before and decided to live the way they wanted. So they kept some traditions and discontinued others that did not make sense to them.

Aya: When you come to a new country you start to think differently. You start to ask yourself: what fits for me? Not what fits everyone else. But when you live in a place and everyone does something you just have to do it too, even though you don't believe in it. Or maybe you don't think about. You just follow like a sheep. When we came here we changed a lot of things in a way. We changed our thinking. Some things stayed as they were and some things we changed. I don't want to be the way other people want me to be. I want to be like I want to be.

They also made their own personal traditions like their own version of Christmas, for example:

Aya: For us it's not important why we have Christmas, why we have Id. Things happen from before, from a long time ago. We can celebrate with them (Norwegians). We had a Christmas tree, we had presents, because it is good to begin the new year with presents. We said to the children that we start the new year with presents. We decorate just like the others, so that the children don't think: we have to go to school and feel bad. We didn't get any presents, we didn't get anything. We didn't decorate the house. We want them to be like all the other kids in school in a way. Not in every way, but so they don't feel left out. They know we have Christmas, and all the decorations and presents, just like all the others. For us it just means that we start a new year and we just start together with all the others. We decorate in the fall, we decorate in the summer. We decorate. It is nice to decorate. That is how we think about it. We don't focus on one thing. Not on Muslim holidays either. We don't focus on any religious celebrations. No Ramadan. We don't have Ramadan, me and my husband. We don't manage to fast or not eat. We didn't find any meaning in that.

**I want to live the way I want, not be judged by others, that's why I am careful with people from my culture.** When asked if she had many friends here from her home country, Aya explained to me that when she first came here there were not many people from

her home country living here yet. After some time, however, many had moved here but she felt that many of them judged the way others live. For example, they were concerned with who drinks alcohol or not. Aya stated that she did not want to waste time getting to know people that judge others.

Aya: I have been careful with people from my culture. Because from my culture also came many, some drink alcohol, some do not, some are religious, others are not. And to get to know a person takes time. Takes part of your life. I have to think about my time. Because I think sometimes people come here from an Arabic country and they have started to focus on the others. Why aren't you a good Muslim? Why aren't you a good Christian? Why don't you? I don't want that anyone comes to me and focuses on me and how I live my life. Why I am like this or that. I came here to a free country, I want to be free. I don't want anyone to judge me. I want to live the way I want to. I want to drink alcohol. I don't want to cut contact with friends because they don't follow a certain way of life. I want to have friends that fit me, not someone else.

**I want to live, not think about war, not be depressed: move forward.** Several times during the interview Aya mentioned how important it is for her to go on. To live here, stay busy, work, plan for her future, and work towards her goals instead of thinking too much about the past.

Aya: First I was very motivated to talk to people, you come here and you want to talk. But when everyone asks the same question about the war then you start to feel you don't want to talk anymore. First I talked, and talked, but afterwards I got very sad, always talking about the same thing. And I said stop. I don't want to only talk about war, my home country. I want to live. I came here to live. I didn't want to die there or become depressed here. One has to find a way to live as normal as possible. Normal like ordinary people.

She also mentioned that she feels some people come here and get stuck in the past and depressed because all they think and talk about is the war and the life they had at home.

**You should show other people that Islam is peace.** For Nahida, it was important that her religion, Islam, is actually very peaceful and not violent as many people in Western societies have the impression of, based on all the media covering the Islamic terrorist groups.



She told her daughter not to be ashamed of her religion, but to explain to people that their religion is peaceful and beautiful.

Shirin: I tell my daughter your religion is peace, it is beautiful. You should keep it, it's a value, you don't have to be ashamed about, it's a great opportunity to be a Muslim. You should show your Islam that it is a peace. You should convince other people to have respect for your religion, you know.

**We need someone to guide us.** All the interviewees in the larger focus group mentioned several times that they needed someone who could guide them into their new life, someone who could lead the way.

Solomon: A person needs a leader and a support in order to achieve his goal. We need a leader, not to give us orders, but to guide us. We really miss that. We only know the contact person and some of them are really good, but some are not doing their jobs and they are people who know our situation, our weak sides and strong sides and we expect them to help us regarding all our situations, but they are not doing their job. And if we don't really get the direction and guidance that we need in order to achieve something we can't do anything.

And help them reach their goals:

Anbessa: It is only when those who should be helped get the help that they need can reach their goals. But if they don't get help they cannot reach their goal of any form. So in order to accomplish something you have to have a guide. Of course the guide is not to command you to do something, but to show you the ways and give you instructions to follow. Well, we came here and welcomed us sincerely, but in the case of integration we must know what we should and what they should do for us. We don't know what to do, we didn't get a guide.

Several interviewees in the same focus group felt that their contact person should be the one to guide them, but that they often weren't good at their job.

Anbessa: We know nothing except the contact person. Even the contact persons are only responsible in some places, but in other places they don't do their job properly. They are your personal contacts and they were supposed to know your problems and weak sides and help or support you accordingly even if you don't say it to them. We only know the contact persons and if they don't help us, show us the way and inform us what to do we cannot do anything until we know everything. If someone is to search for a house it is the municipality that accepts you for settlement, that knows you. Nobody else or no other Norwegian know us and we don't know them. The municipality accepts you. They know your background before they bring you to their municipality. And it is only when they provide you with the supplies that you need that you can improve, advance as well as reach the highest level and give guidance. So there are many gaps/loopholes concerning us. Of course we go everywhere. For example there is no place where I didn't go.

### **People, Institutions, Personal Resources and Strategies that helped during the Integration Process**

**Introduction program.** All informants said that they learned a lot from the introduction program and that it helped them in their integration. Some things they learned from the program were about the education system, and laws. Nahida: "Yes. Yes, the introduction program was very useful, because I learned a lot of things about Norway. And about laws, about education, system of education. I learned mostly everything from that program. It was very, very useful." As well as about the culture and language: Aya: "From the introduction program you learn a lot about the culture, about the language. I thought it was very good. I had a very good teacher. I learned a lot from her."

But also about how to raise children:

Feynuus: First you have a teacher from the commune that explains you everything. They explain how you have to act with your children. That you cannot hit your children, that it is not good to hit the children. That you have to talk to them, not hit them, but explain to them what they are doing is not good, that they aren't allowed to do it.

**Work.** Aya said that the introduction program helped her a lot when she started working. Aya: “ I try to keep busy with work all the time. That helps. It helps in life that you are happy with something you love to do. It is like medicine.”

**Colleagues, neighbours, teachers.** Most informants mentioned that they met good colleagues at work who help them with certain things, like translating and understanding letters, for example. These colleagues are another source for learning about Norwegian culture and language for the mothers. Nahida: ”I am teaching in a school and there I have a lot of friends, Norwegian friends. We are very friendly and very close to each other. They help me a lot when I need it.”

Although the neighbours might keep their distance, and it can take many attempts to ask for help, most informants said that they have also received help from their neighbours, for example with installing the internet.

Shirin: I told my neighbour, he is a man, that I have a problem with the internet and he fixed it for me. I have also another woman neighbour who helps me understand the letters and papers. I found those two.

In addition to colleagues and neighbours, Shirin said that she could ask her teacher if she needed help. Shirin: ”When I have, when I need some help with a problem I ask my Norwegian teacher. He can explain and he is very friendly. ”

**Organizations and institutions: Red Cross, Homestart, Ny Sjanse.** Informants in the larger focus group met a woman from the Red Cross who helped them with different things, for example, minding their children, understanding letters, and trying to find a place to live.

Aya contacted an organization called Homestart when she felt lonely, isolated, and in need of some support.

Aya: Through the health clinic I got in contact with homestart. I asked for help from homestart. Homestart is a contact family. A lady comes and visits and talks. It’s like a friend with a contract. Somebody comes and visits 4-5 hours a week. They try to find a friend for you, but with a contract. So that you don’t call all the time, you have good

contact, but you also have borders. I got visit from a lady, she was very nice to me. I got a friend. We are still friends today. She has become a grandmother to my children. She taught me a lot about the culture. I learned a lot of good things from her, a lot of really good things. You don't learn all if you don't find a friend. You see the offer at the health clinic or in the kindergarden, because homestart tries to reach out to everyone that might need help. And I took contact with them and said I would like to have some help. But it is for free. You don't have to pay anything. They are there to support mothers with children. Support the ones that need it, that are depressed.

Feynuus got help from the Ny Sjanse program with finding an internship where she gained valuable work experience.

**A lady from child welfare services.** Feynuus came to Norway with her own children, her niece and her grandchild – the mother is dead. She told me that she received help and support from CWS because they are the guardians of her granddaughter:

Feynuus: There is a lady from child social services. We are not friends, but I know her well. Sometimes she comes to my house to visit. And she helps with my daughter and my grandchild. She helped me. Because I came here with my grandchild, the child social services took custody, because it is not me that is her mother. So when we were in the reception centre, we got a visit from them from time to time. No problem, just because the girl doesn't have a mother or father. And when we moved here we got a new lady that is responsible. There were a lot of papers and a lot of people in charge. We changed a lot. But now it is the same. And sometimes I call her and say: You haven't been herer in a while. And then she says: Yes. I will come next week.

**Luckily, I could speak English, so I could contact people.** Aya talked about how being able to communicate in English helped her when first coming to Norway.

**I tried to find things to do the whole time.** She mentioned that it was important to her to stay busy and find out what she wanted to do with her life: to find a job she liked that was outside the home. She said that it is important to her to find things to do in her spare time, -- with her children and alone - that make her happy, help her to move on with life, and to not think so much about the past and the situation in her home country. She told me that the things her and her husband have experienced were only a small part and period of their life that is now over, so it's time for them to move on.

**If I have a problem, I ask for help.** The importance of taking initiative and asking for help if needed were especially emphasized by Shirin, Nahida, and Aya. Nahida: "Yes, of course, when I have a problem, when I know someone they can help me, of course I'm going for help."

**My children's success in school gave me energy and strength.** Shirin gained strength and motivation from hearing that her children are doing well in school:

Shirin: Yesterday, no, the day before yesterday I had a meeting with my with my son's teacher. He explained that your son is the best student in the class and we are very happy that we have him in our class. I'm proud of this. It gave me energy to live and to go forward. And I also do the best in my life.

**The mosque.** Shirin mentioned that going to the mosque and the social environment there gave her strength.

Shirin: When you go to mosque it has a very peaceful atmosphere, environment. And you gain the tranquillity in your heart. And you feel yourself is very safe. And the people which are sitting there, they are nice people. And they are greeting you and it gives you positive energy.

### **Experiences and Perceptions of Motherhood in Norway**

#### **Child Raising in Norway**

**Children acculturate faster than their parents.** All of the informants discussed how it is much easier for their children to learn the language and the cultural rules than it is for them.

Hanna: That is why when we come here our children outsmart us faster. Because of their age and learning capacity they grasp easily the language and ethics of Norway. What they are taught in school such as the norms and rights. But we, the older people, need time to get detached from our culture and norms and it takes time for us to learn the new language and to get used to the new culture.

While Feynuus jokingly told me that, when her children asked her why she can't speak better Norwegian, she told them that she is old and that her mind isn't working as fast as their minds anymore, Aya said she thinks mothers should sit down with their children

while they are doing homework and try to learn the language in that way. She meant that it is important for mothers, as role models for their children, to learn the language so they are able to tell their children how studying is important .

Informants in the larger focus group mentioned that it is problematic for them that their children are acculturating faster. They feel it is creating a gap between children and parents and that problems emerge when children know their rights and try to use them against their parents.

Wegatha: The culture of the Norwegian society is pressure for us. The children don't have a problem, they are young and they grab and accept everything quickly, but the culture is really a pressure. The children can easily follow the Norwegian culture, but we still have our culture with us. So we want to live with our culture and they want to live with the Norwegian culture, so here they have a conflict.

They also expressed feeling stressed because of the conflict between the Norwegian culture and their own.

**You have to be a strong parent in Norway; the children's needs come before yours.** It was especially the mothers with younger children who discussed how in Norway they were solely responsible for childrearing. In their home countries, they could get help from their social network of family and friends:

Aya: In our home country you share the responsibility a bit. You are not totally responsible the whole time. You can go and eat dinner at someone's house, so you don't have to make dinner every day. There the responsibilities are a little bit shared. You are still parents, but shared. You can go to someone else's house and they make dinner and you can relax a bit. But here, when your children are small, I don't remember one time I even could take a shower before my husband came home, I couldn't relax a bit, I had two small children, you cannot trust them. Something can happen in just a minute, so you always have to pay attention. You don't get time to relax.

As well as from neighbours:

Feynuus: In my home country, my neighbors and the whole family was there to help me. When I went to work my children were at the neighbours or my family. Here I don't have family, no neighbours that can take care of the children.

This shared responsibility not only applies when watching over the children, but it also applies to the socialization and education of children. Informants in the larger focus group agreed that, in their home country, the whole community educates children:

Hanna: We have also a good culture. For example, the community support. There is a saying that the child is raised by the community, not really by the parents. Everyone is responsible for the child, even a guy passing by. If the child does something wrong he would say: I have seen you, you have done this and this and I am going to tell your parents. So everybody is responsible for the children in our community and that is how we are raised So that community support helps us. For example: there are some women who go, if a woman wants to attend a wedding ceremony or something like that she can leave her children with her neighbours and she can go and come back and there are some parents who travel for business to other cities and they also would leave their children with their neighbours until they come back. There is good community support back home.

They further discussed how they felt one had to be especially strong as a parent in Norway and how children's needs have to be put before their parents'. Ergaalem: "In Norway you need to be a strong, serious parent, because you have to be able to do everything. You have to be able to answer all their requests. It is hard to manage them according to our needs."

Because responsibility is borne by the parents alone, it is they who have to fulfil all the needs of the children.

**As a parent in Norway, it is important to have a person who knows you well and supports you.** Because of this sole parental responsibility, Aya explained that it is especially important to have the support of someone close when parenting in Norway.

Aya: It is important that you have a person that is close to you, knows you well and supports you. So that you are not totally alone. A person that understands you and that can cheer you up from time to time. Somebody that knows that you don't have it easy. Knows the way you have been brought up. A good husband is a big help. Sometimes

one gets tired or sad. You cannot be pedagogic all day long. You are just a normal human being, you can get angry. Then someone else has to be in charge. Help you.

**Education in Norway is different.** All informants mentioned that education in Norway differs from education in their home countries. Shirin: “Because when we came to Norway the method of education and the dealing of the teacher with the students and everything was different”

Aya, who has worked as a teacher both in her home country and in Norway, talked about the pressure she experienced in school when she was young and that, in her home country, education has a heavy theoretical approach compared to Norwegian education that incorporates many practical subjects and fun activities for students.

Aya: There is a big different in the school systems. How many students are in one class, the class teacher. We have subjects, subjects, subjects. No praxis lessons. Very little practical things. Just theoretical subjects. You have to be the best. You have to study a lot. Just sit and do your homework. Just sit after school and do homework in your room. It was very difficult in school. I hated school. You just had to study so you could be good in school and get a job. It was a lot of competition. Not like here. Here you can relax. Relax, practical lessons. Arts and crafts. Physical education, make food. Here you can have fun at school. I think it is fantastic here.

**I have good communication with my children’s teachers.** Most informants talked about having good communication with their children’s teachers, --in person, by e-mail, and/or telephone -- and that they also got help from the children’s teachers when needed. Any problems they had were solved by the good communication they had established.

**In Norway, you do not shout at or hit children.** Feynuus explained how, in Norway, conflicts with children are resolved in ways that differ from what she was accustomed to back home. Instead of shouting and maybe even hitting children, in Norway a parent needs to sit them down, make eye contact, and have a conversation about their behaviour:

Feynuus: In my country, if your child gets in trouble you shout and fight and maybe hit the child. But here no, it is not good to hit. Here you sit them down, make eye contact, and explain what they have done is not good.



For the informants in the larger focus group, this method of working with conflicts that excludes parental power and authority makes them feel that it is difficult to discipline their children. Hanna: "And it is not like in our country, that we can't do anything with that. It's hard to discipline them."

They expressed their helplessness:

Wegatha: If our children want to play games 24 hours, if we do not take off the games from their hands, if we do not follow up them with they come from school and check up if they have exercises or homework,. They want to spend the whole day playing games. Some of the decent ones, they listen to you, but some others they confront you. Here it is not like in our homeland. They do not listen to you quickly. It is somehow terrible here. It is awful for us and our children too. Here they get so much freedom. We have to be careful about them, so they don't spend all their time playing games.

**Being affectionate, respecting children, and being communicative with them.** All the mothers talked about how important it is to spend time with their children, build a relationship of mutual respect and trust through good communication, and to treat the children with affection.

Hanna: Children have their own world and you should make your child a friend. You should know her secrets and you can only know your child's secrets when you have contact and communicate well with them. You have to spend your time on it. This is the biggest weakness I have observed here in Norway. You have to call them constantly on the phone especially when they become teenagers to check where they are, not to stress them, but in a friendly way. And sitting together at home enjoying coffee when chatting. Our coffee ceremony has a meaning, even if it is once a week. It is important and gives you an opportunity to follow them up, what they have been up to. And you tell them also what you have done and who you have met. And through my stories I explain to them the meaning of mother and the advantages of having their mother with them.

Aya also mentioned that she feels it is really important for children to know that they can always come to their mother when they feel low.

Aya: Your children grow up so fast. If you don't sit down with them now while they are small, you will never sit with them when they become teenagers. They will leave. If they feel you haven't been there for them when they were little they will not come and be with you when you get old. It's a give and take. Spend more time with them, get close to them and they will continue to come to you also when they start high school. I work at a high school and many parents come to me and say that their children don't want to spend time with them. Because where have they been when the children were small? They didn't build a relationship! I say to everyone if you want your children to be secure try to be with them. Listen to them, talk to them, discuss things with them! So that you know if your children have anything on their mind, they have problems at school, if they are angry or sad, that they come to their mother. Everyone at some point feels alone. And when your children get to that point they should know they can come to their mom, that their mother is always there for them. That they know they are never alone.

**I advise my daughter to stay positive and take initiative – it takes time to make friends.** Shirin and Nahida, the two mothers in the smaller focus group, talked about how it was difficult for their older children to make friends in Norway. Shirin advised her daughter to stay positive and be patient, because it takes time to make friends:

Shirin: But I explain to her that you should be positive and you should think positively. And we are human beings and one day you will be friend with them, become closer and closer with them. When they know you better, you will become friend with them. And it needs time.

Nahida told her daughter:

All the time I'm saying we're not different, we are human beings, we are not different. I recommend my daughter not feel different from other girls in the class and to be friends and to talk with them and ask them some difficulties that she has in her class. And they helped. They helped her.

**My daughter has chosen this religion; she is secure in her belief.** Shirin explains that, despite people who distance themselves from or confront her daughter because she

openly demonstrates her religious beliefs by wearing a headscarf, her daughter remains secure in her faith.

Shirin: And she studies and she reads and she's not like a Muslim that: my father was a Muslim and I'm a Muslim. It's not hereditary. She has chosen this religion. Because of that she doesn't have any problem in her religion.

**Religion is just a fairytale – I don't want to teach religion to my children.** Aya, on the other hand, doesn't want to teach religion to her children, because she feels they are too small to understand it. Instead, she and her husband teach their kids the difference between right and wrong.

Aya: I don't want to have focus on any religion. Not Muslim. We come from a Muslim family, but I think children do not understand religion. We adults, me and my husband, have sat down many times and tried to talk about religion, but we don't even understand it. This one or this one or that one. We think they are just fairytales. That is how we think. We don't want to talk about it and we try also with the children not to talk about it. About none. Only about what is right or wrong.

**You are the role model for your children.** Three of the mothers -- Aya, Shirin, and Nahida -- discussed the importance of setting a good example for children by integrating into society and learning Norwegian. Shirin talked about the respect children have for their parents when they do this.

Shirin: And I think when your children see to you that you have learned the language and integrated into the society, then she or he will respect you. She will hear you because you are her role model.

And, Aya mentioned that one cannot expect their children to study if one does not oneself study.

Aya: You cannot say to your children: Go and study and find a job, when you yourself just sit at home on the sofa. That sets a wrong example for the children. Children need good role models. If you want your children to learn Norwegian, if you want them to

get better in school, you have to sit down and show them that you manage to study and read Norwegian.

### **Hopes and Aspirations for the Children**

When asked about their hopes for their children's future, everyone answered that they hope their children will learn Norwegian and find a job. Most informants also hoped that their children would choose higher education, but all of them said that it is their children's life, so it is their choice. Aya said she hoped her children would become nice people and be happy with what they have regardless of quantity. Informants in both focus groups also mentioned that they hoped their children would keep both their culture and the Norwegian culture.

Aya: Yes, I would like them to have both of the cultures. As far as they are living here they need the Norwegian culture to be able to go with the society and follow the culture and law. And I want them to grow up also with my culture.

### **Advice for Other Immigrant Mothers Coming to Norway**

The informants responded to the question asking them what advice they would give to a mother who recently arrived in Norway by saying that learning Norwegian is key, because if you don't know the language then you don't understand the system. Only Aya felt that a job was more important than the language, because one would learn a lot about the culture, life, and the language from colleagues at work. She advised newcomers to try different jobs and to do internships in different places to help them discover what kind of work they liked best. She also said one shouldn't listen to others on this matter and to not be afraid about not being able to manage something. "You can learn anything. Try, try!" Everyone said it is important to learn about the culture and Norwegian laws. Shirin and Nahida think mothers should educate themselves here.

Aya further advised that mothers should focus on the children, take positive energy from the children, and plan for the future. Set new goals and plan ahead instead of getting "stuck in the past", as she called it.

### **Discussion**

This study explored the following elements: the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers in Norway, how they experience their life in Norway, how they negotiate their role as mothers in the integration process, what resources and strengths help them in their new environment, and what advice they would give --based on their own experience -- to newly arriving mothers. In this section, I will contextualize a few of the key findings by utilizing the literature and the theoretical framework used for this study.

The findings revealed that the new environment in which mothers find themselves is challenging to them, both as an individual, and as a mother. Being a parent in a new country means that one has to simultaneously orient oneself in the new environment, try to build a stable home for one's family, and be faced with cultural values that might differ and maybe even contradict one's own (Johannesen & Appoh, 2016). Beyond this, immigrant parents additionally face the challenge of having to care for their children in an environment that may have childrearing values that differ from their own.

#### **Collectivistic vs. Individualistic Society**

All of the informants discussed the challenges with cultural differences and especially that they perceive Norwegians as reserved. Some expressed feeling that Norwegian people are "cold", while others felt that people are merely busy with their own lives. In each case, informants discussed the difficulties they experienced when trying to meet and befriend people, contact people, and get help. They stated that, in their home countries, it was normal to talk to strangers on the street while waiting for the bus, for example. None of the informants had close Norwegian friends, but most have amicable Norwegian acquaintances and colleagues. The informants' stories demonstrate how they are experiencing the differences between their former collectivistic societies and the individualistic Norwegian society, within which individuals are more isolated and have a larger sphere of privacy. Some informants presumed Norwegians to be afraid of foreigners. According to the cognitive aspects of acculturation, the views of the new society, members of the other culture, and the views of the individual all influence how people act during intercultural encounters. Viewing Norwegians as cold or afraid could have the effect of immigrants beginning to withdraw themselves from social settings. However, some informants explained how they actively seek contact with others despite how tiresome it can be. One mother explained that she advised her daughter to continue asking for help from the girls in her class and to try to not feel different from them.

All of the informants also mentioned that the climate is a challenge, for practical reasons and the need for extra clothing, and also because of how it affects one's daily life and mood. They considered life to be secluded and mainly lived in the privacy of people's homes, which further impedes the ability to meet people. These experiences reflect the differences between the collectivistic societies the informants have been socialized in and the individualistic Norwegian society. It makes it harder for foreigners to establish new social networks of support.

### **Acculturative Stress**

Previous research has shown that integration is the acculturative strategy that fosters the best psychological adaptation (Sam & Berry, 2010). This corroborates with the statements of the mothers in focus group 1, who suggested that they are experiencing acculturative stress to a higher degree than other informants. They mentioned that they felt they had to detach themselves from their own culture and adopt the Norwegian culture and norms in order to live without difficulties in Norway. The stress caused by meeting Norwegian culture is related to the idea that in order to integrate they need to assimilate into Norwegian society and to their reluctance to detaching from some of their cultural roots. Informants who did not feel this pressure, did not describe meeting Norwegian culture as a similarly stressful experience. The pressure one can feel to dismiss one's cultural identity in order to succeed in a new culture, and the stress caused by this can affect the psychological well-being, which, again, can have an impact on parental capabilities.

### **Challenges Related to Cultural Learning**

The informants who explained they felt the need to assimilate also emphasized that their biggest challenges were not related to their children. Rather, the most frequently cited challenges were confusion concerning the bureaucratic system, the lack of skills (e.g. inability to communicate), and the lack of knowledge of conventions and norms. Again, this affirms Sam & Berry's (2010) description of the cultural learning approach of acculturation. When essential skills are lacking, adaptation to the new social environment and everyday life can be difficult. The informants expressed these difficulties as feelings of helplessness and strong wishes for someone to provide guidance. They expressed a strong need and desire for someone to guide them through Norwegian society by teaching them norms and showing them how things are done, as well as helping with practical things like finding a place to live or understanding letters and bills. They felt they were sent back and forth between the NAV

office and the contact person assigned to them, but that neither helped them properly. Finding a place to live represented a major challenge for them because they were not able to communicate well enough in either Norwegian or English and because they had no relevant information for finding houses in Norway.

These informants lacked the knowledge about Norwegian society and personal resources, such as the ability to speak English, to deal with adversity. They also demonstrated a passive attitude and expressed in their helplessness the wish for someone to guide them instead of having to actively seek out help. Reasons for this can be many: personality type, culture, former experiences, or a combination of a few or all of them. It shows that, while some immigrants find their way into the new society quite easily, others need more support. Two of the informants mentioned that it was quite easy for them to integrate because of their education and that they found the introduction program to be helpful. They assumed, however, that mothers with lower education would experience more difficulties and that, for those mothers, the introduction program would not be enough. Additional study would be required to determine if their assumption is accurate.

Although these informants said that their biggest challenges were not related to their children, they feel their situation has influenced their role as mothers and their ability to parent. Providing your children with a place to live is one of the basic responsibilities for parents. Being preoccupied with worries can have consequences on one's parenting, as well as not knowing how things work in a society because one role of parents is what Andenæs (2004) calls the children's "reality instructors". This term refers to the idea that parents give children guidance in different social arenas that are important for social participation (Andenæs, 2004). One mother expressed this as concern over not being able to properly guide her children through society and that, in the worst case, this could result in her children becoming "druggies". Similar fears of not being able to fulfil parental responsibility and feelings of helplessness have been found in previous research with migrants (Yakhnich, 2016).

### **Acculturation Gap**

Additionally, an acculturation gap can develop between parents and their children because the children are immersed in the new culture at kindergarten or school, thus acculturating faster (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007; Este & Tachble, 2009; Levi, 2014; K. M. Perreira, M. V. Chapman, & G. L. Stein, 2006; Yakhnich, 2016). Therefore, it is not surprising that the informants share similar experiences. Informants mentioned several times

that the children learned the language and adapted to the culture faster. Informants described different ways of dealing with the acculturation gap. While some informants said that being old makes learning the language and adjusting to the new culture a more arduous and lengthy process compared to that of their children, others saw it as motivation to study Norwegian. They stated that studying with their children was intended to help them be a good role model for their children. One of the mothers described how she sat down with her children when they were doing homework and read until she understood. She explained that it is important to be a good role model for your children, and that you cannot ask the children to study and do homework if they see that you do not take the initiative to learn the language. This mother demonstrated an active approach in dealing with the challenge of the acculturation gap and, in this way, prevented intergeneration role reversal that has been documented in other literature (Behnke, Taylor, & Parra-Cardona, 2008; Yakhnich, 2016). However, some informants also expressed concerns about how their struggle with the language and their lower level of education hinders their ability to help their children with their homework, which instills feelings of failure to support their children's progression to a good education. These findings are also in line with results from previous research (Behnke, et al., 2008; K. M. Perreira, et al., 2006).

In contrast to findings in the existing literature, none of the participants in this study mentioned a fear of losing their children because the acculturation gap would be too big to bridge. This fear was salient for the informants in (Levi, 2014). All informants expressed the desire for their children to keep parts of their own culture as well as adopt parts of the Norwegian culture. This aligns with findings from the study by (Aldoney & Cabrera, 2016) and with an acculturation strategy of integration, which suggests that these parents think that, to succeed in society, children need to adopt Norwegian ways of being.

One explanation can be found in a shared response given by all informants. In this response, all informants mentioned feeling highly empathetic towards their children's situation and thus increased their communication with their children as a strategy to work through the challenges they faced. This concurs with what parents have reported in previous studies like (Aldoney & Cabrera, 2016). Mothers elucidated that it was important for them to become friends with their children, to spend time with them, to share their own experiences, and to listen to their experiences. Two of the mothers said this was especially important to them in connection with the experiences of social exclusion, the difficulties with making friends, or the experiences of racism. They openly spoke to their children about this and tried to reassure them through their cultural background and religion. They told their children that



they should not be ashamed, but that they should instead share the positive attributes of their culture with Norwegians. One mother, for example, encouraged her daughter to teach people that Islam is a peaceful religion and not violent like it is depicted in Western media. Although informants and their children are experiencing social exclusion at times, these individuals choose an acculturation strategy of integration similar to the one described by (Sam & Berry, 2010) and recommended that their children do the same. To the extent this is possible and its potential for success depends on the openness of Norwegian society to multiculturalism, their prejudices, and attitudes towards different cultural groups (Berry, 1997).

Other informants mentioned that they thought it was more important to build a close relationship as friends with their children by not forcing them to attend church every Sunday, as they would have done in their home country. So, they discontinued some traditions, while others, like performing coffee ceremonies, were continued and used to build friendships with their children. This demonstrates how the new environment and its associated challenges inspire the emergence of new ways to build relationships and raise children. This agrees with previous studies by Maiter & George (2003), Nesteruk & Marks (2011) and Levi (2014) that found that parenting goals and ways of parenting are not static, but are mediated by social context. Also cultures or cultural practices are not static, but can change depending on the social context.

### **Cultural Translation**

Finding oneself surrounded by a majority culture that has a different religion and different traditions can induce critical reflection about one's own values, beliefs, and traditions. As de Haan (2011) describes with the model of cultural translation, the tension that arises because of these differences leads to something new that cannot be explained by the taxonomy of acculturation theory.

One example is the personalized version of Christmas that one of the informants created with her family. The informant and her husband decided that religion is "just fairy tales" and that they didn't want to teach their children any religion, nor did they want to continue religious holidays and traditions they used to celebrate in their home country without first critically reflecting on their own practices. Because they did not want their children to feel left out when all the other children in school talk about their Christmas celebration and the gifts they had received, the parents decided they would celebrate their own version of Christmas. Now, they decorate their house like other families and celebrate the same day, but with a different meaning. They celebrate the passing of the year with the coming of the New

Year, marking new beginnings and possibilities. So, out of the tension that emerged from the differences between two religions and cultures, this family created something qualitatively new. A new tradition which cannot be placed along the taxonomy of being more or less like the Norwegian culture.

### **Parenting in Collective- vs. Individual-Oriented Societies and Intensive Parenting**

The loss of the extended social network and the difference between parenting in a collective society and the individualistic oriented Norwegian society was another central topic that was discussed in all interviews. The loss of an entire network of others who are willing to help you with the children means that the burden of childrearing rests on the parents and, in reality, often the mothers shoulders alone. This difference in parenting between collectivistic versus individualistic societies has been a topic in previous studies. Levi (2014), for example, describes that the mothers in her study not only struggled with the practical tasks of parenting that mothers find themselves alone with, but that the identity of mothers was based on community and identification with their social group in contrast to the “I” identity that the Western identity is based on.

Participants in the bigger focus group explained how in their home country the whole society was responsible for educating the children, meaning that if a neighbour or passerby sees a child do something they are not supposed to do, he would tell the child to stop. In Norway, they have been somewhat confused about who is responsible for the children. This is not only a reflection of the individualist society, but also of the view that children are rational social agents with individual rights, not the property of parents or society (Hollekim, et al., 2016; Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006).

The phenomenon of “intensive parenting” as used by Hays and described by several other authors such as Faircloth (2013) and Gillies (2011), was addressed by mothers saying that they feel that you have to be especially strong as a parent in Norway. Not only is the mother the one who always stakes care of the children, but she is also the one who, as one informant put it, “has to be able to fulfil all their needs”. This is reflective of the idea that it is the mother who is expected to always be there for the children (Hennum, 2004), that her needs are to be put behind the needs of the children, and who is expected to gain personal fulfilment out of her occupation as mother (Edwards & Gillies, 2013; Faircloth, et al., 2013). Also, the influence of attachment theory that outlines qualities that constitute a good mother, is present in Norway through the idea that delegating too much childcare to others is seen as a possible threat of weakening the attachment between mother and child, and, in the worst case,

potentially causing psychological damage in the child (Jiménez Sedano, 2013). As one mother remembered, when her children were little, she couldn't even take a shower before her husband came home in the evening, because she couldn't leave the children unsupervised and she didn't have anyone to ask for help. The same informant also said that she had been taught from Norwegian mothers that it was important to take time off just for herself, away from her children. This was an idea she had not thought about before moving here. Back home, she said, there were always ways to rest. For example, by taking the family to another family's home and resting while someone else cooked dinner that night. All participants mentioned that back home they could rely not only on family and friends, but also on neighbours to mind the children when needed. This is yet another illustration of the contrast between parenting in a collectivistic and individualist society (Levi, 2014).

### **Discipline and Authority vs. Democratic Family Structure**

The difference in the methods for disciplining children was a common theme in the data. Because of the prohibition of corporal punishment, some informants mentioned the fear of losing authority and being able to teach their children discipline. Renzaho, et al. (2011) made a similar finding. However, most informants said that they preferred the Norwegian way. One shared her experience of being beaten as a child and that, in her opinion, the Norwegian way of solving conflicts by sitting children down, having eye contact, and discussing their behaviour is much better. This description of the Norwegian method reflects the democratic family structure that is the norm in Norway, and a way of childrearing that is characterized by dialogue and negotiation (Hennum, 2002; Hollekim, et al., 2016; Johannesen & Appoh, 2016). It also connects to parenting goals to support children in becoming independent and self-confident individuals (Hennum, 2002; Hollekim, et al., 2016). The way these mothers reflect on the different disciplinary methods and solve conflicts is similar to what the respondents in the study by Nesteruk & Marks (2011) said about the authoritarian methods they were raised with in Eastern Europe that made children "shy", "inhibited", and "self-conscious". They approved of the prohibition of corporal punishment and said the American way of raising children supported their development of self-confidence.

Another informant said she had been reading, for many years before coming to Europe, about approaches to education in French books. She said she did this because she felt that her mother didn't take her serious while growing up, didn't listen to her before she turned eighteen, and because she wanted to be a better parent for her children. The new environment, or information from books, and different ways of raising children led to a reflection on how it is done by a majority of people in one's home country. When someone is living in their usual

environment, they often follow social norms, “just like sheep” as one informant put it. The reason these mothers decided to raise their children this way is not only because of the law against corporal punishment and because it is the Norwegian way, but because they came to an independent conclusion that it is better and therefore how they would like to raise their children. Therefore, these mothers do not adapt according to the Norwegian norms of childrearing and become, in that sense, more Norwegian as acculturation would suggest. Instead, the differences in childrearing are considered, and their critical reflections lead these mothers to adopt their own unanticipated ways of raising their children. This process can be better explained with the model of cultural translation rather than acculturation.

The informant who talked about reading books on parenting had also been living in other Western countries before coming to Norway and said that there is not much difference between the way she is used to raise her children and the Norwegian way. Another informant mentioned that the relationship between parents and children in her home country is changing as a result of people travelling or living abroad. They are, in these ways, exposed to different ideas that they can then take home. This illustrates how culture is not static, especially not in our globalized world with the influence of the internet and transnational communities.

Views on the education system and the relationship with teachers in Norway differ from what immigrant parents expressed in previous research. Lieber, et al. (2004), for example, reported that parents were concerned about the low level of aspirations of their children and the American education system. Several informants said that the education system in Norway is much more relaxed and that the relationship between teachers and students is characterized by equality, not the authoritarian approach that was the norm for them. This, again, demonstrates the democratic relationship between adults and children in Norway and the view of children as rational social agents, as well as the importance of raising children to become independent and self-confident individuals. Informants said they appreciated this. One mother mentioned that she thinks that it is a positive attribute that children are able to have fun in school, in contrast to having so much pressure to perform put on them. Another said she was happy to know that her children can always go to their teachers if they have any difficulties. Knowing this put her mind at ease since her children spend a significant amount of time in school. The same informants also mentioned that they had good communication with the teachers and other people involved with the children. Having this close communication and relationship strengthens these mothers and is, from the socio-ecological viewpoint, something that helps them integrate into Norwegian society.

### **Introduction Program**

All informants reported that the obligatory introduction program they had to attend was valuable and helped them a lot by teaching them about the Norwegian culture, childrearing practices, and about laws and their rights. These findings stand in contrast to findings Lewig, et al. (2010) made in Australia, where parents said they were confused about Australian laws, their rights as parents, and accepted ways to discipline their children. The fact that immigrants are in these classes not only informed about laws, but also about how to raise children reflects that the Norwegian state is taking an assimilationist stance, teaching immigrant parents how they should raise their children thereby institutionally-anchoring Western values as neutral and incapacitating parents of other cultural backgrounds with differing views on raising children (Fylkesnes, et al., 2015).

Other informants discussed finding support from different NGO's (e.g. Homestart or the Red Cross). For some, it took some time to get in touch with these NGO's, which suggests that some immigrants might benefit from being given more information by their contact person, for example, on where to find additional help.

### **Socio-Ecology and Resilience**

Finally, the findings show that the way participants manage the different challenges of acculturating to Norwegian society is contingent on many factors, both of the individual and the environmental. This can be illustrated with the socio-ecological model of resilience by Ungar. In this model, individual factors, such as the personality, the mind-set, level of education, ability to speak English, and views about the Norwegian society and environmental factors, such as the people one meets and structural factors, such as available institutions that help in the integration process all play a role.

Being optimistic and working to do what is best for one's children was mentioned as a strategy for coping with difficulties. This is similar with findings from Aldoney and Cabrera (2016). Staying optimistic and being patient were also listed by one mother as advice she gave her daughter on how to deal with difficulties with making friends. In addition, actively seeking out help from either people or institutions seems to be a strategy that helps in the integration process.

Being able to communicate is also a precondition to integrate, as is having an outgoing personality -- a factor that makes the process easier. These factors are especially important in a receiving society participants described as "cold". The importance of taking initiative, asking for help, and initiating social contact, was also emphasized by several informants. Whether these initiatives are successful of course depends on the people one asks.

Being future-oriented and setting goals were other aspects informants mentioned in addition to, using the opportunity to advance one's education and finding a fulfilling profession, both of which were considered to lead to personal growth. A precondition for this seems to be that one accepts their new life by becoming a part of their new country and does not get "stuck in the past", as one informant called it.

Most participants expressed relief over being able to live in peace, instead of in a war zone and mentioned the positive sides of living in Norway, such as the possibility to pursue their education further.

Religion and/or attending the mosque were important elements for some informants when working with the challenges of living in a new society. Each offers a sense of belonging and a place to meet "friendly people". For others, religion and/or religious communities did not have a role as they worked through their challenges.

For everyone, however, the loss of their social networks was a main challenge. Being future-oriented, having goals, and finding fulfilling work were listed as strategies that helped in the process of integration, suggesting that one accepts that their life will be lived in the new society, instead of grieving over the loss of an old life.

Work and language appropriation were identified as the two most important factors that helped in integration because both keep one preoccupied, but meeting Norwegian colleagues and learning from them about the Norwegian culture were also identified as important.

There seems to be a number of institutions that assist immigrants in transitioning into their new lives. Institutions such as, the Red Cross or Home Start and the obligatory introduction program, for example. It might be beneficial to be more proactive in making immigrants aware of these organizations and programs, in order to counteract the inherent difficulties with language barriers when they seek out this information by themselves. Collectively, this information conveys, as Ungar (2012) highlighted, that resilience is a product of the individual and the environment, as well as the individual's ability to use the resources at hand to face adversity. It is important that the social environment, in this case the Norwegian society, supports immigrants in managing the challenges they are faced with when settling into the new society.

It is important to keep in mind that the results from this research are not generalizable. Experience of immigrant mothers who live in small towns or villages in Norway that are characterized by social familiarity and the ease of establishing social networks, might look very different from those in this study.

Although I am an immigrant, I am still from a Western culture, which might have led my informants to omit some thoughts and opinions. Another limitation of this study is the language barrier, especially with one of the informants. And, because the interviews were done in Norwegian, which is not the mother tongue of any of the informants, this might have led to the fact that some aspects were lost in translation.

### Conclusion

This research served to provide a space for the voices and perspectives of minority parents and deepened the understanding of the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers in Norway. The main conclusion of this study is that participants experience different challenges, both related to them as individuals and in their role as mothers during their transition into Norwegian society, and that they use both individual resources as well as environmental resources to work through these challenges.

Common among all informants, is a feeling that Norwegian society is cold and reserved, and thus it is difficult to build close social relations with Norwegians. In order to do so, immigrants need to repeatedly take initiative, which can be difficult when one feels that the other party is not interested in social contact, especially for immigrants with inhibited personalities or language barriers. The loss of their social network and the difference between the collectivistic-oriented societies the informants were from and the individualistic-oriented Norwegian society is something that affects the informants, as individuals and in their parental roles. Parenting in Norway requires strength, because the burden of parenting lies almost solely on the mother and is not divided within a social network of help. The biggest challenge for all the mothers is the absence of a collective way of parenting and the loss of their social network.

The difference between an authoritarian way of raising children and the democratic family structure in Norway, where children are viewed as rational social agents with individual rights, is another topic that was salient to the experiences of these mothers. The bureaucratic system is a major challenge for some immigrants, especially for those who lack the personal resource of English proficiency. The feeling of having to assimilate into Norwegian society in order to succeed in life in Norway leads to acculturative stress for these immigrants. The idea of having to assimilate might be rooted in the assimilationist stance that the Norwegian government poses in the introduction program -- classes which all immigrants from non-Western countries have to visit. Through these classes, the mothers in the study perceived significant differences between the Norwegian culture and their own culture.

All informants experienced that their children acculturated into Norwegian society at a higher speed and they used different ways of dealing with it, either passively accepting it or actively learning the language and cultural norms to keep up with the children.



Neither culture nor parenting practices are static entities, but are instead influenced by the social environment. Finding oneself surrounded by a majority culture that has a different religion and different traditions leads to the critical reflection about one's own values, beliefs, traditions, and parenting practices. And, this critical reflection can create something new that does not belong to either the original or new culture, but that is qualitatively different from both.

The use of communication and the importance of actively building a close relationship as friends with their children were mentioned as strategy that was used by all informants. All informants also expressed the desire for their children to have both their own and the Norwegian culture, displaying a acculturation strategy of integration. I believe that Norwegian society has much to gain from the influences of the different cultures that the immigrant population brings, for example a more collective way of thinking and a spirit of help and support. However, society must be receptive to this influence in order for this to happen.

The rapid change of the Norwegian society during the recent year has been a challenge for welfare institutions and social workers who are accustomed to working with clients from one majority culture. Social workers working with immigrant clients should keep the experiences and points of view of these mothers in mind to be able to adapt the services to their clients. The need for a wider perspective is critically important, a perspective that includes the consideration of the socio-ecological environment of clients, awareness of the racism clients are confronted with, and empathy towards the position the clients are in. Being aware of one's own values and developing a practice of critical analysis of how they develop and how they shape policies and practice is important. In general, parents want the best for their children and, if that notion is kept in mind, it might improve interactions between immigrants and those working with them.

There are number of institutions that offer help to immigrants, however some people might need some additional help getting information about these institutions.

An interesting and important question is whether the introduction program for immigrants is only useful to educated immigrants, as two of the informants assumed. Evaluating whether this assumption is true or not should be a consideration for further research.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Interview Guide

#### **Intervjuguide**

Fortell om hvordan det var å komme til Norge som foreldre

Hvordan er det å være foreldre i Norge?

Hvordan var det å være foreldre i .....?

Hva/hvem hjelper deg som forelder i Norge? Hvem hjalp deg i .....?

- familie/andre landsmenn/naboer/helsestasjon/barnehage/skole etc.

Hva er viktig når en skal være foreldre i Norge?

Hva er viktig når barn skal oppdras?

Hva håp har du for barna dine/Hva trenger barn å lære/bli?

Har du noen råd til andre foreldre som kommer til Norge?

#### **Interview guide**

Can you tell me about how it was to come to Norway as a parent?

What are your experiences of being a mother here in Norway?

Are there differences in the way children are raised here in Norway to the way they are raised in your home country?

In your opinion what is the right way to raise a child?

What is important in raising a child here?

What helps/has helped you to raise your child/children?

What hopes do you have for your child / children ?

Do you have advice for other parents that have just come to Norway?

## Appendix B

### Information Letter and Consent Form

# **Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjektet "Å være mor i Norge. Erfaringer og perspektiver fra mødre som er innvandrere i Norge ."**

### **Bakgrunn og formål**

Jeg er student ved Universitetet i Bergen og skal skrive masteroppgaven min om hvordan det er å komme fra en annen kultur og å være mor i Norge. Jeg er interessert i erfaringer og oppfatninger om dette tema. Målgruppen er mødre som er kommet til Norge med barn. I studien ønsker jeg å høre mer om dine erfaringer som mor. Hvordan er det å være mor her i Norge? Finnes det noen forskjeller til det å være mor i hjemlandet ditt? Hva var (og er) hjelpsomt for deg i forbindelse med at du nå er blitt etablert i et nytt land som Norge? Hva hjelp/hjelper deg når du skal håndtere utfordringer? Hva gir deg styrke?

Jeg jobber sammen med en gruppe forskere fra Universitetet i Bergen, HEMIL-senteret, som har et større prosjekt om det å komme til Norge som foreldre. Jeg ønsker å gjøre fire individuelle intervjuer.

### **Hva innebærer deltakelse i studien?**

Jeg ønsker intervjuer deg om dine erfaringer og opplevelser som mor her i Norge. Jeg vil gjerne snakke om hva du mener om dette og hva som har vært til hjelp i forbindelse med etablering og tilpassing til et nytt liv i Norge.

### **Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?**

Personlig informasjon, som navn, alder, hvor du bor og andre slike detaljer vil ikke bli delt med noen andre. Bare jeg og de forskere jeg jobber med vil være kjent med dette. Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes 31.12.2018. Opptak av intervjuet vil bli slettet straks prosjektet er over. I det som blir skrevet ned vil verken navn eller annen identifiserende informasjon om deg fremkomme. Navnet ditt vil altså ikke stå i noen av de dokumentene som vil bli skrevet og ingen skal kunne kjenne deg igjen. Det som sies i intervjuet vil ikke bli formidlet videre til andre rundt deg, eller til myndigheter.

**Frivillig deltakelse**

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Dersom du trekker deg, vil alle opplysninger om deg bli slettet. Prosjektet har blitt godkjent av NSD.

Dersom du ønsker å delta eller har spørsmål til studien, ta kontakt med meg, Anne Schmidt tel.45680238 [asc065@uib.no](mailto:asc065@uib.no) eller veilederen min, Ragnhild Hollekim - 41470997 (mobile), 55583132 (jobb) [Ragnhild.hollekim@uib.no](mailto:Ragnhild.hollekim@uib.no)

**Samtykke til deltakelse i studien**

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, og er villig til å delta

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(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

## Appendix C

### NSD Approval



Ragnhild Hollekim  
Christiesgt. 13  
5015 BERGEN

Vår dato: 22.09.2017

Vår ref: 55353 / 3 / AGL

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

### Tilbakemelding på melding om behandling av personopplysninger

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 16.08.2017.  
Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

<i>55353</i>	<i>Negotiating motherhood as immigrant in Norway - Experiences and perceptions of Afghan and Eritrean mothers</i>
<i>Behandlingsansvarlig</i>	<i>Universitetet i Bergen, ved institusjonens øverste leder</i>
<i>Daglig ansvarlig</i>	<i>Ragnhild Hollekim</i>
<i>Student</i>	<i>Anne Schmidt</i>

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget [skjema](#). Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en [offentlig database](#).

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 20.06.2018, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Dersom noe er uklart ta gjerne kontakt over telefon.

Vennlig hilsen

*Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.*

## Personvernombudet for forskning



### Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

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Prosjektnr: 55353

Formålet er å undersøke erfaringene og perspektivet til immigrantmødre i Norge.

Utvalget informeres skriftlig og muntlig om prosjektet og samtykker til deltakelse. Informasjonsskrivet er godt utformet.

Ombudet forutsetter at datamaterialet studenten ikke skal samle selv, men som inngår i prosjektet, kan brukes til dette formålet jf egen tilrådning/konsesjon, samt informasjon og samtykkeskriv til hovedprosjektet.

Personvernombudet tar høyde for at det behandles sensitive personopplysninger om etnisk bakgrunn eller politisk/filosofisk/religiøs oppfatning.

Personvernombudet legger til grunn at forsker etterfølger Universitetet i Bergen sine interne rutiner for datasikkerhet.

Forventet prosjektslutt er 20.06.2018. Ifølge prosjektmeldingen skal innsamlede opplysninger da anonymiseres. Anonymisering innebærer å bearbeide datamaterialet slik at ingen enkeltpersoner kan gjenkjennes. Det gjøres ved å:

- slette direkte personopplysninger (som navn/koblingsnøkkel)
- slette/omskrive indirekte personopplysninger (identifiserende sammenstilling av bakgrunnsopplysninger som f.eks. bosted/arbeidssted, alder og kjønn)
- slette lydopptak