

“MY CHILDREN ARE NORWEGIAN BUT I AM A FOREIGNER”: *Experiences of African immigrant parents within Norwegian welfare society*

Abstract

The article examines how the role of being a parent contributed to experiences of inclusion and exclusion by the adults of eight families with African backgrounds in Norway. We present reflections on ethnicity and citizenship, and on Norwegian parenting values and practices as a background to descriptions on how the African adults experienced encounters with Norwegian adults such as neighbours, other parents, and professionals. The role of being a parent opened a range of opportunities for social interaction and learning. The interactional episodes described by the adults did, however, seem to be constrained by universalistic understandings of ‘good parenting’ and a focus on children’s rights and parental responsibilities consistent with Norwegian practices. This contributed to a sense of being different and morally suspicious. In this situation, the African adults found themselves without an equal position from where to voice alternative parenting values and with their parental authority weakened.

Keywords

Migration • parenting • Norway • individual rights • Child welfare services

Received 2 September 2014; Accepted 25 April 2016

Introduction

In contemporary Europe many people are on the move to secure a better life for their future. Many of them are coming to Scandinavia, quite a few from developing countries in the global South. Adults who bring their children with them or who will give birth in the years to come, face the challenge of raising their children in a totally new sociocultural environment. The aim of this article is to shed light on parenting as experienced by the adults of eight families with East- or West-African backgrounds living in Norway, and on how the role of being a parent contributed to their experiences of inclusion and exclusion in Norwegian society. This work is part of a postdoc project by the second author on how immigrants from Africa experience life in mid-Norway, the strategies they adopt to integrate, and the challenges they meet.

A basic assumption in this work is that standards for good child rearing are part of jointly negotiated social worlds and form a broad range of practices across sociocultural contexts (Kagitcibasi 2007). The assumption of socioculturally constructed contexts leads into our research approach of in-depth narrative interviews, discourse analysis and positioning theory.

We adopt a theoretical framework from Harre & Langenhove (1999:15) who describe the social realm as composed of conversations, institutional practices, and users of societal rhetoric. As part of conversational episodes, people relationally position

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themselves and each other as individuals and as social beings in ‘ever shifting patterns of moral and unstable rights and obligations of speaking and acting’ (Harre & Langenhove 1999:1). When positioning holds a reference to roles, like being a parent, or to institutional aspects of social life, it is termed ‘moral positioning’. Positioning with reference to individual attributes or life-histories is termed ‘personal’. Positioning of self and other always includes both moral and personal aspects and different positioning-options are available for different participants relative to prevailing moral contexts of institutionalised rights and duties (Harre & Langenhove 1999:21-23).

In what follows, we will present reflections on the general moral contexts of ethnicity and citizenship in Norway and of Norwegian parenting. This will serve as a background for descriptions of how the parents in the study experienced personal encounters with Norwegian adults. We found that the fact that the African adults were parents included them in a variety of situations which afforded social participation. However, such participation also actualised a sense of being different and even morally suspicious. The moral positioning of the parents in different social contexts in turn affected expectations and obligations between parents and their children. It also affected the parents’ abilities to act in what they considered to be the best interest of their children.

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The moral context of ethnicity and citizenship in Norway

In her analyses of Norwegian public discourses concerning immigration issues and Norwegian identity, anthropologist Marianne Gullestad (2002) points out that historically an active cultivation of homogenous cultural aspects and feelings of nationalism was at the core of Norwegian nation building. High levels of taxation and economic redistribution have secured a certain standard of welfare within the population. One aspect of extensive economic redistribution is a large bureaucracy and a tendency of 'clientification' of large groups of citizens who depend on the welfare state to secure their institutionalised rights. Gullestad argues that these mentioned historical and structural conditions have contributed to the emergence of 'stability' as a central cultural value related to power balance among citizens. Economic globalisation with its gap between capital and national cultures and between rich and poor makes people worry about a possible loss of welfare and life quality. As a defensive response to such worries, we have seen the rise of an imagined moral community in Norway. This imagined community and feeling of being similar ('sameness') has been strengthened through a focus on national values and implicitly establishes oppositions such as 'difference', 'hierarchy', 'inequality' and 'diversity' (Gullestad 1991:15; Gullestad 2002). With stability and sameness as cultural values such oppositions mainly have negative connotations. Ideals of a stable welfare state may thus contribute to a division between available moral positions of 'immigrants' and 'Norwegians'.

In recent research, several authors have pointed to a need to further develop, nuance and rethink conceptualisations of equality and sameness as introduced by Gullestad. Vike, Lidén & Lien (2001:12-16) differentiate between sameness as a premise for social interaction on the one hand, and equality as a principle for regulating social welfare on the other. They point to welfare-, education-, and work- and employment policies in Norway to exemplify institutions aimed at evening out social inequalities. Vike (2013) argues that the historic background of such institutions may play a more central role in the development of Norwegian national identities than noted by Gullestad. Vike, Lidén & Lien (2001) also differentiate conceptually between dimensions of equality and hierarchy, dimensions of equality and sameness, and dimensions of equality and autonomy.

In terms of equality and hierarchy Bruun, Jakobsen & Krøijer (2011:9) argue that the strong concern for equality among Scandinavians comes with certain values on the level of social interaction, and that value-mastering hierarchies emerge based on how individuals signal their ability and willingness to respect such social codes. If immigrants fail to acknowledge taken for granted norms and values they may be placed low in value-mastering hierarchies.

Vike, Lidén & Lien (2001:23) discuss the dynamics of individuality and citizens' self-government relative to institutions of power such as the national state. In the Norwegian case, it is characteristic that citizens deeply trust the government to fend for their interests. The fact that the concept of 'folket' (the people) has been closely entangled with the nation (Hagelund & Brochmann 2010: 143) underscores this. Vike (2013) traces this citizens' trust to a historical tendency of people grouping and organising based on shared interests as in collective movements and interest-organisations. This established a public social context which later gained a central role in the establishment of the welfare state (Vike 2013:191). In the welfare state all citizens are formally members of educational-, health- and social care programs which are shaped to secure their basic interests. Personal positioning

within the Norwegian welfare context is thus powered by the moral context of how citizens manage their individual, but institutionalised memberships. According to Hagelund & Brochmann (2010:145-6), solidarity with the welfare system is a core duty of citizens in Norway infused with subtle moral connotations of social respectability and legitimacy.

Related to equality and sameness Lidén (2001) develops the paradox that taken for granted sameness can lead to discrimination of immigrants. Through ethnographic work in Norwegian schools she describes how the teachers define the context of interaction based on established norms of what constitutes the relevant knowledge base within the Norwegian egalitarian school system. Children's contributions in terms of expressed knowledge are always evaluated based on the given norm, and background knowledge possessed by children will turn out as more or less relevant to the teacher and more or less correct depending on the cultural background of the child. When differences between children are overlooked and knowledge gained in other contexts than the Norwegian one is made irrelevant, being different automatically means not fulfilling the norm. The taken for granted base of national values and knowledge, together with a focus on treating every child in the same manner when evaluating their expressed knowledge, can then lead to systematic discrimination within the school system (Lidén 2001:81-82).

A base of established values and knowledge exists also with regard to parenting in Norway.

Contemporary Norwegian parenting values and practices

Contemporary ideals of parental care in the Norwegian context are heavily influenced by claims made by the British attachment theorist John Bowlby (1969). According to Bowlby (1969), children have an inborn need for parental love and protection as well as a need to develop personal autonomy. According to attachment theory, these needs are best met by caregivers who are emotionally warm and who support the child's initiatives in a non-intrusive but challenging manner. This sensitivity of the caregiver is assumed to be mirrored in universally recognizable 'attachment behaviours' displayed by the child (Ainsworth 1989). In Norway, the influence of attachment theory has contributed to a 'growing awareness of child exposure and vulnerability' as noted by Hennum (2014:446). A 2012 Norwegian official report on how to secure the development of children, advised for attachment behaviour as an indicator to evaluate whether children receive good enough care (NOU 2012:5).

Western parenting styles have been described as typically low in physical contact (Morelli & Rothbaum 2007). In the Norwegian case, this may be exemplified by parents negotiating with children instead of physically controlling and directing them, waiting for children to get themselves dressed instead of dressing them, letting them walk instead of carrying them, or making children sleep alone instead of together with parents or siblings. This parenting style is usually high in face-to-face interaction and verbal interaction. Much in line with this, Gullestad (1996:36-37) found that situations where Norwegian parents exercise control over children are largely characterised by discussions, negotiations and compromise. Low physical contact is balanced with high sensitivity in the parent towards the emotional needs of the child (Morelli & Rothbaum 2007). Hennum (2002) notes that middle-class Norwegian parents see it as an expression of their love and support when they engage in children's extracurricular activities such as football or music band. Mothers from the rich elite

in Norway engage even more intensively in the leisure activities of their children and while most children in Norway attend kindergarten and after school programs, elite mothers tend to keep their children at home in order to protect them from the hostility of the world outside the family (Aarseth 2014).

Critics of the universal claims made by attachment theory with regard to attachment behaviour and caregiver sensitivity point out that parenting styles, parent-child relationships, and children's typical developmental paths, are relative to more general sociocultural value systems (Morelli & Rothbaum 2007; Chapin 2013). According to Morelli & Rothbaum (2007) individual rights-based modern societies are typically guided by the described 'ethics of autonomy'. Other societies may rather be guided by 'ethics of community' with a focus on duty and explicit hierarchy. Parent-child relations are here typically characterised by bodily closeness while face-to-face contact and verbalisations of individual needs and wants are less frequent. The timing of parental acts of care is such that infants' needs are taken care of in a preventive manner based on adult perception and without explicit verbal recognition. This can be exemplified by studies of child rearing in Sri Lanka (Chapin 2013). Here, adults rarely asked the opinion of children or what they might want. Being opinionated or wanting to act contrary to the wish of others was seen as immature behaviour and diminished with increasing age. These children grew to be relationally oriented with a focus on the best interests of their group. In line with this a comparative study on parenting in Norway and Somalia shows that the Somali parents who were interviewed found it important to teach their children to respect them, whereas the Norwegian participants highlighted the importance of showing their children love and respect (Hundeide 1995).

Methods

The families in the study live in small- and medium-sized towns in middle Norway. Five of the families came to Norway as refugees, one family came as asylum seekers, and the parents of two families came as students. All the adults had at least basic education when they arrived in Norway. Some had higher education and some had started higher education but had their schooling interrupted. After five years or more most of them were managing fairly well in Norway both in terms of employment and housing and in this sense they were 'ordinary' Norwegian citizens. For this study, the families were recruited based on the number of children (at least three) and the number of years spent in Norway (at least five). The table contains an overview of the families. The parents are not presented by their real names.

Parents	Family composition 2012	Employment 2012
Peter & Jane	The youngest child is 18 and still living with parents.	Peter: Part time, commerce and office. Jane: full time, health institution.
Tommy & Rose	Four children are still under the age of 18. None living with parents.	Tommy: Job seeker. Rose: Full time, health institution.
John & Mary	The two youngest children are 12 and 15 and still living with parents.	John: Full time, commerce and office. Mary: Part time, health institution.

Parents	Family composition 2012	Employment 2012
Hassan & Amina	Three children between 0 and 8 living with parents.	Hassan: Part time, transportation. Amina: Part time, health institution.
Aaron & Ethel	Four children between 0 and 5 living with parents.	Aaron: Full time, commerce and office. Ethel: Education Norwegian language.
Linda	Three children between 9 and 15 living with mother.	Linda: Part time cleaning, full time university studies.
Mark & Elena	Three children between 0 and 12 living with parents.	Mark: Finishing higher university education. Elena: Maternal leave.
Festus & Sara	Five children between 4 and 10 living with parents.	Festus: Full time, commerce and office. Sara: Finishing higher university education.

As researchers in the project, we are both women at the same age or older than the participating adults. The second author originates from Africa and has lived more than two decades in Norway; the first author is a native Norwegian. We have both raised children in Norway. We visited the participants two times in the summer and fall of 2012, first for an initial meeting to present the project and then again to interview them. The interviews lasted around 2 h and were recorded. In most cases all household members were present, but the parents did most of the talking. With a focus on everyday routines as well as specific episodes, they talked about how they settled, educated themselves, met people, found work, and cared for their children. After the interview, all families were followed up by way of phone calls or meetings. The study is registered at the Norwegian Data Protection Official for Research and follows the norms for informed consent and confidentiality.

Even though we did not specifically focus on issues of parenting in the questions we asked, 'parent' stood out as the most consistent position for the adults in terms of social interaction. Three themes emerged which we have labelled: parenting as a social arena, autonomous parenting, and intergenerational relations.

Parenting as a social arena

One fundamental challenge noted by the adult family members with regard to settling down in Norway was to establish contact with Norwegians and build relationships. In this regard, their efforts to follow the activities of their children in their life outside the family turned out to become an important gateway to Norwegian society.

Meeting parents

Hassan said "*through the children we got to know all the parents*". He described how the children's friends frequently visited their home and how the parents came to collect them in the evening. Parents also met when they took their children to football training or birthday parties, and in parents meetings in school. As for Mary and John

one of their children was a member of the local school band. School bands have a long tradition and play a very important role on the national day of May 17 when children are celebrated as the future of the nation state. School band activities in general rest largely on parental volunteer work. Mary and John actively supported the band by taking part in fundraising and other activities. In Mary's experience, social and spatial contexts related to children were the most important places to meet Norwegian adults. And John added that *"because when they know that you have children, they tend to get closer to you because of the children"*.

During the interview, John and Mary consistently talked about Norwegian parents in terms of a generalised 'them'. In a similar manner, the single mother Linda used the general term 'Norwegians'. Like John and Mary she noted an interest in her as a parent from other adults. She said: *"I have experienced that it is difficult to get in contact with Norwegians, but when you have children it is easier because children talk and when the Norwegian sees that their children have contact with other children they want to contact the parents to find out who the parents are of the child who is hanging out with their child."* Linda thus indicated that she felt an aspect of control in the interest Norwegian parents showed in her, and also that the interest was limited to her as a parent and not as a person. An experience of suspicion and control emerged also in the description Festus gave of episodes related to children's birthday parties. The first time one of his children was invited to such a party he went there together with the child expecting to be invited in to meet the host parents. However, he was left standing on the stairs with the clear impression that this was only for children. He went home with the notion that this is the Norwegian way of doing it. When the time came for his child to invite to a party he was very surprised to find that all the Norwegian parents came inside and sat down. This left him confused and with a certain uneasy feeling of being observed rather than included *"is it that they don't trust me with their kids or is it that ... that maybe because me I didn't stand in the door and block it?"*

These examples illustrate how possibilities for personal interaction are constrained relative to the role as a parent and the moral context of the situation. All the parents experienced that engagement with children would open an interactional space relative to Norwegian adults. The social expectations were, however, not transparent to them. When they reflect back, they position themselves as opposed to a generalised group of Norwegian parents and convey an experience of being outsiders. Linda and Festus explicitly express that they felt an element of forced self-positioning in the interest shown by the other parents. For Festus, he felt that his home was invaded and speculates whether he was met by suspicion.

Meeting neighbours

Aaron and Ethel and their four young children had established their new home in a second floor apartment of a traditional Norwegian wooden house. Over time the fact that they lived on the second floor contributed to a problematic relationship with their downstairs neighbour who grew increasingly annoyed with the sounds of Aaron and Ethel's children. At the time of the interview, the situation was tense as the neighbour acted in what Aaron and Ethel perceived as a threatening manner. Ethel said it was difficult for her to understand the angry neighbour and that in Africa only people who intended to harm you would behave like this neighbour did, *"sometimes when I come from the preschool with the children and I want to take them inside the house they rather want to be outside running around, I say*

no I do not have time now, I am about to cook dinner, and then they cry when we go upstairs. When they cry the neighbour opens the door and says "why do you disturb us."

Aaron said that they really never tried to irritate the neighbour. Rather they felt terrorised by his complaints and were worried that their children lost their freedom as they always had to be quiet. In this episode, the conflict is focused on the level of noise to accept from children. When Aaron and Ethel reached a point where they no longer could understand the reaction of their neighbour, they started to compare the situation with a possible African context. The situation then became a cultural issue related to what they saw as the right of their children to express themselves. The neighbour on his part seems to be claiming peace and quiet. According to Gullestad (1989), a desire for peace and quiet is a central theme in Norwegian culture used to justify, legitimate and induce social action without itself needing justification (p 85).

Meeting professionals

Festus and Sara also had mixed experiences with a neighbour during one summer when Festus was away working and Sara was looking after four children alone. The apartment was small for such a big family and thus difficult to keep tidy. Their neighbour expressed a lot of concern to Sara about her husband never being at home and eventually filed a report to the Child welfare authorities (CWS) claiming that the parents were neglecting their children. Norwegian citizens in general are expected to report cases where they suspect that children are suffering neglect or abuse. This is part of what Hennum describes as citizens self-government in Norway (Hennum 2010).

Out of the eight families in the study, six had had some interaction with CWS-officials. In our reference to this interaction, we only have the parents' version of the story and no information from the CWS-officials to make a balanced account. The point is, however, not to argue the case of the parents, but to make visible how the moral context of everyday parenting is heavily influenced by institutionalised practices of the welfare state meant to secure citizens' individual rights.

According to Section 4-3 in the Norwegian Child welfare act, the CWS has the right and duty to make investigations when they receive reports from the public. As part of such investigations, they may demand to speak with the child or children alone in a separate room. In the case of Festus and Sara, the CWS intervened to pick up their children from kindergarten to talk with them before the parents came to fetch them. The case was later dismissed and the children were allowed home, but Festus was upset when he talked about this. He said *"because you know, you take these kids, because now you say you want to have dialogue with them. Fine, have a dialogue with them. But can you not first talk to us and say what is the issue here?"* In his protest Festus implicitly questions the positioning of himself and his wife by the CWS. By taking the children out of school without informing their parents first, the CWS representatives positioned Festus and Sara as not responsible and even as possibly harmful relative to their children. After two similar episodes with the CWS in different cities, Festus and Sara adopted an approach where they always made sure to update the teachers in preschool and school about their family situation concerning workload or absence of one parent or the other from the home. Through this forced self-positioning they gained back control of their everyday life, but at the cost of exposing their private life. By adopting this strategy, Festus

and Sara gave in to a position of powerlessness relative to the CWS as expressed in what Hennem calls 'confessional narratives' (2011). By defining their situation of heavy workload and strained economy as a potentially difficult one for their children they implicitly accepted a definition of 'good parenting' in line with the Norwegian norm. In return, they were granted subject positions in dialogues with teachers and they avoided interventions by the CWS. Hennem points out that dialogue between parents and professionals built on confessional narratives function as technologies for professionals to control parenting (ibid). Mark and Elena had a similar experience as Festus and Sara in that their young children were picked up from school by the CWS without any warning. As in the case of Festus and Sara, the children were later returned to the parents. For Mark this episode made him very worried about the expectations from Norwegian society in general and teachers in particular with regard to parenting. Rather than opening up their privacy to the scrutiny of authorities, he and Elena developed a strategy where they closely monitored what their children said and did in order to pick up tacit information from the larger social context about sociocultural norms unknown to them. They used this information to manage their children and to avoid attention from the larger social context about their family life.

Rose and Tommy were the parents with the largest family in this study and they had also faced the largest challenges in terms of settling down in Norway. Their story with the CWS started just a few months after they arrived. The local refugee worker then started to bring a CWS officer on regular visits to their house. Later a female 'house friend' was introduced by the CWS. According to Rose she never really knew why these people came, or if they had some kind of official role. In addition to visiting Rose at home, the 'house friend' frequently picked up one of their adolescent children from school, treated him with food and asked him about the conditions at home. This all left Rose confused and uneasy and she did not know how to handle it. Some years later all the children under the age of 18 were picked up by the CWS and taken to different foster homes. The parents were taken completely by surprise when their children were picked up from school and preschool without warning and the CWS-officials came with a police escort to inform about it. Rose felt betrayed and ill-treated by the refugee office and by the 'house friend' and still did at the time of the interview. She narrated how she frequently saw one of her sons riding with his new foster parents in a car and how she worried that he was neglecting his school work. While he was still living with the parents, the boy liked to play football and she remembered how his friends always came to fetch him for training or matches. She was somewhat reluctant to let him go as she thought his schoolwork might suffer, but she still allowed it. During the interview, Rose implicitly argued her case by explicitly supporting Norwegian welfare state values such as 'paying tax' and 'managing on her own instead of relying on her children to take care of her', and repeated that she had never done anything wrong to deserve that her children were taken from her. By this, Rose made an effort to position herself in line with Norwegian cultural values of being self-sustained and autonomous and neither receiving unnecessary welfare benefits nor being a burdensome parent.

Two of the families who had adolescent and young family members on arrival, experienced family conflicts that would come to involve the CWS. Soon after John and Mary settled, their youngsters found local friends and stayed out late in the evenings. This led to some dispute over house rules. In this period of conflict, officials at the local refugee office and CWS intervened to inform the children about their legal and economic rights. Those who were already 18 were advised

to move out from the home with support from the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service (NAV). As a result, the youngsters moved out only 6 months after arriving in Norway, contrary to the wish of the parents. Hassan and Amina told a similar story. When they arrived in Norway, the family included two adolescent family members. After 3 weeks in Norway, these two boys had made many new friends who gathered in the family house. All were smoking heavily and Hassan and Amina were worried about the health of their baby. The weather was cold and the boys did not easily accept to smoke outside. This resulted in many quarrels in which the CWS got involved. Again a solution came when the boys moved to a rented apartment supported by NAV. Once on their own, the young boys from both the mentioned families dropped out of school. In both cases, the parents expressed disagreement with the CWS in their judgement of what was in the best interest of the children at the time. Mary says that in their case the CWS-officials later admitted that they made an unfortunate decision.

Like the CWS, the educational system is part of Norwegian welfare state structures and school and preschool constituted important arenas for the parents to learn about Norwegian society. Through kindergarten Aaron and Ethel learned about food traditions in Norway and about how children should dress to keep warm. They sometimes got messages from the teachers if clothes were too small or too old. This they received as useful guidance and thus positioned themselves as learners in need of knowledge about Norwegian parenting as held by the preschool teachers. In comparison, Festus and Sara also mentioned that they received messages from school about the clothing of the children. Festus got annoyed about this because clothing is expensive and he found the demands from school high such as when his son was told to buy a new jacket because he needed help to zip up the one that he had. In Norwegian preschools and schools, it is considered important that children become independent in terms of dressing themselves.

Mark and Elena had the impression that teachers considered immigrant parents in a different manner compared to Norwegian ones in terms of how they evaluated the living conditions of children. Mark said *"because in a way if my son or my daughter goes to school with a jeans unchanged for one week, then they (the teachers) consider it as a problem. If a Norwegian does the same thing, that is not a problem for the teachers. But if it is you, you can even get a note that it seems you haven't been checking your child. And there are lots of friends with my son and they don't interview them to see how they live, but the issue is, with my son and my daughter, they are kind of speculating, what are you doing at home, what are you eating? Are they giving you this and that? Do you know that you are to get this?"* Among other things, these examples show that children's clothing is an issue which is very much part of the moral context of parenting. The parents express that they were expected to secure certain explicit standards of clothing. If they failed to do so, or failed to acknowledge the importance of the standard, they found themselves in a position where they had to account for their parenting abilities. Another point to make with regard to Mark's reflections is that his comments about how the teachers question their children about their home environment, resembles the story Rose told about how her son was examined by their 'house friend' about the family situation. It also resembles the confessional narratives Festus and Sara volunteered to their kindergarten teachers. In all cases, the efforts of professionals to secure the welfare and individual rights of the children invoked moral contexts where the parents were forced to position themselves relative to certain parenting standards. In the case of the young adults who were advised to move out from their family home the

invoked context was one where parents should encourage increased independence and responsible self-government in their offspring in line with Norwegian welfare state ideals. By focussing on duty and hierarchical family relations, the African parents were seen to violate this norm.

Autonomous parenting

The experienced normativity of parenting included expectations parents met in terms of securing the happiness and the physical, social and intellectual development of their children.

The degree to which parents of nuclear families in Norway are expected to manage concerns affecting their children was different from what the African parents in the study were used to. Linda found parenting challenging in Norway with three children. In Africa, she said *"all parents are parents to all children. The children can go everywhere, someone is always watching them and they can be outside without any problem. Here they are always inside with mother"*. Linda also mentioned how the pattern of living was different with extended families in the same house and always a grandmother, cousin or aunt present to help with practical chores. While she was still living in Africa she *"... never thought it would be difficult to raise children."* Festus put it this way: *"one of the biggest shocks you get especially when you migrate with kids, is the shock that there isn't like a social structure"*. Ethel also found it difficult with no one to help but tried to see it as part of adjusting to Norwegian everyday life. She said *"Such is life and it is the same for Norwegians, they have no one to ask."* Again Ethel positioned herself as someone who was aspiring to manage in line with the majority population, but also as someone explicitly different.

The number of children in a family is an issue that became relevant in many of the interviews related to the practical and economic expectations facing the parents. Linda noted that immigrants often have many children and economy is one important reason why relatively few immigrant children take part in organised leisure activities. As far as she knew her children were the only ones with immigrant background in the local sports team. They would have liked to join other activities as well, but she had to say no due to economic constraints. In addition to paying the annual fee for the football group, she was expected to take part in fundraising. Usually this means selling lottery tickets, flowers or huge amounts of expensive toilet paper. With three children she got triple amounts of products to sell. As an immigrant with no relatives or old friends on her list of potential customers she usually ended up buying it all herself. By highlighting family size and a lack of social network as characteristics of immigrant families, Linda explained her challenges by differentiating herself from "Norwegian parents". At the same time, she may have overlooked that many Norwegian parents have similar concerns. John and Mary also commented on the number of children still living with the parents relative to the cost of their activities. Mary said: *"it costs money. But the children it is their happiness, you have to do it."* And John added *"Thank God they are only two."* In general, the parents in this study experienced the economic burden as heavy and as an obstacle in terms of meeting the needs and wishes of their children in line with what they perceived as prevailing norms. Without a car or a driver license Mark took his son to extracurricular activities by bus and by walking. But his son was not happy as other children went by car and did not have to struggle their way in storm and snowy weather.

The standard of housing is part of the overall situation of children and their parents. After Festus got a permanent job in Norway, he went to his local government office to ask for a favourable loan to buy a house. Such loans were granted to citizens of moderate means. Taken together Festus and Elena did, however, have what was considered a good income, and they did not qualify. Festus recalled the conversation that took place when he found it unreasonable that the loan were granted based on income alone, and not on the total economy of the family. He argued with the official and the answer he got was that *"you know, I didn't tell you to have those kids..... you are rich, you felt you can afford it"*. This encounter fuelled his reflections on family and child welfare policies. He now saw huge challenges related to his family size and what he called the *"true standard of living"* in Norway. By this he referred to the expected standard of housing, the expected participation of children in a variety of activities which costed money, and demands from preschool and school regarding the clothes and equipment children should possess. When such standards are implicit in hegemonic parenting practices it implies that if you do not have economic assets but still give birth to children, you are irresponsible and a bad parent. Festus thus realised that that the economic issue alone can place immigrant parents low in the value-mastering hierarchy.

We have seen that welfare structures such as CWS and the educational system take efforts to secure children a certain standard of living which is also ripe with parental expectations. Such standards are 'forced' upon families by the welfare institutions in the sense that if the parents refuse to recognise the standards, welfare institutions will intervene. Through citizens self-government, welfare policies also shape social interaction and power value hierarchies in everyday interaction where parents and neighbours meet. In practice, this means that the freedom of immigrant parents to define other standards than the Norwegian ones is very limited. If they do live by other standards their parenting skills may not be recognised as valid. If Norwegian parenting standards functions as a measure stick for all alike, the welfare state may run the risk of letting a taken for granted sameness in terms of parenting values lead to discrimination in a manner similar to the one pointed to by Lidén (2001) in the school setting.

Intergenerational relations

Weakening parental authority

Many of the episodes narrated in the interviews raise issues of weakening parental authority. Peter and Jane told about their son who was 13 years at the time they arrived in Norway. The boy quickly got involved with new friends in school. When he wanted the same freedom of movement as his friends, this led to disagreements as Peter expected his son to ask permission before he went off. The boy then presented a paper with the telephone number of the governmental Child and Family Unit and informed the parents that *"if you speak badly against me, if you give me a tap (slap me) I call this number."* Here the perceived threat of the welfare system enabled the child to disregard the wish of the parents as in the cases of the youngsters of John and Mary and Hassan and Amina. The parents found themselves without the power to act in what they perceived as the best interest of their child. Like the boys mentioned earlier, this boy later moved out to stay with friends and dropped out of school and in addition he faced legal issues with the authorities. In the cases when the young children of Festus, Mark, and Rose

were picked up by the CWS, the parents were tacitly positioned as potentially irresponsible and even harmful to their children. Their economic situation, the number of children, and the degree to which they followed 'wrong' parenting norms, all seems to have contributed to the intervention of CWS. In the case of Festus' family, the CWS gave the young children information about their individual rights and told them that they were not supposed to work. Festus sighed: *"The problem is the kids became a bit hard to deal with. Because before they will do certain things for themselves and then it is like they didn't want to do them anymore because somebody has told them you can't do this or the other. For example packing their own food, they then said, we are not supposed to work. This is not work you know!"*

Research shows that expressions of parental authority which are considered legitimate by society are closely related to implicit cultural expectations about child responsibilities, capabilities and needs, just as expressions of parental supportive behaviour are culturally specific (Morelli & Rothbaum 2007). Immigrants from African countries may experience that their expectations towards their children are at odds with the expectations majority parents in Norway hold towards theirs. In our former example, where Ethel expected her children to follow her inside when she wanted to cook dinner, she expected them to accept her decision. She did, however, not expect them to be quiet and not voice their disagreement. Festus expected his children to pack their own food, but he did not expect his son to necessarily zip his jacket without help. Rose expected her son to study hard, but she did not expect him, or encourage him, to play football. John and Hassan and Peter expected their adolescent family members to abide by family rules even if the rules went against the youngsters' own wishes. Linda noted that she no longer can let her children run free without her supervision.

Expectations about rights and responsibilities as well as expectations about development and learning are part of the moral contexts of parenting. When expectations from parents, and from society, are at odds, the moral context of child-parent positioning becomes more complex.

Questioning parental competence

The adults in the study were well aware that they were viewed as lacking in Norwegian parenting competence. Mark reflected on his own shortcoming like this: *"The issue is how to maintain a standard that you are not sure, so it is a big challenge. Parents are behind and they ... we need also to learn from children. And if you are learning from children, the system will also understand you in a different way that you are not responsible."*

What Mark pointed to relates to value-mastering hierarchies. He noted that children adapt to the Norwegian way of life quickly compared to the parents. As an adult from a culture with a different moral context of parenting he found himself low in the Norwegian value-mastering hierarchy.

Festus reflected on the changing power-balance between parents and children when parents lack contextual competence. One major challenge for the parents was to evaluate whether the demands from their children were reasonable or not. Festus said *"you have your idea of what is right but you are not sure if you say no this or that one. Is that what a typical parent will do? Then I begin to wonder, are these kids playing me like other kids could be playing their parents regardless of their nationality?"* Festus' parental values were experienced as no longer valid in this new context. This upset

the expected relation between him and his children where he was supposed to be the more knowledgeable part. In the Norwegian context, his children soon learned that if disagreements arose they could outwit the parents. In Harre & Langenhove's terms the children were negotiating their rights and obligations of speaking and acting relative to the parents. The parents saw their children empowered by the Norwegian welfare system as well as by their own lack of value-mastering. This in turn made parenting even more challenging.

Conclusions

The narratives told in this study makes visible learning processes among the adult family members in coming to terms with Norwegian parenting expectations. As the cultural norms and the specific expectations became increasingly transparent several of the parents found themselves in positions where they did not have the means to fulfil the perceived expectations or where they did not entirely agree with established practices. The children in the families received information about their rights in school and from the CWS. This information was often infused with negotiations relative to their parents. The resulting positioning of children as individuals with rights-based relations to their parents placed the children well within the logic of emerging welfare state identities with an inherent 'moral of autonomy' and in line with Vike's (2013) point that Norwegian identities are embodying welfare state structures. This same positioning empowered children relative to their parents and made parenting more challenging. It also located parents within value hierarchies reflecting their ability and willingness to meet the rights and needs of their children as defined by Norwegian parenting values. In this position, they often found themselves as "foreigners" or as different from "Norwegians". This illustrates how structural properties of the welfare state meant to secure equality, also power value hierarchies, impact social interaction, and constrain experiences of sameness or difference at the personal level. Paradoxically, the explicit inclusion of children in Norwegian welfare structures made inclusion more challenging for the parents.

This study shows that when adult African immigrants enter subject positions as parents within their social context of small- and medium-sized towns in middle Norway, there is a lack of possibilities for them as 'good parents' to question established Norwegian values or contribute to the range of sociocultural child rearing practices. The reproduction of the division between 'immigrants' and 'Norwegians' which follows from such lack of opportunity may overshadow shared concerns among parents of different origin.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the reviewers and editors of NJMR for very constructive comments and suggestions.

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