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Narratives of changing gender roles

Christensen, Karen

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# NORWEGIAN WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF 20TH-CENTURY MIGRATION TO ENGLAND: *Narratives Of Changing Gender Roles*

Karen Christensen\*

Centre for Health Promotion Research, Department of People and Technology, Roskilde University, Roskilde, Denmark/Department of Sociology, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway

\* E-mail: karench@ruc.dk/karen.christensen@uib.no

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## Abstract



This article discusses migratory gender roles within a north/north movement context. Using the case of older Norwegian women migrating to England while young, actively making migration part of their lives, it combines life course theory and migration theory about transnationalism, and presents three migratory life trajectory typologies. These are developed from life course interviews, based on class and gender role differences. One, upper-class based, is about transnational marriage as a key to leaving a small Norwegian community and becoming a 'European' housewife. Another, working-class based, is about using an au pair job as a stepping stone to migration and marriage, doing family-life-adapted paid work in Norwegian workplace 'niches'. The third, middle-class based, is about using the migratory process for strengthening a professional identity. The article shows how a feeling of transnational ambiguity is exceeded the more the migratory gender role is about realising one's own potentials, moving towards gender equality.

## Keywords

Female primary migrants • Gender roles • Life course • Transnationalism • Ambiguity

## Introduction

British immigration statistics show that between the late 1950s and 1980s, yearly around 5,500 to 9,000 women born in Norway were immigrants in England and Wales, with a peak around 1960 and 1970. While these figures document that immigration among Norwegian women took place at that time, they say nothing about the lives of these women. This article gives insight into migratory life trajectories of women belonging to this group of females migrating to England while young, and choosing not to return. They left at a time when the general Norwegian migration picture was changing from net emigration to net immigration

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with many Norwegian emigrated people returning (Central Bureau of Statistics of Norway 1977). Simultaneously, increasing numbers of women in Norway moved into education and paid work, starting a process of gender role changes (Nielsen 2017). This study's Norwegian women, by emigrating from Norway, went in the opposite direction. Their contribution to gender role changes became part of their migration process. Despite small numbers, this group is of empirical and theoretical interest for the field of migration research. Marked by classical roots in the understanding of migration as a male phenomenon (e.g. Simmel 1950), migration research clearly has had and still has a male bias. When feminisation was found to be a new characteristic of migration in the twenty-first century (Castles & Miller 1993), research defined women as 'passive and followers of their partners' (Lutz 2010: 1648), implying that their type of migration was of no interest. Although scholars in the 1980s started questioning the dominating male role in mass migration by documenting that women were primary migrants too (Morokvasic 1984), women are still often constructed in terms of reproductive roles (Slany, Kontos & Liapi 2010: 12). Even research presenting women as primary migrants easily places them in roles as victims of globalisation, focusing much on domestic workers being exploited by middle-class households (e.g. Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2003; Lutz 2011; Parreñas 2001). However, feminist research has since the 1990s (see e.g. Slany, Kontos & Liapi 2010) brought the issue of women's changing roles – from dependent family members to more autonomous labour migrants – into migration research. Migration is then, however, discussed as a way to escape from suppressive female gender roles, leaving oppressive familial/household relations. Yet (new) disadvantages, such as challenging working condition and low paid work, in the host country are included, making the conditions for the gender role after emigration dependent on different aspects such as 'choice, power, resources and constraints' (Anthias & Cederberg 2010: 43). This article will contribute to the gender aware migration research. It will show that examples of solo migration can be found much earlier than generally suggested in the literature and it will contribute to knowledge about more differentiated understandings of gender role changes in relation to migration. This is in particular called for by scholars studying women left behind by migrating husbands (see de Haas & van Rooij 2010; Rashid 2013). These scholars remind us not to be too fast in assuming emancipation needs and options for women, but rather to look for differentiations within specific social circumstances.

Another migration research bias is about its strong focus on movements from the global south to the global north, thereby primarily involving issues about poverty, as well as escape from political and humanitarian crises. This article instead has a focus on a migratory north–north path with Norway its starting point, a country that in post-war times began a process of developing its welfare state, consolidating its growth of the economy, oil industry development being an important part. This case, in other words, involves no escape from crisis and oppression, and neither is the migration motivation fiscal, contrasting also with the prototype of the economic migrant. While England, historically, colonised major parts of the world and later received immigrants from these countries (Castles 2010: 1573), the Scandinavian countries were never colonised. In this sense, there is no colonial background history between Norway and England. At the time the Norwegian women went

to England, England had few migration restrictions from any country, and from a general 'Norwegian perspective' it was seen as more European as well as more marked by social differences. Using life course narratives, the aim of this article is to explore how women actively made migratory decisions part of their life projects, and developed an everyday life with transitional ties, linking home and host country, but in different ways, related to different gender roles.

Apart from the historical mass emigration to America from Scandinavian countries – paying attention to challenges to the dream of freedom which for many resulted in returns to Norway – very little attention has been paid to emigration from Norway. Typically, research focuses on immigration to Norway/Scandinavia (e.g. Brochmann & Hagelund 2011; Isaksen 2019), with a few exceptions. One is in regard to retirement migration from northern European countries (including Norway) to Spain (Gustafson 2008; Helset & Sandlie 2004) and another is about migrants moving from Norway to Spain for health reasons (Breivik 2011). These studies give some important insights into non-economic migration causes, and particularly relevant here is Breivik's finding of an 'ambiguous' life abroad for Scandinavians, struggling with identity issues related to their lives abroad. However, the studies have no gender focus. Among the very few studies with a gender focus is a study about Swedish women following their Swedish husbands to Singapore, leaving the Swedish dual-earner model and becoming housewives in Singapore (Lundström 2012). Another study, but with a weaker gender focus, is on how (privileged) Nordic migrants (from Denmark and Finland) encounter the Indian social system (Foulkes 2011). This study, based on empirical material conducted in 2009, shows how in particular women, accustomed to manage without a cleaner in their household, even when both husband and wife are in full-time jobs, start to negotiate with the idea of hierarchical relations. Within the context of the more strongly class/caste-based Indian society, they employ domestic workers. These understand their work roles as clearly subordinated and they are, therefore, not even able to call the Norwegian women employing them by their first name (Foulkes 2011). Lundström also pays attention to a negotiation process. She develops it critically, showing how these women retain their status as 'independent' wives, having higher ambitions than being housewives, through new roles as employers of migrant domestic live-in workers. They also renegotiate Swedish social equality norms by presenting themselves as better employers than Chinese women, simultaneously seeing the live-in workers as migrants with 'different' needs from their own. This study shows gendered and racialised processes in a 'transnational expatriate zone' and is important here in terms of pointing out the potential for change and (re)negotiation of gender roles within a migratory setting. The discussion in this article will add more variation to this transnational zone, and to the field of emigration-from-the-north studies, using a life course perspective, including the intersection of gender, migration and class.

In the following, I will present the theoretical approach, combining life course theory with theory about transnationalism. I will then present the case study, its empirical material and methods, followed by the analytical findings comprising three typologies of classed and gendered migratory life courses and finally provide a discussion of the article's contribution to the literature relating to migration and gender role changes.

## A transnational framing of female biographies

The discussion here brings together classic sociological theory about 'the sociological imagination' (Mills 1959) and migration theories, particularly regarding transnationalism (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc 1994). According to these scholars, originally developing the concept of transnationalism, 'Transnational migration is the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement', which implies studying 'the ongoing and continuing ways in which current-day immigrants construct and reconstitute their simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society' (Glick Schiller, Basch & Scanton Blanc 1995: 48). While this is a helpful approach for understanding how the Norwegian women maintain as well as develop ties and connections to Norway, while living in England, the sociological imagination provides insight into the relation between an individual biography and historical times. This imagination is the basic idea in the life course paradigm (Elder 1994). It stresses the element of 'human agency' in terms of making the individual an active part in shaping her or his biography, relating here to the discussion of and interest in female primary migrants. It also stresses change, over the life course and within changing social circumstances, avoiding the study of transnationalism as static (Grillo 2007).

The discussion about transnationalism, or transmigration (Grillo 2007), is developed into one of the main migration research areas (Lee, Carling & Orrenius 2014). Central in the transnationalism perspective is the focus on needing an understanding of the concept of society in a globalised world, and therefore, in analysis one in which the nation-state and its borders cannot automatically be taken as given (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2003). However, Glick Schiller recently pointed out that many scholars wrongly interpret transnationalism as implying 'the end of nation-states' (Glick Schiller 2018: 203) while this was never included in the argument. On the contrary, she and her colleagues pointed at the continuing power of the nation-states to regulate, for example, access for foreigners to the country and defining requirements for achieving citizenship. This power of the nation-states represents important social macro-factors here as they provide the overall national circumstances for the Norwegian women going to England. Included in this are open borders at this time (for all migrants); the offer of British citizenship at some point, but only by losing the Norwegian one; and the regulation of temporary au pair arrangements. In this sense, the regulations include both options, limits and barriers for shaping one's life in the new country. The life course perspective adds to this the impact of different life chances as linked to class, race and gender (Elder & Giele 2009). In particular important here for the narratives of the Norwegian women is the shaping of their life chances through the families they grew up in in Norway, and how this provides important starting points for their later life projects in England. While race is less important here, because Norwegian women are 'invisible' (white) foreigners (Leinonen 2012) in England, it still matters that they are of different nationality. They are still people from another country, some of the women enter cross-cultural marriages (see below) and some are encountering discrimination related to

speaking English with an accent (cf. also Leinonen 2012). In this sense, the transnational approach is helpful in seeing aspects of even a north/north mobility as problematic.

While gender intersects with class and foreignness in the life trajectories of the Norwegian women, gender is also a specific focus here because the analysis points out variations in the shaping of gender roles through the transnational life courses. In a very concrete way, the women narrate about the making of their gender roles and it appears that *feelings* are deeply involved in this narrating process. The theoretical suggestion from this is that the different ways they approach their transnational life is linked to how problematic they see their gender roles throughout life. This is why the concept of ‘ambiguity’, found in Norwegian health migration research (Breivik 2011, mentioned earlier), is included. It contributes in this article to conceptualising variations of feelings related to the making of gender roles in a transnational context.

## The case study of Norwegian women emigrants

The study is based on life course interviews with 10 Norwegian women all born in Norway. The oldest was born in 1931 and the youngest in 1953, and they all migrated to England while still young (between 19 and 31 years), primarily in the 1950s and 1960s (one in 1984, the rest between 1954 and 1970). While those born in the 1930s belong to the generation growing up under the first economic world crisis, those born towards the end of the World War II (WWII) belong to the baby boomers, the large post-war born generation. Both generations are today of retirement age, potentially moving towards a life phase where one may possibly become dependent on help at some point. At the time of the interview, the Norwegian women were all facing old age (aged between 59 and 82 years). They were retired or near retirement, and some of them were widows. They were all living in England. Although belonging to different birth cohorts (Nilsen 2014), the crucial condition here is that they all emigrated from Norway at the same life phase – a family building phase – and at the same historical time in terms of what is generally called a historical *Zeitgeist*. In this sense, they represent a migration cohort. From the perspective of women and their changing roles in society, the *Zeitgeist* is characterised positively. It is a time of change from a generation of women with duties as housewives to a new generation looking into a ‘market place of opportunity’ (Almås 1997), or as found in a three-generation study of farmers in Norway, leaving the convention ‘born to be a farmer’ and moving into more individualised life courses, with more options for life directions (Villa 1999). The Norwegian women here belong to the middle generation described by Villa (1999): the generation that was in a time of change between traditional and new models of living, described also by Nielsen (2017) as the generation struggling with gender equality. This historical period is an important context for the personal narratives found here. They can be seen as giving voice in terms of insight into active decision-making processes of primary experiences of migration (Vandsemb 1995) at that specific time. While the narratives are told from the perspective of present time (when interviewed), the advantage of this is that they represent the women’s reflections on their life path, as lives

where they achieved what they wanted, what was expected of them through gender norms, or what they missed and felt less happy about.

The women were recruited through three organisations, these being community groups for Norwegian people and their families, including thereby many non-Norwegians too. In one of these community groups, I participated in events and gatherings. Through my participation, I was able to develop the trust in me that was necessary for them to be willing to tell me their life story. I myself being a Scandinavian woman living in England at the time of the interview was helpful for the development of trust too. My participation furthermore implied that I could recruit women directly, choosing different women among those who found it interesting to tell their story. Outside this community group, I was able to recruit three interviewees via e-mail contact to two other community groups based in the same city, but with members from different cities. Most of the interviews were carried out at the community group where I participated in activities. They lasted typically 1.5–2 hours, with one exception, where I was invited to the interviewee's home and the interview lasted almost 5 hours. The interviews were semi-structured without detailed questions, but covering topics about the interviewees' childhood in Norway, the reason for making the decision to go abroad, their working life and family life in England, and finally some reflections about getting old in England. Although they emigrated many years ago, they all chose the Norwegian language when telling their story.

All interviews were transcribed and the analysis was grounded in the empirical material (Glaser and Strauss 1967), using analytical tools of coding the material in detail and comparing the stories, then moving from open to selected coding, resulting in central codes such as 'transnational practices', 'Norwegian niches in England' and 'dilemmas of living a life abroad'. As a case study, the empirical material cannot represent the migration cohort these women belong to. However, the effort to include women in different situations resulted in including women from different social classes. As this represents significant differences, impacting on gender roles, the analysis resulted in three life course typologies.

## Three life course typologies

Regarding migratory/transnational practices, the Norwegian women primarily had common characteristics. They all left Norway while young, chose marriage migration by marrying a non-Norwegian man, built a family with him and settled in England. They all maintained their Norwegian language and facilitated their children's learning of the language too. When having the opportunity to become a British citizen, they all rejected this because they did not want to give up their Norwegian citizenship. They all maintained Norwegian traditions such as Norwegian Christmas celebration on 24th of December primarily rather than on the 25th and celebrating the 17th of May, the national day. They all spent much time, in particular during summer holidays, in Norway, especially when their children were still young, visiting family members. It was a key finding that their lives consisted of mixed and negotiated traditions and cultural norms. In this sense, they were 'transmigrants', or

transnational migrants, meaning that they were living lives across borders (Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton 1995; Grillo 2007), however, with some important variations due to different class and gender roles.

### **An upper-class housewife biography – and Norwegian-English ambiguous feeling**

Isabel was born in 1931 in one of the Norwegian seaports. My interview with her took place in her home, a charming old house in a fashionable area in one of the larger English cities. In the hall near the entrance door, there was a very large picture of her husband, who died four years prior to the time of the interview. This picture symbolises a key element in her migrant life story, her main reason for migration having been marriage. She warned me before the interview, saying, 'My story is not really very interesting as I say, because I never worked', assuming I, as researcher, was looking for stories including paid work. Isabel grew up in an upper-class family, with a father who was educated in law, but then inherited a 'general store' near the harbour. Her mother was a musician playing at concerts. Due to her many journeys abroad, the family employed a domestic worker for large parts of Isabel's childhood. Her childhood was safe and surrounded by kin in the local area. The shop was later taken over, although unsuccessfully, by one of Isabel's two brothers. Isabel, as a woman, was not supposed to do this (similar to expectations that the oldest son would take over the farm, cf. Villa 1999). Isabel gained her university qualifying examination and she was then matriculated at a University in Norway, at a time when this was still unusual for women. However, she never started. Influenced by her father's strong opinions about the little town they lived in and the importance of learning about great Europe, she travelled to France and the Mediterranean to see Europe and spend time there. Here, she met a British man studying natural science at one of England's most prestigious universities. Isabel fell in love and chose to change her plans of studying. She moved to England and married him, although her father warned her regarding the English class society, being very different from the Norwegian society with weaker class traditions (see Vike 2018). But as she stressed in the interview, 'I proved him wrong'. She proved him wrong by staying in England and developing her family life here. She and her husband had two children, and both children went to boarding school, a cultural norm in England in upper classes, but not in Norway. While the children were still at home, they hired Norwegian au pairs, and because the au pairs were keen to learn English, and also because the children went to boarding school, the language at home became very much mixed English-Norwegian. They bought a cottage in England for family relaxation. Later, they bought two cottages in Norway. At the time of the interview, Isabel was dealing with a parking problem at one of the cottages showing her strong involvement in these Norwegian properties. Reflecting on her life, Isabel said 'I feel so 50/50', implying similar strong emotional ties to Norway and England. She also expressed a clear dilemma in her life, when telling how upset she was when hearing her son saying 'Mum, you have never worked', thereby ignoring her (unpaid) work with houses (in



England and Norway), household and childcare. She expressed the same by telling me about all the books she can afford to buy, but that they bring her 'nowhere' without an educational platform. She clearly regrets this part of her life, even asking me if I think it would be too late to do an Open University course. In her narrative, this regret is much more in focus than her thoughts about old age. Although 82 years old, she does not think much about this. If her children cannot help because they live too far away, she has the resources to buy the services she needs, and so far, she is employing a Philippine woman to clean her house.

In this first typology, the choice of transnational marriage in the upper social class and a culture of weak gender equality ambitions breaks up personal career plans. The central gender role is the housewife role abroad. But while moving with a man to his country, this is still about her own active choice, as she had other options at the time of migration. However, a strong ambiguity is then later developed (feeling 50/50). The interviewee, Hanne, represents another case in this typology. She also has an upper middle-class background, and some education in accounting, one of the typical shorter education courses for women at that time enabling them to seek secretarial work (Norwegian National Commission 1989). She also became a full-time housewife. Her dependency on her husband, a journalist she followed around the world, came to the forefront, when her marriage ended in divorce. At this point, she developed her skills further, needing a higher income for her and her daughter from her first marriage. At the age of 65 years, she was on her way to moving back to Norway, already having bought an apartment in northern Norway where she was born, if she had not fallen in love with a new British man. This stresses her strong ambiguity in life, as she wanted to go back and was on her way to do this, while the new marriage made her stay once more.

The next typology is different; it represents a lower social class case.

### **A working-class family life biography – ambiguous feeling modified through Norwegian niches in England**

Jannicke was born in 1945 in one of the other sea ports in Norway, a shipping town where many men were sailors, including her father. He was away from the family for long periods, leaving the family, household and childcare to his wife. They had three girls, and the money Jannicke's mother received was often not enough for the daily necessities. When Jannicke finished commercial school learning traditional female tasks such as bookkeeping/accountancy, the family could not afford further education and Jannicke had to find work, but was interested in going abroad, looking for new opportunities in life. As many other girls in her circle of friends, she went to England to start an au pair job; these jobs were announced in Norwegian newspapers. Jannicke described herself as a young and modest girl who then went through a personal development after coming to England where she was an au pair, carrying out housework and childcare, for a rich and friendly family. For the first time in her life she had her own room. She immediately also started entering groups with religious affiliation and developing active social networking. She returned home after

one year, the time limit of work permission for au pairs, but during her stay in England she had fallen in love with a man from South America. In order to be with the South American man, Jannicke searched for jobs, and actively using her Norwegian language capital, she found work that required secretarial competence and Norwegian language. She married her South American man and they had children, but they went through tough times. As a white woman, she felt she was not supposed to be with a coloured man. For example, they found it difficult to find an apartment in England as a 'mixed' couple, encountering racism. And Jannicke and her family had only a small income (even with her husband having two jobs) and a small apartment. So as soon as the children were a few years old, she looked for more work and found a work place requiring much contact with Norwegian people, using again her Norwegian language as capital, now for accessing work. She managed to achieve a Norwegian salary, due to her continuing Norwegian citizenship, and this later gave her a Norwegian pension (both Norwegian salaries and pensions are at higher rates than the English ones). The family went to Norway for all their holidays, Jannicke is socially active in England, a member of a club in Norway with friends there, and her husband, children and today also grandchildren all speak Norwegian. However, even though Jannicke sometimes misses Norway – with emotions tied up to nature – her life is in England:

When the sun is shining I wish I was home and could go for a walk in the woods or the mountains. ... but I won't return, I have my children and grandchildren here. This is my life. (Jannicke, 68)

In other words, she feels settled here. There is (almost) no dilemma. Her husband has been retired before 10 years. She has just retired from her work. The family cannot afford a cottage in Norway, but they can stay at her sisters' houses. Regarding old age, still far away in her mind, Jannicke wants to avoid institutions, but she has no fear. She has her family:

I have lovely children, my son and my daughter and grandchildren ... they call me and say 'oh mum, can you help us please, we need a babysitter' ... so I'm busy all the time, and I know that when that day comes, then they will take care of me. (Jannicke, 68)

The same is true for the interviewee Katrine, a widow. Her sons, living in Norway, France and England, have organised for her to live in her own little house in the garden of the son who is living with his family in England. The family is taking care of her.

Central to this second trajectory typology, which is, in addition to Katrine, also represented by interviewees Grethe, Solveig and Kari, is much struggle. For example, marriage for several of them is not only about cross-national marriage but also about cross-cultural marriages, thereby balancing and negotiating between different cultural values and religions (see Danielsen 2009; and Leinonen 2010 about 'inter-marriages' following globalisation processes). And they could not choose to stay at home as full-time housewives taking care of the children, even though some of them wanted to, because they could not afford that. These kinds of struggles may be a key to their active social networking and creative ways of finding niches for Norwegians, both for jobs and leisure time. As found

also by others (although for highly skilled migrant women), mixed-ethnic relationships do not hinder active building of home-country based networks (Ryan and Mulholland 2013). Important regarding these Norwegian niches seems to be that they represent a way for these women to reconstruct what they lost by being those in their relationships, who left their home country and moved abroad, knowing this implied struggle, financially and more. Thereby, they actively counteract an ambiguity in their transnational lives, making this much weaker in this trajectory than in the first one. These women have invested and actively contributed to creating a life that exceeds either English or Norwegian norms and values, especially through the Norwegian niches, and rather created their own transnational expatriate zone (Lundström 2012) within the possibilities given in the transnational field (Lewitt and Glick Schiller 2004) they are in at that specific time.

While this second life trajectory is created around important choices in life dependent on and adapted to the family, including care needs in old age, in the last trajectory another step towards becoming more independent of the family is taken, using middle-class resources.

### **A middle-class work life biography – beyond ambiguous feeling**

Inger was born in 1937 in a larger town in Norway. Her mother was a housewife; her father worked his way upwards and became a director within retail trade. Apart from it being war time, implying restrictions on everyday life, Inger had a good childhood with skiing in winter time and access to sea and boats in summer time. She describes her mother as strong and someone treating people equally, and Inger admired her. Inger grew up with a good middle-class background and when she chose a professional health education, her father paid for it. He encouraged his daughters to choose education, her sister developing a professional career too. Being compared to her sister, who was seen as cleverer, and sometimes even bullied by other pupils, Inger was not really engaged in learning before she chose her professional direction in life. Again, encouraged by her father suggesting it was good to learn English, she obtained her first access to England through her father's network. Then, she applied for a course, and then later a job in the healthcare sector. At this point in her life, she decided to stay in England because she felt freedom here. Inger then fell in love with a British man, also a professional. They married in Norway, settled in England and later had three children. However, Inger stresses that marriage was not her migration reason:

The reason why I stayed in England was that I loved England. It was not because I loved a man. He came [into my life] after I had decided to stay in England. (Inger, 75)

Except for very short maternity leaves (18 weeks) Inger stayed in the labour marked working full time all the time. But this was also because both she and her husband wanted a two income/equal relationship. Inger says that she never misses Norway and she opposes herself to those Norwegian women, who say they are missing Norway and visit Norway every time they have holidays. When her children grew up, Inger facilitated her children in

learning Norwegian too, but only as a second language. Most important for her was to learn the English language properly herself. Her children should not risk discrimination because of their mother's foreign accent, and for her career, this was essential too. When she decided to retire one year before she had to (at 60, at that time), she did this because she experienced that the healthcare sector was on its way to becoming more bureaucratised, 'forgetting the patient' as she expressed it. And she did not want to be part of this New Public Management related development. Inger and her family own a cottage in Norway near her home town, and the family loves going there when there is time, but Inger is settled and satisfied with living in England, also after retirement. Being used to an active life, following retirement she has engaged more in a Norwegian women's club in England, but she also engages in non-Norwegian activities. For her old age, when needing help, she plans to hire a migrant live-in care worker. This fits in with the new directions within long-term care of active ageing policies and personalisation, stressing empowerment of the care user's role towards independence (see Christensen & Pilling 2014).

Erna and Emma are two other interviewees representing this trajectory. Emma, like Inger, also clearly distances herself from those who went to England to be au pairs and then entered marriage. She says, 'That's not for me', implying that she wanted an education. The way this is stated shows that this is also a class issue. Erna distanced herself from this au pair tradition too, but in another way. She used an au pair job only for learning English, then obtained an education as a nurse specialist in Norway, and then used this to obtain an interesting job at an English hospital. After this, she married and had children in England. In contrast to the other trajectories, the women of this trajectory are actively trying to create more independent lives (cf. Almås 1997; Villa 1999). They develop a professional role in which they are using and developing their skills, and this is then taken into their marriage and family life creating more equal relationships, and maintained when moving towards old age.

## Discussion – of migratory transnational lives and gender roles

The life course perspective is essential for grasping transformations over a life time, and the biographical narratives told from the perspective of present time, for learning about everyday life practice and reflections on gender roles and feelings related to practising transnationalism. This approach brought to the forefront a central finding of how migrant women actively created transnational lives. These are strongly related to class and work situation, and involve the family they left in their home country, the family they built in the host country and the new generation starting with their children. The narratives show deep and complex creations of transnational practices, including practices such as daily family life with two languages, Norwegian au pairs etc.; combining celebration practices from two or more countries; entering cross-national or cross-cultural marriages, choosing between or combining boarding schools in some periods (if at all) with children living at home in other periods; entering Norwegian networks in England and then contributing to making

them multicultural by including husband and children; and searching for work places and forums where a background of Norwegian language and culture becomes social capital for access and participation. However, these transnational practices were also problematic in terms of producing feelings of ambiguity, but in different ways; the wider historical context being crucial.

The north/north movement of these women implies that they are leaving and entering a European country. Although British society has a colonial history and class differences were stronger at the time of the Norwegian women's migration, they were both societies developing their welfare states, and of specific importance here: in both countries, an increasing number of women were moving into education and the labour market. For example, figures show that while 57% of women between 25 and 54 years were in paid work in the UK in 1975 (Roantree & Vira 2018), the percentage in Norway in 1975 was 60 (BUFdir 2018). In other words, there were no large differences, and the tendency of increasing numbers was the same. As a historical time-specific context for the two countries involved here, this is an important difference compared to the south/north movement. Here, women would have the option of negotiating about and possibly choosing stronger equality norms; even within Europe (see Isaksen 2019 for an example regarding women from Italy moving to Norway). While such discussions add to the more traditional gender discussion in migration literature regarding leaving oppressive roles (Slany, Kontos & Liapi 2010), the case here of Norwegian women is different. It rather points out how the migratory practices, and the feelings about these, are linked to negotiating gender roles (cf. also Lundström 2012). It may be surprising that the strongest ambiguous feeling is found among those who had the best life chances. However, while the high social class position brings in financial security, it also weakens the necessity for women's education and work at this time and easily makes the housewife role central for family life, thereby maintaining rather than challenging traditional gender norms. One could also see this as a result of the woman's social class position being 'defined' by her man, and not herself. She earns no money, and she is a high-class woman due to his income and position, although she is contributing strongly by doing unpaid work in the family and household. In a time of changing gender roles, however, a 'pressure' is put on her, making her (migrant) life more ambiguous. For those from the working class, the financial situation is opposite, making two incomes important for the family. Although there can be much financial and cultural struggle, overcoming these struggles – through niches for Norwegians (like expatriate zones, cf. Lundström 2012) – creates more balanced transnational feelings. In the middle-class trajectory, background resources are used for moving into a full professional work role, thereby potentially moving towards a more equal gender role in family and work life, and simultaneously strongly weakening the ambiguity of living abroad.

These different classed and gendered roles then continue into the women's old age phase, which they all are moving towards. This implies then also different ways of solving the need for help they may require: by privately buying services they need; by expecting the family, particularly the children to help; or – if being assessed by the local authority to be eligible for receiving social care services – to use the long-term care systems that have

opened up the possibility of receiving cash instead of services, and using the money for hiring their own care workers, for example migrant live-in care workers.

## Conclusion

This article has given insight into variations of migratory life trajectories among women realising a north/north movement from Norway to England at a time where gender roles are changing in both countries. The case study shows that social class has a central impact on the life chances the women are given, starting with their childhood in Norway. Important variations are then related to the making of different gender roles abroad: the full-time housewife role, the family-adapted role and the professional work role/equal partner role. While transnational practices are important parts of all three trajectories, which these gender roles are part of, differences appear related to how strong the feeling of living an ambiguous transnational life is, with the weakest ambiguity related to the role closest to a gender equal role. The study contributes to research-based knowledge about differentiation in gender roles related to migration (de Haas & van Rooij 2010, Rashid 2013). However, there is no suggestion of a ladder towards equality. Rather, the suggestion is to point at the need for developing knowledge that can add to the understanding of differentiation regarding migratory gender roles, showing how they are shaped and developed differently in different historical time and context.

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## Notes

1. Office for National Statistics, Migration Statistics Unit; Population Census data, 1958–1980, yearly, from tables showing 'Birthplaces of England and Wales residents born outside the United Kingdom, Islands of the British Seas and the Irish Republic'.
2. Related to a research stay, based at the Social Care Workforce Research Unit, King's College London, this data collection was suggested by Director Jill Manthorpe. The aim was to develop material for a presentation at a joint conference with Age UK at Guys Hospital in January 2013 about 'Invisible communities: Working with older people from Europe and beyond'. The article is based on a secondary analysis of this material collected in 2013. This study's data collection was registered at the Norwegian Social Science Data Service.
3. The woman born in 1953, Solveig, had children earlier in Norway, but was divorced and later, when still young, built a new family in England.

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