9. Migrants' attitudes towards female employment

Migrants' gender role preferences and support for egalitarian gender norms are prominent in broader public and academic debates all over Western Europe (Eskelinen & Verkuyten, 2018). These concerns have also been prevalent within public and political debates in the Nordic welfare states for a number of years due to their strong commitment to cultural progressiveness in matters of sexuality, gender equality, and lifestyle. Furthermore, the Nordic welfare states are built upon the premise that men as well as women are active participants in the labour market. Being a "good citizen" is closely related to being integrated in the labour market (Breidahl, 2017). All this is in stark contrast to a situation where migrant women, especially from the Middle East and African countries, have been overrepresented in social assistance schemes for a number of years and hold remarkably lower employment rates than native women (Statistics Denmark, 2019).

Consequently, over the years it has become a widespread assumption that cultural legacy – often referred to as the prevalence of so-called "housewife mentality" in the broader public debate – suppresses egalitarian gender norms: Based on the assumption that norms and values from the country of origin hinder female employment. This problem perception is also prominent in numerous labour market integration policies that have been introduced in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden during the last decades as they are based on the assumption that traditional work–family orientations among migrants (particularly among migrants from countries that are predominantly Muslim) are obstacles to female labour market participation. Most notably, this is reflected in reforms of social assistance in Denmark and the reform aimed at migrants "*A New Chance for All*" introduced in 2005. The most controversial aspect of this reform was the so-called "300-hour rule", formally implemented in April 2007. The rule applied to everybody, regardless of citizenship or ethnicity; however, it was primarily targeted at migrants, especially migrant women (The Danish Government, 2005). The reform meant that married couples receiving welfare benefits lose their right to social welfare if they work less than 300 hours over a two-year period.¹ The rule was very controversial because it contained considerable work requirements and economic sanctions, and it was used for testing whether migrant women were actually available to the labour

market. In 2008, the work requirement was increased to 450 hours (Breidahl, 2012).

Addressing to what extent different migrant groups share egalitarian gender values and adapt to the ones held by natives allows us to shed light on some broader assumptions around housewife mentality in the public debate. It also contributes to the broader debate on whether migrants carry cultural values and norms with them or whether an assimilative impact of the institutions of the Danish welfare state can be identified. These questions have also been much discussed in existing research and the results point in different directions. Some studies find support for the cultural explanation based on an examination of gender gap differences in labour force participation and fertility across ethnic groups in the United States, based on the idea that the "culture" in the country of origin is pivotal for explaining gaps in labour force participation (Blau, Kahn, & Papps, 2011; Fernández & Fogli, 2009). Therefore, the effects from culture are separated from the effects of economic factors and institutions by studying the relationship between differences in labour force participation rates in the country of origin and the economic behaviour of migrants in the United States. The underlying rationale is that preferences and beliefs developed in a different time and place have an impact on current economic behaviour (Blau, Kahn, & Papps, 2011; Fernández & Fogli, 2009). These studies do not, however, examine subjective attitudes at the individual level. Rather they estimate traditional gender roles acquired in the country of origin as the *cause* of relatively low employment rates among first-generation female migrants.

Survey studies, directly measuring subjective attitudes, point in different directions. Some studies find that socio-cultural variables, such as gender values, are of crucial importance for low employment rates among female migrants (Koopmans, 2016). Others point out that a significant degree of adaptation in attitudes towards female employment to the host country have taken place from one generation to the next (e.g. Kavli, 2015; Norris & Inglehart, 2012). Moreover, a group of studies draw the conclusion that migrants' gender values tend to adapt to the ones held by natives (Andersen, 2008; Kitterød & Nadim, 2020; Spierings, 2015). Finally, a smaller number of comparative studies suggest that the institutional and cultural contexts of the host country have an impact on migrants' attitudes towards women's paid work (Breidahl & Larsen, 2016), but also that the country of origin is an important socializing determinant when it comes to gender equality norms more broadly (Röder, 2014; Röder & Mühlau, 2014). Looking into survey-based findings from Denmark, conducted over the last decades, they also point in different directions. Gundelach & Nørregård-Nielsen (2007) find remarkable group differences as some migrant groups (from Iraq, Vietnam, and Turkey) are considerably more inclined to support the statement that men should have the right to a job at the expense of women (if jobs are scarce) compared to other

migrant groups (from Pakistan and ex-Yugoslavia). The so-called “Citizenship survey” collected among native Danes, migrants, and descendants finds that the support for the item “men should have the right to a job” is higher among native Danes and descendants than among migrants. However, at the same time the majority in all groups tend to disagree with this statement (Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2019; see also Andersen, 2008 for a similar finding).

The approach taken in this chapter (and the entire book) differs from existing research in this field by not only focusing on migrants from Muslim or non-Western countries (as most of the literature does), often based on the assumption that people born in these countries are socialized into more traditional gender roles and that they carry these values with them. Comparing 14 different migrant groups living within one context – the context of the Danish welfare state – opens up for a broader discussion and brings in new perspectives to the debate. Comparative welfare state research on the native population within the Western European context points out remarkable cross-national differences when it comes to attitudes towards gender roles and prevailing cultural norms supporting women’s paid and unpaid work, for example between Denmark, Germany, and Italy (Budig, Misra, & Boeckmann, 2012; Pfau-Effinger, 2006; Sjöberg, 2004). Therefore, it is not only interesting whether Muslim migrants adapt to the prevailing attitudes and norms in Denmark, but also how it compares to migrants in general.

The research design of this chapter has some limitations compared to some of the other studies referred to above, as it does not capture change over time (causality). However, as argued in Chapter 1, we make the argument that if broader similarities in attitudes among 14 rather different migrant groups can be identified, it supports the theoretical argument put forward in this book – that the institutions of the welfare state have a possible assimilative impact. One could also argue that if migrants’ attitudes resemble those prevalent among native Danes in terms of female employment we come closer to the “hard core” (Navas, García, Sánchez, Rojas, Pumares, & Fernández, 2005) as these attitudes largely come close to something personal.

THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE ASSIMILATIVE IMPACT OF WELFARE STATE INSTITUTIONS AND COMPETING PERSPECTIVES

The overall theoretical argument of the book relies on the assumption that *welfare state* institutions have the ability to influence or even shape the values and attitudes held by migrants due to the endogenous logic of welfare state institutions, their opportunity structures, and citizens’ experiences with these institutions.

It is well-known from comparative welfare state research that work–family policies, for example family policy constellations, are provided in different ways across countries (Pfau-Effinger, 2004) and that the nexus between the institutional structure of the state and the structure of the family is pivotal for women's labour market participation and their work–family orientations (Sjöberg, 2004). Korpi, Ferrarini, and Englund (2013:8) differentiate between three different so-called “family-policy constellations” characterized by separate sets of legislated programmes: one based on the “traditional family”, a second based on the dual-earner family, and a third characterized as a market-oriented constellation (Korpi, Ferrarini, & Englund, 2013:8). The measure of these types of constellations is the extent to which these sets of legislated programmes “enable citizens to secure material support from public authorities in terms of cash and services facilitating gender equality” (Korpi, Ferrarini, & Englund, 2013:8).

The Nordic welfare states share several features in terms of prevalent cultural norms that support their long tradition of dual-earner family constellations and their well-developed family friendly childcare services (Breidahl & Larsen, 2016). Hence, Denmark (together with Sweden, Norway, and Finland) comes close to the ideal type of a dual-earner family constellation, while Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands are closer to the traditional family dimension (Korpi, Ferrarini, & Englund, 2013:11–12). Family policies in Denmark have, as in many other countries, also been subject to political reforms, but the overall approach in Denmark can still be characterized as a dual-earner career model (Breidahl & Fersch, 2018).

Therefore, the migrant groups studied in this book all live their lives in a specific cultural and institutional context for supporting mother's employment (which is different from, e.g. migrants settled in Great Britain, Germany etc.). This raises the question of whether this specific context also has the ability to influence their attitudes towards female employment (the institutional argument) or whether their attitudes in this field are more deep-rooted due to cultural legacy.

As regards institutional opportunity structures of certain policy institutions – in this case family policies – they can be expected to have an impact on attitudes held by residents – natives as well as migrants. The feedback mechanisms from family-policy institutions are thereby exogenous to migrants' preferences and based on the premise that the opportunity structures provided by family policies, for example childcare, create opportunities that women will take advantage of and, consequently, change their attitudes according to these opportunity structures.

Family-policy institutions can also have an impact on citizens' non-instrumental norms about work due to *endogenous institutional logics*. Hence, the conditions of Danish family policies could have an impact on what

migrants see as morally justifiable (e.g. logic of appropriateness) – a view that is expected to influence their attitudes towards female employment.

The empirical insights in this chapter allow us to study in detail whether 14 rather different migrant groups support these underlying values of the welfare state in spite of differences in self-interest and cultural background (cf. Chapters 4 and 5). We cannot, however, draw clear-cut conclusions about these theoretical mechanisms. If institutions matter, we cannot say anything definitive about whether it is because of available opportunity structures (that it is possible to put children into day-care and combine work and family life) or because this is what migrants regard as morally justifiable due to endogenous institutional logics. As stated in the introductory chapter of the book, real-world actors are embedded in a complex process, where ambiguous norms and values are constantly moulded (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). Following this logic, the book relies on the assumption that institutions influence self-interests, values, norms, perceptions, and welfare attitudes and it is difficult to detangle these dimensions (cf. Figure 1.1).

A closer examination of the empirical results can, however, give us some hints on the underlying mechanisms. For example, if policy institutions matter as opportunity structures we should expect that families with children and migrants in employment are more supportive towards female employment based on the logic that institutions influence the interest of individuals – and that these interests influence their attitudes.

Furthermore, a number of background variables, which the existing literature have pointed out as important predictors of gender role attitudes, are taken into account, for example socio-economic composition and religious orientation (Diehl, Koenig, & Ruckdeschel, 2009).

DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES ACROSS GROUPS – DESCRIPTIVE FINDINGS

Before examining the 14 migrant groups living in the Danish welfare state, we start out by paying attention to broader cross-national differences in attitudes depicted in Figures 9.1 and 9.2. These figures compare attitudes towards female employment in the countries where the 14 migrant groups studied in this book were born (except from a few countries). Survey data from the World Value Survey (WVS) (2010–2014), European Social Survey (2010, in European Social Survey, 2018), and International Social Survey (2012, in ISSP Research Group, 2016) are utilized covering the age group 18–60.² Figure 9.1, left-side, depicts the level of progressive values in a number of countries – measured as disagreement with the statement “*When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women*”. In a similar vein, in Figure 9.1, right-side,

support for progressive gender values is measured as disagreement in the statement *"When a mother works for pay, the children suffer"*.

Although these results should be interpreted with caution, as we cannot compare the migrant groups living in Denmark with the residents in their country of origin (e.g. selection effects), the results in both figures demonstrate large and remarkable cross-national differences. Hence, as regards the question of whether men should have more right to a job than women (when jobs are scarce) around 20 per cent disagree on this statement in a number of countries (Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Japan) while a majority disagree on this statement in Denmark, Spain, and the USA. Moreover, as regards the question of whether children are likely to suffer from a mother working outside the home, we see a pattern where a minority in Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Poland disagree with this statement.

Attitudes Towards Female Employment Among Migrants Living in Denmark

If attitudes towards female employment reflect "cultural legacies" from the country of origin, the large cross-national country differences illustrated in Figures 9.1 and 9.2 should also be reflected in attitudes towards female employment among the 14 migrant groups living within the Danish welfare state. The two statements in 9.1 and 9.2 differ slightly from the items utilized from Comcon and Mifare in the next section, but the items more or less capture the same attitudinal dimensions – whether women should stay at home or not.

When comparing results from the Mifare survey and the Comcon survey below, one should recognize that the items from each survey differ slightly.

Mifare: A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family.

Comcon: Women should not work but stay at home and look after the children.

However, overall, the wording is quite similar and – as will appear from below – the results do not differ much for the groups who are represented in both surveys (e.g. for migrants from Turkey, which figure in both surveys).

Figure 9.2 compares the descriptive results on attitudes towards female employment between the Mifare migrant groups and native Danes, focusing on levels of disagreement in the statements – *"a man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family"* – an indicator of embracing progressive attitudes towards female employment. The figure also demonstrates gender differences in these attitudes.

Note: Left-side, attitudes towards whether men are more entitled to jobs than women when jobs are scarce. Residents in Denmark (ESS 2010 survey) and origin countries (WVS 2010–2014 survey). Right-side, attitudes towards whether children suffer when the mother is employed. Residents in Denmark (ISSP 2012 survey) and origin countries (WVS 2010–2014 survey). Per cent disagree.

Source: Data collected from the ESS 2010 survey (European Social Survey, 2018), WVS 2010–2014 survey (World Value Survey, 2016), and ISSP 2012 survey (ISSP Research Group, 2016).

Figure 9.1 Attitudes to female employment

Note: Migrants and natives in Denmark (Mifare survey). Per cent “strongly against”, and “against”.

Source: Data collected from the Mifare survey (2018).

Figure 9.2 Attitudes towards whether it is a man's job to earn money while the woman's job is to look after home and family

For all Mifare groups the majority of the respondents express egalitarian gender value attitudes as the majority are “strongly against” or “against” the statement “a man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family”. However, the results also indicate some internal group differences. Migrants from the Philippines, Russia, Turkey, Japan, China, and Poland hold attitudes that are more conservative compared to the rest of the groups. However, compared to the results in Figures 9.1 and 9.2 the differences are modest. The gender differences are also modest except for migrants from the Philippines and Poland where the men are considerably less progressive. Women in most groups tend to express values that are slightly more progressive.

Figure 9.3 depicts the results for the Comcon groups where most respondents in each group “strongly disagree” or “somewhat disagree” in the statement that “Women should not work but stay at home and look after the children”. Again, some smaller internal group differences appear. Native Danes and migrants from ex-Yugoslavia and Iraq hold slightly more egalitarian attitudes than the rest – and migrants from Pakistan hold considerably more traditional views.

Note: Migrants and natives in Denmark (Comcon survey). Per cent “strongly disagree” and “somewhat disagree”.

Source: Data collected from the Comcon survey (2015).

Figure 9.3 *Attitudes towards whether women should not work but stay at home and look after the children*

It is interesting to observe from Figure 9.3 how men across all groups express slightly more progressive attitudes towards female employment than women do. This challenges the widespread assumption in the public Danish debate that value-conservative husbands in general suppress migrant women (with a Muslim background). It is also interesting that the results slightly point in different directions than in the Mifare-data where women express more progressive values than men (Figure 9.2).

PATTERNS BEHIND ATTITUDES TOWARDS FEMALE EMPLOYMENT

As the descriptive results in the section above reveal, the differences between the 14 migrant groups are not remarkable and indicate that some degree of attitudinal assimilation has taken place. However, some differences also appear and the descriptive results raise a number of questions. To what extent do the observed differences (e.g. the fact that migrants from Pakistan and Russia express less egalitarian attitudes towards female employment) reflect compositional differences in terms of education and employment or reflect degrees of religiosity? A number of OLS-regressions are presented below that allow us to take into account a number of factors and provide cross-model comparison.

First, we compare the Mifare migrant groups with native Danes to capture some of the underlying mechanisms. The regressions are depicted in a way that allows us to illustrate whether the internal group differences decrease (or increase) when control variables are included. Hence, we are interested in whether including a number of factors in the regressions can help explain differences between the groups or, in other words, whether attitudinal differences persist when a number of factors are taken into account.

As it appears from Figure 9.4, some smaller but significant group differences appear in the binary model (model 1). These differences are not reduced much after control for compositional factors (age, gender, household status, social benefits, education, labour market status, or religiosity (model 2), or having children (model 3). The difference to native Danes is still persistent after control. Most of the Mifare groups embrace progressive gender attitudes towards female employment but some group differences persist. The least progressive group appears to be migrants from Russia.

A number of factors have a significant influence on attitudes towards female employment. Older people and women hold more progressive values than younger people and men. Higher-educated and employed people also express attitudes that are more progressive. Not having children also tends to have a positive effect. This indicates that attitudes towards female employment do not solely reflect self-interest or opportunity structures. Being religious also tends to have a negative impact.

Note: Mifare survey. Regression models comparing native Danes (vertical line) to the migrant groups. OLS regression. Unstandardized coefficients with 95% confidence intervals. N=2,780.

Source: Data collected from the Mifare survey (2018).

Figure 9.4 Attitudes towards whether it is a man's job is to earn money while the woman's job is to look after home and family (0–100 scale)

Next, we direct attention to Figure 9.5 where native Danes are excluded from the regression, which allows us to take a number of migrant-specific factors into account including national identification, time spent in Denmark, and having citizenship or not. As a reference group, we have selected migrants from Great Britain as they come closest to native Danes in Figure 9.4. Models 1, 2, and 3 include the same variables as Figure 9.4. Model 4 includes the relevant specific factors cf. above.

We see a pattern in Figure 9.5 that is similar to Figure 9.4. However, for some groups the difference to the reference group (GBR) disappears and/or are reduced remarkably. For three groups the differences are not significant after control – migrants from Romania, Turkey, and the USA. Interestingly enough, time spent in Denmark does not seem to have an influence on attitudes towards female employment for these groups. This indicates that assimilation patterns do not follow time spent in the new home country. On the other hand, having citizenship tends to influence these attitudes.

Note: Mifare survey. Regression models comparing migrants from Great Britain (vertical line) to the other migrant groups. OLS regression. Unstandardized coefficients with 95% confidence intervals. N=2,491.

Source: Data collected from the Mifare survey (2018).

Figure 9.5 *Attitudes towards whether it is a man's job is to earn money while the woman's job is to look after home and family (0–100 scale)*

Looking next at the Comcon migrant groups, the patterns illustrated in the coefficient plot in Figure 9.6, left-side, is quite different from the Mifare groups as the group differences for most groups disappear after controlling for a number of factors in the models. Only migrants from Pakistan remain significantly less progressive than the other groups after control. This is interesting taking into account that migrants from Turkey, another migrant group who

have stayed in Denmark for a number of years and also came to Denmark as guest workers (or due to family reunification to guest workers), do not appear to be significantly different from native Danes after control. The findings for Turkish migrants to some extent resemble the findings from the Turkish group in the Mifare-data where they do not differ much from native Danes after control. A number of variables tend to influence attitudes towards female employment including gender (men are significantly more egalitarian than women), education, being employed, not having children, living in a mixed couple, and religiosity. Hence, in line with existing literature, people that are more religious also express less progressive gender role values.

The picture does not differ much in the right-side of Figure 9.6 only focusing on the five Comcon groups (where migrants from ex-Yugoslavia figure as the control group). Again, only migrants from Pakistan express less progressive attitudes towards female employment – also after control. Only a few factors seem to influence attitudes in this regression including level of education, not having children, living in a mixed couple, and years spent in the country (which did not have an influence on the Mifare groups). Other variables such as language skills, religiosity, and having a Danish citizenship do not seem to matter.

BROADLY SUPPORT FOR THE DUAL EARNER MODEL

Most of the 14 migrant groups living in Denmark seem to support progressive attitudes towards female employment, as their attitudes largely resemble those who are prevalent among native Danes. These similarities in attitudes are striking considering the rather remarkable differences in Figures 9.1 and 9.2 from the World Value Survey (cf. the first indicator of assimilation). Moreover, attitudes towards female employment can be considered as belonging to the “hard core” (cf. Chapter 2). Consequently, these findings indicate that the institutions of the welfare state could possibly have an assimilative impact on these attitudes as the 14 migrant groups studied in this book are living within a welfare state context that in several ways support women (and men’s) employment, for example as regards the opportunity structures as well as prevalent endogenous norms and values.

The findings also indicate that migrants from Muslim countries are not necessarily the least progressive in terms of gender equality. Rather, a number of migrant groups from the Mifare-data (from Russia, the Philippines, and China) express less progressive attitudes towards female employment compared to native Danes – also after control for a number of background variables. For the Comcon groups, it is only migrants from Pakistan that hold significantly less progressive values compared to native Danes. Compared to attitudes towards female employment more broadly, and in the countries of origin for the groups

Note: Concon survey. Regression models comparing native Danes (vertical line) to the migrant groups, N=1,181 (left). Regression models comparing migrants from ex-Yugoslavia (vertical line) to the other migrant groups, N=361 (right).
Source: Data collected from the Concon survey (2015).

Figure 9.6 Attitudes towards whether women should not work but stay at home and look after the children (0–100 scale)

included here, the differences among the Comcon groups are rather small. As pointed out in the literature review, most attention in research on attitudes towards female labour market participation focuses on migrants from countries that are predominantly Muslim. The results in this chapter seem to suggest that we should be careful about accepting these assumptions uncritically. Most migrants from these countries in Denmark (represented in this survey) seem to be at least as supportive as most other migrant groups.

A number of factors appear to influence migrants' attitudes towards female employment depending on which groups we are studying. When natives are included in the regression, education, not having children, being employed, and being less religious tend to have a positive effect on holding progressive values. Interestingly, national identification and language skills do not seem to explain the differences in attitudes between the groups. Time spent in the country has a positive effect on the Comcon groups but not for the Mifare groups. On the other hand, having citizenship influences the attitudes of the Mifare groups but not the attitudes of the Comcon groups.

We do not find that people with children (who thereby are more dependent on welfare services) are significantly more progressive than people without children. Rather, migrants without children express more progressive attitudes towards female employment. This indicates that the attitudes we measure here do not only reflect how opportunity structures alter the interest of people.

Finally, it is important to point out that the results in this chapter do not allow us to conclude that cultural legacy or migrant-specific features are not hindering labour market participation. As stated in the introduction, employment rates among some migrant groups (e.g. from Muslim countries) are remarkably lower than among native women and they are highly overrepresented among social-assistance receivers.

NOTES

1. In the first year, from 1 April 2007 to 1 April 2008, the requirement was 150 hours of ordinary work within the last year.
2. Ten out of 14 countries of origin are included in WVS and Denmark is not included.