Gender and Family Relations: Experiences of Highly Educated Eritrean Migrants in the UK

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Abstract

Using the concept of intersectionality and narrative interviews with eighteen highly educated Eritrean migrants in the UK, this phenomenological study puts gender and family at the centre of socio-cultural integration of migrants. The research findings indicate that migration increases the economic power and freedom of women, helping them improve their social status and lead independent lives. However, there is a conflict within households relating to the need to maintain traditional patriarchal values and recognise women as equal partners. This, among other factors, has hindered the women's gender equality and emancipation from patriarchal oppression within the host country. Most of the women participants in this study experienced more exclusion and mistreatment than men. They often shoulder career and familial responsibilities. Some women even shift to part-time jobs or interrupt their careers to take care of their children as they lack family support and could not afford to pay for childcare. The study contributes to a better understanding of migrants' socio-cultural experiences in their host country.

Introduction

According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), women constitute about half of all international migrants in OECD countries (IOM, 2014). The report further indicates that the number of highly educated migrant women rose by 80% between 2000 and 2011, as compared to 60 per cent increase for men in the same period. However, the situation is not proportional for Eritrean migrants. They mostly enter Western countries as asylum seekers, and the number of female migrants is lower than male migrants. For example, in 2017 only 19% of the total 1,085 Eritrean asylum applicants in the UK were females (Home Office, 2018). One of the main reasons could be restrictions on women from migrating, partly for their protection from sexual abuse and other human rights violation during the journey (Ratha et al., 2011). Both men and women migrants share many similar experiences in their origin and host countries. They are refugees or what Bauman refers to them as "vagabonds" since they are forced to flee their country due to socio-economic and political challenges (Bauman, 2000; UNHCR, 2011). Upon arrival to the UK, they are also subjected to uncertainty, embarrassment and deskilling (Garrido & Codó, 2017; Stewart, 2005). However, different studies show that the situation is worse for women migrants (Kawar, 2004; Palumbo & Sciurba, 2018). The oppression of women also comes from their fellow migrants, particularly their partners. For instance, there are many instances where Eritrean migrant women have been abused and killed by their partners (Hopperstad, 2020; Lidman & Hartman, 2011; Wijnen, 2018). This mainly emanates from traditional patriarchal values which offer men socio-economic and political dominance (Alesina et al., 2016; Bhattacharyya, 2018).

Women in several African countries including Eritrea are subjected to social discrimination and oppression (Al-Ali et al., 2001; Wester, 2009). The United States Department of State (USDS) explained, "Family, labour, property, nationality, and inheritance laws [of Eritrea] provide men and women with the same status and rights" (USDS, 2018, p. 19). However, men retain higher social value and position of authority both in public and private spaces in the country (Ajygin, 2010). Besides, gender roles in families are set, with certain behaviours and activities associated with each sex (Walker, 1999). In this context, migration is often expected to not only increase the economic opportunity and independence of women, but also to provide a new environment in which they can start anew. In fact, this needs significant participation by men in family lives, in general, and care practices and domestic roles in

particular (Choi, 2019). Without such intervention, migration often leads to greater domestic engagement and downward occupational mobility of women (Ho, 2006). So far, as with women all over the world, migrant women are more likely to experience sexual harassment and victimization than men (Kawar, 2004; Palumbo & Sciurba, 2018). Additionally, employed women, in general, face higher career interruptions and advancement problems (Shah & Shah, 2016).

Furthermore, migration decisions, including identifying a destination country, are made with consideration of future life course events such as family formation and childbearing (Kulu & Milewski, 2007). Some migrants are single, while others have their own families. Many migrants flee their country, leaving their families behind for safety and other reasons. In most cases, it is women and children who are left behind. They expect to be reunited when their partners reached their destination and received their residence permits. UNHCR (2013) reported that family reunification is one of the main issues that concern migrants. They consider family as a central component in their endeavour to fit into their host country (Beaton et al., 2018). Not quite different from this, Cooke (2008, p. 262) stated that migration research should embrace the family as "a central component of migration, or rather that family migration should move front and centre in discussions regarding migration in general". Yet, there are not many migration studies that put family at the centre (Choi, 2019; Jang et al., 2014).

Informed by narrative interviews with eighteen (nine men and nine women) highly educated Eritrean migrants in the UK, this paper discusses gender and family relations with regard to socio-cultural integration of migrants -- an issue which has attracted limited interest in the context of the migration process in general and the case of Eritrean migrants, in particular (see Choi, 2019; Jang et al., 2014). Eritrea, a country with an estimated population of 5 million people, has been one of the top ten countries of origin for asylum seekers in the world in the past decade (UNHCR, 2016, 2018). In 2016, Eritrea was the source country of 459,400 refugees, showing a 12 per cent increase from 2015 (UNHCR, 2016). On the other side, Eritreans have been among the top ten asylum-seeking nationalities in the UK (Home Office, 2015; Sturge, 2019; Walsh, 2019). The present study focuses on the lives of highly educated Eritrean migrants in the UK, who arrived in the country within the past decade. According to UNESCO (2012), highly educated individuals are those who have completed higher education of two or more years. Educational qualification, to some extent, provides migrants with socio-economic

opportunities (Brădăţan & Kulcsár, 2014; Fokkema & De Haas, 2011). Moreover, this paper argues that migrants' experiences are influenced by multiple intertwined factors such as gender inequality.

This study is guided by the research question: how has migration affected gender and family relations of highly educated Eritrean migrants in the UK? The study provides a thorough explanation of the nexus of migration, gender and family relations and, thus, plays a significant role in filling the research gap on the subject. The study also contributes to a better understanding of migrant experiences in a host country. The next two sections explain the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the study, respectively. Then, the paper explores the role of multiple interconnected factors in the lives of migrants.

Theoretical Perspective

Migrants shape their values and attitudes to "fit-in" the new environment and build a successful life (Kim, 1988, 2001). As indicated above, highly educated migrants have some advantages because of their educational qualification (Brădăţan & Kulcsár, 2014; Fokkema & De Haas, 2011). However, highly educated migrants, particularly those from developing countries, often face xenophobia, deskilling, delanguaging, and institutional racism in their host countries (O'Neill, 2017; Garrido & Codó, 2017; Wood et al., 2009). In addition, the United Nations Population Fund (2018) pointed out that "migrant women face double discrimination – as women and as migrants". This suggests that migrant women's lives are constrained by what Carastathis (2014, p. 304) stated as "multiple, intersecting systems of oppression". Therefore, it is important to identify a theoretical framework that allows for exploring multiple forms of exclusion and oppression.

This study is underpinned by the concept of intersectionality to understand the effects of gender, geographical location, culture, socio-economic condition and other categories on women's experiences and their struggle for emancipation. Rooted in Critical Race Theory and Black feminism, intersectionality as a concept was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to address the marginalisation of Black women within anti-discrimination law and in feminist and antiracist theory and politics (Carbado et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1991). In contrast to the feminist and anti-racist scholars who viewed discrimination along a single axis, Crenshaw (1991) argued that multiple axes of inequality intersect to oppress Black women, and these axes

should not be considered separately, rather, the analytical focus must illuminate at the point where the multiple oppressions intersected. Since then, the concept has moved not only internationally, but also within and across disciplines (Carbado et al., 2013; Cho et al., 2013). Intersectionality, in feminist theory, argues that oppression is not a singular process and, hence, could not be captured through an analysis of gender alone (Carastathis, 2014). It recognises the need to examine multiple, converging, or interwoven systems of discrimination (Carastathis, 2014; Davis, 2008).

Although many researchers focus on the intersectional analysis of race, class, and gender, other categories such as sexuality, ethnicity, national belongingness, culture, religion, age, sedentariness, property ownership and geographical location have been added to the list and they need careful consideration (Davis, 2008). Davis (2008) further stated that these categories can be used depending upon the context of the study and the specifics of the research problem. For instance, research indicates that gender, ethnicity and immigration status are significant determinants of socio-economic and political engagement, where women, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people and refugees are more likely to face exclusion (Palumbo & Sciurba, 2018; Stewart, 2005; Wood et al., 2009). Therefore, intersectionality is suitable to explore the experiences of migrant women, including their challenges and struggles for equality.

This study mainly focuses on the intersectionality among gender, geography and culture, and their influences on the experiences of migrant women in their host countries. Geography is not only connected to the location of a place, but also the physical and social context associated with it (Rodó-de-Zárate & Baylina, 2018). Because gender is a social construct, people's perceptions of gender and gendered practices vary from place to place (Brickell, 2006). Geography also exposes migrants to a different type of vulnerability since they lack or lose vital resources such as family support (Bustamante, 2009). Furthermore, geography and, thus, gender are connected with culture (Hall & Du Gay, 1996; Spencer-Oatey, 2012). There are cultural variations between different places and groups of people; and culture is often used interchangeably with a nation (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Spencer-Oatey's (2012) work places two important features in defining culture. First, culture is a set of basic assumptions, values, beliefs, thinking patterns and behaviours that are learned and shared by a group of people. Second, it influences every member's behaviour as well as their interpretation or understanding of the meaning of other people's behaviour. It is important to note that migrants often tend to fit into

their host environment without abolishing their culture of origin. These issues indicate how gender interacts with geography and culture to shape migrant women's experiences.

Methodological Framework

The philosophical position of researchers usually shapes and, in some cases, is informed by, the methodological approaches they use in conducting a study (Hathcoat & Meixner, 2017; Hathcoat et al., 2018). This study is based on a constructionist paradigm which holds that 'reality is constructed in the mind of the individual, rather than it being an externally singular entity' (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129). Constructionism is often associated with qualitative methodology (Bear-Lehman, 2002; Hathcoat et al., 2018). Hence, the study adopts a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design to explore the experiences of the migrants from their stories (Wiersma & Jurs, 2004).

Qualitative research seeks to explore and understand how individuals interpret their social environment (Astalin, 2013; Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2003, 2013). Considering the purpose of this study, a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design helps to examine and understand the circumstances of the participants in relation to their context (McNabb, 2008). Here, the phenomenological approach has two contributions. It helps in identifying the experiences of the participants and understanding the common features they share (Hammond et al., 1991). Moreover, it is used to develop a composite description and discussion of the participant's experiences and the situation under investigation (Creswell, 2013). The following sections discuss the sample and methods of data collection and analysis.

Data Collection

The participants of a study are selected to provide significant information and perspectives concerning the case being studied (Wilson, 2016). Hence, they must be carefully chosen to represent the target population. This qualitative study focuses on gender and family relations in a bid to explore the challenges and struggles of highly educated migrant women in their host countries. To understand this issue, data were collected from highly educated Eritreans who migrated to the UK after completing their university education in Eritrea. In most cases, phenomenological research requires a limited number of interviewees "given the vast amount of data that emerges from even one interview" (Hycner, 1985, p.295). Thus, eighteen participants

including nine women were selected through purposive and snowball sampling and interviewed to collect data for the study. As can be seen in the following table (Table 1), the participants were 30 to 45 years old; and they had lived from 2 to 10 years in the UK at the time of the interview.

Table 1 Participants' profiles

Name of Participant (Pseudonym)	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Years of residence in the UK at the time of interview
Haben	M	36-40	M	2-4
Habtay	M	36-40	M	2-4
Fanus	F	30-35	M	5-7
Semhar	F	30-35	M	5-7
Senait	F	30-35	M	5-7
Weini	F	36-40	M	5-7
Ermias	M	30-35	M	5-7
Michael	M	36-40	M	5-7
Helen	F	30-35	M	8-10
Simret	F	30-35	M	8-10
Neguse	M	41-45	M	8-10
Wolday	M	41-45	M	8-10
Hans	M	30-35	S	2-4
Marry	F	30-35	S	5-7
Yohana	F	30-35	S	5-7
Issack	M	36-40	S	5-7
Yodit	F	30-35	S	8-10
Aman	M	36-40	S	8-10

Overall, qualitative interviewing operates along with a constructionist approach (Mason, 2002). It helps understand the participants' points of view to explore their experiences and lived world (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). However, different interview methods are employed for different purposes. In this study, I used narrative interviews to listen to the voices and stories of

the participants in their own words and elicit rich and detailed data to understand the case under study (Creswell, 2013; Sarantakos, 2013). Through narrative interviews, I asked open-ended questions to encourage the participants to describe their experiences as they understand them (Marhsall & Rossman, 2006; Sarantakos, 2013). I prepared an interview protocol containing basic information about the study, and interview questions to encourage and stimulate the participants to tell their stories regarding the socio-economic empowerment of women, the influence of Eritrean culture on gender and family relations, and balancing work and family responsibilities. The interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the interviewees. Three-quarters of the interviews took about 30 minutes, whereas the rest extended to an hour.

Data Analysis

This study used thematic data analysis, and the following two points were considered in choosing this particular method of data analysis. A thoughtfully matching of data collection and data analysis techniques to the research questions is fundamental to the quality and success of any study (Creswell, 2013). In addition, qualitative research is characterised by the production of a large quantity of data from which significant features can be selected (Cohen et al., 2011). Accordingly, thematic analysis is selected to systematically categorise and analyse the data from the stories of the migrants to seek commonalities, relationships and any other patterns that address the research question (Ayres, 2012; Sparker, 2005). It also provides flexibility by summarising key features of a large corpus of data and, at the same time, offering a rich and detailed interpretation of the data by explaining the events as well as the context (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The study followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of conducting thematic analysis, which can be summarised into: familiarising with the data, generating codes, creating, defining and naming themes, and writing-up. After transcribing the interviews, I constructed a set of categories to interpret the data (Sarantakos, 2013). A hybrid of inductive and deductive approaches was used to code the transcripts from the narrative interviews manually and categorise the migrants' perspectives into different themes. The use of a hybrid approach provides rigour in thematic analysis (Creswell, 2013; Lapadat, 2010). Finally, the data were interpreted and theorised in relation to the theoretical frameworks (Lopez and Willis 2004).

Ethical Considerations

The study followed the ethical principles of the British Sociological Association (BSA) and the University of Roehampton. Accordingly, the interests of the participants were safeguarded using different mechanisms. The issues of information, comprehension and voluntariness of the participants were addressed through informed consent. The participants were told that their responses would be kept confidential to protect their rights, privacy and safety. I also explained to the participants that they could withdraw at any time without giving a reason during the research process. Besides, pseudonyms were used throughout the research to preserve anonymity and, thus, protect the participants' identities.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study are categorised into three themes, showing that migrant women are more vulnerable than their men counterparts. However, the data reveal that the women participants of this study do not simply submit to exploitation, mistreatment and patriarchal domination, but they use the socio-economic and legal opportunities they obtained in the UK to fight for their rights and emancipation. The following sections discuss the themes one by one.

Maintaining Eritrean Traditional Culture

As discussed above, in much of Eritrean society, men are viewed as the head of the family. The notion of "head of the family" is mostly associated with decision-making and division of labour. Many Eritrean men, therefore, use this to maintain an unequal balance of power in socio-economic and political arenas leading to patriarchal dominance (see also Alesina et al., 2016). Bhattacharyya (2018) noted that patriarchal mindset and misogyny are deeply rooted across different cultures in the world, especially in developing countries such as Eritrea. The findings of this study further show that such patriarchal perceptions define gender roles and family relations. The majority of the participants argue that many men tend to uphold traditional gender roles in which women are expected to take on the primary care role for children and do household work. For instance, Senait said:

Our boys are not so supportive at home. Migration has brought less change to the belief of men [Eritrean] on traditional gender roles. They do not usually participate in household works such as cooking and cleaning. They also take a lower role in babysitting.

Senait's argument indicates that some Eritrean men living in the UK have not completely abandoned the Eritrean traditional cultural values. They expect their wives to do most of the household works on top of their paid employment. However, this does not mean that women have continued to be submissive to all their husbands' demands. In this regard, Weini asserted that traditional gender roles are incompatible with the desire of highly educated Eritrean women to use their educational qualifications and develop their professional capabilities.

Highly educated women do not want to spend their time cooking and doing other houseworks. They want to engage in a professional job and advance their career. As members of a family, they want to share their responsibility, rather than taking the primary care role. Indeed, the selfishness of men and the desire of women to be independent are causing many highly educated women to be single. (Weini)

Weini's explanation highlights the opposition of some highly educated migrant women to traditional gender roles. It shows that such women want to realise their dreams, instead of doing childcare and other household works alone. She also argued that such opposition causes some women to marry late or remain single.

Moreover, the evidence from this study indicates that higher education achievement and economic opportunities give the women more power to see their marriage as an equal partnership. Ermias and Neguse noted that the UK has given women economic independence and legal protection regardless of their educational qualification. The notion behind Ermias's and Neguse's statement is to assert that women's complaint about inequality is not mainly determined by their educational qualifications. It suggests that other low-skilled Eritrean migrant women have shown similar opposition to patriarchal domination mainly influenced by Britain's economic support and equality laws. This aligns with research which indicates that economic (in)dependence and legal protection affect women's emancipation from underlying patriarchal

structure (see Dalal, 2011; Sida, 2015). However, it is also important to note that not all men obey the rules and regulations. There are many cases where spouses have abused and even killed their partners for various reasons including their refusal to submit to the husband's demands (Hopperstad, 2020; Lidman & Hartman, 2011; Wijnen, 2018).

The findings of this study reveal that Eritrean culture affects how Eritrean migrants respond to gender roles and family relations in the UK. Different UK laws, including the Equality Act 2010, legally protect people from discrimination, harassment and victimisation in the workplace and the wider society (Government Equalities Office, 2013). However, many men find it difficult to easily change their behaviour, perceptions or actions as they were deeply rooted in their culture or upbringings. The majority of the participants explained that such abusive behaviours of men partly emanate from patriarchal culture that has given them social privilege and control over their partners. It is worth noting that women are legally protected in Eritrea. However, the law is not effectively enforced to properly tackle certain crimes or discrimination. For instance, concerning domestic violence, Indira and Vijayalakshmi (2015, p.2) stated that "although domestic violence is a crime by law, wife-beating is very common in Eritrea because there is no effective enforcement of law that punishes such violence". In addition, many women do not report it due to tremendous social pressure, mainly from families and religious leaders (see also Mohan, 2018).

The data collected for this study indicate that change is not impossible. However, it requires significant transformation by taking the positive cultural practices while changing abusive behaviours. For example, Habtay and Haben expressed that they had done their best to identify and leave any oppressive practices. They both want to be good examples to their children. Such change further corroborates the evidence that cultural identifications are not fixed, but the formation and transformation of identities take time (Hall & Du Gay, 1996). It might not be a coincidence that Habtay supported his wife to get an undergraduate degree and develop her professional life.

Socio-economic Empowerment of Women

The findings indicate that cultural and economic issues are significant in determining gender roles among Eritrean migrants. In addition to legal protection, unlike Eritrea, the UK provides financial payments to people who are on a low income to support their living costs (Andersen,

2019). However, these provisions do not completely solve the migrant women's problems. Indeed, women who were born in modern Western countries are subjected to mistreatment and male domination (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2018). The global 'me too movement' demonstrated that even celebrities and successful women experience various forms of abuse such as sexual harassment and domestic violence (Bhattacharyya, 2018; Zarkov & Davis, 2018). This explains the fact that the experience of the participants of this study fits into the wider global and national (UK) picture of women's mistreatment. Nevertheless, the situation is worse for migrant women especially women of colour and working-class women such as the participants of this study. As Senait and Marry respectively experienced, they are more likely to face racial discrimination in recruitment practices and encounter sexual abuse and fail to report their perpetrators.

Furthermore, many respondents emphasised the effect of socio-economic independence of women in gender roles and family relations. The influence of gender roles is pertinent in the Eritrean migrants who participated in this research project. Many claimed that such cultural practices create a balanced family responsibility with a clear job description. However, some participants argued that this might seem a good point, but it is mainly beneficial to the socio-economic and political advancement of men. Concerning the socio-economic conflict of men and women in the UK, Neguse said:

> Some Eritrean women in the UK are becoming dominant and self-centred [economically]. They are less tolerant [than traditional Eritrean women] to any mistake done by their partners. In addition, they do not want to take primary family responsibility. They take the child benefit from the government, but want to spend most of it for their personal purposes [expecting men to cover the child's expenses].

Neguse is criticising the behavioural change and money spending habits of some Eritrean migrant women. In support of this idea, Aman complained that "Eritrean women in the UK are diverting away from their culture and tradition". Nevertheless, in response, many of the female participants argued that this is a longing for traditional Eritrean culture, which benefits men while excluding and subordinating women. Some male participants also joined their female counterparts in criticising the traditional patriarchal perception. Michael stated that "I pity men

who would like to bring cultural advantages that they used to enjoy in Eritrea to the UK; it is an indication of self-doubt or lack of confidence". These accounts suggest that there is a conflict between the desire to maintain traditional gender roles and women's opposition to patriarchal domination.

Moreover, Weini and Senait explained that the conflict is a clash of different cultures giving rise to strained family relations.

> The conflict of interest or misunderstanding [between men and women] is influenced by our upbringing. We still keep many of our traditions, values and behaviours. For example, we do not usually communicate putting our emotions aside, and solve our problems accordingly. That is how we grew up, and many times we find it difficult to change even abroad. We care more about our pride, instead of looking at things calmly and reach to a common understanding. (Weini)

> Highly educated women get more respect in Eritrea for their educational qualifications. However, women generally are respected for what they are [as women] in the UK. They can express themselves and do whatever they want to do without fear of societal judgment. No one says that they should not do this or that based on their gender, which is quite different from Eritrea where women are not expected to behave in a certain way because of their gender. (Senait)

Weini is concerned about the socio-cultural transformation of Eritrean migrants. Her account highlights that the migrants have kept some traditional practices and attitudes which she finds harmful to women. However, Senait opines that Eritrean women in the UK are free of gender categorisation and societal judgment. Her narrative fits into the discourse about the advantage and top position of women in European societies including the UK (see Baumann, 2017). It is important to note that women are under-represented in high-level economic and political positions and exposed to sexual harassment and domestic violence in the UK (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2018). Yet, it is fair to say that the controls are not as obvious or as tight as they are in Eritrea. This, therefore, gives women some space and freedom to decide on their own as they see it fit.

Balancing Work and Family Responsibilities

Despite their strong opposition to traditional gender roles, most of the women participants noted that they do most of the household chores. They also take the primary role in raising kids. During the interview, Senait and Helen came with their babies since they could not find anyone to look after them. They told me that they have to shoulder double responsibilities or quit their jobs to raise children.

> Having children comes with great responsibility. As a working mom of two, one of the main challenges I face is to balance my professional and family lives. Back home, I could leave them [my children] with my family, if I want to go anywhere. However, here I lack social support. So, they are either with me or in daycare. (Helen)

> I have a baby now and I am raising him alone. He is away from my extended family: sister, aunt, cousin, etc. So, the responsibility is on me, which partly caused me to stop my professional work. I have my husband with me, but Eritrean husbands are not good with housework and babysitting. (Senait)

Senait's and Helen's testimonies show that many women struggle to balance work and family responsibilities and some sacrifice their professional life for their families. Despite society's acceptance of women into the workforce, motherhood comes with the responsibility of raising a child (Poduval & Poduval, 2009). Both work and family [motherhood] need time and commitment. As a result, working women bear dual responsibilities, which cause less career advancement and high career interruptions. This further suggests that women who lack family support are more likely to be victims of such career-related issues. As Senait did, they even interrupt their professional job to take care of their children while others switch to part-time employment and move down the occupational ladder into less-skilled and lower-paid jobs (Alakeson, 2012; Shah & Shah, 2016).

This goes beyond family commitment to their children and reflects traditional gender roles and power relations within the society in which men were seen as providers, while women were used to staying at home to take care of the household and children (Scott & Clery, 2013).

Less has changed as the practice goes on, more or less, the same path. If someone has to stay at home and take care of the house, it is mostly women regardless of their educational qualifications and career. Research shows that the participation of those who seek to be involved fathers is not only limited to occupying a support role during early years of care (Wall & Arnold, 2007), but also fear societal judgement because of their sex (Hodkinson & Brooks, 2018). This suggests that men would find it hard to equally involve in everyday care tasks especially in public spaces.

Similarly, Aman believes that Eritrean men, especially those with higher education, are always in dilemma.

> On one side, they are aware that highly educated women are significant to a healthy family and children. On the other side, such women are independent who do not want to live in the shadows of their husbands. Therefore, they [men] have to choose whether they need a traditional Eritrean family where the father acts as the head or ruler, or a family based on equality and shared leadership. (Aman)

The above statement spells out the view that many Eritrean male graduates hold on marriage and women. The main dillema here is that some men graduates want a partner of the same education level, but they are afraid of losing the traditional patriarchal Eritrean society and all the power and privilege associated with it. Aman pointed out that highly educated men can profit by marrying graduates. However, they first need to recognise marriage as a partnership and women as equal partners. Unless they do this, they are unlikely to have healthy family and gender relations based on mutual understanding and respect and might end in divorce. Women in general and graduate women, in particular, are more likely to walk out of a misogynistic relationship (DeKesered et al., 2017).

Aman's statement was also reflected in the interviews with many other participants such as Ermias, Marry, Michael, Senait, Simret, Yodit and Weini. They affirmed that some Eritrean men are still thinking of the old times, a period when the man was considered as the "head" of the household which bids every household member serve at the pleasure of the head. They further suggested that some highly educated men search for a partner who has lower educational qualification or less professional life to maintain patriarchal privilege and focus on advancing

their professional life, instead of sharing housework and childcare responsibilities. These arguments support findings which evidence that women's higher education and job attainments have significant effects on men's choice of a partner and, perhaps, their marital instability (Byrne & Barling, 2017; University of Michigan, 2004).

Conclusion

This paper investigates the connection between migration, gender and family relations by looking at different intertwined categories particularly geography and culture. Using the concept of intersectionality, the paper analyses these three concepts in relation to the challenges and opportunities of highly educated women for gender equality and emancipation from patriarchal oppression. The findings maintain that migration, to some extent, increases the economic power and freedom of women (O'Neil et al., 2016). The economic support and legal protection that migrant women receive in their host country help in improving their social status and leading an independent life. They also give women more power to view marriage as an equal partnership. However, these developments do not fully protect women from sexual harassment and other forms of mistreatment. Migrant women do most of the household work and take the primary role in raising children.

Many migrant men hold traditional Eritrean culture and view themselves as the head of the family. They sometimes look for partners who would maintain traditional gender roles especially those who could take a primary role in household work and childrearing. This indicates the fact that some highly educated men marrying educated women makes little change to the stereotyped gender relations in the family. In most cases, those men view the education and success of women from their advantage since they expect that such women are more likely to bring additional income and, at the same time, do household chores and help with children's education and other activities. However, many highly educated women resist oppressive traditional culture and strive for equality, with the support of socio-economic and legal opportunities they find in the UK. As shown in the findings, this makes some highly educated men feel insecure in marrying highly educated women and those with high job attainment (see also Byrne & Barling, 2017; University of Michigan, 2004).

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that the intersection of gender, migration and geography have a mixed effect on the lives of highly educated migrant women. For instance,

migration has given the women participants of this study socio-economic empowerment, but it also has removed family support as most (if not all) of their families live in Eritrea. However, the findings of this study concur with studies which evidence that migrant women are more vulnerable to mistreatment, exploitation and career interruption than men (Alakeson, 2012; Palumbo & Sciurba, 2018; Shah & Shah, 2016). The study concludes that the struggle of women for equality could not be achieved without men's awareness and participation

This paper explores the experiences of highly educated migrants concerning gender and family relations within their host countries. It reveals that the challenges and aspirations of migrant women are affected by various interconnected factors such as culture, context and educational attainment. However, the paper is not without limitations. It is based on a sample of interviews from one group of participants. Similar research that focuses on other categories (such as religion) and groups of participants (for example, those without higher education attainment) can broaden people's understanding of the case.

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