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Immigrants' Experiences of Settling in a Rural Community in Norway: Inclusion and Exclusion Through "Being Seen"

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Abstract

This article sets out from two dominant and contradictive narratives about immigrant integration in rural areas in Norway. The first holds that rural areas are "better at integration" as relations in these communities are more tight-knit and personal. The other holds that integration in rural areas is more difficult due to the homogeneity and closed-mindedness of rural communities. Based on ethnographic in-depth interviews with individuals with different immigration backgrounds living in a rural coastal community, the article explores their perceptions of rural integration and their experiences of inclusion and exclusion in the local community. By using the notion of "being seen" as an analytical lens, the article shows that both narratives of rural integration are engaged and that experiences of inclusion and exclusion are interwoven and complex. On the one hand, "being seen" points to more personalised relations and support; on the other, it points to concerns by immigrants that they are seen by locals as "others." The lens of visibility and "being seen" allows for a more nuanced understanding of immigrants' experiences with settling in and finding their place in rural areas, and strengthens the argument for studying rural areas as a particular context for inclusion.

Keywords

hypervisibility; inclusion; integration; Norway; rurality; visibility

1. Introduction

In recent decades, concurring socio-economic and demographic developments have contributed to making populations in Norwegian rural areas increasingly diverse (Stachowski & Rasmussen, 2023). First, many municipalities have embraced refugee resettlement as a strategy to counter depopulation, and there are now refugees living in all of Norway's over 350 municipalities. Secondly, labour-intensive industries such as those

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of the so-called "blue economy" (fisheries and fish farming industries), which are typically located in rural-coastal areas, largely fill their labour needs with labour migrants from Eastern Europe (Henriksen, 2020). Since the EU expansions in 2004 and 2007, there has also been a great increase in Eastern European seasonal workers, both in agriculture and in the fish industry. Many rural communities can therefore be described as "new immigrant destinations," a term proposed by McAreavey and Argent (2018) to describe rural and regional communities with little prior experience of international migration.

Many rural communities in Norway embrace their (new) identity as "diverse" and describe this as positive and enriching, at least publicly and politically (Gullikstad & Kristensen, 2020; Kristensen & Sætermo, 2021). Such presentations of rural place identity should be understood in relation to local political and economic strategies that aim to attract new inhabitants and breathe new life into communities threatened by decline. For rural areas, which are often suffering from depopulation, immigration contributes to so-called demographic refill (Hedberg & Haandrikman, 2014) and economic growth (Aure et al., 2018; Søholt & Aasland, 2019; Steen & Røed, 2018). Immigration is understood as vital in the effort to ensure "a healthy demographic, economic and socio-cultural profile" of rural areas (Kampevoll & Martinussen, 2018, p. 91). Heterogeneity also plays a role when it comes to attracting further newcomers (Aure et al., 2018; Lysgård & Cruickshank, 2016), and interweaves with ideas of inclusion and the possibility of developing belonging, which is often upheld as better in smaller, rural communities than in urban areas. A central element in this idea is that smaller communities both enable and necessitate more contact between the original population and the newcomers. Moreover, the engagement of support services is also believed to be more informal, personalised, and flexible in rural communities (Patuzzi et al., 2020).

The narrative of "everyone knows everyone" in a rural town or village, however, bears a contrasting effect, whereby the tight-knit social fabric of rural communities is understood as potentially making it more difficult for migrants to build social ties, and thus generating a higher degree of social exclusion (Kristensen & Gullikstad, 2021). Also, due to practical reasons including resources and personnel, it can be harder for smaller communities to provide tailored integration services (Patuzzi et al., 2020).

In this article, we explore experiences of inclusion and exclusion for immigrants who, for various reasons, have settled in a rural coastal community in Mid-Norway. Drawing on qualitative interviews, we ask: How do they experience inclusion and exclusion in the community? How does the social visibility of living in a small place shape their experiences in terms of creating belonging? The article proceeds through the following sections. First, we introduce the notion of social visibility in rural areas and insights from research on this topic. Thereafter we present the theoretical perspectives on visibility and "being seen" that have inspired the analysis, before providing an overview of and reflections upon the methods used. The presentation of the empirical material is followed by a concluding part in which the findings and their implications are discussed.

2. Rural Communities, Visibility, and Inclusion

The idea of the Norwegian countryside as diverse aligns with research from other European countries (see, for example, Sampedro & Camarero, 2020). In the field of rural studies, notions such as "rural cosmopolitanism" and "translocalism" (Hedberg & Haandrikman, 2014; Kristensen & Gullikstad, 2021; Schech, 2014) have emerged to describe sociocultural changes related to the increased diversity. However, according to Sampedro and Camarero (2020), the development towards increased diversity can also be an

ambivalent process for rural communities, representing not only opportunities to secure economic and social sustainability, but also worries related to preserving traditional local identities and, as such, is a potential source of conflict, exclusion, and racism. It is still the case that many immigrants find living in small, rural communities difficult. For example, Woods (2018) claims that immigrants remain vulnerable in several aspects of rural communities and that the use of positively laden concepts to describe culturally diverse conviviality (such as "rural cosmopolitanism") overshadows this. In contrast to studies that find rural areas to be better at integrating, others find that rural areas may be more likely to foster xenophobia and scepticism towards foreigners (Penner, 2020; Valenta, 2007).

The social transparency and "close-knittedness" of rural areas are associated with both benefits and constraints for those who live there. On the one hand, residents in rural areas are commonly perceived to have stronger feelings of community (Rye, 2006) and look out for each other (Garland & Chakraborti, 2007). This can represent a positive force for the inclusion of newcomers. For example, Søholt et al. (2018) found that many immigrants in rural areas reported a feeling of "being seen," which they connected with feelings of social recognition and inclusion. However, small places where "everyone knows everyone" can also generate pressures towards conformity and a higher degree of social control and exclusion (Valenta, 2007). Mechanisms of social control can be particularly strong in smaller places, where there is little room to escape the eyes of others. Haugen and Villa (2006), for example, describe how gossip "controls and constrains" rural individuals who might not conform to local normativity. At the same time, the emphasis on the notion of the tight-knit community can contribute to obscure processes of exclusion that marginalise particular groups of rural "others" (Garland & Chakraborti, 2007).

The social visibility of rural places can therefore represent both a factor of inclusion and exclusion. This has been studied concerning various groups, such as rural youth and their decisions to leave or stay (see, for example, Rye, 2006; Stockdale et al., 2018), adult newcomers' experiences of settling in small places (see, for example, Munkejord, 2009), and groups that are particularly vulnerable for marginalisation, such as gay people (Preston & d'Augelli, 2013) and racialised minorities (Stead et al., 2023). About immigrants in rural areas, de Lima (2012) holds that their integration processes may be different than those in urban areas, precisely because their visibility is greater. In settings where homogeneity is seen as the norm, diversity becomes potentially disturbing—coming from without and associated with "others" (Søholt et al., 2018). According to Moris (2021), the symbolic construction of an idealised rurality largely defines who and what belongs to the rural or not. Representations of Western European rural areas are often as "white spaces," which also contributes to the positioning of many immigrants as "others" who are at odds with "nativeness" and authenticity (Søholt et al., 2018). Non-whiteness can therefore represent a marker of difference and of being "out of place" in representations of the rural place (Moris, 2021).

With these insights in mind, the article examines how rurality, visibility, and belonging/inclusion interrelate in the narrated experiences of immigrants in a rural area.

3. Theoretical Perspectives and Analytical Tools

To explore our empirical material, we draw on theoretical perspectives on social visibility and the notion of hypervisibility. This decision derives in part from insights from the existing research in rural areas referred to above, which shows that social visibility is a central dimension of social life in rural areas, and is thus relevant

for studying processes of social inclusion. The decision also derives from the interview material in our study, in which being visible and seen was a recurrent theme and one that seemed to hold different meanings. The analysis employs perspectives that link social visibility to both inclusion and exclusion, and that take on board the connection between social visibility and identity.

According to Brighteni (2010), social visibility—or *seeing and being seen*—is fundamental to human experience and can be understood as the "beginning of society" (Brighteni, 2010, p. 9). Beyond simply "looking at someone who looks back at you," she argues that visibility is complex, ambiguous, and contextual, and that it "unleashes social forces" (Brighteni, 2010, p. 13). Social visibility therefore shapes our experience of being in the world. The visibility can be both positive and negative. It can be empowering and advantageous when it entails recognition and a sense of esteem. Being seen by others therefore represents a validation of us as human beings. Indeed, it is argued that we fundamentally depend on feedback from others and recognition to develop our identity and sense of self-worth (Honneth, 1995). Social visibility can thus represent an enabling resource, that can produce and strengthen belonging and inclusion.

Conversely, seeing and being seen can also represent social control, constraint, and oppression, as well as pressure towards conformism, which tends to target those who are perceived as being different more strongly (Giddens, 1991). Moreover, being seen can harm one's self-esteem when the gaze is deprecating, which is often the case for marginalised groups. The gaze can also become internalised, and become part of a "double consciousness" (du Bois, 1903/2018), where one's own self-understanding cohabits with the experience of always looking at oneself through the (deprecating) eyes of others. Social visibility can thus be understood as a "double-edged sword," swinging between an empowering pole (recognition) and a disempowering pole (control; Brighteni, 2010, p. 39).

The relationship between seeing and being seen is associated with power. For example, contrary to mutual recognition, it can also mean a *denial* of recognition, in that someone is rendered "invisible" by "not being seen." Social visibility is always asymmetric as some groups have more power to render others visible, invisible, or hypervisible (Buchanan & Settles, 2019). Hypervisibility is a result of individuals being recognised for their "otherness" or perceived difference. Moreover, it is associated with them being scrutinised more strongly for possible errors and instances of deviation from norms. Hypervisibility can therefore be understood as linked to invisibility, in the sense that both are a contrast to visibility, both represent subjugation and devaluation, and both are linked to stereotyping (Fryberg & Townsend, 2008). Social visibility is also closely linked to the physical appearance of somebody—or some *body* (Ahmed, 2000). In predominantly white spaces, racialised differences produce both hypervisibility and invisibility (Newton, 2023; see also Ahmed, 2000). The notions of visibility, invisibility, and hypervisibility are particularly relevant for studying processes of inclusion and exclusion in rural places, where social transparency is higher. Drawing on Foucault (1977), social visibility in rural places has been conceptualised as a *rural* panopticon, with "its watchfulness, gossip, and self-discipline" as tools of social control (Philo et al., 2017, p. 231). This control is felt more strongly by the "rural others," whose identities are "silenced or problematized within traditional notions of rurality" (Moris, 2021, p. 475).

We will draw on these perspectives, both explicitly and implicitly, in the analysis of our empirical material. The following section presents how this empirical material has been produced.

4. Data and Methods

The article draws on in-depth interviews with around 35 immigrants living in a rural coastal community in Norway, which, to ensure anonymity, we have called Seaside. The interviews are part of a broader data collection in a project that explored how "integration" is understood by differently situated individuals in a selection of small local communities in Norway.

Seaside is a small town in a municipality with 5,000 inhabitants. The municipality is rather typical for Norwegian rurality, with dispersed settlements around a few towns, and with strong historical ties between the places and the people living there. Although the municipality has always included national minorities, international immigration is a rather new phenomenon. The municipality is home to industries that are extensively related to both farming and fish farming, which creates many employment opportunities as well as expectations of continued growth in economic activity and population size. In the period between 2010—when Seaside first welcomed refugees—and 2018, 290 refugees have been settled, of whom more than 75% were still living there when our study started. In recent decades, quite a few labour migrants have also settled in Seaside. Due to the employment opportunities and the expectations of continued economic and demographic growth, staying is more of a real choice for residents here than in many other rural communities, where the lack of employment possibilities is a significant push factor.

Seaside was chosen as a research site due to the municipality's reputation for success when it comes to immigrant integration. This understanding was known to us through local and regional news, where Seaside was described as being exemplary in its integration work. The stories about successful integration were typically explained by the proportion of refugees who were part of the labour market, which at that time was high compared to other municipalities.

The 35 immigrants we interviewed for this study come from both European and non-European countries and have lived in Seaside for one up to twelve years. Approximately one-third of the informants were women and their ages spanned between 20 and 50 years at the time of interviews. Some informants had come as refugees, some were labour migrants, and some were what is often referred to as lifestyle migrants. Refugees living in Seaside have been settled there in line with Norway's policy of geographically steered refugee settlement, whereby municipalities all over the country are asked to accept a certain number of refugees suggested by national authorities.

The informants were in different life situations. Some were living on their own or with friends, and some were living together with partners and/or children. As for their occupational situation, most of the labour migrants and lifestyle migrants, as well as some of the refugees, were employed in either the private or the public sector, whereas the most recently settled refugees were participating in the Introduction Programme for refugees. The Introduction Programme is a full-time training programme that is intended to prepare refugees and their families for participation in Norwegian working life. Refugees and their families who have been granted a residence permit in Norway have the right and an obligation to complete the programme.

The 35 informants were recruited through active networking and snowball sampling during fieldwork periods in 2018 when two researchers were staying in Seaside for periods of varying length (three weeks to three months). The fieldwork periods included participant and non-participant observation at a variety of

sites and activities, which enabled the researchers to establish contact with potential informants. The interviews included in this article were conducted individually, with couples and in groups, and each lasted for between 45 minutes and two hours. The interviews were mostly conducted in Norwegian and English, and some in German, depending on the informants' preferences and language skills. For most of the informants, this means that the interviews were not conducted in their mother tongue, but rather in a language of which they had rather basic knowledge. To ensure that the informants were able to express their experiences and opinions, the interviews were conducted in a relaxed manner, allowing time for longer explanations and, in some instances, also with some assistance from family or friends, as well as language mixing, which was in line with how the informants usually communicated with teachers, neighbours, colleagues, etc. As translators were not available during our fieldwork, a certain level of language proficiency was also included as a recruitment criterion. The interviews were conducted in various places, including the informants' homes, workplaces, classrooms, and local cafés. The questions addressed the informants' experiences of living in the community, how they experienced the initial period after arrival, and whether and how the situation had changed over time. Integration, in a general sense, was an overarching topic but was explored in different ways depending on the informants' specific life situations and interests. The interviews were thus rather open and explorative, oriented towards providing space for individual experiences and (biographical) storytelling.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researchers themselves or a transcriber. When analysing the interviews, we found inspiration in Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, in the sense that we focused on identifying thematic commonalities across the interviews. This "bottom-up" way of working on the data material made room for an empirically-led focus. The topic of visibility was not something that we explicitly set out to explore in our research. The complex issue of "being seen," however, was expressed by several of our participants and soon emerged as important.

To answer our research questions, we have chosen to present three interviews with four informants: Abel, Caroline and Joseph, and Salim. The reason why we decided to focus on these interviews is that they capture the different ways in which our informants talked about inclusion and exclusion through the notion of visibility and "being seen." This means that the experiences expressed by these four informants were also found in other interviews, but not necessarily expressed as clearly as they were by Abel, Caroline and Joseph, and Salim.

5. Abel's Story: From Being Looked at to Being Seen

Abel was among the first refugees that were settled in Seaside close to ten years ago. Abel comes from Eritrea and, at the time of the interview, was in his mid-thirties, living by himself and working full-time in the public sector. When Abel came to Seaside, he was in his mid-twenties and had lived for three months in a reception centre in another part of Norway. As soon as he came to Seaside, he was enrolled in the Introduction Programme and started to learn Norwegian at the adult education centre. For Abel, this opportunity to learn the language and meet with other people—both immigrants and those working in the adult education and integration services—made settling in Seaside very different from his experiences during his first months in Norway, where no schooling had been offered and he had spent the days on his own doing nothing. Despite this positive change, Abel still found his first months in Seaside rather challenging. The cold climate was an important part of this, as was the lack of social relations:

> The biggest challenge was to get to know people. Seaside is a rather special place. People are not open. It is a closed society. And I can understand that people are somehow sceptical. They did not know me and….So getting to know people took some time.

Establishing a new life in this cold environment was very hard for Abel. He missed his family, he did not speak the language, and he spent many evenings and weekends on his own, feeling lonely and depressed. Moreover, he did not feel included or accepted by the locals living in Seaside. Looking back, Abel can see that the newly established integration office did not really understand that the newcomers needed more than language classes and lectures about Norwegian society and culture to become part of the local community. Also, as in many local communities in rural Norway, there were not really any suitable places to meet and socialise informally, except at the grocery store and the gym. This family-oriented privacy was a new experience for Abel, who was used to hanging out with friends in local cafés in Eritrea.

When the cold winter came to an end, it all changed for the better. First, Abel and the other newly arrived refugees were invited by some locals to become part of the local sports club. Throughout the summer, they met with different people for training sessions and matches, and their number of acquaintances increased substantially. As language was still a barrier to becoming part of the community, Abel also decided to work hard on his Norwegian when classes started up again in the autumn. When his language teachers suggested that he could do part of his language training in a workplace, both his language proficiency and socialisation experience reached a new level. The real game-changer for Abel, however, was when he was approached by some Norwegian men in the local sports club and asked to take on a leading position in the club. After thinking about it for a couple of days, Abel decided to accept the offer. In this way, he got to know a lot of people and he also became a person whom many people in Seaside would know about and relate to:

> When I was in the shop, people would recognise me and "hey," "hey" all the time….I come from a big city [in Eritrea], and if you are to greet someone there it is because you know them. But here, when you go to the grocery store, people would know your face and they would say "hey," "hey."

As we can see in this quote, Abel now feels seen in Seaside, and the visibility that creates this feeling is explained by his extensive network as well as the transparency that comes with a small place. The size and the transparency are also verbalised in another part of the interview, where Abel is sharing some experiences from living in Seaside:

> There are many nice things about Seaside. It is a small town and maybe 70% of the people living here I would know by name. That is special. I would know his name, maybe also the name of his wife, the family, where they are living, and what they are doing. That's special [laughing].

Here we can see that Abel is not only describing himself as seen but also as someone who sees and recognises others. The message conveyed here is that he no longer sees himself as an outsider who is being looked at; he has become one of them.

Abel here describes a transition from experiencing being seen as somewhat objectifying, to being himself the seeing subject, and being seen as a subject. This is also verbalised in another part of the interview, where Abel tells the story of how he got to know his next-door neighbour:

> "In my neighbourhood, there was this lady who was looking at me from behind her curtains. I was parking my car and going for the post in my letter box outside my house. And all the time she was watching me from behind her curtains, following me closely, constantly. This was about three or four years ago. Then I got an invitation to a party. The people living in our street wanted to have a barbeque party where everyone was invited. I got the invitation in my letterbox. I prepared some food for the barbeque, bought some cans of beer, and went to the party. I already knew some of the people at the party and others were new to me. And I got to know my next-door neighbour, who had been watching me from behind her curtains. And now….When I am passing her house and she is on her veranda, she will talk to me and ask me to come over for a coffee. And then I just go there. It is understandable that people are a bit sceptical, but after some time you get used to people and they get to know you and what you are doing and that is…I don't know…I do not really feel that it makes a difference that I am an immigrant.

As we can see from this story, Abel's presence was definitely noticed by his neighbour. But rather than being seen, he was positioned as the hypervisible stranger that his neighbour was looking at from a distance, either out of curiosity or out of fear. But as soon as the curtain was pulled aside and they had the opportunity to meet each other, Abel was seen as a person by someone who also became his friend. And through being seen in this sense, he also felt part of the local community.

6. Joseph and Caroline's Story: Invisible Foreigners

At the time of the interview, Caroline and Joseph had lived in Seaside for about ten years. They came from Germany to Norway hoping for a calm life with less densely populated places and closer proximity to nature. They chose to live in rural Norway to give their children a better life than in urban Germany, where they described their everyday life as rather stressful and hectic. Both Caroline and Joseph were now in their 50s, and their children had grown up and moved to more urban areas in Norway. When asked about their experiences of living in Seaside, the couple made a clear distinction between their private life and their work life:

> Caroline: I always say, get to know people in their spare time or on vacation. There you really get to know people. Otherwise, you are wearing a mask and playing a part to the outside world. But see people in a stressful situation and you get to know their true character….Visiting them, you also get to know people differently. In their own house. Then you experience something together. Experiencing things together is very important.

Later in the interview, Caroline related this to the social transparency of the place:

> New people are maybe something you are scared of or are feeling insecure towards….In such a small community, where everybody thinks they know each other, this is a big issue. If someone appears in the local newspaper, for example, my coworkers discuss heavily who this person is related to and what they do and so on. And I cannot say anything about this. I just observe. And they immediately find a box to put this person in. But we do not have a box they can put us in….We will always be the foreigners here.

Joseph differentiated between what he calls "vocational integration" and "inter-human integration": "Those, for me, do not run parallel, but might even go apart." He explained his understanding of vocational integration as follows:

> We migrated here, but we did not integrate. We have a residence permit, a work permit, and such.…Here it is like that: When Norwegians speak about the German culture, it contains a certain respect. There are stereotypes like *Ordnung muss sein* [there must be order], being on time, being precise and eager. All these stereotypes are present. And if you look at them, they are actually very positive. This is what is being reflected onto us. That means that our status here is a very good one. And yet we experience problems with integration in our private-social life.…People from Syria or Ethiopia who come to Norway, they are not immediately given these positive attributes. Maybe they are even seen as burdens and met with mistrust and fear.

For what Joseph called inter-human integration, he gave an example of meeting a coworker in the town's only supermarket:

> Just when I see her, I see she is turning into another aisle. And I think to myself: She must have seen me. There is no way she has not seen me. Why did she not greet me? The relationship between proximity and distance is confusing here.

Joseph here seemed to describe a sentiment of being denied recognition, by being rendered invisible by his colleague. Convinced she must have seen him, he interpreted this as an active gesture, that for him represented the distinction of being seen ("integrated") in the workplace and "unseen" in a separate sphere. In a setting where these often overlap, this becomes "confusing."

Rural areas are often described as being based on multi-stranded social ties, which tend to bind public and social spheres closer together. Rural residents often meet at the crossing point of each other's work and private life. This is shown in Caroline's example of coworkers talking about a familiar person in the local newspaper. Caroline described their attempts to position this person relationally to one another (e.g., as one's relative, one's former schoolmate, one's neighbour, etc.) as being typical for a "small place like here," where "everybody seems to know one another." Joseph, on the other hand, interpreted his coworker avoiding him as being confusing, even rude—as an active gesture of avoiding seeing one another in the store, in contrast to in the workplace.

Caroline's interpretation speaks to the difficulty of overcoming "foreignness" and of being truly "seen" beyond pre-existing stereotypes. The latter was also important for Joseph. He did not challenge or deny these stereotypes but acknowledged them as an advantage that Germans have in comparison with other migrants in Seaside. It is a complicated manoeuvre to position oneself as neither one (local inhabitant) nor the other (refugee, racialised migrant). So, even though Joseph began by positioning himself as a labour migrant, who was allowed to stay and work but did not feel included in the private-social life of the majority population, he also acknowledged that he was being recognised with advantages and useful qualifications. Nonetheless, the feeling of being an outsider—a "foreigner," in Caroline's terms—persisted.

The couple's experiences reflect the precarity and situatedness of inclusion, even after ten years of living in Seaside. This situatedness becomes clear in their distinction between the work sphere and the private sphere, and it is exemplified in their accounts of situations of being (un)seen. Being seen in their examples was about being truly known and accepted as part of a social group. The impact that these seemingly mundane situations had on Caroline and Joseph, however, shows the precarity of immigrants who are suddenly made aware of their social invisibility.

7. Salim's Story: The Avoided Gaze and Its Reflections

Salim was in his mid-twenties at the time of the interview. He was tall and physically strong, and appeared generally happy in his demeanour. He had come to Norway as a refugee from Syria and had lived in Seaside for roughly two years. He participated regularly in the language café at the volunteer centre—a weekly event in which many Seaside residents participate. During one of those events, he expressed interest in participating in our research. According to Salim, he had not been placed in Seaside involuntarily but had wanted to live there, after he had met a representative from Seaside at an event for refugees, while he was still living in an asylum centre in another part of the country. In the interview, Salim talked about his job in a nearby fish factory, where he worked long shifts—often at night and weekends—to save money, but also to pass time: "What else is there to do here?" He further explained:

> I moved here for the job. Just for the job….It is fine to work here, and I do not have a problem living in a small place, but people here, they are not…[pauses] social. No. I like talking to people, but it is difficult to find a friend here. What shall I do? It is good to work here, but not to meet people. There are nice mountains around too, but it is difficult to find friends you can talk to….I have friends, who are from Syria or Eritrea, but I want to meet Norwegians too; to learn the language, but also to live; for everything, really….For example, just to greet people is difficult. I greet a woman, for example, and we talk a little bit, but later she would not greet me again. I have to greet. I have to start. I do not know what happens. Maybe it is because I am from a different country. I do not know [pause; then, with more conviction:] Yes, maybe it is because I am from another country, and they are afraid of me….Maybe that is it. I do not know, but it is not good.

Themes of isolation and friendship are predominant in Salim's statement. He stated that it is difficult to find people to talk to, and, like Caroline and Joseph, made a clear distinction between work, nature, and meeting people. Work plays a central role, and he said that he "only works," and was "only here for work," which in a sense makes his stay in Seaside independent of making friends and building social belonging. On the other hand, he also expressed frustration over experiences of not being seen and recognised, and said that he would have wanted to have friends.

Salim's statement indicates a heightened sensitivity toward his surroundings and his own position within these surroundings, in a way that that made him feel like a stranger, like a "body out of place" (Ahmed, 2000, p. 8).

He had experienced that attempts to connect with the locals, initiated through greetings and conversations, were not reciprocated, and even avoided. Even though he ascribed them a general lack of sociality, Salim suspected that the perceived lack of interaction was not random, but that fear and otherness were being projected on him: "Maybe it is because I am from another country, and they are afraid of me." Salim was reading his own appearance through the assumed eyes of the locals he encountered. In a way, Salim was constructing "locals" and himself in relationship to one another, whereby the former were acknowledging him as a stranger.

Regardless of whether his interpretation of the locals and their reaction to him reflects their true intentions, the insecurity, of not knowing, but feeling as if one is perceived as dangerous in a given moment, speaks to du Bois' (1903/2018) notion of double consciousness. Salim's sense of possibly being perceived

as dangerous can be seen as mirroring the broader local and national narratives of Norwegian local communities as being homogenous.

8. The Rural Ambivalence of Being Seen

This article set out to explore how rurality, visibility, and belonging interrelate in the experiences of immigrants who have settled in rural areas in Norway. A starting point for the study is the existence of two dominant and contradictive narratives about immigrant integration in rural areas (as opposed to urban areas), where the first holds that rural areas are "better at integration" as relations in these communities are more tight-knit and personal, whereas the other holds that inclusion in rural areas is more difficult due to the homogeneity and closed-mindedness of rural communities. Our research findings show that the social transparency of rural areas does not simply render inclusion "easier" or "more difficult," but that it is a feature of rural places that makes inclusion and integration very different, compared to in urban, less transparent, settings. Transparency, or social visibility, holds a particular significance in processes of inclusion and exclusion in rural areas and is therefore a crucial factor in the analysis of such processes. Visibility can be described as omnipresent, and this is clearly reflected in our informants' stories, where it emerges as complex, temporal, and situational. "Being seen" is subjectively interpreted, and relates to belonging, agency, and self-perception—all of which are important dimensions of experiences of inclusion.

The cases of Abel, Joseph and Caroline, and Salim illustrate well that to be seen can mean very different things in a context of rural transparency, and the meaning might also change over time and between contexts. "Being seen" might mean being recognised or "known" as different, as a stranger—potentially dangerous—who does not really belong to the community, yet it might also mean being accepted as someone "known" and familiar, and, as such, a part of the community.

Abel's story somehow illustrates both these dimensions and brings forth the significance of temporality, of being seen in the sense of "being invited in," as well as "making oneself seen" as in actively making efforts. The social transparency of Seaside started as a barrier to inclusion as he became a kind of hypervisible stranger, a "body out of place" (Ahmed, 2000). At the same time, Abel presents transparency as a potential for inclusion, in the sense that people are more likely to become aware of and to get to know each other in small places than they do in big cities. Abel's story also illustrates the experience of becoming "the one who sees"—that is, the seeing subject, who is no longer subjugated to "otherness" but who sees from the position of an insider. Being seen or being "known," then, is part of the imaginary of rural towns like Seaside, setting and maintaining boundaries between who is "outside" and who is "inside."

In Salim's rather different story, the excluding aspects of social visibility are more dominant. In this interview, we see both an intersubjective transformation, where Salim comes to look at himself through the eyes of the Other, and his perceptions of his position in local rural imaginaries of who belongs in the given space. In his case, "being seen" entails a complex mirroring, in which he becomes not only self-aware but also aware of his visibility, or hypervisibility. In reaction, he initiates encounters by greeting people to counteract the perception of him as a stranger. These acts can be interpreted as conscious and active labour in everyday encounters, which are often invisible or taken for granted by those with the privilege of not having to question their position. Salim's story illustrates that one might be visible without "being seen," and Salim's greetings represent negotiations about an "untainted" visibility that would entail recognition and inclusion.

Caroline's and Joseph's statements express yet another form of "being seen," as they experience inclusion/exclusion as embedded in different contexts, and in relation to positive stereotypes, yet with a persistent feeling of remaining "foreigners." Moreover, their experiences can be seen as "unexpected" in some ways, given that they are not subjected to hypervisibility in the same ways that refugees are, and also have other (linguistic, cultural, etc.) advantages. Nevertheless, their stories reflect a sense of perpetual "othering." This is "confusing," according to Joseph, and the experience of being "partly seen" and "partly invisible" is expressed through an example set in a space where different spheres of rural life intersect. It could also be argued that the "confusion" could be related to different groups of immigrants having different expectations of inclusion and that perhaps Joseph and Caroline were only prepared for the positive aspects of rural social transparency.

The three cases we have presented in this article show how "being seen" is used by the informants to talk about their perception of belonging and position in the rural community, speaking to an understanding of rural areas as spaces "where everyone sees each other." Through the prism of "being seen," we are also able to see how their experiences of inclusion and exclusion are informed—both by their own life histories and personal experiences and by their experiences and perceptions of the other residents in the rural community. The notion of "being seen" not only emerged as central in our informants' experiences, but also appears to capture the complexity related to being a newcomer settling in a small, socially transparent rural community. The lens of visibility and "being seen" allows for a more nuanced understanding of immigrants' experiences of settling in and finding their place in rural areas, and strengthens the argument for studying rural areas as a particular context for inclusion.

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Conflict of Interests

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