

## **The passport as actor in the enactment of the Russian-Norwegian border**

Ann Therese Lotherington and Anne Britt Flemmen

### **Abstract**

The point of departure for this chapter is that the passport can only be understood with regard to the conduct and practical experience of those using it, and that the passport is embedded in 'heterogeneous networks' of people, practices and things (Timmermans and Berg 2003). The passport is nothing in and by itself but becomes of significance the moment a closed border is to be passed. The point is, therefore, not to study the passport in isolation but to follow its use in practice. The performance of identities, being it individual or that of a nation state, takes place in practice, and can only be observed in everyday practice. Empirically the chapter is based on a study of Russian immigration to Northern Norway in the 2000's, in which individual and group interviews, participant observation and document analysis were used as methods. The analysis of the enactment of the Russian-Norwegian border draws on Actor-Network-Theory (Callon 2001).

### **Introduction**

The 200 km Russian-Norwegian border used to be one of the most strictly controlled borders in the World. It was, until the collapse of the Soviet regime in 1991, the border of the iron curtain, the border between East and West, between the Warsaw Pact and the NATO countries. Military appearance, that is, personnel and equipment, on either side enacted the border every minute, every day. Hardly any passed the border station Storskog, the only border station between the two countries. In the late 1980's approximately 2500 people crossed the border annually. Those who did were mainly official delegations, and now and then a group of cultural workers on exchange mission. The passport, with its entry visa, was necessary but played a minor role in the enactment of the border. Instead, the performance of the border was an act of military power.

In 1990, this changed rapidly with 8,259 people crossing the border at Storskog, increasing to 15,940 in 1991, 81,561 in 1992, and as many as 131,000 in 1999. In the late 2000s, the number was reduced to approximately 110,000 crossings annually, according to Norwegian Customs. People travelled for a variety of reasons but what they had in common was a passport with an entry visa making them legal short or long-term migrants. Different visas entitle different rights, such as a visitor's visa (90 days), study permit (for students), family immigration, and temporary or permanent work and residence permit. In the 2000s all kinds of people crossed the border: Business people, skilled and semi-skilled workers, researchers, students, artists and other cultural workers, politicians, tourists of all kinds, and marriage migrants who are of our empirical interest here.

The pattern of migration and travel went both ways. However, due to its one-sidedness, marriage migration illustrates an important distinction from the general picture. Hardly any Norwegians move to Russia to marry a Russian, whereas marriage migration from Russia constitutes a significant proportion of the Russian long-term migration to Norway, and this migration pattern is not gender balanced. As of January 2005, there were 2240 couples consisting of a Norwegian-born man and a Russian-born woman in Norway, and only 65 couples with a Norwegian-born woman and a Russian-born man (Daugstad 2006: 84). The numbers for Russian-Norwegian marriages rose from zero in 1990, to 24 in 1995, to 323 in 2004 (Daugstad 2006: 96). In the late 2000s they stabilized at a level of approximately 300 new marriages each year. This particular migration made women 70 per cent of the adult

Russian population in Norway in the 2000's (Statistics Norway 2009). We have discussed various aspects of this migration elsewhere, and do not repeat it here<sup>1</sup>.

Because of major changes over the last 30 years – from being a border between two major military blocks, or super powers, to becoming a border between the Schengen area, without internal border control, and the outer world in which passport with or without entry visa is mandatory – the Russian-Norwegian border stands out as a particularly interesting border. The enactment of the border has shifted from absolute exclusion through military force to more sophisticated processes of inclusion and exclusion of people and things, in which the passport becomes an actor. Our aim is, therefore, to understand what the passport does as part of the enactment of the Russian-Norwegian border. However, the passport is nothing in and by itself, and does not act on its own, but becomes significant the moment a closed border is to be crossed, like the Russian-Norwegian, and acts as one actor among others in ‘heterogeneous networks’ of people, practices and things (Timmermans and Berg 2003). The passport should, therefore, be followed in use (Latour, 1999), and be understood in relation to the practical experiences of those using it. Our research strategy is to follow the passport as marriage migrants from Russia to Norway use it, to learn about their various relations to the passport, and what the passport does in different situations.

### **Elucidating the passport with ANT**

The idea that the passport might have agency and be an active actor is derived from Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) (Latour 2005). ANT is a transdisciplinary approach rooted in sociology, disrupting conventional scientific distinctions between human and non-human actors, claiming that humans are not always subjects and things are not always objects (Asdal et al. 2001). An actor is any entity that can associate or dissociate with other entities in networks. Objects and subjects are constituted and maintained through continuous translation and transformation in networks of connections – in actor-networks. The actors derive their nature from the network; they are constituted, named, provided with substance, action and subjectivity as part of the interaction in the network. The entity is nothing in and by itself but becomes something in relation to other entities through the process of co-constitution in the network (Prout 1996). Consequently, the passport can be considered an actor, and we follow this non-human actor in its use to understand what the passport becomes and does in its actor-network association.

The actors are heterogeneous, but should at the same time hold equal status, and thus, be analyzed accordingly. The passport then should be analyzed on equal terms with the holder of the passport, the issuing body, border control and other actors. This refers to what is termed

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<sup>1</sup> Analyses based on a study of Russian marriage migration to Norway in the 2000s are published in various journals in Norwegian and English: The ability of Russian women to exert their citizenship rights (Lotherington and Fjørtoft 2007); Norwegian men's constructions of gender and nationality (Flemmen 2004); the subject positions made available to Russian women and to Norwegian men related to them in North Norwegian newspapers, and how this constructs the Norwegian majority (Flemmen 2007); the Norwegian majority population's reaction to Russian-Norwegian marriages; the conceptual and analytical challenges posed in studying these marriages (Flemmen 2008); the challenges Russian women face due to Norwegian immigration policy (Lotherington and Flemmen 2007), and finally the marriage patterns at a macro level, as well as at the level of everyday life, with a particular focus on the complexities and the multi-directedness of the flows across the Russian-Norwegian border within the frame of transnational marriages (Flemmen and Lotherington 2008). All articles are edited into one volume published in English (Flemmen and Lotherington 2009).

‘generalized symmetry’. Generalized symmetry means that all actors (people, non-human beings, things or technologies) should be examined within the same kind of record, using the same tool, at the same level. The human actors should not be privileged (Latour and Woolgar 1979). Like Crawford (2004) and Prout (1996) we use ANT as a method to understand the network in which humans and non-humans take part and, in our case, the role of the passport in it. Prout (1996:200) states: “...the ‘society’ is seen as produced in and through patterned networks of heterogeneous materials; it is made up through a wide variety of shifting associations (and dissociations) between human and non-human entities.” In this perspective, agency is not located in the actors but in the heterogeneous associations of humans and non-humans, and in the relations between, and in the network. How the marriage migrants, the passport and other actors associate in the network and what they produce – the network effects – are core points of the analysis.

We do also find the concept of ‘translation’ useful (Callon 1986). All entities in a network are themselves entities in other network associations. For example, the passport is a network consisting of paper, plastics and other materials, words and images, which again individually constitute complex networks ordering people and things. However, when travelling, people take the passport – the physical object – for granted. It is there. Only if an essential page falls out or is damaged might we start reflecting on the passport as something consisting of different necessary and mutually dependent parts and begin unpicking it. Rather than unpicking it we will see the passport – the physical object – as a “single unified block or point” (Prout 1996:201). We ‘punctualise’ the passport, according to Prout’s terminology. What we unpick is the passport as a nodal point in a network association. This means that the passport moves beyond its status as a physical object to become a “packaging of a network (...) extending it (the network) through time and space” (Prout 1996:202). In this sense, as we will see, the passport “can ‘delegate’ a network, stand in for it, repeating it and performing its work in times and places remote from its origination” (Prout 1996:202, referring to Latour 1991:261). This packaging is what makes the passport able to enact the Russian-Norwegian border far from the physical border station. Translation is thus the process of inscription making influence at a distance possible, and the effect is ordering and production of society and agency, nature and machine (Crawford 2004).

The translation process is about establishing (temporarily) stable networks by making things obvious and taken for granted, something one just does without thinking about it. This is the process of discursive exercise of power (Foucault 1977). The discursive power includes and excludes actors and themes from the agenda in question. It is about what can be said and thought of, who can speak, and with what authority (Ball 1990). According to Callon (2001), the stable network defines who the actors are, and what they can do where. What is possible to say and do within the frame of the network appears as natural and obvious – it is taken for granted and perceived as normal, it is inscribed through translation.

When empirically engaging with Russian marriage migrants, we are interested in how their border crossing acts bring structures and events into existence and set them in action. But, as pointed out earlier, agency is not located in the actors but in the heterogeneous associations of humans and non-humans, in the relations between, in the network. What we want to study is thus not observable but has to be drawn from the analysis of the acts of the actors. The strategy to do so is to enter the network from the nodal point, in this case the passport that provides some form of residence permit. Throughout the chapter we elucidate the passport as a device for governing immigrants at a distance, but demonstrate that the passport at the same time contributes to the production of agency for Russian marriage migrants.

### **The passport in its actor-network associations**

The passport has not always been part of the international migration regime. Before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century free movement across borders was the norm. However, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century restrictions on international migration spread widely. The US, who had been open to massive immigration, imposed restrictions on Chinese immigration already in 1880 (Torpey 2000), and in 1917 Norway introduced mandatory passport checks at all frontier posts in the country. A year later, after the end of the First World War, it became an institutionalized feature for international travel. This development was related to an increasing economic and political nationalist environment after the War, and governments felt a need to control the exit from as well as the entry into their territory. With their growing power and authority over social and economic life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, governments increasingly used the passport to control the citizens' movements, and to include their "own" citizens and exclude "others" (Brochmann 1997).

Today, everyone living within the Schengen area who wishes to cross a Schengen border needs a passport. To acquire one the inhabitant must visit a police station, get a picture taken and fill in forms. Then one must wait until it drops into the mailbox at home. The passport as a symbol of belonging to a certain nation state, provides the holder with certain rights and duties in the country in question, including the right of crossing the national border. In addition to producing a person's national identity the passport produces a nation's identity. This dual process of identity production (individual and national) may, according to Torpey (2000), be seen as a strategy for nationalizing the inhabitants. We do, however, believe there is more to it, and will illustrate our point with the complexity of actor-networks that are activated when a Russian woman decides to marry a Norwegian man and settle in Norway.

### **Enacting the border in the intimate zone of desire**

In the case of marriage between a Russian woman and a Norwegian man the Russian-Norwegian border is enacted within the intimate zone of desire (Flemmen and Lotherington 2008). The couple decides to marry and live together in his home country but cannot just do that. A strictly supervised border is to be crossed, and a knowledge/power nexus about how to do it is activated. Who is in charge of the necessary knowledge? What is the correct procedure in order to be capable of crossing the border to stay in the new country legally? What are the demands of the home country, and those of the receiving country?

First of all, the Russian citizen needs an international Russian passport that will provide her with a proof of the national identity necessary for the successive processes<sup>2</sup>. This is easily accessed these days, as one major change after the dissolution of the Soviet Union was easier access to international passports. In the Soviet time it was hard, if at all possible. Some were given exit passports, but this meant that they lost their Soviet citizenship and thereby the right to return. Hence, leaving Russia has become a minor problem, whilst entering Norway is the challenge. The Russian-Norwegian border is enacted, or produced, in the complex actor-network of individuals, passports, rules and regulations, immigration authorities, consulates and embassies. When the Russian passport holder is a marriage migrant, certain associations between actors in the network are activated.

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<sup>2</sup> Russians above the age 16 hold a domestic passport as their proof of ID. It is compulsory to carry this passport everywhere. It is a Soviet legacy.

The events and structures that are brought into existence when Russian women decide to cross the border from their country of birth to get married and settle down in Norway may be summed up as the Norwegian immigration regime. The regime is activated as a part of the nation state's control of borders, and protection of citizens with legal residency in the country against undesired immigration (Lotherington and Flemmen 2007). Towards Russians the Norwegian state demands a valid visa for Norway/Schengen. The visa symbolizes Norway's relationship with Russia by stating that not everyone who wishes to enter the country may do so. To be considered eligible one must have a reason for the voyage, and a formal invitation must be written from a Norwegian person or institution. Through the immigration regime, Russian women are constituted as specific kinds of immigrants, first of all as marriage migrants, and secondly as immigrants from a non-European Economic Area (EEA) country. As non-EEA citizens they have to apply for a visa, and because they come as spouses, they have to apply with the grounds of marriage with an invitation from their spouse. Hence, before any approach to the border station at all, the Russian-Norwegian border is enacted in a Russian as well as a Norwegian living room. The enactment process activates her search for knowledge to find her way through the Norwegian immigration maze, and his search for a way to invite her that will be approved of by Norwegian authorities. They act on the enacted border from their respective homes.

The Norwegian Immigration Act (NOU 2004) regulates the access to family-immigration as a right. This means that the Norwegian authorities consider it a right for spouses to live together. Even so, Russian women must apply for residence permit. They can travel to Norway, marry, and apply for a residence permit on the grounds of family reunion. However, since she comes from a country where a visa is required, she may first apply for a certain immigration and residence permit for this purpose. This permit is valid for six months and is informally called the "engagement visa".<sup>3</sup> But it is not a visa providing rights in Norway, rights such as language training or work permit (Woon 2007). Russian women, who choose to live in Norway while waiting for their application to be processed, have, therefore, no right to work. The immigration regime demands economic support through marriage. The rationale for this is that the use of welfare goods must be minimized in order for the state to be able to maintain the protection of the citizens, which lies within the welfare state. Therefore, before the residence permit is given, the Norwegian authorities demand that the Norwegian spouse is able to provide for the foreign-born spouse. In this way the immigration regime ensures that new citizens do not represent an economic burden for the welfare state, reducing the use of welfare goods (Brochmann et al. 2002; Lotherington and Fjertoft 2007). This demand of being able to maintain one's own support can also be done through documenting that she has financial resources she can bring into the country. But for Russian women this is rarely the case. They must be provided for by the Norwegian spouse<sup>4</sup>. The Norwegian Marriage Act is therefore another actor in the network. This Act mandates the spouses' mutual economic support, which is what is activated here. In the case of Russian-Norwegian marriages the effect of the law renders the Russian woman economically dependent on the Norwegian husband. She cannot operate as an economic subject in the application period (Brækhus 2017).

The time-frame for considering an application of residency on the grounds of marriage is estimated to 7 to 8 months. For many the process has been up to one year from when they move to Norway until they get their first residence permit. While waiting for the permit the

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<sup>3</sup> This is a description of the rules as they were practiced in the late 2000's. The rules have been unclear and they have been changed several times, to our informant's frustration.

<sup>4</sup> He must at a minimum have an annual income of NOK 200,000 (in 2007), equivalent to € 24,000. Welfare benefit is not counted as income in this case.

migrant is consequently excluded from the labor market and all public welfare benefits (Lotherington and Fjørtoft 2007). These practices can be said to be inscribed in a Russian passport holding the particular entry visa obtained as a marriage migrant.

The Russian passport is necessary for gaining a visa and the visa is necessary for entering and staying in Norway. The two may be seen as one single nodal point in the actor-network of border crossing activities. The entry visa issued by Norwegian authorities is a Norwegian device inscribed in a very literal sense in the Russian passport. It is glued into the passport and appears as an integrated part of the passport. This single physical unit, the Russian passport with the Norwegian visa in it, produces the Russian woman's subject position in her new home country, whilst it at the same time enacts the Russian-Norwegian border in various sites.

### **The frontier as a site of enacting the border**

The Russian-Norwegian border is of course also enacted the moment crossing it becomes relevant, either at the physical location of the frontier, Storskog, or at any international airport in Norway with Russian arrivals. In this enactment process a series of material actors in the network is activated, like passport officials, computers, and physical bars. At this site the passport/visa acts as an extension of the body. It is like Haraway's cyborg, "*a fusion of the organic and the technical forged in particular, historical, cultural practices*" (Haraway 1997:51), here with reference to the border crossing practice. The traveler is no-one in herself, she becomes someone when related to the passport/visa. The passport stands in for and speaks for its holder. The communication at the border station is between the passport, the passport officials, and a computer, which in turn activates other networks in order to find out about any deviations.

### **Enactment of the Russian-Norwegian border in everyday life**

If the passport/visa/holder configuration appears congruent the border can be crossed. However, the Russian passport/Norwegian visa maintains a distinction between "them" and "us". The three years following the first residence permit on marriage grounds are marked with serious restrictions on what an immigrant must, can and cannot do. The so-called "three years rule" applies. This rule mandates that one has to be married to a Norwegian citizen for at least three years to gain individual residential status through family reunion. Because Russian immigrant wives are dependents during these three years, they will be expelled from the country if they leave their husbands, unless they can prove that the husband is abusive. However, proving abuse in the court is challenging and not often considered worth trying. In practice they are, therefore, excluded from the right to divorce if they wish to stay in the country.

This three-years period also limits the Russian women's right of mobility. First, the time they are allowed to visit Russia is limited to 90 days, or they forfeit their permits. Second, the government requires that the couple, in addition to showing good intentions with the relationship over years, literally live under the same roof. This is to prevent pro-forma marriages, meaning "where the marriage is without actual reality, and is entered with the sole purpose of bypassing laws and rules about immigration" (NOU 2004:20:226). At the same time this requirement effectively prevents them from long-distance commuting for work or education.

Thus, the Russian-Norwegian border is also enacted within the Norwegian society as part of everyday life. The control mechanism used is annually to call in residents with certain passport/visas and ask them to prove that they live in the same house, that is, they must provide

two human witnesses for their living together statement. This we have called “the duty to love and live together” elsewhere, which is a particular duty reserved for transnational marriages (Lotherington and Flemmen 2007). The Russian passport/Norwegian visa becomes a means of delegated surveillance. The Russian passport/Norwegian visa stands in for the Norwegian authorities, making sure that the couple follows the rules. If they do not, the border is enacted again, as her reason for staying in the country will expire and she will be expelled.

Three years after the first residence permit is given, normally after having lived in Norway for four years, the Russian woman can apply for permanent residence. Permanent residence provides the holder all the rights of a Norwegian citizen on Norwegian territory, except the right to vote in Parliament elections, which demands full citizenship. Thus, she receives residence permit on individual grounds and can live in the country basically on equal footing with Norwegian passport holders. To be awarded full citizenship and provided with a Norwegian passport, normally demands that the applicant has been living in the country for seven of the last ten years. However, marriage migrants can acquire Norwegian citizenship after four years. Apparently, a certain integration effect is assumed from being married to a Norwegian citizen.

### **Naturalization as closure of the border?**

The Norwegian authorities’ eagerness for Russian marriage migrants to become Norwegians, to naturalize, is underscored by the fact that the police inform them of the possibility to apply for citizenship the last time they are called in for “love and live together” control. Together with the red, Norwegian passport this eagerness is an entity in the actor-network that produces Norway’s national identity. And the success rate is quite high: All in all, 213.000 immigrants have become Norwegian citizens since 1977. Regarding the Russian population in Norway, counting 13.914 individuals by January 2009 (Statistics Norway 2009), a total of 3655 have gained Norwegian citizenship. In the second half of the 2000s, approximately 500 Russians gained Norwegian citizenship annually. The vast majority were women.

Until 2006, when a new Norwegian law on citizenship came into force, it was possible for Russians to retain the Russian passport/citizenship after becoming Norwegian citizens, mainly due to Russian rules denying people the right to give up their Russian citizenship. And people did – for convenience as well as identity reasons. However, the new Act on Norwegian Citizenship put severe restrictions on dual citizenship: Only those who might risk their lives by giving up a former citizenship, such as refugees, were eligible for dual citizenship. The argument for this increasingly restrictive policy was that Norway required full loyalty from her inhabitants, based on the assumption that dual, or multiple, citizenship would be a hindrance for loyalty. It was a strategy for nationalizing the inhabitants, as Torpey (2000) argued, and a process of inclusion of their “own” citizens and exclusion of “others”. The distinction between “us” and “them” is clearly produced, in contrast to a situation with dual citizenship, in which the connection between the passport and the passport holder is blurred (who are you today?), and the State loses control over the inhabitants’ movements, and the passport no longer serves as the authorities decentralized instrument of surveillance.

The new Norwegian law of 2006, banning dual citizenship was not well received amongst Russians in Norway. The actor-network of border crossing was exposed to some doubt and instability. Many women said they would never consider trading their Russian passport for a

Norwegian one. Dual citizenship carried potentials for border closure, whilst the new law on citizenship implied yet another enactment of the border.<sup>5</sup>

### **Conclusion: The Russian-Norwegian border as fluid and malleable**

By following the passport in use, we have found that the passport is co-constituted with other entities in various actor-networks of border crossing activities producing different network effects. We have seen the production of inclusion and exclusion processes, the passport standing in for the traveler as well as the authorities, and not least the enactment of the Russian-Norwegian border at a distance. The border is not a geographical place but is fluid and malleable, produced by the actor-network of border crossing activities, with the passport as an agent.

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<sup>5</sup> The Norwegian Parliament adopted new rules 6 December 2018 allowing dual citizenship.



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