

This chapter was first published in Norwegian:

Lotherington, Ann Therese (2008). Over grensen. Konstruksjoner av likestilling og norskhet i russisk/norske familier [Beyond borders. Constructions of equality and Norwegianness in Russian-Norwegian families]. In: *Tidsskrift for kjønnsforskning* [Journal of Gender Research], 32(1), pp. 6- 20.

The English text appears as:

Chapter 6: “Beyond borders. Construction of gender equality and Norwegianness in Russian-Norwegian families”, pp. 81-98, in Flemmen, Anne Britt and Lotherington, Ann Therese (Eds.) (2009). *Transnational Marriage Migration. Russian-Norwegian Encounters*. Saarbrücken Verlag.

The Russian text is a translated version of this English text with a slightly different title and some adjustments of the text:

Love Across Borders. Construction of gender equality and Norwegianness in Russian-Norwegian families, pp. 248-267.

Ann Therese Lotherington

More than 12 percent of the Norwegian population has immigration background, and immigrants play important parts in changing the Norwegian society from a seemingly homogenous to an evidently heterogeneous society. The Norwegian diversity policy was developed to encounter the challenges this represents. The goal of the policy is to create a society taking into account the individual's right to be different, think differently than the majority and be able to freely choose their own way of life. It should establish a new national self-understanding, compatible with the composition of the population, and with an acceptance of the fact that there are several ways to be Norwegian. The White Paper on Diversity Politics (St.meld. nr. 49 (2003-2004)) acknowledges the differences in the population through a grounded positive attitude towards diversity in culture, religion and values. The goal is to establish an inclusive understanding of what it is to be Norwegian, where diversity rather than similarity lays the grounds for what is the norm and what is desired. Principally, foreign-born people in Norway would, therefore, play a central role in the development of what it is to be Norwegian, but is it really opened up for this? When, at the same time, the significance of securing respect for the basic values in society is underscored, this is an indication that not all forms of diversity can be accepted. Gender equality is especially highlighted as a grounding value in the Norwegian society which cannot be compromised. The question, therefore, becomes which influence Norwegian ideals about equality between women and men have on the immigrants' establishment of their Norwegianness, and what being Norwegian means to them. This is the central topic of this chapter.

Norwegian authorities wish for all immigrants to become Norwegian as soon as possible, and take active part in the Norwegian society, but what criteria counts to be considered and recognised as Norwegian? For some it is probably enough to be born

and raised in the country. The Norwegianness is not doubted. It is implicit and unproblematic and needs no justification. For others this is not enough. Even if immigrants are formally looked upon as Norwegians when they obtain Norwegian citizenship, denominations as second and third generations of immigrants, which still exists within the Norwegian language, may suggest otherwise. This counts especially for women with a Norwegian sounding last name, but with a foreign sounding first name and accent. It is taken for granted that she is married to a Norwegian man and lives in Norway, but her Norwegianness is doubted. What they do to be acknowledged as Norwegian citizens, and what role public policy plays in this is questioned here.

The state and the family

The principle of 'the right of privacy' is an inheritance from political liberalism and the idea of the family as a non-political, private institution that the public shouldn't interfere with. The feminist movement's demand about making the private public was a criticism of this, which had many good points, but at the same time met a lot of resistance from the public Norway when it came to regulation of relations within the family, especially the relationship between spouses. This is mirrored in the Gender Equality Act, § 2, stating that "when it comes to family life and personal matters, the act should not be enforced by the bodies mentioned in § 10 of this law" (my translation from Norwegian) (Lotherington 1999). Other laws and regulations affecting the family directly are on the other hand commonly accepted, for example circumstances having to do with inheritance, childcare and educational duties.

Despite the public's respect for the individual couple's arrangements of their relations, attempts are made to form the relationship in certain directions. It's just that this cannot be done directly (Rose & Miller 1992). It is being done through 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault 2002), meaning an activity seeking to form the citizen's behaviour by operating through their wishes, hopes, interests and beliefs.

With this form of governing the exercise of power is not only a state phenomenon, but the authorities also govern through smaller communities and individuals like the nuclear family (Foucault 1994/2000, Foucault 2002, Dean 2006, Rose & Miller 1992, Inda 2006). For this governing to succeed the people being governed must be capable of acting, or rather, they must have agency, and be able to act according to their wishes and beliefs. However, they govern themselves within the frames of the official governing regimes. The effects of this form of public governing, or the amenability of the governed, depends on the authorities' ability to create connections between the political goals, plans and practices on one side and the society's concept of what is good, healthy, normal, effective and/or profitable on the other side (Rose & Miller 1992).

This governing perspective is applied in the analysis of Norwegian politics towards Russian marriage migrants in chapter 5 in this book. In that chapter the point is to show how Norwegian authorities used (and uses) the marriage institution as a technology of governing and control female Russian immigrants in the settlement process. In this chapter the perspective is used in the analysis of the Russian

marriage migrants' establishment of Norwegianness. According to Norwegian integration policies immigrants should become Norwegians, and take active part in the Norwegian society as soon as possible. In order to direct the establishment of the Norwegianness in a desired way, the authorities can use the specific situation the Russian marriage migrants are in, that being the nuclear family. Through establishing norms for normal nuclear families, which immigrants consider something to aim at, there is created a connection to the political goals, making the governing effective. The authorities can operate through the marriage migrants' interests in, wishes, hopes and convictions that the norms for normal Norwegian nuclear families also counts for them. In this way the immigrants govern the establishment of their Norwegianness themselves and achieve recognition as Norwegians in the Norwegian society.

Inspired by Butler (1990/2004) we may say that Norwegianness is about acting in certain ways, in certain situations. Norwegianness is not something one "has" or "is", but something one "does". It is performative and is done in relation to, amongst other things, the family. This means that Norwegianness is not to be understood as something finished and static, but as something malleable, floating. It is this which makes it possible for Norwegian authorities to suggest a policy working towards a new and inclusive understanding of what it means to be Norwegian, and that immigrants in principal should have influence on this process of change. It is however not possible to reduce Norwegianness to a question of the choices of the individual. One cannot choose Norwegianness freely. Norwegianness must be made recognisable for others in society. A continuous repetition of certain actions, or in Butler's terminology, a repetitive citation of norms, is what makes the Norwegianness recognisable. What actions, or what 'doings' that produces Norwegianness is however not given and is difficult to see in a plain ethnic Norwegian context. Here is where the immigrant population plays an important role, because they wrong-cite, meaning that they do not necessarily repeat the dominating norms for Norwegianness. Wrong citing may imply breaking conventional expectations but also to provide phenomenon with new meanings. The immigrants do it either because they do not know the norm, or because they actively wish to break with the conventions and move beyond the dominating discourse. Either way, such actions show that prevailing expectations about reality are questionable, and that establishing new understandings of reality is possible.

Through wrong-citing change can happen, but as described above, one cannot cite freely in the wrong manner and expect to achieve change. The wrong citing needs a certain acknowledgement from the environment to have the power to change things. We are not necessarily talking about acknowledgement from the established, conventional, discursively dominant, but the wrong citing must at least find an echo in alternative discourses. The goal of the Norwegian diversity policy can be understood as a contribution to establish alternative Norwegianness discourses, opening up for the immigrants to take part in the forming of new Norwegianness norms. The question to be followed up on in the analysis is if the norms for normal Norwegian nuclear families can allow for such an opening.

Gender equality and positioning to Norwegianness

Russian women meet several stereotypes when they cross the Russian-Norwegian border. In chapter 4 of this book, Flemmen defines five subject positions, which are made accessible to them: “The prostitute”, “the thief”, “the worker”, “the woman/mother”, and “the Norwegian-married Russian woman”. The two first positions are solely negative and frame all Russian women in Norway generally. “The worker” and “woman/mother” are by all means positive constructions, as hard working, wise, spiritual and warm. As ‘Norwegian-married’ the Russian women are portrayed positively, but the relation to the Norwegian husband becomes problematic.

On one side she is lucky to have found love in Norway, on the other side there are dangers bound to such a relation, because the man is expected to be in a dominant position and can exploit her. Both ways to portray “the Norwegian married woman” positions her as vulnerable and subordinate to the spouse. The position is enhanced by the dominance based governing technology the Norwegian state uses in relation to marriage migrants, where the Norwegian spouse becomes the most important governing instrument (chapter 5). The subject positions offered Russian women in Norway, who are married to Norwegian men, can be summed up as “the subordinate” or “the suppressed”.

The subject positions ‘subordinate’ and ‘suppressed’ are bad starting points for the establishing of Norwegianness, because a dominating portrayal of Norwegian women is that they are not suppressed, but independent and free. Norway is looked upon as one of the most gender equal countries in the World, and a country where it is good for women to live. The concept of women’s independent position in Norway is used rhetorically by some in the public debate to enhance the Norwegian culture’s superiority, at the same time as immigrants attending Norwegian language classes are told as a matter of fact that there is gender equality in Norway. The representations of Norway and Norwegian culture are about equality and unity, where gender equality is an important ingredient. With Mohanty (1988/2003) we may characterise this as a post-colonial gender stereotypical conception of non-western women as suppressed, powerless victims, and western women as strong and free.

Russian women who settle down in Norway must position themselves in relation to this. Their seemingly Nordic appearance and Christian or secular beliefs, together with the Soviet past with a publicly displayed gender equality and a portrayal of the Russian woman as strong and independent, could give them an advantage. With them they carry baggage that reminds us of the image portrayed of Norwegian women. The way they arrive, as marriage migrants from a country with lower standards of living than Norway, does however seem to undermine this. Because of the structure of marriage migration, meaning the imbalanced economical relationship between the Russian woman and the Norwegian husband, she is not seen as equal to him, but subordinate and dependent (Constable 2003, and chapter 3 in this book). With that the Norwegianness is also doubted. In our work with and amongst Russian women we have observed that their individual backgrounds and stories from Russia count for little when it comes to how they are understood when they come to Norway. Their ethnicity, class, educational background or career from Russia does not matter. To Norwegians Russian women become one and the same, one category where Russian women are Russian women. Everyone must therefore create their individual

identity in Norway, or in other words, position themselves as Norwegians. Such work happens in relations, and the nuclear family is an important arena where this constitution takes place.

Methods

Here, the interest is pointed towards the Russian marriage migrants' representations of the relationship, meaning how they choose to talk about themselves and their family, not what they actually do or how the couple actually arranges things. It is about how they, via the relations within the family, represent themselves. The methodical grip to enhance this has been a combination of visual methods and group interviews. Various groups have seen the short film *Tempo* and discussed it. *Tempo* is a 10-minute movie produced by Eva Dahr in cooperation with Ulla-Britt Lilleås. It is based on Lilleås' doctoral work about women and men's bodily habits and the consequences of how work is shared in a relationship. It illustrates the effects of time constraints in a typical heterosexual, ethnic Norwegian family. At the same time Norwegian ideals for how (married) couples should sort their lives are portrayed in different ways throughout the film.

The strength of this method is that the reference point for the discussion is common. They have seen the same at the same time and are being asked to reflect on what they have seen. The situation opens up for choices of what to talk about. The group members can choose to talk about the couple in the film, if they want to relate the discussion to the Norwegian or the Russian reality they know, and/or to their own family. Whatever they choose to talk about they actively take part in the discussion. Because we in this project were looking for how they present themselves, what they wish to communicate of thoughts and actions to the world around them, the group dynamic becomes important. The members use each other's contributions and points of view in the developments of their own arguments and in their evaluation of how much they would like to share about themselves. Here we talk about positioning oneself both in relation to other Russian women in Norway and in relation to the middle-aged gender scientist who they easily can place in the Norwegian middle class. The bad thing about this can be that some become too active in their positioning, and in this way can end up dominating the séance. This problem is one we know from ordinary group interviews.

Another point with having a common point of reference is that the scientist can use different scenes from the film to drive the discussion forward from one topic to another. This is at the same time the potentially problematic part of the method, because the theme of the movie can set boundaries for what is brought up and discussed.

Two groups of Russian women saw the film. The first group consisted of four Russian born women, married or cohabiting with Norwegian born men. In this group there were two who knew each other from before. Two of the women had children; one had a child from a previous marriage in Russia and two children with the Norwegian spouse. The other had two children with the Norwegian spouse. Only one of them had experience from a marriage with a Russian born man. In age they were between

the beginning and the end of their 30-ties. Three had completed higher university education in Norway and had relevant work, while the fourth was still a student. The women spoke very well Norwegian. The discussion lasted for about two and a half hours, was recorded and transcribed as a whole. The other group consisted of three Russian born women who knew each other already. Everyone spoke Norwegian well. Two were married to Norwegian born men and both of them had two children, whilst the third was living with a foreign-born man (Eastern European, not Russian) and had one child with him. None of them had been married before they came to Norway. In age they were from the beginning of their 30-ties to the beginning of their 40-ties. All of them had college or university education and relevant work. The discussion lasted for two hours, was recorded and transcribed as a whole. In both of the groups the author of the article and Natalia Kukarenko, who is one of the four scientists in the project the article is based on, participated.

In addition to this, two groups of Norwegian women have also seen the film. One of the groups consisted of five colleagues from Norut. The other consisted of the scientist network EMMA-nord, consisting of ten gender scientists. The point in including these groups was to have a point of reference in relation to the work with the Russian groups. However, the data from these groups is not explicitly used in the analysis.

The discussions after the showing of *Tempo* in the two Russian groups did, not surprisingly, end up having to do with the sharing of work between the adults in the home, the parents' relationship with the children and the relationship between home and work, because these were the main themes of the film. Even though Norwegianness wasn't only bound to gender equality and how one looks upon women and women's situation in society, the most central ingredient in the reflections became precisely this topic. It was in relation to gender equality and their view of women they thought they had changed consciously or completely unknowingly after they had moved to Norway. They brought up other aspects of Norwegianness as well, such as upbringing of children, school politics, packed lunch and health politics. This will not be followed up here, even though they are of interest as well, not the least because of the resistance towards them, which was rather strong, compared to the embracement of the gender equality and view of women aspects of Norwegianness. I have chosen to follow up on this in the analysis, precisely because I wish to get a grip of the effects of the dominant gender equality discourse on the construction of Norwegianness. How I define gender equality or what is included in the Norwegian gender equality policy is of no relevance here. The point is how the Russian women talk about and relate to it, or in other words, how the discourse seems constituting for their lives. From the empirical material I have analysed two different ways in which the discourse seems constituting, but the basis for both of them is a take-for-granted-ness in relation to gender equality in Norway.

The Norwegian gender equality's take-for-granted-ness is about an acceptance for the stereotypical portrayal of gender equality as a part of Norwegian culture. By their way of talking about "the Norwegian", Russian women illuminate how the interplay between politics and society has established dominating discourses that they relate to in two very different ways. While some feel pushed to equality, others use the

equality discourse as a resource in their positioning to Norwegianness. To feel that one is pushed to equality is about having uncomfortable relations to the Norwegian gender equality ideal. The environment put pressure on the Russian woman in order to make her change towards the ideal, whereas the woman herself does not want to go down that road. This feeling of un-comfort can be interpreted as resistance against a transformation process towards, or disciplining to, an unwanted Norwegianness. Here the authorities have not succeeded in the establishment of the relations between the political goals and the Russian women's conception of the good family life or a healthy motherhood.

To position oneself to Norwegianness through bringing the assumed suppression to shame seems constituting in a very different way. It includes marking oneself just as equal or free as Norwegian women. Here, knowledge of what it is to be a Norwegian woman in today's society, or maybe especially what it means to be a Norwegian middle-class woman, is shown. The Norwegianness is done in a way that works and is acknowledged, and the relations between the political goals and the Russian women's experience of the good life is established in a successful way.

The Norwegian gender equality poison

Independent of how the Norwegian-Russian couples organise their lives, they can feel equal – or not. A feeling of equality is dependent on a personal understanding of what equality means, their own and other's expectations to equality and the realism in the assessments of possibilities for equality, and how much it is desired. There is no necessary coherence between actual dividing of work and the feeling of equality in the relationship, but the dominating equality discourse has meaning for the connection between them. The feeling of equality can, therefore, be seen as an expression of how the equality discourse works as constitutional for Russian women's lives in Norway. Nina's description of how she met her Norwegian identity in Russia after five years in Norway illustrates this:

What I realise now, when I come home to Russia, is that they look at me as if I am different there also, because I have been living for so long in Norway. They don't look upon me as theirs, but as a stranger. And here (in Norway) you're also a stranger however long you've been living here.

Then I ask her: "...do you know (...) what has changed with you, or do you not realise it yourself? Is it only the others who see it?" Nina answers:

No, it's clear! It's that gender quality poison which is being noticed. When I came home after having been five years in Norway, I met my brother and his family and we ate – that's when my brother asked me whether I was going to make sandwiches for the kids, and whether I could make one for him too. Then I said: "You're not a child, you're a grown-up – so you can make it yourself". His eyes got all big, because he had expected me to do it, and that everything should be laid out on the table for the man. I experienced several of these episodes. They're only little things, but I remember how annoyed I was over the commercials! They used half naked women in the commercials, and

they had nothing to do with the product. I was so provoked by this and told my girlfriends: “How can they show this on national television!?” They didn’t understand my point. So, it is clear that when one has lived in Norway for a few years you become used to people being able to think many different thoughts and say what they want.

Nina has internalised a Norwegianness which makes her react negatively to things in Russia that she earlier didn’t see, and that her Russian girlfriends in Russia still do not see. She does this Norwegianness in Russia and experiences that family and friends don’t understand and don’t recognise her. She defines the phenomenon as a Norwegian “gender equality poison”. Without realising it she has been ‘poisoned’ by living in Norway. This ‘poison’ has made her different from her Russian background. Nobody has told her what to think or feel about gender, but by living in Norway and being surrounded by Norwegians, it has become a part of her. The dominating Norwegian gender equality discourse has worked. It has defined the borders for what is acceptable to talk about, in which way and with what authority. This is why she reacts when friends and family in Russia speak in what she sees as unacceptable ways, and also why she does not achieve acknowledgement and recognition as Russian in Russia when she talks from the Norwegian discourse.

The analysis of the empiric material circles around the Russian women’s relationship to what Nina calls Norwegian gender equality poison and what I define as the dominating gender equality discourse.

The Norwegian gender equality’s taken-for-granted-ness

According to Nina it is easy for a Russian woman to come to Norway, because gender equality is instituted as part of the upbringing of men in Norway. From childhood they are taught that they must contribute to doing chores around the house. She is thankful to Norwegian women, or at least to her mother-in-law, because her husband is the way he is. Maria agrees. She has thanked her mother-in-law many times for the fantastic job she has done with her son. Both of the women are, however, concerned that they with their Russian background can ruin this. The equality is there, but it can disappear. Elena is afraid that she contributed to this with her husband. She had grown up in a family where the father participated a lot in the home, but:

when I got to know my husband and we started to live together, I was going to clean the floor. He said: “Hold on, I’ll help you”. “Oh, no, no, no”, I said. But if I’d have been more strategic that time he might have done more today. I might have made a big mistake. I was impressed but didn’t take it any further. I didn’t agree to us cleaning together, I thought I should do it (...).

Diana feels the equality is more knocked into place. For her Norwegian women are not suppressed in the marriage: “in that case this must have been before the gender equality started for real – there was probably a difference, but that was a while back”, she says. She experiences herself as an equal part in the marriage with her Norwegian husband. The group in nodding, everyone feels equal in the family. Diana

also says that she has actually never met anyone who is not equal. Everyone in her circle of friends is.

In addition to being impressed over the level of equality of their own spouses and families in law, the Russian women let themselves be impressed by how Norwegian men apparently and openly take a part in the raising of children. They see that the situation hasn't become this way by itself, but that public policies has had much to do with it. Elena especially underlines the policies of pregnancy and birth:

I think that the system in Norway contributes to the men receiving more responsibility. (...) But here the system makes it possible for both of the parents to use these days, and then they feel like they have to do something. Not only for their partner, but also for the system – that they have to give something back.

She feels that the system in itself commits the couple to equality. They have to give something back for everything they are receiving and everything that is being arranged for them. After a discussion of the level of the policy and arrangements in Norway and in Russia, Maria concludes: "The law is maybe on the same level, but it is the social, unwritten norms and expectations which are totally different." In other words, one needs more than formal laws for them to be followed. The laws are necessary, but not enough, as Brandh and Kvande (2003) state.

Maria thinks that the consequence of the fact that there is gender equality is that nothing is established beforehand. Everything is an object of negotiation and that can be tiring. It opens up for power as a strategy, as a game between wills in the family where the outfall of the game is undecided. It's about negotiation between the parts of who is right and who can dictate the other's actions (Foucault 2002). Maria says:

That's the problem, it's equal! That is why it becomes so difficult (referring to Tempo). I think there are more consequences of what one can see here, everything is to be negotiated, nothing is set in a way. Both try to do everything well, at home and at work and together as a couple – so of this there are more consequences. One has undecided roles, therefore, one has to negotiate about everything in every situation.

For couples with two demanding jobs there will be a question of which job is most important. Both know that both jobs are important, but: "today – whose job is most important today? Right? He has that meeting, and you have that meeting", (Maria). Irina, who does not have children, thinks this sounds very tiring and that there must be a way to solve the problem with better planning. Maria reminds her that the unforeseen mostly happens when the plan is to do something else, and Irina agrees that she has a point. She sees the importance of plans being sought through and mutually withheld: "That too is gender equality. It demands a lot. Nobody said it was easy".

They experience living in a gender equal society but at the same time acknowledge that it is not necessarily making life easy. Before they arrive, they know that there is

gender equality in Norway, and they take the gender equality for granted when they move to the country. Gender equality is a power they relate to, and accordingly organise their lives. It is a discourse with disciplining effects. For some it can feel demanding and threatening, while others take advantage of the potential in it.

Pushed to equality

The experience of the massively equal Norwegian society makes some people feel pressured to act in certain ways. For those who marry Norwegians and settle down in Norway, the pressure arrives early because they come into a Norwegian family and circle of friends at once after arrival. They are thrown into what is expected by them by well-meaning Norwegian women who, with the assumption that Russian women are exposed and can be exploited by the spouse, give advice about how they should act when it comes to the husband: “In the beginning I received several comments saying I should be tough with him and let him do things” (Maria).

Elena felt the pressure from several different sides and still feels it because she wishes to prioritise time with the children. The advice was about her having to give him more control when it came to the children and let him take more responsibility with chores in the household, so that she could develop herself and her career:

When the first child wasn't even one year old, everybody started asking when I was going to start working again. I wanted to spend time with the child. I really appreciated that I could be with my son and also felt that it was very nice to be able to teach him to speak Russian at once (Elena).

Elena was questioned about why she didn't work and when she was going to start, while Nina experienced silent disparagements when it came to her choice about staying at home when the children were young:

They saw me as weak in recourses, and as a person who only drink coffee in the playground and who is too lazy to do anything, that I'm just a housewife. (...) It's like being at a party where you feel comments that aren't really meant for you, but people just say without thinking about the fact that I actually am in that situation. Then you feel these views.

It is hard to feel acceptance and acknowledgement for one's own choices and priorities under these kinds of circumstances, whilst at the same time it is hard to live up to the demands of the new home country. Norway can – of course – not offer the necessary family network to organise everyday life the way it is done in Russia. There is extra pressure, and as Nina says:

Women aren't really born to be superwomen! (...) You can feel it when you don't have grandparents or others on the side-line and close by – that's when the whole weight is put on the parents' shoulders.

The grandmother plays an important role for Russian women and their children. Because Russian women normally are very young when they have children, they

also become grandmothers at a relatively young age, and because of the early retiring age, she also has the time and possibility to engage with the grandchildren. Grandmother and other retired family members work as an active social network for the young family. This is a great loss for Russian mothers in Norway. Raising the children from a Russian perspective by oneself creates extra pressure, in addition to the pressure of work and career coming from the Norwegian society. Elena says:

I feel more obligated to take care of the children than what might be normal in Norway – it becomes the way it is in Russia. And then I think that I'm sacrificing a bit more. In Russia (...) the mother relates much easier to the fact that she needs to sacrifice something, but here I feel like I have to do everything well – both work and kids – it's a little too much. The state and wealth of the family relies on both. This is why I think the pressure is actually really great.

Elena feels it is not socially accepted in Norway to sacrifice the career for the children and has problems with the expectations of her doing well in all aspects of her life. The way she presents it, the missing social network is only a part of the problem, because if she had lived in Russia and sacrificed her career for a while, she would still be able to achieve acknowledgement. In Norway, she does not. This is why she is struggling with doing well in everything and feels pushed.

The work of building a support system around the family in Norway means, for those who have economy for it and who can take having strangers in the house, to buy services or "outsourcing of house cleaning and childcare" as Maria says. Some also have the possibility of bringing family from Russia to Norway to live with them over a period of time. Irina thinks that the new generation of women, both in Russia and in Norway, prefer to develop an external support system instead of demanding that the husband takes responsibility. Elena agrees and thinks this seems like a strategy to relieve the couple of fighting over how to share chores and responsibilities in the home. At least it is a way of relating to the push towards equality, which makes it possible to appear as gender equal within the family, but the equality discourse becomes a threat for those who wish to live a family life that corresponds to Russian ideals. Without the family network, especially the grandmother, it is up to the mother to maintain the desired standard in relation to the children. To be able to master this, her own working career must be set aside, but such a decision does not generate acknowledgement in Norway. This does not mean that there are no Norwegian women who do the same thing, but they don't get acknowledgement either. This represents wrong citing of the norms for the normal and for a foreign born this citation is bound to the norms of Norwegianness. The way the foreign born do Norwegianness is measured towards an ideal of gender equality in the family, not towards a Norwegian reality. The experience of being pushed to equality can therefore be understood as resistance towards the disciplining to a Norwegianness they don't want to be identified with. For others it works in a completely opposite way.

To bring the assumed suppression to shame

Through positioning oneself as just as equal or free as Norwegian women, the suspicion of suppression, which clings to Russian women, is brought to shame. The citation of norms happens in ways that are recognisable and acceptable for Norwegians. Maria tells us about reactions she gets when she goes to Russia:

In Russia I often get comments. I travel to Russia a lot with work, and then people ask how I work when I travel so much, and “does your husband allow you to travel so much?” “Allow??” “Yes, what does he say when you’re travelling around and meeting strange men other places? What does he do?” “He is at home taking care of the children.” “Ohhh?!!” They get shocked. It’s at a taxi driver level, right?

For her the equal life with the Norwegian husband in Norway has become a matter of course. She feels so Norwegian that she doesn’t even understand what she sees as a Russian question and thinks overall that the conversation holds a very low standard. She was done with these kinds of discussions long ago.

To underscore minimal participation in cooking, that it is a chore handed over to the husband, is a way of marking freedom from convention, especially because cooking is closely bound to the woman and mother in Russia. Irina says that she doesn’t care about what happens in the kitchen: “I don’t buy food, and everything that has the word food in it, I don’t know anything about. He has total control.” This is hard for her mother:

In Russia it is mostly women who have the responsibility for cooking. Men have some specialties they make sometimes – and there is always a huge celebration around this. But otherwise, it is women who take care of it. Very soon I got rid of those stereotypes. My husband makes food; I have no problem with that. My mother has problems with it, but that can stay her problem.

Irina is happy with her Norwegian adjustments and puts her mother’s critique of the lack of Russianness away. She does, after all, live in Norway. Also, at Maria’s it is the husband who cooks, but she wants to have control over what is being made:

(I) really care about what we are going to eat (...) But it is also difficult to balance. One wants to make comments that inspire, but not criticise - right? I’m very much like that... I try to be careful about how I say things, because suddenly he finds out that I’m criticising him, and then he can say “make it yourself” – and that’s like.... Oh, no!

She is happy with her adjustment and doesn’t want to risk the situation of her having to make the food. She is aware of the rules of the game and works on her negotiation comments. They have to be so that she maintains the control without the demand of giving back, at least not in the kitchen.

There is a considerable belief in that demanding, but flexible jobs, mean a lot for the equality and the family relations. This point of view also finds support in research in

the same field (for example Brantdh & Kvande 2003). They cannot see themselves fighting so hard, neither at home nor at work, if they had had a routine job that whoever could take over for them. Maybe they would have worked part time to get more time at home, and with such a job it would also be easier to be at home with sick children, or be at home with one's own illness. Absence would be the employer's problem, not yours. But they have demanding jobs, both the women and the men, and the negotiation about the splitting of chores in the house and outside of the house becomes negotiation on equal terms. Diana says:

(...) he said yes to long distance commuting for nine months, right. Now I say: "Now it's my turn, now it's me who's going to start a career. There is a lot of travelling, and you'll just have to accept that". And that's ok. He understands. It's not like he's the only one who is allowed to develop his job, I also get the opportunity.

This suggests a connection between class and gender equality where the free middle-class occupations make out potentially better grounds for the establishing of equality at home. It corresponds well with Skilbrei's (2004) criticism of the gender equality project's middle-class character. When the Russian women talk from this position, they can be pretty sure that they will reach out to the right recipient, and actually bring the assumed suppression to shame. The equality discourse becomes a resource for them in their making of Norwegianness. Through presentations of themselves and their family life as free and equal, acknowledgement and recognition as Norwegian in the Norwegian society is achieved. Repetitive citing of norms for a Norwegian family life includes at the same time wrong citing of the expectations Norwegians have to female Russian immigrants as minor and suppressed. Instead, they create an identity, which corresponds to the image of the Norwegian woman as free and equal. It corresponds with the middle class, which is an important norm-forming class, and contributes to build necessary trust and acknowledgement for active participation in the Norwegian society.

Co-constitution of Norwegianness and gender

A thorough, but implicit topic in this chapter has been that Norwegianness cannot be understood in and by itself, out of context. Norwegianness is created in the relation to something else. Here we have seen that Norwegianness is presented as an opposite to Russianness with the relations between women and men in the family as a central difference. It is the way the Russian women relate to their husbands that tells us that they have become more or less Norwegian. With that they do gender at the same time as they do Norwegianness, and it becomes impossible to separate the one from the other. Norwegianness and gender produce each other mutually and the nuclear family is the arena where this happens. The Russian women present themselves on the grounds of the relationship with the spouse. The relationship between children and parents is only made relevant now and again. The representation of the relationship between the spouses as equal becomes cardinal for the acknowledgement in the Norwegian society. It is much more important than having packed lunch with brown cheese, or to master and enjoy cross-country skiing.

What we see is that Norwegian politics have effects for the relations in the nuclear family without classical policy instruments, such as laws, regulations or economic initiatives, being activated. Instead, the authorities act on the will of the Russian women, on their situation and on the surroundings. The authorities have successfully created the connections between political goals about equal families and the society's conceptions about the equal life together as a couple being the good life. The image of Norway as a gender equal society meets Russian women when they cross the border. It becomes a baseline knowledge they bring in and relate to in their new relationship. For some the equality discourse is a resource in the work of creating their own Norwegian identity, for others it represents a threat of lacking recognition if they do not repeat the norms for the normal, good nuclear family.

Through production of Norwegianness and gender in the nuclear family the Russian women contribute to re-establishing the established norms for Norwegianness. In this way they are transformed rapidly from immigrants to Norwegians, which is a political goal, but they do not contribute to another political goal, namely diversification of what it means to be Norwegian. In the governing of Russian marriage migrants' establishing of Norwegianness, the gender equality regime has gained precedence for the diversity regime, and gender equality is maintained as a fundamental value in the Norwegian society.