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Identities and cultural orientations of Russian-speaking women in the process of transnational marriage migration to the Netherlands

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Introduction

Transnational marriage migration as a result of which one of the partners moves to create a family with a citizen of the reception country, is an interesting research case for several reasons. Firstly, compared with other types of unions, “mixed” marriages are characterized by differences between the partners in the cultural sense: in ethnicity, religion, national identity, cultural practices, media socialization, etc. Researchers study in which cases a unique family environment leads to reciprocal hybridization and intercultural exchange, and in which it leads to assimilation [Collet, 2015; Scott, Cartledge, 2009].

Secondly, transnational marriage migration has a number of specific peculiarities in comparison to other types of migration. Migrants may not be included in the communities and transnational networks formed by migrants from the countries of origin. Through the partner, marriage migrants gain access to various resources (language practice, information support, a special type of legalization, partial or full financial support, etc.) and support networks in the country of reception, which is formed by the relatives and friends of the partner in the first stage. Such migrants may possess certain characteristics that distinguish them from other types of migrants, in terms of their integration. Indeed, several studies have confirmed that migrants from mixed marriages are more integrated [Furtado, Song, 2015; Scott, Cartledge, 2009]. Meanwhile, a growing body of research demonstrates the lack of an unambiguous interconnection between the experience of living in a mixed marriage and the integration of the migrating partner [Alba, Foner, 2015; Rodriguez-Garcia, 2006; Rodriguez-Garcia et al., 2015], and also explores how integration can be understood and how this process can be measured [Rodriguez-Garcia, 2015].

In our study, focused on the marriage migration of Russian-speaking women to the Netherlands, we examine the cultural specificity of these unions in terms of integration. Particular attention will be paid to women's identities, gender beliefs, everyday cultural practices, and their involvement in various friendship and kinship networks formed in the country of reception, as well as to the contextual conditions in which migrants spend their lives. The main questions of this study, therefore, are: *What cultural orientations (cultural practices, identification, language use) are constructed in the process of marriage migration, and why? What cultural scenarios (e.g., cultural exchange, acculturation) are generated? What are the tendencies observed in terms of the integration of marriage migrants into the host society?*

Transnational marriage migration: integration and cultural exchange

A variety of terms are used to indicate marriages and unions in which one of the spouses/ partners is an external migrant or a member of a cultural minority, for example: mixed/ bi-national/ bi-cultural/ transnational marriage/ intermarriage, and such terms as “mixed unions” and “mixed couple” make it possible to get away from the consideration of only relations that are officially formalized [Alba, Foner, 2015; Brahic, 2013; Collet, 2012; Rodriguez-Garcia, 2015]. There are also

the terms traditionally used to refer to marriages within one's own group and between members of different groups – “endogamy” and “exogamy”, respectively [Rodriguez-Garcia, 2006].

Researchers who have an interest in mixed unions, look for answers to the wide range of issues and ask what determines the choice of a foreign partner and what mechanisms underlie mixed marriages [Górny, Kępińska, 2004; Maffioli, Paterno, Gabrielli, 2014; Niedomysl, Östh, Ham van, 2010]. From the one perspective, several studies have examined what distinctiveness allows us to consider them as special cases, possessing their own unique characteristics, which differ from other pairs. From another perspective, a partnership in mixed unions is considered more as one of the types of migration scenarios, which are described and analyzed within various approaches to migration, such as the integration approach. [Brahic, 2013].

Cultural specificities of mixed marriages

The study of mixed couples in terms of their cultural specificity gives an opportunity to observe new forms of everyday interaction, lifestyle, and identification. The everyday practices and perception of the pairs may gain hybrid traits, cultural compromise becomes a part of daily life [Brahic, 2013], cultural changes in the course of a marriage can lead to different types of biculturalism [Vasquez, 2014].

Collet [2012] criticizes the study of mixed couples which are focused only on the ethnic, religious and other cultural distinctions, as well as on the process of transcultural hybridization. From her point of view, sociological analysis can not be complete if it does not include consideration of the gender roles of the partners and their class positions. She proposes to use a special term “mixedness” for emphasizing a departure from the study of types of cultural diversity of mixed couples to the analysis of cultural specificities in the context of inequalities, possibly existing between partners. Class positions, gender roles and social context can have a greater impact on family life and changes in everyday practices and relationships than cultural differences. The study of the social context involves the consideration of various mechanisms through which inequality between partners is fixed or reproduced. For example, the asymmetry of the legal status of partners is reflected in the fact that one of the partners has citizenship, while the other is obliged to obtain permission for legal residence in the country and faces many limitations in various spheres such as in search of work and the process of employment, in use of the banking sector, in political participation and other aspects. The ethnic and “racial” status of partners can also be the basis of unequal access to resources related to discrimination and stigmatization and affect family relationships. The status of a partner's language may have a direct influence on the choice of language of communication within the family and outside it, as well as various kinds of communication and its consequences. For the study of “mixedness,” it is important to focus not only on observed differences in nationality, names, religions, and cultural practices, but also on the identities of partners and their self-perceptions.

Mutual adjustment takes various social forms: one of the partners may adapt to the main cultural characteristics of the dominant culture and the minority culture, or partners may form a new family lifestyle through reciprocal, social, gender and cultural exchange, which results in the formation of a new urbanized and globalized social stratum which is more mobile and less related to the local and national context [Collet, 2012; Collet, 2015].

Integration perspective

In migration studies, mixed unions have been traditionally assigned a special place. According to the classical concept of assimilation of M. Gordon, migrants must pass seven stages to complete the merger with the dominant group, assimilation, which is the optimal scenario of migrant adaptation. Migrants begin to adapt to a new country with cultural or behavioral assimilation and gradually lose their distinctive ethnic features, the cultural characteristics of their community and cease to use the native language in everyday communication. According to his model, marital assimilation, the process by which there are an increasing number of marriages with the local populations, is the third stage of a linear process [Gordon, 1964]. The straight-line assimilation theory has been criticized for various reasons. New approaches have taken into account the peculiarities of the environment of the receiving community, for example, social class and social segmentation of the host society [Portes, Rumbaut, 2001; Portes, Zhou, 1993; Of Zhou, 1997] and characteristics of the migrants themselves for describing the optimal scenario. In other cases they have criticized the limitations of the consideration of migrants only in the country of reception, whereas modern migrants are transnational [Glick Schiller, Basch, Blanc-Szanton, 1992; Levitt, Jaworsky, 2007].

In order to describe the life paths of migrants in the reception country, new terms are more likely to be used. The term “integration” became the most popular, which is less tinged by the US experience, and more ideologically neutral, better to take into account how migration affects not only the lives and characteristics of migrants but also the host society [FitzGerald, 2014].

The popular questions in the research studying the mixed couples within an integration perspective, seek to understand how migrants in mixed couples integrate into the host society, compared with endogamous unions, in which differences in the trajectories of integration exist, whether it is possible to consider a mixed marriage as a mechanism of social integration.

There are studies that demonstrate the potential for integration of mixed marriages [Furtado, Song, 2015], but much modern work shows that it is impossible to state that there is a definite positive interconnection between intermarriage and the processes of social integration [Alba, Foner, 2015; Rodriguez-Garcia et al., 2015]. For example, in a study conducted in Catalonia, immigrants in exogamous (couples of immigrant with partner, born in Spain) and endogamous unions (couples in which both partners are immigrants) have been studied [Rodriguez-Garcia et al., 2015]. The study focused on indicators such as the command of the language of the country of reception, social embeddedness, operationalized as the structure of the respondent's personal networks and social

capital, as well as identification with the dominant culture and the host society. The results showed a segmented relationship between intermarriage and integration. Differences in the degree of integration could depend on other factors such as country of origin, gender, or duration of residence in the country of reception, instead of the endogamy and exogamy union.

We will consider the cultural specificity of mixed partnerships, focusing on methodological ideas proposed by Collet [2012], and also analyze what tendencies of cultural exchange are observed. We also consider the couples in the context of the integration perspective, meaning integration as the orientation of migrants toward the society of residence in order to acquire full inclusion [Rodriguez-Garcia et al., 2015, p.224]. The question of what is the optimal scenario of building the life trajectories of migrants is very difficult, especially given that we have carried out research on the early stages of marriage migration. Therefore, we use the integration perspective only in order to put the cases studied by us in the field of marriage migration studies. It gives us an opportunity, if not to make a comparison, but, at least, to analyse the similarities and differences in the observed trends.

Methods and sample

The empirical base of the study is interviews with Russian-speaking women (countries of origin: Russia / Ukraine / Belarus), living with a Dutch partner in the Netherlands or planning to move to live with him. Fieldwork was conducted in the spring of 2014.

We are interested in the process of marriage migration which is not subject to formal control by documents, particularly in the case of those who are still planning to migrate, so we used the snowball method for sampling. According to Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, gathering marriage statistics is problematic and can almost not be analyzed because the marriage may be contracted outside of the host country [Beck-Gernsheim, 2007].

Women who moved to the Netherlands were recruited in the social network „Vkontakte” in the popular community oriented to Russian-speaking married women in the Netherlands. Women, who planned to move and who were engaged in preparation, were recruited through a community oriented towards people planning to take an exam required for migration to the Netherlands. For choosing respondents we took into account several biographical indicators, such as age, marital status and immigration status. We interviewed only young women, who had no children together with a Dutch partner, who decided to immigrate to the partner or had already moved. In the case of women who lived in the Netherlands, we interviewed only those who had moved less than a year before the interview.

16 women were interviewed. 8 of them were still in their home countries, and 8 had already moved to the Netherlands to their partners. The age of respondents ranged from 23 to 31 (mean age is 25).

Some women, who were still preparing for moving abroad, had had the experience of living with their partners in the Netherlands. Therefore, within the

process of analysis we did not compare the two groups according to their current place of living at the time of the interview. We took into consideration the presence or lack of experience of long stays in the country of reception. The description of respondents will include information about their migration status (after/ before migration), but the presence of living experience in the Netherlands we mention specially.

The marital status of respondents was diverse and divided into “Single”, “Engaged”, “Registered Partnership” and “Married”. The women who at the time of the interview had already migrated, had lived in the Netherlands from 3 to 10 months (see description of the respondents in “Description of the respondents” section).

The interviews were conducted via online calls using Skype. Interviews were conducted in Russian and took from forty minutes to one and a half hours.

All respondents had a university degree (bachelor's, master's or specialist), except one woman who was completing her education at the time of interview. Communication with their partner in all cases started in English. None of the women had spoken Dutch before they met their partner, similarly, none of the Dutch partners spoke Russian. In some cases, the English of some of the women in the early stage of the relationship was not very fluent. The main scenarios of acquaintance were via initial contact on the Internet or within a tourist trip of one of the partners. In one case, the Dutch partner participated in a student exchange program. In most cases, the partner has a university degree, or is studying for one, at the time of the interview, but in some cases, the partner has only a vocational education or graduated from specialized courses.

None of the women planned to immigrate to the Netherlands before contact with their partner. Moreover, some women emphasized that their resettlement was forced, explaining it by the fact that it is easier for them to adapt to the Netherlands with their knowledge of English and having other skills and competences than it would be for their partners moving to Russia.

Migration Regulations in the Netherlands

The Dutch government “sticks to the basics of restrictive migration policy” [Denisenko, Kharaeva, Chudinovskikh, 2003]. According to information provided by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (<https://ind.nl>), before moving to the Netherlands immigrants should have a basic knowledge of the Dutch language, and be familiar with the history of the country and its system. Such knowledge is verified by a special exam, which takes places in the country of residence of the migrant. The exam, in turn, is one of the conditions for obtaining a provisional residence permit - Machtiging tot Voorlopig Verblijf, or abbreviated MIV. This type of visa is necessary to obtain a temporary residence permit in the Netherlands - Verblijfsvergunning. These procedures are performed by migrants in order to have an opportunity to stay in the Netherlands for more than three months.

The exam requires considerable time and material resources. After submitting the online application to the service for immigration and naturalization, you must transfer 350 euros to a special bank account in the Netherlands. The date and time of the examination are appointed in the Dutch Embassy or General Consulate after paying the examination fee. During preparation for the exam, candidates use the training package “Naar Nederland” that costs about 64 euros.

In addition, in the case of marriage migration, there is a requirement to prove the financial competence of the partner. This measure was restrictive for a large percentage of people who were planning this kind of migration to the Netherlands from countries that are not members of the EU. This problem is described in detail in the article Dutch researchers Leerkes A. and A. Kulu-Glasgow “In the Netherlands, the income requirement for ‘family formation’ was raised in 2004 from 100% to 120% of the minimum wage, potentially excluding about thirty percent of the working population from eligibility” [Leerkes, Kulu-Glasgow, 2011, p. 95].

Features for obtaining of citizenship are based on the country of origin of migrants, but the general requirement is the need to stay in the Netherlands for a period of three to five years with the current residence permit. Obtaining dual citizenship is possible only in a few cases and requiring special proof.

Thus, marriage migration is a very time-consuming process that requires substantial financial and time resources, as well as obtaining special knowledge.

Results of the study

Ethnicities and Identities

We have studied identity in the context of discursive psychology - an approach that is considered as a generalized one for the group of social-constructivist approaches in psychology [Phillips, Jorgensen, 2004; Edley, 2001]. In terms of this approach, identities construct and change in permanent interaction with the social world [Phillips, Jørgensen, 2004]. The processes of social categorization and comparison are central in the construction of identities [Varjonen, Arnold, Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2013, p. 112]. Studies have focused on how social categories are defined and used in social interaction, and on the self-comparison with the “significant others” and contrasting oneself with “others”.

For describing themselves respondents in our research use the categories referring to the ethnic/ national identity - “ girls from Russia”, “Russians”, “Ukrainians”, “Belarusians” as well as to a pan-ethnic (“Slavs”) and linguistic community (“Russian-speaking”).

The narratives of women reflect the view of a culturally homogeneous imagined community of Russian-speaking residents from the former Soviet Union with a common tradition or a similar way of life and, what is much more important, speaking in Russian: “*Well, now, now I am associating with Russians* (in the

Netherlands – authors' note). *That's, well, not even Russians; all are Russians, all who are even Ukrainians, Belarusians, Kazakhstan - they are all Russians. All are Russian-speaking, so I call them Russians*" (Resp. №7, before migration, 24).

The "Russian" category is a supra-ethnic and outside-country characteristic. This is how, for example, the other respondent described her friend, with whom she met in the Netherlands: *"A Russian girl. She was a child when she moved to the Netherlands with her parents in 1991 because they were Jews"* (Resp. №3, before migration, 24). Her friend is a Russian for the responder in spite of the ethnic Jewish history of her family that determined the direction and the reasons for their migration. She uses the term "Russian" as a supra-ethnic category.

For describing the characteristics of their community (Slavs, Russians, Russian-speaking, etc), stereotypical statements are used that reflect the idea of a specific "Russian character" and "mentality". These specific features include the ability to struggle for life, a stout character: *"Our life is harder, you need..., if you are not used to extricating yourselves from a difficult situation, to survive since childhood that then will be difficult in the future ... well, when somebody has a rest and says: "Oh, I am tired only from work", this situation, in principle, we have rarely"* (Resp. №2, before migration, 23). This quotation traces to the widespread beliefs that character traits are formed in the process of socialization in certain conditions which are specific to the country of origin.

The ideas of ethnic peculiarities are used to explain the differences in the practices of friendship between their imagined community and the Dutch. Many respondents share the view that it is difficult or impossible to make friends with the Dutch: *"Friendship in the Netherlands is not as widespread occurrence as we, Slavs, have. Therefore, with our mentality, our sociability, and with our open mind, it seems to me, that we still need to associate with their own kind"* (Resp. №2, before migration, 23).

Despite the fact that many women shared ideas about some common ethnic features and peculiarities of behavior, we can assert that the narratives of women who have had the experience of living in the Netherlands (the first group), are ethnicized more than narratives of women in the pre-migration stage and with little experience of living with a partner (the second group). This fact manifests itself through the tendency to interpret in ethnic categories a wide range of events, actions, patterns of behavior and characteristics of people, as well as to describe the inhabitants of the Netherlands negatively, to contrast the positive ethnic "we" with negative "they": *"Russian people are much deeper than the Dutch and worry more about each other, sympathize more with each other"* (Resp. №10, after migration, 25). The Dutch can be described as selfish people who live for themselves (Resp. №11, after migration, 24), who are not used to helping others (Resp. №12, after migration, 28); a display of their friendship can be perceived as *"affected, a little insincere"* (Resp. №9, after migration, 25). It is important that such a negative characterization of the Dutch is frequently given to explain some of the difficulties that women face, living in the Netherlands. In other words, integration problems are described by women using ethnic categories, for example, it is hard to find a job, but their Dutch acquaintances do not give any help; it is hard to find friends because the Dutch share different attitudes about

friendship, *“the process of migration to this country was an arduous time for me, and I can not say that a lot of people sympathize with me here”* (Resp. №10, after migration, 25).

Among the narratives of the second group of women, ethnicized interpretations of their own/ others' experiences and integration prospects are also found, but they mostly concern the issues of gender representations, understanding the history of love and interaction with a partner. However, along with this, the identification of themselves as a citizen of a large/ small town and their professional identification is most relevant. For example, the difficulties faced by a woman, who has extensive experience in a variety of changes of place of residence, are not explained by country or ethnic characteristics, but by the features associated with the size of the settlement: *“I always have a propensity to some travel, relocation, I always can not stay in one place. So it was that I lived in Moscow a year, and a year in St. Petersburg, and then I moved to Yaroslavl and stayed here because I do not like a big city, I like small towns. (...) That's why I love small towns, so I love Amsterdam”* (Resp. №8, before migration, 25). The Netherlands is not considered as a homogeneous country in terms of the characteristics of its inhabitants, it includes residents of towns and cities with their lifestyles and identities. In the opinion of these women, resettlement to a foreign city which has the proportions they prefer, seems to be easier than moving within the country but to a settlement, which is not liked: *“It is good that I am not going to a small town. Firstly, I would probably not have survived after Moscow, in this countryside, where nothing happens”* (Resp. №6, before migration, 24). These two quotes are about moving to Amsterdam, which is described as a city that has positive features and is suitable for moving, but for the first woman these features are associated with its small size, and for the second with the fact that it is not perceived as small.

Another important category of identity which women with little experience of living in the Netherlands refer to, is a profession. In this context, an interview with an actress of the Moscow musical theater is very interesting. She makes reference to the fact that she is an actress, talking about different aspects of life - giving reason for the choice of a friend in the Netherlands, describing the impossibility of moving to the Netherlands completely, explaining the initial attitudes of the parents' partner to her: *“The actress, it means that such thoughts appear immediately, that is what this profession is, it is vulgar or not vulgar, I do not know exactly what thoughts they had”* (Resp. №3, before migration, 24).

Prejudices and discrimination

Marriage migration is one of the types of migration that is most subjected to criticism from the host society, especially when foreign partners move to countries that are more economically developed than the countries of origin and when partners meet through various mediators, such as marriage agencies, websites and advertisements [Heyse, 2010; Lemish, 2000]. In our study, respondents perceive themselves as a stigmatized group, indicating their familiarity with the image of mercenary Russian-speaking women transmitted through the mass media: *“...everyone thinks that Russia is almost a third world country. Right now we have a broadcast, called “From Russia With Love”, it is about Russian girls*

and Dutch boys and about the fact that Russian girls come here for passports, for money and for fun, and poor Dutch boys have to support all these” (Resp. №10, after migration, 25).

In addition, they also describe their experiences with discrimination and prejudices, including from some relatives of the partner, *“his dad...he initially kept saying that like: ‘Look, these Eastern European girls are just dreaming to find a groom from West Europe’” (Resp. №4, before migration, 23),* and the experience faced by other women from the former Soviet Union: *“associating here with Russian girls, well, with Russian, Ukrainian girls, I have heard from many of them, that umm, well, that there are disparaging attitudes toward them” (Resp. №7, before migration, 24).*

Repeated experiences of discrimination may underlie the construction of ethnicity, that, for example, manifests itself in the refusal of American identification, observed in some second-generation migrants in America [Portes, Rivas, 2011]. In studies conducted in different European countries, it has been shown that Russian-speaking migrant women in some European countries are not only familiar with the shared negative stereotype of Russian women who have moved to developed European countries with economic and other pragmatic goals, but are also trying to distance themselves from that image. Women emphasize the importance of the romantic reasons for moving, and contrast themselves with the people, whose behavior and actions form the basis of the stigmatized image of Russian-speaking women transmitted through the media and in some cases shared by locals [Heyse, 2010; Säävälä, 2010]. In our study, it also highlights the romantic reasons for migration, and, in some cases, respondents contrast themselves with women who were deliberately looking for a foreign partner: *“I never wanted, I never wanted to live in Europe! I’ve always liked, well, I always liked Piter (St. Petersburg - authors’ note). I did not seek, you know, to find some foreign boyfriend, as many women did there, whom I know” (Resp. №16, after migration, 25).*

Even those women who met their partner on the English-language dating sites, indicated that they did not have the goal to get acquainted with a foreigner and even much less to move to him: *“There are, of course, plenty of options for meeting, but I did not have such a purpose, that is, I did not intend to make an acquaintance. That, consequently, is how we met. So we began to correspond precisely with the purpose of learning English” (Resp. №11, after migration, 24).* In this example, it is called the common reason for acquaintance via the Internet, mentioned by the respondents - learning English. Heyse in the study of Russian-speaking women in Belgium distinguishes between two main ways that they use to describe the motives for choosing a foreign partner, both of which are used to legitimize the choice, and highlight the good faith of both. Women either explain this by ethnic reasons, for example, by the fact that the Russian-speaking women are more family-oriented than the Belgian ones or the second group of women points to the motives of romantic love. In our study, there is no such differentiation. Although some partners, according to respondents, deliberately carried out a search for a Russian-speaking wife, all women assert that they were not focused on the choice of just a foreign partner. But even if the meeting is not perceived as ethnically motivated, ethnic stereotypical features of women can be articulated as

significant and important in family life. In the next part, the issue of the intersection of ethnicity and gender will be considered in more detail.

Genders and ethnicities

Transnational marriage migration involves not only the replacement of the gender discursive contexts, but also building a family relationship with a partner who may have different cultural patterns of behavior and family values, especially if the countries differ in terms of dominant gender contracts [Kasymova, 2010].

Gender contracts that regulate the distribution of duties for the management of household affairs, rules of behavior and family relationships, have country-specific characteristics and change in different historical periods within the same state [Temkina, 2008; Temkina, Rotkirkh, 2002]. Russia has a number of significant differences compared to European countries, both at the level of gender ideology and politics, and at the level of everyday gender practices [Rodin, Åberg, 2014]. Since the 60s, in Western Europe and America a new type of fatherhood has been developed, which is characterized by a tendency towards equality of relationships between men and women in the family, as well as their functions. In particular, the Dutch model of active fathering has developed both in the private as well as everyday areas. However, in terms of ideology and implemented gender equality policies, the Netherlands is a controversial case. On the one hand, it is labelled as one of the countries with a rooted strong male-breadwinner model, the characteristics of which include the prevalence of underemployment among women, a clear distinction of the area of responsibilities between the family and the state, the implementation of the functions of “patriarchal control” by institutions in the public sphere [Bussemaker, 2000]. On the other hand, affirmative action policy for women and a number of other indicators, which characterize the Netherlands, determine it as a woman-friendly state [Gardiner, Leyenaar, 2000]. Research of the Russian case suggests rootedness from the Soviet time of a “weak” male-breadwinner model, i.e. the prevalence of households with two breadwinners, but the participation of men in care of the household and performing childcare remains low [Kravchenko, Motiejunaite, 2008]. This is consistent with the peculiarities of gender ideologies of the post-Soviet time. In Russia in the post-Soviet period, a transformation of gender contracts occurred and they acquired traits of neo-traditionalism [Zdravomyslova, Temkina, 2003]. Thus, the neo-liberal ideology of gender traditionalism is based on conflicting beliefs about the equality of women and men, on the one hand, and about the inherent differences between the sexes that determine their characteristics, destinies and career opportunities, on the other. In contrast to the “classical” traditionalism, this ideology includes ideas that a woman's destiny involves not only the performance of her role as a housewife, but also the availability of a wide range of other options, for example, the combination of housekeeping with earning money for the family budget.

Analysis of gender representations makes it possible to divide respondents into two groups. The differences lie in the generally more ethnicized narratives of the first group of women, in building clear ethnic boundaries with Dutch women, compared with the second group. These differences do not depend on the presence and duration of the experience of staying in the Netherlands. The first

group reproduces the contradictory ideas of neo-liberal gender traditionalism. Women share a value of self-realization or building their own careers as well as ideas about the role of women as responsible for housekeeping. Women in this group have positioned this family model as having a national specificity and contrast themselves with Dutch women: *“Their girls (the Dutch women – authors’ note), as for me, and how Rood told me, do not need a family much, they are their own commanders, that is what they want, that they do. They can not cook, do not clean, do not do anything in the apartment, well, at home, do not keep house... I think that a girl should have time to do housework and that, I do not know, should either work, or have any hobbies”* (Resp. №2, before migration, 23). The respondent believes that housekeeping is an essential duty of a woman, as well as professional or organized activities. Employment can often be seen as just an activity that is comparable to a hobby at least by the motivation of being involved in these activities: *“Of course, I’m going to work, because otherwise you can go crazy from sitting at home”* (Resp №10, after migration 25).

The “working mother” contract, dominant in Soviet times, implied that the woman is responsible for the household and the economic welfare of the family. The modern version of the contract is less monolithic, in the sense that it may have different features, such as class-specific differences. For example, the family of the young educated middle class in Russia build a strategy of pragmatic egalitarianism, which implies the existence of egalitarian values of the partners, along with the reproduction of the traditional division of gender roles in the private sphere [Chernova, 2013]. Representation of women in our examples rather reflect practices and standards included in one of the types of post-Soviet reconfiguration of the “working mother” contract, in which the emphasis is put, not on the women's job or earnings, but on their mandatory self-development.

As in other studies [Temkina 2008; Heyse, 2010], respondents of this group believe that they have personal and valuable features that distinguish them advantageously from Western women in terms of their attractiveness to men. According to the respondents, the most important characteristics that are in demand in the marriage market, and which are inherent to Russian-speaking women, are the focusing on family and relationships to a greater extent than on building individual careers and realising their desires, as well as the perception of man as a “family leader” (Resp. №11, after migration, 24) as opposed to the more egalitarian attitudes and values of Dutch women. The legitimization of such a position can be carried out through an appeal to the opinion of the reference group, in this case - to the opinions and practices of male friends of her husband: *“And all of his friends want to visit our house very much ... I think that all the Dutch girls, they are very busy with work, even the boys come and complain about their girls that they are busy with work, that they do not generally have time to go to the cinema. So they are always at work, always in something”* (Resp. №8, before migration, 25).

From the responders' opinions, Russian-speaking women are more “feminine” than Dutch, not only in terms of attitudes and values, but also a special appearance such as a clothing style. They associate feminine clothes with a predominance of skirts and dresses and shoes with heels in clothes. A special style of clothing can be used as a resource for the construction of ethnic identity,

for the maintenance of boundaries between their own and other ethnic groups [Ger, Østergaard, 1998; Vihalemm, Keller, 2011]. Study of T. Vihalemm and M. Keller makes it possible to distinguish two interpretative repertoires through which Estonian and Russian young consumers are represented in the Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking narratives of the Estonian residents - the ethnic belonging repertoire and the consumerist repertoire. Interpretative repertoires are conceptualized within discursive psychology as relatively distinct ways of speaking about objects and events in the world, they provide the basis for social understanding shared by social groups, they permit realisation of the limitations that exist in the construction of self and others [Phillips, Jorgensen, 2004; Edley, 2001; Varjonen, Arnold, Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2013]. The ethnic belonging repertoire, in contrast to the consumerist repertoire, is based on ideas, according to which ethnicity is a key factor influencing lifestyle and appearance [Vihalemm, Keller, 2011]. One of the specific varieties of this repertoire is a sub-repertoire of ethnic mentality, which consists of references to the “mentality” and supposedly deep-rooted cultural differences between Estonians and Russians when respondents explained the perceived differences in their styles of clothing. In our study, the informants in this group also shared ideas about rooted ethnic differences in clothing consumption, and in some cases indicate a change in their own style in the direction of its ethnicization, which occurred after the experience of the visits and living in the Netherlands: *“I say: ‘I’m Russian, in Russia all the girls are beautiful, all are well-groomed, all of them wear dresses’ ... I can’t let myself do what a European woman does”* (Resp. №8, before migration, 25). Women can take these features as extremely important for their marriage - related to expectations of their husbands from the Russian-speaking wife: *“I’m not going to assimilate there or something else, because, and because Rude chose me as a Ukrainian woman”* (Resp. №2, before migration, 23).

The representations of the second group of women are not based on intersection of gender and ethnicity when they describe family relationships and self-identity. For this group in family issues and self-representation the other self-explanatory scheme is significant such as youth, professional, contextual reasons, for example, the necessity of living in a new country. Respondents from this group can sometimes represent ethnic repertoires when they speak on various topics, such as adaptation, or they may share the stereotypical negative images of the Dutch. Here we are only talking about the absence of the intersection of gender and ethnic self-representations.

Education and profession

Respondents typically indicate professional employment as a significant indicator of success of the individual. The significance of professional satisfaction collocates with the articulation of education values. The emphasis on the education of Russian women is one of the key elements in the self-identification strategies. For instance, an answer of one of the women on the question about the level of education was: *“Of course, higher education”* (Resp. №4, before migration, 23).

Education is one of the most important criteria dividing between “us” and those who belong to the other circle, regardless of whether they talk about women or

men. The respondent speaks of her husband's friends: *"those people with whom he was friends, well not exactly was a friend, but dealt with, just dealt with, they seemed strange to me, because they are no match for him, you know? That is, there are people without any aspirations, without any education there"* (Resp. №4, before migration, 23).

The topic of the education of Russian women has surfaced in discussions on various issues. For example, women noted that when they chose a partner, they paid attention to his level of education and it was important to deciding whether to continue the relationship. Education in some cases is used as a characteristic that has an ethnic/ national specificity. Women who talk about the rich cultural heritage of the country of origin, mean mainly high culture (literature, painting, and other fields of art). Education acts as a national value, bearing relation to "Russian culture". Respondents believe that they socialized in a special environment, which affected their erudition and other features that differentiate Russian-speaking women from the others: *"... we have a very rich culture and that is why foreigners are choosing Russian women, because we all are very versatile"* (Resp. №14, after migration, 23).

Many women describe the history of their migration as an experience of self-sacrifice, which led to downward professional mobility for the reunion with a loved one. Respondents said that they had to leave skilled work, realizing that without the language and without validation of their diploma, it is not easy, or in some cases impossible, to receive a similar position or positions corresponding to their level of education in the Netherlands: *"... for me it is a little bit (...) step back on the career ladder"* (Resp. №14, after migration, 23). These examples can also be seen in the context of trying to distance themselves from the image of the Russian-speaking mercantile bride.

Women who have been engaged in low-skilled labor in the Netherlands, mentioned this as an insignificant fact of their biography, emphasizing that it is *"a job for the first period"* (Resp. №9, after migration, 25).

Due to dissatisfaction with their positions in the Dutch labor market, Russian-speaking women attempt to improve their skills to return to the professional status which was lost. Respondents began to attend various educational programs: from short-term language courses to Dutch universities. Motivation to get an education may be associated not only with professional aspirations but also with the ideas of self-improvement.

Cultural orientations

All informants studied Dutch or planned to learn it to perfection, as well as to use it in everyday communication: *"Yes, I will not be ashamed to speak. I understand that I will need to learn Dutch perfectly, if I plan to stay there to live, and live the rest of my life"* (Resp. №2, before migration, 23). The main reason for the fact that all the women study the Dutch language is related to the procedure of migration to the Netherlands described above, which requires passing of a specialized exam. However, many respondents, regardless of their degree of proficiency in the Dutch language, continued to use English to communicate with their partner.

Women on the pre-migration stage stated their readiness for cultural integration in the country of reception: *"But about myself I can say that of course, I will try to understand the traditions of this country as much as possible"* (Resp. №6, before migration, 24). However, none of the respondents aspire to full acculturation for both themselves and their future children: *"the family we have is international and it will remain the same, and the children will speak at least Dutch and Russian"* (Resp. №10, after migration, 25).

After migration, many women began to celebrate the holidays and events which are of importance for the inhabitants of the Netherlands, but at the same time continued to celebrate some Russian holidays. It is usually that the Dutch partners are familiarized with cultural practices through negotiations and by the initiative of the women: *"... I have taught them to eat soup, a whole family"* (Resp. №16, after migration, 25).

In some cases, it met with resistance and led to conflicts. This is particularly evident in the stories about the celebration of "8th March". This day for some informants is of great importance because the tradition of greeting women correlates with the representations of femininity and attractiveness for men: *"...when my husband saw my tears, he was surprised, what is this celebration about? Well, in general, he said he does not know this holiday. And I said that now you have to know it because you have a Russian wife"* (Resp. №12, after migration, 28).

There is a cultural exchange that occurs in families. It concerns not only the holidays and cuisine, but also other spheres of everyday interaction and consumption. However, in some cases, respondents indicated the ethnicization of some of their daily practices, compared with what they did in the country of origin. For example, they began to listen to the Russian-language broadcasts that they had never heard before, watching the Russian-language channel: *"In fact, before I have never watched those programs that I watch now. For example, even now not only about the TV but about the radio...now I actually get a huge thrill out of it. In the past, I would never have listened, but now it is very native and enhances the mood"* (Resp. №14, after migration, 23).

The same tendency can be found in other areas, such as reading Russian-language literature: *"by the way, I started reading a lot of Russian classics here"* (Resp. №15, after migration 30). Together with interest in Russian-language programs, and in some cases in other news resources, the level of interest in the political process has intensified. In particular, some informants became interested in the relations between Russia and Ukraine, which have been associated with the Crimea issues and concomitant events. If respondents who were at the pre-migration stage had mostly only superficial understanding of the ongoing situation, some women living in the Netherlands, were well informed and had a clear position on this issue.

Measuring social embeddedness

Marriage migration is a specific form of migration because the foreign partner, through a spouse, has the opportunity to be included in the network of local residents. In our case, in the early stages, this trend was actually found and

women quite quickly became acquainted with their partner's parents. In all cases, relatives have provided and continue to provide a warm welcome and assistance, to the extent that one couple started to live in the house of the partner's parents together with them. Even if in the beginning, according to respondents, relatives showed ethnic prejudices, they then reviewed their attitudes and by time of the interview they spoke of them very positively.

All respondents did not describe the behavior and characteristics of family members in ethnic categories, they are not considered as typical Dutch, and the positive experiences and interactions with them are not extrapolated beyond the family: *"And parents, you know, are 'golden' really. I have met now a lot of Dutch people because of work, well, they are very difficult people. And they, you know, accepted me as a daughter, and they keep helping"* (Resp. №16, after migration, 25).

Many of the women interact with their partner's parents on a regular basis, but this communication is not perceived as forming Dutch friendship networks:

R.: "That is, in fact, that, of course, I do not have friends here. I associate with his family."

I.: Yeah.

R.: The wife of his brother helps me" (Resp. №12, after migration, 28).

Many women, who have had the experience of living in the Netherlands, at the time of the interview mostly associate with Russian-speaking migrants and mixed couples. Sometimes women are specially looking for Russian-speaking friends on the Internet, but often it happens by accident, for example, at work or in the preparation for the Dutch proficiency test.

This could be facilitated by the stereotypes that we have described above, associated with the perception of the features of Dutch friendship: *"But people who are exactly locals, they do not go to the contact at all, they are mostly kept their group, they do not want to have a contact"* (Resp. №8, before migration, 25).

Conclusion

The study of Russian-speaking women, who have moved, or are planning to move, to the Netherlands to their Dutch partner, makes it possible to contribute to the discussion on the specifics of transnational migration from the point of view of two theoretical perspectives. On the one hand, we study the cultural characteristics of these unions, analyze how cultural practices and identity are formed and transformed in the process of the migration experience. On the other hand, we try to analyze their specificity in the context of integration trends.

For some integration approaches, for prediction of the life trajectories of migrants, it is important to examine in which social segment they are incorporated and what is their social environment [Portes, Rumbaut, 2001; Portes, Zhou, 1993]. In these socio-economic terms, the migrant women have a good starting position - they and their husbands are educated, have work experience or work, and the emigration process, according to migration law of the Netherlands, involves the

financial viability of the Dutch partner. In addition, the study of the Dutch language is essential to stay for a long time in the country.

In our study, we do not see a loss of cultural features or the development of acculturation strategies. We found trends that can be described as the formation of hybrid cultural patterns. Despite the cultural compromise which is inherent to some extent for all families, at the level of identification and certain cultural practices, we observe, in some cases, the tendency of ethnicization, which is based on the fact that the respondents begin to interpret a wide range of events and situations in ethnic categories, to actualize ethnic features and differences, as well as to form orientation of the national culture - read literature in Russian, watch and listen to programs in Russian, and to be interested in Russian-language news. Transmitted and shared negative beliefs about Russian-speaking women who have emigrated for the purpose of marriage, may partly contribute to this process.

All respondents were participating in marriage migration, and this fact gives them an opportunity, in contrast to many other forms of migration, to be included in the family, friendships and other social networks of their Dutch partners. One might have expected that this specificity will determine the formation of personal relationships, but we see another trend - the migrants do not perceive these networks as a part of their friendship circle, they form other networks, in which Russian-speaking immigrants are included and, in some cases, they are considered as the best social group.

A special case is the group of women, who themselves share the beliefs that Russian-speaking women are in demand in the marriage market because of their ethnocultural specificity or their partner shares these ideas. The belief in the value of their ethnic specificity may underlie rootedness of some ethnicized cultural practices, such as apparel consumption, unequal division of household duties, reading Russian literature and other behaviours.

Thus, mixed marriages, in some cases, are the cause of ethnicization of practices and identities - through the prejudice showed by some family members in the early stages and by the host society, and through regular discussion about cultural differences with a partner. Ethnicity as femininity can act as symbolic capital, which women do not want to lose, and that is highly appreciated by their partners.

Our study has several limitations. In the case of women living in the Netherlands, we initially examined those who were members of the Internet community, oriented to Russian-speaking married women in the Netherlands, so we included in our study women who, to some degree, were orientated towards formation of a Russian-speaking social circle. Therefore, it is possible that we did not include in our research other Russian-speaking migrants in the Netherlands who do not want to join these Internet communities and who have other specific characteristics, cultural practices and integration strategies. We contribute to the study of a variety of possible scenarios of living in a mixed partnership, but we can not draw a conclusion about all the Russian-speaking women living with a partner in the Netherlands.

We also studied women in the early stages of migration. Brahic [2013] considers a mixed marriage as a process and examines how the bi-national component changes in the course of life. She criticizes research which focuses on the early stages of a relationship. It is possible that, in our case, a number of trends are peculiar to only the early period of a relationship and a longitudinal study would make it possible to understand deeply the specifics of these families at different biographical stages.

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Description of the respondents

- Respondent №1, before migration, 23, Single, was born in Saratov, lives in Moscow, higher education
- Respondent №2, before migration, 23, Single, from Kiev but at the time of the interview she lived with her boyfriend, higher education
- Respondent №3, before migration, 24, Single, was born in Smolensk, lives in Moscow, higher education
- Respondent №4, before migration, 23, Engaged, lives in Krasnogorsk, Moscow region., student
- Respondent №5, before migration, 27, Single, was born in Ufa, lives in Moscow, higher education
- Respondent №6, before migration, 24, Single, lives in Moscow, higher education
- Respondent №7, before migration, 24, is divorced and has a child from a previous marriage, lives in Kazan, began to receive a second higher education
- Respondent №8, before migration, 25, Single, lives in Yaroslavl, specialized secondary and higher education
- Respondent №9, after migration, 25, Engaged, was born in Ryazan, moved from Novopolotsk, Belarus 10 months ago, higher education
- Respondent №10, after migration, 25, Single, was born in Samara region., moved from Samara 4.5 months ago, higher education
- Respondent №11, after migration, 24, Single, was born in Izhevsk, moved from St. Petersburg, higher education receives additional higher education in the Netherlands
- Respondent №12, after migration, 28, Registered Partnership, was born in Cheboksary, moved from St. Petersburg 4 months ago, specialized secondary and higher education
- Respondent №13, after migration, 31, Married, moved from St. Petersburg 6 months ago, 2 higher education
- Respondent №14, after migration, 23, Single, moved from St. Petersburg 9 months ago, higher education
- Respondent №15, after migration, 30, Married, moved from St. Petersburg 9 months ago, 2 university degrees

Respondent №16, after migration, 25, Single, moved from St. Petersburg 6 months ago, higher education.

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