

From Russia with Love

A Study of Post-Soviet Love Migration to Sweden



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Abstract

This thesis studies love migration from Russia to Sweden. It delves into the Swedish perception of this phenomenon, as well as the underlying reasons therefor. It compiles and recontextualizes relevant prior research and compliments the work of others with an original interview with a Russian woman who moved to Sweden for marriage around a decade years ago. The study finds that while Russians and Swedes perceive love in itself in similar manners, they ascribe different value to love as the sole motivation for marriage, with Swedes prioritizing it more than Russians. This, as well as differing views on family life, as well as a still reflected-upon historical animosity between Sweden and Russia, cements a cultural divide, one expression of which is the suspicion with which Swedes regard Russian love migrants. Swedes see Russians mainly from the *exclusivist* perspective as outlined by Osanami Törngren, and the study finds that phenomena such as previously researched Russian migration behaviour in Turkey has ingrained itself unnecessarily in the Swedish expectations of Russian motivations for coming to Sweden.

Keywords: Love migration, migration, love, marriage, Russia, Sweden, interview, gender, heteronormativity literature study

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1 Introduction

Swedes usually pride themselves on being open-minded and willing to embrace other cultures – a shining beacon of tolerance in an increasingly intolerant world. This image has been cultivated for a long time and is deeply ingrained in the Swedish mindset. An example of this is the previous prime minister of Sweden proclaiming that “Sweden is a great humanitarian power” [own translation] (Melin, 2014). In spite of this, love migrants from specific areas, for example women from the post-soviet sphere are vilified, an example being the term “rysk hora”, literally translated to “Russian whore” being a racial slur referring to for women from the entire Russophone sphere.

Another stereotype that paints cross-cultural couples in a negative light is the notion that many, if not all, of these women are so called “import wives”, i.e. women who meet their partner via online advertisement. These relationships are commonly believed to be thoroughly devoid of love. She is commonly seen as needing the money, and he is seen as using her for sex and companionship, as he is believed to be incapable of finding a woman in a “proper” way. Furthermore, suspicions of domestic violence and abuse are not uncommon in such cases (Wilén, 2009: 3-4).

These are the overarching phenomena with which this study concerns itself. The aim is to facilitate a greater understanding of the negative experiences of these transnational couples in Sweden, with a focus on the migrating woman.

Worthy of note is that, since there is no correct way to describe “true” or “actual” love objectively, the intention has been to define clearly how it is understood by my informants, so only minimal personal or cultural bias affect the results. I will use Victor Karandashev’s definition as a basis for my discussion on the topic.

1.1 Purpose and Ambition

This study aims to research Russian women's experience of migration to Sweden for marriages. Since they are often suspected being either agency-deprived victims or malicious exploiters of their husbands, I will discuss how such suspicions affects the women's, and the couples' view of the Sweden home and their perception of the how they are perceived by Swedes. The study will seek to clarify how Russian women in particular are perceived, and what causes this. As such, the central, concrete questions this study sets out to answer are:

- 1) What stereotypes do Russian love migrants face in Sweden, and what overarching, underlining causes can be inferred?
- 2) To what extent can Russian and Swedish notions of marriage and love be understood to differ?

1.2 Overview of Prior Research

In order to maintain a high standard of intersubjectivity, a presentation of the research on which this study intends to build, is in order.

Finding strictly anthropological texts concerning the Swedish context has proven difficult, which is why the use of a Danish example is necessary. While Denmark is culturally similar to Sweden, their immigration laws differ widely, with Denmark being notably harsher, and it is intuitively clear that this impacts integration processes within the respective countries (Fernandez, 2013: 270).

It is the interpretation of several studies, among those *Mixed couples and critical Cosmopolitanism* by Djurdjevic and Girona, that the aforementioned research seem to be based on the implicit assumption that the migrants are deprived of most or even all agency. This approach is both mentioned and criticised in their article (2016).

Furthermore, the Swedish dissertation *Love ain't got no colour* by Dr Sayaka Osanami Törngren (2011) mentions the issues that come with ignoring the reactions of the society to which the migrant has moved. This, as well as the lack of studies covering the relationships and marriages between swedes and immigrants, is a problem according to Osanami Törngren (2011: 16). Her study is based on several in depth interviews in which she seeks to uncover the Swedish approach to cross-cultural marriages.

The gender theory approach will be based on *En klass för sig*, by Swedish social anthropologist dr Fanny Ambjörnsson (2003), as well as the classic article *Thinking Sex* by social anthropologist Gayle Rubin (1984). Despite the fact that Ambjörnsson's informants are much younger than the group I study, her theoretical framework on gender and how it is made is relevant. The article by Rubin will be

used as basis to understand the theory of heteronormativity, and why some (hetero)sexual acts are seen as more acceptable than others. The specifically Scandinavian context is explored in Nadine Fernandez (2013) article “Moral boundaries and national borders: Cuban marriage migration to Denmark”, in which the Scandinavian norms of equality and self-sufficiency is establish in contract with the rest of the world (2013: 273).

As a complement to this, Dr Victor Kharadenshev’s book *Romantic Love and Culture* (2017) is referenced. Kharadenshev focuses on how the expanded mobility of modern humans have changed the way we view love and marriage. (2017: 37). It also touches the question of the universality of western perceptions of love (2017: 35).

The basis for the facts referring to women specifically migrating from the previous Soviet Union is based on several sources. One such source is the book *Sex, Love and Migration* by Dr Alexia Bloch (2017). Bloch focuses on the experiences of Russian speaking women in Turkey, where the stereotypes of Russian women are similar to the traditional stereotypes in Sweden. Important questions on real love vs the quest for material security is also mentioned (Bloch, 2017 :116). While the Turkish context is very different from the Swedish one, the way that Turkish and Swedish stereotypes align, will be explored.

Furthermore, Anna Appelberg’s (2005) magister thesis “Den ryska kvinnan – en höna som sitter hemma” in which Appelberg studies how Russian migrant women to Sweden perceive the differing gender roles of Swedish and Russian women, as well as how these have collided and interacted when the informants moved to Sweden, is used (2005).

The last of these studies was produced by an NGO, *Riksorganisationen för kvinnojourer och tjejjourer i Sverige*, ROKS for short, and it studies love migration gone wrong in “Täckmantel: äktenskap” from 2009.

1.3 Delimitations

To limit the area of study, this study focuses on female love migrants from the post-soviet countries, specifically Russia, to Sweden. This is due to time constraints, as significant amounts of extra research was deemed necessary, in order for the study to properly factor in other ethnic origins.

Other groups, such as Thai women, admittedly face similar trials, but this study would have had to delve deep into comparing different migrant origin cultures in order for the study to be academically honest, for fear of presenting unfounded generalizations. To do both Russian love migrants, other love migrants, and their respective contexts justice, this study instead opts to dive deeper into the historical and cultural context of specifically Russia and Sweden.

Another matter with which this study does not concern itself, is the topic of trafficking. While it is an undeniably horrible phenomenon, and while it is does concern victims who sometimes happen to originate from the same region, as the love migrants that this thesis *does* study, these matters are fundamentally not the

same. This study specifically wishes to study the matter of Russian women who *voluntarily* migrate to Sweden in the name of love. This study welcomes and encourages any and all further studies that dive deeper into the tragic problem of trafficking, but wishes to make clear that such a topic is beyond the scope and concern of this specific essay.

1.4 Outline of thesis

In the following chapter, which is the second chapter, I will explain my method, as well as take a closer look at the interview I conducted. The strengths and weaknesses of the material gathered will be discussed.

The third chapter will be devoted to establishing the necessary background information: both the Russian-Swedish relationship historically and the views present day Swedes has on transnational marriages.

In the fourth chapter, the two major theories used will be explained. First the stereotyping theory as explained by Osanami Törngren, followed by Gender theory, as described by Ambjörnsson.

In the fifth chapter I will take a closer look on the concepts of love, family and marriage, and how they differ between the two countries. This will be complemented by the experiences of my informants.

The sixth chapter will include a discussion of how Swedes view love migration, especially with a gender perspective in mind.

In the seventh and last chapter I will conclude my research, and give my proposals for further research.

2 Method

Primarily, this is a literature study based on systematization of previous research. As such, a closer look of the theoretical framework will follow this methodological presentation. This is due to the fact that the presentation of the background theory *is part* of the execution of this chapter's outlined method. This approach was chosen so that new knowledge could be derived through aggregation and comparison of independently conducted studies. This way, patterns that are implied by the individual studies can be clearly expressed and understood in their own right.

In addition to this, one deep-dive interview is conducted with two informants, one of whom is an originally Russian love migrant to Sweden, and the other of whom is her Swedish husband.

2.1 Complimentary Interview

It was my earlier ambition to produce a larger set of empirical data, by conducting more interviews than the one that is presented in the final study. This would have enabled the study to be bolder when arguing for its conclusion. This approach was however discarded due to the fact that several informants chose to withdraw from participating in the study. This setback occurred at a time in the study's production cycle, that made it difficult, if not impossible, to find enough new love migrant informants within the study's timeframe.

Instead of finding more informants, this study instead settled on expanding the time devoted to the one interviewee that remained, as well as scheduling an interview with the informant's husband. As it happened the best thing for my informants was to have a joint interview.

This presents challenges and opportunities. The extra time spent with the couple will contribute to a higher amount of trust between the interviewer and the interviewees. An important reminder is that the answers of the informants in no way is applicable for *all* Russian-Swedish couples.

The interview was semi-structured with a few prewritten questions. The purpose with the prewritten questions was to function as a backbone, while the informant was allowed to speak as freely as preferred, following the definition of a classical semi-structured interview (Davies, 2008: 95). The interview was recorded, transcribed and subsequently analysed. My prewritten questions are available in the appendix.

The original plan was to arrange the interview in a closed room where the interview could be conducted in an undisturbed environment. However, due to the

fact that the informants live busy lives with work and children, far away from the site of study, it quickly proved difficult to arrange a physical meeting.

Due to these logistical constraints, the interview was instead conducted using the video camera and recorder of a common online calling service. Another unplanned distraction was that their baby didn't want to sleep and instead was present during the interview, she didn't cause too big a ruckus, but was the cause of the discussion veering off topic a few times. These parts have been deleted from the transcription for the overview's sake.

Here follows a brief introduction of the two interviewees, who are married: The female interviewee shall thus be called Tatiana. She is 40 years old, and born and raised in Moscow, Russia. Tatiana came to Sweden with a psychology degree, and having previously worked as responsible for the HR department at a prominent Moscow-based company.

For transparency's sake, it shall also be mentioned that the interviewer has a previously established familiar relation, outside of this study, with both Tatiana and Herman; in which he was first known. Hence, a *new* trustful bond need not be established for the interview to be honest and open.

Her husband, henceforth called "Herman" is a 49-year-old second generation German immigrant. He was however born in Sweden. He was raised to be monolingually Swedish and has only lived in Sweden. Herman is currently employed as a Marketing and Sales Director in the construction industry.

The couple has been married for more than a decade and have two young children together. The family lives in the middle of Sweden. Herman also has two now adult children from an earlier marriage.

2.1.1 Reliability of Interview Results

Differences in age, societal status, and gender are things that often colour interview results (Davies, 2008: 99-100). This however, ought to matter less than normal, given the previous relationship between me and the two interviewees. The previous researcher-informant relationship, however, can in itself influence the outcome interview. This study foresees three ways that can happen.

Firstly, as the interviewer-informant relationship is active and trusting, the informants may speak in a manner, that assumes that the researcher understands what is being said not only explicitly, but implicitly, due to previous conversations which may have touched upon related topics. While such an assumption may *indeed* be entirely correct, it is detrimental to the quality of the interview transcript, that crucial information and contextualization risks being relegated to conversational subtext. The way in which interview questions have been pre-written takes this into account. Concretely, the questions will actively seek to establish such facts when deemed necessary. If such mutual pre-understandings are hinted at, active measures are taken to establish in writing, that which at was just hinted.

Secondly, the study foresees another problem. This problem is considered distinctly more problematic than the aforementioned. The established researcher-

informant relationship may cause informants to consciously redact their statements, in order to not say things that they would consider socially awkward, or too personal to be said to somebody, with whom further private interaction is unavoidable. That said, this study deems the established informant-researcher relationship to be open and trusting *enough* for such social inhibitions to be minimal. The topic has been discussed by the researcher and the informants in earlier, informal contexts. In this case there was a struggle to keep things formal and to not have to fish for answers they had provided on other occasions. The interviewees also appeared to forget that I, a considerably younger close friend had assumed a new position as researcher. And despite my attempts to remind them to pretend that I knew nothing of their relation and joint experiences, several answers came with a tone of “as you very well know”.

The third issue is one of active contamination. Given the fact that the issue has indeed been discussed informally before – and given that such conversations have included both informants expressing strong opinions on the matter to the researcher, as well as the researcher having giving her opinions on the informants’ specific situation – it is possible that the informants answer the questions in a way that takes these conversations into account, be that or consciously or otherwise. The informants might feel like the researcher is interviewing them to consciously build an academic case for a previously held and expressed opinion on the subject matter. This, combined with the established amicable and trusting relationship between all parties, can cause the informants to tailor their answers to what they *believe* I to want to hear. This study takes active measures to mitigate this crucial problem. I stated for the record, at the start of the interview, that the informants are encouraged to speak their unaltered and unabridged minds, and that they are to pay no heed whatsoever to whatever opinions or thoughts the I may have expressed in the past.

The decision to have both Tatiana and Herman at the same time was primarily a result of scheduling concerns but came with the added perk of the informants not only interacting with the interviewer, but with each other, building on each other’s half-finished answers and sentiments. This, of course, was both positive and negative. On the one side, it helped steer the conversation back on track when one informant had a clearer understanding of what was being asked, than the other. It also facilitated the elaboration of certain points, when one informant divulged *some* relevant information, fell silent, and the other informant picked up the torch. This said, the informants being interviewed in tandem made it possible for them to interact with each other, joke around, and diverge from the subject matter. While this does add the unmistakable value of being able to hear the differences of opinion *within* a relevant couple, it also stole time, and caused some questions to be left half-answered, while at the same time whipping along the conversation in a difficult-to-control manner, which prevented further elaborations.

Some of the preestablished questions felt repetitive and redundant as the actual interview progressed. This prompted the *ad hoc* creation of new one’s questions, which built on the informants’ earlier answers. This, of course, was a feature by design of specifically having chosen to conduct a semi-structured interview

Lastly, conducting the interview in English for the sake of stringently sticking to the thesis's choice of language, might have been a poor decision, as made evident by Swedish creeping into the conversation, contributing to overall confusion. As it is either the second or third language of all involved in the interview, and given that the interview had to be conducted on the spot, without the ability to weigh one's words as carefully as they are weighed in writing, it is also likely that all participants communicated less clearly than they would have with each other, had they opted to conduct the entire interview in Swedish.

3 Background

Here follows a short overview of the context within which the research, and the informants operates. While the informants *are* cited as a source in this chapter, the chapter's purpose is not to provide the bulk of the compilation of research, nor the analysis thereof, but rather to set the stage for those parts of the study, which of course, follow in later chapters.

3.1 Historical Russian-Swedish Animosity

The long history of war and animosity between Sweden and Russia is a possible explanation of the suspicion with which Russia is regarded in Sweden. A prime example these historical conflicts is the Great Nordic war of 1700-21 during which the Swedish king, Charles XII, launched a failed campaign into Russia, which lead to the eventual downfall of the Swedish empire, through the loss of great swathes of land, such as the Swedish territories in the Baltics, due to the peace of Nystad in the year of 1721 (Kinder, 1981: 271). This war lead to the decline of the power of the Swedish king, while the Russian tsar, Peter the Great, managed to strengthen the Russian monarchy (ibid). One can observe how the cultural evolution in the two countries diverged greatly, already back then.

The tales of returning Swedish prisoners of war helped establish the stereotype of the scary Russians, and the Russian expansion into the previously Swedish Finland 1808 strengthened this (Kinder, 1981: 84).

The fact that some sort of historical animosity remains relevant today – at least in Sweden – is made evident in the interview conducted with the two informants. “You took Finland – half of the Swedish kingdom – from us!” exclaimed Herman, when Tatiana said that such old wounds were of little importance to Russians when they discuss Sweden (Interview, 2019). This was one of the few areas on which the couple disagreed.

Furthermore, despite Sweden not being involved in any war since the 1800s and Sweden's almost century long Social Democratic tendencies and government, the two countries were on different sides of the iron curtain. Being a non-communist country geographically close to the Soviet Union, Sweden felt the cold war tensions. While not ascribing any particular importance to conflicts as old as the Great Nordic War, Tatiana expressed that left-over stereotypes from the Cold War Era remained. It should be noted that she expressed that she felt these stereotypes remained prevalent *in Sweden*, and that she did not discuss whether the Cold War left any lasting stereotype of Sweden, in Russia. Specifically, she

elaborated that Russia was seen as “some grey country... with very unpleasant people. You know, it’s like it’s the old stereotypes from the Cold war... I still hear it, I still – it’s absolutely the same, yes.” (Tatiana, interview, 2019). When discussing how *Russians* perceive *Swedes*, she painted a more positive image of what her fellow Russians associate with Sweden:

“So everything I heard was just: “Oh, cool! There’s wonderful people there. It’s... Abba, it’s IKEA, it’s VOLVO, it’s such things people respect. So Sweden, in my country, we have... just... high respect. That’s all. I never hear anything bad... at all. Never!” (Tatiana, interview, 2019).

The Swedish-Russian tensions reached their zenith after a Russian submarine was stranded in the Swedish province of Blekinge in the year 1981, something which at the time was referred as “the worst insult of Swedish territory in modern time” just days after the event took place (Magasinet, 1981).

In recent years the American pop-cultural influence in Sweden has been big, and the media representation of most Russians in movies have mostly been as villains in Hollywood flicks. While Swedish movies describing Russian girls and women in Sweden, such as *Lilja 4-ever*, presents Russian women in a way that this study holds as typical for the stereotypes regarding Russian victimisation.

The combination of aforementioned issues strengthens the negative preconceptions of the entire former soviet bloc as *otherly*. The last years political tensions, especially those following the start of Russian more expansionist politics – in particular the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 is a well-known contemporary example of highly divisive and in the West widely criticised event of this sort. The Swedish minister of defence since 2014, Peter Hultqvist has openly criticised the Russian expansionism, their threats to Swedish safety interest, both in national and international media. One example of this is from the Swedish defence conference People and Defence in January 2019, where he describes Russian actions as “Provocative against Sweden” and as having an “altogether aggressive behaviour” (TT, 13th January 2019).

The events in the Russian sphere of influence that have occurred over the last years have also complicated the process with which Russians can apply for and be granted Visas to visit Sweden. This hampers regular interactions between the nationalities. This contrast is made starker by the relative ease with which one may visit Sweden from, for example, the Schengen region or the European Union at large. This has been cited off-interview (but with informed consent given for sharing) by Tatiana, who expresses frustration concerning what she perceived to be an increased complexity and bureaucracy for her family, when they apply for visa to visit their daughter in Sweden. With her and her children having double citizenships they face no similar problem while visiting Russia.

3.2 Transnational Marriages and the Swedish perspective

In her dissertation, Osanami Törngren describes the approach towards transnational marriages in Sweden as very concerned with *why* marriages between Swedes and non-swedes, or between Swedes with an immigrant background to someone from their homeland takes place. Questions concerning import-wives, failed integration and a suspected lack of love are mentioned (2011: 20). There is no legal prohibition against marrying cross culturally, but that doesn't mean that it isn't view with some suspicion by some (Osanami Törngren, 2011: 27). Statistically, the most common marriage occurs between Swedes and Finns, shortly followed by the other Nordic countries. There also appears to be a pattern where most male migrants come from the western world, such as the US, Germany or Denmark; while female migrants come from Russia, south-east Asia and eastern Europe (Osanami Törngren, 2011: 24). The country of the migrant's origin is important to how the couple will be perceived – a Swedish/western relation is not regarded “as mixed” as for example a Swedish/Gambian is (Osanami Törngren, 2011: 25). One of the fears concerning non-western migrant women are that they are so called import-wives.

The mail order bride, or the *import wife* as the Riksorganisationen för kvinno och flickjourer i Sverige, ROKS, prefers to call her is defined as a woman who gets picked up by her husband/partner to perform household work and sexual favours. Women regarded as belonging to this group comes, most often, from either Russia, eastern Europe or south-east Asia. This type of relation tends to end in domestic violence, and the involvement of ROKS, hence their data on the matter (Wilén, 2009: 3-4). While many cases of this have been documented by ROKS, they also mention that while each such story is heart-breaking, the import wife phenomenon is by no means the most frequent cross-cultural marriage (ROK, 2009: 3). It is also worth mentioning that, while meeting a partner online is becoming more and more common, both within and beyond country borders, this negative stereotype still lives on. This perception of the love-migrants also causes suspicions to be raised with regards to the native partners' intentions or capacities (Djurdjevic 2016, 397). The partner, often a man, is seen as someone undesirable, that needs to bribe his way to a partner. Thus, he is painted as pathetic and sometimes downright abusive.

4 Theory

Here follows a presentation of the different theoretical frameworks, assumptions and concepts from prior research, that this study aims to aggregate.

4.1 Stereotyping

The study will first examine the stereotyping theory laid out in Osanami Törngrens dissertation, this will give insight into how migrants from different groups are treated differently. The following section is on love and marriage in both countries, is mainly based on the research by Karadenshev. This acts as a pillar on which we stand to understand *if* there might be a difference in how citizens perceive true love.

With the study's methodology laid out, and with its disclaimers made, here follows the study's analysis. The points that are to be set into others' contexts are presented one by one. While this, in some cases mean that individual sections deal with individual source authors, this is not a stringently maintained. The very ambition of this study is to aggregate and synergise prior research to derive a greater understanding of the topic at hand. As such, things are consciously presented on a topic by topic basis, not author by author.

Social classification takes place all the time, both on an ethnic level and beyond. When people get convinced of the convenience of adding similar individuals to a perceived group and simplifying their behaviour patterns into bold statements creates stereotypes (Hylland-Erikssen, 2015: 333). A relevant phrase in this case would be "Russian women are whores". The stereotypes might be based on exaggeration or politically charged ideologies (ibid). This can also be internalized on one's own group (ibid) as "Russian women are good mothers" as mentioned by Appelbergs informants (2005:10) A relevant example of such a perceived anomaly in the context of Swedish perceptions of Russians is an educated, professional woman; since the perceived norm is that all or most Russian women live in poor and uneducated circumstances. Hylland-Eriksson also adds that children born of cross-cultural relations gets anormalised by default, as they do not fully belong to either parents' culture (ibid). To understand how love migration is seen in Sweden, I will study the sense of *we* and *them*, and such distinctions and stereotypes in the relevant context.

This study will also delve into Hedetoft's theory presented by Osanami Törngren, whom studies different kinds of cross-cultural marriages and the attitudes towards them. (2011). The theory, presented in her dissertation, describes a stereotype as the "abstract suspicions towards the *other*" (Osanami Törngren,

2011: 66-7), wherein the definition of the *other* or the *them* is based on an assessment on how close *they* are to the perceived *us*. (ibid.). The way the *other* is viewed therefore influences how the stereotype(s) around the specific group is built. According to Osanami Törngren, there are three different ways in which the stereotypical concept of the *other* can be perceived:

1) The *exclusivist* way of perceiving the other, wherein the other is perceived as a danger, and as somebody who is truly different from the perceiver's in-group. Somebody perceived in this, exclusivist manner, is either a direct enemy, or at the very least somebody who is viewed as culturally incompatible (ibid). The bases behind this doesn't have to be based on actual stark cultural differences, but rather on how these differences are observed.

2) The *gradualist* way of perceiving the other, wherein the other is considered to be someone with whom there are *areas* of cultural overlap. Here, the other is seen as decidedly different, but not as dangerous (ibid). These immigrants are viewed with some curiosity, but generally not perceived as dangerous.

3) The *exotic* way of perceiving the other wherein the *other* is romanticised or fetishized. Osanami Törngren mentions that this group is faced with the least suspicion, but also that in some cases the females are viewed as exotic, while the men are perceived as one of the other. (ibid).

These classifications help clarifying how and why some groups are stereotyped differently, and give a simply insight into the Russian example. Given the hostility the viewpoint entails, a cross-cultural relationship with a group seen from the exclusivist viewpoint is more difficult to accept in the eyes of society than one seen through either of the other two lenses (ibid).

While not only being able to answer questions on why and how the love-migrant will face challenges in their new country, this framework as proposed by Osanami Törngren can, according to her, give a fuller picture of society as a whole (2011:17-18). Naturally no population has the same opinion on everything, but general opinions can be discerned. She is of the opinion that this reframing of the issues being studied can help answer questions, such as if interracial marriages are accepted or even allowed in the host country, as well as the question if race or ethnicity is an indicator of what social class within the host society the migrant will end up in? Is there a strong sense of "we" or "them" that prevents integration (ibid)? The stereotypes created does, as Hylland-Eriksson mentions, create a legitimisation of boundaries and gives reasons not to marry outside of the group (2015:333). The frequency, and fraction between cross cultural marriages are also an indicator of how well the assimilation progress for certain groups happens in the host country (Osanami Törngren, 2011: 17-18).

It is noted that this in no way lessens the importance of studying the experience of the migrant and the migrant's new family. That said, this adds a deeper understanding of the migrant's context. In addition to this, Osanami Törngren describes what is required for a cross-cultural relationship to happen (Osanami Törngren 2011:16-18).

4.1.1 Stereotyping and the Non-migrant Partner

Djurdjevic and Girona are of the opinion that not only the experience of the love migrant collective should be studied, but that research should also focus on the migrants as individuals. (2016: 390-391) The argument is made that this lessens harmful stereotypes such as the negative stereotyping of so-called import wives, and that this also presents the individual migrant as someone with agency and socio-political awareness (ibid.). There is always a reason to why one migrates, one of these can be that one disagrees with existing cultural values at home or that one wants to explore somewhere new. Immigrants as well as natives have an understanding that we live in a global and every changing world and are not necessarily stuck in a set worldview that's considered weird or outdated by the new country of residence.

This, the authors claim, is especially important when examining relations between westerners, the classical centre with non-westerners, previously of the periphery (Djurdjevic & Girona, 2016: 398). The reasoning behind this is that especially non-westerners are stereotyped as a whole, no anomalies applied. This focus on groups strengthen already existing negative stereotypes especially if the migrant is from a country assumed to have more traditional values (ibid). These perceptions, such as for example the notion that all hailing from the Middle East are conservative and gender-wise normative, harms both the native and the migrant (ibid).

As mentioned by Fernandez, one of the cornerstones of Scandinavian identity is gender equality, and that together with economical self-support forms the basis for the culturally acceptable autonomous individual (2013: 273-274). When the perception is that either the migrant, the native partner, or their marriage is not living up to this standard, (s)he is met with suspicion from the state and the public, and is seen as morally deficient (Fernandez, 2013: 274, 283). These views and the western celebration of love goes against other types of marriages, such as ones of perceived convenience (Fernandez, 2013: 274). The difficulty here lies in the distinction between the different types of marriages. A marriage can be both loving and economically convenient. Several of Osanami Törngrens informants mentions a fear that non-westerners don't share the Swedish values and norms, especially concerning the topic of gender equality, making them less inclined to imagine such a relation and makes the comment that they wouldn't want their children to be in a relation with *one of those* (2011: 193-196) This furthers the importance of considering the migrant and their partner as individuals.

In addition to this, the authors maintain that one should study the native partner's behaviour within the romantic relationship, and also their role as a native of the culture to which their partner is a newcomer (Djurdjevic, 2016: 390-391). This ought to be further explored as the native learns more, in a self-improving way, evaluating his own cultural values. (ibid)

4.2 Gender theory

The definition of what makes a woman, and how she is viewed is of the utmost importance in both Sweden and Russia. But to answer this a closer understanding of how gender is made, and how it affects what is perceived as normalised femininity is required.

4.2.1 Gender and Heteronormativity

Feminist theories have since long established that masculinity and femininity aren't unproblematically tied to the two biological sexes, but rather is culturally determined (Ambjörnsson, 2003:12). As gender is something that exists through actions, the present norms of gender constantly need to be recreated, hence the definitions of gender are neither static nor universal (Ambjörnsson, 2003:13, 137).

What is perceived as female gender coded behaviour today has its base in 18th and 19th century ideals based on how women should behave in relation to romantic love and societal expectations. Several of these enshrined behavioural patterns pertain to self-control, nurturing, carefulness and empathy. It is also of importance which emotions a woman conveys (Ambjörnsson, 2003:63). Ambjörnsson makes it clear that the expectations naturally haven't remained the same since the 1800s, especially since women nowadays work, birth less children and enjoy vastly improved social mobility (2003:63-64). To follow the present-day modern gender relations, according to Norwegian psychologist Hanne Haavind, Scandinavian women are expected both to be self-sufficient and career-minded (ibid). Similar thought processes can be seen in Fernandez's aforementioned research about gender equal, autonomous individuals (2013: 273-274).

Gender is both defined in the relation to the *other* gender and how one acts towards them, especially in the heteronormative society of today (Ambjörnsson, 2003: 13, 15). This creates the distinction of what is *us*, in this case feminine, and *them*, here masculine. But even not all heterosexual relationships, which are traditionally seen as the superior way to form a relationship, are seen as equal. This is seen in Rubin's theory that the respectability of heterosexual actions depend on with whom, where, how and why they are performed. The reasoning is that sexual relations performed in at home, with one monogamous partner from the same generation, of opposite gender with the intention to procreate is the most socially viable (Rubin, 1984: 152-153). This, Ambjörnsson stresses is the difference between heterosexual behaviour and normative heterosexuality (2003: 14-15). One thing Rubin doesn't mention is the ethnicity and perceived economical background of the partner, and later, I will argue that this is also important factors for determining relationships the position in the hierarchy.

5 Love, Family and Marriage in Sweden and Russia

Before studying the everyday lives of Russian-speaking love migrants to Sweden, the study will lay out the general western, and more concretely the Swedish view of what is considered love, as well as a proper marriage. Then the focus will shift to exploring the attitudes towards marriage, as held by people in the Russophone sphere. This is done in order to explore extent to which these points of view differ from each other.

The study will delve into culturally particular concepts of love, as well as the respective cultural expectations of what marriage should entail. It will also be mentioned how these respective views on marriage and love have evolved over time. Furthermore, it will touch upon the concept of *vital conjuncture* which describes situations in which individuals seriously have to weight mutually exclusive options against one other, I will apply it in a similar way to Mikkel Rytter – in which the choice of a partner will limit other options for the future (Rytter, 2007: 177). This decision can be based on the preference of the state, or that of the family or individual (ibid). Relationships, and marriages in particular, that does not conform to the state’s perception of individual choice *and* romantic love is therefore viewed, by the general public, as highly problematic. This since it’s viewed as backsliding on the front of gender equality.

5.1.1 Romantic Love

Karandashev starts the second chapter of his book with asking if the notion of romantic love is universal, or if it, as some anthropologists believe, is culturally specific western notion (2017:35-36). While he mentions that passionate, if not romantic love does seem to be represented to some degree in historical and present-day societies all over the world, the value western society ascribes to it, stand out amongst other cultures (ibid). He also makes it clear that while there is no universal definition of romantic love. I will, to avoid any confusion of what is defined as *love*, consider the phenomena as presented by Karandashev – with the following aspects as indicative of what often considered is romantic love:

- “Desire for a union, both physical and emotional” (Karandashev, 2017:36).
- “Idealization of the beloved” (ibid.).
- “Exclusivity of the beloved” (ibid.).
- “Intrusive thinking of the beloved” (ibid.).
- “Emotional dependency” (ibid.).

- “Powerful empathy for the beloved” (ibid.).
- “Reordering of motivations and life priorities” (ibid.).¹

Not all of these can be considered to be universal either, but this problem arises from the difficulty to properly define love, which have been mentioned before.

The reason to establish cross-cultural relationships, and even marriages, can be curiosity about the other, whose very cultural difference makes them unique and attractive in their partners eyes (Djurdjevic, 2016: 395). Learning from, as well as concretely living the culture of the partner is both a romantic and educative experience – something that can fuel the romance in its first stages (ibid). Furthermore, keeping this in mind is an important counterweight to the focus studies tends to put on cross-cultural *conflict* in relationships (ibid).

The mutual learning and curiosity for the partner’s *otherness*, according to Djurdjevic and Girona, also explore the similarities between them leading to a dual view, whereas both parties have grown into a cross-cultural outlook (2016: 396).

In the conducted interview, the couple mentions that both have taken some of the other’s cultural and culinary traditions as their own. This does not mean that all cultural particularities are adopted, or approved of, by the respective partners. Tatiana specifically mentions her disapproval of certain Swedish birthday traditions, that she hasn’t ever been keen on adopting. Also worth mentioning is that both she and Herman made it clear that Tatiana hasn’t lost the core of her Russian identity, despite the fact that their children are raised multiculturally and bilingually (Interview, 2019).

¹ It is also worth mentioning that while it may not be relevant in this Swedish-Russian comparison, the aforementioned requirement of monogamy immediately disqualifies all cultures where different forms of polygamy are practiced.

5.1.2 Marriages

As mentioned earlier, the expression of love might not be truly universal, even if many westerners perceive it so. However, the definition of “true love” as a requirement for marriage is a rather new phenomenon, even in the west. Earlier, marriage was often used as a way to settle conflict, expand wealth or secure peace. Thus, a marriage was, for all intents and purposes, a business transaction that benefited the family and or a social arrangement. While young couples could indeed elope in the name of their love, such an act was viewed as disgraceful (Karandashev, 2017).

During the last century or so, the choice of partner has become an individual decision, and is no longer considered to be a familial affair. Also, the emotional attachment between the parts of the pair is seen as the chief reason to establish a relationship. (Karandashev, 2017: 167-168). In a Scandinavian context, both partners should ideally share norms as gender equality and of personal financial independence, to be perceived as loving. (Fernandez, 2013: 274) This logic is in direct opposition to feminist theories, asserting that love can never be entirely free from material concerns and calculations (Fernandez, 2013: 282).

The seven requirements that Karandashev puts forward – as presented above in this study –are all supposedly fulfilled in the western definition of love, with a strong emphasis for the wish for a union (be that a marital one or not) and the importance to idealise/feel strongly for one another.

Worth mentioning as well, is that Karandashev included Russia as a “western” country in how it views love, as he has used Russians as part of the informant group upon which his criteria are based (2017: 165).

In the book by Bloch, the interviewed post-soviet women in Turkey are seldom married to their Turkish partners but are instead often mistresses who are financially dependent on the man (2017: 116, 118). Many of the informants also mention that their men also provided them with a day job in Turkey, with the money earned sometimes being sent home to Russia. Bloch described this practice, along with marrying for a quick citizenship as having become more difficult in the wake of changing Turkish immigration laws (Bloch, 2017: 117).

Becoming a Swedish citizen is not overly difficult according to Wilén, but it takes years, and the case of the so called import wives becomes more difficult, if they haven’t stayed with their partners long enough. The “marriage only to get a citizenship” route takes place but is no way near representative of all immigrant-native relationship (Wilén, 2009: 3). The relationships Bloch studies are of a much ficker nature, than traditional marriages for love, and as such, this study believes that Bloch’s study does not, in fact, observe marriage migration, and that the phenomena should not be conflated.

One could consider the cases Bloch reports from Turkey as essentially a form of work migration with later added sexual and emotional benefits, rather than typical love or marriage migration. The fact that Bloch’s informants arrives in Turkey on a work visa, and meet their partners after the fact, is an indicator of

this. This also due to the fact that while the couplings in question seem semi-stable at best, and rarely seem to result in marriage (2017: 119).

It is, however, a possibility that the generalization of post-soviet migrants everywhere as acting along the lines of Bloch's informants, might have gained international traction. That way, this stereotype can colour Swedish views and expectations of the women moving there from Russia, regardless of how prevalent the phenomenon is in reality.

The wishes of the Swedish state, and to some extent it's population, is that a relationship not only should be for love, but gender equal. One of Osanami Törnrens informants expressed this as "maybe it is perceived that other cultures are more male dominated... I still believe that Sweden and Swedish culture is pretty equal." Thoughts and arguments along that line was one of the more common reasons against cross-cultural marriages and relationships (Osanami Törnren, 2011: 197). The men and women interviewed by Osanami Törnren mostly focuses on Muslim cultures as an area of perceived concern, despite the group not being mentioned in the questions asked by Törnren (ibid), but even if Russia wasn't explicitly mentioned several of the same principles apply. The country has more conservative values than Sweden, and the man of the family is traditionally seen as the provider and head of house. Some of the stereotypes that are mentioned by her aforementioned informants, concerns the practice of Swedish men importing wives with more traditional values. These wives are perceived as having less demands and freedom than Swedish women, and once again returning to perception of the man as "someone with outdated values" and an un-Swedish outlook on life (ibid).

As mentioned earlier, Bloch studies a group of migrant women in Turkey, (i.e. a non-western country), that can be considered as work migrants rather than traditional love migrants despite their relationships with native men, and the fact that some of these women come into the Turkey with a temporary visa might further support this interpretation of their situation (Bloch, 2017: 116). Even among the ones that does marry, few of the informants claim that it's for true "love" (Bloch, 2017: 117).

While of course not immediately generalizable to all Russian-Swedish couples in Sweden, the interviewed informants provide examples of how this notion of Russian women moving to Sweden for money is a prevalent stereotype in Sweden with the following quote:

"Ah. What many believe is that I came from such poor suburban, and I find somebody on the internet just to marry him for money." From my interview with Tatiana, as well as:

"... that I'm a refugee, or that I, shall we say, yeah, have a... not orphan but that I came from a very bad family that just drinks or something else. So that I just ran away from something that I didn't like. I hear, also, that I've been leaving the country for shall we say, political reasons... it was so stupid that I even don't want to repeat it." (Tatiana, 2019, interview).

What one can interpret from the quotes above is that Tatiana feels Swedes overall seem to have little to no knowledge of everyday life in Russia.

5.1.3 The Family Project

As the cultural importance of birthing children diminished in Sweden and several other western countries, the need to get married also lessened. The relation between these two factors being the increased value placed in mutual personal growth as opposed to a union for the sake of procreation. This development decreased the need to establish formalised, legally binding contracts on relationships lessens. Couples can thus now co-live, and even have children, without marital restrictions or securities (Karandashev, 2017: 167-168).

In Russia, more conservative values, such as the importance of marriage and having children, as well as financial security as a motivator for marriage, are all given more weight than they are given in Sweden (Appelberg, 2005: 7). The Russian family should be able to support itself; the man of the house is often, if not always, the chief provider and the safety and life quality of the pair's children is seen as symbol of marital success. While most women engage in wage labour, they are also expected to be nurturing mothers and simultaneously be the caretakers of the family's home (Appelberg, 2005. 10, 13).

5.1.4 The Russian informant's perspective on love and marriage

When the Russian informant Tatiana was asked about the difference between marrying in Russia and Sweden, respectively, she elaborated on the technical differences of *how* to get married in the respective countries. While she did not veer into any longer tract on cultural or normative differences *as such*, she did divulge that non-married cohabitation is less regulated in Russia, and enjoys a decidedly lower status in Russia, when compared to married couples moving in with each other. This does hint at a more traditional approach to the institution of marriage and family life in general. With this information learned, it is also noteworthy that Tatiana did not go into any longer discussion on potential differences in how the respective nationalities express love or interact *within* marriage.

Furthermore, Tatiana mentioned in passing that she left behind in Russia, not only her family and friends, but also her career. This would make her an anomaly from the Swedish perspective, as she neither was poor or unemployed. Here one can see the pain of vital conjuncture in action – two parts make themselves clear 1) Tatiana wants to live with her partner, but can only leave her everything to do so, 2) by choosing to live with her partner of choice, she is going against the will of both countries norms and expectations. She herself expressed disdain towards the notion that she'd moved to Sweden for financial security, instead citing that it was *not* a clear-cut decision for her. While she hinted at having gone through a lot of soul-searching prior to finally deciding to migrate, she cited the fact that her Swedish now-husband had two children in Sweden, who would have had a very difficult – if not impossible – time being brought with them to Russia. One can say that there was no other choice for Herman – Sweden or nothing, but that it was a difficult one for Tatiana, who still loves her homeland deeply. Tatiana also

mentioned that close family figures of hers spoke of their wish to see her happy, even if it meant her moving from them. Conversely, Tatiana did not mention her family expressing any economic considerations when advising her on what to do. This interprets as an expression of the same sentiment of marrying for the sake of love above all other reasons and doubts, as is praised in the West.

Tatiana also expressed the following sentiment: “And of course, we can talk about Russophobia that we have right now” (Tatiana, interview; 2019). Tatiana continues to point out stereotypes using an *exclusivist* perception of her from certain Swedes, using the word proposed by Osanami Törngren. Listing Russia as associated with strange behaviours such as drinking Vodka at random places, the emphasis on Russia as a grey place [inferably as opposed to a vibrant Sweden], emphasises the Russian migrant as someone seen as belonging to a weird, unimpressive and widely different culture. She told, outside of the interview that she herself has been called “you Russian whore” on the street on multiple occasions. She continued by mentioning a specific event from when she was taking her driver’s licence in Sweden, when the instructor asked her to her face if she was “one of those Russian whores that was sent out by the [Russian] government to spy on the West.”

The pair met on a tourist resort in Cyprus, not online as the stereotypes would indicate, in a situation where neither had planned on anything except having a relaxing vacation. Tatiana mentioned in the interview that she felt meeting Herman was destiny, and that she felt an immediate attraction to him, indicating a very romantic outlook on life. Both aspects of her answers show a similarity with the in Sweden praised principle of true love, rather than a planned action. Despite this, what is defined as love and when one should act upon it might differ between the two countries.

6 The Swedish Perspective on Love Migration

Tatiana expressed the feeling, that many Swedes view Sweden as superior to Russia. She mentions that people perceive her homeland as a grey place, devoid of life and vibrance. Thus, it is simply perceived as natural that the love migrants should want to migrate to beautiful, amazing Sweden. My interviewees impression is that she has been regarded with suspicion in Sweden (Tatiana, interview, 2019). It is alluded to by the informant that this pressure both parties within similar couples to *prove* that they *really* do love each other, and that they aren't simply using each other for mutual benefit. For example, the informant has felt stereotyped as somebody poor, who's seeking a better life in the West and has literally been called a whore and a spy. (Tatiana, interview, 2019).

This, of course, disregards the emotionally, if not legally complicated process required to build a new life in Sweden. A woman who searches for the safety of a marriage is sometimes, as mentioned earlier, seen by swedes as either a gold-digging whore or a repressed, misguided victim (Wilén, 2009: 7)

6.1.1 Stereotypes: the victims and the whores

A picture painted in Turkish media is that the Russian woman who leaves her homeland as being what's called "a Natasha" (Bloch, 2017: 126-127). She is described as being a promiscuous, luxury-seeking woman who enthralls her man with sexuality and allure (Bloch, 2017: 120). In other cases, the Russian migrant is described as a mail order bride who found her partner via online advertisement (Tatiana and Herman, interview, 2019).

Simultaneously the Russian woman might be considered conservative, prude and repressed – someone who doesn't realise that she can be something without her husband, and needs to adapt the progressive, Swedish way of life (Herman, interview, 2019). Despite this, the Russian woman is probably seen as less of a victim, than e.g. a Thai or a Muslim woman, whom are seen as having less agency: either for poverty or familiar values, as arranged marriages (Rytter, 2007:176)

The non-migrant man who choses this sort of woman is viewed as stuck in the past as well as having a bad view of women (Djurdjevic, 2016, 397). Herman supports when he mentions that "some people believe I married her because I wanted someone that would *obey* me." (interview, 2019). In Appelberg's essay, her informants describe their fellow Russian women as "beautiful" and "good mothers and wives" (2005: 10), and the Swedish women as "perhaps, somewhat

too independent” (2005: 13). Interestingly, they also mention the Swedish women’s lack of stereotypically feminine accessories such as heels and makeup. They describe the Russian woman as having a tenderness that their Swedish counterparts lacks, making them more attractive in some men’s eyes. This while they also stress that women of both ethnicities are hardworking and strive for some sort of financial security and independence (Appelberg, 2005: 16-17), something that further distinguishes her informants from those of Bloch, who seem to enjoy their temporary flings. Here the Russian informants are themselves stereotyping Swedish women.

6.1.2 The Informants’ Experiences of Being Stereotyped

This study’s Russian informant, Tatiana, discussed in an interview, her private and multiple experiences with stereotyping mentions that many of them concerns her financial situation and political status. As mentioned earlier she had in reality a good career back in Moscow, but she mentions that Swedes tends to assume that she came from a background of suburban poverty or even grow up in an abusive and alcoholic family. She also mentions that others view her as a political refugee which she dismisses as too stupid to repeat.

Other than this she also mentions that her relationship with her husband, Herman is met with suspicion. She describes herself being accused of, in her own words, wanting to “find somebody on the internet just to marry him for money.” (Tatiana, interview, 2019).

Herman, too, mentions that he himself have been stereotyped and that some people show a failure to understand his choice. Those mentioned as recurring, incorrect assumptions were the beliefs that Herman was:

- 1) Too incompetent to find a Swedish girl- aka the ideal marriage partner - and therefore needed to import a wife, to find one. Notable in this case is that he was married for more than a decade with a Swedish woman.

and

- 2) That he wanted a woman that would “*obey him*” (his emphasis, with contextual clarity that this was meant to ridicule the notion, as Tatiana is a determined, independent person).

While there appears to be no notable power dynamics in the couple’s interactions with each other, there is still the concern of economical dependency. Specifically, that her still being unemployed in Sweden, despite her having higher academical merits than her husband, renders her incapable of achieving independent economic security. making her dependant on her partner for survival.

While the husband being the sole provider may seem like a stereotypical example of unbalanced gender dynamics within love migrant couples, the situation has not arisen by choice, and both Tatiana and Herman dream of her

getting a job of her own. Being outspoken people, both Tatiana and Herman deny this having had any effect on their respect for one another. That said, it is nevertheless inferable from the interview that this is a stereotype they both face. It is also noteworthy that while this specific couple defy this stereotype, they are only one isolated case, and it is perfectly conceivable that toxic power dynamics may arise in couples in situations similar to this one. Herman himself understands and accepts that Tatiana is far from the only immigrant struggling to find employment in Sweden and is very clear with that fact that he resents the system, not his wife. Worth mentioning is the fact that it is often difficult for migrants to get a job in Sweden (Frycklund, 2017).

6.2 Gender Roles Across Borders

In her essay Appelberg studies self-perceived gender roles and how they are different to those of Swedes, according to her Russian informants. All of Appelberg's interviewees accept that there is a clear difference between Russian and Swedish women (2005: 1). With the feminist theories presented by Armbjörnsson (2003) in mind, here, a clear example of gender roles in the process of being established can be found.

In her section on background, Appelberg mentions that gender roles are well defined in Russia and cites a schoolbook in which typical masculine and feminine traits are listed. Example of feminine ones are "considerate", "in need of protection" and "talkative, but soft-spoken" that appear in stark contrast to the examples of masculine attributes: "aggressive", "good at decision making" and "hides emotions" (2005: 15). The book in question might have gone out of print in the last decade and the half, but it is nevertheless a clear example of a more conservative view on gender. The interviewed young women mention a few things that fit into the Swedish stereotypes about them: beautiful and family oriented, but also emphasises that the Russian woman is hardworking and studious, not only motherly (Appelberg, 2005: 10, 16, 17). An interesting side note is that Russian women have been working and supporting their families financially since the Soviet Union was in its cradle. While the man is traditionally the main provider, women have had the opportunity, or been required to both work and study, even so.

The attributes mentioned above stands in contrast to the words they use to describe Swedes: while her informants says that they admire Swedish women, they also describe them as colder and less nurturing than their Russian counterparts - something that makes the Swedes less appealing to men (Appelberg, 2005: 10). In other words, the Swedes are perceived as less feminine by their Russian counterparts. Gender equality is, as mentioned several times before, an important part of the Swedish identity. As pointed out by both Osanami Törngren and Fernandez, any outside influence that might be perceived as threatening this, is viewed with suspicion (Fernandez, 2013: 283; Osanami Törngren, 2011: 197). Hence, the idea that the Russian females aren't as

financially autonomous both feeds into the idea of the migrating woman and her Swedish partner as contra-progressive elements, in the eyes of some Swedes.

6.2.1 Heteronormative hierarchies

According to the theory proposed by Rubin, there are different types of heterosexual behaviours that are ranked differently depending on factors as age-gaps, monogamy etc (Rubin, 1984: 152-153). The highest-ranking ones are monogamous relations between two partners of a similar age, but opposite sex in a private space where no commerce is involved (ibid). Considering the fact that both of my informants are of a similar age, are married for consensual, entirely non-commercial reasons, several of the high-status requirements listed by Rubin occur (ibid). Thus, it stands to reason that their relation should be perceived as high-ranking by the Swedish public. Yet it is clear that this isn't the case.

I propose that there are two reasons for this, 1) that people judge from their own stereotypes and might assume that there are commercial factors included whatever it's true or not. 2) There is an ethnic factor behind this. The stereotypic reason of why Swedish men chooses non-Swedes or non-westerners is that they aren't good enough to court the ideal partner and settles for the second best. The opposite appears to be true in Bloch's Turkish example, where having an eastern European mistress is seen as a status-symbol (Bloch, 2017:117). The attitude, although different at the surface, appears to hint at ethnicity factoring into a relationship's place in the heteronormative hierarchy – even if it is far from a solve all explanation.

7 Conclusion

The Russian woman is both seen as something *exotic* and sexual, per the definitions made by Osanami Törngren, as showed by the examples brought up both by Bloch and my informants, while at the same time often being viewed as something dangerous and alien. Especially the quote from the driving instructor, when Tatiana was called both a whore and a spy highlight this. This places Russian migrant women in Sweden in the *exclusivist* category, with hints of the *exotic* category. The perception of Russians as hostile to Sweden can be further emphasized by the etymology of Swedish words such as “ruskigt”, (rough translation: bad and/or uncomfortable) and “rysligt”, (rough translation: terrifying or scary).

It is clear that due to their choice of partner, the interviewed couple has faced trails similar to the alienating and stereotyping processes referred to in this study, with both the Russian wife and the Swedish husband expressing a feeling of being misunderstood. ‘The informants’ experiences strengthen the points made by the above systematized prior research, and their individual experiences – while not automatically generalizable – paint a clear picture of what it entails, to marry for the sake of love, and leave Russia behind for Sweden; One runs the risk of being seen as either being malicious or victimized. This includes the notion that Russian women come to Sweden to marry for money, be it through a ploy to trap gullible or otherwise undesirable men, or be it out of sheer desperation to escape native poverty. This at the same time as the sexualisation of the Russian is made a point of attractivity, while being the cause of resentment, nonetheless.

Furthermore, this hostility is perceived in spite of the rather similar skin colours and not-so-different appearances of Russians and swedes. This is interesting, as Osanami Törngren mentions these factors as commonly used cultural differentiators (2011:68).

Thus, it is necessary to look towards other differences, in order to explain the reason for the Swedish perception of Russians, and this study understands these reasons to be partly cultural. At a cursory overview, one might assume that cultural similarities such as both being mainly Christian and generally industrialised countries, should be enough to put the migrants in the *gradualist* camp. However, the difference in primary Christian denomination of the countries, secular-lutheran and orthodox, respectively, are of note. This study understands this religious difference, in combination with the countries being historical enemies as emphasizing the Russians as part of the *exclusivist* camp, in Swedish eyes, as supported by the conducted interview. Another point raised in the interview is that of contemporary politics and the expansive politics of Russian president Vladimir Putin, which makes many Swedes feel uneasy or threatened. While Tatiana rejects the idea of her being any kind of political

refugee, it is notable nonetheless that the *Swedish* reception of her, has incorporated the Russian state's actions, as a subset of the stereotypes one applies to Russian love migrants.

7.1 Differing Family Lives

The search for a man with whom the woman can achieve the Russo-culturally expected family project with financial safety, can be seen as contradictory to the Swedish attitude of premiering love over every other marital motivation. While even Swedes do take economical facts into consideration before establishing relationships, it is not something one talks of. That part is – at the very least rhetorically – viewed as a practical problem one has to overcome, preferably in private, and not outspokenly viewed as a factor of the decision process. This process of decision making - based on the Swedish gender expectations – is a cornerstone to the autonomous ideal that Fernandez raises. Thus, Swedes easily perceive Russia as culturally reactionary, as well as too focused on money, even greedy. In reality, it might simply be a consideration concerning if the woman feels safe to commit to a relationship or not, rather than actively seeking money. It needn't be seen as a lack of appreciation for love as such, but rather as a wish to know that one will be able to live a prosperous life with the man one loves. Here, the woman is sometimes stereotyped to be a victim of poverty who opts to sell her soul and body to escape it. Thus, she is both a pitiable victim as well as despicable in her own right, since she lets herself be “bought”.

This consideration does, as previously established, not exclude the existence of so called “true love” in any given case of love migration. On the contrary: whether the woman's life conditions might improve or not, leaving one's homeland is no easy choice. It entails learning a new language, adapting to the new culture, which might reject one's reason for being there. If the Russian woman is ready to leave her family and old life behind for the partner in question, despite the monetary uncertainty, aforementioned risk of societal rejection, et cetera, this study holds as likely that the perceived lack of romantic love in such cases, remains squarely in the eye of the Swedish beholder. This conclusion is supported by the fact that there is support for the notion of romantic love, in Russia as well as in Sweden.

With this in mind, this study infers that the key to understanding the Swedish perception of Russians as being hostilely alien, springs *not* from differing notions of what *love* is, but rather, differing cultural views of what *family life* should look like.

Something that this study considers a good example of this, is drawn from the interview with Tatiana and Herman. the couple agreed that family life differs between Russia and Sweden. For example, they perceived unmarried co-habitation is both normal and legally rather similar to being married in everyday situations. Conversely unmarried co-habitation was hinted at being culturally

frowned upon and legally dissimilar from marriage to a greater extent than in Sweden.

In conclusion, Russians and Swedes seem to have rather similar concepts of romantic love as such. That said, Swedes maintain and defend the exclusivity of romantic love as the *sole acceptable motivation* of relationships, to a notably greater extent than Russians do. Thus, Swedes are prone to feel that Russians value “genuine love” too little to be trusted as marriage partners.

According to Tatiana: to Russians, on the other hand, marriage is seen as much more of an irrevocable commitment, than it is seen as such by Swedes. Russians are, on their end, prone to assume that Swedes do not take marriage and the commitments it entails seriously enough. The cultural value placed on children, and how you raise them is another important difference, as Russian culture still enshrines procreation as central to being married. Contrast this to Sweden where the romantic partnership is the foremost aspect of relationships and marriage. This further divides the Swedish and Russian expectations of how family life should look, and how family life should be approached, which contributes to a perception of mutual otherness.

All in all, and a few cultural similarities aside, the relationship between the countries, and therefore the relationship between the countries’ respective populations, have been strained for hundreds of years.

7.2 Future research

While I am confident in the reliability of its results, it is however, a thoroughly qualitative study with precious little original empirics, and no statistical basis whatsoever. Thus, this study strongly encourages those with the necessary resources available, to conduct wider statistical studies, testing the results of this study, on the Russian love migrant community in Sweden, at large.

Furthermore, this study invites comparative studies to build on the claims presented in this one. For example, this study mentions Thai women as another stereotypically ostracized group of love migrants. Comparing this study to similarly conducted research specifically concerning Thai women, would be a good step, in researching whether the treatment of Russian women, is a phenomenon specific to Russians in Sweden, or if Sweden treats other love migrant collectives similarly.

Other matters to which this study would like to point is the “import wives” and trafficking phenomena. As even genuine love migration is often stereotyped as “wife importation”, trafficking, or close thereto, this study would like to point to the need to study how these matters shape the perception of the others. For example, a topic study would be how people perceive matters such as wife importation and trafficking, and how these perceptions shape how love migration as a separate phenomenon is perceived. While this thesis made a conscious effort not to study those subjects – due to them being fundamentally different from what is studied in this thesis, they remain relevant topics for social science.

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9 Appendix 1: Interview Questions

Hi, thanks for participating. For your information, this interview is recorded and will be transcribed. You will, however, be allowed to remain anonymous. That said, for transparency reasons, it will be stated that we have some sort of pre-established, trusting relationship before this interview. As such, I want to point something out. Sometimes, when we speak, we don't spell out that which we know the other person is already aware of. I want to urge you to speak your mind, and even though I know underlying factors, please spell them out for the interview. Again, thank you very much for participating.

Questions for both informants:

- 1) How, and where did you meet your partner?
- 2) What first drew you to them?
- 3) When did you decide to move in with your partner, how did you decide where in which country you wanted to live?
- 4) Do you feel like there is a cultural difference in the approach to marriage in the two countries? IF YES, how come?
- 5) Why did you decide to marry?
- 6) To what extent have you or your partner faced what you perceive to be *stereotyping* based on your origin or situation?
 - a. How did it happen? Was it focused on one, or both of you?
- 7) To put it on the record, I know you have been in a marriage before this one. Can you tell me about it?
- 8) To what extent do you feel you've picked up values and cultural from your partner's culture?
- 9) What is your view of what marriage entails in your native country?
- 10) If you were to briefly describe how you view the relationship between Russia and Sweden as countries through history, how would you summarize it?

Questions specifically directed to W:

- 1) What did you leave behind in Russia when you moved? Career? Family?
- 2) What was your image of Sweden and Swedes before you moved here?

Questions specifically directed to H:

- 1) To what extent, and in what ways, do you feel alienated by Swedish society due to your choice of partner?