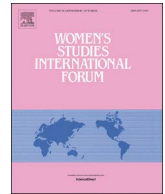




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## Dressing down to fit in: Analyzing (re)orientation processes through stories about Norwegianization

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## ABSTRACT

This article addresses the relation between gender and social change in the context of east-west migration. Using a feminist phenomenologist and interpretative approach, the analysis shows that Russian female migrants in Northern Norway, although well-educated and generally well-integrated in the local labor market, often felt that they were on display and judged through their bodies. Their bodily visibility pushed them to make changes regarding their ways of appearing, dressing and in their migration status. We conclude that the migrants' self-consciousness, as well as their various ways of "becoming Norwegianized," may be conceptualized as an effect of local, gendered stigmatizing processes.

## Introduction

This article examines the relation between gender and social change in the context of east-west migration.<sup>1</sup> Employing a feminist, phenomenologist approach, we draw on data from a qualitative study of female Russian migrants having settled in Finnmark, in northernmost Norway. The article reveals that Russian female migrants in Northern Norway, although well-educated and usually also well-integrated in the local labor market, often felt that they were on display and judged through their bodies. Their bodily visibility pushed them to make changes regarding their ways of appearing, dressing and in their migration status. We conclude that the migrants' self-consciousness, as well as their various ways of "becoming Norwegianized," may be conceptualized as an effect of local, gendered stigmatizing processes.

Finnmark, bordering Russia in the east, is a vast but sparsely populated county that for decades has experienced a steady population decline. Since 2007, though, the numbers have stabilized and even begun to grow, mainly due to immigration. Currently, migrants constitute approximately 10% of the population (Statistics Norway, *Kommuneprofilen* 2017),<sup>2</sup> originating from countries such as Finland, Poland, Lithuania, Thailand, Somalia and Afghanistan. The largest group of immigrants living in Finnmark today, though, comes from

Russia. After the dissolution of the Iron Curtain in 1989, Russian migration was driven primarily by economic reasons, given the severe conditions in post-Soviet Russia. Nevertheless, over time, the motivations have become more diverse (Johanson & Olsen, 2012). Since its beginning, this east-west migration has been strongly feminized. Today, 70% of the Russian migrants living in Finnmark are women, among whom the majority obtained their residence permit after having married a Norwegian man, whereas 30% came as students or specialist labor migrants (Tevlina, 2015, p. 72). Although the political relations between Russia and Norway have softened over the years, at the same time, new symbolic boundaries have been created (Kramvig & Stien, 2002), often reinforced by ideas of cultural difference, as well as bureaucratic procedures that may be understood as discriminatory on an individual level (Viken & Schwenke-Fors, 2014).

Following the increase in female migrants across the east-west border in northernmost Norway, Russian women in (Northern) Norway have become the object of ample research. Various studies hence highlight how Russian women have for a long time been associated with, and must negotiate, negative stereotypes. Prostitution, in terms of Russian women selling their bodies to Norwegian men, became a problem in some places in Finnmark in the 1990s. Additionally, many studies have examined issues related to experiences and consequences

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of this cross-border prostitution (see e.g. Flemmen & Lotherington, 2009; Jacobsen & Skilbrei, 2010; Kramvig & Stien, 2002; Leontieva & Sarsenov, 2003; Lotherington & Flemmen, 2007). Russian women's experiences of gendered inclusion processes in local communities have also been examined (Wara, 2016a, 2016b; Wara & Munkejord, 2016). Even though, as mentioned above, Russian migrants in Northern Norway are generally highly educated and well-integrated (Aure, 2012; Munkejord, 2015), the media's depiction of them was for a long time one-dimensional (Flemmen, 2007). In particular, newspaper articles have emphasized those few involved in criminality, or criticized Russian marriage migrants assumed to be motivated by economic factors rather than "pure love". In combination, the pejorative media representations, the prostitution-oriented research and local stereotypes have had a long-term impact on Russian women's everyday life experiences in Northern Norway, as has also been found more generally in studies of female migrants from post-Soviet states in other countries, such as Italy (Näre, 2014) and Portugal (Hellermann, 2006). A study of female middle-class Russian immigrants in the US, likewise, found that former Soviet women often felt the need to redefine and downscale their professional identities, as well as to redress their sexuality in the new normative milieu (Remennick, 2007, p. 327). Moreover, a study by Krivonos (2017) on Russian-speaking young migrants and (un)employment in Finland is of relevance. Although a neighboring country, Finland has, compared to Norway, a more uneasy historical relationship to Russia due to the fact that Finland was part of the Russian Empire until 1917 and the subsequent Finnish civil war. Partly viewed against this ambiguous past, Krivonos's study reveals that Russian-speaking immigrants in Finland today, despite often having degrees from their country of origin, are immersed in processes of being racialized. Moreover, she shows that, as a strategy to "carve out spaces for respectability and worth," young unemployed Russian-speaking migrants in Finland claim belonging to the Finnish society at the cost of other ("undeserving" and "lazy") migrants, often simplistically referred to as "asylum seekers" (Krivonos, 2017, p. 13).

This article builds on relevant national and international literature in order to examine the gendered and bodily experiences related to east-west migration analyzed through the stories told by Russian women having settled in Northern Norway. In the following, we will outline the conceptual and methodological framework adopted before presenting the empirical findings, our analysis and conclusions.

### The body as a site of intercultural encounters

In our analysis, we take inspiration from Merleau-Ponty's conceptualization of the phantom limb in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012[1945]), Ahmed's understanding of (re)orientation practices (Ahmed, 2004) and Näre's perspectives of migrancy (Näre, 2013a, 2013b). While the phantom limb refers to the ambiguous presence of a lost or amputated limb, the concept of (re)orientation practices is inspired by the phenomenological notion of intentionality, meaning that the body is always "oriented toward something" in its effort to make the world a familiar place (Ahmed, 2006, p. 553). Migrancy, moreover, is suggested by Näre (2013b) as a fundamental social category in line with, and intersected by, class, race and gender. Näre (2013b, p. 604) defines migrancy as "the socially constructed subjectivity of being a migrant, which is inscribed in certain bodies by the larger society in general and legislative practices in particular." Migrancy is thus a useful concept that helps us to understand interconnections between migration and gendered bodily experiences among migrants embodied in specific geographical contexts.

Before we continue, it may be relevant to clarify that phenomenology as an empirical methodology conceives experience as "always already meaningful, even prior to active reflection" (Sobchack, 2010, p. 52). This means that objects of consciousness and the values attached to them are "synthesized by an embodied consciousness," constituting a "lived body" (ibid.). This lived body, which is intentionally directed,

moreover, "rises toward the world" through the activities of perception, interpretation and expression (Merleau-Ponty, 2012[1945], p. 78). A phenomenological approach thus makes a distinction between the objective, material body and the phenomenal, lived body. Moreover, it makes a distinction between the lived body and language. At the same time, these phenomena are interconnected.

The phantom limb or phantom pain is introduced by Merleau-Ponty as a metaphor to grasp what happens to a body when missing something that was there before (ibid., p. 78–85). Concretely, a phantom limb is a limb that has been removed or lost, for example, due to surgery or an accident, but that despite its absence may still be felt by the body (as if it was still there). In the case of a phantom limb, then, the lived body's knowledge "emerges provisionally as the correlation of the experience's subjective and objective aspects" (Sobchack, 2010, p. 53). To explain this, Merleau-Ponty says: "The phantom arm is not the representation of an arm, but the ambivalent presence of an arm" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012[1945], p. 83). The body, moreover, comprises two layers: the habitual and the actual body (ibid., p. 84). The habitual is what we have learned to do and can do without thinking (for example, always putting on lipstick before going outside the house). The habitual body, then, represents skills that function as a reminder of what we can call a complete, or whole, body. Our skills are well known to the actual body, but difficulties may emerge when something disturbs the communication from the habitual body to the actual body. Thus, in the case of a lost limb, either materially or metaphorically, the actual body can no longer rely on or relax in the habitual. The putting on of lipstick before going out is no longer an automated skill or habit but is questioned, perhaps even impossible to accomplish. This may cause pain for the person in question, and may result in the phenomenon of phantom pain.

In this article then, the perception of the phantom limb/pain can help us conceive what we can call an "amputated Russianness" among some of our participants, which again may shed light on why some of them feel the need to (re)orientate themselves, for example, through new dressing strategies in order to fit in after having settled in Finnmark.

Merleau-Ponty's perspectives on the phantom limb are used in combination with Sara Ahmed's (1999, 2004, 2006) postcolonial feminist phenomenology of (re)orientation practices. Ahmed understands migration as a (re)orientation, both in terms of movement and dislocation, and also as "a mechanism for theorizing how identity itself is predicated on movement or loss" (Ahmed, 1999, p. 332). When the migrant is dislocated, (s)he feels tensions between "here" and "there" and "estrangement," after which a process of (re)orientation may take place, in the sense of orienting oneself "towards certain objects that help us find our way" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 543).

Our analytical perspectives used rest on the idea of a body-in-the-world that knows itself through its active relationship with the world and its ongoing identification with it (Merleau-Ponty, 2012 [1945]). The Russian women's practices and experiences related to dressing will thus be examined as a conscious act that presupposes a capacity to reflect and locate meaningful connections between one's own practices and surroundings. Such perspectives are relevant for a discussion of the clothed body's "(re)orientation," understood as a meaning-seeking process and as a site for change resulting from specific interconnections between the gendered migrant body and specific geographical locations.

### Data and methods

In order to obtain a description of the participants' own bodily experiences related to settling in their new place of living, a phenomenological and interpretative approach was considered most appropriate (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This article draws on data from participatory observation, individual interviews and focus group interviews. The data collection took place during five field visits (2012–2015) in a northern

Norwegian town. During these field visits, the first author, herself a female Russian migrant living in Northern Norway, conducted interviews but also spent time with the participants in a variety of social settings, such as ladies' nights, at the swimming pool, in the sauna, and on skiing trips. The first author took also part in Christmas celebrations and other events organized by the local Russian Association and participated in informal town walks and café visits with several of the participants. Different themes were highlighted during the encounters and interviews with the participants. In particular, the fieldworker was interested in understanding the female Russian migrants' everyday life experiences in Finnmark. As a result of this interest, the participants told stories about how they felt, in the beginning after settling in Finnmark, visible, vulnerable and judged by their bodies, and in what ways they responded to these experiences.

Importantly, we consider the encounters between the researcher and the participants as an interactive context for storytelling, in which ongoing discursive processes are integrated into the immediate, moving, cognitive, and speaking bodies (Tanggard, 2009). The second author did not take part in the data collection. However, she conducted fieldwork in the same town during the same period on (mostly female) migrant care workers (Munkejord, 2016) and immigrant entrepreneurship (Munkejord, 2015), interviewing some of the same participants that took part in this study. Thus, whereas the first author produced all the data upon which this article builds, both authors collaborated closely in the analysis of the data, as well as on the conceptualization and writing of this article.

More precisely, in this article, we analyze data from field visits and in-depth interviews with 15 Russian women (3 labor migrants, 5 exchange students and 7 marriage migrants). At the time of the interviews, the participants were aged from 20 to 55 and had lived in Norway between 1 and 20 years. All of them had grown up in a city, half of them in the northwest just across the border and half of them in cities in other parts of Russia. All the participants had higher education or were students, most of them were well-integrated in the local market in jobs where they made use of their education, and may be categorized as middle-class.

In order to present the data in some detail, we selected three participant portraits. These illustrate how the participants in this study, across different modes of migrancy, and across different ages, talked about how they felt visible and vulnerable upon their arrival in Finnmark, as well as how they used various strategies in order to try (re)orientate their way of being in the world. Different participants' stories could have been selected to illustrate variations in experience. We decided to highlight the stories of one marriage migrant, one labor migrant and one student, who were of different ages and who had settled in Finnmark at different points in time.

All the interviews were conducted in Russian, recorded, and then partially transcribed and translated before being analyzed in collaboration with the second author. However, the following analysis builds not only on the three cases that will be presented in this article but on the data material as an integral whole. Our analysis is inspired by intersectionality, which enables us to see how categories such as migrancy, gender, and class may be viewed as "assemblages" or "overlapping systems of simultaneous oppressions" (Anthias, 2012, p. 126). Anthias, moreover, points out that intersectionality postulates that "different social divisions interrelate in terms of the production of social relations and in terms of people's lives" (ibid.).

In the following, we will present the embodied stories of the marriage migrant Maria, the student migrant Aleksandra, and the labor migrant Sofia in order to capture variations in interconnections between migrancy and otherness. The names used in this article are pseudonyms, and some details have been modified to try to secure anonymity. Moreover, the first author has presented the empirical case stories to the three participants in question, and all three of them accepted that the portraits could be used for analysis in publications.

### Three stories about (re)orientation

*Maria: "I felt like a white crow, but now I'm black, like everyone else"*

Maria is one of the informants the first author met during her first fieldwork visit. Maria had moved to a North Norwegian town as a marriage immigrant ten years earlier. Her degree in economics from Russia had come in useful when starting a business with several employees. She described her life in Norway through the metaphor of the "A4 format:" "two children with my Norwegian husband, a house and a cabin." She is a positive, active and engaged woman, who knows the town's Russian community well. Maria thus introduced the first author to several Russian participants and served as a door opener in the beginning of the fieldwork.

On the first author's second field visit, Maria collected her at the airport, wearing a lovely mink coat with a modern, elegant design. Her car outside was fashionable. Maria explained that her motivation to buy a more expensive car was that it suited her ideas of good quality as well as aesthetics: "I spend so little time on dressing up that I thought a car might compensate for my everyday appearance. You have to give yourself some treats!" Upon a compliment, she also gave a quick explanation for the fur coat: she used it very rarely, even though this was, according to her, the most "practical and comfortable" garment for the cold temperatures in Finnmark during the winter. Later, Maria clarified that she tended to avoid wearing fur because "it's not accepted here." Sports and down garments were her usual attire, even though she knew, as she put it, that such clothing "isn't very feminine." Even so, she found it "painless and comfortable" and "apt to fit in here." She used a Russian proverb to describe her motivation for change and her emotional sense of clothing practices, saying that she felt "like a white crow" when wearing the clothes she herself preferred.

Feeling like a white crow is a common Russian phrase for drawing attention to oneself and not fitting into social contexts. A white crow is an unusual natural phenomenon that results from a rare mutation, albinism, which makes crows more visible and therefore more vulnerable to predators. In Russian language, a white crow is a symbol of being "other," often associated with suffering, misunderstanding, and alienation, based on the assumption that the homogeneity equals normality. At the same time, however, it may suggest purity, individuality and a strong personality. Maria's use of this metaphor sparked a reflective process in the fieldworker on a range of issues, such as forms of reason, dominant regimes of taste, femininity, and linkages – to be explored below – between the migrant body, place, and othering processes.

Maria described her new place as "a community lacking in urbanity," and commented that she sometimes missed applying make-up: "In Russia I wasn't able to go out and throw away the garbage without putting on make-up," she explained.

Maria not only stopped using make-up and her fur coat in Norway but also stopped wearing a skirt, except for special occasions. She explained this in the following way:

I felt I had to explain and give reasons for wearing a skirt. I felt that people turned around behind my back and the world almost stopped. It sometimes made me very angry.

She said that she sometimes missed being a "feminine woman" in Norway but instead chose to travel to other places when she felt the need to express these aspects of her personality. She also made the following reflection:

I'm often told that we Russians are so good at dressing up. But such comments can also have a double edge. They might be sincerely meant as a compliment, but it can also happen that the real message is wrapped up in politeness, suggesting that we are overly made-up, vain or insecure. They [the local women] often connect an absence of femininity to equality and independence, and [Russian]

femininity to submissiveness. There's a different logic at work here, and we just have to accept it. There's no use in trying to convince them otherwise.

Further, Maria told the first author that she had been asked about sexual services and told that being Russian and wearing a skirt in Finnmark can be an unfortunate combination, as it might create negative associations among the local population.

I haven't worn a skirt in a long time, it's like it doesn't matter that much anymore. It's too much of a bother [...]. I've become Norwegianized and prefer sleeping a bit longer to dressing up. It's rather relaxing.

The first author was puzzled by Maria's stories, not least by thinking about how she left the nice, warm fur coat hanging in the closet opted to wear sports garments not to train or relax, but even when she was going to town. The use of fur garments can be associated with many different discursive fields, such as animal protection, ecology, nature, status and power relations. We will not address any of those areas but will instead focus on the phenomenon of the fur coat worn by a Russian woman in Finnmark. As Maria explained, wearing a fur or a skirt while being a female Russian migrant in Finnmark was interpreted by locals in such a stigmatizing way that it pushed her to dress down. Maria also explained that the prejudice against Russians in Finnmark hit her daughter in school when she wore what Maria considered normal clothes:

Here, if you're not wearing saggy sweatpants or sports clothes, and if you're Russian to boot – then you're either vain or a hooker. If you're wearing normal clothes, they ask you if it's your birthday. This may of course be because it's a small town, but it gets even worse when you're Russian. At primary school, my daughter was often called a whore or vain, just because she was wearing normal clothes and not sports gear. I don't know if things are different now.

*Aleksandra: "I felt like I had morphed into something else..."*

Aleksandra is 23 years old, originally from a small North Russian town. She arrived in Finnmark as a student one year before the interview. Holding an M.A. from a university in Murmansk, she was offered to go on a student exchange and was currently taking her second Master's degree, which she saw as "an excellent chance to get an education abroad." The Master's program she was completing in Norway was designed for international students and was taught in English. She had already learnt some Norwegian and said that she had made friends with both international and Norwegian students. Her boyfriend lived in Murmansk, and she was planning to return after having completed her degree. She stated the following:

In Norway, there are both different expectations from and demands placed on women. It feels great to be able to walk around with uncombed hair and still feel appealing or attractive as a woman. I recall being really shocked at first that discovering that local women walked around with untidy hair. I could clearly see that they hadn't brushed it, as we're used to. I saw it straight away, it was like the first thing I noticed. You know how we're raised...our self-respect starts with cultivating our own bodies. When a woman neglects her appearance, it's like the ultimate decay. It means she's in total decay, that she's utterly lost. But here, other qualities are emphasized, and you have to get used to it. Those things aren't connected to self-respect, it's rather the other way around. Everything is upside down. I recall that being without make-up and with uncombed hair made me feel naked and without knickers. It felt strange. It all felt wrong; it was me, sort of, not completely. There was something strange about me. I felt like I had morphed into something else...And each time I happened to pass by a mirror or a window I looked at my own image with wonder. There was an alien being looking at me – a troll

with tangled hair. I wasn't sure if I liked what I saw or not.

This account illustrates a recurrent theme in the narratives of several of our participants. It revolves around Aleksandra's thoughts about the local women's rough and ready hairstyles that require minimal effort, in her words, "walking around without having brushed your hair." Her story is framed by a comparison between Russia and Norway, in which clothes and physical appearance are understood as a vehicle for her own orientation in different places:

I remember telling this to a female friend who had been here for a while. She just commented: 'Welcome to the club – you've become Norwegianized!' But today I feel like my natural self when my hair is messy, and I feel both phony and strange when my hair is brushed.

*Sofia: "I did not change at all, because I already wore high heels the European way"*

Sofia is around 30 years old and is originally from a small North Russian town. Three years before our encounter, she decided to settle in Finnmark because of her Norwegian partner living there. In order to obtain a residence permit, she enrolled in a Master's program. She felt it was a waste of time, since she had already finished her education in Russia some years earlier. Her boyfriend asked her to marry him, but Sofia emphasized that "getting married in order to stay in Norway" was not an option for her. She did not want her boyfriend, his family or their Norwegian friends to see her as a marriage migrant; she wanted to be regarded as an "independent and self-reliant" woman. Shortly, however, she obtained employment in line with her Russian education and was able to reformulate her status as a labor migrant (as a specialist). When the first author asked her how it was for her, settling in Finnmark, she replied as follows:

I didn't notice any difference. This is a small place and people dress practically, in a way that suits their laid-back lifestyle and the climate. I didn't notice any difference with respect to clothing, behavior or mentality. I use neither fur garments nor red lipstick anyway, and even in Russia I wore high heels the European way. My style wasn't particularly Russian. So, I didn't make any changes whatsoever. It feels as though I've come from Russia to Russia. Only the language was different. Apart from that, there aren't many differences. I've always been sportive. But I sometimes read between the lines and understand that Russian women in general are conceived in particular ways, and that there is a peculiar interest in Russian women. I've heard stories from the 1990s. Sometimes people ask me why Russian women use red lipstick and why they put on make-up...Then I tend to answer – also with an undertone – that perhaps they want to look like 'women!' and suggest that they [the Norwegians] really have few things to talk about. I actually didn't reflect on those comments at the outset, but once I started to learn both the language and the hidden meanings I understood a lot of what was being said between the lines. Such as the realization that Norwegians are very preoccupied with gender equality. I've understood that it's like they love to tell others how virtuous they been when they've done housework, but when we do it it's instantly seen as submission. It means 'poor stupid you.'

Further, Sofia felt she had settled in an exotic little town, with many recreational possibilities in the natural environment. She said people in town were nice and easy to get to know:

I don't miss Russia at all. I can't imagine going back. You have so many possibilities here, and I feel safe, young, attractive and independent. I feel strong here.

To sum up very briefly, the stories of Maria, Aleksandra and Sofia show how dressing styles and appearance can be understood as (re)orientation practices within a new place of living. In Maria's story, we

discern sorrow or pain at not being able to dress like she did in Russia; Aleksandra said she had started to enjoy not always brushing her hair or putting on lipstick before going out, whereas Sophia claimed that she dressed exactly as before, in a sporty way. Similar experiences along these three lines were told by several of the other participants. The three portraits highlight how dressing styles, appearance and migration status may be interpreted as cultural signifiers in interpersonal encounters and employed as a necessary strategy to avoid local prejudice and othering processes that could affect certain groups of migrants for years. This process will be further elaborated below.

### Analysis of (re)orientation processes through stories about Norwegianization

#### *Russianness as a phantom limb*

In the following, we will highlight interconnections between gendered bodies and social change in the context of east-west migration, with a particular focus on the participants' stories about appearance and clothes. We understand clothes both as an "interface between the body and society" (Storm-Mathisen, 2010, p. 48) and as a phenomenon that may both transcend and neutralize boundaries and distinctions between differently situated people. When analyzing dressing strategies, it is important to remember that dressing is always subject to shifting interpretations across space and time. As argued by Secor (2002, p. 8), space constitutes the "meaning of dress," and at the same time enforces "norms of dress" in particular ways (Secor, 2002). Secor, moreover, refers to the framework developed by Entwistle (Entwistle, 2000) in order to understand the relationship between body, dress and space, particularly regarding how different spaces are operated by different sets of rules that determine the norms of self-presentation encountered as they move between various spaces:

In sum, the study of dress as situated practice requires moving between, on the one hand, the discursive and representational aspects of dress, and the way the body/dress is caught up in relations of power, and on the other, the embodied experience of dress and the use of dress as a means by which individuals orientate themselves to the social world.

(Entwistle, 2000, p. 39)

Inspired by this perspective, our analysis will illustrate how the participants' clothed bodies can be understood both as "information" about local norms and as an individual condition for experience as they orientate themselves toward their new place of abode in their efforts to make the world a familiar place (Ahmed, 2006, p. 553) (see also Christou & Michai, 2015). In her article "A Phenomenology of Whiteness" (2007), Ahmed goes even further, arguing that bodies take shape by being orientated around certain bodies or institutions more than others. Such bodies, for Ahmed, are both organizational bodies and human bodies subjected to societal structures. She argues:

Whiteness could be described as an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space. [...] Phenomenology helps us to show how whiteness is an effect of racialization, which in turn shapes what it is that bodies 'can do'.

(Ahmed, 2007, p. 157)

Ahmed argues that black bodies are used to confirm ideas about "white" normality. Whiteness, as pointed out by Krivonos (2017), moreover, is not a matter of skin pigmentation or phenotypical traits. Rather, it may be considered as a system of advantage that grants privilege to (some) white people, while excluding others. Whiteness, Krivonos (2017) argues, becomes a site of struggle for people who do not meet the socially constructed ideals of whiteness in a certain socio-spatial context. In the following analysis, these ideas can help us comprehend why Russian women in Norway orientate themselves

around Norwegian cultural norms when adapting their ways of dressing and appearing after having settled in Finnmark. As the three participant portraits above illustrate, the participants talked in different ways about a phase when they *felt lost* when they encountered local prejudice against Russian immigrants, coupled with local norms about dressing and femininity. "Losing one's orientation" is often associated with the loss of one's place in the world and disorientation (Ahmed, 2007, p. 157). Since Merleau-Ponty's (2012[1945]) primary concern is with inherited bodily structures, disorientation from a phenomenological viewpoint only becomes meaningful in terms of the body's original instinct to orientate itself in space.

Maria, the marriage migrant presented above, felt that her body was out of place after settling in Finnmark. She experienced her clothed body, in particular when wearing her fur coat, a nice skirt, and lipstick, as abnormal and unnatural. She felt that her body did not fit in, that it sexualized her (for a similar analysis, see Kofoed & Simonsen, 2011). Her clothed body was no longer (as she had experienced it back home in Russia) an unnoticed, anonymous, tactile subject but had turned into an object for her reflection that had obtruded into the *foreground* of her orientation. After some years of encountering prejudice in various forms, however, she chose to change her way of dressing in Finnmark and started instead to wear "painless and comfortable" sporty clothes that helped her "blend in." As a result, she herself concluded that "I have become Norwegianized and prioritize sleeping a bit longer to dressing up. It's quite relaxing." Letting oneself become Norwegianized can, in Maria's case, be understood as a *bodily (re)orientation* (Ahmed, 2007) to avoid stigmatizing othering processes and to avoid being in the way and/or feeling out of place. Maria explained her motivation for her Norwegianization in the following way:

I have the impression that many people [here] believe that if you're Russian and wear a skirt, you're a piece of merchandise, a simple formula without variations.

This utterance sheds light on how categories such as "Russian," "woman," "living in Finnmark" and "wearing a skirt," are mutually reinforcing and establish associations with prostitution. The important point is not just that a Norwegian woman in a similar skirt would be perceived and treated differently but also that the negative experiences among Russian women wearing skirts in a Norwegian context provides a backdrop for their (re)orientations in their dressing strategies in order to avoid local stereotypes.

Furthermore, when dressing in the local way, in sporty, painless and genderless clothes and with less make-up, Maria felt a certain comfort and anonymity, allowing her to move more naturally through her new place of abode. Hence, when Maria ceased to wear skirts, fur and make-up the way she used to, she sensed that this change, "from white to black crow," was a necessary precondition for inhabiting her new place of living in a positive way that allowed her to pass relatively unmarked in the streets. At the same time, however, we argue that the concurrence of "Russian + skirt + make-up + fur" was incorporated into Maria's bodily acts as a defect, as a phantom. In other words: the experience of having to stop being yourself, and stop wearing the clothes you like, may be compared to the experience of having an amputated limb (Merleau-Ponty, 2012[1945]: 79). Attention is then focused on the body in pain, which is pushed into the foreground. This may trigger a process of objectification that may affect an individual's experience of herself and her opportunities.

Maria's story indicates that it was not only her clothed body that was stigmatized in the small North Norwegian town where she had settled but also that local prejudice and stereotypes directly affected her ten-year-old daughter, who was bullied at school when wearing what her mother considered as "ordinary clothes." Thus, by being brought directly into the interpretive framework produced in the 1990s by the prostitution debate in local media and in national research, as referenced above, Maria's daughter's dignity was challenged. Maria's daughter, in other words, was lambasted with her Russian mother and

the 1990s debate, even though she is a young girl and a Norwegian citizen, born and raised in the community. The fact that her body became object of bullying means that it was objectified through her clothing. In this way, the body became the focus of her daughter's attention and was defined by the experience of not belonging in her world.

#### *Russian femininity as a resource*

Whereas Maria was negatively affected by the media discourse from the 1990s, Sofia, the sporty labor migrant, explained that although she has heard stigmatizing stories about Russian women being perceived as prostitutes, she has not been particularly affected by such prejudice herself. She also claimed that she had not changed in any way after settling in Finnmark, but at the same time, she underlined that even before migrating to Norway she wore “high heels the European way” and that she “didn't have a typically Russian style,” which she defined as “fur and lipstick.”

However, our analysis reveals that the othering process of Russian migrants in Finnmark could be both magnified and somewhat neutralized by the authorities and their regulation of immigrant status (Lotherington & Flemmen, 2007, p. 63). Our data reveal that when the Russian women settle in Finnmark as marriage migrants, which is the most common way of entry among this group, they often meet suspicion that they have married a Norwegian man for economic convenience rather than pure love. Importantly, in addition to this suspicion, marriage migrants will lose their residence and work permits if they separate from their Norwegian partner within less than three years upon arrival. One's presence in Norway as a marriage migrant during the first three years, hence, depends entirely on the relationship with the Norwegian partner (as also pointed out in Flemmen, 2008; Flemmen & Lotherington, 2009). This problem was brought up by the labor migrant Sofia. She did not want her in-laws and Norwegian friends to consider her as a marriage migrant but as an “independent woman,” which also corresponded to her desire for freedom, authenticity and unconditional relationship with her partner. She explained that although falling in love with a Norwegian man was the main reason for her migration across the border, she did not want this to appear to be someone who “had to get married in order to stay in Norway.” Sofia was accepted by a local Master's program in order to obtain a residence permit as a student, and after a relatively short time, she obtained a relevant job and a residence permit as a labor migrant (as a specialist). This was, for her, experienced as much less stigmatizing than having to answer that she was a marriage migrant as a response to the commonly asked question, “How and why did you come to Norway?”

Aleksandra, the young exchange student, had a social circle consisting of international students as well as students from other parts of Norway. She was very enthusiastic about the chance to study “abroad” and stated that she appreciated the European style. From the perspective of “being-in-the-world” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012[1945]), the body's orientation is bound up with its position and situation. In a way, Aleksandra, as a young student staying temporarily in Finnmark, can be said to be in a privileged situation, as she could allow her body to be orientated toward Norwegianness (in terms of messy hair, no lipstick and a comfortable style), understood as a fun, exciting and rewarding process. At the same time, she explained that she felt it was demanding to inhabit her new place of living as an arena for habitual and “natural” bodily practices. Thus, in the beginning, she experienced disorientation and a loss of her natural place in the world. She also experienced that her ways of expressing femininity were challenged. In her own words, she felt that “everything had been turned upside down,” and that she, when imitating the Norwegian way, had been converted into “something genderless.” She thus felt that her body was almost unrecognizable to her and that “nothing was right.” It might be argued that Aleksandra, in the beginning, after having (re)oriented her way of dressing and appearing, lacked confidence in her own body: “It was

like, I was unsure of whether I liked what I saw or not.” This shows, among other things, how the body sticks to its ingrained habits. When Aleksandra recognized her Norwegianized look after a while, her new body was (re)integrated as a new “natural way of being.” This integration occurred through the body's capacity to inhabit and adapt to new surroundings. In phenomenological terms: Aleksandra's habitual Russian body was expanded, through the actual body, into a Russian-Norwegian one, which changed her orientation. At the time of the interview, she hence thought it was “a pleasure to walk around with uncombed hair and still feel appealing, attractive and as a woman.”

Aleksandra's motivation to become Norwegianized opened her up for inhabiting new spaces and transgressing her Russian body. Her Russian body, in other words, was constituted as a resource rather than as a phantom limb. It may be safely assumed that Aleksandra's young age and migratory background as a student had an influence on her positive take on her own (re)orientation.

#### **Conclusion**

In this article, we have analyzed the participants' clothed or dressed bodies – not focusing on self-presentation, fashion or aesthetics, but with respect to changes or adaptations of dressing strategies in their new place of residence. We have perceived their dressing strategies in light of social categories such as migrancy and gender in order to explore how such categories might mutually reinforce each other and constitute some clothed bodies as “marked,” while others go “unmarked”, or remain neutral, and have particularly focused on how certain entanglements produce a specific type of vulnerable positionality (Anthias, 2012; Staunæs, 2003). We started from the idea that changes in dressing practices among our participants occur as a result of their migration to a new place, where they incorporate place-bound discursive, social and bodily perceptions of what is “normal” and “morally accepted” (Näre, 2014). The analyses have shown that our participants' bodies ended up embodying the larger society's perceptions of normality and decency through various adjustments to try to “fit in.”

More specifically, our analyses have shown how Maria, Aleksandra and Sofia attempted, in different ways, to assimilate their new social space, as well as spatial norms and meanings within their own bodies, after having settled in Finnmark in northernmost Norway. Although they all talked about their “Norwegianized” dressing strategies as somehow comfortable and relaxing, their (re)orientations have also caused bodily pain that was handled in differing ways. Whereas Sofia, the labor migrant, talked about herself and her way of dressing as “already Norwegian/European” before migrating across the border, it was very important for her to avoid being viewed as a “Russian marriage migrant,” and she therefore made substantial efforts to escape this, in her view, stigmatized and stigmatizing status. Aleksandra, the young exchange student, on the other hand, stated that, in the beginning, after settling in Norway, she felt really outside of her own comfort zone after having (re)orientated (or changed) her way of dressing and doing her hair. However, perhaps due to her young age and the temporariness of her stay in Norway, as she at least planned to return to Russia after having completed her degree in Finnmark, she quite soon got used to, and began to appreciate, her own new bodily appearance that allowed her to pass as more “unmarked” in the local streets. Maria told the story in which the bodily pain is the most noticeable. She decided, after some years in Finnmark, to become “Norwegianized,” e.g., to stop wearing fur, skirts and make-up as she was accustomed to, because she felt it was too stigmatizing to hold on to her Russian ways. When her daughter also encountered prejudice and was bullied at school, being called “vain” and a “whore” when wearing what Maria judged as ordinary, pretty clothes, Maria chose to wear sportswear as some of the local women did, even when she was going out to do shopping or going to town, in an even harder attempt to avoid negative attention. In this case, her Russian clothed body was experienced, we

argue, as a phantom limb in a metaphorical sense.

Our participants encountered local prejudice about female Russian migrants and local ideas about the right way to express femininity in various ways. This pushed them into (re)orientation practices. Whereas such (re)orientations could be experienced as comforting and relaxing, they also entailed ambiguous feelings. Hence, several of our participants, in this article illustrated through Maria's story, felt that they had been forced to remove their own *complete* female Russian body, as it used to be. In Merleau-Ponty's (2012[1945]) terms, subjectivity is fixed on one's own bodily horizon through pain. The pain unsettles the body's orientation, or its grasp of a particular situation (ibid.), but can also initiate a process of reconciliation with respect to the new context (see also Ahmed, 2006). This process, in turn, shapes new (re)orientation practices. We do not understand (re)orientation practices merely in terms of free will but as changing practices responding to an ontological necessity to allow one's body to remain "functional" in a phenomenological sense. Ahmed's perspective on (re)orientations, thus, helps us highlight and explain the regulatory and productive aspects of practices (e.g., new ways of appearing or dressing) that are sedimented into the body through repetition.

The participants' (re)orientations may lead to new experiences and, eventually, to new practices. For some, moving across the border to a small town in North Norway can require a painful (re)orientation, as in the case of the marriage migrant Maria. However, for others, their (re)orientation process can be less problematic. These differences are also linked to other relational processes and differentiating practices, e.g., how gender, age, race and migrancy/mode of migration influence one another and, likewise, limit or expand the body's reach.

To conclude, the empirical stories we have analyzed in this article suggest that (re)orientation, or "becoming Norwegianized," is a demanding process for Russian women settling in Norway. It is not only about adapting to one's new place but also about to what degree and how a migrant must acquire new ways of being and, at the same time, to what extent it is feasible to hold on to *one's own way* of being. Our participants made efforts to change their clothes/appearance/migration status in order to try to belong in their new place of living in various ways, which points to their feelings of vulnerability regarding being Russian women in a Norwegian setting. Moreover, their readjustments and transformations may also be conceptualized as an effect of local, gendered stigmatizing processes.

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