

## Summary

This thesis is concerned with exploring how understandings and practices of family and belonging unfold in an emerging middle-class segment of descendants of immigrants from India and Pakistan. This generation is now entering the labour market, marrying, and having children of their own. In this process, they have to negotiate and maneuver contradicting understandings and practices of family and everyday life in the intersections between the parental generation, Norwegian society, and transnational social fields. Taking descendants of immigrants as a vantage point the thesis examines questions of social transformation, gender, generation, and belonging.

The thesis is based on fieldwork among couples of Pakistani and Indian background with higher education, living in Oslo and neighbouring municipalities. The data material includes ‘local couples’ where both spouses were born in Norway or came to Norway as children, and ‘transnational couples’ where one spouse grew up in Norway and the other in Pakistan or India. Investigating in what ways these different family constellations shape or influence the understandings and practices of family is a central part of this study.

By focusing on couples with higher education, those that in the eyes of the Norwegian authorities might be seen as examples of a ‘successful integration’, I am also interested in the ways in which this group’s family lives are embedded in larger narratives of belonging, modernity, and hope. Following a pragmatic approach to class where class position or class aspiration is based on the level of education and work, the couples in this study may be seen as part of a new, emerging Norwegian middle class.

The thesis explores the ways in which these changes affect understandings and practices of family, belonging and personhood. In a situation of increasing enrollment in higher education and changes in labour force participation, the thesis ask whether we find specific forms of individualization in this generation. Do we find a redefinition of the family members’ commitments to one another? If so, in what ways? Which roles do gender and gendered positions and obligations play? What implications do these have for transnational ties and for the experience of belonging in Norwegian society?

Rapid and huge social transformations involve new understandings and practices of family life and new emerging personhood. The thesis shows how these changes and contradictions lead to re-negotiations of marriage practices, of ideas of what ‘a good match’ is and of what a failed marriage is, of living-arrangements, as well as of local, national and transnational belongings. The thesis argues that the ideal of an intimate modern marriage and a modern life are widely shared between both genders. Pursuing higher education and marrying someone with higher education are seen as important part of reaching this goal. However, at the same time as these ideals are held high, many also desire to act in accordance with the wishes of their parents and preserve what they see as important characteristics of South-Asian family lives. In their married lives several of the couples in the study experience that finding a balance and ‘merging’ different marriage and family ideals (and practices) can be challenging.

The women and men in the study place themselves in, and understand their life trajectories through *a narrative of generational change*. This narrative works as a ‘tool,’ a ‘mediating device’ (Holland et al., 1998) or as what Hage (2004) calls a ‘minor utopia’ that the women and men in the study make use of in their efforts to make sense of their individual life trajectories, their family histories, as well the larger social transformations. The narrative tells the story of a movement from tradition to modernity – sometimes verbalized as a transition from Indianness/Pakistaniness to Norwegianness.

The study not only pays attention to similarities and differences in relation to the majority population, but also to the differences within this generation of descendants of immigrants, as they are differently positioned in terms of gender, age, education, ethnicity, religiosity, and marriage constellations (e.g. local or transnational). In doing so, the thesis emphasizes significance of *generation, gender and transnational ties*.

The study argues that family and kinship are not static cultural resources, but rather historically situated, negotiated processes continually being produced and always involving human beings with desires and sentiments. At the same time, families as crucial bearers of cultural traditions, norms, and values, as well as producers of specific loyalties and moralities and forms of subjectivities and personhoods. As such, families represent ‘cultural systems’ in a Geertzian sense – as carriers of distinct ethics and world views, and they constitute both ‘models of’ and ‘models for’ social action (Geertz, 1973). To capture the way such family systems work, the thesis suggest we speak of different *family logics*. As a *patterned dynamics* the concept of family logics are meant to capture the processual aspects, but also how

processes have certain forms. Structure and practice and form and process are not opposites, nor do they imply an 'either/or' perspective. Rather, they are different dimensions of social reality.

Dealing with the issue of the complexity of social transformations, the thesis discusses how the 'settled' generation is at the same time the 'unsettled' generation. The notion of *(un)settledness* draws on Johnson-Hanks' (2002, 2005) concept of 'vital conjunctures' as *potential transformation*. By introducing the notion of *(un)settledness*, the thesis seek to highlight how this generation is positioned in a disjuncture with several processes taking place at the same time, giving rise to both uncertainty and potentiality. This generation's complex stories of belonging, of settledness and unsettledness, of finding their place in the world and in the family, and of not completely owning the conditions for these processes, points to a situation in which contradictions and paradoxes are part of everyday life