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MIGRATION AND MARRIAGE:
Examples of border artistry and cultures of migration?

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1 The politics of transnational marriages

One of the main ways for migrants to gain access to another country is through marriage. Whereas northern European countries such as Denmark, Germany and Belgium welcomed thousands of guest workers in the 1950s and 1960s, by the early 1970s options for entering these countries had narrowed considerably for migrants from non-EU member states. Due to the tightening of national legislation on migration, people were frequently left with two options for entering Western Europe: asylum or marriage.

Migration flows are shaped in many ways by the receiving nation states, often as a consequence of the push and pull factors of socioeconomic demands (e.g. the need for highly skilled or low-skilled workers), but just as often of national discourses on the foreign cultures of ethnic others and "thick" perceptions of culturalist national selves (Appadurai 1996; Hedetoft 2006; Stolcke 1995). Current West European discussions on migration emphasize the tension between political discourses and socioeconomic demands at the national and supranational levels. Although demographic data show that Europe needs immigration in order to maintain its prosperity, the debate is characterized by voices (frequently belonging to the political right, but to a growing extent also the centre and left of the political spectrum) stressing the negative consequences of migration: the loss of national social coherence, a burden on welfare systems, radicalization and ghettoization.

This issue of the *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* (*NJMR*) focuses on transnational marriages in northwest Europe. The starting point for the six authors' contributions was a research seminar held in Copenhagen in the autumn of 2006 on the theme "Migration and Marriage". The seminar was arranged by a group of Danish researchers working together on a collective project on transnational marriages among Turks and Pakistanis in Denmark,[1] these being among the largest immigrant groups in both Denmark (see e.g. Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs 2009) and other countries in northwest Europe. The role that transnational marriages play among groups of Turkish immigrants in this region in particular is a theme that all the articles in this issue analyse in a variety of different dimensions.

This issue of *NJMR* provides both specific and general views of the meanings and effects of transnational marriages and therefore includes perspectives from sociology, anthropology and economics. The articles convey the experiences of and aspirations for transnational marriages as described by people who have married across contexts, as well as showing the general trends and implications of marriage migration for ethnic minority groups in northwest Europe. By applying diverse disciplinary and comparative perspectives, we are able to gain useful insights into both micro and macro aspects of transnational marriages, including their individual push and pull factors and the role of nation state legislation and debates.

Since the mid-1990s, there has been a boom in research publications dealing in various ways with the implications of the transnational marriages of immigrants in Europe. Contributions to the field (e.g. Bredal 2006; Charsley & Shaw 2006; Schmidt et al. 2009; Timmerman 2008) often describe aspects of these marriages

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within the context of the receiving nation state, a perspective that is also present in this issue of *NJMR*. However, the present articles extend the perspective in two respects. First, they focus on transnational marriages as social practices, fields and processes, that is, in terms of their contextualization within everyday life. Secondly, the articles highlight transnational marriages as a route of migration. This perspective calls for deeper reflections on the gains and losses of migration, as well as on migration as a process, including, transgressing and eventually "playing with" (as the concept of border artistry emphasizes) the borders of nation states.

2 Turkish and Pakistani marriage migration in and beyond the Nordic context

Marriage-based migration is a well-known phenomenon in the Nordic countries. In Norway, for example, 20% of those immigrating from outside the Nordic countries between 1991 and 2004 arrived as a result of marriage (Daugstad 2004: 40). Among youngsters of Pakistani background – the largest immigrant group in Norway – three out of every four found a spouse who shared their Pakistani background, but was living outside Norway before marriage (between 1996 and 2001) (Lie 2005: 71–72). In Denmark, marriage has historically played a prominent role in migration patterns, particularly in the period between 1973 and 2001. National statistics from 2001 show that in that year residence based on marriage was the most prominent route to obtaining residence in Denmark (Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs 2002). However, Denmark also illustrates how public and political anxieties over increasing ethnic heterogeneity have heightened the attention given to marriage migration as a practice that should be restricted in order to ensure social cohesion. Restricting marriage migration was and is also a recognized means of limiting immigration. Furthermore, legislation regulating marriage migration is a social technology that arguably furthers the integration of ethnic minority citizens *already living* in Denmark (see Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs 2003). Danish regulations regarding marriage migration were tightened from 1997 onwards (Bredal 1999), with the most drastic legal changes taking place in 2002. From that year onwards, applications for residence in Denmark based on marriage have been subjected to a 24-year rule (meaning that one or both partners cannot marry before they are 24), an attachment rule (the couple must prove that they share a greater attachment to Denmark than to any other country) and a number of economic restrictions. The regulations have so far caused a significant drop in the number of young people of immigrant background (but also native Danes!) who are marrying and settling down together in Denmark (Schmidt et al. 2009).

However, studies also show that while such tighter family reunification rules in some Scandinavian countries have diminished the rate of transnational marriages they do not prevent such marriages from happening (ibid.). People may simply choose to settle down with their partners somewhere else, as the Danish case illustrates. Since the 2002 tightening of the Danish rules on marriage migration and family unification, an increasing number of people have settled down in southern Sweden with a non-Danish spouse (ibid.; Rytter 2007a, 2007b). "The cat and mouse games" of immigrants and immigration authorities that Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim refers to in her article in this volume are also a persistent aspect of marriage and migration in the Nordic countries.

As already mentioned, Turks and Pakistanis comprise significant sections of non-Western immigrants particularly in Norway (Pakistanis) (Daugstad 2006: 20), Sweden (Turks) (Statistics Sweden 2009: 20ff.) and Denmark (Turks and Pakistanis) (Statistics Denmark 2009: 15f.). In Finland, migration from these two countries is rather insignificant, surpassed by immigrants from, for example, Somalia, Iran and Iraq (see e.g. Martikainen 2009: 81). Importantly, marriage migration is *also* a prevalent phenomenon among people of Pakistani and Turkish descent living in European countries *outside* the Nordic area, which makes a comparative perspective possible. Several studies of Pakistani marriage migration exist in the UK (e.g. Charsley 2006, 2007; Shaw 2001), whereas studies of Turkish marriage migration are strongly represented in Belgium and Germany (Gonzales-Ferrer 2006; Timmerman 2006,2008).

As statistics show marriage migration is a prevalent phenomenon among Turks and Pakistanis who have settled down in the Nordic countries as well as elsewhere in Europe, we may ask why is this actually the case? All the articles in this issue discuss this question, each in their way. Johan Wets and Christiane Timmerman, for example, describe a "culture of migration" among Turks living in Belgium. However, as, for example, Beck-Gernsheim's article shows, we must also think of marriage migration as an example of more general trends of economy, mobility (and the lack of such) and ways of tackling national legislation in the different receiving states. Transnational marriages are often created in a cross-field of personal aspirations for a better future, Western nation states' demands for cheap labour and the changing history of migration legislation. These trends are all visible in the Nordic countries but, as illustrated by this issue, are also enmeshed in strands of nationalism and marriage across Europe.

3 Thematic perspectives on transnational marriages

The five articles in this issue focus on four related themes: 1) the push and pull factors of marriage migration; 2) transnational marriages as transnational practices and a transnational field; 3) transnational marriages in relation to gender and global inequality; and 4) migration and marriage: beyond methodological (trans) nationalism.

3.1 The push and pull factors of marriage migration

Frequently, the research literature describes migration as a means of social improvement (e.g. Olwig 2001). By moving distances both nationally and regionally, people hope to improve their living conditions and the conditions of their offspring. Rosy images of Western Europe circulate in the regions, cities and villages from where chain migration takes place, often supported by the tokens of prosperity that migrants show off when they visit their home villages. However, as already mentioned, opportunities to enter EU member states have diminished for non-EU residents over the last three decades.

Transnational marriages can thus be motivated by the social deprivation and inequality that exist on a global scale. At the same time, this very type of marriage is facilitated by the compression of time and space that globalization has created. One example of the globalization of marriage markets are the Internet pages offering West European males access to marriage markets in eastern Europe or Asia (Beck-Gernsheim, this issue). Marriage migration is a common aspect of global economies. What is lacking in the poorer parts of the world, such as social and economic mobility, can be acquired elsewhere. In the wealthier parts of the world, the lack of resources is of a different currency, having been created, for example, by demographic changes. When the number of women decreases in rural areas of northern Jutland in Denmark (as eloquently described by Danish researcher Sine Plambech; see Plambech 2005), men who remain in the area must look elsewhere to find wives. In finding partners, they rely on a network established between Thai women in Denmark who have already married Danish men and the village they come from back in Thailand. In that sense, the resources that people hope to gain by migrating (or by receiving migrants) may be economic, but also social (as when women from immigrant countries hope to marry a "modern" man who will allow them to be independent) and cultural (as when immigrant men in the receiving countries marry a woman from back home in the hope of marrying a "traditional" wife, as Timmerman and Wets discuss in this issue). By using quantitative data from Belgium and qualitative data from Turkey, the two authors show how Turkish marriage migrants are seldom able to achieve the dream of economic prosperity when they settle down in Belgium (also Olwig 2011). Often migrants are fully aware that the fantasy of financial prosperity is indeed nothing but a fantasy.

3.2 Transnational marriages as transnational practices and a transnational field

As Garbi Schmidt's article shows, one reason for transnational marriage may well simply be that two people fall in love. Thus, global marriage markets build on other factors than rational analyses of how to access the "good life", such as emotional attachments. The emotional attachment that marriage includes may be a token of the affection between two people, but it can equally involve ties between a wider group of people who belong to the same family, the same village or the same region of the world. Hence, emotions are also aspects of the global economy.

The impact of emotional attachment is also illustrated by Timmerman and Wets' concept of a "culture of migration" (this issue). Based on ethnographic research in the Turkish village of Emirdağ, the authors show how cultures of migration build on a mixture of dreams of better life opportunities in Western Europe and existing, well-established traditions and networks of migration. Push factors of migration are entrenched in the desire for global mobility (Beck-Gernsheim, this issue), as are the trust and proximity established in and through transnational family networks.

Transnational family networks are a means both for people in the sending countries to gain access to Western Europe and for young immigrant men and women who are already living in the West to find a suitable spouse "back home". However, the role of these networks does not end there. The compression of time and space fostered by globalization (including information technology) allows family members to communicate easily, frequently and cheaply with each other. Although national borders certainly matter when people want to move from one country to another, nation states do not sever the attachments or lines of communication that migrants share with their transnational family networks *per se*. In her article, Schmidt shows how these networks are fixed in daily practices and feelings of connectedness and proximity, thus creating spaces of their own. Ultimately, transnational networks and the practices, such as marriages, that they foster invite us to think and rethink spatial dimensions, as well as how people experience and live them.

3.3 Transnational marriages in relation to gender and global social inequality

While practices of transnational marriages dwell on the horizontality of transnational networks, they also highlight global, national and cultural structures of inequality. Register-based studies of transnational marriage migration in northwest Europe show that the vast majority of marriage migrants move from less developed to more developed countries, very seldom the other way round (e.g. Schmidt et al. 2009).

A crosscutting theme of the articles in this issue is that of gender. Women use marriage as a means to gain upward social mobility, or "just" mobility as such. Regardless of whether their route to marriage migration is an Internet-based marriage broker or a family network, the hopes and aspirations of migrant women appear similar: they see marriage a way to gain autonomy, to escape the traditional gender-defined order of things in the home village, to escape hard, manual labour and boredom. However, migration does not always fulfil a woman's hopes and aspirations for a better life. In their article, Timmerman and Wets show how

marriage migrants do not necessarily fare well in their new country, and that they might even do better in the country they have left. Besides having limited access to, for example, the labour market, migrants often face another, stigmatizing dimension of transnational marriage: that the majority population frequently sees these types of marriage as based on force and inequality, especially for women (see e.g. Schmidt, this volume).

While transnational marriages underline the globalization of economic and gender-specific inequalities, they also underpin how people handle these challenges through what Ulrich Beck has called "border use", that is, "crossing nation state borders or instrumentalizing them for the accumulation of life changes" (Beck 2007). What people gain through the processes of transnational marriages is inscribed into a global economy of social mobility, economic gains and cultural capital. Although such processes inevitably entail the risk of loss and deprivation, border-using is often a conscious route to, at least, imagined improvement. As Beck-Gernsheim writes in this volume: "to the border artistes of the 21st century, a transnational marriage is by no means an obstacle. On the contrary, it is what they actively seek; it is their 'passage to hope'."

3.4 Migration and marriage: beyond methodological nationalism

The phenomenon of transnational marriages exemplifies well the push and pull factors of globalization. Globalization potentially expands the social structure of families in a realm that is characterized by a paradoxical enmeshment of geographical distance and emotional proximity. When a male immigrant living in, say, Denmark decides to marry a woman from his parents' village in Turkey or Pakistan, the decision is frequently a means to keep family networks intact and to establish a sense of belonging. Within a research perspective, transnational marriages are a fine example of the limitations of methodological nationalism (Schiller & Wimmer 2002): although they are deeply affected by the rules and regulations of nation states, couples and families, each in their own way, find ways of overcoming these challenges and of *living* across borders.

One important perspective that the articles in this issue share is that of global migration as a phenomenon created by global*ized* social inequality. However, although economic and social deprivation are motivating factors for people to leave their country, this special issue of *NJMR* also shows that we must take other factors of (potential) deprivation into account when explaining why people choose to leave. To claim the role that one wants to play as a woman and to hold on to certain networks and strands of belonging are both equally strong motives for transnational marriage. Also, it should not be forgotten that to marry transnationally is, for many, a means to overcome separation from one's loved ones. Transnational marriages include a variety of incentives based on aspects of social mobility, network belonging, (romantic) desires, cultural traditions and the hope for a financially better life. While for some a transnational marriage is a pathway to improvement and change, for others it is a means to maintain stability and connectedness.

Finally, while we often think of migration as a transnational phenomenon, migration is still, for some, an intra-national phenomenon. As in Kimberley Hart's description of women from the Turkish village of Yuntdağ, who marry and settle down in one of the larger cities of the region, the motives of national or regional migrants resemble those of transnational migrants. By moving to the city and marrying a man who lives there, the women of Yuntdağ aspire to improve their life situations and secure the futures of their children. In that sense, Hart's article is an important contribution to our understanding of the situation in sending countries, as well as further reminding us that, although migration is often a cross-national phenomenon, it is just as much about moving from the periphery to the centre generally.

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Notes

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