Intimate Contradictions: Comparing the Impact of Danish Family Unification Laws on Pakistani and Cuban Marriage Migrants
Nadine T. Fernandez and Tina Gudrun Jensen

The Danish family unification policies are based on an underlying moral agenda rooted in the idea of emotional, intimate, love-based marriages as the basis of the modern nation state. This paper questions the efficacy of this moral agenda by examining the unintended consequences and false dichotomies that emerge with the implementation of the legislation, particularly focusing on kin relations and individual autonomy. Empirically, the article compares how the legislation affects both the intended targets (intra-ethnic marriages among Danes of immigrant descent) and the unintended targets (ethnic Danes who marry non-European spouses, namely, Cubans). This comparative perspective highlights the cracks in the moral agenda of the state’s efforts to shape family formation and, ultimately, the contradictions of attempting to promote ‘modernity’ over ‘tradition’.

Keywords: Marriage Migration; Legislation; Kinship; Denmark Family Unification

Introduction
In her book on transnational marriage Charsley (2012) notes the fragmented nature of research on marriage-related migration. A wide variety of practices fall under this terminological umbrella including marriage contracted over the Internet or through international marriage brokers; intra-ethnic marriage within minority/immigrant communities;
and marriage that emerges from travel encounters or sex tourism.

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Researchers from diverse disciplines have developed largely independent avenues of investigation often focusing on just one type of transnational marriage. Charsley (2012) advocates a more integrated approach bridging these various streams of research to advance conceptual developments in the field. In this article, we attempt to heed this call, by examining how the moral agenda of the Danish family unification policies affects two very different types of marriage migrants: ethnic minority Danish–Pakistani women who marry men from Pakistan and ethnic majority Danish women who marry men from Cuba. In Denmark, as in much of Europe, marriage and family unification remain one of the few avenues for legal residency (Beck-Gernsheim 2007; Kofman 2004; Schmidt 2011a, 2011b). The strict Danish policy, instituted in 2002, aims to stem the flow of immigrants arriving through marriage, particularly Danish citizens of immigrant descent (Turks and Pakistanis) marrying spouses from their ancestral homeland and to prevent forced marriages. The legislation has a strong normative agenda and turns the ‘territorial border of nation state into a moral boundary guiding how marriages should be contracted and family life organised’ (Rytter 2011, 92). While targeting the intra-ethnic marriages of minority populations, the laws affect all Danes marrying non-European partners. In this article, we look at the varied and often unintended consequences (Charsley et al. 2012).1 This legislation has on both the intended targets (such as Pakistani) and non-targeted (such as Cuban) marriage migrants.

With our comparative approach, we attempt to overcome not only the disjointed nature of marriage-related migration research but also try to address other weaknesses in the marriage migration literature. First, researchers primarily focus on family unification within particular ethnic groups and, thus, study it through an ethnic lens (Glick Schiller, Caglar, and Guldbrandsen 2006). The analytical focus in this article stems from an anthropological comparative approach focusing not on homogeneous units but on the similar human conditions and contexts (Gingrich and Fox 2002) related to family unification. This comparison probes the various ways people construct meaning and how they create relationships between objects, persons and situations (Melhuus 2002; Moore 2005). Thus, juxtaposing these two very different types of marriage-related migration destabilises this ‘ethnic lens’ and brings the legislation itself into sharper focus.

Finally, our comparative analysis explores how the partners’ experiences in these two very particular types of cross-border marriages are similar, yet different, in unexpected ways. Their responses to and negotiations of the Danish policies result in gender and family dynamics which cast doubt on the efficacy of the moral agenda on which the legislation is based. That is, the couples’ practices demonstrate that the Danish family unification policy often has unintended consequences which can undermine the policy’s stated moral objectives, resulting in an ironic situation inverting supposedly ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ practices of marriage and kin relations. The debates surrounding the marriage practices of Danes of immigrant
descent are often constructed in terms of this traditional/modern divide, yet our analysis reveals the very constructed nature of this dichotomy itself. The empirical material for this article was drawn from two separate studies based on biographical interviews with Danes and their migrant spouses. The participants were mainly recruited through snowball sampling while doing participant observation. For the Cuban–Danish couples, Fernandez conducted over 40 in-depth interviews during 2011–2012 with couples living in the Copenhagen area. Roughly half of the couples she interviewed were Cuban men (mostly black or mulatto) married to (or separated from) white ethnically Danish women. Fernandez conducted the interviews in Spanish, English or Danish, depending on the participants' preferences. The intra-ethnic Pakistani couples were part of a study conducted by Jensen on ethnic minority Danes with a background in non-Western countries who had moved to Sweden with their spouses because the couple could not obtain family unification in Denmark. The study consisted of 24 in-depth interviews carried out in 2008 and 2011 with ethnic minority Danes (mainly descendants from Pakistan, Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon) and their migrant spouses from their ancestral countries. The interviews were carried out in Danish, Swedish or English, depending on the informant. In both studies, partners were of similar ages, ranging from their twenties to mid-thirties. Both researchers interviewed the spouses separately, and in some cases, more than once. We have changed all participants' names and some non-essential details of their stories to protect their anonymity. From these two larger studies, we each selected one typical case to illustrate our argument in this article.

The article opens with a brief genealogy of the moral agenda of the Danish policies, an overview of immigration and Danish family unification legislation, and then introduces and analyses the comparative empirical contexts, with a particular focus on kin relations.

**Marriage, Love, Kinship, Morality and the State**

The moral agenda of the Danish family unification policy rests on an implicit connection between intimate romantic love, marriage and the nation state. An examination of the history of marriage reveals these connections as products of historical processes, not pre-existing social facts. The emergence of marriage based on romantic love and companionship is a relatively recent phenomenon in the West (Coontz 2005; Povinelli 2002, 2006; Wardlow and Hirsch 2006). Dated variously from the eighteenth century to early twentieth century, European historians document a shift towards ideal marriages rooted in emotional intimacy, rather than based on social rank or kin alliances. Wardlow and Hirsch (2006) suggest that various economic, demographic and ideological factors contributed to this shift. Urbanisation, capitalism, industrialisation, wage labour and the decline of household production bolstered the ideals of the nuclear family, decreasing the couples’ dependency on extended kin and increasing the mutual interdependence of the conjugal couple. These structural changes
were augmented by media technologies (literature, magazines and later film) which also shaped ideas about the emotional-based marriage bond and helped link these new marital ideals to notions of progress and modernity (Wardlow and Hirsch 2006).

Povinelli (2002, 2006) takes this historical shift further by theorising the links between modernity, emotional intimacy and marriage and the nation state. She asserts that with the emergence of the market economy, civil, social and political rights and obligations are increasingly defined by membership in an abstract human order or citizenship rather than by a kinship/aristocratic matrix. With marriage detached from rank and lineage, the question becomes what then the basis for marriage and family formation should be. The answer, Povinelli (2002) argues, is intimate romantic love—feelings associated with a person’s worth based solely on his or her personal qualities.

Companionate, love-based marriage is thus the keystone of the modern West. Forming oneself as a modern autonomous subject revolves around the individuality of love, intimacy and pleasure. Marriage becomes a route to self-realisation, rather than a traditional strategy for social reproduction and the fulfilment of kin obligations (Giddens 1993; Padilla et al. 2007). In romantic love marriages, individual choice and autonomy takes precedence over and against the needs of the group, and the conjugal couple is privileged over other family ties.

The recent debate over non-Western marriage migration to Europe is rooted in these ideas of love-based marriage, forming a rhetorical divide between ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ marriages and family patterns. In this debate, the ‘West’ embodies modernity, individualism and liberty and the ‘non-West’ traditionalism, collectivity and constraint. For example, Rytter (2012) argues that in the public eye, Danish-Pakistani marriages are ‘suspect and contradict the usual motivations of “real” Danes in contracting marriages’, and are frequently condemned in political and public discourses (Rytter 2003; Schmidt 2011a). Non-Western migrant families are often characterised as based on ‘collectivistic’ norms where the individual is an integrated part of a family unit; choice of marriage partner concerns the entire family (Bredal 2006). Altogether, non-Western immigrants’ marriage and family life are seen as potentially anti-Danish, non-modern, traditionalistic and patriarchal in that they at best suppress individual autonomy, and at worst, threaten the moral fabric of the nation state. Current debates about non-Western marriage migration gloss over the historical developments that have led to the ideas of ‘modern’ versus ‘traditional’ marriages, and instead take these categories as a priori rather than constructed over time.

**Immigration and Family Unification Policy in Denmark**

Denmark is a small country of about five million inhabitants. Its smallness is often an argument for characterising Denmark as a mono-cultural society, associating
smallness with cultural and historical homogeneity and with economic success realised in the post-war development of a universalistic welfare state (Hedetoft 2006). While not a new phenomenon, immigration to Denmark has increased considerably during the last 60 years including foreign labourers from former Yugoslavia, Turkey and Pakistan arriving from the late 1950s to 1974. Always concerned about immigration, the government formally halted labour immigration in 1973 due to the oil crisis and subsequent recession. Henceforth, immigration became dominated by family unification. Today a total of 59% of first- and second-generation migrants and their descendants come from non-Western countries and constitute 10.4% of the Danish population (Danmarks Statistik 2012). Despite the relatively low percentage of immigrants, Danes are among the most negative and sceptical towards immigration within Europe (Goul Andersen 2003). Since 1980, ‘integration’ based on assimilationist principles has been a declared objective in Danish immigration politics (Hamburger 1990). Central to the Integration Act of 1999 is the goal that foreigners understand Danish society’s ‘fundamental values’ including ‘Danish’ norms for family formation (Jensen et al. 2006).

In 2002, the Danish government adopted new legislation on family unification, recognised as the strictest rule in the world (Schmidt 2011a). The new legislation explicitly seeks to alter immigration patterns and prohibit forced marriage and marriage between cousins. The family unification reforms include the following five requirements: (1) Both partners must be over 24 years old; (2) The partner in Denmark must have adequate housing of a reasonable size and with a long-term lease; (3) The partner in Denmark must be able to provide for their spouse and must not have received public assistance for one year prior to submitting the application; (4) The partner in Denmark must post a specified sum of money as collateral to cover any possible public assistance the municipality may have to pay during the first seven years the foreign spouse is in Denmark and (5) The total ‘national attachment’ of the married couple should be at least as great to Denmark as to any other country. While these requirements have reduced the number of family unifications in Denmark over the last decade, many people have found other ways to marry transnationally, e.g. by moving to neighbouring Sweden to obtain family unification there (Rytter 2011).

The goals and intentions of the rules are described in the ‘The government’s action plan for 2003–2005 on forced, quasi-forced and arranged marriages’ (Regeringen 2003). The Action Plan fosters free choice of marriage partners, individual protection and (gender) equality by informing ethnic minority youth about their rights and possibilities. In this picture, the family of immigrant descent is seen as a vector of traditional, non-modern values pressuring youngsters into certain cultural patterns, rather than encouraging the development of independent autonomous individuals.

While the majority of ethnic Danes marry endogamously in terms of ethnicity, class
and education levels, the family unification rules have affected the lives of all young Danes wanting to marry a partner from abroad in often unintended ways. Some of these inadvertent consequences point to an intrinsic incongruity between supposedly ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ forms of marriage and family life that result in ironic situations. These tensions are illustrated in the following empirical sections that focus on the stories of a targeted cross-border intra-ethnic Pakistani marriage and a non-targeted Cuban–Danish couple.

The Intra-Ethnic Pakistani Couple—Mona and Naveed

Since the late 1960s immigrants of Pakistani descent have constituted one of the major non-Western ethnic minority groups in Denmark (approximately 25,000 people) (Rytter 2010). Many have migrated to Denmark through marriage unification. Mona, a 25-year-old Danish citizen has been married to 27-year-old Naveed, a Pakistani native, since 2005. They live in the southern Swedish city of Malmö because they could not obtain family unification in Denmark. In the 1970s, Mona’s parents left Pakistan and settled in Denmark. Her father came to work, and her mother was a housewife and raised their four children, of whom Mona is the youngest. Mona was born and raised in Copenhagen, graduated from high-school and had plans to study before she married. Naveed was born and raised in a small village close to Islamabad, where he worked as an electrician. He came from a family with seven siblings. Mona and Naveed were paternal first cousins. They first met in 1997, and only knew each other vaguely when they met again in 2005. Mona was in Pakistan for seven weeks to attend a friend’s wedding. At that time, she had not been in Pakistan for six years and felt very alienated there, ‘I did not like Pakistan at that time. The girls were not like me. They were busy gossiping and making eyes at me’.

During the stay in Pakistan, her family started to persuade Mona to marry in an arranged marriage, ideally with a cousin from her mother’s side of the family. At first, Mona was reluctant to marry; she had difficulties imagining herself married and with children. Mona stated, ‘She [her mother] wanted me to marry with somebody from her side. The reason why people marry within the family is because they don’t want to lose contact’. By that, she expressed a general tendency among Pakistani families in Europe to establish arranged transnational marriages involving first cousins as motivated by emotional ties of kinship such as keeping families in contact (Charsley 2007; Shaw and Charsley 2006). However, Mona did not like the potential suitor or his brothers.

Mona’s choice of marriage partner became a family issue. Her mother’s family continued suggesting different partners among the cousins from her side. Mona told her family that she did not want to be pressured to marry and was fed up with the string of suitors presented to her. She then started seeing Naveed. This initiated a major family dispute, especially among her mother’s and father’s families. After some negotiation, Mona got her way, marrying Naveed, the ‘wrong’ cousin. She stated:
They started pressuring me a lot in my mother's family. I said that I didn't want to be pressured. I went home to my cousin [Naveed], whom I hadn't seen for eight years. But he did not say very much. I thought he was playing hard to get, but that was because he didn't want to burst into joy in front of his parents. As soon as his father went out, he [Naveed] jumped over to me and started to talk. His mother had met me that day, and saw that we were doing well together. Then she said to her husband that it would be great to have me as her daughter-in-law. My father was also positive, but wanted to ask his wife, daughter and sons, so it was important that everybody accepted. I didn't know what to answer. I wanted my parents to accept first.

During the holiday Mona spent in Pakistan, she and Naveed agreed to marry. They did the Muslim wedding ceremony (nikah) in Pakistan. Mona was 19 years old and knew that she and Naveed could not settle in Denmark because of the Danish rules on family unification primarily due to their ages. The fact they were cousins was another potential obstacle to obtaining family unification in Denmark. So she decided to settle in Malmö, Sweden, and apply for family unification there. She had just graduated from high-school and had to find a job to prove to the Swedish authorities that she was able to provide for Naveed and herself. Simultaneously, she bought an apartment in Malmö. Mona’s family helped her to settle in Sweden. While they lent her some money to buy an apartment, Mona also contributed since she had to work to demonstrate her financial stability to the Swedish state. Then they had to wait for a short-term visa for Naveed. They spent the first three months living in her parents’ apartment in Copenhagen which technically was breaking the rules since Naveed did not have a visa for Denmark. As many other couples who move to Sweden to obtain family unification, they were living semi-legal lives (Rytter 2012).

During their stay in Denmark, they held another major wedding ceremony for family and friends in which Mona was 'given away' to Naveed. After this ceremony, Mona and Naveed moved to Sweden to start their life together. They applied for a five-year residency visa for Naveed but had to wait another eight months to get it. Mona started the stressful process of commuting between her home in Malmö and her job in Copenhagen. Naveed was left alone in the apartment in Malmö waiting for his Swedish identification papers so he could begin studying Swedish and looking for a job. Until then he could not leave Sweden and spent his days waiting for Mona to come home from her job in Denmark. After Naveed obtained his visa, he started Swedish language school where he met new friends, many from Pakistan in similar situations. With high unemployment and exploitation of foreign labour in Malmö, he could not find a job. It was difficult for the couple to live on only one income. With money problems and Mona’s constant commuting between Denmark and Sweden,
they had difficulties imagining an ordinary family life and keep postponing having children. Still, they intended to stay in Sweden. Naveed had many friends there, and Mona resented Denmark because she could not obtain family unification there consequently describing Denmark as a ‘racist’ country.

The case of Mona and Naveed reflects how families may play a decisive role in the choice of marriage partner. Many Danes with an ethnic minority background who move to Sweden to obtain family unification characterise their marriage as arranged. However, as in the case of Mona, the influence of the family often takes the form of accepting a partner that their daughter or son has already chosen. Mona, Naveed and other informants spoke at length about shifts in Pakistan towards more autonomy in choosing marriage partners. When reflecting about their choice of a partner, many interviewees emphasised contingency and chance in contrast to the planned and arranged. The couple happens to meet each other—not knowing each other beforehand—and fall in love. When speaking about the process of marrying Naveed, Mona emphasised that choosing a marriage partner whom she liked reflected her ‘Danishness’, ‘What counts for me and Naveed, I don’t know about Naveed, but I am very Danish, so I ought to marry somebody I like’. In that way, she associated romantic love with Danishness, or implicitly, with being ‘Western’.

When asked about the importance of marrying a spouse from the country of origin, Mona emphasised this as a safe choice particularly among women:

It’s because – it’s a bit rudely put – but women don’t have so many to choose between [in Denmark]. They should choose from Pakistan. It IS rudely put, but of course women also choose men from here, but our parents have this idea in their heads that your future is safe if you choose one from Pakistan. I think it’s a bit because they don’t know so much about the country, the area. I don’t know what it is, but they say that men [from Denmark] have a bigger tendency to say: ‘I don’t want to be with you any longer, I leave you’. While men from Pakistan are more engaged.

For Mona choosing a Danish–Pakistani husband is a bad decision in the eyes of the Danish–Pakistani community (Rytter 2009). This opinion is generally due to the fact that ethnic minority men do worse with respect to education and social marginalisation, compared to women (Liversage and Jakobsen 2011). According to Mona’s family, choosing a spouse from the country of origin, then, leads to a safe marriage—and future—and furthermore, a spouse who is untainted by Danish culture and lifestyle so more likely to maintain cultural norms from the country of origin. However, these aspirations are also affected by the very ‘Western’ lifestyle of the women who choose a husband from their ancestral homeland. When further
reflecting on her choice, Mona indicated that Danish–Pakistani men were more dominant and patriarchal than men from Pakistan: ‘I had the impression that the Danish–Pakistani men, they can be very dominating. They know more about Denmark and the world’. Likewise, the Pakistani husbands who married women from Denmark, tended to describe their wives as women who had grown up with a lot of freedom, who studied at universities and were highly skilled, who worked, went to parties, had close male friends, etc. Often they told this to highlight that people from Pakistan are not as traditional as others might think, and that gender roles there are changing too.

The story of Mona and Naveed is in many respects representative of targeted couples with a non-Western ethnic minority background. Still, their story is not unlike other stories of family unification among non-targeted couples, as the following case illustrates.

The Cuban–Danish Couple—Victoria and Javier
In contrast to the more numerous ethnic Pakistanis in Denmark, Cubans comprise a tiny and relatively recent immigrant group. As they are not part of earlier labour migration, nor are they part of any chain migration, they are clearly a non-targeted group regarding family unification legislation. They are from the Americas, yet not from an OECD nation. About 460 Cubans (nearly equal numbers of men and women) live in Denmark. While determining how many entered Denmark through marriage is difficult, over 300 family unification permits have been issued to Cubans between 2000 and 2010 (Danmarks Statistik 2012). Victoria and Javier have been married for seven years, and they have a young bi-racial son. Laughing Victoria recalls leaving for her first trip to Cuba:

My father and brother took me to the airport and the last thing my brother told me was, ‘don’t get married over there!’ I said, ‘no, don’t worry about that’. I was only 21 years old. I wasn’t thinking about getting married, and look what happened!

Victoria, a white ethnic Danish woman, now 33 years old, grew up in a middle-class family in a small city in Jutland. Both her parents were professionals, and she had one brother who lives outside of Copenhagen. There was no history of immigration in her family, nor any close family members who married foreigners. She was, in this sense, a very typical Dane. She moved to Copenhagen to study at university when she was 20 years old, and now works as an economist in a nearby municipality. During her studies, she took a break to travel in 2002. On the advice of a girlfriend who had recently returned from a trip to Cuba, she decided to go to Cuba to take a Spanish language course. She knew nothing about the island before she left and looking back on it saw her decision to go to Cuba as random. She had no connection to the island, knew no Cubans in Copenhagen, was not involved in the salsa dance scene and spoke
very little Spanish. It was trendy to go to Cuba to see the socialist island before it changed and before Fidel died, and annually more than 10,000 Danes visit Cuba as tourists.

Her husband Javier, a dark-skinned black man, was born and raised in Santa Clara, the youngest of six children of working-class parents. In Cuba, he studied graphic design and worked in a number of art and media-related jobs. He had other foreign girlfriends before meeting Victoria, but these were mostly casual affairs, and like most Cubans he had never travelled abroad.\(^5\)

Another Danish woman who was also studying in Santa Clara invited Victoria to the party where she first met Javier. As she had only been in Cuba about a month, Victoria did not speak much Spanish, nor Javier much English. Despite the lack of a common language, they worked hard to communicate and were clearly attracted to each other. Thus the romance began. Victoria would visit him often in the city park where he had a small booth selling his paintings. Their relationship developed quickly and soon after they met, Javier moved into the room Victoria was renting and they lived there together for seven months while she completed her Spanish course. Javier noted, ‘we have a pretty love story’ and Victoria concurred that, ‘we knew very quickly that we had a relationship that wasn’t going to end any time soon’.

As a single white woman (clearly a tourist) in Santa Clara, she was approached by many (mainly black and mulatto) men on the street, offering black market goods, guided tours, restaurant recommendations, etc. Many Cubans seek or welcome contact with foreigners. For some Cubans, there is an economic motivation to interact. However, for many Cubans the interaction is spurred by sociability and curiosity, as Victoria noted, ‘tourists are a tourist attraction for Cubans’. That is, Cubans seek interactions and friendships with tourists as a way to learn about and experience other cultures (Simoni 2011). For most Cubans, it is the closest they will come to actually travelling themselves.

While many Danes experienced the hustling in Cuba directly, once they started relationships with Cubans, the women were warned about the men’s possible ulterior motives by older Cuban women. Victoria recalled, being pulled aside by the owner of the house where she rented a room. The middle-aged white Cuban woman told her to be careful about what she was doing and that these men were not all good people. Victoria’s parents also expressed concern about her relationship with Javier. They were not against it, but wanted to be sure it was serious, that she was just not infatuated and fascinated by all things Cuban. With the prevalence of sex tourism (Berg 2004; Cabezas 2009; Fernandez 1999) and Cuba’s general economic situation, people on and off the island often assumed that relationships between foreigners and Cubans involved material motives. Given this context, Victoria and Javier highlighted their love for each other and tried to distance themselves from instrumentalist
readings of their relationship. For example, Javier commented, ‘I never had desires to leave Cuba. I was focused on my art. I wanted to travel. But travel as an artist, travel and return and continue to create with my art’. Victoria asserted, ‘I also didn’t go with the idea of marrying a Cuban’. She also credited their love for sustaining them through the complicated labyrinth of family unification rules in Denmark.

After her Spanish course ended, Victoria returned to Copenhagen. The couple stayed in touch via emails (often four or five daily) and costly long-distance phone calls. The first thing Victoria did in Denmark was to begin the lengthy process of inviting Javier to visit her. Obtaining a tourist visa for a Cuban was an expensive and time-consuming bureaucratic odyssey on both sides of the Atlantic, as Cubans required special exit visas and permits from Cuba in addition to a visa from the destination country. Javier was fortunate that his visa requests, both in Cuba and Denmark, were successful. After three months, the papers were ready and Javier arrived in Denmark on a three-month tourist visa which he extended for an additional three months. The couple married in 2003 before his Danish tourist visa expired. The day after their wedding, the couple received a letter stating that because Victoria was under 24 years old the couple could not reside in Denmark. They were given one month to leave the country. When they wed, Victoria was 23 years old. She commented, ‘We knew it would happen. We knew the laws, but we just didn’t think it would happen so fast. It was really rough’. The couple moved to Malmö. Victoria was studying and working part-time in Copenhagen, and she commuted daily on the train. She stated, ‘[moving to Malmö] was really horrible, because it was not what we wanted to do’. It was a very difficult period for both of them. For the first three months, Javier could not even enter Denmark, while he waited for his Swedish residency visa. The couple lived six months in Sweden and then spent three months in Cuba. At the end of the nine-month period, Victoria turned 24, and they moved back to Denmark and began the process of fulfilling the other rules for family unification.

**Kin Relations: Dependence and Independence**

The Danish family unification requirements hope to promote the Western ideal of ‘modern’, autonomous individuals as the basis for family formation. This ideal of individual independence is evident in various arenas in Danish policies. At one level, nothing encapsulates individual autonomy better than the idea of falling in love. As outlined earlier, love-based marriages are the foundation of society in the modern West, embodying as they do very individually oriented techniques (such as romantic love and affective consumption) for creating the autonomous self (Padilla et al. 2007). However, our two empirical cases illustrate that evidence of individual motivation is more crucial in some transnational marriages than in others. Since the Cuban–Danish couples clearly choose their spouses without family involvement, it is easier to assume that love, or at least, individual autonomy may be co-present even if economic or migration motivations are suspected. However, for the intra-ethnic Pakistani marriages, the role of family in arranging the marriage or the kin
connection between the spouses makes individual autonomy difficult to determine and, therefore, also harder to assess if freely chosen romantic love exists in these couples. Unions involving elements that the Enlightenment saw as ‘unreason’ (genealogical inheritances like kinship, tribalism, patriarchy) are clearly more suspect than those that might involve economic interest, for example (Povinelli 2002). The state sees the Pakistani intra-ethnic marriage as part of the pre-Enlightenment patterns based on ‘unreason’ (kinship, tribalism and patriarchy), that is why these marriages are more dangerous to the modern state than Cuban–Danish marriages, for example, even if love might be in question.

In response, we see in our couples’ narratives an attempt to distance themselves from stigmatised assumptions6 (e.g. sex tourism, marriage for visa and forced marriage) and also efforts to actively reproduce the same norms regarding love-based marriages and individual autonomy that underpin the marriage regulations. We are not questioning or assessing the presence of love in their relations, but rather examining how their discourse of love connects to the underlying moral agenda of the state. This is illustrated in the cases of both the Danish–Pakistani and Danish–Cuban couples, whose stories reflect the dialogical principle (Bakhtin 1986) of how utterances are shaped and developed in interaction with others, contributing to a societal discourse on themes such as family unification.

At another level, Danish family unification laws also aim to promote individual autonomy and independence through financial requirements. The purpose of these is to insure that the sponsoring partner can support his or her immigrant spouse so that the immigrant does not become dependent on the welfare state, or enter the country solely for the generous benefits that all legal residents enjoy. As public opinion generally perceives immigration as a drain on public resources, the regulations aim to screen out marriages with immigrants who could potentially become a burden for the welfare state. In addition, the Danish spouse cannot have received welfare in the previous year and must be self-supporting.

However, dependency is defined not only as relying economically on the state for subsistence but also relying economically on the family. In the Scandinavian context, both types of dependency are often presented as a problem with moral undertones and are increasingly seen as an individual trait rather than a social position of subordination (Eggebø 2010). Thus, the Danish family unification rules aimed to avoid both financial dependency on the state and also dependency on the family. Ideally, the Danish spouse should be able to meet the financial and collateral requirements of family unification policy; thus, ensuring that they can support their immigrant partner and avoiding family involvement in the marriage. A ‘modern’ marriage should be independent of family and self-supporting financially, and a ‘traditional’ marriage is not. Our comparative material demonstrates that this plays out in very unexpected ways for transnational couples.
While there was never any question that Victoria and Javier freely chose to be in a relationship together, their marriage and family unification could never have happened without the involvement of Victoria’s parents. As Victoria noted, ‘[the Danish state] makes it impossible for young people to marry foreigners if you don’t have parents who will help’. The Danish family unification requirements mandate a level of financial stability and resources that pose challenges for numerous young couples. However, while the Cuban–Danish couples may avoid financial dependence on the state, some young Danish women often cannot meet the financial requirements without the assistance of their parents.

Many of the interviewed Cuban–Danish couples relied on the Danish partner’s family to meet the regulations on housing, collateral and income. Victoria’s income consisted of her student stipend and her part-time job. These sources did not provide nearly enough revenue to deposit 50,000 Danish kroner (approximately $9,000) in a bank account as collateral. Victoria’s parents deposited the money for them. In other cases, parents assumed monthly payments to the bank (a type of insurance policy option available for those unable to deposit the cash).

Victoria’s family helped finance the move to Malmö and the move back to Copenhagen. In addition, they helped pay the rent on their apartment in Copenhagen, as the regulations required a long-term lease which limited the apartments they could rent, and made the available apartments more expensive. After their son was born, her parents helped them purchase a small row house with space to accommodate the young family. Other couples used their parents’ address as their ‘home’ address for the housing requirement, though they actually spent more time in an apartment that did not meet the regulations (either because of size or type of lease). Victoria’s family played a key role in helping the young couple comply with the financial and housing aspects of the regulations.

The rules forced the young couples to become increasingly dependent on, and at times, indebted to the Danish families who finance their compliance with the regulations. Rather than independent, autonomous individuals engaging in a marriage of their choice, some of these Cuban–Danish marriages assume characteristics of ‘traditional’ marriage patterns the state is trying to curtail. Because of the financial burden, the marriages become family projects, where the young couples are subject to the parents’ willingness and ability to invest financially in the marriage, mirroring collectivist kin relations. This dependency can strain relations within the couple, as well as between the Danish woman and her parents. While this was not a source of tension for Victoria and her parents, some women found that the dependency did put them in an uncomfortable position vis-à-vis their parents.
The fact that the Danish family becomes so involved in these marriages raises questions about the normative model of family and the independence the legislation is supposed to promote. In reality, the Cuban–Danish couples highlight that even in societies that celebrate free choice and independence, romantic relations and kinship itself entail a certain degree of dependence on others. This is particularly evident in intergenerational relations within families.

In the case of Mona and Naveed, we see that Mona’s family did play a role, though not a decisive one, in her choice of marriage partner. In that way, this case and many others reflect the ambiguous space between individual autonomy and the collective constraint of the family (Bredal 2006). Mona never considered that her marriage was ‘forced’ by her parents. On the contrary, she—and other informants in similar situations—experienced force from the Danish state, namely, being forced to settle in Sweden.

Non-Western migrants generally have lower income than ethnic Danes (Danmarks Statistik 2012). Unlike Victoria’s parents, Mona’s parents did not have the same possibilities to fully finance settlement in Sweden. Consequently, Mona and Naveed were less dependent on Mona’s parents in this respect than Victoria and Javier were on Victoria’s parents. The potential influence from the family, furthermore, changed drastically as Mona and Naveed moved to Sweden to start their married life together, far away from relatives in Denmark and Pakistan. Although Mona commuted daily to Copenhagen, she spent little time with her family due to the time consumed by the long commute. As her parents were old and ill, they rarely visited the couple in Sweden. In many ways, Mona’s family relations became more attenuated, and her family did not interfere in their married life in Sweden. While Mona often missed her family, she was still determined to stay in Sweden. However, Naveed had no interest in being close with the family in Denmark:

Mona: He doesn’t like to go to Denmark. But it’s not because of Denmark, but because of my mother.

Naveed: When we go there [to Denmark], then we only meet her mother and father and my cousin. But I study here, it’s good, all my friends are here, I know how to go about, how many shopping malls there are. I know everything. But I don’t know anything about Copenhagen...

Like Naveed, many other, both male and female, migrating spouses from targeted non-Western countries expressed their relief and joy about living far away from their in-laws in Denmark. Even the Danish spouses of immigrant descent, to some extent, were caught in a dilemma between missing their family and enjoying their independence. For many of them, Malmö constituted a space free of social or kinship relations where they could discover the world on their own and escape from work life and family problems. This discovery included forming new friendships, being able to take care of themselves and forming their own family life. Many informants described their lives in Sweden as ‘isolated’, but they used this term in a positive sense. Though they were foreigners with few relations in Sweden, they gained
privacy and avoided pressure from their in-laws.

In that way, Sweden became an independent project of freeing the couple from the extended family and cultivating the intimacy in their new core family. The migration to Sweden provided them with a ‘modern’ sense of self and a new consciousness of identity (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992), which was different from their experiences of being an ethnic minority in Denmark. Both the cases of the Danish–Cuban and Danish–Pakistani couples show a concern from the family. In different ways, the families may not have agreed entirely with the choice of marriage partner, nevertheless, parents support the couples. This support is more financial in the case of Victoria and Javier, whose married life in Denmark is dependent on the economic support of Victoria’s parents. The involvement of the Danish family destabilises the normative model of family, independence and gender equality that the legislation is supposed to promote. As cross-cultural anthropological research shows, all kin relations, even in societies that celebrate free choice and independence, entail a degree of dependence on others. This dependence is particularly visible in cross-generational family relationships.

In the case of Mona and Naveed, from the outset, the Danish state categorises their family formation practices as ‘incorrect’, ‘un-Danish’ and a dangerous marriage bound by collectivistic and patriarchal traditions. Nevertheless, the couples themselves express modern imaginings of marriage by stressing falling in love, intimacy and individualism. They move to Sweden because they cannot secure family unification in Denmark, thus circumventing the Danish rules. This move has consequences for their relationship. The spatial distance not only enhances their independence from kin relations but may also enhance their cultivation of ‘modern’ ideas of love and family life. In contrast, the case of Cuban–Danish couple Victoria and Javier show that the process of fulfilling the rules to obtain family unification in Denmark makes them economically dependent on Victoria’s parents, thus enhancing their dependence on kin relations in a way that makes them appear as more ‘traditional’. The economic dependence on the parents thus makes their family seem to be based on ‘collectivistic’ norms in which the family constitutes a unit of which the individual is an integrated part (Bredal 2006).

**Conclusion**
The moral agenda of the Danish family unification policies is rooted in Western ideas of modernity, individual autonomy and the link between romantic love, marriage and the state. Our comparison of the impact of this legislation on the targeted (intra-ethnic Pakistani) and non-targeted (Cuban–Danish) couples demonstrates that implementing this moral agenda does not always produce the desired results. The empirical material illustrates the unintended consequences resulting from the Danish family unification laws. Whereas the legislation is intended to promote modern and
autonomous individuals, the effects of the laws create different kinds of (in) dependencies to kin relations. The contradictions emerge in how these consequences directly or indirectly invert the relationship between ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’, such that those who are considered to be ‘modern’ become ‘traditional’ and vice versa. In that way, the couples illustrate the incongruity between so-called traditional and modern forms of marriage, showing opposite impacts of the same legislation and calling into question the validity of the ‘modern/traditional’ divide. From the outset, Victoria and Javier would be seen as ‘Western’ and ‘modern’ but engage in more traditionalistic kinship relations to obtain family unification. Whereas Mona and Naveed, who from the outset are considered ‘non-Western’ and ‘traditional’ enact more modern forms of love and independence from kin. Ultimately, these contradictory outcomes destabilise ideas of ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ marriages and question the efficacy of the state’s attempt to legislate morality through family unification laws. Our cases illustrate that whether they come from immigrant or ethnically Danish families, young couples enter marriages shaped by and deeply embedded in their social relationships, especially kin relations, though the cultural forms of that interdependence varies.

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Notes
[1] Our approach parallels that of Bledsoe and Sow (2011), who examined unintended consequences of family reunification legislation among African migrants in several European countries. These are commonly used racial terms in Cuba, and how the men self-identify. Wardlow and Hirsch (2006) note the presence of ‘courtly love’ as early as the eleventh 605 century, and Povinelli (2002) also cites changes contributing to this shift as early as fifteenth century. The dates cited here mark a period when many of these earlier trends converged to solidify and popularise the idea of love-based marriage in the West. Today, the major migrant groups come from countries including Turkey, Germany, Iraq, Poland, Lebanon, Bosnia-Herzegovina, African nations (especially Somalia), Pakistan, former Yugoslavia, Norway and more recently Thailand and the Philippines. As a socialist state, Cuba has restricted travel for its citizens. Until January 2013, in order to travel, Cubans were required to have an exit visa from Cuba and a letter of invitation from someone in the destination country along with a visa for that country. The government under Raul Castro is only now easing some of these restrictions.

[6] Eggebø’s (forthcoming) research in Norway shows a similar tendency, and argues that legislating on love can be difficult. She finds that Norwegian immigration officials must operationalise ‘love’ in order to assess its role in a transnational relationship.

References


