Moral boundaries and national borders: Cuban marriage migration to Denmark

Abstract: The discussion of marriage migration in Denmark primarily has focused on citizens of immigrant descent (“New Danes”) who marry partners from their ancestral homeland (often Turkey or Pakistan). This type of marriage migration was the target of the strict Danish family reunification policy instituted in 2002. This paper examines the genealogy of the morality underpinning the family reunification policies and asks whether the rules actually promote this moral agenda or have unintended consequences. Empirically, I shift the focus from immigrant Danes to native Danes who marry Cubans. Finally, while little attention is paid to the non-western country involved, transnational marriages always involve two nations. This paper investigates how state policies on both ends of this migration trajectory shape moral-territorial borders that transnational couples navigate.

Keywords: transnational marriage, cross-border marriage, family reunification, Denmark, Cuba, marriage migration

Introduction
With increasing population flows and tighter immigration restrictions, family reunification remains one of the few avenues for legal entry into Denmark and many other European countries (Kofman 2004, Beck-Gernsheim 2007, Schmidt 2011a, Schmidt 2011b). The strict Danish family reunification policy instituted in 2002 aimed at stemming the flow of immigrants entering the country through marriage, particularly Turks and Pakistanis marrying Danish citizens of immigrant descent. In a recent study, Rytter argues that the policy has turned “a territorial border of nation state into a moral boundary guiding how marriages should be contracted and family life organized” (Rytter 2012b). Policy-makers perceive transnational marriages as a problem; namely that non-Western immigrants will not integrate successfully into Danish society. For the Danes, integration entails not only gainful employment, but moreover cultural integration (Jöhncke 2011). The universalist welfare state is simultaneously a political/economic and a cultural model embodying key values and ideals; making it an explicit part of Danish identity (Jöhncke 2011). As a result, concerns over integration and the moral elements of the family reunification play out as “culture wars” (Hervik 2011). Former minister of integration and self-proclaimed cultural imperialist, Bertel Haarder, crafted much of the restrictive legislation (Blüdnikow 2003). He urged the importance of preserving “Danish” values such as democracy, human rights and modern views of women. The family reunification policies he instituted contribute to this moral agenda, and to the goals of inhibiting forced marriage and arranged marriage, limiting non-European immigration and fostering better integration of existing immigrant groups. Given these objectives family formation and reunification policies are now a central arena for moral
reflection. Morality, in this sense, refers to understandings of basic obligations and a sense of
propriety (‘doing the right thing’) that informs everyday thinking and actions and shapes
judgments passed on others (Oxfeld 2010); here in the realm of family formation.
While targeting Danes of immigrant descent, ethnic Danes marrying non-Europeans are also
ensnared by the legislation. This article expands Rytter’s framework of the moral
implications of family reunification policy by (1) examining the underpinning genealogy of
the policies’ social norms and morals and (2) asking whether the rules actually uphold this
moral agenda or instead have unintended consequences. Furthermore, Denmark represents
only half of the story. Transnational marriages always involve two states. With few
exceptions (Alexander 2013), the non-western country involved if often overlooked.
However, in this particular coupling, the Cuban state also poses obstacles placing couples in
moral and legal predicaments with *two* states restricting their movement and, ultimately, their
family relationships. Empirically, I shift the focus from “ethnic minorities” to “native Danes”
who marry Cubans. A non-targeted immigrant group sheds a less politicized light on the
debate enabling us to ask what model of Danishness, family, and cultural values are the
policies really enforcing? What are the roots of these values, and is the policy effective?
Looking at the Cubans foregrounds such issues and moves us beyond the “ethnic lens” of
Muslim migrants. Focusing on native Danes we can see the contradictions in both states’
legislation more clearly. My empirical material highlights the implicit modernist
assumptions about love, marriage, and family, and reveals how the moral and ideological
fabric of the Danishness (which the policies supposedly enshrine) is not seamless, but shot
through with contradictions. Other countries have been inspired by Denmark’s stringent
immigration policies. My analysis underscores the urgency of assessing the efficacy of
promoting a moral agenda through family reunification policies in Denmark, and by
extension, in other regulatory immigration regimes.

About 460 Cubans (nearly equal numbers of men and women) live in Denmark. While
determining exact numbers entering through marriage is difficult, over 300 family
reunification permits were issued to Cubans between 2000-2010 (Denmark Statistics). Here
I draw on over 40 open-ended, in-depth interviews I conducted in 2011-12 with Cubans and
their Danish spouses in the Copenhagen area. Like Cubans in Spain (Berg 2011), Cubans in
Denmark do not form an ethnic community in any meaningful or visible way so finding
interlocutors required relying on personal contacts. As a visiting researcher at Copenhagen
University I met several students married to Cubans, and through neighbors and friends I
connected with other Cuban-Danish couples. My previous research in Cuba (Fernandez
2010) helped me quickly establish connections to Danes who knew Cubans. Contacting
Cubans though these diverse networks, I then used snowball sampling to identify additional
participants. The interviews are supplemented with participant observation at venues
frequented by some of the Cuban-Danish couples. About 60% of the couples I interviewed
were Cuban men (mostly black or mulatto”) married to (or separated from) white ethnically
Danish women. Both partners were of similar ages, mostly mid-twenties to mid-thirties,
though there were a few middle-aged couples. The interviews were recorded, and the
participants’ names and identities changed to protect anonymity.

The paper starts with an historical examination of the connections between love, marriage,
and the modern state. I then explore how the legislation based on this matrix entangles the
Cuban-Danish couples in moral paradoxes due to understandings of the “proper citizen” and
“proper marriage” in both the Danish and Cuban states.
Genealogy of Marriage, Love, Morality and the State

Scholars agree that the emergence of marriage based on romantic love is a relatively recent phenomenon in the West (Coontz 2005, Wardlow and Hirsch 2006) (Povinelli 2006, Povinelli 2002). Dated variously from the 18th to early 20th century, European historians note a shift toward ideal marriages grounded in emotional intimacy, rather than those defined by social rank or kin alliances. Before the 18th century, marriage was primarily a social, economic, or religious contract and among the landed aristocracy, a means of consolidating property and inheritance. Wardlow and Hirsch (2006) outline historical research suggesting a number of factors contributing to this shift. Demographically, declining fertility and infant mortality, along with increased life expectancy, meant that couples spent a relatively longer period together without young children in the household, leaving time for the couple to construct emotional intimacy. Urbanization, capitalism, industrialization, wage labor, and the decline of household production fostered the ideals of the nuclear family, reducing couples’ dependency on extended kin and increasing the mutual interdependence of the conjugal couple. Accompanying these structural changes, Wardlow and Hirsch (2006) suggest that media technologies and discourses (literature, magazines, and later film) also shaped ideas about the emotional-based marriage bond, and helped link these new marital ideals to notions of progress and modernity.

Povinelli (2002, 2006) takes this historical shift a step further by theorizing the connections between modernity, emotional intimacy and marriage, and the Western nation state. She asserts that with the emergence of the market economy, civil, social, and political rights and obligations were increasingly defined by membership in an abstract human order or citizenship (rather than by kinship/rank). With marriage unshackled from lineage, the question became what then should be the basis for family formation. The answer, Povinelli (2002) argues, was intimate romantic love -- feelings associated with a person’s worth based solely on his or her qualities as a human being.

The idea of individualistic love and intimacy is closely tied to the modern liberal state. Individualistic love and other practices and fantasies about self-making, self-sovereignty, and the value of individual freedom define what Povinelli calls the “autological subject” (Povinelli 2006). Povinelli links this “autological subject” with the Western Enlightenment project of contractual constitutional democracy and capitalism, and contrasts it with social constraint embodied in the “genealogical society” based on kinship, descent and rank (Povinelli 2002). The Enlightenment’s embrace of humanist reason marks a supposed rupture from the genealogical inheritances of unreason (e.g., kinship, tribalism, and patriarchy) (Povinelli 2006). Yet this modernist project “presupposes a liberal humanist claim that what makes us most human is our capacity to base our intimate relations, our most robust government institutions and our economic relations on mutual and free recognition of the worth and value of another person rather than basing these on, for example, social status” (Povinelli 2006, p.5). In a similar vein, Cole links ideas of romantic love and Christian ideals of love (humility, self-sacrifice, and selflessness), and also the connection to the Christian conception of the autonomous subject. This subject “who can take his or her proximate attachments and generalize them in the name of the common good also underpins the political contract of liberal states which presupposes a subject constituted through shared national project” (Cole 2009). Intimate love is thus the foundation not merely of true families but also of true nations; therefore, denying the foundational role of human love in family formation is seen as a threat to the nation (Povinelli 2002).
Companionate, love-based marriage is thus the mark of the modern West. Love, intimacy, and pleasure are central to forming oneself as a modern autonomous subject. Marriage is increasingly viewed as an arena for self-realization, rather than as a traditional strategy for survival, social reproduction, and the fulfillment of kin obligations (Padilla et al. 2007b, Giddens 1993). The companionate marriage privileges the conjugal partnership over other family ties making emotional intimacy the ultimate goal of marriage. Furthermore, companionate marriage assumes a level of gender equality; implicit in the ideology of love is a notion that, as individuals, each partner has equal value (in practice not always the case). Wardlow and Hirsch (2006) argue that gender equality connected to the companionate marriage serves as a trope for representing narratives of progress and modernity. Gender equality is also a keystone in Scandinavian social democratic welfare states. Here individual autonomy is strongly linked with both the capacity for self-support through wage labor and with gender equality. Emphasizing individual rights, women’s employment, and dual-career/dual-earner families, the Nordic universalist welfare state undermines the model of the male bread winner (Eggebø 2010). Over the past fifty years, the idea that men and women are individually responsible for providing for themselves has supplanted the ideology of the household headed and supported by a man (Eggebø 2010). Even within married or cohabiting couples it is common for each partner to keep their finances separate though both may contribute to joint household expenses. In this context the proper marriage, thus, should also embody these same ideals of autonomy, individualism and gender equality that the welfare state promotes and supports; ideals central to the Nordic self-image.

Today these ideals of a love-based companionate marriage rooted in autonomy and individualism are evident in Danish family reunification policy and political discourse against forced marriage and marriages of convenience. By controlling migration through family reunification, the Danish state asserts the moral ideals of the Western Enlightenment project of contractual constitutional democracy. Unions not based solely on intimate romantic love undermine these fundamental ideals and thus are seen as immoral and threatening to the state. Scholars (Jørgensen 2012, Schmidt 2011a, Rytter 2011, Rytter 2003, Liversage 2012) studying marriage among immigrant Danes note that the arranged marriages of Muslim immigrants are frequently condemned in political and public discourses. For example, Rytter argues that in the public eye Danish Pakistani marriages are “suspect and contradict the usual motivations of “real” Danes in contracting marriages” (Rytter 2012b). The motivations of Pakistani and Turkish marriages, often arranged by family members and possibly contracted between cousins, appear to embody “old-fashioned” values privileging the interests of the kinship group over those of the individuals. Even the few young Pakistani couples who do have “love marriages” attempt to follow the “script” of arranged marriages negotiating the shifting agency and autonomy from parents to spouses by allowing parents to “arrange” the marriage with their self-selected partner (Rytter 2012a).

The presence of these structural motivations, with echoes of a “genealogical society,” overrules any emotional attachments or individual agency that may be co-present in intra-ethnic marriages. The Danish state’s position is that the primacy of love is the only valid motivation for marriage among “real” Danes. Thus, the state calls into question the morality of immigrant-Dane marriage practices and implements restrictive legislation to protect the nation from the “threat” that these “non-modern,” “non-love-based” marriages pose to a state presumably grounded in the fundamental idea of the “autological subject.” These “non-modern” marriages are but one instance of the perceived challenges ethnic minorities pose to the moral and ideological fabric of the country (Jöhncke 2011). However, the moral agenda of the stringent legislation begins to unravel if we examine inter-ethnic cross-border
marriages. Here even “real” Danes marrying non-European partners fall into zones of moral uncertainty, often in unintended ways. In looking at the contradictions, I highlight three aspects of the confluence of ideas of love, marriage and the modern state central to shaping the moral core of Danish family reunification policy: 1) the centrality of individual autonomy and choice in forming relationships, 2) the use of gender equality as a trope for modernity, and 3) the entanglement of love and interest.

**Force vs. Choice**

Individual self-determination and autonomy lie at the heart of the emotional basis of modern marriage and constitute a key element of the modern Western state. These moral ideals permeate not only popular discourse and debate around family reunification, but also inform policy. In the case of Denmark, free choice of marriage partner is central to a proper marriage, meaning a love-based marriage, freely entered into by two consenting adults (Jørgensen 2012). Danish policy explicitly argues against forced marriages, and also assumes that marriages between close relatives (e.g., cousins) among “new Danes” are not contracted out of the partners’ “own free will.”

The Danish state so strongly opposes what it considers forced marriage that the Danish Immigration service outlines specific criteria used in determining if a marriage was forced such as the circumstances surrounding the wedding, the spouses’ personal relationship and the relationship with prospective in-laws prior to the marriage. The “Government’s Action Plan for 2003-2005 on Forced, Quasi-forced and Arranged Marriages” outlines initiatives that are still in effect to prevent forced and arranged marriages (this report treats the two as synonymous). In the forward, former Integration Minister Bertel Haarder (Liberal Party) and former Social Minister Henriette Kjær (Conservative People’s Party) state that it is unacceptable for young people to be forced or pressured into marriage against their will. They frame this position with the statement that “respect for values such as free choice, protection of the individual and gender equality is vital. A democratic society is based on personal freedom. This means that all young people, regardless of ethnic background, should be able to choose their own spouse” (Danish Government 2003). The report is peppered with references to protecting personal freedom (particularly that of young women) from the oppressive structures of family tradition and culture. Arranged marriage is presented as the project of the parents or kin group, not the couple themselves. But what if it is not the family, but the state (or states) that is (are) “forcing” the marriage? Is “force” only a problem when it comes from the family? The Cuban-Danish couples show that “force” also plays an important role in their marriages; yet in their case the “force” comes from the states involved at both ends of the migration trajectory. The following vignette recounts a typical story of meeting and marriage between a young Danish woman and a young Cuban man and their confrontation with both states’ legislation.

**Pernilla and Dayron**

Nearly all of the couples in my study met in Cuba while the young Danes were on vacation or had traveled to Cuba to study dance, music or Spanish. The women often met their future husbands during their first weeks in the country, and made several trips to Cuba before inviting their partners to Denmark and deciding to marry. In most cases, less than two years elapsed between their first meeting and their marriage. All of the couples I met had successfully met the requirements for family reunification, although some spent some time in
Malmö, Sweden, due to the rule requiring both partners to be at least 24-years old. Dayron and Pernilla’s courtship, marriage, and family reunification represent a typical pattern. In 2004 Pernilla was 23 years old and working full time in an after-school program. She and a girlfriend decided to travel to Cuba for a three-week vacation. The young women spoke little Spanish. As single white women (clearly tourists) in Havana, they were approached by many men on the street offering them black market goods, guided tours, restaurant recommendations, etc. For the most part, they found this unwanted attention annoying and distasteful. While in Havana at a popular outdoor art space where local rumba bands perform, Pernilla met Dayron, a 25-year-old mulatto man, who was hanging out with some friends. Unlike other Cuban men, Dayron did not try to sell them things or hustle them. He only wanted to talk and was curious to hear about life outside of Cuba. He had completed a vocational level (technico-medio) education and was working at a state-owned agricultural warehouse.

Despite the lack of a common language (Dayron spoke limited English), they worked hard to communicate and were clearly attracted to each other. Thus began the holiday romance. Although both assert that neither had intentions of a longer term relationship, they spent the remainder of Pernilla’s vacation together and continued to communicate via letters, calls and emails after she returned to Denmark. After several months back at work, Pernilla decided to return to Cuba for a longer stay to be with Dayron. She enrolled in a Spanish course and spent three months living with Dayron. Their relationship continued to develop, and she quickly learned basic Spanish, so communication improved. The long-distance romance resumed after Pernilla returned to Denmark.

The couple had known each other for less than a year when the distance proved to be too emotionally draining and too expensive to maintain. Pernilla had neither the time nor the money to continue travelling regularly to Cuba, and phone calls and internet access (in Cuba) were expensive, but they did not want to end the relationship. Neither, however, at this point did they want to marry, as the typical lifestyle pattern in both Cuba and Denmark for people their age was to live together without a formal, legal marriage.

While both argue they did not want to marry, they saw no alternative to be together. With no children or property in Cuba, Dayron would be seen as a possible immigrant and his tourist visa likely rejected if Pernilla attempted to invite him to Denmark. Even if he were granted a tourist visa, it would give him only three months in Denmark (with a possible 3-month extension). Likewise, Pernilla could stay only three months in Cuba on a tourist visa. Calculating their options, including the costs and risk of applying for a tourist visa, marriage appeared the only reasonable solution for them to continue their relationship. Thus, after having spent less than six months with Dayron in the same location, Pernilla returned to Cuba for a month-long visit and married Dayron. The process of getting Dayron out of Cuba and into Denmark through family reunification was an expensive and time-consuming odyssey through a labyrinth of bureaucracy on both sides of the Atlantic.

As was true for the former socialist bloc countries, travel and emigration has been very tightly controlled in Cuba since the 1959 revolution. Until January 2013, in order to travel Cubans needed an exit visa (tarjeta blanca) from Cuba, and a letter of invitation from someone in the destination country along with a visa for that country. Obtaining each of these documents involved many bureaucratic steps, including filing costly paperwork that could take months to process. Moreover, Cubans educated in sectors such as healthcare, may be unable to leave the country before having worked a certain period to repay the cost of their
education. As a result, some young Cubans with whom I spoke purposely do not complete their educations, knowing that doing so may hamper their chances to emigrate or travel. Likewise, Cuban men must also have completed (or be exempted from) mandatory military service. Fortunately, Dayron had fulfilled his military service, and he was not employed in a vital sector of the labor market. Nevertheless, to obtain the exit visa, Dayron had to quit his job and request travel permission from the minister of the sector in which he worked. Dayron did not want to leave Cuba without the possibility of returning if things went badly in Denmark with Pernilla. To leave Cuba legally and retain his residency, inheritance, and property rights, Dayron had to apply for a foreign residency permit. This “PRE” (*permiso de residencia en el exterior*) is granted to Cubans who marry foreigners (excluding US citizens) as well as to selected artists, musicians, scientists, or professionals who reside or work abroad but have not technically emigrated (Duany 2011). With the PRE, Cubans can return to Cuba to live permanently and can visit the island for stays up to 12 months without requiring entry permissions or visas. Like Dayron, many of the Cubans I interviewed had the PRE, and maintaining their rights in Cuba was essential for them. However, some Cubans had no PRE, because either they had never applied or their applications were denied. Even after marrying a foreigner, no guarantee exists that the applicant will be granted the PRE. Furthermore, maintaining the PRE requires that Cubans living abroad continue to be “good citizens” or else they risk having their PRE revoked (e.g. if they engage in political activism against Cuba) (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2010). Luckily, all of these exit processes went relatively smoothly for Dayron and within six months after their marriage the papers on the Cuban-side were ready.

At this stage of the story, one may ask how such a marriage was “forced.” By about 2006, Cuban national identity was no longer as tightly bound to the political project of the revolution as it had once been; leaving the country was no longer an act of treason. However, despite this shift, the idea of the nation as a political community had not yet been completely supplanted by the new focus on nation as culture (Hernandez-Reguant 2009). For Dayron, the only way to leave Cuba for an extended period and maintain his Cuban citizenship rights required the PRE, which he could obtain only if he married a foreigner. Thus, as marriage is one of the few ways for the average Cuban to emigrate legally while retaining key rights at home, the Cuban state, in a sense, “forces” marriage.

The Danish family reunification reforms, ostensibly designed to promote a “modern” individual-rights approach to marriage and family formation, have resulted in the opposite effect for some couples like Dayron and Pernilla. While they had freely chosen to be in an intimate relationship with each other, the regulations from both states pushed the couple to legally formalize their romance. In studies of cross-border marriages in Norway, Eggebø (2013) notes a similar pattern. The transnational couples she interviewed would have also preferred to live together, but immigration regulations prevented them. At that stage of their relationship, neither Dayron nor Pernilla wished to marry. Cohabitation without formal marriage is widespread and culturally acceptable both in Cuba and Denmark.

While public and political discourse in Denmark around “forced marriage” focuses on family involvement, states can also “force” marriage on couples who would prefer to construct their relationship outside of prescribed normative social categories. Furthermore, the Danish policy addresses issues of “individual choice” solely in reference to the autonomy to choose one’s partner, not the autonomy to choose how one wants to conduct that relationship. For the Cuban-Danish couples, their individual autonomy of how to practice their intimate relations is violated by the immigration and emigration rules of two states, rules that dictate and
require a formal legal marriage. The Cuban-Danish couples’ experiences show the cracks in the moral agenda on which discourses of “individual autonomy,” “choice” and “force” rest.

Dependency, Gender and Modernity

Ideas of dependence and independence are central in welfare, gender and immigration policies in Nordic states (Eggebø 2010). Dependency is defined as relying economically on the family or the state for subsistence. In Scandinavia dependency is often presented as a problem with moral undertones and is increasingly seen as an individual trait rather than a social position of subordination (Eggebø 2010). Issues of dependence and independence emerge in the Danish family reunification policy in two arenas: the financial realm and gender relations.

First, couples in Denmark seeking family reunification must prove financial solvency. The sponsoring partner should be able to support the immigrant spouse, so that the immigrant does not become dependent on the welfare state. As public opinion generally perceives immigration as a drain on state resources, the regulations aim to bar marriages with immigrants who could potentially become a state burden. In addition to collateral, the Danish spouse cannot have received welfare in the previous year. Ideally, the Danish spouse should be able to prove that he or she can support their immigrant partner and avoid both state and family involvement in the marriage. In reality, however, many young Cuban-Danish couples struggle to meet these financial requirements.

While the Cuban-Danish couples may avoid financial dependence on the state, some young Danish women cannot meet the financial requisites without parental assistance. Many of the Cuban-Danish couples I interviewed met the regulations on housing, collateral and income by relying on the Danish partner’s family. While some of the young Danish women, like Pernilla, had full-time jobs, others had only a student stipend, or part-time work. However, even with a steady job, Pernilla did not have the resources to deposit 62,000 Danish kroner (approximately $11,000) in a bank account to be held without earning interest for seven years as collateral. Pernilla’s parents deposited the money for the couple.

The housing requirement was not an issue for some couples, as many of the women were already owned coop apartments or lived in large enough apartments with long-term leases, as was Pernilla’s situation. For others, their parents either helped pay the rent or purchased an apartment for the couple. In several cases the couple used their parents’ address as their “home” address for the housing requirement, even though they actually spent more time in an apartment that did not meet the regulations (either because of size or type of lease). The Danish family thus played a key role in helping the young couple comply with the financial and housing regulations.

However, the rules forced the young couples to become increasingly dependent on, and at times indebted to the Danish families. Rather than independent individuals engaging in a marriage of their choice, some of these Cuban-Danish marriages assumed the characteristics of traditional marriages of a “genealogical society” that the state was trying to curtail. The financial burdens made the marriages family projects, where the young couples were subject to the parents’ willingness and ability to invest financially in the marriage. This dependence often strained relations between the couple, as well as between the Danish woman and her parents. Pernilla commented, “I told my parents about the family reunification requirements,
the money and everything, and they told me not to worry about the money. They were happy to loan me the money, but I felt bad about it. … I don’t think there should be money between family members. I’ve never liked to borrow money from others or receive money or gifts.”

While the indebtedness per se was not a source of tension for Pernilla and her parents, the financial dependence did put her in an uncomfortable position vis-à-vis her parents.

Second, in terms of gender equality and fostering women’s economic independence from men, Scandinavian countries have made great strides (Eggebø 2010). Gender equality is a central aspect of national identity in the Nordic welfare states (Eggebø 2010). However, financial and collateral requirements for family reunification in Denmark make immigrant spouses dependent on their sponsoring partners; thus conflicting with national ideals of gender equality and individual economic independencexiv.

The Danish family’s involvement in these marriages raises questions about the normative model of family, independence and gender equality that 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. This dependence is particularly evident in intergenerational relationships within families. The policy’s financial requirements disrupt the ideal of gender equality within the conjugal couple. These financial requirements cause the Cuban husbands, at least initially, to rely economically on their Danish wives and often on her parentsxv.

Thus couples are again caught in a moral double bind on two fronts, the regulations increase spousal dependency and therefore gender inequality within the couple, and the young Danish women become even more dependent on their parents. So the couples’ multiple levels of dependence and gender inequality put them on shaky moral grounds in a nation where identity is rooted in ideals of individual independence and gender equality. While the public debate has focused solely on preventing dependence on the welfare state, the family reunification legislation reinforces other types of dependencies and gender inequities that remain unaddressed.

**The Problem of Love versus Interest**

The dominant Western ideals of romantic love, individualism and progress crystallized in the companionate marriage stand in stark contrast to marriages contracted for interest (money, kinship, visas). To assert a bond of love is to simultaneously reject social utility. Povinelli, quoting Habermas, states that “the jeopardy into which the idea of the community of love was thereby put… as the conflict between marriage for love and marriage for reason that is, for economic or social considerations” (Povinelli 2002). In the battle between intimate love and instrumental marriage, intimate love won, and it has “became the tender of the democratic marriage contract, the true grounds for the union between persons and a necessary basis for a community of people… love of persons and love of country are the twin contracts of modernity” (Povinelli 2002). As love is essential to our idea of humanity, the fundamental belief in the emotional basis for marriage and family formation means that those who marry for other reasons can be seen as less than fully human (Povinelli 2002, Cole 2009).

Throughout Europe, including Denmark, marriages of convenience are prohibited. The Danish Immigration Service reviews family reunification requests assessing if the main purpose of the marriage was to obtain Danish residency and considers the following factors:

- Whether they have ever lived together
- Whether they speak the same language
• Whether there is a large age difference
• How well the couple knew each other before marrying
• Whether the Dane had been previously married a foreigner (i.e., then divorced after the foreigner obtained residency)
• Whether they have children together

If the Immigration Service suspects that the marriage was not contracted for love, but for gaining a visa it can deny the family reunification request. Eggebø’s (2013) research in Norway, where similar regulations against sham marriages exist, shows the difficulty of operationalizing “love” to assess its presence in a cross-border marriage. As a concept, “love” can have multiple meanings that are negotiated within the context of marriage migration. Structural factors can blur assessments of the presence of love in a marriage, particularly if the foreign spouse comes from a poorer country. In such cases, Eggebø argues that immigrant spouses try to distance themselves from stigmatized assumptions (e.g., sex tourism, marriage for visa) and also actively reproduce the same love-based norms that underpin the marriage regulations (Eggebø 2013). However, Myrdahl (2012) asserts that for immigration authorities in Norway, proof of love is more crucial in some transnational marriages than others, due to what she argues is the racial agenda of Norwegian immigration legislation

Cuban-Danish marriages, embodying economic differences of the global north/south divide, are suspect. Since 1959 Cuba has been a country of emigration. Currently more than 30,000 Cubans emigrate annually, mostly to the US. However, since the economic crisis of the 1990s and the increase in foreign tourism, marriage has also become a way of leaving the island (Reid 2012). Both in Cuba and in Denmark the public assumption is that these marriages are motivated by reasons other than romantic love. My purpose here is not to assess the presence or absence of love or migration motivations in these couples, but rather to reveal how assumptions of love and the norm of companionate marriage shape the moral terrain these couples traverse.

In Cuba, socialist ideals of gender equality sought to free women from economic dependence on men. Under socialism, citizens would ideally be able to pursue emotional, economic, and political self-realization, and could form and abandon romantic relationships without concern for social or economic security (Andaya 2012). After the fall of the socialist bloc in 1990, many Cubans believed that the economic crisis precipitated a moral decline, evidenced by materialist interests in romantic relationships. Andaya noted that her informants expressed concern about a resurgence of “anti-values” (i.e., materialist values) in couples (Andaya 2012). This common sentiment is reflected in the lyrics of popular Cuban songs which encourage women to seek men who can support their desires for consumption or provide a passport for foreign travel and a life abroad. Both kin-making and cultivating friendships with foreigners have become key strategies for Cubans to ensure their own and their family’s well-being (Andaya 2012, Allen 2011, Simoni 2011).

Conscious of these views, Cuban-Danish couples distance themselves from these amoral motivations when recounting their romances. While in Cuba, Pernilla was warned by older Cuban women about the ulterior motives of some men. One Danish woman who brought her Cuban boyfriend to Denmark commented to me, “Well, maybe Yesuel is only with me to get the opportunity to leave…maybe he only wanted to leave, but I felt he really loved me. I didn’t really think about that.” In recounting his and Pernilla’s courtship and marriage,
Dayron, like other Cuban men I interviewed, downplayed any interest in migration; though all admitted a desire to travel and see the world. Dariel, a Cuban man married to a Dane commented,

I was only 19 (she was 21), and I came from rural Eastern Cuba. She left after a few weeks and I thought we wouldn’t see each other again… I never thought I’d leave Cuba - growing up in the monte (rural mountains) and raised with a socialist system. I never, never thought about it… Our relationship was funny, because at first it was her that pursued me and she made the decision to get married. I never thought I’d leave.

Knowing that life is hard in Cuba, the Danish women also acknowledge that other motives may have been present, but stress the love they had for their partner and their belief that the feelings were reciprocal. Whether implicitly or explicitly, the norms of companionate love-based marriage simultaneously shape and are reproduced in the couples’ narratives. While the dichotomy between love and interest stigmatizes Cuban-Danish couples, it fails to recognize how all intimacy rests on a complex blend of material and affective relations. While companionate love-based marriage pervades popular Western ideology and is the basis for both common sense understandings of marriage, as well as grounds for state policy, it ignores how emotions and materiality are deeply intertwined. For the Cuban-Danish couples, we see this interconnection both in the couple’s relationship and in the Danish partner’s relationship with her parents. Zelizer (2005) argues that the idea of economic activity and intimate social attachment as, “separate spheres and hostile worlds” pervades studies of economy and interpersonal relations. Yet in reality exchange and affect are entangled rather than opposed, material provision and emotional attachment are mutually constitutive (Andaya 2012, Padron Hernandez 2011, Parry, Bloch 1989, Zelizer 2005).

Feminist theorists (vanEvery 1996, Collier, Yanagisako 1987) have also unraveled the opposition between love and material interest, asserting that love and family have never been free from material concerns and calculations. Cross-cultural studies show that love is embedded in a broader-political economic context and does not exist above the material world (Wardlow and Hirsch 2006, Padilla et al. 2007a). Andaya summarizes this position as “deeply felt emotional attachments are thus developed and experienced within material conditions that simultaneously shape, enable and constrain individual choices” (Andaya 2012). Like the emergence of romantic love and companionate marriage, the related divide between money and love is not “natural,” but develops with the growth of capitalism and modern social institutions. Cole suggests that “the question is not whether interest and love are opposed, but rather how the divisions between the two are socioculturally produced and managed, and what are the potential consequences for intimate relations” (Cole 2009).

From the perspective of the Cuban state, marriage legitimates foreigner-Cuban relations that could be seen as instrumental sexual liaisons. The fact of marriage and the implicit presumption of love allow the state to grant exit visas and foreign residency permits (PRE) without interpreting emigration as treason, despite the potential entanglement of interest. Both the migrants’ destinations (not the US) and their presumed motivation make them not traitors, but socialist citizens in love. For Danish immigration authorities, the migration motivations of the Cuban spouse can be more easily overlooked, since love is assumed to be co-present, while the kin motivations (another kind of interest) of the Turkish and Pakistani marriages, as love is assumed to be absent, cannot be overlooked. In both cases, as a couple’s motivations are called into question based on the presumed separation of love and interest, the couple traverses a ground of moral uncertainty. Only by “desacralizing and relativizing love” (Cole 2009) and ideas of companionate marriage can we see the historically situated ideas shaping the moral boundaries that transnational couples in Denmark transgress.
Conclusion

Through family reunification rules the state enforces normative models of marriage and family life that embody the key elements of Danish identity, such as moral ideals of autonomous individuals, gender equality, and love-based companionate relationships. Marriages that do not conform are amoral and furthermore a threat to the state; as the values, embodied in “proper” family norms, are foundational to national identity and conceptions of humanity. To be human is to love. People who engage in intimate relations not based purely on love can be seen as less than human, so the state’s suspicion (or rejection) of some marriages can be read as a dehumanizing gesture.

This paper reveals the historical development of ideas of love and marriage in an attempt to problematize the moral agenda underlying Danish family reunification legislation. To promote the “autological subject” over the “genealogical society,” immigration authorities stress individual choice of a partner free from kin involvement as the basis for marriage. The state defines “force” solely in regard to who one marries. However, for the Cuban-Danish couples, “force” comes not from the families’ influence of who to marry, but from the states’ influence of how to conduct their intimate relationship. The case of the Cuban-Danish couples highlights how states at both ends of the migration trajectory “force” marriage as a prerequisite for migration and cohabitation. In this marriage migration debate, we see that “force” is not singular but can come for various sources.

Similarly ideals of gender equality and autonomy can be undermined by the legislation’s financial requirements, turning marriage with a non-European spouse into a family project. Young couples become financially dependent on and indebted to Danish families, threatening young women’s independence and also making gender equality within the conjugal couple nearly impossible to achieve. Finally, the false dichotomy between love and interest places many transnational couples in the shadow of suspicion as motivations are questioned on both ends of the migration trajectory for the Cuban-Danish pairs.

The Cuban-Danish couples demonstrate how romantic relationships are, and always have been, embedded in social relations that constrain and facilitate choices both at the state and family level, thus unraveling the “Enlightenment fantasy” of individual autonomy (Povinelli 2006). The Danish legislation reinforces and highlights these relations of dependence between spouses and among family members. Whether they come from immigrant or ethnically Danish families, young couples enter marriages shaped by their social relationships, especially kin relations, though the cultural form of that interdependence varies. The goal, as Povinelli (2006) argues is not to champion individual freedom over social constraint or visa-versa, but to recognize how these discourses shape social life; and to attempt to describe what she calls a “thick-life in which the density of social representation is increased to meet the density of actual social worlds” (Povinelli 2006, p.21).

The Cuban-Danish couples’ practices of intimate life both challenge and lay bare the moral underpinnings of Danish family reunification legislation and also Cuban emigration policies. Their stories demonstrate the difficulty of legislating on naturalized understandings of love, marriage, and autonomy. Ideas of love are the hinge on which the doors to exit Cuba and enter Denmark swing, as such we should be careful to “relativize and desacralize” our understandings of this concept.
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1 The reforms included the following requirements: 1. Both partners must be over 24 years old; 2. The partner in Denmark must have adequate housing of a reasonable size; 3. The partner in Denmark must be able to provide
for spouse, and must not have received public financial assistance in the previous year; 4. The partner in Denmark must post money (100,000 DKK in 2011) as collateral to cover any possible public assistance the municipality may have to pay after foreign spouse moved to Denmark; and 5. The total ‘national attachment’ of the married couple should be at least as great to Denmark as to any other country.

ii See Jørgensen (2012) for excellent overview of the history leading up to this legislation, and Rytter (2012) for how the legislation is surrounded in discourses of humanism, securitization, and nationalism. Jöhncke (2011) insightfully examines of the development of, and identification with the Danish welfare state which many see as threatened by the presence of non-Western immigrants (Jørgensen 2012, Jöhncke 2011).

iii Bledsoe and Sow (2011) use a similar tactic examining different African immigrant groups to highlight the contradictions that emerge in humanitarian approaches to family reunification in Spain and Germany.

iv Cubans marrying Danes in another European country would not show up in these numbers.

v Mulatto is the common racial terminology used in Cuba for mixed-race individuals and it is the term by which some of my informants self-identify.

vi This article focuses only on Danish women with Cuban men. I will examine the opposite couple configurations in other writings.

vii Wardlow and Hirsch (2006) note the presence of “courtly love” as early as the 11th century and Povinelli (2002) also cites changes contributing to this shift as early as the 15th century. The dates cited here mark a period when many of these earlier trends converged to solidify and popularize the idea of love-based marriage in the West.

viii Recent research demonstrates that these ideals are prevalent now throughout the world (Cole 2009, Thomas 2009, Wardlow and Hirsch 2006).

ix Ethnic Danes can legally marry their cousins.

x For the full list of criteria see the Danish Immigration Service website <http://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-us/coming_to_dk/familyreunification/spouses/validity-of-marriage.htm>

xi The government under Raul Castro is only now easing some of these restrictions.

xii In Denmark it is possible to seek family reunification as a domestic partner without being legally married, but Dayron and Pernilla did not meet the stringent 18 month cohabitation requirement. Furthermore, this would not have allowed Dayron to exit Cuba with the PRE. Though he could have applied for the PRE after leaving Cuba, he wouldn’t take that risk. Many Cubans fear that their applications for the PRE are more likely to be rejected if they have already left the country.
The amount of collateral required has varied. In 2013 the required amount is 50,800 Danish kroner.

Eggebø (2010) notes similar issues of spousal dependency occur under Norwegian family reunification laws.

Similar issues economic dependency are also relevant for Danish men with foreign wives. The young Cuban women I interviewed tended to marry slightly older and more established Danish men. These men did not need to rely on their parents for financial help, but their Cuban wives certainly were dependent at least initially on their husbands financially and for their residency visas.

Given my theoretical framework, I argue that states see some cross-border marriages are more suspect if they fall into the model of a “genealogical society” rather than the modern “autological subject.” The Thai-Danish marriages for example may combine love and interest, but these unions are not based on what the Enlightenment saw as unreason --genealogical inheritances. By comparison, the Turkish/Pakistani intra-ethnic marriages are seen to represent pre-Enlightenment patterns of the genealogical society. Thus, they are perceived as dangerous to the modern state.

See Charanga Habanera’s song “El Temba” and Alexander Abreu’s group Havana d’Primera with the song “Carita de Pasaporte.”