

TOURIST BRIDES AND MIGRANT GROOMS: CUBAN-DANISH COUPLES AND FAMILY REUNIFICATION POLICIES

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ABSTRACT

As a development strategy mass tourism often precipitates social changes, expected and unexpected. Emigration through marriage may seem to be an unlikely by-product of the expanding tourist industry in Cuba, but the increasing number of Cubans emigrating through marriage to a foreign partner has paralleled the influx of tourists since the mid-1990's. This article explores how gender dynamics in the Cuban tourist milieu intersect with gendered underpinnings of family reunification policies in Denmark by focusing on the marriage migration pattern of Cuban grooms with Nordic brides. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Denmark among Cuban marriage migrants and their spouses, the study shows a cross-border migration pattern shaped by multiple factors including global economic asymmetries, the eroticization of Cuban culture in the tourism industry, and the gender egalitarian welfare state of Denmark.

KEYWORDS: Cuba, cross-border marriage, Denmark, family reunification, gender, tourism

Introduction

Traditionally geographic proximity was a key feature in defining the pool of potential marital partners. However, with an increasingly mobile population and the vast connective possibilities of the Internet, the days of marrying the 'girl' or 'boy' next door have largely ended. For many people, the marriage field is now globalised. Both popular and academic research (*The Economist* 2011; Niedomysl et al. 2010) document the growing trend of marriages joining partners from different countries. While this paints a picture of seamless mobility and flows of people, in reality couples are faced with increasingly restrictive immigration policies especially in Europe.

In efforts to limit all immigration, marriage is one of the few remaining ways to establish legal residency in many European nations (Bryceson 2019, Kofman 2004; Beck-Gernsheim 2007; Schmidt 2011b). The brittle borders of 'fortress Europe,' which have been particularly restrictive in Denmark, have largely targeted intra-ethnic cross-border marriages in which members of Muslim minority groups seek spouses from their ancestral homelands (namely Turkey and Pakistan) (Rytter 2011, 2012; Liversage 2013; Schmidt 2011a; Jørgensen 2012; Wray, Agoston and Hutton 2014). However, intra-ethnic marriages are not the only type of cross-border marriages. Marriage migration is, in fact, a quite diverse field encompassing phenomena including: war-brides, arranged marriages, international marriage brokers, and liaisons emerging from study-abroad, peripatetic professionals, and tourism (Charsley 2012; Williams 2012). Regardless of how couples first meet, they still confront the border obstacles of family reunification once they decide to formalize their union, and additional visa complications if their marriages end.

Herein lies the contradiction, globalization requires the seamless flow of goods, ideas, markets, and even (in some contexts) people across blurred borders, while state immigration policies are designed to police and restrict mobility. The very same borders can be both blurred and brittle. There are really only borders between sovereign nation-states. The quality of those borders – brittle, fortress-like, closed *or* blurred, flexible, open – depends on who is attempting to cross them and for what purpose. The mobility of the particular individual can be facilitated and eased, or hampered and blocked.

Tourism is a kind of mobility that relies on blurred borders and an ease of movement, money, and goods. On the other hand, family reunification is a kind of mobility that can make those same borders brittle and closed. This article examines a situation where the blurred borders of tourism intersect with the brittle borders of family reunification. The Danish/Cuban couples navigate and experience the transformation of these borders (in both countries) as they shift from blurred to brittle. The migration emerging from tourism forces us to rethink the predominantly labour market explanations of migration flows. While economic issues are not absent in the Danish/Cuban couples, both spouses see self-fulfilment, emotions, and the affective relationship at the core of their mobility. It is a migration pattern deeply shaped by global economic asymmetries, the temporal context of post-Soviet Cuba, and erotized national imaginaries, but also in an unpredicted way the gender egalitarian Nordic welfare state. Finally, I examine what happens when these marriages end, and how national borders again become brittle for the divorced marriage migrant. In many of these cases, transnational family formation is followed by family dissolution. As with their marriages, the state is present in the divorce as well, as migrants struggle to redefine their residency status. I focus here on

the less studied male marriage migrants, which comprise roughly half of the trans-border Cuban/Danish couples. These atypical marriage migrants remind us that discussions of gender and sexuality should include men and masculinity as well.

Methodology

This article draws on ethnographic fieldwork and over 50 open-ended interviews I conducted in 2011-12 with Cubans and their Danish/Swedish spouses. As of 2016, there were 548 Cubans (nearly equal numbers of men and women¹) living in Denmark (Statistics Denmark 2018). Between 2000-2016 over 350 family reunification permits were issued to Cubans indicating that they entered Denmark through marriage to a Danish citizen (Statistics Denmark 2018). In Sweden in 2016, there were 2803 Cubans, slightly more men than women (Statistics Sweden 2018). I interviewed a smaller number of couples in two Swedish cities (Malmö and Stockholm). Cubans in Scandinavia, like those in Spain (Berg 2011), do not form an ethnic community in any meaningful or visible way; so finding interlocutors required relying on personal contacts and snowball sampling. My previous research in Cuba (Fernandez 2010) helped me to establish connections to Danes and Swedes who knew Cubans. In addition to the interviews, I conducted participant observation at salsa venues and cafes frequented by some of the Cubans. Cuban men (mostly black or mulatto²) married to (or separated from) white ethnically Danish or Swedish women comprised about 60% of the couples I interviewed. The couples were mostly in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties, though there were a few middle-aged couples. All the couples met in Cuba while the Scandinavian partner was vacationing or studying (Spanish, salsa, drumming, etc.). I have changed the participants' names and identities to protect their anonymity.

Gendered mobilities: Tourist brides & migrant grooms

Until very recently a focus on gender and sexuality in the transnational sex, migration, and cross-border marriage literature has usually meant "women." The literature has thoroughly documented the experiences of the numerically predominant migrant brides (especially from Asia) and their northern husbands. From this literature (Cabezas 2009; Kempadoo 2004; Piscitelli 2004, 2006, 2008; Schaeffer-Grabiel 2005) the images that dominate are of international sexual liaisons with women from the global south as the objects of western male gaze and sexual commodities for white male desires. In response, Constable (2005) and other scholars have examined the brides' agency and motivation in pursuing these relationships to move away from the victim model. Despite the women's agency, the inequalities inherent in the 'gendered geographies of power' (Pessar and Mahler 2001) and 'cartographies of desire' (Pflugfelder 1999 in Constable 2005) frame the imaginaries of these North/South marriage relations. Though less frequently, female tourists also indulge in sexual encounters when traveling in the global south (Ebron 2002; Kempadoo 2004; Brennan 2004, Karkabi 2011, Phillips 2008). Research on these sexual engagements often conclude that "women simply become equal to their male counterparts in the consumption of [Caribbean] sexuality" (Kempadoo 2004). Whether framed as sex tourism or romance tourism (Pruitt and LaFont 1996), Karkabi notes that these studies often arrive at similar conclusions, "there is a need foreign women seek to fulfil through their encounters with local men who were inevitably led into these relations due to economic hardship" (Karkabi 2011:81). In these structurally over-determined sexual unions, the

local men are either subjugated to the women's superior economic positions, or as seen as hustlers 'playing at love' (Brennan 2004) with the ultimate goal of migration. While structural asymmetries certainly form the backdrop for all these gendered relations and border crossings, they do not fully explain the individual motivations or understandings of these relationships. Frohlick's (2013) research on female tourists in Costa Rica, begins to address these issues with her focus on the formation of women's sexual subjectivities and the mutual construction of sexuality through travel, though her account provides us solely the women's views. Only recently have migration studies begun to examine the gendered experiences of migrant men (Datta et al. 2009), and there are very few studies which examine men as migrant husbands primarily in intra-ethnic couples (such as Pakistanis or Turks in Northern Europe with spouses from their home countries) (Charsley 2005; Gallo 2006; Fleischer 2008). The Cuban/Danish couples bridge the literature on sex/romance tourism and marriage migration, not fitting neatly into either category yet containing elements relevant to both. They offer an opportunity to look more closely at the temporal, global, and gendered dynamics that give rise to this particular configuration of marriage migration and the blurred and brittle borders they confront, and to examine in the broadest sense, the social impacts mass tourism may have on a host society employing it as a development strategy.

Racialized, sexualized Cuban tourism

In the wake of the collapse of the socialist bloc in 1990, the Cuban government turned to international tourism to jump start its failing economy. It was a development plan that fundamentally re-aligned the country's economy re-inserting it into the dominant industry in the Caribbean region. While Cuba had not been officially closed to tourists prior to 1990, the industry that had flourished prior to the revolution in 1959 (Schwartz 1997), for the most part had been neglected, its infrastructure decayed, and basic amenities were scarce. During the socialist revolution, the US-focused mass-market tourism of the 1950s shifted to hosting small numbers of visitors mostly from socialist bloc countries or those on solidarity visits from capitalist ones. The borders were not closed *per se*, but certainly were not welcoming to waves of western pleasure-seeking travellers prior to the mid-1990s.

Cubans themselves faced the brittle borders and travel restrictions common in socialist nations. International tourism for the average Cuban was rare. Domestic tourism did continue particularly with trips as incentives and rewards for model workers. International travel for Cubans was mostly state-sponsored³ and related to study, work, military engagements, or international solidarity missions (e.g. doctors and teachers sent to help allies in Africa and Latin America). Until 2013 Cubans required an exit visa to leave⁴ the island (*tarjeta blanca*), and if the trip was not state-sponsored they also needed a letter of invitation from someone in the destination country and an entry visa for that country. The relative immobility of the local residents stood in stark contrast to the fluid mobility of the visiting tourists who experienced the Cuban border as blurred, not brittle. Vivid economic inequalities also distinguished these two groups, the hosts and the guests.

The rise of prostitution and *jineterismo*⁵ that accompanied the growth in tourism has been well documented (Alcazar Campos 2010; Berg 2004; de Sousa e Santos 2009; Kummels 2005; Fernandez 1999; Diaz 1996; Cabezas 2009). Popular music lyrics⁶

encapsulated the tremendous social unease caused by affective engagements with foreign tourists. Such encounters were shaped by global images of blackness and sexuality that became part of the marketing of Cuban culture worldwide. Javier, a black Cuban man living in Denmark, noted that, “now in Cuba it is the blacks who are traveling to Europe... many of my friends have left...they’re not hustlers [*jineteros*], but they have left the country.” Hanna (his Danish wife) added, “it is a new migration from Cuba – marrying foreigners to leave and it is other types of Cubans leaving [compared to those who left in previous decades]... almost all of the Cubans in Denmark are black.” In Cuba, like other tourist settings, intimate relations often play on sexualized racial stereotypes (Simoni 2015, 2013, Meiu 2017). Frohlick notes that black Costa Rican men with white foreign girlfriends engage in “ethnosexual dynamics of mutual desire.” Within the tourist context of Cuba, blackness has transformed from a ‘hindrance into an asset.’ “Cuba is not only cool, but black Cubans are again considered ‘hot’ in the global market place of images and experiences of pleasure” (Allen 2011). In fact, in the foreign gaze, *all* Cubans become racialized as their eroticism and sensuality is attached to a national-cultural category not exclusively to skin colour (Forrest 1999). Gustavo, a white Cuban living in Sweden, commenting on the appeal of Cuban men for Swedish women, “we give a woman a lot of affection, we talk to her, hug her, kiss her, and she blushes...we admire her and show her off. We are experts in making love. In Sweden, you don’t see couples holding hands. Women here are lonely and bitter. That’s why they are attracted to Cubans - we are more romantic and more affectionate.”

Male sexual prowess is seen as quintessentially Cuban – regardless of skin colour (Simoni 2013). Like Ebron’s (2002) male informants involved with European women in the Gambia, the men I spoke with were not victims. Their sexual histories recounted their relationships with the women they married, and their migration narratives convey stories of self-formation, of enactments and assertions of blackness and masculinity in their relations with white foreign women. For the Cuban men married to Scandinavians, their sexual desirability operates not only in Cuba, but persists in Scandinavia as well thanks to the fluidity of globalized images. They can as Hernandez-Reguant (2006) asserts, turn “negative racial and sexual stereotypes of black males into positive attributes in a new context requiring new strategies of sociability” (Hernandez-Reguant 2006).

Blackness in the post-Soviet era, like nearly all facets of Cuban social life, is in flux. The revolutionary government had sought to foster a homogenizing ‘revolutionary’ identity for all citizens, swallowing racial and other differences in an asserted, but never fully achieved, socialist equality. That vision unravels in the subsequent post-Soviet era and blackness, economic strata, sexuality and gender are all refashioned in a tourism-focused and more market-driven economy. As Hernandez-Reguant suggests, Black Cubans occupy the interstices of socialism and capitalism (Hernandez-Reguant 2006) – a space where racial, sexual and gendered meanings are being renegotiated - where black men are reclaiming and undermining a western gaze. For them desire for white women emerges not from a position of self-hatred, powerlessness or economic desperation, as instrumentalist views of these interracial transnational relationships would assert, but from a position of power rooted in their racialized heterosexual masculinity.

In a similar vein anthropologist Marc D. Perry (2016) argues that, “while a sexualized commodification of blackness may operate globally as a site of consumptive desire, it may simultaneously allow some darker-skinned Cubans spaces and gendered modalities of labor with a market economy in which AfroCubans are often structurally marginal” (2016: 47). As one black Cuban man quoted by Perry (2016) states, “I love it when white women chase me...Imagine it, in the face of all the racism that has always called my skin dirty, worthless...” (Perry 2016: 45). These men can use and enjoy the power of their Cuban (black) male sexuality to facilitate migration in the context of affirming their manhood while also escaping the economic hardships of the island. The temporal backdrop of post-Soviet Cuban tourism saturated with racial-sexual-national overtones provided the context in which most of the Cuban/Danish couples met. For the Cubans, the mobility of the tourists and prevalence of Cuban imaginaries abroad opened up a new chance for individual mobility. In discussing their relationships, both Cubans and Scandinavians deploy idioms of mobility, travel, and self-actualization that lie at the heart of modernity (Karkabi 2011; Phillips 2008; Bulloch and Fabinyi 2009).

Economic aspirations were always part of this picture. Like many other male migrants (Poeze 2019), the Cuban men hoped that moving abroad would enable them to help family who remained on the island. Jobs in Scandinavia generated remittances for family in Cuba. Yet, many men tried to downplay the economic aspects of their migration to avoid casting a shadow of instrumentality over their marriages. Their marriage-migration narratives, by necessity, walked a fine line between the material and the emotional; lest they be accused of contracting a ‘sham marriage’. To meet family reunification requirements, love is the only legitimate basis for a ‘real marriage’ (Eggebo 2013; Fernandez 2013).

Mobility, modernity, music and marriage

Cuban men tapped into an array of narrative tropes to dispel shadows of instrumentality in their marriages. Morally justifiable themes included kin obligations, fulfilling personal ambitions, and connecting themselves to the globalizing world through travel (Fernandez 2018). Many scholars (Amit 2007; Urry 2007) recognize the central place of travel and international experiences in Western ideas of modernity and self-development. For the Cubans and their Scandinavian partners, travel and personal aspirations, not surprisingly, are recurring topics in explaining their marriages and migration trajectories.

In their formulations of why they emigrated, the Cubans rehearsed commonly held assumptions about globalization that Salazar and Smart (2011) outline; namely, that geographic mobility means positive change, improvement, and economic progress (Salazar and Smart 2011). While some migrant husbands had completed their education or training in Cuba, most realized that they needed to have Danish educational credentials to gain access to the labour market in Denmark. Enrolling at Danish universities or technical schools, many of the Cuban men were able to obtain jobs in the hospitality industry, computer/technical fields, healthcare, and in institutions serving children or the elderly. Few of the artists and musicians could live solely from their art; so many had supplementary jobs mostly in the service or retail sector. In all fields basic

Danish language skills were essential, and finding any type of job was very difficult without some knowledge of Danish.

Victor, a black Cuban, has been living in Denmark for more than ten years, working in a supermarket during the day and pursuing his musical career at night. This Cuban musician, now divorced from his Danish wife, recounted how they met through a circle of foreign musicians he had known in Cuba. Music was at the centre of his world. The friendships he developed, and still maintains today, were a way for him to expand his professional networks within that world. Music, he hoped, would lead to international travel. To see the world, to learn, and to return to Cuba, that was his plan. He had auditioned for foreign businesses looking for Cuban musicians in the hopes of realizing these dreams. It was through this network of friendships that he eventually meets Carolina, the Danish woman he marries. She started taking percussion lessons with Victor, and their student-teacher connection turned into a romance. When she had to return to Denmark, they deliberated about if and how to continue their fledgling relationship, cognizant of the immigration hurdles they would have to overcome (Fernandez 2013; Fernandez and Jensen 2014). Victor stated:

After some months [she invited me to Denmark], it was the only way because she couldn't continue traveling [to Cuba]. So she took a gamble and I took a gamble too, to try (*probar*). ... [since arriving in Denmark]. We decided... let's continue trying. Really it was a big test.... In those first months I felt really strange. I felt like I had won a scholarship (*una beca*). ... and while I was still married I thought I'd go back to Cuba if there were any problems. I still had this idea of the scholarship. I felt like I was on a scholarship (study abroad). Where was this scholarship going to take me?

Victor describes a process of travel and self-making. His relations with foreigners emanate from his music. The connections he established are professional exchanges around music, not materially motivated hustling. His contacts developed into longstanding, 'authentic' friendships (Simoni 2014), and the people he met in Cuba continued to be part of his life even after he moved to Denmark. Victor's relationships are rooted in a shared art – playing, performing, and creating music. This dynamic is similar to what Simoni (2014) describes in Cuban friendships with tourists where the Cubans insist on their “commitment to a disinterested, affection-based friendship.” Meeting and marrying a Danish woman was at the end of this chain of associations, not the start of it. Victor had never envisioned leaving the country through marriage. Similarly, another Cuban man married to a Dane, Javier, commented, “I never had a desire to leave Cuba. I was focused on my art. I wanted to travel and then return to continue to create with my art.” Ernesto, also a musician, expressed similar sentiments when talking about his Danish wife:

She returned to Cuba because really from the very start when she met me she wanted to bring me here to Denmark. I told her no, not now, not right now. At the time I was doing things in Cuba that were important to me... there was a really creative wave [in Cuba at that time].

Later Ernesto moved to Denmark, but continued to maintain strong ties and partnerships with Cuban musicians.

Concepts of modernity and self also fuel the Scandinavian women both in their desire to travel and in their relationships with the Cubans. Many of the young women traveling to Cuba are engaging in what Amit (2007) calls 'life cycle travel' - at transition moments of life (after finishing high school, after deciding to change their career at university, etc.). As Scandinavians, the borders of the world are blurred and easily crossed; most of the woman had travelled extensively before arriving in Cuba. Some were on six-month circuits through Asia, others through Latin America. Most were in a period of their life where they worked for several months in Scandinavia to save up money to travel, then went off on a trip with a girlfriend or two, returning to Scandinavia, working to build up their savings, then travelled again.

Both travel (Amit 2007) and romantic love (Giddens 1993) are tied to processes of self-fulfilment and transformation. Giddens argues the notion of romantic love is closely connected to self-identity. Love has become a critical part of modernity and marriage is increasingly an arena for self-realization and pleasure (not simply social and physical reproduction) (Padilla et al. 2007). The Danish women often use these constructs of romantic love and self-formation to discuss their marriages with their Cuban partners in relation to their own perceptions of themselves as Danes.

When I asked Vibeke what she valued in her relationship with her Cuban husband, Yesuel, she replied:

I was with the man I loved and he was so interesting. I remember thinking when we broke up, some of my identity was gone and maybe I'm less interesting now as a person, because he was so interesting to my friends and family. I lost part of my identity [after we broke up].

Some of the Danish women commented on their affinity to Cuban culture and how it fits into who they are, and how they think about themselves. Astrid states:

many of the ideas I have are more compatible with Cuban culture than with Danish culture... like everything here is more arranged and planned and I like what Cuban culture represents - that everything is not all planned all the time. I always said I wanted to live in a place where one can scream - that's a metaphor for me - for what I see in Cuban culture... I don't think I'm so Danish in many regards. [pause] I am Danish, but I don't identify with Danish culture in many ways...

These women appreciate the cultural differences they find in Cuba, and in many ways their Cuban husbands are a way of making those differences an integral part of their lives. In so doing, they can distance themselves from some aspects of Danishness that they find constrictive. In their husbands, they see what is lacking in their lives in Denmark (spontaneity - living in the moment). They have fallen in love with individual men and with the Cuban culture that their husbands embody.

These constructs of romantic love and self-formation were central in their narratives about their relationships to their husbands. When the women met their spouses (usually in their first weeks in Cuba), they understood little or nothing of the racial dynamics at play on the island, nor in their own relationships. They were, however, keenly aware of their status and economic power as foreigners in socialist Cuba. So the racialized, sexualized masculinity and the heterosexual dynamics (the predominance of couple-hood in Cuban social life) on the island dovetails with the women's search for self-discovery... and in this romantic union, the migration connection is formed.

Marriage is often not the goal, but the means to an end - the couples want to be together and given state restrictions at both ends of the migration trajectory. Marriage is the only solution to get Cubans legally out of Cuba and legally into Denmark (Fernandez 2013; Fernandez and Jensen 2014). While the motivations of Cuban men for economic and professional advance are clear, the Scandinavian women's willingness to assume the complicated project and burden of bringing their Cuban lovers to Denmark through family reunification is less obvious.

Gender equality, complementarity and the welfare state

Bringing a non-European spouse into Denmark is a difficult undertaking. Since 2002 the Danish government has instituted restrictions to reduce immigration through family reunification (Rytter 2011; Schmidt 2011a).⁷ The Danish women who for the most part experienced the Danish state as a benevolent benefactor supporting their education and well-being are confronted suddenly by complicated immigration regulations and obstacles. National borders, which had always been blurred or invisible to them, become very evident and brittle as they navigate the rules to bring their husbands into Denmark. Victoria recalled receiving a letter from the immigration office the day after their wedding in Denmark informing the couple that they had 30 days to leave the country. Victoria was only 23 years old when they wed and family reunification legislation stipulates that both spouses must be at least 24. She recounted, "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 (like several others I interviewed) moved to Malmö, Sweden, near the Danish border, until Victoria turned 24 and could legally reside in Denmark with her Cuban husband. The family reunification legislation was often the first confrontation these women had with the Danish state.

Independence is a central concept in the Nordic states and is tied to both financial well-being and gender equality (Eggebo 2010). The Nordic welfare states promote gender equality by countering the male bread-winner model with women's participation in the labour market, an emphasis on individual rights, and dual-career family patterns (Eggebo 2010). Women's integration in the workforce is seen as a key feature of gender equality since it frees women from financial dependence on men. The goal for immigrants (male and female) is to be employed and financially independent, buttressed by the welfare state and gender equality. To this end, the Danish government offers language training, and education once immigrants are proficient in Danish. The Cuban husbands were initially very dependent on their Danish wives first to meet strict financial requirements of the family reunification legislation, and then to support them while they learn the language, complete their education or training, and find jobs. The assumption on the part of both the Danish state and the Danish wives was that the men will eventually become financially independent and fulfill the cultural expectation of a two-income family. The state expects this since the welfare system is expensive and relies on tax revenues to operate, but Danes themselves also expect that their spouse will work outside the home. Reflecting on her Cuban husband's first months in Denmark, Pernilla noted, "it was hard in the beginning because I had responsibility for everything. It was me who had to fill out all the paperwork, pay the bills, speak for him, do everything.... But because we didn't have much money [only her student stipend] he found a job as quickly as possible." While the Cuban husbands relied on their wives when they arrived and settled, the women saw this as a temporary situation.

Even before they migrate, the men knew that they would have to work once they settled in Denmark. For Danish women, Cuban men, even those who have had previous Scandinavian spouses, are still attractive because they anticipate that they will not be burdened by supporting these men. Often the bi-national couples, like many Danish households, kept their finances separate though they were likely to both contribute to common expenses. If the men are not financially independent, the state, not the women, will provide a safety net for them (at least once they have established residency). The structure of the welfare state and the independence of Scandinavian women make these relationships with Cubans relatively low risk in financial terms and with respect to their own social position. Indeed, most of the men did find work, especially after mastering basic Danish language skills. Obtaining initial low-level service jobs often happened through their wives' social networks and connections. Here again, the relatively privileged status of being married to a native Dane, helped them take full advantage of available education and employment opportunities, and access to needed resources in the social welfare system.

Beyond the finances, there is another way in which Scandinavian gender equality shapes the dynamics of these Cuban/Danish couples. Some of the Danish women noted the differences in relationships with a Cuban versus a Dane. The women expected their Cuban husbands to adapt to the egalitarian nature of most Danish marriages with both partners sharing housework and childcare as well as contributing to finances. For some Cuban men, these were hard adjustments as Cuban homes generally follow a more unbalanced gendered division of labour. However, several Danish women appreciated the gender differentiation their husbands brought to their marriages. Lene, a Danish woman in her forties stated:

There are some things regarding my femininity....I feel affirmed as a woman [with my husband]. [When I was growing up] in the 70s, women's liberation was something very dogmatic [so you couldn't be feminine]... but in Cuba it's wonderful to be a woman and you can easily dress up without excuses. ... There is a physicality [among Cubans] and a man thinks you are... lovely [as a woman].

While gender egalitarianism blurs the lines between the sexes in Scandinavia, in Cuban culture, heterosexual relations are rooted in gender complementarity. Analyzing Cuban couple-hood among white Cubans, Lundgren (2011) argues that heterosexuality in Cuba is rooted in the complementarity of female needs and uncontrollable male drives (Lundgren 2011). In this context, Lundgren (2011) in her study of white Cuban couples, notes that male expressions of eroticism are interpreted as legitimate performances of their uncontrollable male virility. These widely held gender stereotypes are grounded in distilled understandings of what it is to be male and female in Cuba (Andaya 2013; Hamilton 2012).

Danish women had no such assumptions and were therefore surprised by the gender differentiation they experienced in their relations with Cuban men. Some felt more feminine or enjoyed the chivalry and charm of the Cuban men.⁸ For some Danish women, greater gender differentiation was an attractive cultural difference, and contributed to the Cuban men's ability to find new Danish partners if their first marriages failed. The ongoing appeal of Cuban men was no doubt shaped by global images of Cuba— a racialized, eroticized culture that permeates both the tourist realm where these relationships formed and also extends abroad. The women themselves did

not refer directly to these images of Cuba or racial differences, but these imaginaries certainly shaped the tourist context in which these couples met and the social world in Scandinavia where there is an active salsa-dance scene and Cuban-themes clubs in many major cities.

Happily ever after?

Marriage today is an uncertain undertaking in Denmark. As the anthropologist John Borneman (2005) suggests, “the one practice that goes hand in hand with a love marriage is divorce, necessarily so because the rationale for love marriage is an unstable emotion” (34). Nearly 50 per cent of all Danish marriages end in divorce. Among transnational Cuban-Danish couples who often barely knew each other when they wed, the odds of them staying married may be even worse. Many of these bi-national marriages lasted only a few years, resulting in a kind of abortive nuclear family formation. In both marriage and divorce “the central appeal is the promise of permanence, a relationship that endures (or is permanently over)” (Borneman 2005: 32). Endurance or finality is insured by both external authority (culture, society, or the state) and coercion (Borneman 2005). Nothing could be truer of the migrant in a transnational marriage where the promise of permanence, in terms of residency, and ultimately citizenship, looms large. The brittle borders of the state that seemed relatively invisible after the couple achieved family unification, become hyper-evident as divorce threatens the migrant’s immigration status. In cross-border marriages, gender and the state are intertwined before, during, and after the transnational couple’s relationship.

The end of a marriage is never just one moment, but an unfolding process. While the couple may have mutually agreed about the cessation of the relationship, the question of how to confront the changing immigration status of the migrant spouse can lead to a variety of responses. For some couples like Victor and Carolina, severing the personal relationship also meant severing the migration support, for others the legal marriage and migration status may end, but some type of personal relationship continued particularly if there are children involved. Most importantly, having a biological child will allow the immigrant to remain in Denmark and shared parental custody is the norm.

Victor’s narrative and description of the issues that led to divorce had a particularly gendered tone. Over time he found many of the cultural differences in expected gender behaviour in Denmark hard to accept as they starkly contrasted with what he was accustomed to in Cuba. He related what he witnessed at a small dinner party with his wife and her girlfriends. There were few men at the dinner, and Victor was astounded to watch the boyfriend of the hostess act in what he perceived as a subservient manner. He [hostess’s boyfriend] did all the work – made the food, set the table, washed the dishes. The hostess did nothing, not that she helped a little. She did nothing. All she did was smoke cigarettes. She never got up and never stopped smoking. Why was it like this? I was really shocked. Undoubtedly, I was more *machista*, but this was really an extreme case.

Victor could not reconcile himself to the inversion of gendered power from *his* home turf where they met, to *his wife’s* where they currently lived. The relationship had

incubated in one cultural context, but was transplanted into another. Victor's experience of being a spouse and an immigrant in Denmark produced in him a sense of powerlessness. His marital relations exacerbated his lack of agency and fueled his indignation. He recounts:

The relationship was very unbalanced. She was dominating and strong and I was in a very dependent and weak position. I didn't even know how to get on the bus. She had to explain everything to me all the time. People here who marry foreigners from poor countries, you can't deny that there is Eurocentrism, and although they [the Danes] don't want to act like they bought the person, but this person [the immigrant] has to do more or less what the other one wants. For immigrant men it is difficult because of their machismo, and I'm not a *machista* Cuban, I wasn't in Cuba. After a while it was easier for me to understand and get accustomed to things here, although they shocked me. It's not France or Spain, Scandinavia is something else... This encounter between the Cuban man and Danish women is really difficult.

For Victor, the gendered configuration of their marriage along with the personal traits of his wife paved the road to the divorce. But from the start, the state was a presence in their marriage, and a key player in the process of both their union and its dissolution. Their divorce and its permanence happened quickly. In Denmark, divorce can take place either with or without separation. Often a couple will file for separation first. They will be scheduled for a negotiation meeting at which time they are informed about the rules of separation and offered counseling. After a separation period of at least 6 months, the couple can file for divorce. Alternatively, the couple can file for divorce without separation, which expedites the process. Divorce without separation is only possible under certain circumstances⁹ such as infidelity (which is the most common cause for divorce in Denmark). Victor and Carolina opted for the expedited route by claiming infidelity, though neither had been unfaithful. The papers were filed, and the divorce was finalized in about two weeks. While the state is vigilant about catching marriages of convenience, pro-forma divorces seem to escape scrutiny; of course, there is much less at stake from the state's point of view.

At the time of their divorce, Victor still had a year and a half remaining on his initial 3-year residency visa (and legally he could have remained in the country until that visa expired). However, even before their divorce, Victor found the dependency of being an immigrant spouse unbearable. So shortly before they divorced, in what might be seen as a self-defeating act, he took the only path he felt he could. Victor recounts: I went to immigration [office]. They could see that I was still married, we had not filed for divorce yet. And I said, I want a work visa, what are my options? They asked me "why would a person who is married and has the privileges that come with that, want a work visa?" And I said, "for the same reasons you would want one. Because your laws put the foreigner who marries a Dane in a position of dependence, and I want to be independent." Well, they couldn't say anything to that.

Immigration officials accepted his request and began processing his application for a work visa and while the wheels of bureaucracy turned, and letters were sent and documents requested; he had the right to remain in the country. Meanwhile, with the help of his Danish friends, he worked through cultural organizations and the musicians' union to secure an initial residency/work visa – though his struggle for permanent

residency continues. At the time of our interview in 2011, he had been living in Denmark for about ten years and still had only a temporary residency/work permit that had to be renewed every two to three years. If they had had children, the children would have been Danish citizens through their mother, and Victor would have been permitted to stay in the country even if the couple had divorced.

One of the changes legislated in Danish immigration reforms of the early 2000's was extending the time one must be a resident before applying for citizenship from three years to seven years (and those seven years must be under the same visa status – so switching from a spousal to work or student visa resets the clock to zero). Many couples, Victor and Carolina included, complained of the marital stress caused by the struggle to obtain family reunification. While the divorce certainly provided an exit from these obligations and expenses for the Dane, it only initiated a new struggle for a stable immigration status for the Cuban spouse.

Conclusion

In the last 20 years the growth of tourism in Cuba has led to an increase in Cubans emigrating as marriage migrants. The particular dynamics in contemporary Cuba and the global tourism market with the attendant eroticization of Cuban culture have contributed to a rising number of marriage migrants. Examining migrant grooms forces us to question simple assumptions of economic motivation on the part of the men and ask instead what emotions and intimacies motivate these couples and how do the brittle borders of Denmark affect these marriages. From the perspective of Danish/Cuban couples, we see how both partners frame their relationship around ideas of mobility, self-development, and romantic love. In these narratives of modernity, the borders of nations blur and disappear – and the self-fulfilment and intimate relationships are central.

However, marriage itself is a fragile institution, and the endings of these relationships often leave the immigrant spouse in a position of instability and insecurity. Families may be the building block for society, but the reality is that many Cuban/Danish newly formed transnational families end in divorce. Couples can move from the process of family formation to rupture in the span of a few years. In these cases, we see that the borders really only disappear for some, when the privileged mobility of tourism intersects with the restricted mobility of family unification, the brittle borders and global inequalities that frame these Cuban/Danish marriages are apparent.

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¹ Unlike in Scandinavia where numbers of Cuban men and women are nearly equal, Cuban women greatly outnumber Cuban men in southern European nations like Italy (García-Moreno 2010).

² 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.

³ Cubans also left the island on visits to see relatives exiled in US or Spain, but these were often difficult to arrange and subject to changing US and Cuban policies and exile politics.

⁴ These requirements were in place as national identity was bound to the revolution's political project such that leaving Cuba was an act of treason. By the late 1990s-early 2000s 'nation as culture' had supplanted the idea of 'nation as political community' (Hernandez-Reguant 2009).

⁵ This broad term encompasses a range of tourist-hustling activities from sexual exchanges to selling cigars or black-market items.

⁶ For example, the Havana d'Primera's song *Carita de Pasaporte* (2011) written by Alexander Abreu recounts a woman's desires to leave Cuba at any cost. In counterpoint, the 2004 song *Callejero* (Hustler), by the group *Moneda Dura* (Hard Currency), sings of middle age female tourist who arrives in Havana looking for a young lover to show her a good time, but the young man refuses her advances and offers, proclaiming in the refrain, that he is not a hustler.

⁷ See Jørgensen (2012) for a history leading up to this legislation and Rytter (2012) for how the laws are embedded within a discourse of humanism, securitization and nationalism. Jöhncke (2011) examines the development of the Danish welfare state, which many citizens see as threatened by non-Western immigrants (Jørgensen 2012; Jöhncke 2011; Rytter 2012).

⁸ Some scholars and journalists (Gottlieb 2014; Kornrich, Brines and Leupp 2013) have argued that egalitarianism does not necessarily guarantee sexual satisfaction in a marriage. In more gender-neutral marriages, Kornrich et al., assert that less gender differentiation leads to less sexual desire.

⁹ Other circumstances for divorce without separation are: domestic violence, bigamy, having lived apart for more than two years, or having illegally taken custody of a child or illegally taken a child out of the country.