

THE MARRIAGE ROUTE TO MIGRATION

of border artistes, transnational matchmaking and imported spouses

Abstract

In preindustrial society, marriage was part of the family economy and as such a major instrument for building alliances to stabilise or improve status and wealth. It was only in the 18th and 19th centuries, and in Western societies, that romantic love became the normative foundation of marriage. Yet in other parts of the world marriage patterns continue to follow a different script. Moreover, as a result of present-day globalisation and migration, the instrumental value of marriage is spreading again and gaining new importance. Two trends are playing a major role here. On the one hand, as economic and political conditions in many regions of the world deteriorate, many people build their hopes on migration. On the other hand, Western countries try to limit migration by setting up very restrictive rules, with family unification becoming the last chance for entry. In response, young men and women in many parts of the world are redirecting their wishes and ambitions by placing their hopes in marriage, or more specifically, on marriage in accordance with migration rules. Here the first imperative is that the candidate must be a native of the West or a legal resident there.

Keywords

Global inequality • immigration laws • marriage • restrictive migration policies • transnational matchmaking • transnationalism

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The following paper analyses the interrelationships between migration and marriage that are being produced here. In particular, it discusses three points: first, the emerging patterns of spouse selection; secondly, their context, causes and consequences; and thirdly, the major strategies used to find a suitable spouse – that is, suitable for migration purposes.

1 Introduction

In recent decades, many Western countries have seen a marked increase in the number of bi-national marriages. In a world in which ever greater numbers of people are crossing borders and working, studying or going on holiday abroad, it is normal for people of different national backgrounds to meet, sometimes grow to be friends, and sometimes fall in love with each other. At the same time, the age of globalisation also features relationships that are

a consequence not of geographical mobility but of the *desire* for geographical mobility. As global economic disparities widen, men, women and families from poor countries seek to better their lives through migration. In growing numbers, they are placing their hopes on marriage migration. Marriage for social mobility thus becomes directly linked to marriage for geographical mobility.

As a consequence, in Western countries marriage migration has now become a public issue, from politics and the media to novels and talk shows. In these contexts, marriage migration tends to have an aura of the shady or even indecent. Labels such as *mail order brides*, *visa wives* and *imported husbands* signal a fusion of passion and calculation, desire and deception. In politics, such marriages are often criminalised and suspected of being sham marriages. Feminists often treat them as falling within the framework of the global exploitation of women, a case study in male violence (dominant Western man versus helpless foreign woman). For the average citizen, meanwhile, such marriage practices seem alien,

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even barbaric, because of their affinity to instrumental motives that represent a violation of the Western ideal of love, the breaching of a cultural taboo.

The present article examines the subject of marriage migration from a different point of view. Instead of a moral discourse that is centred solely on “them”, on those from outside, it looks also at “us”, natives of the Western world. In this way, the interconnections and flows between poorer and more prosperous regions, between “the West and the rest”, come into focus. Seen like this, marriage migrants are not conceived as victims or perpetrators in some anonymous territory, but rather as agents in a globalised world, their moves tuned to the opportunities, rules and restrictions that come with globalisation. In short, the marriage route to migration is, in good part, paved by Western influences and institutions.

On the conceptual level, this line of argumentation is rooted in the transnational approach to migration, which emphasises the need to look “beyond the boundaries of existing analytical categories of social science” and proposes instead a “view of the world as a single social and economic system” (Schiller et al. 1999: 43f.). More specifically, this paper challenges the dominant Western discourse on marriage migration by presenting a “view from below”. As such, it can draw on diverse sources in recent social science. It is closely related to James Scott’s book, *Domination and the arts of resistance* (1990), in which he analyses the power dynamics between dominant and subordinate groups, and draws attention to the “infrapolitics of subordinate groups” (183ff.). Likewise, there is an affinity with Ulrich Beck’s book, *The cosmopolitan vision* (2006), which argues that, as we live in an age of global interconnectedness, it is high time for a change of perspectives: we must learn to go beyond the boundaries of nation, ethnicity and colour, and learn to take the view of the “global other”. Thirdly, the approach practiced here is related to Roger Ballard’s program of “Inside and outside” (2008), a switching of perspectives from majority to minority, an exercise in getting away from methodological nationalism and “Seeing through the migrants’ eyes” (see Yurdakul 2009: 2).

It would be naive to think this an easy task. Rather, it is a constant uphill struggle against the voids, deficiencies and biased assumptions of our respective mental landscapes. This holds true also of the ideas presented in the following: inevitably, they will tell of my own shortcomings and biases.

1.1 Towards a transnational framework for marriage migration

In brief, this paper proposes a transnational framework for marriage migration. The arguments I will present here will proceed as follows. First, in a short theory-oriented section, I shall address the “why” of marriage migration. Why do people in the poor regions of the world not do as their fathers and mothers and the generations before them did, that is, remain poor, stay in their home region and

marry a partner from there? Why are people in the poor regions increasingly opting for migration today, and why are they choosing marriage migration, rather than submitting to poverty, striving for social mobility in their own country, or trying other forms of migration? The second part of my analysis deals with the “how” of marriage migration. Given the geographical, social and cultural distances between the different parts of the world, how do people from the poor side of the global divide manage to find a spouse from the well-to-do side? Drawing on qualitative and quantitative material from a broad range of studies, I shall suggest two major options for transnational matchmaking: commercially arranged marriages, and kinship-arranged marriages.

In the third part, I will discuss the prospects for the future. Is marriage migration here to stay, and will it perhaps even grow stronger? Or have we reached a turning point, a reversal of trends? And if so, which factors come into play here?

2 The desire for migration versus barriers to migration

2.1 The desire for migration: growing and spreading

Social inequality is by no means a new phenomenon. On the contrary, for most if not all periods of history it has been part of everyday life in most regions of the world. Yet today inequality has probably reached a new level, and even more so, it is taking on a new and globalised form: the enormous gap between rich and poor nations has been amply documented. While some groups live in peace and relative wealth, others – the majority – live in politically and economically unstable regions with little access to basic rights and high rates of unemployment, poverty and illness.

At the same time, as the age of globalisation is characterised by a compression of time and space, these different worlds are becoming increasingly interlinked. This holds true with respect not only to economic relations, but also to politics, law, education, the arts and culture. The impact of the media is a good example. As amply documented, the mass media – film, television, video, the Internet – have become ever more widely accessible in recent years, expanding to distant countries and continents, and reaching not only major cities but also remote villages. These media convey information, both true and otherwise. They tell stories, again some true, some not. In any event, they communicate messages, images, promises that fire the human imagination. According to the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, the media are influencing the lives and ambitions of more and more people in more and more parts of the world. “More persons throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of the possible lives offered by mass media in all their forms. That is, fantasy is now a social practice; it enters ... into the fabrication of social lives for many people in many societies” (Appadurai 1991:

198). Rather than accepting their lives as a matter of fate, more and more people are beginning to imagine other worlds and are comparing them with their own. In this way, the lives even of very ordinary people are no longer shaped solely by their local situation and experience, but increasingly by scenarios that the media suggest are available (Appadurai 1991: 200).

According to sociologists Scott Lash and John Urry (2007), the flows of global tourism have a similar impact. For what local people see is a vast number of tourists who spend weeks doing nothing but engage in mass consumption. Once again, local people are being presented with images of affluence that fire their imagination and give rise to dreams of a better life.

In this way, “global” standards and comparisons (along with their myths and fictions) have reached the remotest parts of the world. Whereas previously men and women had known only their own local conditions, now they are beginning to see beyond this horizon and to build up new aspirations. As a result of global integration, they have come to ask, why be poor and repressed here when people elsewhere have plenty to eat, own a house and car, and can go to the doctor when they fall ill? Why suffer here? Why not try to go there?

2.2 The tightening of immigration laws

The question, though, is how to make a reality of such hopes. Because in the countries of the First World poverty and unemployment have been increasing markedly, many countries have largely closed the door to economic migrants. Yet the building of ever more walls to protect “Fortress Europe” or “Fortress First World” has proved only partially effective. Faced with on-going poverty at home, many people, rather than giving up their hopes of migration, decide to fight the obstacles and to try alternative or indirect routes to wherever they hope to make a better life. As the American sociologist Caroline H. Bledsoe writes: “Creating policies inevitably creates the potential for actions that contravene these policies” (Bledsoe 2004: 97). In this vein, prospective migrants explore, and try to make use of, the possibilities left open by the authorities (Böcker 1994: 90ff.). In due course, a series of moves and counter-moves begins, with “cat- and-mouse games” (Palriwala & Uberoi 2008: 46) of all sorts being played out between immigration authorities on the one hand and would-be migrants on the other.

3 Routes to a new life

3.1 Border artistes

Western countries’ regulations on entry are of major importance in this situation. Because the life project of migration depends to a

significant extent on these regulations, they become the yardstick from which people in the rest of the world take their lead – not by simply accepting them, but by taking an active approach, translating the regulations into strategies for action. In this respect many would-be migrants prove to be very skilful and flexible: they are “border artistes”¹ indeed (Beck 2006: 157). They have learnt the rules of cross-border existence, from the basic to the highly sophisticated. They have become experts in the discipline of boundary management, knowing when to keep clear of borders and when to cross them, how to subvert, circumvent, bridge or make use of borders, all the while carefully adapting to context, situation and moment. This is a special kind of knowledge, and there are many ways of practising it. A common strategy is “biography management”. Here, would-be migrants go to great lengths to tailor their personal qualifications, characteristics and circumstances so that they fit the required profile and gain the approval of the immigration authorities (see e.g. Bledsoe 2004).

Education is one way of doing this. A case study by Annett Fleischer (2007) focuses on a popular kind of socialisation that has developed in Cameroon, a form of “education for leaving” or, to be more precise, an education for study in Germany (the most desired destination in Cameroon as a result of historical links).² Here the older and most experienced members of the kin group identify the most intelligent, socially skilled, linguistically gifted individual from among their teenage sons, daughters, nieces and nephews. From then on, the hopes of the family are pinned on this individual. He or she becomes the focus of the kin group’s resources, with everyone chipping in to fund language courses, secondary schools, visas and travel expenses. For several years, the chosen candidate is systematically nurtured in such a way that he or she meets the requirements of the German authorities. For the kin group, this is an investment in the future. In Cameroon, as in many other countries, migration is a family and community project organised in accordance with fixed rules of honour and reciprocal exchange. Thus, those who make it to Germany thanks to the support of the kin group can be expected to provide a quid pro quo later on – sending money, bringing back consumer goods when they return home, and supporting other family members in their efforts to join them in Germany.

In other parts of Africa, people’s hopes are focussed on a sporting education. If a son demonstrates a talent for football, the kin group pools its resources to nurture his skills through special training. This they do in the hope of attracting the attention of a professional scout who will sign him to an international club, kicking off a career in football potentially worth millions (Wait 2008).

3.2 The option of marriage

But these are special situations presupposing historical links or exceptional talents. Normally, those eager to migrate have just three options. They may take illegal routes (very risky), apply for asylum

(little chance of success) or, finally, try to claim the right to family reunification. With regard to the latter, though there are variations in detail, most Western countries apply similar rules. Accordingly those who are legally resident in the USA, EU, Canada or Australia can bring over close family members living elsewhere. As a rule, this includes parents, children and spouses (Kofman 2004).

Because of the tremendous tension between hopes of migration and barriers to migration, and because joining a family member abroad is the most promising pathway to migration, marriage takes on a historically new significance for the younger generation of would-be migrants. This is my focus in what follows. To put it in a nutshell: given these conditions, marriage becomes a door opener and springboard for those wishing to reach the First World. In due course, the marriage market undergoes a major transformation, with new priorities and preferences emerging. Within a few years, a new dream spreads across the globe, the dream of a marriage that brings with it the right to migration.

In this context, a marriage certificate takes on a new function. It becomes, to use Beck's term, a most valuable resource for border artists. Or, to build on Scott's concept, choosing a Western-based spouse is a deliberate strategy, neatly fitting the power dynamics between dominant and subordinate groups. It is a kind of action characteristic of minority groups, testing the limits, stretching the borders but also submitting to the rules of the majority while, at the same time, subtly challenging and eroding them. In this way, by a creative handling of the majority's regulations, the subordinates follow their own kind of moral compass, redefining the line between "legal" and "illegal" and asserting their own interests. Or, to paraphrase Scott, while the "dominant elite", the countries of the dominant West, are "ceaselessly working to maintain and extend ... control" over migration, people of the subordinate group, the migrants and would-be migrants, are "correspondingly devising strategies to thwart and reverse this appropriation" (Scott 1990: 197), for instance, by choosing marriage as a path to migration. This produces a seemingly paradoxical effect, a "chain migration over legally closed borders" (Böcker 1994).

Individuals and/or families may attempt to find a suitable spouse for such a marriage in a number of ways, depending on social and personal resources. In what follows, I suggest two major options for transnational matchmaking. First a basic option, open to anyone; second a special option, linked to particular groups, their strategies and resources.³

4 The basic option: commercially arranged marriages

For those who want to try the marriage route to migration, the essential question is how to find a suitable partner. Given the enormous geographical distances and huge differences in life circumstances, how can people in the poor regions of the world

find someone from the "sunny side" regions who is willing to marry them?

In the age of globalisation, there are in fact a number of ways of achieving this. In recent years a broad range of commercial outfits have emerged serving the needs of would-be immigrants. The international marriage brokering industry – which took off in the mid-1980s and saw major expansion from the mid-1990s on (Lu 2008: 133) – includes marriage agencies, professional or semi-professional individuals, as well as various forms of mediation via the Internet, newspaper advertisements, organised matchmaking tours and to some extent sex tourism also.

Which of these pathways an individual tries depends on various factors, particularly legal, economic and cultural parameters (in both the country of origin and country of immigration), and also on the personal characteristics and preferences of the would-be migrant. In what follows I will draw three constellations, each presenting an example of the basic option. To demonstrate the wide range of possibilities, they represent destinations widely separated with respect both to geography and culture: South Korea, the USA, and finally, Taiwan and Norway.

4.1 Foreign brides for farmers: marriage agencies and marriage tours

In many of the highly industrialised countries, the situation of farmers is characterised by severe hardships (low incomes, an uncertain future, long working hours, physical problems). As young women who have grown up in the countryside become dissatisfied with such prospects and often move to the city, the men left behind have great difficulties in finding a wife. This constellation creates a kind of golden opportunity for women in other parts of the world. Here is a situation of supply meeting demand: on the one hand Western men, single, most of them young or middle-aged, most of them ready to marry but in no position to do so; on the other hand women in the poor regions of the world who are desperately longing to leave, are looking for a Western spouse and consider the possible hardships, difficulties and obstacles involved a price worth paying for. And indeed, in recent years numerous organised efforts have emerged to bring the two groups together, from marriage tours arranged by local authorities to the activities of commercial matchmaking institutions.

Take South Korea, for instance. Over the last two decades, this country has seen dramatic economic development. In recent years, the number of bi-national unions has increased substantially, from 1.2% in 1990 to 11.9% in 2006 (Shim 2008: 56f.), with many of the bridegrooms being South Korean farmers and their brides coming from Vietnam, India or other Asian countries (Shim 2008). This boom in bi-national marriages (which has meanwhile also reached urban areas in South Korea) is in good part a result of massive advertising campaigns:

In South Korea, billboards advertising marriages to foreigners dot the countryside, and flyers are scattered on the Seoul subway. Many rural governments, faced with depopulation, subsidize the marriage tours, which typically cost \$10,000. The business began in the late 1990s by matching Korean farmers or the physically disabled to mostly ethnic Koreans in China, according to brokers and the Korea Consumer Protection board. But by 2003, the majority of customers were urban bachelors and the foreign brides came from a host of countries. The board says between 2,000 and 3,000 agencies operate now (Onishi 2007).

4.2 Destination USA: marriage ads in Indian newspapers

Even in the early 21st century, in India marriages are often arranged by parents, frequently with the support of the extended kin group. Yet the criteria that guide the search for suitable candidates do not simply follow ancient traditions; on the contrary, in good part they reflect the values of modernity, indeed of globalisation. Take, for instance, the Brahmins (India's elite caste) in Tamil Nadu and the ways they facilitate marriage. According to a recent study (Kalpagam 2008), the plans, hopes and ambitions of these Brahmins revolve chiefly around one particular goal: migration to North America. To make it to the USA or Canada has become *the* priority life project, a yardstick of prestige and a status symbol.

To a significant extent, the assessment and selection of marriage candidates is moulded by this ranking of cultural preferences. Young Brahmin Indian men living in the USA or Canada are high up the son-in-law wish list. To achieve the widest possible selection, Brahmins have gradually changed and optimised how they search for potential marriage candidates. While formerly contacts via the social networks of family and friends played a major role here, other ways of mediation are now gaining in importance which allow a wider radius of action. The so-called "advertisement route" is one example:

Diaspora alliances in the 1960s and 1970s... were largely settled through personal kin and friendship networks. As local alliances became increasingly difficult to settle in this way, personal networks were increasingly complemented through impersonal networks, especially matrimonial advertisements.... As ... more women came to be employed, even the marriageable girl herself would go to the newspaper office to place the advertisement; some took the initiative to use that channel when their parents felt inhibited to do so.... Today Internet advertising has added a new dimension in the business of identifying compatible partners. (Kalpagam 2008: 100)

A special evaluative scale has developed for such Indian–American unions, which are known as *varan*:

In the scale of symbolic capital, America *varan* alliances are exceptionally prestigious.... The prestige of an American *varan* itself varies depending on whether the boy possesses a Green Card or an H-1 visa, whether the boy went to the US/Canada for higher studies and then settled there, or whether he went for employment. In case of emigration for employment, there is a distinction between employment for a short-term job contract ... and a more enduring job contract with prospect of permanent relocation. The American *varan* alliance with Green Card-holding boys ranks as the most prestigious match. (Kalpagam 2008: 101)

In this way, candidates for marriage are classified into fine gradations and ranked accordingly. And the yardstick of their attractiveness is their suitability for migration, their "America potential".

4.3 Patterns of chain migration: migrants as matchmakers for migrants

As shown time and time again, migration often takes the shape of chain migration: once a few migrants from an ethnic group have succeeded in settling in some Western place, more people from the same region will follow them, their passage made easier because they can build on the help and information provided by the pioneer generation.

The same pattern can be found in marriage migration. Sometimes, women migrants married to a Western man start to bring over women from their home region by providing them with work opportunities; sooner or later, many of the newly arrived women also marry a Western man (Jensen 2008). Sometimes, pioneer migrants directly engage in marriage migration and actively arrange cross-border marriages for women from their family, neighbourhood or village (Lu 2008: 132f.). Such activity may be started by a cousin or neighbour in the home country who is eager to leave and asks the migrant to find her a husband, or it may be triggered by Western men looking for a foreign wife asking for the migrant's mediation (Lauser 2004: 124f.). Depending on the circumstances, this kind of matchmaking is done as a favour, to help near ones, or it is done for financial reasons. A typical example of the former is Lily, an ethnic Chinese woman from Indonesia married to a Taiwanese man.

After three years of marriage, Lily has arranged three Taiwanese-Indonesian marriages. The bridegrooms are her husband's friends, but Lily did not know the brides prior to matchmaking. She accompanied the potential bridegrooms to her hometown, and then referred them to a local matchmaker specialising in Indonesian–Taiwanese marriages, who knew how to prepare the legal documents. Lily did not charge the bridegrooms, but they paid her travel expenses, thus enabling her to visit her family, and after each successful match she was given an envelope containing cash as thank-you gift. In addition, she asked some money from the local broker (Lu 2008: 136).

In other instances, the financial motives are predominant. Some pioneers, once they realise that they can make good money, make a business out of helping their countrywomen to migrate. The story of some Thai women settled in Svalbard, a small Norwegian territory to the north of Norway proper (5), is a case in point.

The pioneers lived on Svalbard for several years until they became recruiters for chain migration from Thailand. The process was nurtured by a recession in the home country in the late 1990s that hit the countryside particularly strongly. When at that time pioneers from Svalbard visited their home areas, to the people there they appeared to be the very embodiment of success, and the West seemed to be a place where enormous money could be made. To stimulate such hopes further, some of the pioneers quickly learned the art of “impression management” and presented glamorous images of their own achievements, which served as both an impetus for migration and an incentive for increased demands from the migrant’s family (Jensen 2008).

As shown by these stories, networking between place of origin and place of destination can take on many shades and shapes. Quite often, a borderline between help and profit is difficult to draw (Jensen 2008).

5 The special option: kinship-based marriage arrangements

While the basic option of transnational matchmaking – commercial arrangements – is open to anyone, provided he or she has some money, the second option is available only to some groups. Two conditions are crucial here: first, families must have relatives settled in the global North/West; and secondly, kinship networks must play a major part in many areas of social life.

In the sending countries of labour migration, large groups of people meet both these requirements. Because of large-scale labour migration in previous decades, today many men and women in the global South/East have relatives settled in the global North/West. Furthermore, in many non-Western societies, including many of the sending countries of labour migration, networks of kinship are of major importance. Mutual support is a moral obligation, from everyday life to politics to business arrangements, as well as when it comes to migration. Quite often, families pool their resources, so that one person has the necessary funds and can obtain whatever is needed for the migration enterprise (visa, documents, tickets, trafficking fees etc.), the expectation being, of course, that s/he will, in due course, take her turn in supporting those left at home. Last but not least, this pattern of collective action holds true in respect of marriage. Marriage is not an individual bond, but a family project arranged by the parents or extended family, often with the active involvement of kinship networks (e.g. Ballard 2001; Shaw 2001).

For potential migrants and their families, this creates a special option. Rather than taking the commercial route, they can deploy

family networks and appeal to family loyalty for support. In their own countries it is often customary to marry a close relative. If they follow this pattern and find their bride/bridegroom from among the family members settled abroad, this is seen an excellent choice: they remain in line with established norms and at the same time gain the longed-for entry-ticket. And indeed, empirical studies show that many of the young migrants-to-be focus their aspirations on such a match, as in Pakistan: “Young men pin their hopes of social advancement on going to England by marrying a relative there” (Shaw 2004: 279; see also Bledsoe 2004: 104). Young men – and women – in other countries harbour similar hopes. From Turkey to Morocco, much the same sentiment prevails: “Marrying a migrant’s daughter is by far the most attractive way to gain admittance to the Netherlands, or in fact any Western Country” (Böcker 1994: 97).

Furthermore, as family members settled abroad have their own reasons for desiring such a marriage (Beck-Gernsheim 2007), they are often quite willing to agree to such proposals. And if, for one reason or another, they should think otherwise, their relatives in the home country can exercise some social pressure. To improve their chances of a favourable answer, for example, they can appeal to their relatives to observe the duties of honour, respect and mutual help; or otherwise, they can make a refusal publicly known in the home village or home town, in this way exposing the migrants and accusing them of having forgotten their duties and the precept of loyalty to kin. Most migrants, rather than run a serious risk to their reputation and honour, will be careful and agree to a marriage proposal coming from the old country (Ballard 1990: 243; Shaw 2001: 326, 2004: 281).

6 Conclusions

Whether the basic option or the special option, both ways of transnational matchmaking reflect the same trend. Today, in the age of migration and globalisation, a new criterion of partner selection is being established. In the countries of the Second and Third Worlds, people are increasingly focused on the question of whether a marriage candidate offers “migration potential”. Here the geographical distance between country of origin and receiving country is no accident and even less a disadvantage; rather, it is these couples’ secret marriage broker and witness. Or to put it differently, to the border artistes of the 21st century, a transnational marriage is by no means an obstacle. On the contrary, it is what they actively seek; it is their “passage to hope” (UNFPA 2006).

6.1 Prospects for the future

With a view to the time span of the last three or four decades, I have so far referred to the increase in marriage migration. But if we focus on the figures for the last few years, a slightly different

picture emerges. The data show that in parts of central and northern Europe the rate of increase has slowed, and in some parts the number of such marriages has even decreased slightly.

This slight turn in events may be partly due to the lifestyle changes occurring in Western countries, which are affecting people's propensity to marry in particular. More and more people are now living together without a marriage certificate or remaining single. If the overall number of marriages is in rapid decline, bi-national marriages are likely to be part of the general trend and occur less often. Furthermore, the political climate in central Europe has changed over the last few years, particularly with respect to immigration. Governments are going to ever greater lengths to seal off the frontiers of "Fortress Europe". In Germany, for example, where the Social Democrat–Green coalition of 1998–2005 tried to strengthen the rights of immigrants somewhat, the Grand Coalition that succeeded it has struck a noticeably harsher tone. Immigrants tend to feel that Maria Böhmer, the new immigration minister, speaks for the government rather than for them. Multiculturalism, which often used to be praised as a virtue of modernity, is now considered naive or suspect, a utopia quite out of touch with reality. Instead, the new buzzword is "integration". Integration is now being encouraged, and even declared to be the immigrant's primary duty. The bookshops are full of publications centred on the topic of "women as victims", particularly with respect to other religions and cultures. Here women appear as victims of honour killings, forced marriages, circumcision, repression, and as the objects of archaic customs, ritual practices and patriarchal violence.

Necla Kelek, the daughter of a Turkish *Gastarbeiter* or "guest worker", is a prominent example of this trend (Kelek 2005). In her book *Die fremde Braut* ("The foreign bride"), Kelek relates her conversations with Turkish women in Germany. In her narrative, forced marriage becomes the central topic and is declared, without further evidence, to be the general fate of Turkish women – a presentation that combines sympathy with the suffering of women with sweeping indictments of Turkish communities in Germany. Within a short time, the book became a bestseller and found favour with feminist women, as well as with men at the very conservative end of the political spectrum who had always warned against the invasion of Islam. Though migration experts publicly criticised Kelek's statements (e.g. Terkessidis & Karakasoglu 2006), the author has been repeatedly praised for her courage and showered with awards and honours; a talk show favourite, she has also been involved in panel discussions and political committees (Beck-Gernsheim 2006, 2007).

In the wake of this change in political climate, laws and regulations affecting the lives of migrants are being interpreted more strictly or formulated more restrictively. This also applies to the rules governing family reunification, especially with respect to spouses. To focus once again on Germany, since September 2007, in order to be allowed to enter the country, a spouse from abroad must have reached a minimum age of 18 years and have a basic knowledge

of the German language. Though immigrant associations, refugee groups and church organisations have protested against this last regulation, pointing to the severe hardships it may cause, it has not been revoked. The language tests are being continued, and the chances of spouses entering Germany have been further minimised via subtle changes in legal definitions and clauses. The result is a dramatic decline in the number of immigrants: in the first six months of 2008, the number of visas issued to those wishing to join their spouses has decreased by almost a quarter compared to the same period in 2007 (Newsletter 2008: 1).

If the cat-and-mouse games between would-be immigrants and those wishing to thwart them continue, and if the advocates of a restrictive approach gain further ground, we may see a further reduction in the number of immigrant spouses. But what will be the result? In all likelihood, there will be no return to ethnic homogeneity (of the German, French, Danish or any other kind). As long as the gap between poor and rich countries and the resulting pressure to migrate persist, there is no prospect that people living in the poor regions of the world will abandon their hopes. Far more likely, the border artistes will continue to exist and seek out alternative routes – perhaps switching to other forms of family reunification (Bledsoe 2004), perhaps trying to make their way as illegal immigrants.

Western nations may design many new regulations and restrictions to stop the boom in visa wives and imported husbands, and such attempts may prove partially successful. But in the end all these regulations will not be able to stop groups situated at the lower end of the global hierarchy, those confronted with constant misery, from dreaming of a better life. Nor will such regulations stop people from investing all their energies and creative powers into efforts to make their dreams come true. In the age of globalisation, with its many means to compress time and space, we cannot expect such actions to be confined to the national territory. Whether Western countries want it or not, the promise of a better life is a powerful incentive to mobility and migration. So in all likelihood border artistes will not vanish, but are here to stay, notwithstanding fences, walls and all kinds of restrictive regulations.

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Notes

1. The term in the German original is "Artisten der Grenze" (Beck 2006: 157). In the English edition, this is translated as "acrobats of the border", but "border artistes" seems more appropriate.
2. Before the First World War Cameroon was a German colony. Against the backdrop of this historical link, both West and East Germany offered scholarships for students from Cameroon in the late 20th century.
3. The two options outlined below should not be understood as being the only ones or as representing the whole range of possible pathways. Likewise, they are not meant to be mutually exclusive, whatever the situation and actors. Rather, in some

contexts there might be overlapping zones or combinations of the two.

4. As described by Jensen (2008), the situation in Svalbard, a group of islands situated between European mainland and the North Pole and under Norwegian sovereignty, is very special. Svalbard is not part of the Schengen agreement, so anyone can enter. Yet living at Svalbard gives foreigners no rights to Norwegian welfare services, and housing is restricted. Furthermore, the border with mainland Norway (and thus other European countries) remains closed. People coming to Svalbard are practically confined to it.
5. For EU citizens, this rule does not apply.

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