

‘Migrant Carer-Wives’ – Between Transnational Marriages, Care Work for Older Husbands and Gendered Precarity



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RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Migration is traditionally categorised into migration for work or family. However, utilising interviews with both immigrant families and publically employed care managers, this study documents the existence of a hybrid type, involving migrant wives who arrive to care for substantially older husbands – an arrangement about which Danish care managers use the term ‘fetched wives’. Register data also document that the relatively infrequent remarriages among older immigrants primarily involve men finding much younger wives abroad. We term some such women ‘migrant carer-wives’. From a marriage market perspective, the demand for such marriages indicates that care needs of the men involved are not presently met. For various reasons, including linguistic and cultural ones, such men cannot or will not rely on either state-sponsored eldercare or aid from adult children. Instead, they (or their children) seek wives abroad. Women who are virtually ‘unmarriageable’ locally due to unfortunate circumstances may accept such ‘carer-wife’ marriage proposals. While these marriages may provide such women with a livelihood, they also lead to not only isolated and strenuous lives with many care duties but also a precarious dependency on the adult children of husbands, who do not necessarily regard their fathers’ new wives as kin.

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INTRODUCTION

Migration is divided into different categories. One of the most common of these categories is labour migration, with an important subtype being care migration. In such migration, women, in particular, move from less to more affluent countries to take care of children, the sick and the elderly. This type of migration is partially driven by a 'care deficit' in the Global North (Lutz 2011; Williams & Brennan 2012). Doing the menial work involved (the 'three c's' of caring, cooking and cleaning) may both provide a livelihood and enable female workers to remit money to their families, thus becoming part of the migration-development nexus (Andersson 2000; Coe 2019).

Another central migration category – generally viewed as distinct from labour migration – is marriage migration. The ideologically enforced contrast between these two migration types echoes the division between the public and the private sphere. This contrast is shaped by what Zelizer (2000) has labelled the 'hostile worlds view', according to which motivations of love and money should be kept distinctly separate as not to contaminate each other. However, the strict distinction often drawn between emotional and material motivations for marriage is a false dichotomy. Thus, as marriage market theory teaches us, spouses can be seen as finding each other in a market where they search for a good exchange value of resources such as education, age, looks and wealth (Becker 1981). It is thus not surprising that research shows an overlap between labour and marriage migration, as when female labour migrants move to do household work and subsequently marry their employers, or when marriage migrants enter the labour market in the host country, often in reproductive occupations (Lauser 2008; Piper & Lee 2016; Yeoh et al. 2014). Studies of transnational match-making and mail-order brides also show the intertwining between a variety of motives for marriage and migration, including financial ones (Brettell 2017; Constable 2009; Yamaura 2015).

This article is an exploration of a particular intersection between labour migration and marriage migration, which we call *migrant carer-wives*. This type of migration combines elements of labour migration such as explicit agreements on exchanges between care work and remuneration, with a marital contract as well as cohabitation between the marriage migrant and a spouse in need of care.

Our data indicate that this strongly gendered type of migration may consist of more or less 'unmarriageable' women (Thai 2008) from the Global South who marry older men in need of care. The phenomenon is thus tied to the fact that in some parts of the world marriage is virtually compulsory for women, as it is almost the only way in which women can secure themselves a livelihood (Cindoglu et al. 2011).

As our investigation has a focus on transnational social spaces, we investigate occurrences in which such women marry older men living in Denmark with an immigrant background. Although seemingly a rare type of migration, the existence of such migrant carer-wives nevertheless brings out particular dynamics between men and women, between sending and receiving countries, and between public and private spaces. We consider it important to explore this specific kind of migration as it may not only produce particular kinds of precarity, but also give insights into the complex permutations arising from intersections between gender, age, migration and various needs for material and immaterial support.

In the next sections, we discuss, first, literature on marriage migration, and on care provisions for older immigrants. Second, we briefly present the quantitative context of such transnational marriages involving older spouses. Third, we outline the empirical material on which we base our qualitative analysis. And fourth, we present interview material from a handful of migrant carer-wives to document the hybrid character of such arrangements. We end with a discussion and conclusion.

THE CONTEXT I – MARRIAGE MIGRATION

Marriage market theory proposes that financial principles centrally affect who marries whom. Like success in the labour market, finding a spouse depends on the conditions of the market and the personal characteristics that determine an individual's attractiveness (bargaining power).

One central principle in marriage is homogamy – the idea that people generally marry people who are similar in terms of educational level and ethnic background (Blackwell & Lichter 2004; Lichter & Qian 2019; Milewski & Hamel 2010; Rytter 2012). However, there may also be patterned exchanges in marriage, as seen in marriages between well-off older men and substantially younger women (England & McClintock 2009). Such patterned exchanges also occur in transnational marriages, which give access to a larger and more diverse marriage market. Marriage patterns may vary in terms of both gender and migration context. Hence, in this section, we focus on studies where, first, the marriage migrants are women, and, second, the direction of migration is from less to more affluent countries. In such marriages, wives may be both better educated and substantially younger than their husbands (Balistreri, Joyner & Kao 2017; Elwert 2016; Levchenko & Solheim 2013). This type of exchange in cross-border marriages, exemplifying what has been called 'global hypergamy' (Constable 2005), can be observed not only for majority men but also for men with minority backgrounds (Kalpagam 2008; Qureshi 2016; Thai 2005). One relevant observation regarding the underlying dynamic is that men who are considered poor in their affluent country of residence may be attractive partners because they are considered well off in less-affluent countries – a phenomenon labelled the 'status paradox' of migration (Nieswand 2011).

With regard to the exchanges involved in marriage, women from the Global South may seek husbands abroad for far more than simply financial reasons. Some women hope that foreign husbands will espouse more egalitarian views than men in their home country – although such hopes are often dashed (Constable 2009; Faier 2007; Tsai 2011). Others seek husbands abroad due to being virtually 'unmarriageable' in local marriage markets due to advanced age or being divorced, for instance (Thai 2005; Yeoh et al. 2014). With limited options in their local labour markets, marrying abroad may be one way in which such women can try to improve their lives (Piper & Lee 2016). As also shown in rich empirical studies of such marriages (e.g. Faier 2007; Liversage 2013a; Yamaura 2015), such marriage migrant wives should not be viewed through the dichotomy of being either gold diggers or victims, but as active agents, enacting life strategies within a context of structural and ideological constraint.

One last point is that marriage migrant wives are often placed in vulnerable positions after their arrival. Having left their family and networks behind, they arrive in a context in which they often do not speak the host country language. They also become highly dependent on their husbands for their residency permits. Some of these women may

have limited options for exerting agency due to their subordinate position in marital, familial and national 'gendered geographies of power' (Mahler & Pessar 2001), and may have difficulties resisting if they, for example, suffer exploitation or experience domestic abuse (Choi, Elkins & Disney 2016; Erez et al. 2009; Raj & Silverman 2002). Although divorce is generally the exit option from abusive marriages or similar difficulties, this option may not be readily available for many marriage migrants as not to have to return to their country of origin, where strong norms against divorce may prevail (Liversage 2013a, 2013b; Voolma 2018).

THE CONTEXT II – CARE NEEDS OF OLDER IMMIGRANTS

A second theme of this study relates to the care needs of older immigrants. Presently, immigrants from the Global South are ageing in increasing numbers across Northwestern Europe, leading to a surge in publications on the intersections between ageing and migration (e.g. Al Ajlan 2019; Baykara-Krumme & Platt 2018; Ciobanu, Fokkema & Nedelcu 2017). These demographic changes are also making the care needs of older immigrants an increasingly urgent issue for families and societies alike.

When immigrants age, the norms, practices and structures of their countries of origin encounter those of their country of residence (Levitt & Schiller 2004; Oxlund 2018). For instance, in a Scandinavian country like Denmark, where the vast majority of both men and women are in the labour market, care for the elderly is largely a public responsibility (Esping-Anderson 1990). Most of such care is carried out by home helpers employed in local municipalities who assist with both practical and personal tasks. As care work is highly feminised in Denmark, most employees are female (Andersson 2012; Dahl 2019). Older individuals with high levels of support needs have access to care homes.

Although older immigrants also have access to these professionalised services, studies show that, relative to their needs, they generally use such services less than older individuals from the majority (Denktas 2011; Hansen & Siganos 2009). Language difficulties, a lack of understanding of the system and a preference for familial care may underlie this lower degree of take-up. In particular, there seem to be a preference against care homes (Ismail 2021; Liversage & Jakobsen 2016; Sparre & Rytter 2019).

Instead, families may care for older family members themselves. This aligns with norms on filial duties being stronger among ethnic minorities from, for example, the Middle East, as compared to majority populations (de Valk & Schans 2008; Schans & Komter 2010). However, caring for old and infirm parents at home may be strenuous. As care work is also feminised in ethnic minority families, the high female employment rate in Scandinavia may also challenge the ability of ethnic minority families to provide care (Rytter et al. 2021).

With migration bringing different parts of the world into contact, some ethnic minority families devise novel family care solutions. For instance, Chinese families in the US may draw on cash-for-care schemes to hire Chinese-background care workers providing in-home care as 'fictive kin' (Lan 2002). This arrangement enables adult children to provide culturally appropriate care for parents without being burdened workwise or financially. Indeed, cash-for-care schemes often have a high take-up in ethnic

minority families (Forssell 2013; Frericks et al. 2014), as such public remuneration can facilitate provisions of home care, delivered by either family members or by co-ethnic ‘fictive kin’.

This article investigates another approach to meeting the care needs of older immigrants, which integrates a public remuneration scheme. As this type of care is tied to marriage migration, we draw on Becker’s marriage market perspective (Becker 1981) to investigate what types of supply, demand and exchange are implicated in such marriages. In doing so, we attend to both gendered norms and practices across transnational social space, and to the production of precarity for the carer-wives at the centre of such arrangements.

METHOD AND DATA – QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

This article stems from the AISHA research project (Aging Immigrants and Self-Appointed Helpers Arrangement 2017–2021).¹ This project focuses on families using the care scheme entitled ‘self-appointed helper arrangements’ (§94 in the Danish Social Service Act). Such self-appointed helpers are generally family members who are paid to undertake specified tasks, which professional home helpers would otherwise have carried out. Typically, the municipalities hire self-appointed helpers for only a few hours a week, as the helpers replace the short visits of professional employees. Naturally, in case of large care needs, the number of remunerated hours grows, but it rarely comes close to matching the amount of time family helpers spend providing care. Part of Danish legislation since the 1990s, the scheme enables municipalities to accommodate special needs and the clients mostly consist of ethnic minority families (Rytter et al. 2021).

In the AISHA project, we used the self-appointed helper scheme as an entry point to investigate the interface between family and state care provisions in ethnic minority families. First, we interviewed self-appointed helpers, care-receiving older individuals and/or other family members in 30 families with a §94 arrangement. This part of the data material totals more than 100 interviews, which were carried out in Danish or in languages such as Arabic, Turkish or Urdu. Second, we interviewed 52 municipal care managers (or other municipal actors) who had been tasked with instigating and overseeing the care arrangements. Third, we interviewed a number of older immigrants and their kin about old age and care expectations in families who did not have a §94 arrangements.

In a limited number of cases, we encountered §94 carers who were marriage migrant wives of substantially older widowed or divorced immigrant husbands. We also encountered municipal care managers who mentioned such wives shouldering considerable care burdens. The care managers used the term ‘fetched wives’ or ‘fetched spouses’ (in Danish: *‘hente-koner’/‘hente-ægtefæller’*) for such women. The existence of specific terminology indicates the existence of a social phenomenon. We thus decided to investigate this intriguing intersection between care and migration in greater depth.

In doing so, only a subset of our data material – five cases of such arrangements – was relevant. To ascertain whether this limited number of substantially younger marriage

¹ The project – and thus also this article – was supported by the Velux Foundation’s HUMpraxis programme under funding number 13472.

migrant wives were part of a broader pattern, we conducted an analysis of Danish register data. These results – which revealed a distinct pattern – are explained in full elsewhere (Liversage 2021).

Building on these quantitative observations, we conducted a directed content analysis of the interviews from the arrangements with substantially younger marriage migrant wives to older husbands (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). We coded the details regarding the establishment, practices and evaluations of these particular arrangements. Before coming to this qualitative analysis, the next section presents the main quantitative findings.

THE QUANTITATIVE SETTING – A REGISTER DATA ANALYSIS OF REMARRIAGE PATTERNS

We could assess the pattern of transnational marriages to older husbands because all legal residents in Denmark (both immigrants and natives) are assigned a unique personal identifier. Across various registers, this identifier ties together information on issues such as gender, age, year of migration, country of origin and years of marriage, divorce, widowhood etc. Based on data from the years 2003 to 2018 relating to individuals in the 55- to 80-year age group, we conducted an analysis answering the following questions:

- How often do older immigrants remarry?
- Who do they remarry?
- What is the age difference between spouses in such marriages?

Our focus is on previously married immigrants who were now widows/widowers or divorcees. We attend to older immigrants from the countries Turkey and Pakistan (two main countries of labour migration), or – pooled together – individuals from the four Arab refugee countries of Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. We compare the results with the Danish majority.

The first finding of the quantitative analysis is that remarriage for individuals over 55 is rare. Only 1.2–1.7% of older immigrants from the three immigrant groups remarried. While there are almost 11,000 Turkish immigrants in the 55- to 80-year age group, only 143 individuals (1.3%) remarried in the years 2003–2018.

The analysis also shows that remarriages among immigrants are highly gendered: it is predominantly older men who find new wives, a gendered pattern generally seen in old-age remarriages (Brown et al. 2019; Schimmele & Wu 2016). In the three immigrant groups, men in fact remarry between six and 15 times as often as women. In the vast majority of immigrant remarriages, spouses are found abroad. A small number marry ethnic minority women already living in Denmark, and fewer still marry women from the Danish majority.

One last point is that a clear age pattern exists depending on the choice of spouse. When older immigrant men remarry, the age difference is smallest (5–9 years) when the marriage is to a majority Dane and somewhat larger (10–15 years) when spouses are ethnic minorities living in Denmark before the marriage. The age difference is largest (14–20 years) when wives travel to Denmark from abroad. The largest age differences occur in the Arab refugee group. While a much smaller share of older Danish men remarry wives with an immigrant background, the age-graded pattern

in such marriages is similar to the one observed in the three immigrant groups with Danish husbands on average being 16 years older than wives when marriages are transnational (Liversage 2021).

This quantitative analysis documents that while the number of older immigrant men who remarry is small, the ones who do so predominantly marry substantially younger wives who travel to Denmark as marriage migrants. The experiences of some of these wives is our focus in the remainder of the article.

OLDER IMMIGRANT MEN AND YOUNGER MARRIAGE MIGRANT WIVES

In the next sections, we unpack the experiences of migrant carer-wives. Our main case is a woman, whom we call Bouchra. She was hired as a \$94 helper for her husband, Abu Mahmoud. We visited and talked to Bouchra several times over the course of seven months. We also talked to her husband, and interviewed one of his adult daughters twice.

THE DEMAND SIDE – AN OLDER IMMIGRANT MAN IN THE GLOBAL NORTH

The story of Bouchra's arrival in Denmark begins with the care needs of her older husband-to-be, Abu Mahmoud. When he was in his mid-70s – and suffering from several chronic conditions – he lost his wife, who had cared for him. With the almost universal sense of responsibility that adult children feel towards parents as they age (Baldassar 2008), his six adult children faced the question of how to meet the care needs of their father.

First, the children – most of whom lived near their father – tried fulfilling their filial duties by having Abu Mahmoud live with them in turn, a type of care arrangement observed in other ethnic minority families (Liversage & Jakobsen 2016; Nielsen, Waldemar & Nielsen 2020). Abu Mahmoud, however, insisted that he wanted to die in his own home. His adult daughter also commented that it was almost impossible to make the arrangement work, as the children were in full-time work or education, and as Abu Mahmoud found it hard to accept help.

The children then turned to the municipality. As their father clearly needed support, he was eligible for home help, and workers from the municipality started visiting Abu Mahmoud's flat several times daily. However, this arrangement did not work well either. First, Abu Mahmoud was not happy to have 'strangers' in his home whom he could hardly communicate with, as his Danish was poor. Second, in the feminised Danish care sector (Bloksgaard 2011), almost all the home helpers were women. Abu Mahmoud refused to let such workers see him naked due to a cultural taboo on nakedness between unmarried men and women (Bjerke 2020; Ismail 2021). This made it hard to help him with bathing and going to the toilet, leaving Abu Mahmoud without needed help, and leaving his children with a problem yet unsolved.

As a third solution, the adult children considered finding their father a new wife – she could speak Arabic with Abu Mahmoud, and a wife's care with bathing etc. would not be considered 'haram' ('forbidden'). As Abu Mahmoud was eligible for municipal support, such a wife could even generate an income by becoming a self-appointed

helper, paid by the municipality. Abu Mahmoud agreed that this might indeed be a viable solution.

THE SUPPLY SIDE – A YOUNGER UNMARRIED WOMAN IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

When the marriage-migrant-to-be, Bouchra, was in her mid-30s, she worked in the health sector and was engaged to be married. Then, unexpectedly, her fiancé died, and Bouchra got depressed and subsequently lost her job. Single women rarely live alone in her country of origin, so she lived with her parents. When her sister was divorced, she and her two children also joined an increasingly crowded household. When Bouchra's father subsequently had to retire, the family's financial situation became precarious, and Bouchra struggled to find new employment. With economic problems in her country growing daily, however, she could not find anything stable. Had she lived in, for example, the Philippines, Bouchra might have migrated abroad to find work and remit money (Parrenas 2007), but in her context this option was unavailable.

Instead, Bouchra stayed at home until one day she was contacted regarding an offer of marriage. The contact came through a transnational network where one of her expatriate relatives... 'knew what a hard time I was facing in [country of origin]'. When this relative heard that Abu Mahmoud's children were searching for a new wife for their father, he acted as a matchmaker, believing that the marriage could be of benefit to Abu Mahmoud and Bouchra alike.

THE MARRIAGE ARRANGEMENTS

After initial negotiations, Abu Mahmoud and two of his children travelled to meet Bouchra and her parents. From the beginning, Bouchra knew that the offered marriage was not an ordinary one. She was well aware that if she married Abu Mahmoud ... 'I would go to Denmark through family unification to take care of him [...] I weighed the pros and cons, and found that there were more advantages in it for me'. As she explains:

Abu Mahmoud is a wealthy man. I got a solid sum of money as '*mahr*' [marital gift]. He was generous, and he still is. My family and I needed the money. In fact, I paid my parents' debt in their house with the money I got. We also agreed that I would send enough money to my parents, so they can live from it. I find that my financial rights related to my religion have been respected, so I am satisfied with that part of the agreement.

The quotation shows that the arrangement centres on a clearly defined exchange between care and money. In Islam, marriage is a contractual agreement between a man and a woman. For the marriage to be valid, the marriage contract must specify a *mahr*, a marital gift from husband to wife (Spencer 2011). The size of the agreed *mahr* enabled Bouchra to pay off her parents' house, thus alleviating their financially precarious situation. The contract also stated that Bouchra would... '... get a specified sum each month until Abu Mahmoud is no longer here to pay it'. The marriage thus lead to a substantial financial transfer flowing from north to south, and exemplifies why marriage migration should not be excluded from the migration-development

nexus debate (Piper & Lee 2016). The interview also reveals that Bouchra 'weighed the pros and cons' of accepting the marital offer. Acting on her own accord, she should not be regarded as a passive victim, a stereotype commonly applied to immigrant women (Kapur 2002). However, her decision to become a (hard-working) marriage migrant exemplifies how active agency may unfold under conditions of considerable structural constraint.

Bouchra also reported that even though her parents benefited financially, they were unhappy about the situation: 'Several times, my parents asked me if I was sure I wanted to accept the marriage. In fact, they both cried a lot. They felt that I was making a huge sacrifice'. Bouchra, however, saw the marriage differently. As she explains:

I was almost at the end of my thirties. Where I come from, the possibilities for marrying a man my age was minimal. Besides, I was not interested in falling in love again. And it had been tremendously difficult to find a good and steady job. But with the contract with Abu Mahmoud, I could live in a good place, and also provide for my parents, and for my sister's children.

The fact that she was virtually 'unmarriageable' in her local marriage market (Thai 2008; Yeoh et al. 2014) was thus central for 37-year-old Bouchra's decision to give 76-year-old Abu Mahmoud her 'yes'.

Regarding her visa, Bouchra tells that it came through quite easily, regardless of the strict Danish rules, which has regulated marriage migration since 2002 (Eggebo & Brekke 2019). One reason was that the 24-year minimum age requirement was not a problem for the couple. Another reason was the relative economic resourcefulness of Abu Mahmoud, which enabled him to fulfil requirements such as placing a deposit of approximately 7000 Euros as collateral in a savings account and having accommodation of a specified size in his own name.

It also played a part that Bouchra arrived in Denmark in 2016. Had she married two years later, she would most likely not have been able to gain a visa, due to the introduction of a number of 'integration requirements' in 2018. Besides requirements related to language skills, education and employment of both spouses, these changes also made it impossible to gain a visa for a marriage migrant if a couple was to live in a specified number of Danish residential areas with high shares of ethnic minorities (Staver, Brekke & Søholt 2019). Abu Mahmoud lived in exactly such an area.

MARRIAGE, EXCHANGE AND A VULNERABLE TYPE OF WIFEHOOD

As a marriage migrant, Bouchra arrived in Denmark as a wife rather than a worker. However, this did not necessarily make for an easier life, as '... the workload placed on a wife may even be intensified since the labor of love offered by a family member is supposed to be incommensurable (thus unpaid) and incessant (no days off)' (Lan 2008: 1805).

Upon her arrival in Denmark, Abu Mahmoud's adult children organised a meeting with the municipality at which Bouchra was taken on as Abu Mahmoud's self-appointed helper. This meant that she received a (quite small) monthly salary, giving the arrangement some similarities to Lan's study of eldercare in Chinese families in the US

(Lan 2002). In both cases, money from the authorities is integrated into provisions of culturally appropriate in-home eldercare, provided by co-ethnics rather than by adult children. In fact, it could easily be the case that it was (at least in part) Bouchra's pay check, rather than money from Abu Mahmoud himself, which the adult children sent to Bouchra's parents each month. Even though Bouchra was thus their employee, the municipality's interest in her well-being and working condition seemed very limited (see also Rytter & Sparre 2021).

Altogether, this carer-wife arrangement benefited both Abu Mahmoud and his children and made Bouchra able to support her family. However, Abu Mahmoud's extensive care needs made Bouchra very isolated, as it tied her to her new home almost around the clock. She described her first five years in Denmark as follows:

I am locked into this position now [...]. I have no friends, no family – only Abu Mahmoud. I know I am here to take care of him, I am well aware of that, but he is tired and sleeps almost all the time. We talk very little [...]. It is of course frustrating. I feel emptiness.

With a chronically ill husband almost twice her age, Bouchra's work was never done. As a wife, not a worker, she had no maximum working hours or weekends off. Needing some respite from her duties, Bouchra had been able to attend Danish classes two evenings each week, when adult children stopped by to visit their father. These classes were her time off, and the highlight of her week.

Clearly, without the rights of a worker, Bouchra did not have full access to the normal rights of a wife either. For instance, after arriving in Denmark she wanted to redecorate the flat she had moved into. Abu Mahmoud's daughter told us that Bouchra's wish to do so '... provoked us all, but most of all my little sister, who in fact had a row with Bouchra. It was bad'. While Abu Mahmoud defended his new wife's wish to redecorate, the daughter we interviewed commented that 'we still think that the flat is mum's'. As the quotes reveal, Bouchra was expected to take over the care work done by Abu Mahmoud's first wife, but met with resistance when she – as the present wife – wanted to put her mark on the place she lived.

Also in other ways, the adult children tried to ensure that Bouchra remained more like a worker than a wife. One issue concerned children – a common outcome of marriage. When Bouchra married Abu Mahmoud she was 37 years old, and wanted to have children. This topic also figured in the marital negotiations, with Bouchra making the following comment:

The children wanted 'no children' to be added to the [marriage] contract. The imam, however, thought that doing so would be unethical, as this is only something which Allah can guarantee. That disappointed them a bit.

Subsequently, Bouchra tried hard to make her husband give her a child, with one of Abu Mahmoud's daughters remarking that Bouchra... 'thinks that if she has a child by my father, she can stay in Denmark if and when my father dies – may Allah not allow it'. In her 40s at the time of the interview, however, Bouchra had not had success becoming a mother.

Bouchra's hybrid position as a carer-wife is also revealed by another financial specification in her marriage contract. Besides the Islamic marriage contract stating the amounts given in *mahr* and the monthly remittances to her parents, the contract

... '... also said that I cannot inherit'. Bouchra's position was thus constructed to ensure that she was something less than a 'real wife'. Along the same lines, one of Abu Mahmoud's daughters commented on Bouchra that '[...] she is a part of our life now, but I don't know if she is family. She probably is, but not fully – we can neither let her fully in nor shut her fully out'.

From one perspective, Bouchra needed to be a wife: only as such could she get a visa to Denmark, as the country does not allow low-skilled labour migration. And only as such could she provide Abu Mahmoud with the needed intimate care in a culturally appropriate way. From another perspective, however, the inheritance rights of a new wife and any children she might bear could threaten the interests of Abu Mahmoud's adult children. So, they tried to prevent her from inheriting and from becoming a mother.

Although a 'no inheritance' clause may be part of the Islamic marriage contract in the country of origin, such a clause contradicts Danish law where a surviving spouse must always inherit at least one-eighth of the estate. Bouchra's vulnerable position with limited understandings of Danish language and law will nevertheless place her in a precarious position when her husband dies.

Regarding her future, Bouchra said that she knew she '... could establish a good life in Denmark, if I am allowed to stay'. She feared, however, what would become of her when her much older husband died. Bouchra felt dependent on Abu Mahmoud's adult children for navigating the Danish authorities. She feared, however – and probably with good reason – that they would not help her once their father passed away.

OTHER CASES OF MARRIAGE MIGRANT WIVES MARRYING MUCH OLDER HUSBANDS

As the register data shows, only a small number of older immigrant men remarry, but most who do find substantially younger marriage migrant wives. We expect that only a minority of these men have large care needs, so we believe that carer-wife arrangements such as Bouchra's are rare.

Nevertheless, the AISHA project's interviews with care managers from the Danish eldercare sector show that such marriages occur regularly enough for the care managers to use the term 'fetched spouses' or 'fetched wives'. Drawing on insights from sociolinguistics, the existence of a specialised term points to the existence of social practices where the term has relevance (Hymes 1977; Saville-Troike 2003 [1982]). One care manager made the following comment about her work related to the §94 of the Social Security Act:

Sometimes we encounter 'fetched spouses'. Some are simply married and brought to Denmark to be carers. At least that is what it seems like. There is a great age difference, and they arrive in Denmark quite late in terms of when the illness concerned started.

Another care manager told a story about meeting a young marriage migrant wife who literally sat by the feet of her older, infirm husband, ready to provide him with any desired service. This care manager suspected that the wife would be unable to resist her husband's demands, even when they were unreasonable and possibly physically hurtful, and turned down his application to use his wife as a §94 helper (Rytter et al.

2021: 153). The fact that Danish care managers have such experiences thus points to the existence of migrant carer-wife arrangements in some ethnic minority families.

Other interviews in ethnic minority families without §94 arrangements revealed that transnational marriages involving older men could also be based on close emotional ties rather than needs for care. We met a Turkish couple in this category, where both spouses said how happy they were to have found each other. They were only sorry that their efforts to have a child together had been unsuccessful. A main difference between this couple and Abu Mahmoud and Bouchra was that the husband had no care needs to attend to.

As most of our interviews were conducted with families who had a §94 arrangement, our focus was on families with substantial care needs. In these interviews, we encountered other family arrangements, which had similarities to Bouchra's and Abu Mahmoud's. One example was provided by Alina. At the age of 40, she arrived in Denmark to marry an immigrant husband (a 60-year-old divorcee in need of substantial care). Alina described the start of the marriage 10 years earlier as follows:

When we got married, my husband was only blind [due to diabetes]. But then he had first one leg, and then another leg amputated [...]. [Since I came here...] I always took care of the household chores, and helped him. But after he lost his second leg, I began to care really a lot [...]. It is not easy to be in the home and care for an ill person. You have the full responsibility – and it is physically hard work [...]. He is blind and he cannot walk, so he cannot even get himself a glass of water.

Alina reported that her blind (and subsequently also infirm) husband had very little contact with his ex-wife and two children. Alina's arrival in Denmark had provided him with extensive in-house care, but the arrangement left Alina isolated and burdened.

Another woman employed as a §94 helper was Fatima, a marriage migrant from Turkey. She was more than 30 years younger than her 92-year-old husband Emin. Emin had lost his wife to illness decades previously when he was still in good health. He decided he wanted a new wife, also due to household needs, as a number of his adult sons were still living with him. On her part, Fatima (who was illiterate, and lived in a small village) had been married locally when she was 16 years old. She had, however, been abused by her husband, who abandoned her a year later. As divorcees had few options in the local Turkish marriage market, Fatima lived for more than a decade with her poor widowed mother. Fatima's best option was that an older widower with children would want to marry her (Cindoglu et al. 2011).

Mirroring Bouchra's experiences, the adult children of Fatima's husband were also involved when this marriage was contracted. During one interview, Fatima turned off her husband's hearing aid and in a hushed voice explained her childlessness as follows:

It is because of his children, that [husband] and I have not had a child. They did not want him to have any children with me. So they made sure he had a vasectomy. They were worried about the inheritance – whether the inheritance had to be split up.

Like Bouchra, Fatima also experienced that the deceased first wife still played an important role in her married life. While Bouchra managed to set her personal mark

on the flat where she lived despite resistance from her husband's children, Fatima lived in a flat in which only one picture of a wife was on display – and that was one of her husband's first wife. Fatima also told that she '...slept in the bed of the first wife for many years'. And like Bouchra, Fatima feared what would become of her when her husband died. As she worded it:

I worry about what the children will do, if something happens to their father –will they then send me home? Or will they take care of me and help me? I do not know the language, and I have no education. And I have no children. I am very concerned about my future.

Fatima and Bouchra are in the same kind of precarious position. They are not-quite-kin to their husbands' adult children, and they are generally marginalised in Denmark, so their prospects when their older husbands die are cases of concern.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article investigates a particular intersection between care and migration, leading some women to migrate and become what we call 'migrant carer-wives'. This migration does not align with the 'hostile worlds view', according to which the motivations of love and money should be kept distinctly separate, so they do not contaminate each other (Zelizer 2000). Instead, research reveals that a gendered exchange between youth and migration may take place in transnational marriages (Balistreri, Joyner & Kao 2017; Levchenko & Solheim 2013). Likewise, analysis of Danish register data shows that when older immigrants remarry, the most common type of wife is a substantially younger marriage migrant (Liversage 2021).

In line with basic marriage market theory, these marriages may be exchanges between 'unmarriageable' women (Thai 2008) and older men with care needs. On the one hand, women in precarious positions gain access to a livelihood in a more affluent country, including the opportunity to remit money to their families. On the other hand, older men get access to a source of intimate labour (Yeoh et al. 2014). Part of the financial cost of the wives' labour may be defrayed by Danish municipalities.

As in Bouchra's case, the duties/remuneration exchange may be laid out in a contract. Nevertheless, the relational dynamics remain complex. As Yeoh et al. put it:

There is no simple trading of money for care, or care for money; the relationship is not one of perfect substitutability between money and care but instead one better characterised as a fraught, negotiated terrain where love and labour, care and money, exist in fluid states of partial substitutability and complementarity. (2014: 290)

Further complexities arise from the fact that a third party may be involved in setting up these arrangements: The older men's adult children, who otherwise face problems caring for ageing immigrant fathers. As the anthropologist Michael Jackson points out: 'every life crisis involves, in some sense, a crisis of agency' (2007: 206). Thus, if adult children learn that both their own care and solicited public care for fathers is untenable, finding a younger migrant wife might be a viable alternative. Devising such a solution must also be seen in the national context of both migration and labour market regimes. In countries such as Germany or Italy, a substantial 'twilight zone'

of live-in migrant care workers providing eldercare exists (Lutz & Palenga-Möllnbeck 2010). In Denmark, while national legislation makes such arrangements unfeasible, the §94 arrangements of the Danish municipalities may provide a related type of 'precarious inclusion' in the labour market for migrant women providing care (Rytter & Sparre 2021).

Younger marriage migrant wives are commonly perceived as either victims or gold diggers. However, as Bouchra's case reveals, they should be seen as agents actively pursuing a better life under considerable structural constraints. The hybrid character of being a carer-wife may, however, place such women in precarious positions. They do not have worker protection to guarantee a minimum pay or time off, as they are simply fulfilling their marital duties. They may also have limited access to the normal privileges of wifehood, as when Fatima found out that her husband's adult children had prevented her from becoming a mother (through her husband's vasectomy). Or when Bouchra's Islamic marriage contract stipulated that she would not inherit her husband. The isolation of live-in care also keeps such women from learning the local language, forming networks and getting to know their country of destination, further deepening the risks they face when older husbands die. Expanding the literature on gender and migration by documenting patterned ways in which marriage migrant wives may arrive to shoulder substantial care burdens, this analysis shows yet another way in which the 'care gold' of women from the Global South is cheaply extracted elsewhere in the world (Hochschild 2003).

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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