

# **Marriage Migration and Integration: interrogating assumptions in academic and policy debates**

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## **Abstract**

In both policy and academic debates in Britain, as elsewhere in Europe, concern is increasingly expressed over the implications of spousal immigration for ‘integration’. Continued practices of ‘homeland’ transnational marriage within some ethnic minority communities in particular are presented as problematic, and new immigration restrictions likely to affect such groups in particular are justified on the grounds of promoting integration. The evidence base to underpin this concern is, however, surprisingly limited and analysis is based on differing and often partial conceptualizations of integration. Through an examination of the evidence in recent studies we interrogate the impact which spousal immigration can have within differing domains of integration. Exposing the complex processes at play we demonstrate the need for future research to deploy a nuanced, more comprehensive concept of integration if it is to avoid simplistic assertions that these forms of marriage migration have a single, direct impact on integration processes.

**Keywords:** marriage migration, transnational marriage, integration, immigration, migrants, family, marriage, regulation.

## **Introduction**

Strong sociological traditions view intermarriage as a marker of migrant or ethnic assimilation (Alba & Golden 1986) and benchmark of integration (Birrell 2000:38, Beck-Gernsheim 2007:272, Schinkel 2011:101). In contrast to many expectations, however, significant proportions of the Europe-born children (and grandchildren) of earlier labour migrants have continued to marry partners from their ethnic ‘homeland’, rather than ‘natives’ or even co-ethnics raised in their country of birth (Beck-Gernsheim 2007, Wray 2011). Such transnational marriages are increasingly presented by academics and policy makers in the UK and parts of continental Europe as an impediment to integration not only of the migrant spouse but of their partner and future offspring (Çelikaksoy 2006). The underlying logic of such arguments is that continual ‘replenishment through family reunion’ (Heath 2014:3), or the arrival of a first generation in every generation, undermines generational processes of incorporation into the host society, at best creating only ‘segmented assimilation’ (Zhou 1997, Crul & Vermeulen 2003).

Empirical research on this topic however is limited, has produced varying results, and is characterized by differing understandings of integration. Studies have tended to treat integration *either* as an empirical phenomenon suitable for quantitative measurement through a limited number of key indicators, *or* as a discourse to be critiqued. What is often missing is a critical engagement with the empirical bases for the arguments surrounding relationships between marriage migration and integration processes. In this paper, we consider processes of integration across five domains, paying particular attention in the evidence to the nuances, conflicting evidence and arguments concealed by assertions that these forms of marriage migration have a negative impact on ‘integration’.

A growing body of literature, particularly in Europe, addresses the causes and consequences of intra-ethnic transnational marriage. Within this, the limited empirical research on integration has produced varying results. Indeed, given the diversity of local and national contexts and the ethnic, religious and socio-economic variation in marriage migrants and their spouses, relationships between marriage migration and integration are likely to exhibit some diversity (c.f. Rodriguez-Garcia 2015, Home Office 2011, Charsley *et al* 2012). We draw on evidence from a variety of contexts but with particular attention to marriages between British Pakistanis and partners from Pakistan, which have been the particular focus of negative representations in the UK.

We begin with an account of the representation in academic and UK policy discourses of ethnic minority transnational marriages as an integration problem. Drawing on conceptual approaches from the European sociological literature, we then explore the findings of the research literature within the constituent domains of integration. The article concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the available evidence and highlights implications of our analysis for the future development and deployment of the integration concept in this field.

### **Ethnic minority transnational marriages as an integration problem**

Two books on immigration published in 2013 received substantial media attention in the UK. In the prologue to economist Paul Collier's volume *Exodus: Immigration and Multiculturalism in the 21st Century*, after noting his German grandfather's immigration to Britain and marriage to an English woman, Collier writes about his own wife and son:

'At borders, we [his family] present three different passports: I am English, Pauline is Dutch but brought up in Italy, while Daniel, born in the United States, proudly sports his American passport... If ever there was a postnational family, mine is surely it. But what if everyone did that?... Would this matter? I think it would matter a great deal. Lifestyles such as that of my family are dependent, and potentially

parasitic, on those whose identity remains rooted, thereby providing us with the viable societies among which we choose.’ (p5)

For Collier, ongoing marriage and family migration play a crucial role in migration’s main challenge to a cohesive society: the problem of ‘unabsorbed diaspora’.

*Exodus* is part of a wider questioning of the perceived relatively open approach to immigration under the former New Labour government, following hot on the heels of *The British Dream* by David Goodhart, Director at the time of the think tank DEMOS. Goodhart argues that some communities of immigrants and their descendants (particularly those from ‘traditional, rural Muslim’ backgrounds in the former industrial centres of Northern England or the Midlands) become ‘stuck’ in economic, cultural, and social terms. Amid a complex of factors including poor uneducated backgrounds, local economic decline, linguistic issues, too much ‘cultural protection’, ambivalence to women working and negative stereotyping, transnational marriage is again considered to play a key role:

...extended family bonding lies at the root of the higher segregation of South Asians, and especially South Asian Muslims. This tends to be reinforced when the arranged marriage is a transcontinental one with someone from an ancestral home usually in the Indian subcontinent. (p87)

For British Pakistanis in particular (most of his discussion concerns those from Kashmiri/Mirpuri backgrounds in Northern cities such as Bradford), the practices of importing spouses from Pakistan is, Goodhart argues, a ‘self-inflicted cultural wound’ (p66), inhibiting the integration of both the current and subsequent generation.

Only some kinds of transnational marriage are generally presented as a problem<sup>1</sup>. Goodhart contrasts the marriage practices of (mainly Kashmiri) Pakistanis which he views as keeping them tied to networks of kin and poor rural communities in the subcontinent, with the transnational marriages of Sikhs, who often select spouses ‘from the English-speaking Sikh diaspora’ (p61). The latter, he suggests, form part of Sikhs’ preservation of just enough cultural protection to avoid absorption into the ‘rough’ working class to allow eventual integration at a higher socio-economic level (p66)<sup>2</sup>. Marriages between partners from developed countries – such as those in Collier’s family - are generally considered unproblematic and are usually not the target of restrictive immigration legislation, reflected in low rates of refusals for spousal visas (Charsley 2012). Whilst in parts of East Asia, commercially-brokered inter-ethnic transnational marriages take place on a significant scale and are considered to present challenges for integration, in the UK it is the ‘homeland’ marriages of ethnic minority populations which have attracted particular attention.

The idea that ethnic minority transnational marriages are problematic from an integration perspective is not new (Wray 2012), and is common in contemporary political discourses not only in Britain but elsewhere in Europe (Kerckem *et al* 2013, Scholten *et al* 2012, Thapar-Bjökert & Boveri 2014). The Danish government, in particular, has been a pioneer in regarding marriage migration as detrimental both to integration of ethnic minorities and to the nation (Schmidt 2011).

Amid the growing academic literature on marriage-related migration to Europe, we also find not infrequent reference to integration problems (e.g. Çelikaksoy 2006, Timmerman 2006). Commentators have suggested several mechanisms by which such marriages may hinder integration. Language barriers may inhibit employment opportunities for migrant spouses (Cameron 2006), with impacts for families' socio-economic prospects. Traditional gendered relations of power and divisions of labour may be exacerbated, with immigrant brides ill-equipped for European expectations of domestic and labour market equality (Thapar-Bjökert & Boveri 2014; Timmermann 2006) and limited language skills and education leaving them dependent on their husband and in-laws (Scholten *et al* 2013). High fertility (Cameron 2006) might further stretch household resources which, combined with issues of language, has consequences for the education and integration prospects of the next generation (Joppke 2009, cf. Goodhart 2013: 66). This type of marriage could also demonstrate and support strong overseas bonds (Waters forthcoming, cited in Heath 2014; Scholten *et al* 2013),

facilitating ‘transnational social control’ (Timmerman 2006) and an orientation towards the ‘homeland’ rather than the ‘host’ society. In sum, then, such marriages have been viewed as ‘importing poverty’ (in the words of MP Ann Cryer in *The Economist* 2009), and as drawing generations born in Europe back into inward looking ethnic communities whose integration as a group is hindered by the economic and cultural consequences of the ‘immigration super-highway’ of marriage (*The Economist* 2009, cf. Migration Watch 2004, 2005, Scholten *et al* 2013).

Negative understandings of the relationship between spousal migration and integration are not inevitable. Whilst Northern European countries have tended to view family migration as an unwanted side-effect of (contemporary or earlier) labour migration, and a potential barrier to integration, in many Southern European countries family migration has not been so central to public debates (Kerckem 2013), and in traditional countries of immigration such as Canada family reunion (if not necessarily transnational marriages for existing residents) has sometimes been viewed as facilitating integration (Spencer 2011). This more positive view is also reflected in European Council Directive 2003/86/EC, which states that: ‘Family reunification... helps to create sociocultural stability facilitating the integration of third country nationals in the Member State, which also serves to promote economic and social cohesion, a fundamental Community objective’. In recent years, however, there has been considerable convergence towards more restrictive approaches towards family migration among European nations. In this



paper, we focus on the forms of ethnic minority spousal immigration which have been the particular focus of recent political attention.

Integration concerns are increasingly used to justify tightening of spousal immigration policies (Bonjour 2010, Bonjour & Kraler 2014). In Britain, pre-entry English language testing was introduced for spouses in 2010, whilst the 2011 Home Office *Family Migration* policy consultation suggested several responses to the perceived integration problem of immigrant spouses including: increasing income requirements, extending probationary periods, raising the English proficiency level, and a Danish-style ‘combined attachment’ rule. The latter would have required couples to prove that their ‘combined attachment’ to the UK was greater than to any other country in order to qualify for reunification, and has been seen as specifically targeting intra-ethnic minority marriages given that those with significant linguistic, familial and social connections to other countries are particularly affected (cf. on Denmark Jorgensen 2012)<sup>34</sup>. Whilst the logic of the language requirement with regard to integration may be obvious, the rationale connecting the income requirement to integration was explained in a Parliamentary briefing paper:

The Government believes that family migrants and their sponsors must have sufficient financial independence not only to be able to support themselves without recourse to the State, but also that they should have the

wherewithal to allow the migrant to participate in everyday life in a way that enables them to integrate and play a full part in British society. This requires a level of income higher than the current maintenance requirement, which is equivalent to the level of income support, is inadequate to prevent migrants and sponsors becoming a burden on the welfare system and in turn inhibits proper integration.<sup>5</sup>

In the end, all but the ‘combined attachment’ proposal were implemented in 2012. Whilst these measures do not make explicit reference to culture or ethnicity, income and language requirements disproportionately impact on those ethnic minority groups with lower income profiles (Migrant Rights Network 2012) sponsoring partners from non-English speaking countries.

The largest such group are British Pakistanis (Charsley *et al* 2012), with over half of British Pakistanis married to a partner from overseas (Dale 2008, Georgiadis & Manning 2009). The British Pakistani population is also often characterized as particularly problematic in terms of integration. They are routinely identified as suffering from a weak labour market position and poor educational performance (Modood *et al* 1997, Modood 2003, Platt 2005, Khattab *et al* 2011). Concerns over segregation and lack of socio-cultural integration heightened after the Bradford riots in 2001, and subsequently intensified amid concerns over extremist Islamism in Britain,

prompted debates over whether ‘Muslims integrate less and more slowly than non-Muslims’ (Bisin *et al* 2008:245, Arai *et al* 2011). The co-existence of assertions of problematic integration with significant levels of transnational marriage could be (and has been) taken as suggestive of a connection between the two.

### **Evidence across integration domains**

Perhaps surprisingly, the evidence base for such assumptions is ‘fragmented and incomplete’ (Bonjour & Kraler 2014). Empirical research directly assessing the relationship of such marriages to integration is rare and its findings inconclusive. Even for the British Pakistanis discussed above, for example, recent research has found no clear evidence that they have resisted changes to more British orientations and practices (e.g. language fluency and democratic engagement). ‘Indeed, in the case of gender attitudes and employment in the ethnic enclave (where the first generation from Pakistan were fairly distinctive), the rate of change is faster for people of Pakistani background [than other ethnic groups]’ (Heath 2014:7).

Integration is a complicated, contested, often ill-defined, yet widely adopted concept (Spencer & Cooper 2006, Spencer 2011, Modood 2012, Wieviorka 2011).<sup>6</sup> In academic discourse it describes processes of migrant and host society engagement across a broad canvas of domains, but is nevertheless often used in the much more limited sense of social ‘cohesion’ (CIC 2007). Many critical commentators argue that the concept is

‘less neutral than often assumed’ (Fokkema & de Haas 2011:8), confusing the empirical *is* with the normative *ought*. ‘Integration’ indeed often carries strong normative connotations of a desired end-goal, such as a narrow conception of socio-cultural national belonging which may itself be perceived as exclusionary (Gedalof 2007, Rytter 2010, Fog Olwig 2011, Schmidt 2011). In the field of marriage migration such critiques, however, have tended to focus on the normative potential of the concept, rather than interrogating the empirical assertions made by those who employ the term. Here, we demonstrate the need for this second variety of analysis.

The processes described as integration span several domains. Various categorisations have been suggested. Erdal and Oeppen (2013:876) divide them into two main groups: the ‘socio-cultural’ (including belonging and social networks), and the ‘structural’ (including economic, political and legal aspects) (cf. Fokkema & de Haas 2011). Other scholars have divided them further to facilitate analysis of processes within and, crucially, between domains (Entzinger 2000; Heckmann and Schnapper 2003; Ager and Strang 2008). Here we follow Spencer’s typology of five domains: ‘structural’ (participation in the labour and housing markets, education etc.), ‘social’, ‘cultural’, ‘civic and political’, and the realm of identity (Spencer 2011:203; Spencer & Charsley forthcoming).

We know that processes in these five domains may be relatively independent or interacting, and indicators used to assess an individuals' integration may show varying results in the different spheres, reflecting the complex and multiple nature of the processes involved (Spencer & Cooper 2006, Jayaweera 2012). There may even effectively be 'trade-offs' between domains, where a lack of social integration beyond an ethnic group may facilitate group mobilization, for instance, with potential benefits in terms of economic resources and/or political engagement (Maxwell 2012)<sup>7</sup>. We also know that processes of integration are multidirectional in a number of senses: participation in the 'receiving society' at the same time as retaining transnational connections; in the sense of engaging not only migrants and their families but individuals and institutions in the societies with which whom they interact; and because these are processes that may reverse: in the structural domain, for instance, through becoming unemployed or homeless.

Transnational marriage may have more bearing on some domains and processes than others but the importance of taking this holistic perspective, of recognising the complexity of integration processes and range of factors involved, is not always recognized in either academic or political debates. Rather, these commonly focus on one or two aspects or indicators as if this denoted integration across all domains (Jayaweera & Choudhury 2008).

In the following discussion, we shall explore the empirical evidence on the relationship between marriage migration and integration in each domain. Given the limited empirical evidence on the relationship between ‘homeland’ marriage migration and integration processes, we draw on direct evidence where this is available but also draw out the consequences for marriage migration of broader debates concerning processes in these domains. Whilst the discussion is based on a review of the relevant bodies of research, we do not seek here to present a comprehensive literature review, but rather to illustrate key arguments in each domain, highlighting areas in which situating arguments within broader social science debates and a contextual, multi-dimensional conceptualization of integration provide fruitful avenues to interrogate common assumptions in this field.

### ***Structural domain***

Structural aspects of integration are the most frequently studied. A significant literature exists, for instance, on issues such as education, occupation and labour market participation amongst the ‘second generation’. Whether or not this is referred to as ‘integration’ reflects the traditions in which the authors are writing. This is also the area in which most direct research exists on spousal migration.

One debate surrounds the impact of transnational marriage on structural outcomes for the European-raised spouse and for their children. Becker (2010), for example, suggests

that ethnic Turkish children in Germany with one migrant parent have poor educational outcomes. In terms of impacts on spouses, one common suggestion is that a husband from a more 'traditional' or 'patriarchal' society may impede the wife's labour market engagement – an opinion which British South Asian women themselves expressed in Dale and Ahmed's qualitative research (2011:911). The authors' own analysis of national Labour Force Survey data, however, did not support this suggestion (Dale and Ahmed 2011). Indeed, women may choose a transnational marriage for 'modern' ends (Lievens 1999), escaping in-law control, or to secure a more educated match than is available locally (Charsley 2013, Çelikaksoy *et al* 2006). In addition, minimum income requirements for sponsoring spouses – or the need to demonstrate they will have no recourse to public funds - mean that women sponsoring a husband will usually be in employment. Indeed, UK Home Office (2011) figures show that the overwhelming majority of UK sponsors of spousal visa applications (94%) are in paid employment at the time of the application (rising to 98% for sponsors of spouses from Pakistan and India).

Another concern expressed is that having a migrant spouse in the household may inhibit a family's socio-economic prospects. UK Home Office research does not unequivocally support the suggestion that migrant spouses are a financial 'burden': migrant husbands from less developed countries have higher rates of employment than the UK average, although slightly lower earnings, whilst migrant wives' employment rates are

significantly lower but earnings match the UK average (2011: 7-8). In the Home Office data, moreover, the income of the majority of sponsoring spouses was fairly low (£10-25,000), suggesting some indicators of 'poor integration' may relate to characteristics of the British rather than overseas spouse. Indeed, Peach (2006) argues that low rates of women's labour market participation – a characteristic not restricted to migrant spouses - is a key explanatory factor in British Muslim populations' socio-economic vulnerability. Recalling our understanding of integration processes as the outcome of both migrant and societal factors, we must also allow that poor integration outcomes can equally reflect societal barriers rather than solely or even significantly the characteristics of the individuals themselves.

Analysis of Australia's longitudinal survey of migrants provides a rare insight into how processes of integration vary between those entering under different visa categories, and develop over time. Family migrants score lower than other categories on several socio-economic and linguistic measures. Intra-ethnically married migrants (which would include the 'homeland' marriages problematized in the European discourses) fare worse than those in inter-ethnic marriages. However, level of education is more significant than visa category of entry (Chiswick *et al* 2006, Davidoff 2006, Khoo 2003) <sup>8</sup>.

Language ability and structural integration measures are often interrelated, but differences in spoken language ability between (skills selected) economic and family migrants disappear by 3.5 years after immigration, and differences also decrease over



time in reading and writing between these categories (Chiswick *et al* 2006). Family migrant's employment rates increase over time since immigration, although differences in earnings remain (Davidoff 2006).

Apart from language requirements, spousal migrants are usually not 'selected' by immigration regimes on the basis of education. Much discourse on the presumed structural impacts of marriage migration assumes that immigrant spouses will have limited educational capital, but this is not necessarily uniformly the case (Kofman & Raghuram 2006). Indeed, research from Denmark has suggested that in Danish Pakistani transnational marriages, the migrant spouse may have higher levels of education than their sponsor (Çelikaksoy *et al.* 2006)<sup>9</sup>. In Hoogheimstra's (2001) Netherlands study, Turkish women marrying transnationally also tended to have husbands with higher levels of education than themselves. Qureshi (2014) presents fascinating case studies from Sikh families in which highly educated brides from India are sought for sons in Britain who themselves have lower levels of education and labour market prospects, suggesting that some transnational marriage may in part represent attempts to enhance structural integration. Even if these women do not always have the opportunity to pursue further education or fulfill their career ambition, this injection of educational aspiration may have consequences for children raised by such mothers.

### ***Social Integration***

Here two particular areas of argument concerning social integration of migrants are frequently cited in relation to marriage migration: social capital and transnationalism.

### *Social Capital*

Social capital has been an important element in the study of migration and integration. Fokkema and de Haas provide a neat summary of one significant view of migrant social capital:

More social capital.... does not automatically mean being more integrated in receiving societies. The literature on social capital has distinguished strong and weak ties (Granovetter 1973), closed and open networks as well as bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam 2000). From this, we can infer that closed networks among migrant populations (bonding social capital) without strong social ties with native populations (bridging social capital) and other immigrant groups (the so-called ethnic bridges)... hinder integration into “mainstream” society (2013: 9).

In relation to marriage migration, theoretical debates on the implications of bonding and bridging social capital are paramount. Co-ethnic families in this context represent bonding social capital *par excellence*. Family networks, such as those involved in marriage migration, can therefore be viewed as likely to inhibit social integration (Fog

Olwig 2011:191), so that perceived failures of integration of a minority ethnic or immigrant group are often blamed on collectivistic families (Grillo 2008:31). Both familism (Tossutti 2006:2) and culturism (Schinkel 2011:100) are considered extreme examples of the pitfalls of family migration.

In the broader social science literature, however, the notion that bonding social capital prevents bridging social capital is contested (Nannested 2008), with disagreement about the effect of these capitals (Tossutti 2006:2) on integration. Research from Europe suggests that some migrants' bonding social capital may have a positive effect on bridging social capital (Nannested 2008:612). Jacobs and Tillie (2004:420) argue that the denser associational networks are in a group, the more political trust its members will have, thus assuming a positive link between bonding and bridging social capital. The UK Commission on Integration and Cohesion's *Our Shared Future* report also suggests that those who have more bonding social capital are more likely to bridge (CIC 2007:162). Comfortable homogenous contexts may provide individuals with higher self-esteem nurturing processes of bridging. Viruell-Fuentes, for example, argues that ethnic enclaves are useful mediators for migrant integration (2007:1532). Migrant or ethnic organisations, moreover, can provide opportunities for acquiring skills which may be useful in other domains (Spencer & Cooper 2006:6, 50, 57).

Human capital theory also tends to ignore the potential benefits of chain migration (providing bonding social capital) in fields like employment (Davidoff 2006:3) where migrants entering established families benefit from their networks of contacts or employment opportunities. Hence, Carrera argues that families are important in helping individuals overcome structural discrimination (2006:11) and family and religious institutions assist immigrants in adapting to the country of settlement (Tossutti 2006:2, Jayaweera 2012).

### *Transnationalism*

Cross-border marriages often form part of broader transnational networks and social practices (Charsley 2012). As such networks are often intra-ethnic, they are usually taken to constitute a transnational form of bonding social capital. Ethnographic work on the social distances and tensions in intra-ethnic transnational networks (e.g. Carling 2008, Charsley 2013), however, undermines the assumption of a simple shared group. Even dominant discourses recognize that transnational networks can ‘bridge’ significant socio-economic divides: opportunities for dramatic social mobility through migration are often presented as the main attraction of transnational marriage for overseas partners. But the fact that their transnational networks may be more diverse than their local networks in socio-economic terms can also be a factor motivating European-born descendants of migrants to consider a transnational match, as a more educated or higher

status partner may be available among their networks overseas than within their country of residence (Charsley 2013, Hoogheimstra 2001, Carol *et al* 2014). Hence transnational Sikh diasporic marriages have been seen as part of successful strategies of socio-economic improvement and integration (Ballard and Gardner n.d.). Even where unions take place within extended families in an ethnic 'homeland', as is common for British Pakistanis, transnational marriages may be both bridging (in socio-economic terms) and bonding (in familial terms) (Charsley 2013).

These issues must also be situated within broader debates on the impacts of transnationalism for processes of integration. Whilst some have suggested that the maintenance of cross-border ties impedes integration, others argue that this is not a zero-sum game (Portes *et al* 2002, Portes *et al* 2008, Erdal & Oeppen 2013). One particularly wide-ranging quantitative study (Snel *et al* 2006) concluded that transnational identification and activities do not impede integration but that the relationship varies both according to which aspects of each are examined (Jayaweera 2012), and with labour market position. Moreover, a causal relationship may be difficult to establish, as barriers to local or national integration may also motivate transnational engagements. Bolognani (2007), for example, suggests that some British Pakistanis' plans for (ethnic) return migration to Pakistan (whether or not put into practice) must be understood in the context of experiences of Islamophobia. Transnationalism has also been found to nurture self-esteem (Erdal & Oeppen 2013:873) and it would seem likely

that a degree of confidence is necessary for many aspects of integration (cf. Goodhart 2013: 243-4). Overall, then, the empirical literature calls ‘for somewhat less bold statements about the virtues or the perils of transnationalism’ for integration (Morales & Morariu 2011: 168).

### ***Identity***

Analyses of migrants’ and their descendants’ identities or feelings of belonging were popular at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. Hall 1995). Current scholarship, helped along by growing interest in transnationalism, has accepted the possibility of multiple simultaneous attachments (e.g. Abbasi-Shavazi *et al.* 2008:54). Moreover, phenomena such as ethnic revival are not necessarily manifestations of links with the present-day society of a country of origin (Carling 2008) but have more varied underpinnings and implications (Erdal & Oeppen 2013:54). Ethnic or religious identities do not necessarily erode with time or integration overseas and homeland attachments can be bound up with identity politics in the country of residence (Bolognani 2007:72, van der Veer 1995).

Nevertheless, popular understandings often end up representing strong in-group identity and belonging (be it ethnic or religious) as a threat to social cohesion. Transnational marriage may be viewed as evidence of unwillingness to identify with the nation of residence. Recent British research including the South Asian and Muslim groups most often problematized in this regard, however, suggests less polarized identity formations: local identities can at times be more important than national ones (cf. Jan-Khan 2003)

and 'British' has become an identity dearer to Muslims than any other ethnic group because it is broad enough not to disturb religious sensitivities (see Gardham 2009). In one recent British study, Muslim family migrants reported experiencing significant levels of discrimination (Jayaweera 2012:92) but these experiences did not necessarily erode feelings of belonging to Britain (ibid.: 102).

### ***Civic and Political***

The intertwining of processes between the various domains will already be evident. Democratic and civic participation are often treated as measures of integration, but they can also be important mechanisms of processes in the social, identity and civic and political domains. Debates surrounding the social capital implications of ethnic organizations were noted above, but immigrants may also learn how to be political actors through 'being ethnic' (Portes *et al* 2008:1058). On the other hand, there is evidence that frustration at perceived discrimination and patterns of minority-majority interaction may prevent minority ethnic groups from engaging in democratic and civic processes out of disillusionment and a feeling of exclusion (Sanders *et al* 2014), although socio-economic status may be an important variable (Tossutti 2006:5). 'Second generation' ethnic minorities are less likely than the first generation to participate in the democratic process (Sanders *et al* 2014). These British citizens, it has been suggested, expect to be treated like their white peers and if they perceive that this is not the case, the resulting disillusionment leads to lack of engagement. Of course,

greater social and political awareness may underlie awareness of the injustices they face (Heath 2014:8), and therefore speaking up against discrimination, or simply being able to recognize it, may itself be a measure of well-developed social and political engagement. In this ‘paradox of social integration’ the second generation is more aware of discrimination and so develops more ‘reactive ethnicity’ than the first (Werbner 2005, Heath 2014:8).

Public discourses surrounding marriage practices (with an ethnicized focus on transnational marriage, and forced marriages) may be part of an experience of Islamophobia, whilst spousal immigration regulations impacting on some groups more than others may be perceived as an injustice exposing the reality that not all national ‘insiders’ have equal rights in practice (de Hart 2009). The perceived equality which has been argued to be necessary for integration (CIC 2007) may thus be undermined by restrictions on spousal immigration affecting some migrant and citizen groups more than others (de Hart 2009, Wray 2011, Kofman *et al* 2008).

All this leads to some intriguing possibilities: that a transnational marriage may be contracted as part of a political disengagement, but the migrant spouse may have greater inclination towards civic and political engagements than their ‘second generation’ sponsor; or that the migrant spouse may not recognize discrimination and therefore not perceive it as a barrier to integration. Alternatively, Wagner (2012) has documented



cases of transnational couples denied reunification in Denmark who view it as their political duty to contest what they see as the unfairness of the immigration regulations. One common response has been for Danes to relocate to Sweden where, as EU citizens exercising their right to free movement, they can be joined by their partner. They may then live 'semi-legal' lives (Rytter 2012) commuting between Sweden and Denmark, and perhaps exercise their eventual right to return to Denmark as a couple. Here, then, transnational marriage and attempts at reunification are themselves constituted both as political acts of dis-obedience oriented towards the nation-state, and as enacting transnational space as 'obedient' mobile EU citizens. Not only the EU citizen spouse, but also the (would be) migrant partner are conceptualized as 'civic actors in their own right whose practices could help transform liberal democracies and push for greater freedom and equality' (Wagner 2012: 3-4).

### ***Cultural***

Transnational, arranged, and/or consanguineous marriages are often presented as both *evidence* of a retained homeland traditions / failure to adopt the values of the country of settlement (Bonjour & Kraler 2014), and as a *mechanism* by which cultural practices and boundaries are maintained. Indeed, British Pakistanis themselves sometimes cite keeping connections with cultural roots as a motivation for transnational marriage (Charsley 2013, cf. Lievens 1999, Timmerman 2006). Gender ideologies have been a key area for concern here, with assumptions that 'homeland' marriage may reinvigorate

traditional views of domestic relations of power and issues such as women's employment. Available evidence suggests, however, that the reconfigurations of gender relations in transnational marriage may be more complex, and vary considerably with the gender of the migrant spouse. Writing of Danish Turks, for example, Liversage (2012) suggests that whilst in couples with a migrant wife, traditional gender relations may be amplified, they can be undermined or reversed where the husband is the migrant (cf. Charsley 2005). In Nicola Mooney's (2006) work on Sikh marriage migration to the Canada, young women's status is enhanced by their pivotal role in family migration.

Culture however, is a complex concept which does not lend itself easily to measurement. In one recent study, Fokkema and de Haas (2011) examine 'socio-cultural' integration of recent migrants from a variety of African backgrounds in Italy and Spain. Among their interesting conclusions is that those with higher levels of education and information about the destination before migration were more integrated in socio-cultural terms. Of particular relevance are two findings: that being female and North African are positively associated with socio-cultural integration, challenging stereotypes of Muslim (largely spousal-) immigrant women; and a lack of great differences in socio-cultural integration between those who cited economic reasons for migration, and those citing relational motivations (a category which would include marriage migrants). The study, however, is based on the compilation of an index of socio-cultural integration from a range of individual measures: informal contact with

non-co-ethnics, participation in organisations (native or foreign), having a partner born in the receiving country, fluency in the country's dominant language, degree of 'modernization' of views on gender roles and family relationships, and ethnic identification. Questions over whether factors such as partner choice or participation in organisations should be considered measures of or contributors towards processes of integration, and whether ethnic identification is antithetical to local or national identification, should be evident from the preceding discussion<sup>10</sup>.

Just as the concept of integration can carry strong normative connotations of socio-cultural national belonging, cultural difference is an arena in which discourses surrounding marriage migration may themselves be perceived as exclusionary (Fog Olwig 2011, Rytter 2010, Schmidt 2011). A rapidly growing body of literature addresses the stigmatisation of 'homeland' marriages in culturalist approaches, with arranged transnational marriages in particular associated with coercion, sham, and pre-modern gender and generational relations (Schinkel 2011, cf. Huijn *et al* 2012) incompatible with modern European national identities. These kinds of discourses may add to the perceptions of discrimination and exclusion discussed above.

### **Concluding discussion**

Assertions that ethnic minority transnational marriages inhibit integration processes are common in both political and academic discourse and appeal to 'common sense'

arguments concerning the cultural and socio-economic implications of what used to be referred to as ‘chain’ migration. We find these debates lacking in three respects: in the evidence cited to support that contention; in the limited concepts of ‘integration’ on which they rely; and in the disconnect between aspects of the analysis and broader social science debates in which they have already been critiqued. In relation to social capital, for example, we saw that assertions about the negative impacts of bonding capital are strangely divorced from analysis elsewhere in the social science literature which suggest alternative conclusions could be drawn.

Disaggregating the domains in which processes of integration take place allows us to examine the evidence and accompanying analysis more clearly. In each domain, by situating the material within broader research on processes of integration, we find debates that complicate the assumptions which underlie assertions that marriage migration is bad for integration: contradicting the evidence on which those assumptions are based, or pointing to alternative causes. The analytical separation of these domains does not necessarily imply their empirical separability. Anthropological studies, for example, have deconstructed the boundary between the economic and the cultural (e.g. Osella & Osella 2000), but here employing these categories allows us to disentangle debates around the relationships between marriage migration and diverse aspects of integration, whilst recognizing their interpenetration.

The available empirical evidence on the integration consequences of intra-ethnic marriage migration is surprisingly limited (Bonjour and Kraler 2014) and has as yet not produced definitive support for the suggestion that marriage migration is an 'integration problem' (Bonjour & Kraler 2014). The limited quantitative research which does exist runs into challenges over how to measure integration, producing diverse results with differing bases. Distinguishing between dependent and independent variables is a further problem, and even where correlations appear between transnational marriage and conventional markers of poor integration, the preceding discussion outlines some of the difficulties in attributing a causal relationship to marriage migration.

What is also apparent are the variations between processes across the five domains, necessitating their disaggregation in any future work. One small British study on Muslim migrants (Jayaweera 2012) contrasting the integration of family migrants with other categories, for instance, finds family migrants were less likely than economic migrants to be economically active, speak English well, or participate in community organizations. They were, however, also less likely to be struggling financially. They interacted with people from other ethnicities or religions in a higher average number of spaces and were more likely to vote in elections, perhaps indicating that their greater security of residence enhances political engagement (cf. Fokkema & de Haas 2011 on opportunities for permanent settlement encouraging socio-cultural integration). On the other hand, discrimination and deprivation may negatively affect processes of

integration within and across domains (Spencer & Cooper 2006:4; 36-41). Local social and cultural integration in contexts of deprivation may be antithetical to social mobility, the consequences of which may appear as indicators of poor integration in the structural domain (low educational attainment, high rates of unemployment) (Modood 2012). Quantitative studies which focus on only a few indicators of integration therefore risk obscuring different patterns of engagement in other domains or apparent by other measurements; patterns which may show outcomes that challenge the negative picture otherwise conveyed.

Quantitative research alone is limited in its ability to capture the complexity of the factors shaping the social, cultural, political, structural and identity processes encompassed by a holistic concept of integration. Sensitive qualitative research is also needed to explore these complex interwoven issues. Some such work exists on integration processes more generally (e.g. Erdal 2011), but has been largely absent in the specific area of marriage migration. Clearly, however, the dynamics of complex processes in and between domains may vary not only between ethnic groups (given, for example, differing conventions of gendered labour market engagement) but also between the same groups in different locations with differing local conditions (e.g. labour markets, ethnic relations) or national policy frameworks (Carol *et al* 2014, Celikaksoy *et al* 2006, Koopmans 2004, Kulu-Glasgow & Leerkes 2013, Oliver 2013).

There is, therefore, unlikely to be a single answer to the question of the implications of intra-ethnic transnational marriage for ‘integration’.

The topic is not merely an empirical one but also has normative and political dimensions. As we have shown in this paper, it is important that such critiques do not obscure the need to interrogate the empirical assertions made by those who employ the term. Moreover, integration processes are affected by policies – legal or institutional barriers and exclusionary practices may inhibit integration (Finney & Simpson 2009) while failure to address discrimination adequately can expose children of migrants to its effects as they expand beyond an immigrant enclave (Viruell-Fuentes 2007) – and policy inevitably rests on normative underpinnings. Hence, not only do discourses problematizing transnational marriage on the grounds of integration themselves have exclusionary potential, as noted above, but the restrictive regulations (on spousal entry, entitlement to welfare etc) increasingly justified with reference to these discourses also carry implications for the complex, multidimensional processes of integration (Oliver 2013, Bonjour & Kraler 2013, Strik *et al* 2013). Here, then, as Caroline Oliver (2013) has recently observed, policy concerns with ‘integration’ and with managing both migration and migrants may be in tension. In this exploration of one category of migration – that occurring through marriages between members of European ethnic minorities and partners from their ancestors’ countries of origin– the disaggregation of the concept of integration exposes problems with the simplistic assertions on which

current policy discourses in the UK (and elsewhere in Europe) often rely, and demonstrates the need for future research to deploy more complex and nuanced conceptualizations of integration in order to tease out the full range of factors, including policy interventions, impacting on the processes at play.

## **Acknowledgments**

This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council [Grant: ES/K006495/1]. For the Marriage Migration and Integration project report please see <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/ethnicity/projects/mmi/>.

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<sup>1</sup> Although recent restrictions to spousal immigration legislation in the UK have affected a wider range of nationalities (Children's Commissioner for England 2015).

<sup>2</sup> An argument drawing on those made in Ballard's well-known 1990 paper.

<sup>3</sup> Sponsors of spousal visa applicants of different nationality also display differences in average earnings (Home Office 2011), meaning that the effects of income requirements will also be patterned by group.

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<sup>4</sup> The Danish attachment requirement was recently (2016) judged to be discriminatory by the European Court of Human Rights.

<sup>5</sup> Changes to Immigration Rules for Family Members, Standard Note SN/HA/6353 (19th Sept 2013) <[www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN06353.pdf](http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN06353.pdf)> (accessed 11th Sept 2014)

<sup>6</sup> For reasons of space, in this article we do not engage with critiques of integration as suggesting incorporation into an outmoded conception of society as a bounded whole, nor with the question of whether integration should be conceptualized as a gloss for multiple processes rather than thing in itself.

<sup>7</sup> Maxwell's model is more complex, including other variables such as size of group (a small segregated group may still lack political clout), experience of discrimination (without which socially integrated individuals may still be able to integrate economically or politically) and access to financial resources.

<sup>8</sup> Cf Jayaweera's (2012) contrast between recently arrived and established Muslim family migrants in Britain. The more established residents reported more inter-ethnic contacts, and greater financial wellbeing.

<sup>9</sup> These findings varied across ethnic groups, and with the authors' measures of assimilation and parental conflict.

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<sup>10</sup> A NORFACE project (SCIP) also aims to provide new evidence on the early phases of migrants' socio-cultural adaptations in four European countries, but few results are yet available.