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## research

# What's love got to do with marriage?

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The formation of a marriage is frequently conceptualised as one of the most intimate relationships that people enter into, predicated on particular assumptions of romantic love at the point of entry into the marriage. This article explores marriage practices associated with 'love' and 'arranged' marriages, frequently presented as polar opposites, with love marriages positioned as normative and arranged marriages as alien and other. It draws attention to non-traditional practices such as online dating and 'mail-order' marriages to disrupt dominant assumptions of romantic love and draws some parallels between these practices and those of arranged marriages. By doing so, the article not only acknowledges alternative trajectories to marriage, but also serves as a useful intervention to interrogate the hegemonic Euro-American constructions of intimate relationships.

**key words** marriage practices • South Asian • immigration • Bollywood • internet dating sites • 'mail-order' marriages

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## Introduction

The formation of a marriage is frequently conceptualised as one of the most intimate relationships that people enter into. Such relationships are predicated on particular assumptions of romantic love at the point of entry into the marriage and on mutual consent, with individuals operating as autonomous agents. The focus of this article is to explore marriage practices arising from romantic love and arranged marriages. These marriage practices are often positioned as polar opposites, with romantic love as the normalised approach of the neoliberal, autonomous subject and arranged marriages as the domain of 'backward others'. To begin with I offer a normative characterisation of love and arranged marriage practices, situating this within the literature on intimacy before exploring the limitations of normative conceptualisations of both sets of marriage practices. I aim to challenge such constructions via an exploration of choice and rationality as these are interlinked hallmarks of the neoliberal subject. While choice is central to romantic love, rationality, at first glance, has a more dubious place, given the privileging of emotion and passion in romantic love. In contrast, arranged marriages are where parents or other relatives traditionally find a marriage partner for their adult child and where consent of both parties is central. Parental marriage choices of suitable spouses are based more on rationality than on notions of romantic love, hence occupation, earning potential and family background are central to decision making. Importantly, this form of marriage does not necessarily

require love to be present at the start of the marriage, but rather it is assumed that love will grow and develop in time. The article does not discuss in depth the issue of forced marriage (where one or both parties do not consent and where duress is used), although it should be noted that there can be a slippage between arranged and forced marriage (Gangoli et al, 2006).

This article uses an intersectional, critical approach to analyse key literature in the field of marriage and intimacy and utilises a multi-layered analysis of the interrelationships between individuals, family, culture, structural inequalities and citizenship. I argue that such an approach is essential to avoid pathologising individuals or cultures while at the same time disrupting the assumed characteristics of love and arranged marriage practices. The focus of this article is on entry pathways into marriage and it discusses a range of marriage practices. Importantly, it does not engage with the merits or otherwise of the institution of marriage but focuses on marriage practices. Much of the key literature in the field (eg, Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) is dominated by Western notions of intimate relationships and practices. In contrast, this article draws attention to alternative forms of marriage practices from the South Asian diaspora as well as in Euro-American contexts. By doing so, it not only acknowledges alternative trajectories into marriage, but also serves as a useful intervention to interrogate the hegemonic Euro-American constructions of intimate relationships. Shaw (2000) and Smart and Shipman (2004) have already started this work and this article builds on their arguments by illustrating the way in which Western notions of intimate relationships appear to be used by the United Kingdom (UK) state to regulate the marriage practices of 'others' through immigration legislation. As discussed later in the article, the trajectories posited for transnational marriages are heavily imbued with particular notions of the 'ideal' way to form a marriage and by extension the 'ideal' citizen.

## **Pure relationships?**

Giddens (1992) proposed that intimate relationships were moving to 'pure' relationships and used the rise in romantic love as a case study and precursor of the pure relationship. He understood romantic love as both part of and in tension with the pure relationship. Pure relationships are characterised by fluidity, rather than permanence, and where external social constraints and inequalities dissolve through a process of increasing trust and self-disclosure or confluence. Hence, the pure relationship is argued by Giddens to be based on equality, respect and mutuality with unequal gender relations (and other social divisions) rendered void. Giddens' notion of 'plastic sexuality' posits that female sexual desire and expression have been freed from the link between sex and reproduction, thus opening up the possibility of sexual equality in (heterosexual) relationships. Central to such a schema is the assumption that it is both possible and desirable to act as autonomous agents outside of social processes that structure everyday lives and practices. The tenuous and fragile nature of relationships is also argued by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) via their individualisation thesis. The inherent individualism of both Giddens and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim fits well within contemporary neoliberalism.

Giddens did not see pure relationships as permanent and this therefore presents a direct challenge to marriage practices that emphasise relationships 'till death do us part' and the cultural and economic pressures (particularly prior to the 1960s) to stay

in marriages especially where children were involved. The number of divorces per year is one measure that illustrates that permanence following marriage is not a given and to some extent it could be argued that this is indicative of pure relationships. One way to test the theory that confluence marks current relationships and that contextual factors such as economics do not impact on the highly individualised notions of confluence is to explore divorce rates in times of recession. Divorce rates themselves need to be treated with caution as they only reflect people who were or are married and does not include cohabiting couples. In the UK, both marriage rates and divorce rates are on a downward trajectory according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2012), so an easy comparison of divorce rates in different years is difficult to make as the marriage rate is also declining, inevitably contributing to the downward trend of the rate of divorces. The fact that the marriage rate is decreasing could be interpreted as a solid avowal of Giddens' hypothesis. However, equally persuasive is the hypothesis that various structural and cultural features may contribute to lower marriage rates. Examples of this include the changing role of women, particularly in the labour market, and the creation of a welfare system that militates against absolute poverty. These factors remove women's economic imperative to marry of previous decades. In addition, there is also widespread cultural acceptance of cohabitation as well as divorce, thus allowing for more fluid relationships.

With these limitations in mind, it is nevertheless useful to consider the rate of divorce in the current economic crisis. The current recession started in the UK in the first quarter of 2008 and lasted until the summer of 2009. The limited recovery was short-lived, with a 'double dip' recession starting in the last quarter of 2011. The divorce rate in 2009 was lower than in preceding years, at 10.5 per 1,000 of the married population compared with the highest rate in 1994 of 14.2 per 1,000 of the married population. The number of marriages is on the decline and one of the common explanations for this is the growing expense of both marriage and divorce. The low rate of divorce in 2009 is commonly assumed in part, at least, to be impacted by the economic recession, so that people who might have divorced are staying together because of the costs associated with separation and falling property prices. Research from a number of countries has found that adverse economic conditions, particularly when moving from employed to unemployed status (rather than long-term employment), and particularly for men, generate conflict in intimate relationships (Glen and Coleman, 2009). At the start of the current recession, more 'male' jobs in manufacturing and construction were lost. This therefore indicates that the impact of the recession is more profound in working-class relationships. This was also found by Wilcox (2009) in his study in the United States (US), which illustrated the higher vulnerability of divorce in couples with a high-school education only compared with college-educated graduates. Other contributory factors in relationship breakdown are:

- conflict about money matters;
- stress arising from having less money;
- negative impact on self-esteem;
- a shift in gender roles and expectations of men to make a greater contribution to household chores (Glen and Coleman, 2009).

In contrast with 2009, the divorce rate for 2010 was elevated, indicating that the current recession may have contributed to an increase in divorce rates in that year

as there is often a time lag between the start of a recession and changes in divorce rates. It should also be noted that this is in the context of declining divorce rates in the period 2004–11, with the exception of 2010 (ONS, 2012). This was also found following the 1990–92 recession, where divorce rates increased noticeably in 1993 (ONS, 2012). Hence, it appears that recessions and attendant economic hardship impact on divorce rates, but that there is a time lag during recessions to allow for the recovery to begin as this optimises household resources. This suggests that financial problems are an important aspect of divorce but that the timing of divorce is context dependent (see also Roberts, 2009, for similarities in the US context).

What the empirical evidence therefore suggests is that the pure relationship has not developed in the way that Giddens postulated. The current economic recession is reported to have had a significant impact on personal relationships and therefore questions the fundamental premise of the pure relationship. The salience of economics and gender roles still appears to exert a powerful influence on intimate relationships and these are far from being ‘dissolved’. It could therefore be suggested that perhaps pure relationships, if they exist, are largely the prerogative of the rich who are immune to recessions and more protected than poorer people from economic pressures. These arguments are in line with previous critiques, for example Jamieson (1999) who provides a powerful and cogent argument against the Giddensian pure relationship. Three key interrelated arguments highlighted by Jamieson are used to illuminate the central concerns of this article:

- First, Jamieson argues that the enduring nature of structural inequalities is inadequately addressed in Giddens’ work. The recent evidence presented above of contributory factors in relationship difficulties in times of economic recession continues to highlight the centrality of structural influences on personal lives. Feminist scholars have been at the forefront of articulating the interrelated nature of the private and public spheres. These arguments appear to be as important today as when they were mooted.
- Second, Jamieson, along with Morgan (1996), argues that an over-determined approach to relationality can work to obscure the power relations inherent in personal relationships. Jamieson also disputes Giddens’ notion that democratising intimate relationships would lead to a radical transformation of society. Although equality may be achievable in individual heterosexual relationships, this will not impact on wider societal issues such as pay differentials between men and women or gendered labour markets.
- Third, Jamieson argues that Giddens draws on a highly therapeutic discourse in his characterisation of the pure relationship, which is problematic in that therapeutic discourses may in themselves reinforce the existing social order. Further, the overtly Euro-American characterisation of the pure relationship has not been sufficiently analysed despite Britain being a multicultural society (see Smart and Shipman, 2004).

## **Contextual choice**

Based on their empirical work with three minority ethnic communities (Indian, Pakistani and Irish families) Smart and Shipman (2004) illustrate the importance of kinship and family ties. Rather than the fluid or contingent relationships posited by

both Giddens (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), Smart and Shipman illustrate that marriage decisions in the communities they looked at are not made solely on the basis of what two individuals want – indeed, the issue of choice is not purely individual, but itself involves engagement with cultural traditions and varying degrees of respect for, or identification with, religious affiliations and histories of migration. Contextual choice is therefore central to such decision making compared with more individualised notions of choice.

Contextual choice is also important in understanding the dynamics of arranged marriages. Arranged marriages can appear alien to Euro-American eyes as they explicitly involve from a very early stage the importance of family, kin and community. The collectivist and multidimensional nature of decision making in such relationships is often misunderstood as a somewhat 'backward' tradition of marriage practice that is yet to catch up with the West's more liberated form of marriage decisions. In response to this, Smart and Shipman (2004: 496) suggest a continuum from choice and decision making based on strong kinship ties at one end to choices and decisions based on weak kinship ties on the other and where the context of decision making is family and kinship ties. The continuum does not attach a value judgement as to which end of the continuum is 'better' for decision making regarding marriage and this is a helpful intervention in equalising different forms of marriage practices.

Despite the problematisation offered above, there are elements of the pure relationship that endure, namely romantic love. As highlighted above, Giddens acknowledged the place of romantic love as a constituent of pure relationships, but argued that pure relationships departed from traditional notions of romantic love towards confluence. Confluent love assumes both emotional as well as sexual equality and satisfaction, does not assume permanency and breaks the tie of romantic love to heterosexuality (Giddens, 1992). In contrast, romantic love is cast as seeking the one special person for life, with heroes and heroines dominating the cultural imaginary. Marriage rates in the UK are declining, yet the narrative of romantic love is strong and its qualities appear to have endured the test of time. It is still considered to be a pre-cursor to marriage.

Arranged marriages are often assumed to be devoid of romantic love (at least at the outset) and more focused on contextual choice as argued by Smart and Shipman (2004). In addition, arranged marriages frequently take on a more practical orientation and can be thought of as a form of introduction agency as prospective families within a specific community exchange what is currently called 'biodata'. Biodata can be thought of as an autobiographical curriculum vitae where certain criteria are essential – such as religion, language or ethnic community – thus eliminating people who do not fit the essential criteria. Biodata also include photographs of self, job or profession, number of siblings and whether they are married or not, interests, hobbies etc. This may seem a rather reductionist and impersonal manner in which to approach personal relationships and on the surface is in stark contrast to normative Euro-American cultural practices of marriage. Arguably, it is the emptiness of love and the privileging of rationality that perhaps jars most with Euro-American sensibilities and which work to position arranged marriages as alien and other.

Importantly, in arranged marriages, love does not always have to be present at the outset of the relationship as it is assumed that love will grow and develop over time. The conceptualisation of love here includes both romantic love as well as the notion of commitment – not just to each other but also as part of a wider family and kinship

system. Hence, the yearning for intimate relationships to fill the void of isolation of modern life as invoked by, for example, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) is not easily transferable to a context where family and kinship ties dominate everyday personal life. Family and kinship ties are the central organising aspect of arranged marriages, but this does not mean that the idea of romantic love is absent.

There are two arenas in which South Asian arranged marriages can be seen to blur the boundary between romantic love and practical and kinship practices. The first such arena is Bollywood movies and the second is the exponential rise of websites (such as shaadi.com) for potential South Asian marriage partners. Each of these is addressed in turn alongside a discussion of what the use of internet dating sites and 'mail-order' marriages in Euro-American contexts say about romantic love.

### **Arranged marriage and romantic love: Bollywood**

Bollywood movies are widely watched in South Asia, in the Middle East and by the South Asian diaspora. Bollywood movies are an important form of cultural production, which reproduces its own normative assumptions about family, gender roles, home and nation. Within the diaspora such movies have several functions, including educational, which aim both to reinforce hegemonic narratives and also (albeit less frequently) to offer spaces of resistance where such hegemony is contested. Hence, Bollywood itself is in the process of a continual shift as it attempts to grapple with the impact of modernisation on the Indian public, as well as the different trajectories of the diaspora that it still hopes to capture via its films. The South Asian diaspora in the UK is not a passive consumer of Bollywood and has itself produced films that appeal not only to the diaspora, but also to Western audiences. Examples of such films include *Bhaji on the beach*, *East is East* and *Bend it like Beckham*. These films speak to the experiences of the diaspora, including experiences of racism, a longing for 'home' and the negotiation of identities, cultures and agency. However, these films are few and far between and Bollywood remains the mainstay of cultural consumption.

Within mainstream Bollywood, there is still a dominance of traditional family and marriage storylines. Their central message works to reinforce traditional family values and marriage is seen as central to this. As Kabir (2001) argues, although the backdrop of the movie might be in a Western city, the films revert to traditional Indian family values on the issue of marriage. The basic narrative involves two heterosexual people falling in love. The young people's families disapprove but come round in the end, or alternatively the young person sees the error of their ways. Most Bollywood movies are variations on this theme and good Bollywood movies often have colourful wedding scenes and popular song and dance routines. They represent weddings as a family and community affair rather than the more couple orientation of Euro-American weddings. The notion of marriage is strongly entrenched in South Asian contexts, but an ideal scenario includes romantic love and parental approval. These storylines permit romantic love in certain situations, with autonomy and choice heavily mediated by family. Central to the movies is aligning spouses' social class, religion, family background and culture and this is the context in which romantic love is permissible. In this way, Bollywood rarely departs from its normative 'matching' of class positions and tends to present a homogeneous Indian culture rather than the multitude of classes, cultures and languages that comprise India. This emphasis on homogeneity is partly commercial as the movies have to resonate with audiences with diverse cultures,



locations and positionings, from rural villages in India, to the diaspora and beyond. It is perhaps surprising that Bollywood movies are watched so widely in culturally diverse geographical spaces by local populations including Russians and Nigerians (Kabir, 2001). Bollywood cultural homogeneity is also based on traditional gender roles and generally tends to eschew the changing role of Indian women in domestic and transnational labour markets and the resultant growing professional, middle classes.

Within South Asian cultural studies, the film *Dilwale dhulaniya le jayenge* (*The brave-hearted takes a bride*) commonly known as *DDLJ* is frequently discussed as, unusually, it focuses on diasporic lives in London. Several films have since followed in this vein, but *DDLJ* was the first in 1995. What makes it unusual is the focus on diasporic Indians or non-resident Indians and its engagement with themes of 'home', belonging and marriage from the perspectives of non-resident Indians. Here, the patriarch of the family is a Punjabi Indian (Baldev) living in London and is nostalgic for home. It is clear that dislocation through migration and a sense of disconnection with England drives Baldev's ideas about who his daughter Simran should marry. 'Home' for him is still Punjab while for Simran 'home' is London. Baldev's sense of identity and belonging is firmly tied to Punjab and his desire for his future son-in-law to be a good Punjabi boy from his homeland is portrayed as a way of solidifying family and cultural bonds, filling the void of disconnection and maintaining Indian cultural values.

Bollywood's characterisation of the West is just as stereotypical as its portrayal of homogeneous India, discussed above. The essentialised view of the West is represented as a culture of loose morals, improper sexual behaviour, lack of respect for elders and consumption of alcohol, normally personified in the character of the 'bad woman' or vamp. These characteristics are considered to be threats to the essentialised construction of the morally superior Indian culture, central to which are family and Indian cultural values embodied in the desire for a Punjabi son-in-law (Kuljeet) in *DDLJ*. This ideal is counterpoised to the young British Asian man (Raj) that Simran falls in love with. As the plot unfolds, it transpires that Kuljeet is more interested in settling in the UK than in his intended, Simran. The characterisation of Kuljeet as scheming and devious for privileging his material gains over romantic love is notable. In contrast, Raj travels across continents not only to woo Simran, but also to prove to her father that he is a worthy son-in-law. Significantly, when Simran suggests that Raj and her run away to be together, it is Raj who refuses unless Simran's father agrees to their marriage – which he finally does. In this way, Raj reveals himself not only as a man in love (as in romantic love: crossing continents to acquire his bride) and deeply committed to Simran, but also one who demonstrates respect for his prospective father-in-law and thus a man who upholds traditional Indian values despite living outside India. At his core, therefore, Raj remains Indian, even if westernised. As Desai (2004: 134) notes, Raj's subjectivity is 'deterritorialised' as a 'good' westernised Indian and I argue that this opens up space for consideration of hybrid identities. It is this that makes the film significant as it begins a shift from essentialised to hybrid identities and fractures the normative assumptions of the West and India. What the film also highlights is that the motivation for Baldev's choice of Simran's husband is driven by a sense of loss and dislocation and while not condoning his attempts for this union to be formed, it is important to understand the emotional and structural terrain in his desires. Further, Simran's desires are divided between wanting to please her father and following her own heart. Within this narrative, contextual choice is helpful to understand the choices that are made by Baldev and Simran, but attention also needs to be paid to



the emotional processes that contribute to the eventual choice. Importantly, it is not just Simran's cultural identifications that are important, but her father's identifications too that instigate the topic of marriage.

The theme of romantic love is present throughout *DDLJ* albeit inflected through an Indian lens of what it means to be a good Indian – whether in India or abroad. Importantly, many Bollywood movies illustrate that narratives of romantic love are very much present in the Indian context within the confines discussed above. This therefore works to blur the boundary between 'arranged' and 'love' marriages by introducing and reiterating romantic love into the cultural lexicon. The second arena where romantic love is present is via Indian marriage websites, discussed next, alongside a consideration of western online dating websites and 'mail-order' brides. These spaces illustrate the importance of criteria and rationality in initial relationship formation and displace traditional notions of romance as the start to intimate relationships.

## Dating and matrimonial websites

The most well known of Indian marriage websites is shaadi.com. It has been in operation for over 15 years, reports having 20 million members and appears to be successful for South Asians seeking a marriage partner. *Shaadi* means marriage in a number of South Asian languages, including Hindi and Urdu. This makes it clear from the outset that the website is intended to introduce people looking for marriage rather than any other type of relationship (eg, cohabitation, extra-marital affairs etc). The 'stories' of love and marriage on shaadi.com are skewed to the success stories, as the website is highly unlikely to represent people who have had negative experiences meeting potential spouses via the website. Three observations emerge from my brief look at the website. It is striking that a number of marriages or plans to marry are between people living in different continents – that is, it is transnational in its reach. In these instances, the relationship initially develops via email, text, Skype and telephone and if the people involved consider they have found a potential marriage partner, a visit will be organised and a marriage entered into shortly after that. Parents will also Skype the intended as well as his/her family, thus combining modern technology with age-old traditions. One member on shaddi.com wrote:

I saw his profile and I knew he was the guy I've been waiting for so I sent him a request and he accepted it. Within a couple days we started talking to each other on phone for hours and we fell in love right away. He was in UK and I was in Canada and luckily I was traveling to UK where we met each other after 4 months of talking on the phone. He met my parents and I met his parents and things are going great. We are planning to get married next year. (Member 1)

The second observation is the way romantic love is significant in the success stories advertised on the website – in the quote above and in the following account:

I met my life partner on Shaadi.com where [name of potential groom] had expressed interest in me. Just within 7 days of interaction he proposed to me as if it was love marriage and I said yes to him. I never thought my

arrange marriage would turn into Love marriage and that I would get my dream boy. (Member 2)

For this person, it appears that the initial intention of using the website was to find a suitable match in terms of parental expectations, which rapidly transforms into romantic love, thus illustrating the slippage between love and arranged marriages. Linked to this, the third observation is on the brevity of the 'courtship' period. Both the accounts above indicate a relatively short timeframe to decide on a marriage partner once contact has been made. This is quite a different practice compared with Euro-American practices where long courtships often involving a period of cohabitation are commonplace. The search for the perfect partner in Euro-American contexts is temporally extended compared with South Asian practices. Here it appears that an interesting switch is taking place. Deciding to marry in the first flush of romantic love as in Indian practices can be argued to be foolhardy or irrational, given the strong association of romantic love with irrationality (being swept off one's feet, being madly in love etc) yet the influence of family exerts a powerful rationalising influence that helps to balance potentially rash decision making. In contrast, the long courtship period of Euro-American practices means that the initial rush of passion is tempered by the time a marriage takes place. More practical considerations enter the frame such as whether to get married particularly where the couple are ready to have children, the cost of a wedding, housing costs, financial arrangements (eg, tax, benefit or pension arrangements to secure the welfare of the couple and children) (eg, Carter, 2010). The privileged status of romantic love (particularly in the West) denies the ways in which practical concerns feature in contemporary marriages. The representation of arranged marriages as empty of love and Euro-American marriages as full of love is thus problematic as it appears that both sets of practices deploy both romantic love and practical and economic considerations in marriage decisions. Rather than conceptualising these practices as completely alien and other to each other, the discussion above indicates that there can be shared dimensions between romantic love and practical matters in different communities, albeit arrived at through different routes and different temporal frames.

Further, the use of online dating websites has dramatically increased in Europe and North America, with about 16 million users in the US in 2004 (Madden and Lenhart, 2006). Dating websites fall into two broad typologies:

- where users have to complete personality tests and are then matched to potential dates by the provider;
- where individuals generate their own profiles and assess other people's profiles themselves.

Heino et al's (2010) US study focused on the second of the typologies and found that the metaphor of the 'market' resonated with individuals who utilised the dating service. Online dating provided access to huge numbers of people and users sifted through various categories or preferences related to physical appearance, locality, employment etc. Respondents in the Heino et al study reported the process of online dating as akin to using a shopping catalogue and relying on specific criteria to ensure that they connected with people with similar interests and values. They were aware of the reductionist process that the functionality of the website induced, but used this

to filter people out, while acknowledging the imperfections of the process, including the commodification of self and others that dominated relationship initiation at the expense of the 'magic' of romantic relationships. Such a filtering process is also likely to be influenced by social positionings – hence a neutral term such as preferred 'location' on a dating website is already imbued with desire as different geographical areas (eg, more expensive) might be more coveted or desirable.

The analysis presented by Heino et al of the criteria-driven process of internet dating sites has much in common with practices of arranged marriages where similar criteria are drawn up from which to select potential suitors. While there are clearly differences based on the role of family, the similarities include 'biodata' or a personal profile, drawing up essential criteria (often class inflected) to aid selection, the role of rationality and the delaying of the 'magic' of romance.

A further arena in which a 'catalogue' approach, at least in relationship initiation, to searching for a marriage partner is the 'mail-order' bride. As Constable (2003) argues, the term 'mail-order' bride is considered offensive by those who are in such relationships because it assumes particular negative constructions of the men and women involved in such transnational relationships that are not always justified. Constable carried out an ethnographic study of US men marrying Chinese or Filipina women from China or the Philippines via online agencies who initiate what Constable terms a 'correspondence relationship'. In her consideration of the motivation of the protagonists, she found some accounts that disrupt the stereotypical constructions of such relationships. The common assumptions are that US men are interested in Chinese or Filipina women (Asian in the US nomenclature) as they are perceived to be delicate 'lotus blossoms': passive, docile, subservient and sexually alluring, while holding traditional family values. Their perceived passivity is also seen as leaving them open to exploitation or trafficking (Constable, 2003: 7). This is presented in stark contrast to the strident, assertive US woman. Constable did find many accounts that mapped onto these highly racialised, gendered and classed constructions, but she also found accounts from men that relayed a more nuanced understanding of the women they were corresponding with, including:

- their own dependence on their girlfriends when they went visited them abroad;
- recognition of the sense of disorientation and dislocation that their potential wives might experience on arrival in the US;
- a growing awareness of racism.

'Many came to question their presumptions about the privileges of race, nationality and gender in relation to the immigration process' (Constable, 2003: 7). The issue of immigration is central to many transnational marriages and this is discussed later.

Alternatively, Chinese and Filipina women are constructed as a 'dragon lady' – primarily motivated by the economic benefits of living in the US and thus as only interested in gaining settled immigration status in the US (Constable, 2003: 13). Through her careful analysis of face-to-face and online contact with the participants, Constable illustrates how the women were more than these constructions, demonstrating agency and choice and a desire for romantic and committed relationships, but where economic, material and cultural factors all had a bearing on building relationships. To note, is that some of the female participants had good jobs in their own countries, but were older and/or divorced and perceived that American

men would not hold their divorced status as an issue in the same way as local men might. Like arranged marriages, romantic love was not always deemed to be crucial at the start of the relationship as it was assumed that this would develop. The frisson of exchanged looks across a crowded room, the desire and longing, the sense that this is the one right person are hallmarks of the initial stages of traditional romantic relationships. The widespread use of internet dating sites and 'mail-order' brides works to challenge such notions.

### **'Importing' spouses, identity, belonging**

Within the UK, the European Union (EU) and the US, the 'importation' of spouses is viewed as highly problematic and the immigration processes associated with it are experienced as cumbersome and disempowering by those subject to them. Central to immigration processes for spouses in these diverse contexts are notions of ideal citizens, belonging and a suspicion of marriages with non-countrymen/women as well as marriage practices that are at odds with notions of romantic love (Wray, 2011). Within the UK, the state accepts the practice of arranged marriages compared with Nordic countries, which are highly critical of arranged marriages. These countries reassert much more strongly the idea of romantic love as the only form of acceptable marriage. Myradahl (2010) argues that privileging romantic love in Norway has become racialised and that this is most notable in Norwegian family reunification policies relating to marriage. There is greater scrutiny and approbation via immigration law where a Norwegian citizen chooses to marry a non-Norwegian citizen from the country of their parents' or grandparents' origin and this is aimed specifically at Norwegian youth of Pakistani heritage. Myradahl argues that these marriages are only seen as 'genuine' (via the immigration process) if they follow a traditional romantic love trajectory as this is consistent with Norwegian romantic practices and of the neoliberal autonomous citizen. Fair (2010) writes in a similar vein from a Danish context and purports that the privileging of romantic love works to automatically draw the boundaries of who is included and who is excluded in the category of 'Dane' and therefore who is considered to be a full Danish citizen. For example, it clearly does not include people who might have been born in Denmark but belong to a non-Danish ethnic group and have different marriage practices. The mobilisation of identity and belonging are thus central in European debates particularly on transnational marriage, which do not seem to allow for hybrid identities.

While the UK state is more accepting of arranged marriage, it has made it clear that these should ideally occur from within minority ethnic communities already settled in the UK, rather than 'importing' spouses from abroad (outside the EU). Hence, the problem within the UK is perceived as importation of spouses rather than the practice of arranged marriages per se. Indeed, concerns over incoming spouses are also problematised in cases of 'love' marriages. Incoming spouses are assumed to be unfamiliar with British culture, ways of life and gender relations, as less tolerant and in need of education in the British way of life. They are positioned as not belonging and as posing a problem for social integration and the immigration control agenda. Post 9/11, incomers from outside the EU specifically from Muslim countries are perceived as a security threat. These aspects are closely intertwined under the umbrella of citizenship:

- what it means to be a citizen;
- how the borders of citizenship and nationality should be regulated;
- what the qualities of an 'ideal' citizen are;
- the rights and responsibilities of citizenship;
- what the relationship between different social and ethnic groups should be.

While it is beyond the scope of this article to elaborate in detail on citizenship, discourses of citizenship appear central in the UK response to transnational marriages. Importantly, the concern over transnational marriage is closely related to immigration matters. The continual tightening of immigration and asylum legislation means that one of the only legitimate ways of obtaining settled status for non-EU citizens in the UK is via marriage. From the UK state's perspective, marriage is therefore the chink in the armour of an otherwise stringent and robust immigration policy. Hence, the regulation of marriage becomes an essential component of managing migration. Yet the idea of intervening in marriage decisions between a citizen and their choice of spouse presents a dilemma for liberal democratic states that pride themselves on values of freedom, autonomy, equality and tolerance.

Nevertheless, various barriers have been put into place to regulate and limit the number of incoming spouses including:

- increased powers for registrars to stop marriages that they consider suspicious;
- a requirement for the UK spouse to have sufficient financial resources to support their incoming partner so that the incomer will not be a drain on UK welfare resources;
- a requirement for the incomer to be able to speak and write English at a specified level;
- a requirement for the incomer to be able to undertake a 'Life in the UK' test as part of the process of gaining British citizenship.

Should the relationship break down within five years, the incoming spouse will generally be deported to their country of origin. Such external constraints work to shape personal relationships and to limit the freedoms extended to them, particularly regarding relationship breakdown and access to the welfare state within the first five years of marriage. Far from 'pure' relationships, via such arrangements the UK spouse (who acts as the sponsor) is afforded a large degree of control over their incoming spouse and has the potential to increase their spouse's dependency on them, thus writing in inequality in transnational marriages. It can therefore be argued that transnational marriages, in addition to the dimensions of structural inequalities highlighted by Jamieson (1999), also replicate traditional (global) North–South hegemonic power relations.

## Conclusion

The construction of arranged marriages as devoid of love and normative Euro-American practices as full of love has been disrupted by:

- illustrating narratives of romance, home and belonging in Bollywood movies and Indian internet matrimonial sites;
- highlighting how a long courtship period in Euro-American contexts can move from romance to practical concerns in the decision to marry;
- demonstrating how Euro-American marriage practices involving internet dating sites and 'mail-order' marriages use practical criteria in assessing potential partners.

These arenas work to blur the boundaries between love and alternative marriage practices.

Although romantic love is privileged in Euro-American contexts, this article illustrates that a more diverse set of practices is utilised, for example internet dating websites and correspondence marriages – at least at the start of the relationship. In these arenas, as well as in arranged marriages, the focus is on desirable qualities (personal and economic) of the potential spouse and of self-presentation in the form of profiles or 'biodata'. Criteria are devised to sift out unsuitable partners and these criteria are inflected by racialised, gendered and class positioning. These inflections imply that 'choice' is already always contextual rather than an unfettered individualism proffered in fairytale romances. The criteria lists can be interpreted as a rational attempt in relationship initiation, from which romantic love and commitment can grow. However, authors in this field point to the embarrassment that people experience in utilising internet dating sites and correspondence relationships as traditional romantic relationships are still perceived as superior (eg, Constable, 2003).

The increasingly widespread use of these methods in the West to meet life partners challenges the hegemony of romantic love, while simultaneously drawing on it. What these different forms of marriage practices demonstrate is that there is a dynamic relationship between love and material conditions. To focus initially on the material is not necessarily to debar romantic love as even in normative enactments of romantic love the decision to marry is influenced by the material. Further, the availability of contraception, the expansion of the welfare state, the changing role of women particularly in the labour market, divorce settlements and cultural acceptance of cohabitation and divorce all make it possible to leave relationships. Thus, far from being a matter of unfettered individual choice or confluent relationships, both cultural and societal shifts provide the conditions to make cohabitation and separation a feasible option.

Within normative Euro-American discourse, arranged marriages are posited as being devoid of romantic love, while the Indian context discussed above points to the importance placed on romantic love through popular culture such as Bollywood movies. It has also been argued that in addition to romantic love, economic and practical concerns are central in both South Asian and Euro-American contexts in decisions to marry, albeit temporally and spatially very different. The discussion presented above on the similarities and differences between love and arranged marriages, as well as a discussion of internet dating sites and 'mail-order' brides, help to further dissolve the distinctions that have tended to see arranged marriages as devoid of love and love marriages as full of love.

Lastly, the article has not only interrogated different forms of marriage practices, but also reiterated the importance of structural relations as mediating the intense individualism embedded and called forth within practices of romantic love marriages or confluent relationships. In addition to Jamieson's (1999) critique of Giddens (1992)

on the ground of social inequalities based on gender and class, the discussion above has illustrated the centrality of immigration practices in shaping the ability to form and end marriages. Immigration policy in the UK, many EU countries and the US shapes who the state considers to be an ideal spouse and the way in which displays of love should be performed and evidenced (Wray, 2011). The fluidity and confluence argued by Giddens is thus severely curtailed by such structures. Myradahl (2010) argues that the use of immigration policy in Norway (and arguably in other states) rests on a racialised and nationalistic view that the only acceptable trajectory into marriage is via romantic love, if one is to be considered 'truly' Norwegian or Danish as also argued by Fair (2010). This conflation of marriage practices and identity does not appear to permit hybrid identities – that one could simultaneously be Norwegian and Pakistani.

In the UK, the government has introduced a plethora of measures to curb marriage migration, including the higher age (18 years) at which UK citizens can marry non-EU citizens (compared with a lower marriage age – 16 years – if marrying EU citizens). In July 2012, the current coalition government raised the income threshold requirement of UK citizens wishing to marry non-EU citizens substantially to £18,600, rising to £22,400 where there is one child and an additional £2,400 for each additional child (UKBA, 2012). These income thresholds alongside the requirement to demonstrate the intention to live together for at least five years and a higher standard of English than is currently required, all point to the state as truly policing love across boundaries.

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