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**To cite this article:** Eleonore Kofman (2023) Integration Discourses, the Purification of Gender and Interventions in Family Migrations, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 46:14, 3037-3057, DOI: [10.1080/01419870.2023.2166791](https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2023.2166791)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2023.2166791>



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Published online: 09 Feb 2023.



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# Integration Discourses, the Purification of Gender and Interventions in Family Migrations

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## ABSTRACT


In a critique of integration, Schinkel (2018) highlights the purification of class and race which evacuates explanatory variables from studies of integration as a concept and practice. Surprisingly gendered purification is left out. This article argues that a range of gender issues presenting migrant women, especially from Muslim countries, as being deficient in modernity and contributing to poor social reproduction through their family practices and transnational ties, were at the forefront of political calls for intervention in family lives and the implementation of integration measures in the past two decades. In part this reflects an attempt to alter the class composition of family migrants and bring them closer to middle-class norms and values. Such reductionist and homogenizing representations continue despite the complexity of contemporary family migrations and practices, reinforcing the continuing purification and simplification of categories of analysis in discussions of racialized gender and classed integration in European societies.

**ARTICLE HISTORY** Received 21 January 2022; Accepted 6 December 2022

**KEYWORDS** Purification; integration; gender; class; Muslims; family migration

## Introduction

More reflexive approaches to the study of integration have advocated a shift beyond a normalization discourse to disentangle research from prevailing categories and migration policymaking (Moret, Andrikopoulos, and Dahinden 2021). This has led to methodological strategies to de-naturalize and de-ethnicize integration (Amelina and Faist 2012; Levitt 2012). One of the steps it would entail is to cease reducing migrants to nothing but their culture, undifferentiated by socio-economic positions, and which for many demarcates them as being alien in the societies in which they are living. Indeed, separating out migrants and their descendants from the economic, social and

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political processes affecting the whole of society could be considered a failure of integration (Korteweg 2017).

In a hard-hitting critique of integration and the way the concept is used to categorize individuals into those who belong and those who do not form part of society, Willem Schinkel (2018) highlighted the purification of class and race from studies of integration as a concept and practice which sustains a classed and raced form of domination.<sup>1</sup> Purification refers to the absence of certain explanatory variables to account for differences in boundaries between those who require integration and those who do not, that is, where some are dispensed from integrating, while others are not. Dispensation of integration means that white citizens are not researched or described in terms of their “integration” compared to those who are supposedly in need of it, and who receive attention on these grounds. For the latter, “ethnicity”, generally stands in for “race” and becomes the only explanatory element in classifying and monitoring. Both in categories of practice and categories of analysis (Brubaker 2013), economic factors are excluded from any explanatory role in the differentiation between degrees of “integration”. Effectively racialized groups are reduced to an homogeneous and unchanging ethnic identity from which all their practices stem.

Yet while class-based variables may be absent from research on integration, class permeates discourses for the need for integration and imposition of increasingly restrictive immigration policies to achieve these aims in relation to individuals and their descendants. Racialized groups are exhorted to integrate into middle-class practices of the nation (Anderson 2013; Block 2015). Some suggest that class has become an unacceptable criterion of discrimination in contemporary democratic societies, and hence only appears in official policy in the form of proxies such as economic resources, cultural values, education, individual “merit” or skill (Bonjour and Chauvin 2018) as the basis of sifting between deserving and undeserving migrants (Bonjour and Chauvin 2018). However, the relationship between tougher immigration policies seeking to limit entry to those with economic and social resources and more demanding integration policies is evident (Elrick and Winter 2018). Thus, the (economically) weak citizen with a precarious relationship to the labour market need not apply to be a sponsor. The ideal immigrant will be able to adopt the modern liberal and liberated values of middle-class citizens in their country of destination.

What is surprising in these critiques of integration is the absence of any discussion of the role of gender discourses. Whilst it may be mentioned as a variable (Favell 2022) in critical approaches to the concept of integration in liberal democracies, there is no exploration of how central gendered discourses have been in the elaboration and implementation of integration policies and the creation of boundaries between those who are capable of belonging to national societies and those who should be excluded. The

threats to modernity from supposedly uncontrolled transnational family migration primarily by women from Muslim countries have also served to represent integration as being in crisis (Vacchelli 2017) and in need of being urgently addressed and acted upon.

One exception in the failure to take gender into account in integration discourses is the gender and migration literature (Anthias 2013; Anthias, Kontos, and Morokvasic-Muller 2013; Anthias and Pajnik 2014; Kofman, Saharso, and Vacchelli 2015; Kontos 2014; Korteweg 2017; Korteweg and Triadafilopoulos 2013). Building on this literature, I highlight the centrality of gender from the early 2000s in shaping the contours of integration imperatives and activating interventions into family migration in a number of North Western European countries, such as Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, Norway and the UK.

In the following section, I outline the emergence and development of family migration as a site of intervention required to safeguard “dominant norms” of a modern and liberal society from the threats of imported and problematic practices. Section 3 develops in more detail three overlapping discourses concerning diverse aspects of gendered integration focussing primarily on Muslim women, generally represented as a homogeneous group with completely different practices in private and public spheres. Incompatible practices of early and forced marriages, inability to speak the language and unwillingness to participate in the labour market have been deployed as arguments for the introduction of language tests, knowledge of the society of entry and attachment to the country. In contrast, other non-Western women, who migrated for labour market purposes, such as Filipinas or Latin Americans, or who married native men, such as Thai women (Fresnoza-Flot and Ricordeau 2017) or skilled spouses, have not been discussed in terms of integration.

Section 4 discusses the shift in recent years to concerns about sponsors, a majority of whom are male, in an attempt to further restrict transnational marriages using class-based interventions, such as minimum income requirements, to make it more difficult for the economically weak to benefit from it. As immigration policies have become more discriminatory (Ellermann 2020) with stratifying effects, sponsors of family members, including all citizens in some European countries, need to demonstrate stable and regular economic resources and an ability to be independent of state support (Kofman 2018; Staver 2015). On the basis of evidence highlighting the changing stratification of migrant groups, Section 5 argues for going beyond a homogenizing representation of migrants and their economic inclusion and socio-cultural practices and take into account the changing dynamic of migrant groups in gender and class terms and complexity of strategies shaping their lives.

## Migrant women, integration and family migration

An historical reading of the implementation of early integration measures following the challenge to multiculturalism in the late 1980s and 1990s clearly indicates how migrant women in a number of North Western European countries were accused of failing to integrate and were invoked as the reason to impose integration measures on those who sought to immigrate (Christou and Kofman 2022; Kofman, Saharso, and Vacchelli 2015). In the same way that Schinkel (2018) castigates the failure to apply socio-economic variables to research on migrant integration, public debates about migrant women's failure to integrate were couched in terms of social and cultural practices and the threat their lack of modernity posed to societies. Though clearly Muslim women were the principal target in these European states, the heterogeneity of migrant women's experiences was at the same time set aside, thereby reinforcing racialized gendering. The integration they were expected to aim towards was based on an unchanging and essentialist notion of culture (Anthias 2013; Haapajärvi 2022).

Whilst there are a number of studies of the portrayal of migrant women and their "problematic" integration in specific countries, there has been less general reflection on the centrality of gender and its intersectional dimensions in discourses of integration and the making of integration policies with the major exception, as previously noted, of the field of gender and migration. There have also been some general analyses of the relationship between family migration and integration which have included the role of gender relations (Bonjour and Kraler 2015; Eggbo and Brekke 2019). Integration measures were directed primarily towards family migrants, of whom about two-thirds were women. The imperative for integration policies was underpinned by a number of key themes related to socio-cultural practices as demonstrations of modernity in which targeted populations were accused of being deficient. The first one covers non-participation in the labour market which would match expectations of gender equality and satisfying family life (see Haapajärvi 2022); secondly the consequent socio-economic marginalization and formation of an ethnic underclass leading to the reproduction of future citizens with weak prospects (Bonjour and Duyvendak 2018) by poorly educated mothers; and thirdly illiberal and often primitive family practices incompatible with liberal societies, such as early and forced marriages, honour killings, female genital mutilation, and transnational marriages, especially with cousins and kin, which has been a special concern in Denmark. Although migrant women, in general, were often depicted as poorly educated (Ghorashi 2021), Muslim women, in particular, were targeted as the problematic figure of integration, while gay emancipation was mobilized to frame Muslims as non-modern subjects, especially in the Netherlands (Mepschen, Duyvendak, and Tonkens 2010).

From the 1990s and early 2000s, concerns about the conditions of diverse populations emerged forcefully in a number of Western European societies, eventually leading to the attempt to anchor migrant populations in the supposed core values of the nation-state and management of immigration, especially of family migration. Cultural analysis of inequality (Alund 1999) and cultural racism postulated the inability of certain groups as not being able to fit into European societies as a result of traditional cultural traits, including backward gender and sexual relations, an argument which was already forcefully promulgated by far-right parties such as the *Front National* in France (Kofman 1998). Security concerns post-2001 led to preoccupations with whether diversity could be sustained in modern welfare states (Goodhart 2004) and an “excess of alterity” supported (Sartori 2002 cited in Grillo 2008). This period also generated the problematization of the culture of ethnic groups, immigrants and refugees, in particular of immigrant women as bearers of backward traditions and questioning of their ability to participate in the public sphere due to patriarchal community structures. Racialized women were depicted as the victim of a traditional culture in which the dominant group is presented as tolerant in contrast to the intolerant other. A climate of insecurity provoked a fear of disintegration with policy changes directed towards Muslim populations in particular.

Demands for conformity to a homogeneous cultural norm of the real Dane and the need to demonstrate loyalty were enacted most clearly in Denmark. The Social Democratic Party stipulated in 2000 that those wishing to benefit from family reunification (primarily from Morocco and Turkey) would have to show that they had more attachment or allegiance to Denmark than their country of origin (Jeholm and Bissenbakke 2019). Though considered by France, the Netherlands and the UK, an attachment condition was not adopted. However, in the Netherlands, Germany and France too integration measures were equated with espousal of core Dutch, German or French values. In Southern European countries, such as Italy and Spain, the demand for social reproductive labour in the absence of public provision meant that female labour migration from Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union was important as from the 1990s (Anthias and Lazaridis 2000), which meant family migration was not as significant a proportion of total migration at the end of the twentieth century.

It should be remembered that family migration, though still receiving little scholarly attention until about 20 years ago in Europe (Kofman 2004), was the primary source of permanent settlement. The migrant family itself was represented as being at the root of migrants’ failure to integrate due to the practices which underpin it (Grillo 2008) or as a producer of deviant norms and practices (Bonjour and de Hart 2013). The “third country” national family in the European Union was seen as being out of control, and at odds with the pillars of secularism and gender equality, upon which a liberal society

defines itself. The need for intervention and resocialization (Ruffer 2011) legitimated immigration restrictions. Hence the growing interest in family migration, integration requirements and their impact (Bonjour and Kræler 2015; Eggbø and Brekke 2019).

The “othering” of the “migrant” family is highly gendered. Migrant women are portrayed as victims of economic deprivation and patriarchal oppression while migrant men are represented as violent oppressors (Block 2021; Bonjour and de Hart 2013). High and continuing levels of family migration, especially transnational marriages with populations from the country of origin, were seen as reproducing undesirable practices in the present and the future, and thereby sustaining a population living parallel lives, if not in ghettos (Casey 2016). As a recent negative comment on integration problems in the UK asserts:

One reason for [integration problems - language, women’s employment] being most pronounced among people from Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic backgrounds is that they tend to live somewhat more separately from the mainstream, both physically and in terms of social norms, and are two of the groups most likely to bring in spouses from their ancestral homes, especially the Pakistani group. This produces the so-called “first generation in every generation issue, with full integration constantly being restrained by one parent with a foot in another country.” (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities Report 2021 (The “Sewell Report”))

“The compelling of compliance with the core (westernized/democratic) values of the respective society are summarized as the basics of gender and diversity and equality and freedom of speech” (Christou and Kofman 2022, 101). In an assimilationist understanding of cultural negotiations of values and expectations, women’s rights and compliance with particular understandings of gender equality are often instrumentalized for a synthetic subordination (Kontos 2014; Kostakopoulou 2014). In France, although there had been considerable social intervention targeting migrant women in the 1980s, the headscarf affair in 1989 involving young Muslim women of North African origin, catalyzed discussions on women’s potential roles in integration arising from practices incompatible with the country’s fundamental principles, such as equality between the sexes (Kofman 1997). As a result, an integration contract for those in the country was introduced by the Socialist Prime Minister Michel Rocard in 1990 and an institution the Haut Conseil à l’Intégration set up in 1989 following a decade of increasing interest in migrant women who became the target of social intervention in disadvantaged areas, especially those of North African women of Muslim background. As multiculturalism began to be critiqued,<sup>2</sup> it was replaced by integration discourses and policies in the 1990s directed towards migrant communities in the country, integration measures would shift towards more individually oriented policies.

From the 2000s, these measures sought to reduce levels of family migration through pre-entry integration tests in Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and the UK (Kofman, Saharso, and Vaccelli 2015). Such tests may demand considerable economic and cultural capital to pass the required language level and knowledge of society (Erick and Winter 2018; Goodman 2011).

More recently, Sarah Farris (2017, 4) coined the term femonationalism to capture the “exploitation of feminist themes by nationalists and neoliberals in anti-Islam campaigns and the participation of certain feminists and femocrats in the stigmatization of Muslim men under the banner of gender equality”. Through the study of France, Italy and the Netherlands for the period 2000–2013, Farris notes a convergence among different political projects within the context of a neoliberal political economy. In these countries, far-right nationalist movements had either gained power, as in Italy, or become influential and had used concerns about gender equality to modernize their agendas in the past two decades. So too, Farris argues, have some feminists and liberals invoked gender equality to frame Islam as a quintessentially misogynistic religion and target Muslim women in particular for integration. Though primarily attacking the argument of the lack of cultural integration, Farris also highlights the push for women held back in the household by patriarchal practices to be economically integrated through social reproductive sectors in which there exist severe labour shortages, especially in Italy (Farris and Scrinzi 2018). What is most distinctive about the criticism of Muslim women’s subordination and call for emancipation are right-wing nationalist movements which have traditionally espoused strongly demarcated roles for men and women where the latter are located as reproducers of families and the nation. Nevertheless raising gender issues concerning immigrant populations was not new for such movements. These were addressed by the *Front National* in France in the 1980s when it critiqued immigrant cultures for the ways their men treated women whilst at the same time attacking French women for failing to respect traditional sexual divisions and exhorting them to stay at home (Kofman 1998). Despite its espousal of the defence of women’s rights and gender equality in order to bolster its support from its growing female electorate under Marine le Pen, who stood in the Presidential elections in 2012<sup>3</sup>, the FN continued nevertheless to target migrant men and their misogynistic attitudes in its anti-immigration programmes (Farris 2017, 34–37).

In the next section, I outline three key overlapping discourses relating to problematic integration by migrant, largely Muslim, women. Overall these discourses represent Muslim migrant women and their communities in particular as not belonging to European societies (Korteweg 2017), as being deficient in a number of ways (Block 2021) that make them unworthy of having the right to settle and, above all, the ability to reproduce future



citizens and the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997). Their supposed lack of participation, disproportionate call on social resources and importing of problematic practices are in turn deployed to support measures that limit family migration and promote the need for integration tests, both at the border to limit entry and for those seeking to reside in a country. Portraying integration as being in crisis, as Vacchelli (2017) does in a reading of continuing British concerns (Casey 2016) over Muslim women as being inherently anti-modern and ill-equipped to live in a modern society, serves to frame the diagnosis of the present malaise (see themes in section 3) and prescriptions for future strategies. Underpinning this analysis and consequent intervention to preserve common norms and tackle the failures of integration is a harkening back to a golden age (Korteweg 2017) when society was simple (Kofman 1998).

### Discourses of gendered integration

- (i) The first theme highlighted **gender inequality** in relation to work where migrant women have low rates of participation in the labour market which has generally been the core element of equality (Eggbø and Brekke 2019). In Scandinavia, the emphasis on emancipation and independence was to be achieved through the labour market (Eggbø 2010). A satisfying family life would be achieved by women working and independently earning their own income (Bech, Borevi, and Mouritsen 2017) and where work was an integral part of being a good citizen. This became more closely connected with reducing welfare dependence in the early 2000s in Denmark (Rytter 2019), though in some countries, such as the UK, welfare dependence was generally a prominent concern. Little attention has been paid to the discrimination encountered by migrant women in the labour market or the level of participation of different groups of them (Korteweg and Triadafilopoulos 2013). Attention has rather been directed towards the low level of participation by Muslim women in the UK from Bangladesh and Pakistan and in Germany and the Netherlands from countries such as Morocco and Turkey. At the same time, gender equality has been promoted as the model to aspire to for prospective migrants compared to the supposed backwardness of the countries from which spouses come. Rottmann (2022, 655) argued that one of the purposes of German pre-integration courses held in Istanbul for prospective Turkish spouses was an emphasis on gender equality behaviour and policies in Germany which served to increase the students' modernity and belonging in their new nation. It could be interpreted as a form of biopolitical governance to enhance Turkish migrants' capacity for cultured, modern membership through

fostering their self-cultivation of national (German) and middle-class ideals (Elrick and Winter 2018). Acceptance of the prevailing gender ideology and norms of the majority population may be used as the indicator of successful integration, as in the case of the Netherlands for example (Maliapaard and Alba 2018).

- (ii) The second theme involved the **failure of integration** due to socio-economic marginalization and the formation of an ethnic underclass impacting on the reproduction of future citizens, arising in part from poorly educated spouses. As mothers, they do not have the requisite skills to educate their children to succeed in society and hence contribute to the continuing reproduction of socio-economic inequalities (Joppke 2007). The motto “if you educate a woman, you educate a family” was invoked in the Dutch PAVEM Commission (Participation of Ethnic Minority Women) (Prins and Saharso 2008) which was set up in 2003 by Rita Verdonk, the Minister of Integration and Immigration at the time. Dutch parliamentary debates noted that the marginalization of specific population groups could be passed from generation to generation, thereby requiring the need to ensure that women as parents have a better starting position in the Netherlands (Bonjour and de Hart 2013; Kirk 2010). These arguments underpinned the introduction of integration tests requiring a knowledge of Dutch language and society prior to entry. The reinforcement of the integration of mothers for the future of their children was also enunciated in German debates (Block 2021, 387).

More generally the theme of the social reproduction of family members (love, marriage, parenthood, fertility) as future citizens (Christou and Kofman 2022, 103) would implicitly underpin a series of regulatory controls and policing over intimate and family relationships seeking to steer their belonging to the nation (Bonizzoni 2018.) Problematizing deficits of integration was deployed as an argument to impose more restrictive policies on family members who were not seen as proper members of society which increasingly encompassed “ethnic minority” citizens in addition to migrants. Interviews in Germany with politicians and civil servants about the 2007 migration reform reveal their negative views of ethnic minorities in Germany as uneducated and prone to abuse welfare provisions (Block 2021) which, as we have previously noted, was ascribed to low levels of employment.

- (iii) The third theme focussed on **family practices** incompatible with liberal societies and the formation of couples through transnational and cross-border marriages (Christou and Kofman 2022, 104). Western “liberal” and open societies had to be protected from patriarchal and traditional gender roles where the body of the female Muslim migrant

served to demarcate the boundary between the civilized Westerner and the uncivilized illiberal outsider (Kirk 2010; Razack 2004). On the other hand, Muslim men were portrayed as being responsible for women's isolation and submissiveness and were accused of behaving badly in the private sphere and in public spaces i.e. their masculinity is stigmatized (Pratt Ewing 2008 on Germany; Razack 2004 on Norway; Scheibelhofer 2012 on Austria and on the Netherlands see Huizinga 2022).

The illiberal practices, mentioned above, included forced marriages, honour killings and transnational marriages with cousins, the latter being a notable concern in Denmark. Transnational marriages more generally were deemed to contribute to the creation of parallel societies and continuing segregation (Casey 2016; Wray 2011), a theme that also surfaced in debates around legislation relating to family reunification in Germany (Block 2021).

In Scandinavia, there was widespread agreement that the problem of failing integration lay in the laxity of family reunification policies (Schmidt 2011) and high levels of transnational marriages. Imported wives and intra-ethnic marriages have been represented as an indicator of deficient or failed integration (Block 2021; Ünsal 2007). Thus family migration became the terrain for the control of cultural differences, initially at the stage of admission, but then extending to subsequent stages of permanent residence and citizenship (Christou and Kofman 2022, 104). Forced marriage, with its links to cousin and kin marriage, also played a central role in arguments for the raising of the age of marriage in many of these countries (Block 2015; Kofman, Saharso, and Vacchelli 2015) as in Austria (21 years in 2009), Denmark (24 years in 2003) and the Netherlands (21 years in 2006).<sup>4</sup> The attempt to respond to forced marriages generated demands for language proficiency to be established prior to entry (Goodman 2011). Ann Cryer, a British Labour MP from 1997 to 2010 for a constituency with a large Muslim Asian population, made a direct connection between arranged marriages, difficulties in learning English and the success of different ethnic communities in the UK, that led her to call for English tests (Kofman, Saharso, and Vacchelli 2015). In Germany too it was argued that those caught up in forced marriages were prevented from leading an independent life (Yurdakul and Korteweg 2013) and resisting parental authority and other family pressures because of poor language proficiency. In Denmark, politicians conceived of forced marriage as primitive and "un-Danish" with no place in the country (Schmidt 2011, 362–363) and hence considered intervention in the private sphere as an appropriate measure that would help to ensure that migrants conform to prevailing social norms (Fog Olwig 2011).

Generally in countries such as Austria, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and the UK, forced marriages, age of marriage and marriage with cousins served to target Muslim women amid calls for the

implementation of pre-entry language and knowledge of country tests. These were introduced from 2002 onwards in Denmark and in 2004 in the Netherlands. In Norway, the attack on forced marriages did not lead to restrictions on spouses (Eggbø 2010) but restrictions were later applied in 2010 through minimum income requirements. Hence states sought to slow down and reduce family migration, and especially marriage migration, through a series of measures which would restrict and make entry for spouses far more selective and transnational marriages more difficult.

Transnational marriages in general have received a hostile reception from many politicians on grounds of it reproducing a continual failed integration (see theme 2) for those who sought partners in their countries of origin or of their parents. Though an attitude shared with other countries, in Denmark the stringent attachment rule (Bissenbakker 2019) demonstrates a fixation with transnational marriages by minority ethnic groups (van Kerckem et al. 2013). From 2000 to 2018, the Danish attachment requirement stated that family reunification in Denmark could only be granted if the spouses' combined attachment to Denmark was stronger than the spouses' combined attachment to any other country (Ministry of Integration 2002 [L152] §9, part 7). Originally designed as a means of attacking forced marriages by the Social Democrats, it became a tool to link national belonging to a juridical tool regulating family reunification (Jeholm and Bissenbakke 2019), and thus a means of producing the desirable and good family (Moret, Andrikopoulos, and Dahinden 2021). Attachment was evaluated through a number of criteria, including the length and continuance of the sponsor's prior residence in Denmark, the presence of other family members in the country, the couple's language skills and education, and/or labour market participation. Extended visits to other countries as well as the presence of children and other family members abroad were weighted negatively (Block 2015). The attachment criteria was the main reason for refusing family reunification applications (Rytter 2010). Though struck down by a European Court of Human Rights judgement in 2016 for its ethnic discrimination between those born Danish and those who acquired it later in life, it was replaced by a new Aliens Immigration Act in 2018 with stronger integration requirements.

### **Targeting sponsors**

The first round of restrictions, outlined above, had targeted the selection of spouses, but a subsequent set of restrictions with far harsher economic criteria, was introduced in addition to the language and knowledge of society tests for spouses. These restrictions aimed at reducing the number of sponsors able to bring in non-EU spouses and children, and often deploying the argument of promoting integration. Unlike for spouses, here the majority

of sponsors were male. Minimum income criteria have been introduced in Belgium, Finland, France, the Netherlands (2004), Norway (2010) and the UK (2012). In the latter three countries these requirements apply to citizens as well. Though Denmark does not stipulate a minimum income, there are other economic criteria, such as employment and a financial guarantee, to qualify for family reunification (Bech, Borevi, and Mouritsen 2017). In addition there are other costs, such as administrative charges and visas which add considerably to the financial burden for the sponsor.

These economic criteria and financial burdens have meant that access to family migration has become a matter of class (Elrick and Winter 2018; Kofman 2018; Staver 2015; Ypi 2018). Only a better class of citizen has the right to participate in a transnational marriage. Unlike the earlier integration measures largely directed towards female migrants, such class-based criteria encompass the poorly performing male and female citizen (Anderson 2019) who has not earned the right to the family of their choice. Love in this instance is not enough (Sumption and Vargas-Silva 2019); money is needed to have the right to access love and live in the family of one's choice. In the UK, the minimum income for sponsors of £18,600 per annum introduced in 2012 has to be earned for 6 months continuously and cannot be supplemented either by the prospective income of the spouse or by family resources. The aims of the policy were to "ensure that migrants are supported at a reasonable level that ensures they do not become a burden on the taxpayer and allow sufficient participation in everyday life to facilitate integration" (Home Office 2011). Though not openly stated, the assumption is that sponsors would probably be of South Asian origin, with some of the largest number of spouses from abroad.

Inevitably the application of the minimum income led to a fall in the number of applications or delays in amassing the necessary resources and, for some, a lengthy separation (Charsley et al. 2020; Wray et al. 2015). Given the gender pay gap, greater likelihood of low-paid and part-time work, for example as care workers, teaching assistants and shop workers, as well as caring responsibilities, women are much less likely to fulfil the necessary criteria to sponsor a spouse. British working women have been 30 per cent less likely to earn enough to sponsor a non-EEA partner compared to males. This led to a rise in the percentage of male sponsors and female spouses which had previously been around 60 per cent but reached 75 per cent (spouses) in 2016 (Sumption and Vargas-Silva 2019). Women from certain minority groups, such as Bangladeshi and Pakistani in the UK, have been particularly hard hit with their average earnings well below the female average.

In countries, where citizens are not exempt from minimum income requirements, minimum income measures have reinforced discrimination against those with low levels of economic capital, drawing in an increasing

number of citizens with uncertain prospects resulting from the growth of precarious employment (Anderson 2019). For those with low economic, but high cultural capital, some have managed to find a solution, for example, through relocation to another EU state using freedom of movement regulations. In a study of a small number of sponsors in the UK who had strategically relocated, nearly all had degrees and were often in jobs that enabled them to work outside of the UK (Wray, Kofman, and Simic 2021). Global mobility of workers, students, tourists and working holiday-makers has added to the opportunities for the forging of transnational intimate relationships (Wagner 2015). Being mobile, however, may for a time create a precarious economic situation for the sponsor who is unable to demonstrate the required resources earned in the country. In this way, the couple becomes entrapped in the meshes of family migration regulations and often experiences lengthy periods of separation (Charsley et al. 2020; Wray, Kofman, and Simic 2021). So whilst some of the racialized nationalities remain the main groups bringing in spouses, an extensive range of nationalities from both wealthy and poorer countries are making applications for family visas. For example, in the UK in 2010, 57 per cent of applicants came from 10 countries, including the US, whose citizens constitute one of the largest group of spouses (Home Office 2011). Though this detailed study of marriage migration has not been replicated, the main nationalities for family migrants (mainly spouses and partners) in the post-COVID period are heterogeneous – Pakistan, India and US and now South Africa and Iran form the top five countries (Home Office 2022).

In contrast to the populations designated as displaying deficits of integration, citizens from wealthier countries, are envisaged as being educated and well off, and in some countries dispensed from pre-entry tests (Block 2021; Ellermann and Goenga 2019). In Germany and the Netherlands, these include migrants from other OECD countries, such as Australia, Canada, United States as well as Japan and South Korea and in Germany, even some South American countries such as Brazil (Elrick and Winter 2018). So too are the spouses of the skilled, depicted as unproblematic in terms of their integration and exempt from integration tests. Furthermore, the latter are seen as not requiring any support to settle (Weinar and Klekowski von Koppenfels 2020, 3–4). Yet they often call for support in areas of structural integration – training, recognition of qualifications, entering the labour market (Eaves 2015; Föbker 2019; Purkayastha and Bircan 2023).

### **Beyond the homogeneous representation of migrant women and integration**

As the various discourses concerning problematic and failing integration reveal, it has been racialized Muslim women who have largely been the

target and the catalyst for more restrictive policies, even if the socio-economic criteria have caught within their orbit a wider range of migrants and non-migrants. Tellingly, policy concerns over forced marriages, domestic violence, honour killings, and labour market position of women have not been matched with evidence in arguing for more restrictive migration policies (Kolbasi Munyam 2017). This includes, as noted previously, attempts to make transnational marriages more difficult in order to block the importation of traditional practices and continuing links with countries of origin. It has been argued the complex dynamics of transnational marriages of the children of migrants has often not been adequately explored (Charsley, Bolognani, and Spencer 2017). Rather it is assumed that particular nationalities enter into such marriages in light of their collective cultures, and that instead of following the precepts of modern romantic love, they are still locked into a traditional kinship mode and are thus backward and incapable of integrating. Indeed Charsley, Bolognani, and Spencer (2017) commented that there has been little detailed empirical research on the relationship between transnational marriage and integration. Furthermore, quantitative studies have often not utilized more complex categories underpinning the changing dynamic and strategies pursued in transnational relationships (Charsley, Bolognani, and Spencer 2017; Glas 2021) to develop a less simplistic understanding of the phenomenon which would address the different rationales of those involved in transnational marriages.

In a study of Dutch Turkish second-generation youth, it was found that marrying transnationally was not related to their structural integration (nearly all sponsor interviewees had completed high school and were working or in education), but had more to do with their search for those with similar cultural identities which might have been reinforced by a feeling of being excluded by Dutch society (Maliepaard and Alba 2018 on Moroccan and Turkish youth in the Netherlands). Research on this group in fact highlighted that their transnational marriages were often love marriages (Kolbasi Munyam 2017). Furthermore, women may choose a transnational marriage for “modern” ends, escaping in-law control, or to secure a more educated match than is available locally (Charsley, Bolognani, and Spencer 2017, 476).

Research has also questioned the notion that stronger preference for transnational spouses is more common among lower-educated women. After controlling for religiosity, it was found that transnational marriage was higher among more educated Turkish women, a situation which might be related to the lack of appropriately educated partners in the country of residence (Carol, Ersanilli, and Wagner 2014). In the UK, however, lower qualifications correlate with higher levels of transnational marriage. In a study of British Pakistanis and Sikhs, the exception was British Pakistani women with less than secondary education, who had rates of transnational marriage comparable to those with higher education (Charsley et al. 2016).

There is often little recognition of changes over time, particularly amongst the descendants of migrants. In the UK, for example, government statistics and academic analysis have tended to ignore generational differences and to treat each ethnic minority as a homogeneous group (Heath 2014). However, in relation to gender attitudes and employment, the rate of change is faster for people of Pakistani background compared to other ethnic groups (Heath 2014, 7). Studies of spouses in the UK (Eaves 2015) with a sample representative of the actual range of nationalities have also shown their relatively high level of education. In this study conducted in London and the South East over 50 per cent had at least one degree. Yet the image of the uneducated migrant spouse equated with a low-class position often persists. In addition, greater variations may emerge around the average over time, such that a particular ethnic group may encompass a successful and integrated elite alongside excluded and disaffected co-ethnics (Heath 2014 in the UK and Maliepaard and Alba 2018 in the Netherlands). Changes in class composition may also arise not merely from social mobility in the country but also shifting patterns of immigration. Large-scale immigration of educated migrants from South Asian countries since the beginning of the century into sectors, such as health and IT in the UK, has undoubtedly impacted on the class composition of such groups. It thus behoves us to question assumptions of homogeneity in our categories of analysis (Brubaker 2013).

## Conclusion

Surprisingly gender, and how it is deployed in discourses of integration, have often received only a passing mention in critiques of integration which have overlooked the historical centrality of gender issues and racialized gendering of Muslims in initiating the discourses of deficits and unfit subjects with problematic familial practices who require tutoring to become worthy of living as proper members of modern societies. Gender discourses, especially against Muslim women, as I have shown, have been at the core of binaries created around the backward and the modern, including attitudes towards gender equality, and their supposed destabilization of shared social norms. Concerns about parallel lives emerged as many European Western societies discarded multiculturalism at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries as a framework for managing increasingly diverse communities. As I have indicated in this article the negative gendered discourses against Muslim women in particular laid the basis for calls for intervention in family migration which states envisaged would reduce transnational marriages and the constant replenishment of low-skilled and lowly educated female migrants importing problematic cultural practices and reproducing poor future citizens. The justification for integration tests at the border and civic integration requirements post-entry was shared by both social democratic and right-wing



parties, though as Farris (2017) and Farris and Scrinzi (2018) highlight far-right nationalist parties have also recently instrumentalized elements of gender equality in their anti-immigration programmes.

The sense of a crisis in national identities within increasingly diverse societies has played out through critiques of problematic family practices and social reproduction. Thus a second set of interventions in many Western European countries targeted the sponsor in this instance through economic criteria which sought to filter out not just the unproductive migrant but also the precarious citizen from partaking in transnational marriages. It is often argued in support of policy interventions in family migration that economic precarity undermines the ability to integrate. Here, we see gender and class intersect in the targeting of sponsors where economic precarity affects female sponsors to a greater extent given their lesser earnings and caring responsibilities (Sumption and Vargas-Silva 2019).

At the same time, the focus on gender aspects in integration policymaking fails to recognize diversity and intersecting differentiations within migrant groups and their evolution over time. In particular, ethnic and religious identities of Muslim women are too often depicted as homogeneous and trapped in an unchanging culture and ethnic identity from which all their practices stem. The categories of analysis applied to the rest of the population are denied them.

As several scholars have commented, there is insufficient empirical data available which would demonstrate the complexity and dynamic of their lives and their transnational relationships and enable categories of practice produced by such groups to reflect the reality of their lives. Conducting research with the full array of categories of analysis, including the way that they intersect with each other and evolve over time, would be an appropriate move in de-ethnicizing integration and breaking down the boundaries between those who “need” integrating and those who supposedly do not. This means understanding how the different sites and categories of integration have evolved with respect to particular racialized groups and recognize that they too are differentiated along socio-economic and class lines (Chafai 2021), that is they are not purified of this dimension and are also stratified, as are non-migrant populations. We need to listen to the voices and demands of different groups and their unequal access to economic, social and political resources and discriminatory experiences so as to understand the complexity of their strategies in the country and transnationally.

## Notes

1. Schinkel's article, following a book *Imagined Societies*, formed the centrepiece of a special issue of *Comparative Migration Studies* to which 12 scholars were invited to comment.

2. Susan Moller Okin (1999) questioning of whether multiculturalism was bad for feminism, largely on grounds of the oppression of women in the private sphere, provoked considerable controversy.
3. She also stood in 2022 against Emmanuel Macron.
4. In the past 15 years or so, the authenticity and genuineness of marriages have come to the fore pushing back the issue of forced marriages to some extent (D'Aoust 2018).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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