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## **Silenced Husbands: Muslim marriage migration and masculinity**

(part of 'Invisible (Migrant) Man' Special Issue submission)

**Author 1 (For Correspondence):** Katharine Charsley, University of Bristol

**Address:** School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies

11 Priory Road, Bristol BS8 1TU, UK

**Email:** [katharine.charsley@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:katharine.charsley@bristol.ac.uk)

**Telephone (no fax available):** +44 (0) 117 331 0609

**Author 2:** Anika Liversage, SFI (Danish National Centre for Social Research)

**Address:** Herluf Trolles Gade 11

DK- 1052 København K, Denmark

**Email:** [ani@sfi.dk](mailto:ani@sfi.dk)

**Telephone:** +45 3348 0857

**Fax:** +45 33 48 08 33

## Author Bios

**Katharine Charsley** is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Bristol. Her main research interests are in gender and migration, particularly transnational marriage, and in South Asian diaspora. Her most recent publications include an ethnographic monograph *Transnational Pakistani Connections: marrying 'back home'* (2013, Routledge) and an edited collection *Transnational Marriage: new perspectives from Europe and Beyond* (2012, Routledge). She is currently leading an ESRC-funded research project on 'Marriage Migration and Integration', and convenes an international research network on 'Marriage and Migration'.

**Anika Liversage** is a Senior Researcher and Program Director at SFI – the Danish National Centre for Social Research. Her research interests are immigrant family relations, attending specifically to issues of gender and power. She speaks Turkish, having lived in the country for four years, and much of her work concerns changes in Turkish immigrant families in Denmark. Recent publications are "Gender, conflict and subordination within the household - Turkish migrant marriage and divorce in Denmark", (*Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 2012) and – with Katharine Charsley – "Transforming polygamy: migration, transnationalism multiple marriages among Muslim minorities" (*Global Networks*, 2013).

## **Silenced Husbands: Muslim marriage migration and masculinity**

### **Abstract**

In both Denmark and Britain, legal and policy discourses have relied on a range of problems implicitly or explicitly linked to transnational marriages involving ethnic minorities in order to control and change the character of spousal immigration. These discourses often focus on the vulnerability of Muslim women, whilst Muslim men appear as patriarchal figures abusing their power over co-ethnic women. In this article, we use qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with Pakistanis in the UK and Turks in Denmark to explore gendered challenges for Muslim migrant husbands, and demonstrate experiences inconsistent with the assumptions that underpin regulation. Attention to intersecting identities reveals weaknesses in such men's relational positions, and multiple arenas in which their masculinity is problematized or denigrated. In combination, these representations function to limit such men's ability to give voice to their vulnerabilities and the challenges they face, and thus to reinforce assumptions of male hegemony.

## **Introduction**

In this paper, we draw together our separate research on Turkish marriage migration to Denmark, and Pakistani marriage migration to Britain, to explore the concealed, or ‘silenced’ vulnerabilities experienced by some migrant Muslim husbands. These vulnerabilities stand in stark contrast to the figures of the powerful Muslim patriarch or coldly strategizing economic migrant which underlie much immigration policy discourse surrounding transnational marriages in both countries.

In the UK, successive policy documents since the turn of the century have argued for the need to restrict spousal immigration (e.g. Home Office 2002; 2007), sometimes explicitly citing the lead of Denmark where, since 2002, legislation has become increasingly restrictive (Jørgensen 2012). In both countries, a discursive emphasis on the risk to British or Danish ethnic minority citizens (largely women) of being forced into marriage overseas has been used as a justification for immigration restrictions – discourses which have been extensively and critically examined (e.g. Wilson 2007; Chantler, Gangoli and Hester 2009). Attempts have also been made to draw attention to the plight of isolated immigrant wives vulnerable to domestic abuse but risking deportation if they leave their marriage. In both countries, this has resulted in concessions exempting victims of domestic violence from the need for the marriage to endure a probationary period before settlement is granted – although the difficulties of proving domestic violence mean that the concession is less easily accessed in practice (Danneskiold-Samsøe, Mørck and Sørensen 2011, Wilson 2007).

In the UK context, since the Coalition government’s declaration of intent to radically reduce non-European immigration to Britain, the emphasis in policy discourse appears to have shifted somewhat away from the protection of vulnerable citizens from forced marriage, in

favor of emphasizing the need to tackle ‘sham’ marriages (i.e. marriages of convenience for immigration purposes) as a form of fraudulent immigration (Charsley and Benson 2012).

In all of these problematisations, the victims are implicitly female<sup>1</sup>, whilst men appear in powerful oppressive or calculating roles: as patriarchs forcing daughters into marriage for the sake of honour<sup>2</sup>; as abusers of imported brides<sup>3</sup>; and as ruthless economic migrants either fooling innocent women into believing their intentions in marriage were genuine, or contracting ‘paper’ marriage for payment (Charsley and Benson 2012). In Denmark, this gendered imagery of “evil Muslim men” was made explicit in January 2010, when Jesper Langballe, MP for the Danish People’s Party (a support party for the government between 2001 and 2011), stated in a national paper that:

“Of course [a right wing debater] should not have said that there are Muslim fathers who rape their daughters, when the truth instead seems to be that they only kill their daughters (the so-called honour killings) and... turn a blind eye to rapes by uncles” (Langballe 2010, own translation)<sup>4</sup>.

In both the UK and Danish contexts, then, Muslim men are often represented as patriarchal and strategizing (or worse), rather than as themselves potentially physically or emotionally vulnerable. This representation is also present when such men are involved in transnational marriage, as bride forcers, importers or exploiters (Razack 2004). This imagery is then used to support regulatory measures that would otherwise appear illiberal and discriminatory. Such measures can thus be presented as consistent with the values of human rights and equality; as protecting citizens and national interests (Charsley and Benson 2012; Keskinen 2012).

As Helma Lutz notes, ‘within the scope of Muslim masculinity, the patriarch and perpetrator is but one possible pattern of social practice; others are hardly investigated and attract little attention’ (2010: 1653-4). In our work elsewhere, we have attempted to explore the neglected experiences of migrant husbands, revealing vulnerabilities elided by the dominant discursive constructs of the powerful Muslim migrant man. From the few available studies of migrant husbands (Charsley 2005; Gallo 2006; George 2005; Pe-Pua 2003), we know that being a migrant husband can be a difficult and relatively disempowered position. While the “... hegemonic definition of manhood is a man *in* power, a man *with* power, and a man *of* power” (Kimmel 1994, 125), marriage migrant men may be disempowered not only due to their recent arrival in a new country, but also their proximity to, and dependence on, their wives and in-laws. Charsley (2005) and Liversage (2012b) have explored Pakistani and Turkish migrant husbands’ experiences of migration against the virilocal norm as challenging to hegemonic masculine aspirations, whilst our previous collaboration on contemporary forms of polygamy among our two research populations drew attention to the role of experiential tensions of migrant living in some men’s decisions to take second wives (Charsley and Liversage 2012).

In this article, we employ qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with Pakistanis in the UK and Turks in Denmark to further the exploration of gendered challenges for Muslim migrant husbands, and demonstrate an experience inconsistent with the assumptions that underpin regulation. We demonstrate the hardships men can suffer, in large part due to the destabilization of gender identities, brought about through their specific migratory experiences (Alcalde 2011). The material we employ is drawn from research conducted over the last decade as part of our broader interests in migration, ethnicity, gender, and the family. Here, we do not aim to provide a representative portrayal of the lives of Muslim men

who have migrated through marriage, but rather to highlight dynamics in cases where such men's vulnerabilities are particularly exposed. We have thus focused on material from interviews with men who have experienced significant instability and divorce in their marriages to European-raised co-ethnics. We focus in particular on the narratives of three men who provide particularly striking illustrations of these dynamics, and use this material to examine some of the mechanisms which contribute to the invisibility, or 'silencing' (Houston and Kramarae 1991), of the suffering experienced by some migrant husbands.

Our central argument is that there is a layering of logics within marriages, kin-groups, ethnic communities, and wider cultural and institutional frameworks which together impede the expression and understanding of these problems. Attention to intersecting identities as (marriage) migrants, as men and as Muslims reveals weaknesses in their relational positions, and the multiple arenas (legal, political, institutional and within the 'community') in which their masculinity is variously problematized or denigrated. In combination, these representations function to limit such men's ability to give voice to their vulnerabilities and the challenges they face, and thus to reinforce an assumption of male hegemony. In extreme cases, the results can include the labour exploitation, domestic violence and limitations to mobility more commonly reported in the case of isolated migrant wives (Buttoo 2009).

### **Intersectionality, masculinity and migration**

Intersectionality as a concept arose from a feminist critique of monolithic understandings of gender and race (Crenshaw 1989) and has become a well-worn analytic path in the study of ethnic minority women. It has had influence in the study of men and masculinity, where the complementary concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995) aided in the 'rethinking and problematisation of patriarchy [which]... can be seen as part of debates on intersectionality' (Hearn 2011, 91). The conceptual looseness or flexibility (depending on



the author's point of view) of intersectionality has been both a source of critique and valuation (Davis 2008).

Perhaps surprisingly, considering its influence in the cognate field of ethnicity, intersectionality has been less widely employed in migration studies (Bürkner 2012). It has seen some use in the study of gender and migration, but predominantly in work on women migrants (e.g. Lazaridis 2000). Recently, however, intersectional studies on, or including, men, have also started to appear (Dyer, McDowell and Batnisky 2010; Batnisky, McDowell and Dyer 2008; Alcalde 2011; Kleist 2010; Näre 2010). Transnationalism, a school which has dominated recent approaches to migration, has been described as a particularly 'neglected area of inter-sectionality' (Hearn 2011, 98). A transnational perspective adds multi-locality to multi-positionality, leading Mahler and Pessar (2001) to suggest a model of 'gendered geographies of power' as one response to the need for a more geographically expansive and multi-perspectival conceptualization of intersectional difference and power relationships. This model has been widely employed in studies of gender and transnationalism (e.g. Constable 2005), attending specifically to how social locations on different scales are embedded in different, and sometimes contradictory power geometries, central for the agency which individuals are able to assert (Mahler and Pessar 2001).

We have emphasized transnationalism in our other writing on Turkish and Pakistani transnational marriage (Charsley 2005; 2006; 2007; Charsley and Liversage 2012; Liversage 2009; 2012a; 2012b; Liversage and Jakobsen 2010; Liversage and Rytter forthcoming).

Whilst transnational networks remain relevant, in this article we argue that a focus on intersecting identities and axes of domination as they operate in the British and Danish contexts is in itself useful in 'making visible', or here perhaps 'giving voice', to hitherto neglected experiences of oppression and exclusion. In addition, our fieldwork often allowed

expression of unheard experiences at an individual, inter-personal level, as several interviewees stated that they had never spoken in detail to anyone about their difficulties before. As Junaid from Pakistan put it: “I talked to you first time in my life [about] my personal things”.

### **The research contexts and main protagonists**

Turkish migration to Denmark and Pakistani migration to Britain have followed broadly similar trajectories – initial labour migration in the 1960s and 70s (starting earlier in this period for the Pakistanis than the Turks), followed by family reunification, the birth of children in Europe, and then a pattern of ongoing immigration through transnational marriage. Since 2002, Denmark has been in the vanguard of moves to restrict spousal immigration in Europe, with the consequence that numbers of ethnic minorities sponsoring spousal immigrants have declined substantially (for details see Jørgensen 2012; Schmidt et al. 2009; Liversage and Rytter forthcoming). Britain has also become increasingly restrictive towards spousal immigration, but, at the time of writing, the possibility of ethnic minority transnational marriage remains more open in UK than Denmark.

Whilst many transnational marriages are successful (Charsley 2013) in the cases we examine here, the marriages - like so many in contemporary Europe - had ended in divorce. We focus particularly on the narratives of three divorced former marriage migrant protagonists: Mert and Hakan (Turkish migrants to Denmark) and Junaid (Pakistani migrant to Britain). We include more Turkish than Pakistani cases to balance the extensive presentation of Pakistani material in an earlier publication on “unhappy husbands” (Charsley 2005). The many similarities between the three men’s stories and those of other marriage migrant men reveal how the similar structural positions in the two different migratory

settings may result in similar life experiences, analysed here as a product of similar intersectional positions.

Junaid is a Pakistani man who married his father's sister's daughter in 1993, and came to join her in Britain soon after. For the first few years he worked in his brother-in-law's grocery shop, before becoming a taxi driver. At the time of our interview in 2008, he had not seen his three children for five years, having lost access rights to them in his civil divorce. He claimed not to know the reason that his wife and her family asked him to divorce her (by issuing the religious *talaaq*). Junaid was interviewed in English, a language which was not his mother tongue.

Mert, from a Turkish village, also married his father's sister's daughter, and came to join her in Denmark in 2001. The marriage was strained from the beginning and ended in divorce in 2006. In 2007, when the interview took place, Mert's residency status was insecure, and he had difficulties seeing their young son. Lastly, Hakan was from a Turkish provincial town. One of his school friends migrated to Denmark when she was in her teens, to join her father who had moved there some years before. A few years later, she married Hakan, who subsequently joined her in Denmark. In 2007, after five years of marriage, the couple divorced, and Hakan returned to Turkey where he was interviewed in 2009. Both Mert and Hakan were interviewed in Turkish and their quotes subsequently translated into English.

### **Intersecting positions...**

#### **...as recently arrived migrants**

One central aspect of Junaid, Mert, Hakan and other husbands' intersecting positions is their identity as *recent migrants*. Whilst like many migrants they may experience various forms of discrimination from the ethnic majority, the position of newcomer from the ethnic

‘homeland’ appears also to be a source of stigma among their European co-ethnics - or at least becomes so in their troubled affinal families. In Britain, such men are sometimes referred to by British Pakistanis as ‘freshies’ (fresh off the boat) or ‘mangetars’ (fiancées, even though their marriage have usually taken place before they set foot on British soil).

Such ‘freshies’ have little local knowledge and few social contacts, making them dependent on their spouses and in-laws and their networks. Furthermore, particularly in the case of the Turkish migrants, such recent arrivals have little knowledge of the language spoken in the country into which they had arrived. Merton formulated very strongly the inferior position in which a Turkish marriage migrant man could find himself in Denmark:

There is a name, which both men and women abhor: It is ‘the ones who came from Turkey’. Both the [Turkish] men and the women who are born here [in Denmark] talk harshly to the ones who arrive, and they belittle you. They say: ‘what do you know about anything – you came from Turkey!’ ...

This account, and the British Pakistani terminology of ‘freshies’ and ‘mangetars’ speak of a characterization of new migrants as inferior, lacking the attributes and knowledge necessary for independent adult masculinity in the European context. This cleavage between ‘the established’ and ‘the outsider’ (Elias and Johnson 1965) is a differentiation which – as we shall see – can have a central bearing on other aspects of such men’s identities, including their ability to ‘be men’ in the ways to which they aspire.

A central consequence of being a recently arrived marriage migrant is that such men do not have independent residency permits. They are thus dependent on the continuation of their marriages for a legally-defined probationary period, before they are sure of remaining in Europe in case of a divorce. In Britain, the probationary period was one year during the

period when Junaid and many of the other Pakistani migrant spouses interviewed arrived in Britain (increasing to two years in 2003 and five in 2012). In Denmark, the period was three years before 2002, when it was raised to seven years. Thus, when Mert and Hakan divorced in 2006/2007, they had not yet gained independent residence rights. This legal difference strongly affected the experiences of the divorced men. Although Charsley has reported elsewhere a case of a young man returned to Pakistan by his in-laws within months of his arrival in Britain (2005), vulnerabilities stemming from immigration status were not a key theme of the British research. In contrast, several Turkish interviewees reported having been threatened with “not getting the passport” - a threat which has more commonly reported as levelled against migrant wives seeking to leave violent husbands (Danneskiold-Samsøe, Mørck and Sørensen 2011; Wilson 2007). This extended dependency seems central to understanding the quite radically disempowered situations of some Turkish interviewees. The recent extension of the probationary period to five years in the UK, however, is likely to mean that extended dependency will also become a more significant part of experiences in Britain.

### **... as male marriage migrants**

The generally dependent situation of a recently arrived migrant is further shaped and aggravated by the gendered social location into which he arrives. As such men join wives in Europe, they leave their own parents behind, and move into proximity with their in-laws. This is a reversal of the virilocal settlement which is otherwise found in Pakistan and Turkey. In these countries, a woman commonly moves to live with not only her husband but also his parents. Such wives are expected to adjust to the husbands’ family culture, and later pass it on to the next generation.

Elsewhere, we have investigated the phenomenon of Pakistani and Turkish husbands joining their wives' families in Europe (Charsley 2005; Liversage and Jakobsen 2010)<sup>5</sup>. The more frequent occurrence of this phenomenon in Europe as compared to the countries of origin reduces the derogatory connotations which attach to the phenomenon there (cf. Chopra 2009). Such co-habitation is nevertheless often challenging for the recently arrived husband, who must show deference to his parents-in-law, complicating his ability to shape his relationship with his wife. Even when the couple does not live with the wife's family, proximity to this side of the extended family, combined with distance from the husband's natal kin, may produce pressures on marriage migrant husbands.

Junaid explained how this situation made his life difficult:

...When we [were] married, when we came over, first six months – no problem. Because there was nobody to answer [to]. We rent the house, we [were] living separate from the family. So slowly, slowly, influence comes... And then it always comes into my conversation – my mother-in-law, my brother-in-law, father-in-law. They overrule everything... I would say – any marriage, any marriage, English people's marriage – when the in-laws interfere, overrule their daughter, overrule their son-in-law, it doesn't work... My brother-in-law [and] my father-in-law even come and shout at me at home.

Junaid here describes being overruled by male kin – his brothers- and father-in-law; a male assertion over another (structurally weaker) man which does not challenge the conventional gender hierarchy. Marriage migrant men thus finding themselves in the weak position of incomer normally inhabited by brides may have few resources with which to defend themselves. Indeed, in Hakan's case, pressure from his male in-laws unfolded as overt attempts at feminization:

All my life, I have not cooked. I don't know how you do it. The only thing I can do is break an egg. But [the wife's] big brother sought to force me to cook. They tried to pressure me to do it.

Acts of manhood are often aimed at 'claiming privilege, eliciting deference and resisting exploitation' (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009) with male-to-male interaction being central in the establishment of ranking (Walle 2004). In the interaction described above, Hakan's male in-laws asserted their own dominance through interactionally positioning Hakan below them, exposing his 'unmanly' weakness as they chided him about performing a femininely-coded domestic task. While Hakan did manage to resist cooking, he was, for example, unable to stop his brothers-in-law from driving off in Hakan's newly acquired car, without asking his permission first.

This weak relational position in regard to in-laws as well as wives was a repeated feature of our interviews with troubled migrant husbands. In the next section, we investigate their narrated experiences of disempowerment regarding their autonomy in public spaces, in domestic contexts, and when it came to finances.

### *Surveillance in public space*

In some interviews, men narrated their wives' and in-law's ability to restrict their mobility in public space. Hakan complained that when he moved in with his in-laws,

...[my wife's] family began to pressure me: 'Don't do this, don't do that; don't leave the house if you have not got permission' – her father and mother did like that. If a man travels abroad [from Turkey to Denmark] his [new] family puts pressure on him... 'Watch your step! Tell us where you go! Don't do this or that!'

One explanation for this scrutiny is the fact that governmental concerns with ‘bogus’ marriages may be shared by wives and families worried that the attractions of immigration may be a migrant husband’s principal motivation for contracting the marriage (Charsley 2006). Concerns over a husband’s fidelity may also be heightened in the context of his entry into a European society with more liberal relations between the sexes than those to which he may be accustomed. Whilst the hope of a more ‘traditional’ or religiously observant spouse is often part of the motivation for transnational marriage (Charsley 2014; Constable 2005; Timmerman 2006) in-laws may wish to ensure that the new arrival lives up to expectations regarding fidelity. Junaid experienced such suspicions about his behaviour. Working as a taxi driver, he complained that his brother-in-law reported to his wife if he was seen talking to female customers:

Sometimes you pay more attention on the road: You are happy, you talk to your customer, you don’t pay any attention to who is going passed by you. My brother-in-law passed by me, he called my wife and tell her: ‘He was talking to a white girl, she was sitting right in the front seat. And he ignored me.’ ...Why would they go to my wife to influence: ‘He’s talking to those girls’? What is the outcome? They wash their brains.

### ***Disempowerment in private space***

Within the household, men’s complaints regarding disempowerment centered on issues of domestic chores. These issues were more frequent in the Danish interviews - the higher labour market participation among Turkish women in Denmark than Pakistani women in the UK may underlie this difference. Whilst men in both contexts may experience culturally unfamiliar levels of expectation of domestic labour, the fact that many of the Danish wives were in paid employment may have increased female expectations that the husbands would



engage in household chores. Survey results document that a more traditional division of work also exists among Pakistanis than Turkish minority populations in Denmark (Jakobsen and Deding, 2006).

Whilst differing gender norms certainly form part of the context for understanding the interviewee's complaints over housework, domestic division of labour was often presented as more than this – as a further area in which a wife or in-law could exploit their positions of power over the in-married husband. Mert recounted the following:

When I had taken a shower, [my wife] said that I should clean everything up. And I certainly cleaned – walls, floor – polished it all. And then she came to control, pointing out: “You missed something there!” She loved my cleaning and my cooking. Sometimes when I wanted to shower, she said: “I’ll go first, so you can clean up afterwards”. And sometimes she showered herself without cleaning up.

Mert's narrative of cleaning under his wife's surveillance suggests a perceived emasculation as he is forced into taking on the feminine (and low-status) household chores, and clearly communicates to us that he could not be ‘the man’ (at least in terms of general Turkish expectations) of the house.

### ***Lack of control over financial affairs***

A further point of dispute and control for both Junaid and Mert concerned remittances.

Junaid spoke of contesting his in-laws' interference in his financial affairs:

My father-in-law and brother-in-law come into my home and they're asking me... ‘Why did you send that money to Pakistan?’ Hang on a minute... the things will be provided, the mortgage paid, everything. I'm working hard for that. I'm not sending *your* money, I'm not sending your *daughter's* money! Why would they ask me that?

The distribution of financial resources over transnational space is commonly a cause of tension and conflict (Lindley 2010; Carling 2008). Mert, who like Junaid wanted to remit to the family he had left behind, resorted to sending money in secret:

You take a false name. So it says: “Fatma sends money”. Otherwise hell breaks loose. You do it in secret. If my wife hears about it, she would cut off my arm. But now I am single so I can send money. So my married friends come and ask me to remit money for them.

Once more, it is in the Danish case, where dependency on the marriage for the right to remain in the country is extended, that the power geometry between a marriage migrant husband and his wife and in-laws in Europe appears more asymmetrical<sup>6</sup>.

### *Voice and Silence*

The extent to which men voiced their objections to these forms of control varied. First, as Charsley (2005) argues, having the support of the wife in such situations of conflict is central for the well-being of a migrant husband. It was often when wives could not or would not step in, that problems escalated. Hakan, for example, sought his wife’s support against her brothers’ efforts to make him cook, but to no avail:

I asked her to tell them that they should not bully me, but she didn’t want to. [She said] ‘They are my brothers, they are my parents – I cannot go between you. You have to do it yourself’. So I was stuck there... Her family also threatened me with the passport [ie. not being able to stay in Denmark]. And I could not say a word. What could I have done? Started arguing?

With his wife not standing up for him, embedded as she was in gendered and age-dependent family hierarchies of power, Hakan describes his position as being “stuck”, and feeling that he “could not say a word”.

Although initially vocal, Junaid also decided that he would rather keep his silence than speak up and risk spreading the conflict without much hope of bettering his situation. ‘If I answer [father-in-law]’ he said, ‘there is a fight. So I didn’t answer him back...’ Neither did Junaid want to voice his complaints to his own natal family:

[If] for example I tell them: ‘Father, your sister done this to me, your brother done this to me, your niece...’ They will [be] nasty to them – ‘Oh you done this to my son.’ Apart from being nasty, outcome is zero.

Marital conflict and divorce within cousin marriages have the potential to cause wider rifts within the extended family (Charsley 2014), with the consequence that Junaid did not turn to his relatives in Pakistan for support. Mert, who was also married within the family, experienced first-hand how voicing complaints to relatives in the country of origin could do little but increase the level of tension. He said that it was not him, but his wife and in-laws, who drew his parents into the arguments:

It was really bad. My wife would call my mother in the middle of the night saying: ‘your son did this and that’. My father-in-law would call up, and say: ‘What sort of a catastrophe did you bring upon us?’ My mother would say: ‘Relax, he is not like that’ – because she knows me. My mother began feeling bad. She got scared when the phone rang at night: Is it now them again, about arguing and about fighting?

While parents in the country of origin could become involved in the conflict, it seemed that – as Junaid had anticipated – they could do little to ameliorate the migrant husband’s

predicament. Consequently, several interviewees described how they did not tell anyone of their difficulties (cf. Alcalde 2011 on Latino men in the US experiencing marital problems).

In several of the narratives we collected, however, the bodies of our Turkish and Pakistani interviewees came to express their distress in other, non-verbal, ways. For Junaid, this was simply secretive crying and sleeplessness when his in-laws pushed for a divorce, and he missed his children painfully. When Hakan's situation grew hard to bear, he nevertheless attempted to keep his problems secret from his father, but:

...my father found out when I spoke with him on the phone. At that time, I hadn't told anybody about it – if I could stand it, I would stand it myself, [so] as not to ruin the marriage. But my father asked me on the phone: 'What is the matter, my son?' He could hear that I had begun stuttering. I told him that nothing was wrong. But he said: 'If you don't tell me what is going on, I'll come'. He would have come to Denmark, for sure. And then, I told him about it.

Here, Hakan's resolve to 'stand it' on his own – i.e. to 'take it like a man' – was undermined by a stammering beyond his conscious control. Shortly after this parental intervention, Hakan abandoned his marriage and left Denmark. He reported that the stress of his stay in Denmark resulted in severe health problems including irregular heart rhythm, weight loss, and a depression, for which he was still receiving medical treatment when interviewed. Some other men in similar situations also reported physical problems resulting from their experiences.

### **...as Muslim men**

After periods of considerable and escalating conflict, the marriages recounted in this article each ended in divorce. In several cases, the ensuing contact with State institutions brought

into play another aspect of their intersecting positions – that of Muslim men in contemporary European societies, which we touched upon in the beginning of the article.

Racialised categories are, as the intersectionality critique makes plain, always also gendered. The Orientalist colonialism described by Spivak as purporting to save ‘brown women from brown men’ (1988) has clear parallels in contemporary Islamophobic representations of Muslim men as a homogenous class engaged in the oppression of (universally vulnerable) Muslim women (Cooke 2002; Fluri 2009). Thus, as noted earlier, Muslim men are often constructed in European discourses as patriarchal and oppressive, while Muslim women are seen as victims in need of assistance (Razack 2004; Keskinen 2012; Korteweg and Yurdakul 2009). It was notable that several of the men we interviewed felt that negative representations of them by their (former) wives or in-laws were, or would be, easily accepted by institutions of State. One example of this came from Junaid who was unable to gain access to his three children after his divorce:

I paid so much money to barristers, to court and all that, to get access to my children. The system will not allow me... That’s the allegation [the ex-wife] made: that I will kill her and kill my children and fly to Pakistan... I was saying to the court – ‘Keep my passport, okay? Keep my passport and give me access to my children. I don’t care what the other people did.’ I say to even police, I say to even judge, I say to everybody - ‘If you think I will fly back to Pakistan, I need a passport. I give you my passport, all the details. You give me access to my children.’

Similarly, Mert felt that negative representations of him by his (former) wife and in-laws were (or would be) easily accepted by institutions of State, leaving him in a vulnerable position:

I have no one here who can support me. If they called the police, they could say that I had been to the house and had taken the child, and had been hitting – they can lie so much... And in such a case I would not be able to save myself, because no one would be supporting me... So I am afraid of what will happen – that they will lie about me and accuse me... Here in Denmark I have learned that if you are a man with a child who gets divorced, you are *zero*.

Of course, it is not only Muslim men who may feel that they are in a disadvantaged position, for example in family court proceedings, compared to the mothers of their children<sup>7</sup>, but in these cases their gendered parental status as fathers intersects with gendered perceptions of Islam. As another divorced Pakistani man complained: ‘[They are] all on her side, helping her, not me. I’m like an American movies villain’.

‘Community organisations’ working for the interests of ethnic minorities in both our research sites are also run primarily by and for women. It has been argued that in attempting to resist ‘ethnic patriarchy’, ethnic minority women may inadvertently reproduce a hegemonic discourse which racialises, homogenises and denigrates the masculinity of men of their own ethnic group (Pyke 2010). In Junaid’s account, however, his wife’s reproduction of dominant understandings of dangerous and oppressive Muslim masculinity is represented as more instrumental than accidental.

### **Narrative reconstructions - being “a man” in difficult circumstances**

As we suggest above, these migrant men often felt unfairly treated, but had few resources with which to defend themselves. Several did, however, use the interview situation to present alternative constructions of their identities – constructions according to which they,

themselves, should be perceived as ‘respectable’ rather than as ‘failed’ men (Gallo 2006; Kleist 2010).

Such ‘narrative reconstructions’ – to use a term proposed by Williams (1984) in his writings on health narratives – are ways in which those deprived of conventional biographical trajectories (in Williams’ case by ill health) may reconstruct meaning in their life narratives. In our interviews, men repeatedly took the opportunities of the space to speak about their problems to reconstruct a worthy masculinity from their stories of belittlement. Whilst their lack of domestic authority, financial independence, and respect from wider society may have called into question their ability to achieve a ‘hegemonic’ masculinity, they portrayed themselves as fulfilling alternative but valued forms of masculine identity.

These narrative constructions revolved around being responsible and caring husbands and fathers – identities far removed from the oppressive patriarchal figures found in the public discourse. This identity was explicitly contrasted with a construction of their ethnic minority male peers raised in Europe – one of the sources of their own denigration. In the following excerpt, Junaid states that making money – the prototypical achievement of the male breadwinner – is not the only important male role: caring for one’s family is important if one is to be a ‘good man’. As a reported reply to his brother-in-law, who belittled Junaid for not making as much money as other Pakistani taxi drivers, Junaid states that to earn so much, such men had to ...

...sleep in the car. Where is your wife, where is your children, where is your life?... I don’t do that. I want my wife, my children, to know that I am their father, I am their husband. I want to take care of them... but at the same time I do work hard... sixty seventy hours a week, any time, weekend nights, during the week days. Ah, also – I always pick up my daughter and drop my daughter to school.

Here, Junaid constructs himself as a man who can combine being both a good, hard-working earner and a caring family man. Mert similarly constructs himself as a 'worthy' man: hard-working and family-oriented as well as honest, explicitly contrasting this to 'dishonest' and 'selfish' Turkish men raised in Denmark. His construction of their lack of work ethics is embedded in a Danish welfare state context, where individuals may get social support if they are unemployed or ill. Hence Mert claims:

The ones who came from Turkey [i.e recent migrants such as himself], almost all of them work "white" [i.e. paying taxes]. But the [Turkish] men born here [in Denmark], they have really found out how to cheat. They go to the municipality and claim that their arm or leg hurts... Last year, I had a back operation. And I went straight from the sick bed and went back to work. The [majority] Danes should go check: The ones who arrive from Turkey, they are not sick very often, but the ones who grew up here, they fake sickness.

As with Junaid, Mert also balances this construction of him being 'truthful' and 'hardworking' in public space, with being a good family man in the private sphere. Here, too, he positions himself as superior to the Turkish men raised in Denmark, about whom he claims the following:

These [second generation] men feel no responsibility. Even when they have wife and children. They are not home Friday, Saturday – they go to the discoteque. They don't think about their family. Even if their child falls ill, and you call them, they say: "Give [the child] a pill, I am busy". That is how irresponsible these men are.

The self-constructions referenced here can on the one hand be seen as countering their denigration as ignorant and incapable 'freshies' (cf. Gallo 2006). The construction also,



however, taps into ambivalences between the diaspora and the country of origin. In both the Turkish and Pakistani cases there are dual constructions of the merits of homeland and diasporic populations in which hierarchies may be contextually inverted. Should their relationship be constructed as the modern and wealthy diaspora, versus the underdeveloped and traditional country of origin? Or should it conversely be the morally-sound country of origin versus a corrupted and spoiled second generation in Europe? Both sets of evaluations may underlie conceptions of transnational marriages – as an antidote to corruption, as cultural/religious renewal, as a chance for advancement, or as a risk of exploitation in either direction (Shaw and Charsley 2006; Timmerman 2006).

These constructions of their own worth and capabilities vis-à-vis the more dominant second-generation men in their affinal families and local ethnic communities could, however, be difficult to hold on to in the context of a lonely, pressured existence. One Turkish marriage migrant reported that he found himself even doubting his own opinions:

When a person has heard the same thing again and again, they begin to believe it is the truth. If everyone else agrees, you think: ‘I am probably mistaken’. In reality, it may be all the others who are mistaken – but if they all say it, you come to think that they have to be right. And if I stick to my opinions, everyone tells me that I am mistaken.

### **Concluding reflections**

This article is based on a limited number of cases of men who had all experienced very difficult situations and does not permit us to generalize about the position of migrant husbands in general. Indeed our broader bodies of research data include many cases in which migrant husbands do not encounter the kind of challenges discussed here, or in which

such situations are a phase before their lives improve. The cases in this article, however, allow us to explore vulnerabilities which are concealed in the dominant policy discourses surrounding marriage migration, in which (Muslim) men appear as powerful, strategizing figures. Here, instead, we find migrant husbands in the position of vulnerable incomers more often identified as applying to migrant wives.

These unfavorable positions can create asymmetries which may be exploited. Again, we will stress that this is by no means always the case – some women, for example, find that their migrant husbands' gendered power and a strong stigma attached to divorce can preclude them from leaving unhappy marriages (Liversage 2012a). Furthermore, actions experienced as unjust by migrant husbands may appear reasonable to a wife or in-laws eager to control what they see as the dangers of having 'imported' a husband from Turkey or Pakistan.

Evaluation of such conflicts is by no means simple, and in the present case we only have the men's side of the story. Is the experience of resisting domestic chores, for example, simply one of uncomfortable adjustment to more egalitarian gender relations? Here, however, we do not intend to evaluate the reasonableness of these husbands' complaints; nor to evaluate relative suffering – to set the vulnerabilities of migrant husbands against those of wives, or to judge whether, say, the denial of a wife's wish to engage in paid labour is more or less harmful than the denial of a husband's wish to remit a proportion of wages earned through such labour. Some gendered dynamics may indeed work in men's favour. Men may have easier access to, and experience less stigma as a result of, divorce, and women may more often be the victims of domestic violence. Opportunities for contracting polygamous second marriages are similarly gendered in favour of men. But to point to such differences as undermining the need for attention to the experiences of men like Junaid, Mert, and Hakan would be to reinforce their silencing. Moreover, it would be to ignore the potential of the

analysis of power inequalities affecting migrant men to cast light on more extreme examples – such as the increasing reports of domestic violence against South Asian migrant husbands in Britain (Buttoo 2009).

These men's experiences can be drawn upon to demonstrate the destabilizing effects that (marriage) migration may have upon masculinity and upon men's lives (Alcalde 2011; Kleist 2010). It is the contrast between the expected social order, and the reality encountered upon migration to Europe, which brings out these stories of unexpected hardship and unmanly defenselessness – stories otherwise rarely told for fear of undermining masculine identity projects.

The field of intersectionality has seen a multiplication of factors proposed for analysis beyond the 'big three' of race/ethnicity, class and gender (Yuval-Davis 2006). In our analysis, the importance of subtleties of context and local identities come to the fore. One key dividing line is within the ethnic community, between the settled or locally-born, and the marriage-migrant newcomers. Applying an intersectional analysis (more commonly used in the study of ethnic minority women) thus reveals a potentially vulnerable position, and destabilises homogenous understanding of 'Muslim men'.

An intersectional understanding of these male marriage migrants gives insight into the multiple identities and axes of power which together may cast silence over their problems. Their positions as migrants and lone affines in their marital families combine to place them in weak positions of power which undermine their ability to stand up for themselves in the domestic setting. Furthermore, their inability to live up to being a "man *in* power, a man *with* power, and a man *of* power" (Kimmel 1994,125), and the stigma of 'unmanliness' associated with such weakness may further deepen this silence. This vulnerability may not, however, be appreciated by external bodies for whom their identities as Muslim men carry

connotations of gendered oppression of women. In drawing together the very similar experiences of these divorced Muslim marriage migrant men in two different ethnic and national context, we hope to highlight a new area in which an intersectional approach may 'render visible' (Yuval-Davis 2006) hitherto poorly recognized vulnerabilities and asymmetries of power within an all-too-often homogenized and vilified social group.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Although attempts are made, for example, to stress that some victims of forced marriage are male (Samad, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Although recent cases of ‘honour killings’, such as that of Shafiea Ahmed in Britain, have demonstrated the central involvement of mothers in what might have been thought of as masculine crimes. (<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-19068490>> accessed 8/11/13)

<sup>3</sup> The recent British case of Naseeba Bibi, however, featured a mother-in-law importing unwanted brides for her sons only to imprison them and exploit their labour (<<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1166117/Mother-law-kept-sons-wives-locked-like-slaves-dogs-13-years.html>> accessed 8/11/13).

<sup>4</sup> See Keskinen 2012 for details on the debate.

<sup>5</sup> In Turkey, one in twenty co-resident households are uxori-local. In contrast, one in two such households are uxori-local in Denmark (based on an investigation of all Turkish marriage migrant spouses in the age group 18-24, who married Turkish spouses living in Denmark between 1994 and 1999 (Liversage and Jakobsen, 2010: 700)). Thus a larger share of Turkish men lived in extended households with their wives’ kin in Denmark as compared the situation found in Turkey. This change in pattern testifies to the new situations men may find themselves in under conditions of migration.

<sup>6</sup> Such experiences are context dependent: other migrant husbands reported negotiating with their in-laws, and being able to remit openly to their families.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. the campaigning groups ‘Fathers for Justice’ (UK) and the ‘Foreningen Far’ (‘Dad’s Organization’) (Denmark).