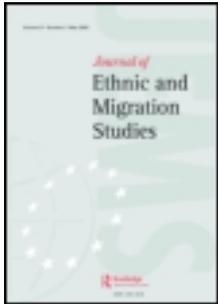


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### A Real Marriage? Applying for Marriage Migration to Norway

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# A Real Marriage? Applying for Marriage Migration to Norway

Helga Eggebø

*Marriages of convenience have become a central concern in political debates about immigration policy. According to Norwegian regulations, the right to marriage migration only applies to 'real' relationships. The notion of a real or genuine marriage, as opposed to a marriage of convenience, raises the question of what characterises a legitimate intimate relationship. Based on interviews with the parties involved, this article investigates how marriage migrants and their partners perceive the application process for marriage migration to Norway, and how they are affected by the idea of marriages of convenience. It argues that the scholarly literature on contemporary intimate relationships is relevant to studies of migration and provides important insights into the narratives of marriage migrants and their partners. On the one hand, 'the pure relationship' seems to be one standard against which cross-border marriages are sometimes judged. On the other hand, the ideal of the pure relationship is also used by marriage migrants and their partners to question immigration regulations. The pure relationship is one, but far from the only, normative ideal present in the narratives of my interviewees. Interviewees draw on several different, and sometimes contradictory, norms, ideals and narratives of intimacy when they talk about and justify their own relationships, after being confronted with the immigration regulation's requirement for a 'real marriage'.*

*Keywords:* Marriages of Convenience; Marriage Migration; Intimacy; Pure Relationship; Application Process

## Introduction

In many European countries, marriages of convenience have become a central concern in political debates about immigration policy.<sup>1</sup> Such marriages are often presumed to be widespread, and legal measures have been taken in order to prevent migration on this basis (De Hart 2006; Williams 2010). The frequency of marriages of

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convenience is hard to establish, but the number of rejected applications on this basis is relatively limited and existing research provides little evidence of high numbers of unrecorded cases (De Hart 2006; Digruher and Messinger 2006; Econ Pöyry 2010; Williams 2010; Wray 2006). However, the idea of the marriage of convenience has a broad impact that is not limited to the rejected applicants. It has served as a political argument for general restrictions on marriage migration, and measures taken to prevent marriages of convenience often affect genuine marriages as well (De Hart 2006); throughout the application process, cross-border marriages are scrutinised in order to determine whether or not the marriage is genuine.

According to Norwegian regulations, the right to marriage migration only applies to 'real' relationships. The notion of a real or genuine marriage, as opposed to a marriage of convenience, raises the question of what characterises a legitimate intimate relationship in contemporary Norway. Some recent studies suggest that the normative standard that cross-border marriages are judged against resembles what Giddens (1992) has described as the 'pure relationship' (see also Hagesæther 2008; Lan 2008; Williams 2010).<sup>2</sup> The pure relationship, 'a relationship of sexual and emotional equality', is a central concept in Giddens' (1992: 2) work and has become a main point of reference in many empirical studies of contemporary intimate relationships (e.g. Illouz 1998; Jamieson 1998, 1999; Roseneil 2007; Smart and Shipman 2004). In the work of Giddens (1992), as well as Bauman (2003) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), changes in contemporary intimate relationships are described as key elements in twentieth-century processes of social change; the ongoing processes of individualisation and increased reflexivity evident in the realm of intimacy may have profound influences on modern institutions.

Marriage migration<sup>3</sup> actualises the question of what characterises modern intimate relationships, and a number of studies analyse the relationship between immigration policy and norms of intimacy, marriage, gender and sexuality. Most studies of family immigration regulations, however, do not relate to the theoretical discussion on changes in contemporary intimate relationships initiated by Giddens, Bauman and Beck. Rather, they have focused on the processes of inclusion and exclusion brought about by national regulations, and how these processes are structured by gender, sexuality, race and class (Breger 1998; De Hart 2007; Kraler 2010; Lan 2008; Luibhéid 2002; Mühleisen *et al.* 2009; Myrdahl 2010; Schmidt 2011; Strasser *et al.* 2009; Van Walsum 2008; Wray 2006, 2008). As several migration scholars have pointed out, cross-border marriages are subject to scrutiny, checks and public debate to a much larger extent than other relationships, and otherwise-liberal regulations of family life do not apply to immigration policy (Gedalof 2007; Strasser *et al.* 2009; Van Walsum 2008; Williams 2010; Wray 2008). Consequently, marriage migration represents a special case for studying intimate norms and practices. This special context, where otherwise-often-unspoken norms and assumptions are articulated, specified and codified, is an important site for analyses of the changes and continuities and the ideals and practices of contemporary intimate life.

Studies of family immigration regulations have often analysed policy, legal documents and administrative practices, though some include migrants' own accounts and strategies (e.g. Breger 1998; Charsley 2006; Schmidt 2011; Strasser *et al.* 2009). This article investigates how marriage migrants and their partners (the sponsors) perceive the application process for marriage migration to Norway, and how they are affected by the idea of marriages of convenience. The data consist of 19 interviews with applicants and/or their partners for marriage migration to Norway. I analyse the accounts of these informants in order to understand what norms and narratives of contemporary intimate relationships are activated in this context. The guiding research question in this article is whether Giddens' (1992) notion of the pure relationship can account for the ways in which marriage migrants and their partners talk about, understand and justify their relationships when faced with Norwegian immigration regulations' requirement for a 'real' marriage. I first present the theoretical framework, methodology and some necessary contextual information. This is followed by an analysis in three parts, the first showing how the ideal of the pure relationship is used to question immigration regulations, the second focusing on how the ideal of the pure relationship is questioned by marriage migrants and their partners, and the third arguing that the informants draw on different and sometimes contradictory narratives of intimacy when they talk about and defend the reality of their own relationships.

### **Migration and Intimate Relationships**

Within migration studies, the family, intimate relations and love are subject to increasing scholarly interest (Bailey and Boyle 2004; Constable 2005; Grillo 2008; King 2002; Kofman 2004; Kraler 2010; Mai and King 2009; Smith 2004; Williams 2010). Migration scholars have presented different arguments concerning the relationship between norms of intimate relationships and immigration policy. One argument is that the family norms of the majority population in a local context function as the normative standard against which all relationships are judged (Myrdahl 2010; Schmidt 2011; Shah 2012; Williams 2010; Wray 2006). However, according to Helena Wray's study of British regulations, these do not always privilege marriages conforming to the norms of the majority population. Rather, marriages perceived as traditional and in accordance with the norms of the migrant's local community are accepted, even though they may diverge from the majority's norms and values. Marriages which are perceived as atypical and unorthodox in the migrants' country of origin appear to be more likely to be rejected (Wray 2006, 2008).

Furthermore, some scholars have focused on the contradictions between immigration policy and other policy fields, arguing that the underlying norms of the former often diverge from the implicit and explicit norms of the latter—e.g. family law, welfare-state policy and gender-equality policies (Eggebo 2010; Van Walsum 2008; Wray 2008). Van Walsum (2008) identifies numerous inconsistencies between Dutch family law and family immigration policy, and argues that there is a

growing disjunction between liberal family law and restrictive family immigration policy (2008: 219–57). Kraler studied the consequences that family immigration policies have on the migrants themselves, and focuses on how they struggle to bring their own practices in line with the family norms and ideals of state policies (2010: 17). Moreover, family immigration regulations embody a fundamental tension between the right to privacy and family life on the one hand, and national immigration control on the other hand (Foblets and Vanheule 2006; Strasser *et al.* 2009; Wray 2008).

Changes in contemporary intimate life are a central issue in some analyses of modernity and post-modernity (e.g. Bauman 2003; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1992). Most scholars agree that intimacy has undergone a transformation in postwar Western societies in terms of women's position in the family, lesbian and gay rights, sexual liberation, increasing rates of divorce, declining marriage rates and increasing rates of cohabitation. However, opinions differ regarding what characterises 'contemporary intimate relationships'.

According to Giddens, modern marriages 'have veered increasingly towards the form of a pure relationship' (1992: 58). The pure relationship has four central characteristics. First, it is a 'social relation [that] is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it' (Giddens 1992: 58). Second, the partners are emotionally involved; they open up to one another and create a sense of intimacy through processes of mutual disclosure. Third, the pure relationship presumes equality, power balance and individual autonomy and has a potential for changing power relations and gender hierarchies. Fourth, it is characterised by sexual equality and reciprocal sexual pleasure being key elements in whether the relationship is sustained or dissolved (Giddens 1992).

Giddens has been criticised for describing an idealised version of intimacy that diverges considerably from people's real relationships and practices (Jamieson 1998, 1999; Smart and Shipman 2004). According to Jamieson, contemporary intimate relationships are not freed from economic and social structures. Rather, material circumstances, such as money and a shared household, bind people together (1999). Spending time together and sharing a house provide people with detailed knowledge about each other, and this is a minimal sort of intimacy found universally (Jamieson 1998). Practical sharing and caring is also a way to express love and create intimacy, which may often be just as important as mutual self-disclosure (Jamieson 1998, 1999). Furthermore, she challenges the thesis that modern relationships are becoming more democratic and equal, highlighting the persistence of gender hierarchy and structural inequalities. Nevertheless, she acknowledges that there is a general assumption that a good relationship will be equal and intimate, and shows how people work to create a sense of an equal relationship, despite social and structural inequalities (1999: 484–5).

'Love' is a key concept in several works on intimacy (see Bauman 2003; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1992; Jamieson 1998; Luhmann 1986). According to the sociologist Eva Illouz (1998), people tend to talk about their own intimate relationships by drawing simultaneously on two contradictory narratives of love. *Romantic love* is an immediate, irrational and overwhelming force superior to reason and family considerations. Romantic love is 'love at first sight', an extraordinary adventure where the protagonists often meet obstacles that prevent them from marrying (Illouz 1998). Illouz' informants see this model of love as foolish and unreal, a Hollywood myth, and say they do not believe in it. Rather they prefer a realistic model of love, where the relationship develops more slowly and evolves from friendship. In the narrative of *realistic love*, reason and passion are combined as the partners are compatible to one another and love develops from the routines of everyday life. Paradoxically, however, realistic love is also rejected because it lacks intensity and passion; it is seen as unromantic, cold, unappealing and old-fashioned. In fact, the romantic and the realistic models of love are both discredited and 'held as ideals by the same people, who invoke them for different reasons at different points in the interview' (Illouz 1998: 171).

### Case and Methods

Marriage migration accounts for a substantial number of migrants in many European countries (EMN 2008). In Norway, marriage migration constituted 43 per cent of all immigration between 1990 and 2006 (Daugstad 2008: 73) and has received increasing political interest (Hagelund 2008). As in many other European countries, political debates about marriage migration have centred on the issue of forced marriage. One example is the controversial proposal for a 21-year age limit for marriage migration, inspired by the Danish 24-year law passed a few years earlier (see Bredal 2005; Hagelund 2008; Myrdahl 2010; Siim and Skjeie 2008). In recent immigration law proposals, forced marriage, the abuse of migrant women and children and marriages of convenience are presented as the three central challenges related to cross-border marriage migration (AID 2007; NOU 2004). During the 2000s, marriages of convenience received more attention than before, both from policy-makers and in the media. In 2010, Norway adopted a new legal definition of marriage of convenience, also inspired by Danish legislation (AID 2007: 187), that is stricter than those of many other European countries (Econ Pöyry 2010: 2).<sup>4</sup>

The main preconditions for marriage migration to Norway are that the marriage is formally legal, that the relationship is 'real' and that the couple lives together. The sponsor must also document his or her means of subsistence and adequate housing (Econ Pöyry 2010; Eggebø 2010; Staver 2010; UNE 2008). In 2009, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration assessed 11,168 applications for marriage migration. All told, 15 per cent of the applications were rejected but, of these, only 1.8 per cent were rejected because they were deemed to be marriages of convenience (Econ Pöyry 2010).

Recent efforts to prevent marriages of convenience have had major consequences for the administrative processing of applications (Econ Pöyry 2010: 2). Of particular importance are the instructions from the Ministry of Justice and the Police, specifying what factors civil servants are to consider when assessing applications. These factors include how long the spouses have known each other, their knowledge of each other, whether they can communicate in a common language, their age difference and whether the marriage is atypical according to the traditions of the immigrant's home country (Justis- og Politidepartementet 2010). These instructions concerning marriages of convenience are similar to those of other European countries (see, for instance, Econ Pöyry 2010).

The primary data for this article consist of 19 interviews with applicants and/or their partners for marriage migration to Norway. Eleven of the interviews were carried out with one partner only and eight had both partners present. Informants were recruited through organisations, personal networks and an Internet forum, and the interviews were conducted during the autumn of 2008 and early winter 2009. The gender breakdown was 15 women and 13 men, 22 heterosexuals and six non-heterosexuals, of whom 12 were Norwegian citizens and 16 were non-Norwegians (citizens of Australia, Iraq, Liberia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Russia, Somalia, Thailand, Turkey, the Ukraine, the USA and Venezuela). At the time of the interviews, two applicants had been rejected; four were waiting for a permit and/or visa and 12 had already received a positive decision and been able to join their partner. One of the interviewees had, according to her own story, entered into a marriage of convenience.

The interviews were informed by a semi-structured interview guide and interviewees were asked to talk about the application process for marriage migration and their relationships. The aim of the interviews was threefold:

- to produce narratives about the application process and the informant's intimate relationships, including their reflections on the immigration regulations' requirement for a real marriage and what they themselves consider to be a real marriage;
- to gain access to detailed descriptions of individual lives and trajectories and of how rules, regulations and institutional processes function in relation to people's lives; and
- to tease out general features of the application process.

This last part of the analysis also included legal texts and policy documents pertaining to the Norwegian immigration act (AID 2007; NOU 2004; *Utlendingsloven* 2008) and data from short-term fieldwork at the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration.<sup>5</sup>

The interviewees presented very different stories and their narratives are clearly shaped by the application process and its outcome. Despite their differences, all the interviewees had been in a situation where they had to relate to the Norwegian migration regulations, and most were directly or indirectly confronted with the idea

of the marriage of convenience. Many felt that their relationship was being questioned throughout the application process and that they had to defend the 'realness' of their marriage. During our conversations, many interviewees opposed regulation and control practices and defended their own relationships as real and legitimate.

### **The Practical Dimensions of Intimacy**

Detailed knowledge acquired from spending time together and sharing a home may be seen as a minimal and universal aspect of intimacy (Jamieson 1998). When applying for marriage migration to Norway, most applicants and sponsors are subject to interviews with the immigration administration,<sup>6</sup> during which they are asked a wide range of questions about the relationship and the partner. Questions tend to be specific and detailed and concern material and practical aspects of the relationship and the partner's everyday life, and these control practices appear to focus on what Jamieson (1998: 8) describes as 'the practical dimension of intimacy'. During their interviews with the researcher, applicants and reference persons often questioned these control practices.

Many informants described the application interview as an uncomfortable situation where they felt nervous and stressed. The situation is uncomfortable because they know they are being scrutinised and tested, but they do not know according to what standards and what specific parameters. A male marriage migrant from South America related his interview:

They ask where you met your partner. They want to know the precise date, and if you remember what time exactly, that's even better. So during the interview, it's important to have a good memory (. . .) They look for marriages of convenience, and I have no problem with that. Our story is true, so it was alright for me. But when they wanted to know not only where you met and how long you have been together, but what our flat looks like and more intimate stuff, it felt uncomfortable. You have to cooperate though, but it is uncomfortable to answer (. . .) [The police officer] wanted me to sketch the flat (. . .) and asked all kinds of detailed questions. Not exactly the colour of my partner's socks, but things like that. Many odd questions. He wanted to know everything in detail (. . .) A lot of people wouldn't have handled this situation the way I did. People tend to get nervous, forget things. We know they are looking for something, but we are not quite sure what. So it is an uncomfortable situation. And it is easy to forget the exact date of when you met your partner, because right there and then, you feel the pressure. It's like an exam. You are stressed. You are nervous (Interview 8).

The situation is marked by the unequal power relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. The authorities set the standards and define the criteria for what a real marriage is, and the civil servants of the immigration administration have the power to make decisions on this basis. Applicants however, just 'have to cooperate' and then await a decision.

Analysis of my data allows me to discern some general features of how the reality of a marriage is scrutinised. As the above quote illustrates, there are generally two types of question asked during interviews with the immigration administration. First, there are those concerning the development of the relationship, from when they first met until they married. For example, when and how the partners met, whether they were introduced to each other by another person or met randomly, the number and duration of visits, how long they had known each other before they decided to get married, who proposed, the number and names of wedding guests, what food was served, the price of the wedding ring and who paid for it. Second, there are questions concerning the couple's everyday life such as who sleeps on which side of the bed, how the partners take their tea or coffee, what film they saw last time they went to the cinema and where they keep the vacuum cleaner. They also ask questions about the partner's friends and family—for example, names, addresses, dates of birth and occupations. When searching for real marriages, the immigration administration focuses on shared detailed knowledge acquired from spending time together and sharing a home. Consequently, the control practices described here appear to be more in line with Jamieson's descriptions of intimacy, than with that of Giddens.

Some informants find the detailed and practical questions easy and unproblematic to answer. Others find them intrusive and uncomfortable and worry that they will not be able to provide the information and detail requested, or that what they say will be used against them. Others again see such questions as ridiculous, meaningless and rather irrelevant for the task of determining whether a marriage is real. One informant, a Norwegian woman previously married to a man from Iraq, suggested that the questions asked do not capture the important dimensions of intimacy and proposed an alternative interview strategy:

First of all, the interviews should have been shorter and more human. Second, they should have asked more intelligent questions related to deeper psychological aspects of marriage, with both of the spouses there together at the same time so they could also talk to each other. I think that would have made it easier, much easier, to reveal whether it is true or not. They should have a psychologist there, a person who is trained to observe people (Interview 6).

According to this interviewee, investigations should focus on interaction, communication and feelings instead of practical details. The informant also remarks that such an interview strategy would probably be even more intrusive than questions about practical and economic matters. However, the point seems to be that, to her, the investigations do not seem suitable for distinguishing real relationships from marriages of convenience. While the immigration administration focuses on practical sharing and detailed knowledge acquired from everyday life, this informant, instead, highlights the deep knowledge and understanding acquired through communication and the mutual disclosure of inner thoughts and feelings. Thus, she seems to draw on an understanding of intimacy resembling the pure relationship, and this narrative of

intimacy is used to question immigration regulations and the procedures of the application process.

During our research interviews, informants tended to oppose control practices with reference to the right to self-determination and privacy, and demanded state non-intervention into private matters. According to Giddens, self-determination is a key feature of the pure relationship (1992: 199). In contrast, the practices of immigration control make cross-border marriages heavily dependent on conditions defined by immigration regulations rather than by the partners themselves. A Norwegian woman married to a Pakistani man comments:

I found the questions they asked really provoking. (...) They asked how long we had known each other, how much we had talked, how many times we had met, and so on. Is that their business? It is my private life! Why should they know these things? Whether I have known my husband for a long time or not, that is my problem. (...) I find it provoking that you can't choose. It is like you cannot choose where you find your spouse. Do you have to find a spouse in Norway? Should the state decide whether you marry a Chinese, Japanese, Pakistani or Norwegian? (...) [While we waited for a visa], it was very difficult to plan anything. (...) We couldn't plan the wedding properly and we lost a year of living together. (...) Our life together was postponed. If I were 18 or 19 alright, but I am 30 and certainly didn't need the postponement (Interview 19).

Her intentions, as shown in the quote above, were apparently questioned by the immigration administration due to the fact that she had chosen an arranged marriage to a man from the same country of origin as her parents. In public discourse, arranged marriage and marriage of choice are frequently presented as fundamentally contradictory (Bredal 2005; Fair 2010; Myrdahl 2010; Schmidt 2011). To this informant, however, the normative ideals of autonomy, self-determination and privacy encompass the right to choose an arranged marriage without being questioned by state authorities, and she opposes the procedures of the application process with reference to these ideals.

The ideal of the pure relationship explains, I would argue, why many marriage migrants and sponsors react to and oppose the practices of immigration control and, to some extent, the pure relationship appears to be the standard against which the control practices of the immigration administration are judged.

### **The Pure Relationship in the Context of Migration**

Equality, power balance and mutual sexual pleasure are important elements of the pure relationship (Giddens 1992). While some control practices focus on practical information and domestic details, the issues of equality and sexuality are also aspects of how a real marriage is understood by the immigration administration. As cohabitation is a requirement for marriage migration, the police may show up at the spouses' place of residence to determine whether they live together (Econ Pöyry 2010: 38–42).<sup>7</sup> Such home visits do not appear to be widespread, but several informants say

they worry one may happen any day. During home visits, the police checks for shoes, clothes, toothbrushes, razorblades and other personal items. They also look for evidence that the couple share a bed (Mühlisen *et al.* 2009). Control practices tend to focus on cohabitation in a shared flat and the consummation of the marriage. In some countries, investigations include direct questioning about sexual practices (Digruher and Messinger 2006; Luibhéid 2002), but this is not usually the case in Norway. Still, one Norwegian sponsor interviewed says she was questioned about sex:

I understand that they ask questions concerning sexuality, but really, I think it is rather irrelevant. I mean, couples are so different with regard to sex. Some have a lot of sex, others don't. I do not think that sexual intercourse, which they tend to focus on, can reveal that much. Intimacy is more important (Interview 6).

Even though the state does not control spouses' sexual practices in other contexts, the control practice concerning sex could still be seen as somewhat in line with traditional legal understandings of marriage, as consummation has been regarded as essential to marriage in much European family law (Crowhurst 2008; Lando 2004; Telste 2000). Such practices are also, to some extent, in line with the notion of the pure relationship, where 'sexuality and intimacy are tied together as never before' (Giddens 1992: 84). My informant, however, challenges the assumption that sex is essential for a real marriage and presents sex and intimacy as separate issues. She activates what Illouz (1998: 166) has described as 'the modern notion of sex and love, where these are separate narratives which may and may not converge'.

According to Williams, cross-border marriages are always likely to fall short when the pure relationship is set up as the template for marriage, because these relationships are 'even less likely than marriages between citizens to be truly equal' (2010: 83). Indeed, several informants said they worried that their relationship would be perceived as unequal and thereby disregarded as unreal. As a Norwegian woman married to a Pakistani man commented:

In our case, cultural difference concerns class, education, language and so on. The authorities see these kinds of difference as an alert, a warning lamp! (Interview 18).

According to her, she and her husband were perceived as very different from each other, and this raised suspicions about their relationship. Other informants share her concern that social differences between the spouses—e.g. class, culture, age and religion—could lead to perceptions of the couple as incompatible and raise suspicions of a marriage of convenience.

According to both Giddens (1992) and Jamieson (1999), equality is a widely shared ideal for a good relationship. The ideal of equality can serve to discredit many cross-national marriages and several informants talked about how they feel discredited in public discourse, by the immigration administration, by the local community and sometimes also by their own family. Global economic inequalities are often interpreted as a motive for marrying a person residing in a wealthy welfare state

such as Norway. According to the informants' narratives, people are prone to suspect that marriage migrants from non-Western countries marry for the sake of economic betterment. On some occasions, these assumptions may even lead the couple to question each other's intentions. A male sponsor married to a Thai woman comments:

I think that marriage migrants are often believed to marry for practical reasons. And these are thoughts I have been thinking myself as well. Are there only practical reasons for the two of us to live together? Would she leave me when the three years of temporary residence permit have passed? (...) Falling in love is the basis for marriage, but of course, there are also practical reasons for staying together. Love is not the only bond between us (...) You live together, and the more practical stuff has to be done (...) Is love or practical sharing the foundation of marriage? I think it's both (Interview 10).

Marrying for economic, practical and strategic purposes would diverge from the ideal of the pure relationship, sustained only for its own sake and characterised by autonomy, equality and power balance (Giddens 1992). However, according to my informant, real relationships are not devoid of all practical and economic bonds, and practical commitments and gains do not stand in opposition to love. Questioning this opposition, the informant seemed to repudiate the suspicion cast on (some) cross-national marriages due to structural and economic inequalities. Drawing on an understanding of intimacy which resembles that of Jamieson, the informant can be said to challenge the ideal of the pure relationship.

### **Realistic and Romantic Love**

Illouz (1998) shows how people activate two contradictory narratives of love—realistic and romantic—when they talk about their own intimate relationships. A general tendency in the material analysed here, regardless of the interviewees' gender, national background and immigration status, is that people draw on a repertoire of different norms and ideals for marriage and intimate relationships. Several informants referred to both the romantic and the realistic model when they defended the realness of their own relationships. A Nepalese sponsor temporarily settled in Norway with his wife and child described his marriage as 'not a totally arranged marriage, nor a pure love marriage; it is a combination' (Interview 4). According to Illouz, 'marriages of "reason" organised by families and combining passion and reason, form part of the realistic model of love' (1998: 164). Presenting the story of his own relationship, the informant combines the two contradictory narratives of realistic and romantic love. Moreover, his narrative is also in line with Wray's argument that there is a tendency to accept marriages perceived as traditional and in accordance with the norms of the migrant's local community, and to reject relationships perceived as atypical:

A friend of my parents has a cohabitant. He and his partner live together, but they are not married. Then he moved here and applied for a visitor's visa for her. He didn't get it. (...) If any European had a cohabitant, he would get a visa (...) Maybe

the authorities think that these kinds of relations don't exist in Nepal and that it might be fake? (Interview 4).

The informant suggests that migrants from some parts of the world are judged according to the immigration administration's perception of what a traditional relationship looks like in a certain part of the world, and this would be consistent with Wray's findings (2006, 2008). It seems that different expectations about intimate norms and practices are applied to different applicants, depending on their country of origin. Apparently, immigration regulations may also be informed by sometimes contradictory narratives of love and intimacy. On the one hand, the administration seems to expect people to present a realistic narrative of love. On the other, marriage migrants are also expected to conform to the ideal of romantic love (Lan 2008; Myrdahl 2010; Schmidt 2011).

The Nepalese couple was apparently never suspected of having a marriage of convenience. In contrast, a Norwegian woman married to a Pakistani man felt that the reality of their relationship was being seriously questioned throughout the process and experienced the application process as extremely difficult and provoking. According to her, the relationship was regarded as suspect because she is older than her husband, because they have both been married previously and because her husband is from Pakistan. Studies often describe a tendency to suspect and control marriage between local women and foreign men more than others, particularly if the woman is considerably older than her partner (Breger 1998; De Hart 2006, 2007; Digruher and Messinger 2006; Hagesæther 2008; Kraler 2010; Mühleisen *et al.* 2009). According to Wray's study of British control practices, male applicants from the Indian sub-continent are regarded as suspicious, in particular if there is a considerable age gap (older wife), or if the sponsor is divorced or has children (2006: 311–12). During our interview, my respondent presented her objections to what she saw as discriminating control practices, and defended the reality of her own marriage:

One Friday night we were talking, and he said something very wise which all these people who have an opinion about other people's relations should have heard. He said that what happened to me and you shouldn't be possible. That we could marry and have a life together. We are from different planets. We come from different countries, from different continents. From different cultures, from different religions and have different economic and social backgrounds. We are different culturally and academically (Interview 18).

She presented a narrative of romantic love. It is extraordinary; a story of impossible love and sacrifice where the lovers have overcome considerable obstacles to carry on the love (Illouz 1998: 173). The informant's narrative breaks with the 'everyday life taken-for-grantedness' and the notion of compatibility described by Illouz as central features of the realistic model of love (1998: 167–9). She draws on the narrative of romantic love to challenge control practices where compatibility and reason—central features of realistic love—seem to be the normative standard against which her

relationship is judged. The narrative of romantic love is activated in order to defend the reality of the relationship. According to Kraler, this is a common narration strategy among marriage migrants suspected of being in a marriage of convenience (2010: 51). However, elsewhere in the narrative, she activates the model of realistic love. She describes a love relationship developed from friendship and a marriage where the practical routines of everyday life are an important aspect of intimacy. Moreover, she describes the similarities between her husband and herself and thereby stresses compatibility. In line with Illouz' findings, both narratives of love seem to be presented as ideals by the same people in the same interview (1998: 171).

## Conclusions

Migration scholars have shown how family immigration policies privilege some relationships and disadvantage others, and that immigration control represents a form of state control of intimacy quite different from that with which most couples are faced. Even though the informants oppose and question this control, most of the marriage migrants and sponsors interviewed say they think there have to be some kinds of regulation preventing immigration on the basis of marriages of convenience, and acknowledge that only real marriages should give the right to marriage migration. All, except one, regard their own relationship as real and also regard the control practices of the immigration administration as unnecessary in their particular case. Even though most applications for marriage migration are accepted and the majority of relationships are recognised as real, the application process places people in a frustrating situation of indeterminacy. The informants emphasise that genuine relationships should be recognised and treated with respect but, even in their own narratives, there do not seem to be any unitary definitions of a real marriage. Rather, informants draw on different and sometimes contradictory norms, ideals and narratives of love, intimacy and marriage when they talk about and justify their own relationships, faced with the requirements of the Norwegian immigration regulations.

Marriage migrants and sponsors' accounts provide insight into the contemporary norms and practices of intimacy in a global context, and theories on intimacy are relevant for studies of migration. According to the findings in this article, the pure relationship seems to be one standard against which cross-border marriages are sometimes judged. Structural inequalities between spouses may become a reason to suspect that the marriage is entered into for strategic purposes; this would contradict the ideal of a 'relationship for its own sake'. However, many of the control practices of the Norwegian immigration administration—for example, detailed questioning regarding practical, material and economic matters—are more in line with the practical dimension of intimacy and the realistic narrative of love described by Jamieson (1998, 1999) and Illouz (1998) respectively, than with the pure relationship.

Interestingly, the pure relationship also functions as the standard against which the control practices of the immigration administration are judged by applicants and their partners. When confronted with the notion of a real marriage centred on

practical intimacy and realistic love, the informants defend the realness of their relationship and question the relevance of the authorities' control practices by activating the narrative of romantic love or the ideal of the pure relationship. In this article I have shown that Giddens' (1992) notion of the pure relationship is one, but far from the only, normative ideal present in the narratives of the marriage migrants and their partners. Jamieson's and Illouz' studies on intimacy that focus on realistic love and practical commitments, and the literature on migration and intimate relations that focuses on the processes of exclusion brought about by immigration law, also provide important insights into the narratives and experiences of the interviewees.

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### Notes

- [1] Terms such as 'bogus', 'fake', 'sham', 'residence' or 'bad-faith' marriages, and '*marriage blanc*', are used to describe what is known in Norway as a 'pro forma marriage'. For the sake of conceptual clarity, this article will use the term 'marriage of convenience'.
- [2] In a recent study of marriages of convenience, sociologist Pål Vegard Hagesæther suggests that 'the pure relationship' functions as the ideal that cross-border marriages are judged against in the Norwegian context (Hagesæther 2008: 28). Pei-Chia Lan has studied female migration to Taiwan, and suggests that the practices of immigration control privilege 'pure relationships' and devalue traditional marriages (Lan 2008: 846).
- [3] The concept of 'marriage migration', or more specifically 'cross-border marriage migration', includes the migration of one spouse following the other (family reunion), as well as family formations—people who marry across borders (Williams 2010: 5). 'Family migration' includes both marriage migration and reunion with other family members (children, parents etc).
- [4] According to Norwegian policy-makers, efforts to prevent marriages of convenience should focus on family formation rather than on family reunion (AID 2007; NOU 2004); however, the rules and regulations are the same for both categories.
- [5] Data from fieldwork include interviews, observational data and case files where marriage of convenience had been suspected. Elsewhere, I have analysed policy documents (Eggebo 2010) and the accounts of employees at the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (Eggebo 2012). A comprehensive analysis of this material is outside the scope of this article.
- [6] I use the term 'immigration administration' to cover the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, the Immigration Appeals Board, local police units and migration-related staff at Norwegian embassies. Applicants are usually interviewed by embassy personnel in their country of origin, and sponsors are interviewed by the local police in Norway (Econ Pöyry 2010: 33–43).
- [7] A family immigration permit is temporary and, if the spouses do not live together, separate or divorce, the residence permit is withdrawn. After three years of temporary permits, a migrant can apply for a permanent one. A permanent residence permit is not contingent on the marriage and grants the marriage migrant an independent residence status. For an overview of similar regulations in other European countries, see the EMN report (2008).

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