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Twice as many helpers: unpacking the connection between marriage migration and older labour immigrants' access to family support

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Abstract

In research on ethnic minority families, the topics of marriage migration and filial support to the elderly have generally been studied separately. This article argues that the two phenomena are linked, as older immigrants are better able to receive family support when children-in-law arrive as marriage migrants, leaving behind their own parents in their country of origin. On the basis of interviews with 39 first-generation immigrants from Turkey who are aging in Denmark, the study argues that the substantial family support which these older immigrants receive depends on the ability of their children and children-in-law to divide such support between them. In the host country context in which women generally work, however, the failing health of older immigrants may lead to considerable family strain. To honour filial obligations, some families make use of an option to seek to have daughters or daughters-in-law employed by the authorities to provide family support.

Keywords: marriage migration; Turkish immigrants; filial obligations; domestic labour; intergenerational support.

Introduction

Since the 1990s, a substantial share of migration research has applied a transnational perspective, seeing the lives of ethnic minorities as unfolding in transnational social spaces, spanning the borders of two or more nation-states (Basch et al., 1994; Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002). Part of this research focuses on transnational family networks, including a strand of studies investigating how new families are formed. Such studies bring out both the extent of and manifold reasons underlying marriage migration – including the renewal of links to the ancestral 'home-land', expansion of available marriage markets, and provision of legal routes of entry into affluent host countries with increasingly restrictive migration regimes (Beck-Gernsheim, 2007, 2011; Charsley, 2012). Compared to other groups, immigrants from Turkey have had a high proclivity for transnational marriages (Carol et al., 2014; Milewski and Hamel, 2010; Van Kerckem et al., 2013). The rate of Turkish transnational marriages has been particularly high in Denmark, some

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studies in the 1990s finding that around 80–90 per cent of the labour immigrants' children were finding their spouses in Turkey (Celikaksoy Mortensen, 2006; Liversage, 2013). This high rate can be tied to the first generation of Turkish immigrants in Denmark generally having little education and being of rural origin, hence being more prone to reproducing traditional patterns of family formations (Bernhardt et al., 2007). The level of Turkish marriage migration to Denmark has fallen off in recent years, due to both the introduction of the new legislation around 2002 and increasing levels of education among immigrant offspring.

Other studies of transnational family networks have focused on reproduction and shifting norms and practises regarding 'filial responsibilities', that is, the extent to which adult children support their elderly parents. Of central interest here have been the effects of migration from more collectively to more individualistically oriented societies on such norms and practices. This research interest is timely: Since much of the immigration to north-western Europe occurred as labour immigration around 1970, this first generation of labour immigrants is now growing old in increasing numbers, and the care and support which such aging immigrants receive is an issue of increasing scholarly and practical concern (Burr and Mutchler, 1999; de Valk and Schans, 2008; Naldemirci, 2013).

The two phenomena – marriage migration and family support within families (i.e. fulfilling filial responsibilities) – obviously might be linked, as new marriage migrants renew ties to their country of origin, where filial responsibilities are generally attributed greater importance than in the destination country. The purpose of this article, however, is to draw attention to how marriage migration possibly also affects the practice of filial responsibility in another manner: Marriage migration may strongly shape the presence and absence of family members across the transnational social space. Thus, when a couple is formed through a transnational marriage, the migrating spouse may leave his or her parents behind in the country of origin. Hence, such a couple may have only one – and not two – sets of gradually aging parents present in the country of residence. As care and support are intimately linked to physical proximity, this structural aspect of marriage migration is central to the subsequent provision of support to older family members. Nevertheless, to this author's knowledge, this link has hitherto remained unexplored.

Understanding the demographic aspect of marriage migration as the patterned distribution of specific family relations across transnational social space, the research question in this article is, thus, the following: *How are practices of family support towards aging first-generation immigrants affected by their children predominantly having spouses who arrived as marriage migrants?*

The study focuses on Turkish immigrants in Denmark. Register data analysis shows that 92 per cent of the around 10.000 endogamous Turkish marriages in Denmark, which occurred between 1981 and 1999, included one spouse who arrived as a marriage migrant (Liversage, 2013: 1076). This group has thus had particularly high

rates of marriage migration. The present analysis is based on qualitative interviews with 39 older Turkish immigrants. The article is structured as follows: First, it outlines two elements from Turkish society: the value attributed to filial responsibilities and the principle of patrilocality that influences the organization of the provision of domestic labour within family networks. Second, it discusses existing knowledge on filial responsibilities in the context of migration, and, third, the intersection between marriage migration and patrilocality. The fourth section describes the qualitative data and the fifth section presents qualitative findings regarding the provision of family support for older immigrants. The article ends with a discussion and conclusion.

Turkey: Filial Responsibilities and the Principle of Patrilocality

Filial duties have traditionally been attributed considerable importance in Turkey, as Turkish society has been said to be

“based on close-knit interpersonal relationships where support and sacrifice of parents towards their children, and the obedience and responsibility of children in caring for their parents in old age are strong, widely accepted values” (Imamoglu and Imamoglu, 1992: 102).

While falling birth rates and increases in rates of education and urbanization, nowadays, are straining such norms and practices (Yavuz, 2014; Yazici, 2012), the World Value Survey nevertheless shows that upholding ‘obedience and responsibility of children’ is attributed central importance (Halman et al., 2008: 21). Thus, 86 per cent of Turkish respondents agree to the statement that ‘regardless of what the qualities and faults of one’s parents are, one must always love and respect them’. In comparison, only 36 per cent of respondents agree to this statement in the destination country of Denmark (World Values Survey, 2015).

In Turkey as elsewhere, provision of care for the elderly, including help with domestic chores, is strongly gendered in feminine terms. Hence, between siblings, such help may be provided by daughters rather than sons. But there is another central actor in the Turkish family context whose importance should not be overlooked: the daughters-in-law. The importance of daughters-in-law as care providers for elderly family members is tied to a Turkish principle of patrilocality with some brides beginning married life in an extended household together with the husband’s parents (Bastug, 2002). This patrilocal pattern contributes to a historical Turkish preference for having sons rather than daughters (Kagitcibasi, 1982; Nauck and Klaus, 2005). Indeed, Turkish survey results show that in the late 1990s, over 40 per cent of the married 20–24-year-old women began married life cohabiting with the parental generation (Aykan and Wolf, 2002: 409). In 95 per cent of the cases, such extended families were patrilocal, that is, occurring with the husband’s (as opposed to the wife’s) parents (ibid: 408).

When daughters-in-law integrate into their husbands’ families, they may perform considerable amounts of domestic labour (Bastug, 2002). Recent developments in



Turkey towards smaller families, higher levels of education and urban living have, however, contributed to changing this family system, including reducing the access of mothers-in-law to the labour of their daughters-in-law, with daughters gaining importance as providers of parental support (Kagitcibasi, 2005; Kandiyoti, 1988).

Filial Duties amongst Turkish Immigrants

When it comes to immigrants in Europe, survey studies document that norms prescribing that adult children care for ageing parents are generally more strongly held in immigrant – as compared to majority – populations (Burr and Mutchler, 1999; Keefer et al., 2000). Studies thus show, firstly, that immigrants generally place greater importance on filial support than native populations and, secondly, that immigrants from Turkey (when compared to other immigrant groups) place particularly high importance on upholding such norms (Schans, 2007). Such support may entail both emotional ties, showing respect for the older generation and the concrete supply of help with domestic chores, transport and so forth (Naldemirci 2013, 2015). For older immigrants with poor skills in host country languages, filial support may also be in the form of linguistic support in interaction with the host country health system or public authorities.

Studies show that adherence to strong norms of filial obligations can indeed be found in the ‘second generation’, raised in Europe. Thus, a German study comparing levels of family solidarity between ethnic Germans and Turkish immigrants of both first and second generations finds that ‘the family solidarity potential is far higher among Turkish migrants than among Germans. These differences persist in the second generation and in all age groups’. Furthermore, the observed pattern is affected little by socio-economic differences (Carnein and Baykara-Krumme, 2013: 29). Such findings indicate that norms of filial responsibility indeed exist across transnational social space.

In the expression of such norms, the Turkish patrilocal family pattern may also be observed. Thus, an interview study with ‘second generation’ Turkish immigrants (aged 25–35) who live in Germany sheds light on expectations regarding the provision of help to aging parents. In this study, the interviewed men of Turkish origin generally implied that their wives (i.e. the older immigrants’ daughters-in-law) were expected to play a central role as caregivers for the older generation (Lorenz-Meyer and Grotheer, 2000: 200). It should be noted, however, that expressed norms about upholding filial responsibilities may not always translate into practice and that factors such as parental needs, intergenerational gender constellations (women generally provide more practical support than men) and education levels contribute strongly to shaping the practices of care within and between families (Schans, 2007; Schans and Komter, 2010).

Marriage Migration and the Attraction of Europe

Regarding the interplay between marriage migration and filial support, a central observation is that while patrilocality has been an important principle for many

families in Turkey (especially in rural and lesser-educated regions), this principle has not patterned flows of marriage migration. The affluence of Europe has meant that the vast majority of couples formed between a spouse with Turkish origins raised in Europe and a spouse raised in Turkey have settled in Europe. Thus, brides and grooms alike have migrated due to marriage. While arriving wives integrated into their husbands' families in accordance with the principle of patrilocality, such patrilocal settlement was not possible when husbands arrived, as they left their parents behind in Turkey (Lievens, 1999). In fact, as a reversion of Turkish extended household living patterns, a substantial minority of young marriage migrant husbands actually began life in Denmark cohabiting with the parents of their wives (Liversage and Jakobsen, 2010) – a type of extended family only rarely observed in Turkey. Such matrilocal living arrangements possibly empower young wives and correspondingly undermine their husbands' positions, putting some of these men in unexpectedly vulnerable positions (Charsley and Liversage, 2015).

The remaining part of the article analyses how – decades after the marriages of the second generation were contracted – the extensive marriage migration of husbands as well as wives contributes to shaping the care and support the first-generation labour immigrants receive in old age. First, however, I describe the underlying empirical material.

Method and Data

The article draws on a body of qualitative interviews carried out in 2013 in 24 households with older immigrants who were born in Turkey. These households contained a total of 39 older individuals, where at least one resident was between age 70 and 72. The households were located utilizing address information from Statistics Denmark and contacted by letter (in both Turkish and Danish) and follow-up phone calls explaining the project. The interviews were carried out in Turkish and/or Kurdish.¹

To establish the best possible rapport with the respondents, we allowed spouses to participate in the interviews if they so wished. Most respondents are 70–72 years old, but in the entire group ages span from a second wife in her mid-50s to a husband in his early 80s.

The interviews combined semi-structured and life-history approaches (Bertaux, 2003), where respondents were encouraged to describe their lives and asked thematic questions, including questions about the help they received from family members and other sources. All interviews but one (due to interviewee preference) were taped and transcribed in full in Turkish. NVivo software supported the data analysis and selected quotes were subsequently translated from Turkish into English. To protect anonymity, respondents' names were altered.

¹ The research project was supported by the VELUX Foundation.



The respondents generally originated from underdeveloped rural regions and had limited education. Aligning with the Turkish cohort they originated from, most male respondents had thus attended school for five years, while most female respondents had never attended school at all (Bastug, 2002). The respondents had on average of 4.6 children, with a range of 1-8. Corresponding with the general pattern of marriage migration, the vast majority of the respondents' children had married spouses who had entered Denmark as marriage migrants. These transnational marriages had predominantly been arranged, with parents choosing spouses from their villages of origin, not uncommonly from within the family network (Liversage and Rytter, 2015).

High Levels of Support from the Offspring to the Older Generation

In six of the 24 households, the older members lived together with one of their adult children. All six of these cases were with adult sons, thus adhering to the patrilocal principle. Four of these sons also had wives and children of their own, thus maintaining the Turkish 'cultural ideal' type of extended three-generational families (Aytac, 1998). Similarly, register data analysis on the household composition of all older Turkish immigrants (aged 65–74) living in Denmark shows that 23 per cent live together with an adult child, the vast majority with a son. Such intergenerational co-residence may facilitate the exchange of practical support between generations, the providers of support often being the sons' wives rather than the sons themselves (Liversage and Jakobsen, 2016).

While some older Turkish immigrants in Denmark thus live together with adult children, the majority (77 per cent of those aged 65–74) do not. In the remainder of this article I therefore draw on interviews from the 18 non-extended households, focusing on practices of filial support, attending particularly to the link between marriage migration and which family members actually provide such support.

Providing Practical Help to Older Immigrants

According to the interviews, the older immigrants received a considerable amount of help and support from the offspring generation. As three respondents explained:

It's difficult for me to shop. Sometimes the daughters come and do it. And sometimes the grandchildren come and clean. They look after us, do things... And if they come in the evening, they cook, too (Yasar).

Our children come to visit, and to help us, too... [And when we are on vacation to Turkey] they clean our flat. They vacuum and wash. They fill up the fridge. They drive us to the airport and pick us up again... And the daughter-in-law comes and washes and cleans everything (Belgin).

Our son comes and shops. Our daughter comes and cleans and washes our clothes... [With regard to grandchildren], my daughter's children don't come as often anymore – they're grown and working. Before, they came to wash our clothes and those sorts of things (Ahmet's wife).

In these quotes and elsewhere in the interviews, we hear of different relatives – primarily daughters, daughters-in-law and sons – providing help. Grandchildren are also mentioned as providing a limited amount of help. Sons-in-law hardly figure at all as helpers in the narratives.

While sons were often mentioned as helping with shopping (a task shared fairly evenly between men and women in Turkish immigrant families, see Jakobsen and Deding, 2006: 66), most of the help with domestic work was undertaken by daughters and daughters-in-law. The centrality of both of these female family relations can be linked to the demographic changes induced by marriage migration: While the reception of help from daughters-in-law is in line with traditional Turkish expectations, daughters also provide substantial support to their own parents. They are better able to do so because they have no parents-in-law nearby, whom they might otherwise be expected to support. The absence and presence of given family members, thus, create family constellations in the immigrant families that differ considerably from the constellations typically found in Turkey. The result is that, on average, aging first generation immigrants in Denmark are able to draw on assistance from almost twice as many women from the younger generation as compared to the average situation for aging peers in Turkey.

The Need for Support in the Host-country Context

The existence of more family members to share filial obligations increases the resources available in immigrant families. In the post-migratory context, such resources can be sorely needed for at least two reasons: Firstly, older immigrants arguably have greater needs due to processes of migration and, secondly, the offspring generation often face considerable challenges with providing support due to host-country economic structures.

Regarding greater needs for support, due to their immigrant status, the aging immigrants were often unable to communicate with Danish institutions and authorities. Older Turkish women in particular often had very limited command of Danish, and often required family support when needing to see, for example, a doctor. As two women reported:²

² Institutions also offer professional translation assistance, but the older immigrants generally preferred help from their kin.



I don't speak Danish. So my daughter comes and takes me [to the doctor]. Or my son does. I can't do it myself (Halime).

[On going to the hospital]... the children sometimes go with us. But they don't always have the time. 'You have to take time off work and take me there', I say. But the child has a job to take care of (Gamze).

A second reason why the sharing of support between more family members could be central for older immigrants was related to the economic structures of the host society. Denmark has a much higher female employment rate than Turkey (Eurostat, 2015), challenging the ability of the offspring generation to provide help to aging family members. Thus, in Denmark, women's employment rate stands at 72 per cent for the 30-64-year-olds (only three percentage points below the male rate). In comparison, the employment rate for 30-64-year-old immigrant women from Turkey is 37 per cent (Statistics Denmark, 2015) – a rate far below the rate for Danish women, but nevertheless higher than the employment rate of Turkish women in Turkey (Eurostat, 2015).

The high employment rate for majority Danish women is tied to a welfare state system (with mostly female employees), which undertakes many of the functions that are carried out within families in a country like Turkey. Thus, similar to public childcare, the Danish welfare system also provides eldercare. Related to such welfare services, the children of older native Danes generally consider domestic help to parents (e.g. with cleaning) as being the responsibility of the Danish authorities rather than the family's responsibility (Colmorten et al., 2003). While the older Turkish immigrants were often also entitled to such public homecare free of charge, several respondents explained that they sought to avoid receiving such services, citing reasons such as linguistic difficulties, dissatisfaction with cleanliness standards and cultural norms (e.g. reference was made to homecare helpers entering the home without first removing their shoes). The respondents' avoidance of the homecare services aligns with the general finding that lesser-educated immigrants use homecare less than native populations (Denktas, 2011; Hansen and Siganos, 2009).

While the older immigrants could seek to avoid receiving public homecare (preferring support from the family instead), the offspring generation might feel strained when seeking to meet aging immigrants' needs, even when more family members were able to share the work (i.e. due to marriage migration). In some cases (also tied to factors such as the elderly immigrants' number of children, the children's marital and employment status and where such children had settled), health problems and other issues nevertheless forced some older immigrants to draw on public homecare.

Another outcome was daughters or daughters-in-law (the two central providers of support) in some cases actually being hired as homecare providers by the Danish authorities and thus remunerated for providing family support.³ In Danish social legislation, this arrangement is entitled 'self-chosen helpers'. We encountered three such cases (either planned or realized): a daughter, a daughter-in-law and a (female) grandchild. Such arrangements can be seen as an ethnic minority group's way of seeking to uphold norms of filial responsibility in a challenging post-migration context in which women must also earn their own income. Statistics show that ethnic minority families utilize the policy option of 'self-chosen homecare providers' many times more often than do majority Danes (Copenhagen Municipality, 2015). A similar use of host country policy provisions to better live up to home country norms of filial responsibility is also documented in families with older Chinese members living in the United States (Lan, 2002).

Discussion and Conclusion

This article adds to the literature on filial responsibilities in ethnic minority families by drawing attention to the important link to transnational marriage practices: If the adult children of aging immigrants generally have marriage migrant spouses, the demographic composition of the immigrant community is skewed in a way that facilitates the provision of intra-family support.

Such a pattern can be observed in Turkish families in Denmark with older first-generation immigrant members. Firstly, these immigrants had relatively many children. Secondly, as 80–90 per cent of such children married spouses from Turkey, for each of these married couples (with one marriage migrant spouse) only one – not two – sets of aging parents live in the country of residence. Interviews with older first-generation immigrants reveal that they receive considerable support with their domestic chores when they grow old. This help is very often provided by female family members, both daughters (whose parents-in-law are far away) and daughters-in-law (whose own parents are far away).

Existing survey studies have found that the Turkish 'second generation' (i.e. individuals of Turkish ethnicity born and/or raised in the host country) expresses considerable support for country-of-origin norms of filial responsibility, a burden which is primarily shouldered by ethnic minority women (Carnein and Baykara-Krumme, 2013; Schans and Komter, 2010). This study shows that upholding such practices in Europe may be shored up by high levels of marriage migration at an earlier point in time.

³ The policy option of 'self-chosen homecare providers' is regulated in the Danish law on social services, § 94. The municipality will have to accept the provider chosen, and the helper must support the municipality's guidelines on provisions of help – including a principle of 'help to self-help'. The number of weekly hours of employment depends on the municipality's assessment of needs. The hourly pay of the home helper is around the pay given to other home helpers – app. 18 euro per hour before tax.



Dividing the ‘burden of care’ between more family members (as compared to the situation in Turkish families who never left their home country) may be important for at least two reasons: First, the need for help amongst older immigrants is often greater than among non-migrants due to their limited host-country language proficiency. Second, as compared to Turkey, the Danish host-country context is less hospitable to care being provided by family due to the high female employment rate.

Tied also to factors such as the health and age of the older generation, some families nevertheless experience substantial problems providing the support they wish to supply and/or the support desired by the older family members. Some such families are able to apply to have their daughters or daughters-in-law hired as ‘self-chosen helpers’. As also seen among Chinese immigrants in the US, such an option may facilitate the fulfilment of filial responsibilities by providing a means to overcome structural constraints in the host country context.

With care for the elderly being intimately tied to physical proximity, the findings of this article indicate that future studies of filial support in ethnic minority families could be well advised to direct attention to the effects of earlier patterns of (marriage) migration for the subsequent provision of care. This study indicates that such earlier marriage migration patterns contribute significantly to making possible the family support that older Turkish immigrants receive in Denmark today. The same can be expected to be the case for other immigrant groups where rates of marriage migration have been high and where daughters-in-law play a central role in the provision of support for the aging parental generation.

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