

Book Review

Transnational Marriage and Partner Migration: Constellations of Security, Citizenship, and Rights,

by Anne Marie D'Aoust

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This edited book brings forward important reflections on the migrant experience of couples, often but not always with examples of marriages between a citizen of a developed country and a migrant from the Global South. The chapters discuss policy and practice in Western European countries, North America, and developed countries in Asia. With a large number of international contributors, including some well-known academics in the area of family migration, the book presents chapters from diverse perspectives illustrating how the legal and social laws regulating family migration shape family life beyond the visa process, while the (re) unification of transnational couples is dependent on highly political understandings regarding migration and family. There are also chapters dedicated to discussing motivations for 'non genuine' transnational relationships, governmental instruments to assess genuineness in a relationship, with their shortcomings, and chapters analysing all the performance and staging work required to present a genuine relationship.

D'Aoust's strong introduction on the history of migrant wives and international law highlights the tension embedded in the partner visa's origins, a visa that is not granted to fit in any country's development plan, in contrast to the extensive planning behind student and work visas, for instance. After all, the existence of migrant partners benefits one individual citizen regardless of the country's interests. Unsurprisingly, nation-states present passive and active resistance to the individual citizen accessing the right to 'marry the person of their choosing,' an issue identified in migration law and in the behaviour of state agents in all countries as discussed in the book. The "state vs. individual" tension appears in chapters from all perspectives, including chapters engaging the standpoint of migrants, sponsors, immigration officers, and politicians in parliament.

The chapters are divided in four parts, the first three parts with three chapters each and the fourth and final one, with three chapters and one Epilogue.

Part One, "Policing Rights and Belonging: Histories and Legacies of Marriage Migration Management," is focused on the management of family migration by the receiving nation's laws; with two chapters focused on legal and social debates, the first from Betty de Hart and second from Saskia Bonjour and Massilia Ourabah; and the last chapter by Ji-Yeon Yuh focused on the experience of migrant women from the same country of Korea, migrating



to the same host nation but under two different migration regimes, in two separate historical moments.

Part Two, “Intersectional Effects of Contemporary Marriage and Partner Migration Management: Stratification of Rights,” is focused on the vulnerabilities intersecting with the family migration/partner visa process; with first, a chapter by Helena Wray reflecting on the gendered narratives about state protection of citizens in four different nations; second, a chapter by Grace K. Tran on partner migration and the psychological and material impact of the practice on the sponsors’ lives, masculinity, and sense of self; and third, the last chapter analyzing social narratives on family reunification and children’s rights. This latter chapter from Kerry Abrams and Daniel Pham is actually the only one in the book focusing on children’s experiences.

Part Three, “Navigating the Security State: Couples and State Bureaucracies,” has each chapter starting from the perspective of a group of agents managing the bureaucracy of family migration; including first, a chapter by Anne Marie D’Aoust where immigration lawyers encourage couples to present as a more stereotypical pair for the immigration process; second, a chapter by Laura Odasso and Manuela Salcedo Robledo where “intimacy brokers” navigate the family migration route with same sex couples; and third, a final chapter by Mieke Vandenbroucke where immigration officers investigate immigration fraud and the inadequacies of the system to capture linguistic and cultural expressions to assist decision making. This third part is the most cohesive part of the book and, while the chapters are independent from each other and in theory need not be read in sequence, they complement each other and benefit from being read in a sequence.

The last part of the book, “Challenging Neoliberal Affective Regimes: Care, Work and Economy” brings chapters that challenge the policing on the propriety and genuineness of families and the behaviour expected from migrant partners in order to be considered part of a genuine relationship. The first chapter by Pardis Mahdavi reveals the difference in the migration experience between men and women from the same background, who migrate to the same country but under different visa streams, and who become unable to socialize and build community together. The second chapter by Rhacel Salazar Parreñas reintroduces the question if genuineness in a marriage is established by intention or by following the rites and rules of marriage; while the third chapter by Eithne Luibhéid discusses marriage to avoid deportation by genuine same sex couples. Lastly, the Epilogue from Audrey Macklin puts the focus back on the dynamic citizen, migrant partner, and the state; setting the migrant partner and the state as competitors for the loyalty of the committed citizen. It presents an alternative reading of the family, where the nuclear family usually identified as the basis of a society is only the family made of citizens of the same nation. Transnational marriage would create a disruptive unit for the Nation and not a stabilizing one.

This book comes highly recommended as a valuable addition to a variety of fields: cultural studies, immigration law, anthropology, ethics, feminist theory, and family studies. It would suit newcomers to family migration and family studies; and even established academics trying to expand their understanding of the phenomenon geographically and from the perspective of intersectionality.

“Transnational Marriage and Partner Migration: Constellations of Security, Citizenship and Rights” is an engaging examination of the laws and practices regulating borders and consequently regulating bodies and couples’ lives, with consideration to the harm caused by such regulating practices. However, this is also a hopeful examination of the ways to challenge these regulations, maintain individual or cultural authenticity, and even to reinvent what it is ‘to do’ migration and marriage.

Reference

D'Aoust, Anne-Marie, ed. 2022. *Transnational Marriage and Partner Migration: Constellations of Security, Citizenship, and Rights*. Ithaca, NY: Rutgers University Press. <https://doi.org/10.36019/9781978816749>.