
Katharine Charsley has edited a volume with diverse angles and fascinating materials for analysis of the concept “transnational marriage”. Examples include: “Bollywood style” wedding videos travelling the globe bringing transnational families together,\(^1\) divorce practices among Turkish immigrants in Denmark changing in accordance with new family power relations,\(^2\) and a modern turn on the classic story of falling in love through letter writing, that although with a happy ending illustrates the technical, legal and cultural challenges with a transnational marriage.\(^3\)

Marriage across borders is by no means a new phenomenon, but the process of globalisation, contemporary communications technology, and the increased ease of travelling have certainly impacted upon both the access to and the character of transnational marriages. Research on the phenomenon has indeed followed suit creating a vast and varied literature on the phenomenon. Charsley offers a review of the different strands of this literature in the first chapter, of which also legal scholarship is part. Typically it is the intersection between family law, immigration law and integration policies that will be of interest from a legal viewpoint and of which several of the contributors take as their field of research.\(^4\)

With the backdrop of such a differentiated and also in some sense conceptually confusing body of literature, this volume aims at providing new conceptual tools as well as opening “up new avenues for research on marriage, migration and transnationalism”. The book approaches the theme of transnational marriage from four different angles that also make up the four different parts of the book: Concepts (part one), legal contexts (part two), marriage, transnationalism and belonging (part three), and gender, power and visibility (part four). It is an ambitious endeavour, bringing about new material, perspectives and methodology to pave the way in this sense.

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\(^2\) A. Liversage, ‘Transnational Families Breaking Up: Divorce among Turkish Immigrants in Denmark’, chapter 8.


1. Concepts

The two first chapters attempt to provide an overview and further conceptualise “transnational marriage”. Charsley shows that many situations that are manifestly different have been given the term “transnational” which implies a need for clarification. Williams’ take on transnational marriage as a continuum seems a persuasive one, capturing the degree of border crossing – which varies greatly – in the analysis. The continued focus on the transnational as something unfixed, imagined and open as a community or a social space as it is perceived by the members itself is also a well-founded one, albeit making it somewhat vague and hard to grasp for the reader.

The examination of the second part of the concept, namely “marriage”, is equally interesting. Charsley shows how the word “marriage” is attributed to practices that are of such different natures that it is impossible to give the word a universal meaning. Several of the contributors illustrate this by showing how immigration authorities – in their control of whether the marriage is real or pro forma – apply a notion of marriage as it is understood in a Western context. This in turn impacts how marriages are celebrated and documented in an effort to comply with such notions.

In addition to this is linguistic ambiguousness, where “marriage” denotes both the wedding ceremony, the contracting of a relationship between the spouses, and the endurance of such a relation over time. Therefore, Charsley maintains that there is a need for a broad perspective of these phenomena, bringing together processes from the national level, perspectives of gender and transnationalism and a wider view of the inter-related relationship of marriage, migration and transnationalism. Such a broad view of “transnational marriage” is indeed upheld by the different contributions to the volume.

2. Legal Contexts

The second part of the book examines the legal contexts of transnational marriage, with Helena Wray and Martin Bak Jørgensen focusing on the growing regulation in Western countries with the aim of making it harder to immigrate on the basis of marriage to someone already living in such a country.