

# The Circle of Life:

Care Arrangements and Marriage Strategies  
in Pakistani Migrant Families

Mikkel Rytter

[mikkel.rytter@cas.au.dk](mailto:mikkel.rytter@cas.au.dk)

# Panel no. 5: The intergenerational mutual interdependence in aging societies

## **Abstract**

*An increasing number of the approximately 25.000 people with a Pakistani background in Denmark are ageing and in need of different kinds of help and care. Still, few elderly Pakistanis enter nursing homes or receive home care provided by the municipality. Instead, family members care for them at home in complex “care arrangements” that mobilize numerous family members for different practical and emotional assignments.*

*In this paper, I explore how concerns for elderly care inform marriage strategies among the upcoming generation of Pakistanis. Often the future care of aging parents become an important criterium when marriage partners are selected. However, the future-oriented marriage strategy is complicated by the general social and educational mobility in the Pakistani community, the increasing number of women entering the labor market, rising divorce rates and a strict Danish legislation on family reunification that makes the ‘traditional choice’ of a spouse from Pakistan difficult and insecure. Thus, the connection between care arrangements and marriage strategies highlights the intergenerational interdependence when it comes to care for elders in an aging Pakistani migrant community.*

# The long durée of Pakistani Migration

- 1) The *male labor migration* in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.
- 2) The phase of *family reunion* that occurred from the mid-1960s through to the 1980s.
- 3) The phase of *marriage migration*, beginning in the 1980s and continuing throughout the 1990s and 2000s.
- 4) A fourth phase of *migration for family care*, which entails long- or short-term migration for the care of elderly kin.

(Harriss and Shaw 2009).

# Entrainment

- Entrainment is a metaphor from biology; address how biological organisms are enabled and formed by external factors, i.e. how the human body or flowers follow the rhythm of day and night based on the light from the sun (Coe 2016: 40).
- Think of a Jackie Chan action movie where the hero rides a motorbike in a sufficient pace to jump from the bike to a train. In this way “entrainment” refers to the way that members of a given family organize and coordinate their rhythm, life projects and trajectories.



# THE AISHA PROJECT

Increased diversity among aging Danes – currently more than 70.000 have immigrant / refugee background.

Vulnerable group with many health problems...

In years to come the number of elders with immigrant background will increase. The elders often have:

- Negative perspective and ideas of public health care (very few use nursing homes)
- Little knowledge of the Danish language and available options/ service provided by the welfare state.

→ There is a need alternative solutions and care arrangements...



# PROJECT DESIGN

## Aarhus and Ishøj

- Large and small municipality / Vest and East Denmark
- Relative high concentration of citizens with immigrant background

above 65 years (Aarhus > 3,5 %; Ishøj >10 %).

## Family studies:

Anika Liversage: Danish-Turkish families

Abir Ismail: Danish-Arab families (ph.d.-project)

Mikkel Rytter: Danish-Pakistani families

## Fieldwork among care managers in the municipalities:

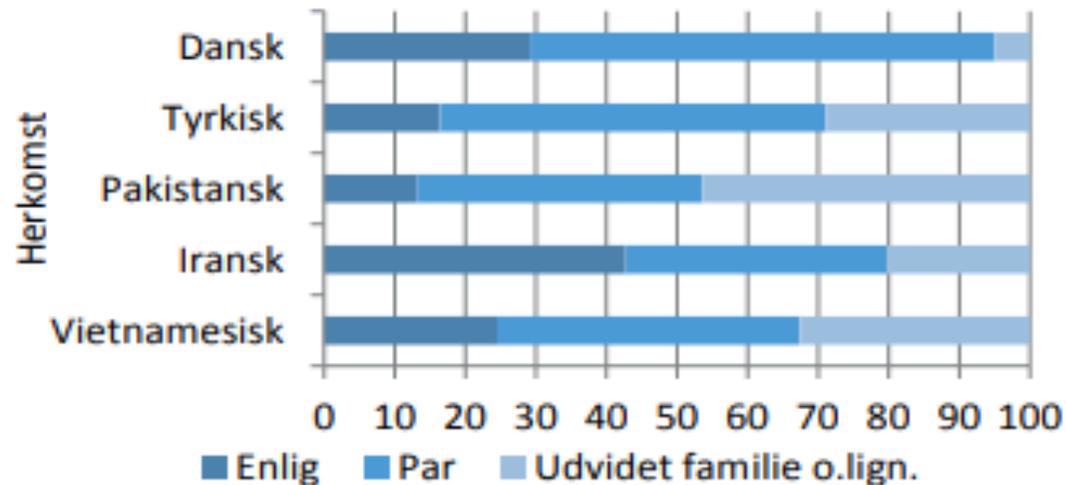
Sara Lei Sparre



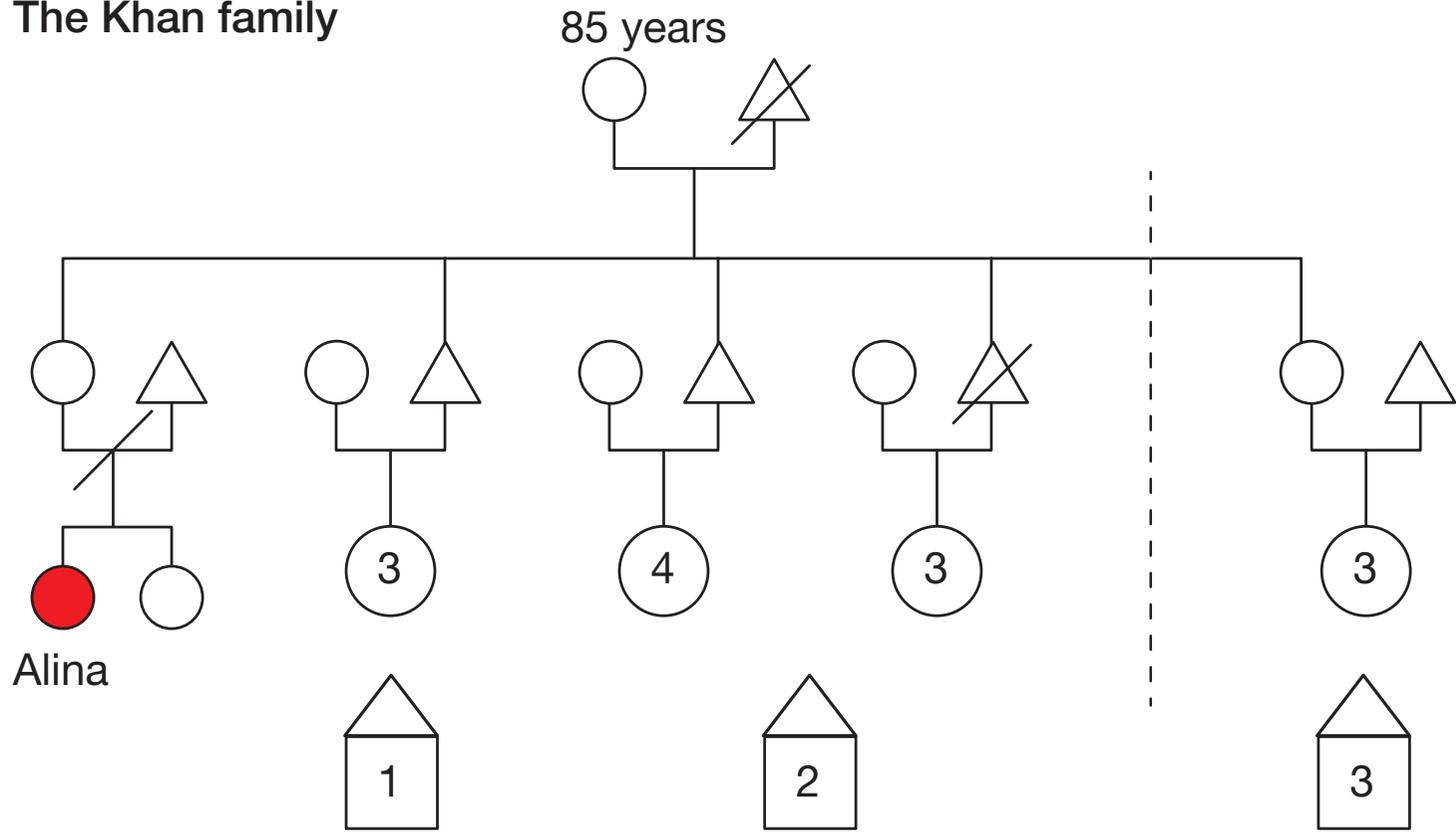
# Housing and extended families

## Pakistani kinship:

- Patrilineal with preference for virilocal households.
- Extended families (an aspect of social mobility).
- ‘Families with open doors’ (Schmidt 2002).



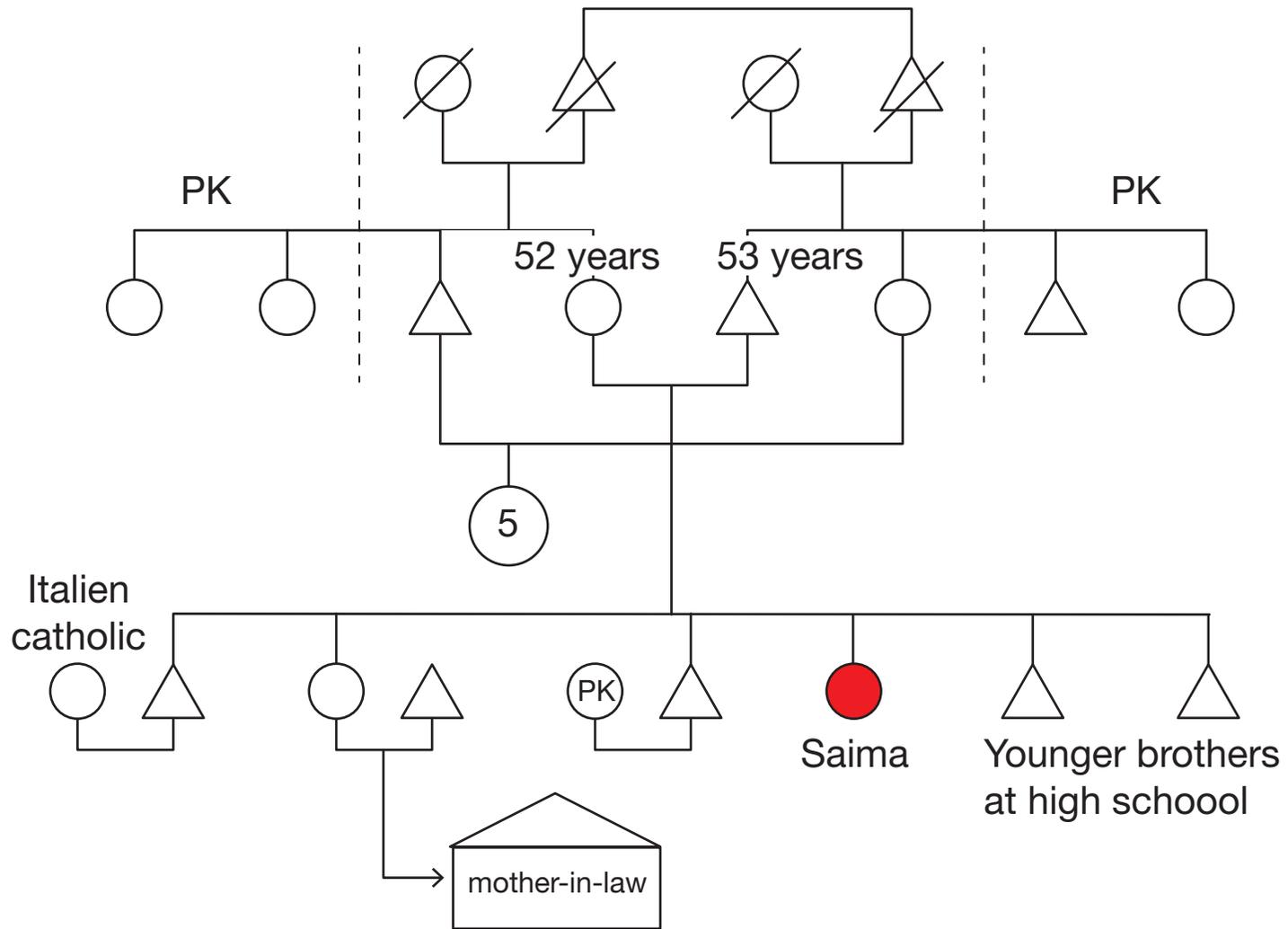
The Khan family



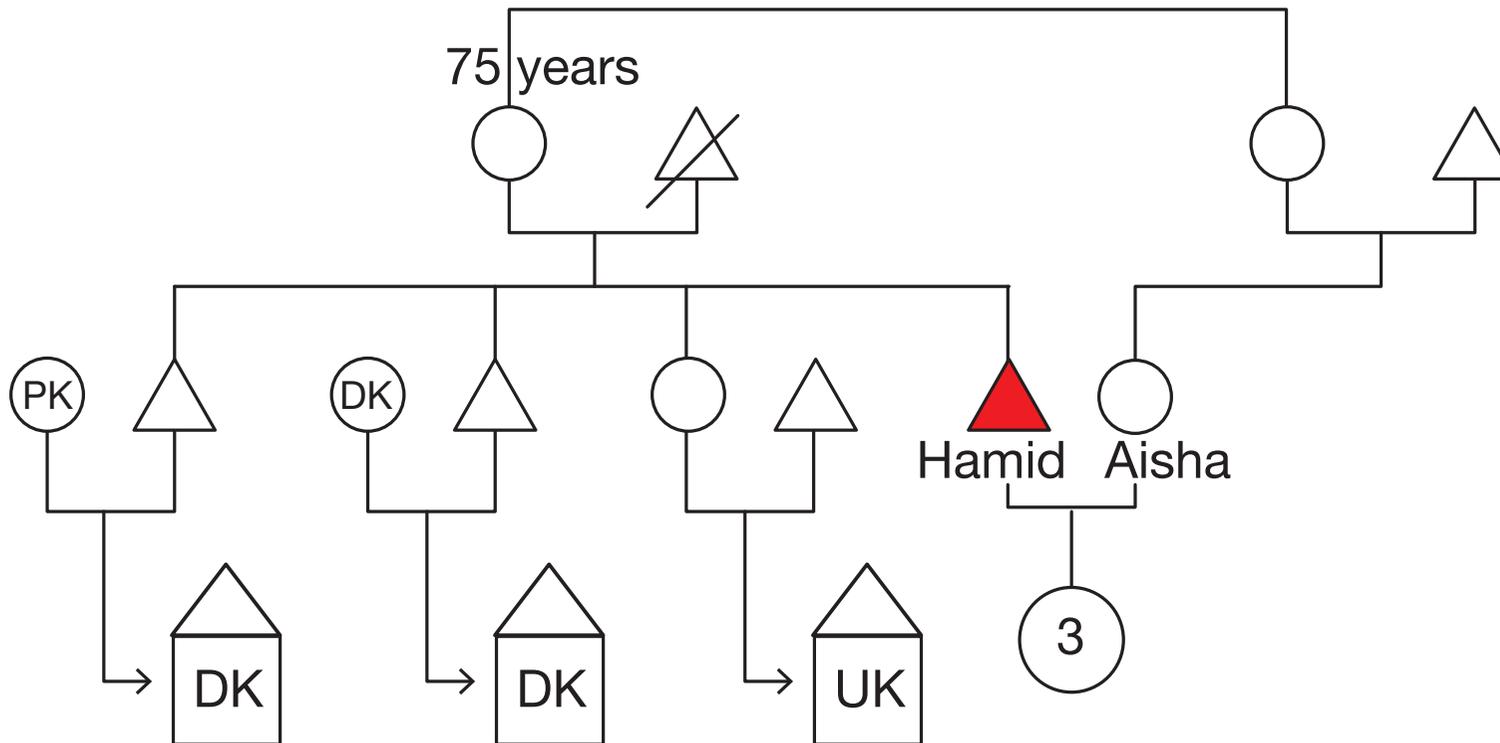
# Care arrangements in Pakistani families

- Option of getting a 'self-appointed helper' (Sparre and Rytter 2019).
- The challenges facing 'de facto childless' aging Pakistanis (Shaw 2004).
- Return more or less permanently to 'the first homeland' (Liversage and Jakobsen 2016).

# The Awaz family



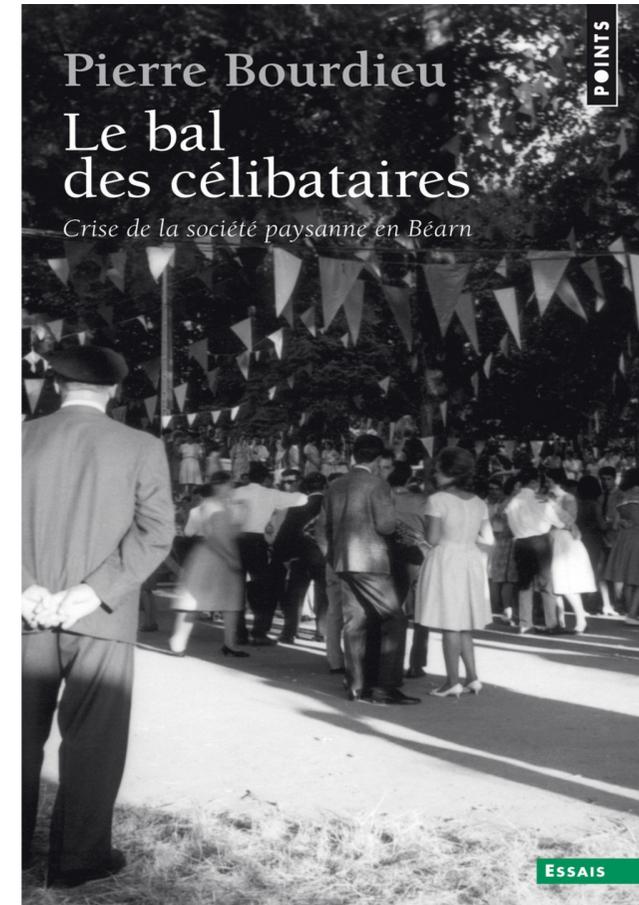
# The Malik family



# 1. Preparation for old age

Marriage is a means to protect and optimize the family reputation and status, and to secure the patrimony and the farm (Bourdieu 1976).

The migrant families prepare for taking care of aging family members in the future. The three cases show how family entrainment structure care arrangements, and how some children withdraw from the duty and obligations of the 'generation contract'.



## 2. Family care is gendered

Family care arrangements are gendered.

In the virilocal household the sons have more duties and obligations towards the parents than the daughters, who on the other hand have obligations and duties toward their parents-in-law.

The care giver (and self-appointed helper) is often a spouse, daughter or daughter-in-law.

Gender roles are challenged by Danish labor market and the high living expenses that encourage dual-earner families.

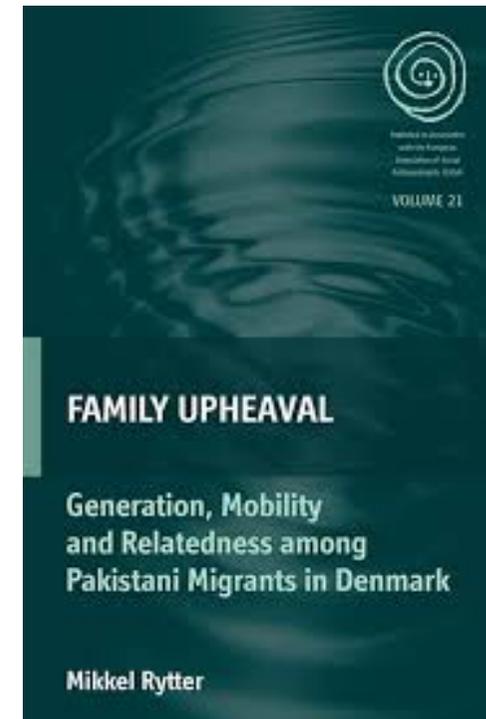
### 3. The changing intimacy of Pakistani migrant families

- The Transformation of Intimacy (Giddens 1992)
- Liquid Modernity (Bauman 2009)
- New family scapes → New care scapes (Appadurai 2006)

Family Upheaval: Transnational arranged marriages within extended family → Local love-marriages in 'new' families.

The general transformation of the marriage institution among Pakistani migrants have severe consequences for the elders in the family:

- **Social mobility (better education, good jobs).**
- **Increasing number of divorces.**
- **Strict legislation on family reunification (Liversage and Rytter 2014).**



## Conclusion: The circle of life

- In order to understand the organisation of elderly care we need to include the marriage strategies of the upcoming generation.
- Family entrainment = the way family members coordinate their projects, plans and life trajectories.
- Every family is a 'moral laboratory' (Mattingly 2014), where members have to re-negotiate notions of family relatedness and organise the care of elders.
- Migration and changing notions of family relatedness → new hybrid forms of 'care-scripts' (Oxlund 2018).