

Care and Resistance

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SUMMARY *I consider the ways in which acts of kinship among British South Asians such as the suitable arrangement of a child's marriage can be rejected by the child as an act of care and reframed as acts of force. Drawing on ethnographic research with people who have experienced "forced marriage," I examine the processes through which they come to re-examine the meanings of kinship and care from their own perspective and through their own life course. I argue that acts of care are not stable givens but rather constitute a constantly shifting set of configurations evolving through changing life experiences. [care, conscripted care, forced marriage, kinship, resistance]*

Belonging, as an ideal of kin relatedness, travels with and by its resistances.
—Rupert Stasch, *Society of Others* (2009)

In their stereotypical forms, love marriages are self-arranged and often take place across caste or community boundaries. Arranged marriages are parentally arranged and usually conform firmly to notions of caste endogamy, except in instances of love-cum-arranged marriage where the parents may agree to publicly endorse the love choice of their child.¹ "Forced marriages" are those in which one or other parties to the marriage do not give their free consent.² In this paper, I consider the ways in which British South Asians arrange a child's marriage so that an outward act of care is experienced as an act of force, be it physical violence or emotional coercion. I also examine the ways in which the child's rejection of this arrangement is sometimes framed as a form of consent. Drawing on ethnographic research with those who have experienced a "forced marriage," I examine the processes through which care is constructed and comes to be reimagined by looking at the ways in which care prompts questions about choice, marriage, gender, and sexuality.

In his discussion about anthropological theories that seek to connect kin relations with emotions and feelings, Rupert Stasch presents us with McKinley's now famous critique of Schneider and his articulation of kinship as a "philosophy." McKinley said: "Kinship is the philosophy many cultures hold about what completes a person socially, psychologically, and morally, and how that completeness comes about through a responsible sense of attachment and obligation to others" (2001:143). Stasch adds to McKinley's definition through his research on Korowai kinship by arguing, first, that intersubjective belonging is

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a practice of concrete material actions (such as giving food) and, second, that kinship is “not *Gemeinschaft*” or belonging *per se*, but it is constituted “with and by its resistances” (2009:133). In this paper, I argue that subjectivities of kinship care are not stable, knowable givens but rather constitute a shifting set of caring actions and imaginings evolving through changing life experiences. This develops the theme presented in the Introduction of this volume of the significance of a temporal dimension to unsettling our commonsense understandings of care according to changing life experiences that cause shifts in orientations to the past, present, and future. The case of “forced marriage” exemplifies this unstable characteristic of care constituted socially with and through the choices and resistances of the many kin concerned.

For instance, one of my informants, Hawwa, had a very traumatic “forced marriage” in Bangladesh from which she narrowly escaped, causing her enormous pain and unhappiness, as well as harsh criticism toward her parents for having brought up a girl who refused to marry as she was told. Nevertheless, when I met her many years later, she insisted that I meet her mother and invited me to her parents’ home in northeast London. On the table awaiting us lay a spectacular array of meat kebabs, handmade and deep-fried samosas, fried prawns, and Bengali sweets. Hawwa’s mother, Jameela, bustled back and forth replenishing the dishes and dropping other delicacies into sizzling hot oil. Hawwa warned me that her mother only spoke Sylheti and was uneducated. Jameela was reluctant to proffer a view on her daughter’s disastrous marriage, being shy to express her thoughts. After some prodding from her daughter, Jameela told me that she didn’t intervene when her husband decided to marry their daughter to his brother’s son. These were obligations he had to his own mother. Furthermore, Hawwa was a rebellious child who was a truant at school and known to be involved with numerous non-Bangla boys. Jameela was blamed for her daughter’s exit from her arranged marriage. Although under British law she was guilty of a terrible crime against her daughter, not protecting her from a “forced marriage,” I noticed a tenderness between Hawwa and Jameela, and honesty in discussing the tragic nature of their past. By the time of our conversation, Hawwa had met a new man, and despite him being non-Bengali (he was Afro-Caribbean), Hawwa’s mother had embraced him and Hawwa’s little son as her own. Even when care had turned into coercion, the passage of time saw Hawwa and Jameela resume their relationship as mother and daughter, caring together for Jameela’s child from a new relationship of her own choosing. This shows how unsettled care can be over a single life course. Although care can damage and inflict immeasurable pain, it can heal past wounds and form the basis through which kin can reshape, rematerialize, and renew their bonds.

In what follows, I present a short ethnographic account of care in the context of kinship relations for an informant who had a “forced marriage.” The vignette concerns a man called Fayaz who was forced into a marriage he did not really want. Like many of my informants, Fayaz’s “forced marriage” had taken place some time ago. He had grown up in Birmingham and now lived there with his wife and two children. Talking to Fayaz many years after his marriage, I could see that despite being forced into a marriage not of his own choosing, he felt strong obligations of care toward his wife and children. As another informant

of mine said when reflecting upon her “forced marriage,” “Within the structure that existed, I made a choice.” She took what life had heaped upon her, a painful and traumatic “forced marriage,” and managed to care for her children and rebuild her life. As Fayaz’s story will also show, this indicates that we need to pay careful attention to the ways in which even those who have experienced a sharp and painful deficit and betrayal of care may nevertheless transform through these experiences and choose to inhabit roles in which they come to define their own future lives through the caregiving they choose to offer in the present.

This ethnography and the subsequent discussion reveal chosen and con-scripted caregiving as ways of distinguishing different subjectivities of care. These subjectivities of care are not exclusively internal states of individuals but ones that are constituted through forms of everyday materiality (e.g., feeding a child, caring for a parent) and resistance (e.g., having sex outside marriage, caring for an unloved in-law). What determines the trajectory of these choices and forms of care is the recognition of the role of the caregiver within the subjectivities that exist. This theme will be picked up in a discussion of anthropologist Carol Adam’s work on caring simultaneously for her mother and her mother-in-law, and what this revealed to her about the subjectivities of care and resistances at play. Through a discussion of Fayaz’s marriage, I hope to show that people’s perceptions of their parents’ actions and their subsequent relationship with them and their own children change over time, revealing the complex and unsettled ways in which they experience and, in turn, give care.

Fayaz

I met Fayaz, a British Indian man, in a Birmingham bar on an LGBT+ night. At the time I was conducting research on marriages of convenience among gay and lesbian south Asians, and Fayaz was introduced to me as someone who had married a woman. He shook my hand as he danced and with a big smile on his face said, “I am happily married! I have a normal, straight life! Obviously, this is also a part of me!” Fayaz was a stylish and muscular man in his late thirties, with dark hair gelled back and a strong Brummie accent. Pointing across the room to a man who was dancing passionately with a tall European-looking male, Fayaz said that the man was his brother, who also had an arranged marriage. We swapped contacts and agreed to meet at a later date when we might better hear our conversation.

A few weeks later, I met him at a fast food restaurant in another town. We sat at a quiet table next to a busy railway station as he spoke and ate his food. He started by telling me about his family’s marital history in Birmingham. He was an Indian Muslim and had two uncles who had married outside the community, one to a Hindu woman and the other to a Sikh woman. The children of an aunt had also married British people of other ethno-religious backgrounds with little apparent disruption. Fayaz continued by saying that his own parents, both Indian Muslims, had a love marriage and moved to Britain because of it, but their happiness didn’t last long and they subsequently divorced. When it was their turn, Fayaz and his older brother were married by his mother within the

biraderi, kinship group, in parentally arranged marriages. Fayaz made a point of saying that his mum “knew” about his brother’s gay relationship.

He said he once asked her about her motivation for arranging her sons’ marriages. “You all had love marriages, some married *goriyo* [white people] too, so then why did you arrange ours?” He claimed that her reply was honest. She said, “Looking at the mess we all made [of our marriages], I thought that maybe the old ways were better. I really hoped that it would work for you and your brother.” I asked about how he received the news about his own imminent arranged marriage. He said, “We would call it *zabardasti* [literally, to compel or enforce]. At the time I saw it more like an initiation. I had to go through it. I could have said no. In fact I did to two girls.”

Fayaz indicated that he turned down two unsuitable matches he had been presented. Similarly, he described his brother’s marriage as “emotionally forced.” Laughing at my questions he recalled, “In reality, we didn’t know better. [It was as though] we were told, ‘Here, here are some girls. Pick one.’ It’s a dream come true ... I think that is why he initially agreed.” His brother’s marriage soon ended in a messy divorce. He was married to his first cousin, so his mother-in-law was also his mother’s sister. Consequently, the divorce caused more dramatic schisms upon the larger kinship group, not just his immediate family. It polarized the couple’s relatives, half of whom were unwilling to speak to the other half.

Fayaz’s own life had not been easy, even though he spoke about it with characteristic good humor, smiling as he described the *zabadasti* or force involved in getting him to marry. After marriage his eldest child, a girl, was born with a rare congenital condition that meant that she was severely disabled, and he and his wife had to transform the rhythm of their lives in order to care for her needs. Soon after this, his wife unexpectedly became pregnant for the second time. With two young children, one of whom needed intense care, he had to take long periods off work to assist with their care. Consequently, he lost his job and the only source of income for the family. When we spoke, he said he was nevertheless extremely strong at this time and his faith in Islam helped him pull through, but a sense of helplessness made him aware that he was at the limits of his emotional and existential capacity to cope.

At around this time, his parents suggested that they all move back to India where the family still had a home that needed repairs and attention. He said that he was quite religious at the time, so looking after his parents was an important obligation. So, he suggested to his wife that they move to a city called Hyderabad even though neither of them had lived there before. It was soon after the move to India that Fayaz had what he described as “a very bad experience.” From what I could understand, he was invited to the home of a powerful local leader who raped him. During our conversation, he expressed that he thought what had happened was his fault. He was unable to face going home so he ran away to stay with relatives, explaining to his immediate family that he had a sudden work trip and had to rush off. He stayed away for some time before he was able to return home.

At home, things also began to deteriorate with his mother and wife arguing all the time. This soon led to arguments with his wife. Then, to add to it all, his mother-in-law moved in and started to interfere with their domestic life,

involving herself in all their discussions and decisions. He says that one day as he sat there eating his food, he realized that he was so stressed he was ready to snap. Everyone wanted his time and he had no time at all for himself. His job was stressful, and he felt he had aged a few decades in the past few years. He returned to the U.K. to spend a few weeks on his own and began to frequent gay clubs and bars. He says that whenever he felt depressed or got into an argument with family, he felt he needed the sexual attention from other men. He described it as “sexual liberation” but then corrected himself and called it a “negative liberation.” When I asked him why, he said:

I believe actions affect other people. If my wife ever found out, straight away she would leave me. I'll be honest with you. *Meri galti hain* [It is my mistake], but at other times I know that my instincts and drives take over. I believe that every human can make choices but it's not easy to resist. It's hard. See this bar where we met? I came to it after one and a half years ... I would often think, I will tell her, but then, I think I would lose everything, and more than that I will hurt her. She wouldn't be able to bear that the one who she knows she doesn't know.

Fayaz found himself in an impossible bind with inconvenient sexual desires that he was neither able to resist nor reject. Fayaz's subjective world is characterized by a heady mix of obligations, coercions, sexuality, and cares—all of which exert themselves upon his world. Tom Boellstorff has argued that heterosexual marriage for his *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesian informants create identities that are more about blurred boundaries than they are about boundaries transgressed, allowing his informants to inhabit what he describes as a *gay* archipelagic self in which there is little desire to integrate one's spheres of life into a single narrative (1999). At first sight, Fayaz's choices do appear to blur rather than transgress boundaries and to occupy “multiple” selves, but his choices are also emphatically within “the structures that exist.” What is striking is that he chooses to recognize these structures as existing even though he could easily have done otherwise. Alongside the helpful notion of blurring, I draw attention to an explicit acknowledgement of kinship born with and through resistance. When we first met in a gay bar, Fayaz said to me, “I am happily married. Obviously, this is also a part of me!” As I show in the next section of this paper, binary models of choice or conscription in care cannot begin to account for the dynamic and changing nature of caring relationships that characterize the lives of my informants.

Choosing Caring Choices

In a recent intervention in the debates about caregiving and care, Carol Adams defines caregiving as “attention that is helpful to another because of the other's physical, mental, or emotional needs” (2017:765). Her article is dedicated to her sisters and is built on a decision to give care. Adams and her sisters made an active choice to care for their aging mother who developed Alzheimer's and her father who had a heart condition and was at risk of a fatal heart attack. Simultaneous to her parents' sudden decline in health, she was somewhat “forced” to care for her mother-in-law out of a sense of obligation as the most available daughter-in-law and wife of her husband. In this respect, her

article raises important questions about gender and the nature of choices when it comes to care, caregiving, and how we theorize them. Adams points out that nearly 50% of caregivers over the age of 50 in the U.S. said they “didn’t have a choice” in taking on the caregiving role, as it was a matter of “conscription” rather than “talent or gift discernment,” falling to the person “without a career” or “the one working from home,” “the one who was childless,” or the one who was female (2017:767–768). In contrast, Adams and her sisters spent nearly a decade providing care for their parents, collectively making a choice to offer care and sharing it equally (2017). Adams describes her caregiving as a “role” which she was able to step in and out.

Caring “roles” rather than actions are an outcome of deliberate individual choices which raise questions about how to reconcile the self once they no longer inhabit a particular role, which profoundly changed them. Adams makes a strong argument for the virtues of caregiving as a choice, an act of will through which she and her sisters come to form a team of caregivers, resisting the temptation to feel sorry for themselves by setting firm moral boundaries about what the role entailed and how it should be inhabited. Her choice as a daughter who cares deeply for her ailing parents is somewhat unexpectedly juxtaposed with her obligation to care for her husband’s mother who comes to live with her and her husband, and for whom she becomes a reluctant and unhappily conscripted caregiver. Adams is frustrated when her mother-in-law’s care needs detract from the caregiving she has chosen to provide her own mother, threatening even to “destroy her mental health” and then, her own marriage (2017:773). Throughout her paper, there is a tension between the caregiving she chose and the caregiving that is foisted upon her, the role that Adams can inhabit as an act of choice and the one that she is conscripted to. In both cases, Adams argues that the care that is given is one that constitutes “attention that acknowledges the other’s needs by saying, ‘I will help’” (2017:765–766). However, it is clear that Adams views chosen care as a higher form in which the caregiver allows themselves to feel intimate and fully empathetic towards the care recipient. She states, “Caregiving is energy brought to another—intelligence, touch, observation, and emotion. Caregiving is the opportunity to be vulnerable with another person, protecting their vulnerability but exposing your own by being available, present. Physical stamina, emotional strength, and mental acuity along with nervous energy often constitute the state of caregiving” (2017:766).

Chosen and unchosen forms of caregiving are an outcome of need, in which particular social structures and dispositions are in play for those who can and do care. However, Adams’ construction of a binary between choosing to care for her parents and being conscripted to care for her mother-in-law gives little space for the all-important temporalities, intersubjectivities, and ambivalences that arise in and through caring relationships, however they start out. Regarding her care as deliberate, a “choice” and a “role” which she might step out of, we get a vivid but nevertheless singular account of the meaning of actions and their effect on those involved. In contrast, my informants’ lives point me towards conscripted care as a much richer resource through which to view the production of kinship relations and caring selves through time.

Developing this argument further, I draw on Stasch who argues that for Korowai in Indonesia, the activity of “caring for” and the mental activity of

"caring about" are not strongly distinguished as they are in the west. Practices of concrete material actions, such as giving food, signify kinship and care. Without such giving, the relationship is assumed to be just a matter of sight or "eyes alone," literally, unsubstantiated or questionable, throwing kinship itself into question (2009:133–136; 2009:134). Thus, he shows, Korowai tend not to draw sharp boundaries between a subjective experience and material action. In such a schema, in terms of the argument being pursued here, choices of care are simultaneously choices of kinship. The distinction between chosen and conscripted care is that the former is characterized by an intersubjectivity, an exchange of vulnerability in Adams' description, that defines and underpins the social structure. What seems to coalesce between the models presented by Adams and Stasch and what I extend in this study is that the basis of care is not action alone but the ethical subjectivity and self-formation and resistances to it that inevitably accompany it.

Amongst South Asians, one form or expression of care is the appropriate arrangement of their offspring's marriage. This is an obligation of care that parents owe their wider community, an "intergenerational form of care" according to Evelyn Nakano Glenn, that isn't one that can be easily detached from the relationship of being a parent (2010:5). Whilst many families do allow children to self-arrange their marriages, this is nevertheless usually done as a form of domestication, controlling the choice of the young through the generosity of the elders. Arranging a child's marriage is an important responsibility of parents and provides the means through which the group, be it a caste or ethnoreligious community, reproduces itself. Parents who fail to fulfill this responsibility can be considered derelict in their duty of care as parents and are seen as having allowed their children to "sit on their heads" or "become their friends," something Jameela was accused of when Hawwa resisted her marital arrangement. Conversely, Fayaz's account of his conversations with his mother reveal his willingness to be conscripted into a heterosexual marriage and the subjectivity of a gendered male householder through which he expresses his care for his mother and family.

The relationship between care and kinship in the South Asian case is much closer to the materialization of Korowai than it is of Euro-America. You care for your kin actively and materially because they are kin, and the caring you do is an obligation you carry that is inherent within the very relationship of kinship. To ignore these obligations or to ignore the need to materialize them as in Korowai ideas of "eyes only" kinship, is to abdicate the relationship itself. Choosing can be threatening and dangerous because it can imply a willingness to contemplate the loss of the relationship itself. Consequently, arranging your child's marriage is considered a quintessential part of their care. It is only after their children's marriages that tradition-minded South Asian parents can expect the care that they have bestowed upon their children to begin to flow back towards themselves in turn. For Fayaz, his acquiescence to an "emotionally forced" marriage is arguably one form of care towards his parents, if that care is "attention helpful to another."

Using the heuristic distinction between chosen and unchosen or conscripted care, Adams' draws our attention to the identification of the subjectivity of the caregiver and the role of caregiver that they inhabit. Notably, neither Jameela

with her feeding nor Fayaz with his marriage identify with their chosen caregiving roles. Fayaz acknowledges that he isn't the heterosexual father and husband his family imagines him to be, and Hawwa's mother is clearly not the paradigm of a loving mother as she participated wittingly or unwittingly in her daughter's "forced marriage." Nevertheless, they both identify with the need to fulfill that role and they do this by identifying their caring subjectivities within the materialities and "structures that exist." In both cases, we see the way in which care, like kinship, is constructed through reference to a world of societal care rather than an obligation to a single individual. To say that Fayaz lives a double life or maintains a façade would not do him justice. He has engaged with the choices of care before him and been attentive to the needs of both his parents by way of his "emotionally forced" marriage, and now to the needs of his wife and children. Care is made visible not through its direction towards another individual but rather through its care for and with the wider social group, replete with all its ambivalences and resistance.

Notes

1. The term "child" is used deliberately here as an ethnographic construct. South Asian's confer social adulthood upon marriage and, especially, the birth of children. Consequently, people commonly describe the unmarried as "*baccha*" / "*bacche*" – child / children.

2. I use inverted commas around the term "forced marriage" to signal that I am treating the term ethnographically and exploring its usage and meanings as I encountered it during my fieldwork. It is important to note that it is nevertheless both a legal category, and a term found in everyday speech in Britain to denote parental coercion in arranging a child's marriage.

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