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How Has Religiosity Influenced the Restrictiveness of Marriage Immigration Policy in Serbia, Denmark, and the United States?

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At best, religion has been relegated to a secondary role in any discussion of migration. For so long, contemporary society has seemingly marginalized the influence of religion and religiosity on discourse concerning migration. While the influence of culture and tradition is constantly reiterated, any direct discussion of the role of religion in migration research has seemingly been avoided. This undermines the historic value of religion in shaping culture and tradition through a practice of repeated rituals. Ultimately, these rituals have become ingrained in the mindsets and attitudes of people whether they admit it or not. Arguably, no contemporary society has been fully able to liberate itself from the shackles of culture and tradition, yet most are willing to neglect the role of religion and subordinate it to the mere personal separated from the collective. Of course, the role of religion and religiosity is a polarizing issue and one that is not easily addressed in migration research.¹ However, this does not mean that the role of religion and religiosity in migration is nonexistent or even less meaningful. Religion is occasionally labeled as fundamentalism in any discussion of migration policy. In the majority of cases this is an accurate assumption², but at times, this is not always an accurate position since equating religion with fundamentalism gives it a negative political undertone that seems to undermine the active participatory interaction of religious members and institutions with governments in developing migration policy. Cases exist where religion has not diverted to fundamentalism and mere opposition, but where religion has actually worked with state institutions to develop pragmatic migration policy.

¹ Notable, yet limited, works addressing the complex relationship between religion and migration include: *Enlightened fundamentalism? Immigration, feminism and the Right* by Liz Fekete and *Managing religions, citizenship and the liberal paradox* by Bryan S. Turner.

² Liz Fekete, "Enlightened fundamentalism? Immigration, feminism and the Right," *Race & Class* 48 (2006): 1-22.

This paper argues that religion has been an especially important factor in the development of marriage migration policy in Serbia, Denmark, and the United States. Religion, whether actively or passively, directly or indirectly, has influenced the development of marriage migration policy in these nation-states. Whether in the form of popular religious attitudes, exemplified through religiosity, or tangible religious institutions giving voice to believers' opinions, the fact remains that powerful forces are at play in forming marriage migration policy in these nation-states. Generally, the influence of religiosity on the development of marriage migration policy has either taken a proactive approach in working together with government in setting marriage immigration standards or has worked in opposition to government in trying to prevent the enactment of certain laws that it considers ungodly.

Essentially, religiosity has directly influenced the restrictiveness of marriage immigration policy in Serbia, Denmark, and the United States. The argument that follows does not rest on the notion that religion has worked completely against the development of marriage migration policy or that it is entirely against foreign marriage immigrants but rather that it has placed certain extenuating conditions on marriage immigration that are of a higher standard than those pertaining to nationals entering marriage. Restrictiveness in this sense means the complexity and difficulty placed on foreign marriage migrants and their partners as opposed to domestic nationals entering marriage. Moreover, restrictiveness in this case may also apply to a cross-temporal comparison of the country in question, comparing the complexities associated with marriage migration policy across different periods in time with an evidenced connection to religious influence. After all, evidence that will be presented in the following discussion seems to suggest that marriage migration has evolved with the evolutionary role religion has had in the lives of its people and its institutions.

Marriage Migration and the Case of Serbia – Ethnic Orthodoxy and Civil Law

Arguably, the example highlighting the role of religiosity in influencing the development of restrictive marriage immigration policy has been in Serbia. Essentially, conservative religiosity has had a powerful influence in restricting marriage migration in Serbia. Generally, Serbia is not a well-known immigrant country with “foreigners constituting only a marginal 0.3% of the population”³. Surely there is a sizable quantity of emigrants, but very few immigrants. Serbia's only real experience with immigration issues was during the Yugoslav Civil War in the 1990s, which created a huge Serbian refugee influx fleeing war in neighboring Croatia and Bosnia. With the normalization of political order, important immigration issues have been far and few between and therefore immigration reform has been extremely slow to follow other political, economic, and legal reforms the country is currently undergoing. However, the alarming population decline in Serbia has introduced a host of new issues and discourse over push and pull factors influencing migration has resurfaced.

³ Ruti Sinai, Adi Binhas and Yael Rockoff, *Alatke za Rad za Integraciju Imigranata u Srbiji* (Medunarodna organizacija za migracije – Misija u Srbiji. 2012), 10.

A decade of war followed by the mass exodus of migrant workers from Serbia into Western Europe due to a lack of employment opportunities, as well as continuous economic woes that are making it harder for young Serbian families to decide to have babies which are now considered a luxury, have all led to an alarming trend of population decline. In fact, “Serbia has lost [377,000] people – 5 percent of its population –over the past nine years according to the results of its most recent census released last month”.⁴ Peculiarly, the problem within Serbia, a country that is historically rural and based on agriculture, seems to be that women are migrating out of small villages and into large cities and, when the possibility arises, even across borders. These women are apprehensive of getting married, considering babies a luxury in this time of economic hardship. On the other hand, Serbian males, especially those in rural areas, are facing a similar challenge of marrying and having children. Thus, to combat this problem of rising depopulated settlements, the government has been discussing the possibility of importing women from the former Soviet Union and China that are of “reproductive age”.⁵ Of course, such a robust “active population policy that has been proposed by Serbian minister for labor and social policy, Rasim Ljajic” has brought with it a variety of marriage immigration issues.⁶ Inevitably, public discourse over marriage migration in Serbia has also caught the attention of Serbia’s religious authorities who are important stakeholders in the state’s policy-making process.

On the outside it may seem that Serbia is pursuing an active and liberal marriage migration policy. After all, to combat an alarming decline in population, it sees its solution in importing mail-order brides of a reproductive age. This policy has caught the attention of Serbia’s religious authorities, specifically the Serbian Orthodox Church. As a traditionally conservative Christian Orthodox nation, the Serbian Orthodox Church is a major religious institutional force regulating ways of life of its people. In Serbia, religion and ethnicity are interrelated. To be a Serb is to be a Serbian Orthodox Christian and vice versa. With this interrelation of ethic and religious identity it only seems natural that the Serbian Orthodox Church would be involved in issues regarding immigration that serve to affect the rather homogenous ethnic makeup of the nation. Moreover, when it comes to marriage migration, the Serbian Orthodox Church with its governing body, the Serbian Orthodox Synod, has been especially vocal in opposing the possible liberalization of marriage migration policy. As such, only up until recently, the Serbian Orthodox has generally worked in opposition to government in calling for restrictive measures in marriage migration policy.

The surprising rise to power of the political right post-2012 elections in Serbia has had astounding consequences for the country’s policies, even when it comes to issue concerning migration. Currently, the Serbian Orthodox Synod has been able to work closely with the Serbian President Tomislav Nikolic and Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic in restricting marriage migration policy and reversing all previous steps towards liberalization. Fundamentally, the “Serbian Orthodox Church is extremely fearful of the influence of secular Western ideals,” even those pertaining to marriage, which any liberalization of Serbia’s marriage immigration policy

⁴ Matt Robinson, “Serbia at a loss to stop population decline.” *Reuters*, December 6, 2011, accessed May 12, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/12/06/us-serbia-population-idUSTRE7B50RB20111206>.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

might adopt.⁷ More specifically, the Synod is dedicated to keeping the sanctity of marriage intact and generally restricted to Serbs in order to maintain a “homogenous people’s organism who share a common re-traditionalist historical, ethnic, and religious bond”.⁸

In legal terms, marriage migration policy in Serbia is dictated by the overarching *Porodichni Zakon* (Laws Concerning Family) of the Republic of Serbia. The *Porodichni Zakon*, under Article 3.1, defines marriage between a “man and woman who are equal and free”.⁹ In order to enter this civil union, the only documents necessary for nationals to apply for a marriage license include “official copies of both birth certificates as well as official copies of proof of Serbian citizenship”.¹⁰ Furthermore, under Article 4.1, the *Porodichni Zakon* also recognizes de facto relationships under special circumstances. Both articles 3.1 and 4.1 are in harmony with general laws regarding marriage regulation in most European nations. However, laws regulating marriage in Serbia become overwhelmingly restrictive when they include a foreign national. In this instance, marriage migration becomes tied to the *Zakon o Strancima* (Laws Concerning Foreigners) of the Republic of Serbia. Article 32 of the *Zakon o Strancima* recognizes marriage migration for the sole purpose of “family reunion”.¹¹ In order for this union to be recognized by the state, the Serbian national must submit an “official request to the Ministry of Internal Affairs to gain the right to cohabit with the foreigner on the territory of Serbia”.¹² When clearance is gained, “official copies of both their birth certificates as well as official copies of citizenship that are notarized” are required to acquire a marriage permit.¹³ These documents will determine the rights of movement for the foreign partner who is “restricted to residing on a single Serbian address” for a set duration of time.¹⁴

The place where religion seemed to sometimes have gotten directly involved in marriage migration is in the actual process of marriage, specifically having the responsibility for issuing copies of the birth certificates in order to apply for a marriage license. Unique to Serbia, the Serbian Orthodox Church has in the past been involved in issuing birth certificates since they undertake all baptisms of newborns. Historically, the Serbian Orthodox Church had undertaken many of these administrative duties of the state since there is no official separation between church and state in the country. Only relatively recently has the duty of issuing birth certificates gradually transferred to become the sole responsibility of the state rather than the church. In this regard, some consider that through this still evolving role the Serbian Orthodox Church is indirectly giving its blessing to the union by willingly providing the person with a birth certificate for the purposes of obtaining a marriage license. In the case of entering such a union with a foreigner, especially of Muslim origin, there have been a few alleged cases where the

⁷ Milan Vukomanovic, “The Serbian Orthodox Church: Between Traditionalism and Fundamentalism”, March 12, 2010, 154, accessed May 12, 2013, http://www.academia.edu/2771368/Serbian_Orthodox_Church_Between_Traditionalism_and_Fundamentalism.

⁸ Ibid, 159.

⁹ Porodichni Zakon (Laws Concerning Family), *Republic of Serbia*, Art 3.1, accessed May 11, 2013, http://www.disabilitymonitor-see.org/documents/legislation/serbia/social_welfare/porodichni_zakon_ser.pdf.

¹⁰ “Boravak i Nastanjenje Stranaca,” Ministarstvo Unutrasnjih Poslova (MUP), accessed May 11, 2013, <http://www.mup.gov.rs/domino/dokumenta.nsf/boravakstrancil>.

¹¹ Zakon o Strancima (Laws Concerning Foreigners), *Republic of Serbia*, accessed May 11, 2013, http://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_strancima.html.

¹² “Boravak i Nastanjenje Stranaca”, 2013.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

religious institution has simply postponed releasing this document when it is known that the other partner is not of the Orthodox religious persuasion.¹⁵ In these cases, there seems to be an ongoing conflict between the Serbian state and the Serbian Orthodox Church where concerns over depopulation are pitted against conservative religious ideals in promoting a homogenous ethnic and religious society. On the other hand, with the rise of the political right in Serbia, the church and state seem to have seemingly made progress by making certain compromises in regards to the issue. Recognizing the fact that migration for the sake of population growth (or even survival) is a necessary reality, the government and church have been compelled to reach a compromise at least in the regulation of subcategorized partner cohabitation, whereby de facto marriage is restricted to nationals only. Under Article 32, cohabitation between Serbian nationals and their migrant partners is not recognized.¹⁶ While the majority of countries in the European Union recognize de facto marriage, Serbia has reserved this right for Serbian nationals fearing that this clause would be misused while simultaneously arguing that de facto relationships, in comparison to civil marriage, usually do not produce reproductive outcomes that would solve the country's concern over depopulation.

Controversially, in keeping with religious conservative principles, marriage migration policy in Serbia wholly denies the existence of same-sex marriage. While Western Europe is grappling with the prospect of legalizing same-sex marriage, inevitably extending this right to marriage immigrants also, Serbia seems resistant to this trend. For now, same-sex marriage is a taboo thematic that nobody dares to address, let alone legislators of Serbian marriage migration policy. As long as the "Synod regards same-sex marriage a Western sin," Serbian legislators are powerless to overturn this mindset and dare not introduce the discussion of integrating homosexual foreigners into marriage laws.¹⁷

Religion, in the case of Serbia, has served as a guiding institution regardless of how tragic this may sound, as it has provided a forum for the Serbian people. Despite calls from the European Union that more should be done to further secularism and the liberalization of immigration policy to fit in with EU standards, Serbia remains a culturally conservative country. Ethnicism, expressed through religious identity and association with the Serbian Orthodox Church, remains a defining feature of the majority of the population. Many argue that what the Serbian Orthodox Church has done is give voice to the general sentiment of the Serbian public, regardless of whether morally accepted or not. The Serbian Orthodox Synod has expressed the reality of the situation, reflecting the conservatism of society and distrust of the Serbian majority towards foreigners. This also pertains to marriage immigration policy that is seen as a potential threat to the social survival of the state. Certainly, however, there is a schism in Serbia between idealism and pragmatism. On the one hand, the Serbian secular government considers further liberalization of marriage migration policy a solution to the problem of depopulation. On the other hand the Serbian Orthodox Church is fearful that such policy would undermine the ultimate

¹⁵ K. Doknic and S. Tabacki, "Sta svaka gradanka i gradanin treba znati o Sprskoj pravoslavnoj crkvi", *Koalicija za Sekularizam*, March 26, 2010, accessed May 10, 2013, <http://www.sekularizam.org/sto-svaka-gradjanka-i-gradjanin-treba-znati-o-srpskoj-pravoslavnoj-crkvi.html>.

¹⁶ Zakon o Strancima.

¹⁷ O. Hopko and V. Vranic, "Jedan pastirski osvrt na homoseksualnost." *Pravoslavljje: Novine Srpske Patrijarsije*, 2011, accessed May 11, 2013, <http://pravoslavljje.spc.rs/broj/1046/tekst/jedan-pastirski-osvrt-na-homoseksualnost/print/lat>.

aim of ensuring the survival of an ethnically homogenous nation. Therefore, the Serbian Orthodox Church is working with the current nationalist government to further restrict marriage immigration conditions but at the same time offer alleviation to the problem of depopulation. To this effect, the Synod has allowed the Serbian government to restrict marriage immigration to all but those foreigners that come from culturally and religiously similar backgrounds for the purpose of easing assimilation; specifically from the Orthodox tradition. Thus it comes as no surprise that the “overwhelming majority of marriage migrants currently arriving in Serbia are women from Romania, Macedonia, Ukraine, and Russia. Together, these women constitute around two thirds of the total migrants into Serbia”.¹⁸

Marriage Migration and the Case of Denmark – Religio-Cultural Homogeneity

Unlike in Serbia where religiosity is presented through the workings of the Serbian Orthodox Church as an active and powerful politico-religious institution dictating the lives of its people, religiosity in Denmark comes in the more subtle form through culture. It is no secret that Denmark has continuously sought to maintain its pure homogenous cultural identity that is strictly Danish, viewing any foreigner as an intruder. Danish culture is based on its Evangelical Lutheran tradition that has been ingrained in the attitudes of its people throughout the ages.^{19 20} After all, focusing on Denmark’s religiosity is not irrelevant when taking into account that even the Danish Constitution notes its Evangelical Lutheran heritage. More specifically, Article 4 of the Constitutional Act of Denmark asserts that “the Evangelical Lutheran Church shall be the Established Church of Denmark, and as such shall be supported by the State.”²¹ In this sense it becomes clear that there is a close relationship between the church and state, between religion and homogenous religio-cultural identity in Denmark. Similar to Serbia, religiosity no matter how passive and secular it may be today shapes Denmark and influences its migration policy. To deny the influence of Protestant religiosity on marriage migration policy in Denmark is to deny the core component that defines this nation’s unique homogenous cultural and ethnic homogeneity.

Currently, immigration policy in Denmark has become a contested issue and one that has gained much publicity. In particular, “the 2002 elections brought in a liberal/conservative government, further restricting immigration by enacting the Aliens (Consolidation) Act No. 608”.²² The 2002 Aliens Consolidation Act is highly criticized due to its controversial content. Generally, the Aliens Consolidation Act targets two main groups: refugees applying for residential status on a humanitarian basis and marriage migrants applying under family reunification procedures. Most important, the Aliens Consolidation Act imposed further stringent conditions on marriage

¹⁸ Ruti Sinai et al., *Alatke za Rad*, 11.

¹⁹ Steve Bruce, “The Supply-Side Model of Religion: The Nordic and Baltic States,” *Journal for the scientific study of religion* 39 (2000).

²⁰ Lene Kühle, “Concluding remarks on religion and state in the Nordic countries,” *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 24 (2011).

²¹ The Constitutional Act of Denmark, *Kingdom of Denmark – Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, June 5, 1953, accessed May 17, 2013, <http://www.eu-oplysningen.dk/upload/application/pdf/0172b719/Constitution%20of%20Denmark.pdf>.

²² Maria Gulicova-Grethe, and Jenjira Yahirun, *Marriage Migration in Denmark Country Study (EMZ)*, (Berlin: Berlin Institute for Comparative Social Research: Member of the European Migration Centre, 2004), 4.

immigration that did not exist previously. There is no doubt Danish marriage migration policy has always been fraught with various conditions but it seems evident that this new Aliens Consolidation Act, introduced by the conservative government, has imposed further restrictions. In terms of a cross-temporal comparison, Gulicova-Grethe and Yahurin, contend this new Aliens Consolidation Act represents the pinnacle of marriage migration policy restrictiveness in Denmark.²³ The Aliens Consolidation Act stipulates “Danish residents intending to marry third [country] nationals or who have already married third country nationals must be at least 24 years old (raised from 18), must not have drawn on welfare funds for the past 12 months, must show evidence of a permanent residence, and must be able to support their spouse.”²⁴ The Act also requires both marriage migrants and their spouses have greater ties to Denmark than to any other country: “A residence permit under subsection (1)(i) can only be issued if the spouses’ or the cohabitants’ aggregate ties with Denmark are greater than the spouses’ or the cohabitants’ aggregate ties with another country.”²⁵ In addition, “a permanent residence permit will only be issued to the migrating spouse/partner after 7 years, raised from the previous 3.”²⁶ To this effect, extending the preconditions necessary for Danish nationals to marry foreigners has further restricted marriage immigration in Denmark.

From the previous analysis it is evident that Denmark is committed to preserving its homogenous cultural identity. In truth, the Danish government is wholly concerned with ensuring the attachment clause is fulfilled, thereby guaranteeing that these foreign marriage migrants have fully embraced Denmark and its culture as their own rather than using marriage to further ulterior aims. Ultimately, Danish culture, no matter how secular, has been arguably molded through the ages by the Christian Protestant tradition, which is based on a Judeo-Christian morality that willingly sacrifices individual interests for the good of the community. After all, this homogenous cultural collectivity did not historically develop in isolation from religion, for the source of Danish cultural legitimization can be traced to its adoption of a Protestant religious identity that was the consequence of the historical Reformation that swept the Nordic region.²⁷

Fundamentally, the Aliens Consolidation Act is criticized for being discriminatory. Namely, critics argue that the Aliens Consolidation Act is discriminatory on a religious basis. Simply put, this religious discrimination is based on the fact that it discriminates against marriage immigrants of third world countries who are generally not of a Christian persuasion. Danish immigration statistics show the highest growth in immigrants in the past decade has been from third world countries, topping out at an astounding “4068 non-Western migrants in the first quarter of 2013” alone.²⁸ Furthermore, demographic statistics suggest that most of these third world migrants residing in Denmark and potentially marrying Danish citizens are either of Muslim or Buddhist background. These statistics are worrisome to Danish policymakers when taking into account

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ole Riis, “Religion Re-Emerging: The Role of Religion in Legitimizing Integration and Power in Modern Societies,” *International Sociology* 13 (1998): 250.

²⁸ Dorthe, Larsen, “Migration To and From Abroad,” *Statistics Denmark*, 2013, accessed May 16, 2013, from <http://www.dst.dk/en/Statistik/emner/flytninger/flytninger-til-og-fra-udlandet.aspx>.

how relatively small the population of Denmark is, currently measuring in at 5,547,683.²⁹ Concerns over preserving Danish homogenous cultural identity are rising given this potential threat of multiculturalism. Therefore, to halt this growing trend, religion has indirectly become an effective cultural indicator and simultaneous discriminatory control for immigration. Since Danish homogenous cultural identity is synonymous with its specific national form of Evangelical Lutheran religiosity, everyone that is not Danish is automatically excluded. In this regard, the interconnection of Danish nationality and religious Evangelical Lutheran identity becomes all the more apparent, making it impossible to separate between the two. This seems to be the case for all the Nordic states.³⁰ Ultimately, however, this also means that Denmark is restricting marriage migration and discriminating against immigrants based on religious persuasion and/or heritage.

Denmark's government justifies its immigration policy with a peculiar call to ensuring equality by guaranteeing equal rights for migrants. Pragmatically, this equality should take fruition through the successful implementation of the 2005 Integration Act "Integration as a particular issue has been a declared objective in Danish policy since the 1980s, and in 1983 a new foreigners' law was introduced along with a "Memorandum on Migration policy". A specific integration law, however, was not formulated before 1999, being the first of its kind in a Western country. The law led to some changes in the organization and implementation of the integration policy".³¹ In this regard, Danish policymakers have considered the Integration Act the foundation and legal marker in this drive for migrant equality. However, controversy over the Integration Act and Danish integration policy as such has arisen. More specifically, the problematic issue of whether Danish integration requires a certain degree of sameness is emphasized.

Danish perceptions are guided by the notion that the more similar people are the more equal they are. Division between 'Us' (Danish) and 'Them' (immigrants) is not resolved through the Integration Act that fails to take into account the need to adopt a pluralist multicultural perspective. Instead:

to be equal in Danish society, thus tends to imply to be similar. This notion of equality is closely related to the perception of Denmark as a cultural homogeneous country, and to the conceptions of social egalitarianism and universalism as constitutive elements of Danish society. The intimate connection between equality and sameness is reflected in the approach to multiculturalism in Denmark and in the Danish integration policies. Thus, the concept of integration is generally used in the sense of assimilation, and the benchmark of successful integration tend to be individual inclusion and cultural transformation".³²

To this effect, it can be argued that Danish attitudes equating integration with transformation are formed by a profound Protestant messianic missionary duty to indirectly culturally Christianize its population. In fact, Danish policymakers seemingly resemble historic Christian missionaries

²⁹ OECD, Stat Extracts "Demography and Population. Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development," 2012, accessed May 16, 2013, <http://stats.oecd.org/#>.

³⁰ Kühle, "Concluding remarks," 2011.

³¹ Tina Jensen et al., "Analysis of Integration Policies and Public State-Endorsed Institutions at National and Regional Levels in Denmark," *The Danish National Centre for Social Research* (2010) 54.

³² *Ibid*, 57.

seeking to convert the foreign immigrant masses, if not in religious persuasion then at least in cultural identity. Simultaneously, Danish policymakers are justifying this marriage migration policy restrictiveness on the basis of an inverted type of Judeo-Christian morality that equates cultural homogeneity, ensured through common religious belief, with universal equality.

Nowhere is the powerful influence of religiosity restricting Danish marriage migration policy more evident than in its policies failure to recognize polygamy, which is now considered a fundamental pillar of religious rights granted to Muslims and other religious minorities. In harmony with Christian principles and traditions, Danish marriage migration policy does not recognize polygamy as legal. Therefore, “in Denmark, regardless of whether polygamous marriages are legal in the country of origin, only one spouse can gain family reunion as a marriage migrant”.³³ Arguably, of course, in this manner Danish marriage immigration policy is clearly seen as discriminating against Muslim religious (and ethnic) minorities and naturally restricting their otherwise normal polygamous way of life. However, Danish policymakers seem adamant not to allow polygamous marriages to be valid in Denmark. In fact, Danish marriage immigration policy has limited males to one wife only, “promising to tighten regulations to enable the deportation of migrants discovered to be in polygamous marriages”.³⁴

Marriage Migration and the Case of the United States – Fundamentalism and Sexuality

The influence of religion and religiosity in restricting marriage immigration policy in the United States is extremely complex and generally rests on the migration theory of “client politics”³⁵. Generally, it is well known that migration policy in the United States is highly influenced by the political process of client politics whereby various interest groups lobby political support for their policy preferences. Of course, marriage migration policy is no exception to this political process of client politics, and various religious groups have taken advantage of this system to further their own agenda and let their voices be heard. Throughout history, the United States has always had a unique but complicated relationship with religion. Positioning itself in the middle of the spectrum between pure theocracy and totalitarianism,” the United States repeatedly voices its dedication to the principle of separation of church and state.³⁶ Yet, from the outside it seems that the United States is a deeply religious nation, one that constantly reaffirms its connection to religion. Arguably, this interconnection between the state and religion, no matter how separate, engages on the level of client politics.

The pragmatic influence of religiosity on politics in the United States has always been viewed with relative suspicion, even to the point of being labeled as fundamentalism. However, this is the inevitable result of aggressive client politics in which religious groups have been granted the freedom to engage the state on this level. Historically, American Protestant fundamentalism has been the most active in pursuing a radically conservative political agenda fueled by its zeal to

³³ Kathrine Charsley and Anika Liversage, “Transforming Polygamy: migration, transnationalism and multiple marriages among Muslim minorities,” *Global Networks* 13 (2013): 65.

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Christian Joppke, “Why Liberal States Accept Unwanted Immigration,” *World Politics* 50 (1998): 272.

³⁶ Ronald Johstone, *Religion in Society: A Sociology of Religion*, (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007), 148.

save the “American state from terrifying moral decline”.³⁷ This zeal has caused it to engage in client politics with the belief that it can save America by influencing government to take an arguably “nationalist fundamentalist” approach to US policy, including migration of course.³⁸ For a time, this apparent equating of fundamentalism with nationalism was successful in gaining public attention but was far less effective in producing real policy changes. Thus, over time, the factor of religiosity in client politics in the United States has seemingly diverted away from fundamentalism and has now adopted a more balanced approach. Diverting away from nationalistic Protestant fundamentalism, “American Evangelicalism has taken a middle ground and changed the way in which religiosity influences public policy in America”.³⁹

“As a theoretical construct, marriage is an important component of Protestantism and the traditional paradigm of the family”.⁴⁰ Crucially, religious influence through client politics in US marriage migration policy has come in the form of the Evangelical Immigration Table (EIT). It is the Evangelical Immigration Table that has taken on the role of becoming the official spokesperson for the Protestant Christian community in America, representing the factor of religiosity in influencing the restrictiveness of marriage immigration policy in the United States. Essentially, American Evangelicals are seeking to let the voice of religiosity in developing marriage migration policy be heard. Realizing the changing demographics of their church communities, American Protestantism has supported the comprehensive immigration reform bill. Just the simple fact that the Evangelical Immigration Table is ready to support this reform legislation is a noteworthy change and a step in the right direction that drastically goes against the traditionally religious conservative view of restricting overall migration inflows and opposing granting legal status to several immigrant groups and categories.

Controversially, however, religious support has stopped short in supporting certain amendments to US marriage immigration reform, thereby threatening the potential passing of the bill. Namely, views concerning marriage immigration have not changed as evidenced by the position taken by the Evangelical Immigration Table. More specifically, the EIT has fallen short in supporting the “reintroduced Uniting American Families Act, which would guarantee equality for bi-national lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender couples by allowing the American citizen to sponsor their spouse or partner for a green card, like straight couples do. There are an estimated 36,000 gay and lesbian bi-national couples who would benefit from the bill, many of whose families could be fractured when one parent faces deportation”.⁴¹ To this effect, it seems that conservative religious views among American believers remain restrictive when it comes to same-sex marriage immigration.

Certainly, views among American Evangelicals are changing, but when it comes to the issue of sexuality in relation to immigration, religious ideals taken precedent. There is a fine line between

³⁷ Johstone, *Religion in Society*, 189.

³⁸ Malise Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: A Search for Meaning*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 156.

³⁹ Walter Meade, “God’s Country?,” *Foreign Affairs* 85 (2006).

⁴⁰ Steven Koven and Frank Gotzke, *American Immigration Policy: Confronting the Nation’s Challenges*, (New York: Springer, 2010), 104.

⁴¹ Sarah Posner, “Immigration reform might actually hinge on what the Bible tells us,” *The Guardian*, May 10, 2013, accessed May 25, 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/may/10/immigration-reform-evangelical-christian-support>.

reform and reformation and for the American Evangelicals their opposition to same-sex marriage reform represents their idealized view that they are fighting for Christian principles that will ultimately save America from moral decay. Therefore, despite reformed views, religiosity in the United States is evidently still influencing the restrictiveness of marriage immigration policy by discriminating against all couples that are not of the heterosexual orientation. For now the EIT remains adamant in opposing the Uniting American Families Act as it applies to same-sex marriage immigration, arguing that this goes against God's Word and is thus considered a sin. For now, at least, marriage migration policy in the United States must thread a fine line between reform and sin.

In retrospect, the interconnection between religiosity and migration is extremely complex and is best portrayed through marriage migration. Fundamentally, religiosity has clearly influenced the restrictiveness of marriage immigration policy in Serbia, Denmark, and the United States. Whether directly or indirectly, through a defined politico-religious institution or a call to cultural religious tradition, the fact remains that religion and religiosity presents a powerful force in influencing the restriction of marriage immigration policy. Whether through its concern for ethnic purity, cultural homogeneity, or sexuality, religiosity remains a powerful factor when discussing marriage migration policy. Ultimately, religiosity has become the voice of a different vision for humanity that considers marriage in terms of the collective rather than the sum of the individual. With such an outlook, it is no surprise that religiosity takes a more constrained view of migration, believing that imposing restrictions on marriage immigration is the expression of a more weighted approach to the sanctity of the human condition.

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