

Presentation

Nationally mixed couples have become a widely ignored demographic and sociological phenomenon in European societies. This fact may be due to its novelty as a massive trend in social construction of everyday life. Although there is a long history of immigration in Europe, the relatively recent significant increase in the number of nationally mixed couples as a specific trend is striking, and is one that characterizes the changing social and cultural dynamics within all advanced European societies. Notwithstanding this phenomenon's innovative social and cultural dimensions, nationally mixed couples are exposed to a series of obstacles and impediments by nationally based administrations and public opinion. As examples, demographic statistics ignore or hide their existence due to inadequate data collection and misleading, even obsolete conceptions; public opinion frequently stigmatizes them as a menace to traditional family norms, stereotyped social mores, prejudices and even just stubborn views of national identity. Often nationally mixed marriage is seen as a stunt in order to obtain a resident permit in countries where migration is highly controlled. But, the reality of nationally mixed couples points to the complex character of social and cultural dynamics in a globalising world, the contradictory trends of individuality, free choice and human rights, and the multiple restrictions imposed by institutions in order to control and/or steer social and cultural change in accordance with political interests and public opinion. Nationally mixed couples are, therefore, a manifestation of social and cultural change. As a significant sociological phenomenon, they are related to globalization and immigration, the advance of cultural diversity, the pursuit of individuality and postmodern life-styles. They are an indicator of multiculturalism, social integration in complex societies and changing cultural patterns, of pluralism, tolerance and peaceful cohabitation. For all these reasons, the contradictory management of nationally mixed couples by the public sphere is mainly due to an extensive lack of information on its causes, backgrounds and effects.

The increasing number of nationally mixed couples is an indicator of multiculturalism, social integration and changing cultural patterns towards pluralism, tolerance and peaceful cohabitation. The main cause of its increase is not solely due to migration for economic or political reasons. It is also the con-

sequence of the increased social, educational and job-related mobility within Europe in a globalising world. These trends have widely influenced the ethnic, religious and cultural composition of former nationally constituted societies and have changed the direct social interactions and relations into new patterns of marital choice between immigrants and persons who belong to the majority population in the countries of destination. Nationally mixed couples produce new identities and modify historic and cultural traditions and heritage. Does this cultural mix impact national identities and a European identity?

Social integration in multicultural societies is narrowly related with trans-cultural interaction. More than that, social integration in multicultural societies has become a mainly cultural problem. It is narrowly related with the increase in immigration and the appearance of parallel ethnic, cultural and religious structures within the societies of destination. During the last two decades, European immigration has led to problems of social and cultural integration for the foreign populations and also turned into a political issue insofar as economic participation and social welfare programs are exposed to restrictive measures. Today, it is obvious that neither an imposed assimilation nor thoughtless multiculturalism have been successful as political strategies. One of the consequences of this failure is many European societies are exposed to xenophobic reactions, populism and racism in order to defend their supposed national identity. In this situation, politicians are becoming more inclined to impose legal and administrative restrictions on foreigners, notwithstanding their public acknowledgement of multiculturalism in general. Mixed couples are directly affected by these measures, especially when they are suspected of being merely “marriages of convenience”. For all these reasons, migration and mixed marriages have become a motive for social and political conflicts in many European societies, and as such, nationally mixed couples are considered to be an interesting field of study in the social and political sciences.

In spite of its conflictive character, immigration and its related consequences also indicate the necessity to redefine the cultural framework of advanced societies and in view of the possibilities for future social relations among citizens of different cultural backgrounds. Statistics now demonstrate a strong increase in binational and intercultural marriages in most European countries, with rates of between 10 and 15 % of the annual values – and this trend will likely rise in the future. What does it mean sociologically if a German man or woman marries a Turkish partner, or a Moroccan to a Spanish one? How does the social environment react to this fact, and what consequences does it have in terms of the socialization of their descendents and the environment. How do they influence the cultural setting within a still nationally defined society? To what extent can we consider this trend as a manifestation of transcultural hybridisation or of multicultural reconstruction of national societies? Is intercultural marriage or partnership an embedded alternative to the politics of integration imposed by public administrations? Can a private affair, such as marriage, be seen as a better solution than administrative measures? Are both strategies reasonable, complementary instruments for social integration, far

away from cultural essentialism and nationalism? Can direct, personal relations contribute to a new cultural framework for globalised societies?

The articles presented as a monographic contribution to *Papers* is the outcome of discussions by an international group of investigators from Spain, Germany, France, Greece, Turkey and Morocco over the last three years. It refers to the theoretical and methodological challenge today's sociological investigation is confronted with in view of social and cultural change imposed by globalisation. The authors try to present empirical information that contributes to a reflexive sociological programme of investigation into transcultural processes based both on statistical data and qualitative interviews. In this sense, the structural and the interactive aspects, the micro and macro, the subjective and the objective dimensions of the phenomenon are combined within the theoretical framework of what George Ritzer proposed as the integrated sociological paradigm.

The first contributions focus on the structural dimension of the phenomenon, stressing its demographic implications and the impact of immigration on marital choice in Spain (G. Steingress, A. Esteve/Cortina) and France (B. Collet). Steingress, Esteve and Cortina look at the impact of immigration on the demographic structure of Spain as a basic process for explaining the increase in the number of nationally mixed couples, and Steingress refers specifically to some of the cultural consequences of this social phenomenon, which transcultural hybridisation refers to. They also underline basic conceptual questions related to the definition of what "mixed couples" means in advanced societies and make proposals for a more adequate statistical recognition of this social category. As Collet points out, nationally mixed couples are a very complex social and cultural construction and their in-group and out-group integration depends widely on what their cultural differences are based on. The following articles analyse the situation of nationally mixed couples based on qualitative methodology, especially biographical research, depth-interviews and case studies. The relationship between ethnicity and belonging is demonstrated in the case of second-generation Turkish immigrants in Germany (U. Apitzsch/E. Gündüz). The conclusion reached in this case is that ethnic belonging of mixed couples is not enough to explain their relationship. It is also important to know more about the biographical history of each of the members that builds their bicultural identity. E. Santelli defends the multi-faceted character of "mixedness", stating that it is not only related to different cultures, but also to the variations in educational level, socialization, gender and peer groups. Her conclusion is that nationally mixed couples cannot be satisfactorily explained only by the concept of ethnic and cultural identity/difference. It is a more complex and/or multi-dimensional phenomenon that needs to embrace the biographical history of each member of the couple as the most relevant process in transcultural hybridisation and in the construction of new identities.

G. Tsiolis demonstrates the adequacy of the biographical method in order to reconstruct identity constructions in changing cultural identity in the case of Armenian Greeks who immigrated to Greece from post-soviet Armenia.

The last two contributions refer to cases, experiences and analyses of situations of mixed couples in the Moroccan and Turkish context, that is, outside the specific European arena. C. Therrien presents her ethnographic studies on the trajectories of mixed couples in Morocco and posits, “the theoretical framework used by social sciences to describe mixedness is no longer adapted to contemporary situations of mobility.” She proposes to see it a “journey” based on negotiation and ambivalence that allows cultural enrichment and self-distanciation. Finally, N. Gültekin demonstrates that transcultural hybridisation as an effect of intermarriage might strongly depend on political and ideological conditions. In this context, he invites new debate on ethnic intermarriage between Kurdish and Turkish peoples. In spite of the political implications of marriage between individuals of both ethnic groups, he underlines the necessity for studying processes like assimilation, integration and hybridisation. His main argument is that notwithstanding the impact of Western modernization in Turkey, these processes are heavily influenced by the resistance of the specific social structures and traditions in Anatolia, reinforced by the low status of women in the patriarchal social system, so that intermarriage between Kurds and Turks is most often characterized by the assimilation of Kurdish culture by the politically dominating Turkish culture.

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