A different perspective on exogamy:
Are non-migrant partners in mixed unions more liberal in their attitudes toward gender, family, and religion than other natives?

Abstract
Classic assimilation theory perceives migrant-native intermarriage as both a means to and a result of immigrants’ integration processes into host societies. The literature is increasingly focusing on marital exogamy of immigrants, yet almost nothing is known about their native partners. This explorative study contributes to the literature on migrant integration and social cohesion in Europe by asking whether the native partners in exogamous unions have different attitudes toward gender equality, sexual liberalization, family solidarity, and religiosity/secularization than natives in endogamous unions. Our theoretical considerations are based on preference, social exchange, and modernization theories. We use data of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) of seven countries. The sample size is 38,447 natives aged 18 to 85, of whom about 4% are in a mixed union. The regression results of the study are mixed. Persons in exogamous unions show greater agreement with family solidarity, are thus less individualistic than those in endogamous couples. Yet, mixing is associated with greater openness to sexual liberalization and gender equality as well as more secular attitudes. These findings can only partially be explained by sociodemographic control variables. Hence, immigrants in exogamous unions with natives may integrate into the more liberal milieu of their host societies, in which natives continue to place a high value on providing support to family members.

Key words: Exogamy, gender equality, attitudes, partner choice, migrant assimilation, Generations and Gender Survey

1. Introduction

Increasing shares of migrants in European host societies have affected receiving countries by creating a change of opportunities on partner markets. It is still true that non-migrant natives are usually in unions with other natives, and migrants are generally in unions with other migrants (Schroedter/Kalter 2008). However, in European countries with larger migrant populations, there appears to be a slight increase in mating preference for members of minority groups as partners (Potârcă/Mills, 2015), and the numbers of intermarriages are on the rise (Qian/Lichter 2011). In Europe, the average crude mixed marriage rate is
0.8 per thousand persons, and about 15% of the total number of marriages in 2006 and 2007 were intermarriages (Lanzieri 2012).

Classic and new assimilation theories perceive marriages between majority and (migrant) minority groups as a means to or and a result of immigrants’ integration into their host societies (Alba/Nee 1997; Aldridge 1978; Gordon 1964). Elwert (2018) highlighted that “intermarriage lies between the poles of social openness and social restraints” (Elwert 2018: 14); it is connected with social structure (Blau 1977; Blau/Becker/Fitzpatrick 1984), and social status (Davis 1941). Numerous studies have focused on the migrant partners in mixed couples in Europe and the US, including on their determinants and trends in partner choices (e.g. Baykara-Krumme/Fuß 2009; Beck-Gernsheim 2006; Chiswick/Houseworth 2011; Chi 2015; Lichter/Qian/Tumin 2015; Pagnini/Morgan 1990). Research on the so-called intermarriage premium effect (Furtado/Song 2015; Lee/Bean 2004) works with the implicit assumption that the native partner facilitates (further) social integration of the migrant partner. However, to date almost nothing is known about the native partners in these unions (Elwert 2018).

This is somewhat surprising, as the literature promotes the perception that people in mixed marriages could be “seen as the ultimate boundary breaker” (Rodríguez-Garcia 2015: 13). This basic assumption, however, has rarely been contested (Milewski/Gawron 2019). Our paper is of an explorative nature and aims to increase our knowledge about the native partners in such unions, who are as diverse as the immigrants themselves.

For the natives, there are different possible types of mixed unions with migrants, which coincide with different societal and legal conditions for meeting, mating, and marrying the potential partner. First, the marriage markets in older member states of the European Union include a growing percentage of descendants of the immigrants who arrived in the 1950s and 1960s (Eurostat 2014). Second, migrants from European and non-European countries today, especially women, move more often as singles than the classic work migrants who arrived in the 1960s did (Anthias/Lazaridis 2000). Some research has indicated that being in a mixed union may foster the possibilities of permanent residence in Europe for migrants from non-European countries (de Hart 2015; Koopmans/Michalowski/Waibel 2012). Migrants from countries belonging to the European Union have the privilege of freedom of movement (Verwiebe 2008). In the member states of the European Union, the share of European migrants is still lower than the share of non-European migrants (Mau/Büttner 2011), but the number of intra-European couples has been increasing (Schroedter/de Winter/Koelet 2015; Verwiebe 2008). Third, marriage migration may not be a new phenomenon, but as a result of globalization, in which also marriage markets are globalized, it is increasing (Elwert 2018). Non-migrant men and women can meet and mate with potential spouses abroad and “import” them (Constable 2003; Kim 2010; Niedomysl/Östh/van Ham 2010). In the case of marriage migration, the native partner is the starting point of the integration of the migrant into the society at destination. In these marriage market segments, natives – like migrants – may need to overcome legal obstacles created by integration and migration policies, as well as prejudices or even sanctions imposed by their social networks, if they form a mixed marriage (Alba/Foner 2014; Carol 2013; Contucci/Sandell 2015; Rodríguez-García 2010; Schlueter/Meuleman/Davidov 2013).