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Kogan, Irena

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*Irena Kogan*

## Introduction to the special issue on *Minority ethnic groups' marriage patterns in Europe*

### **Motivation, main research questions, and theoretical backbone of the volume**

Post-war migration in Europe is marked by various types of population movements. Throughout the 1950-70s, immigrant workers, largely male, were recruited to satisfy the booming economies of major European countries, whereas after the mid 1970s their wives and children joined them, thus increasing the number of host countries' foreign-born population. In the 1980-90s, migration movements changed their character, becoming of a more humanitarian nature. Nevertheless, one of the most important sources of migration to Western Europe has been family reunification. As second- or third-generation immigrants in Europe become old enough to start families of their own, the question of their partner choices becomes even more important. These days, a substantial part of family reunifications is indeed an inflow of marriage partners among immigrants already residing in the country of immigration or their descendants. Despite the significance of the family-driven nature of European migration and the importance of the marriage migration phenomenon, an adequate understanding of immigrants' marriage patterns and their systematic analyses in European countries is still lacking. This collection of papers aims at shedding light on partner choice among various immigrant groups in four European countries: Germany, Great Britain, Sweden, and France, focusing, where possible, on the phenomenon of transnational marriages.

The choice of marriage partners among immigrants and their descendants is considered to be the most telling indicator of their integration in the host country. Ethnic intermarriages indicate long-lasting social interactions beyond the borders of ethnic groups and reflect the social distance and cultural proximity between the charter and the immigrant populations. They are indicative of the openness of the host society to ethnic diversity and of the degree of harmonisation between a country's different population groups. For immigrants and ethnic minorities, they are likely to provide a strong and durable fundament for integration in various spheres of life. Thus, two crucial questions of migration research with regard to social assimilation, both to be pursued in the papers collected in this volume, ask the following: whether the trend towards intermarriage strengthens with every successive generation and through which mechanisms it is either fostered or impeded.

Scarce evidence suggests that, even in the second generation, the level of intermarriage for some groups is quite low and is only marginally increasing compared to the first generation of immigrants (Schroedter/Kalter 2008). Despite some variation by the ethnic groups, coethnic marriage is still the most dominant pattern for many ethnic groups, with the phenomenon of 'imported' or transnational marriages remaining pronounced. Compared to intermarriages, the practice of importing partners from the country of origin could be seen as the type of marital choice that indicates the highest degree of orientation towards the sending society, its culture, and its traditions. It can slow down the assimilation process considerably due to recurrence of language and integration problems for a newly migrated partner. Children born in such families – even though they are born in the host country – often have difficulties within the education system, as their parents lack the necessary cultural knowledge and social resources to successfully navigate it. Hence, in the two country cases, German and British, for which the data permit it, the phenomenon of transnational marriages is explored in further detail.

Theoretically, the papers of the current volume adhere to general ideas of the contact theory (Blau et al. 1984; Blau et al. 1982) and build on Kalmijn's (1998) distinction between three groups of factors relevant for studying intermarriage and homogamy: (1) the preference for certain characteristics of a spouse based on the individual's resources (e.g., differences of education, socio-economic status, length of residence in the host country, cultural and religious similarity), (2) the influence of the social group (third party) of which they are members (e.g., family, religious community), and (3) the potential constraints imposed by the structure of the marriage market (e.g., sex ratio, size of own ethnic group).

With regard to the choice of marriage partners among ethnic minorities, the cultural resources of an individual appear to be particularly important, influencing his or her preference to marry someone who is of similar background. Third parties are able to influence ethnic marriage patterns via group identification and group sanctions. The stronger the feeling of group identification and the more racial and ethnic groups have internalized the norms of endogamy, the bigger is the tendency to ethnic homogamy. Family sanctions are still important among some ethnic groups, above all those in which family bonds and kinship networks are particularly pronounced. Sanctions are also provided by a religious community or organisation, signifying a smaller propensity for inter-religious and interethnic marriages. Kalmijn (1998) stresses that ethnic homogamy is governed not only by individual- and group-level factors, but also by structural arrangements in terms of the demographic composition of the population as a whole, its regional concentration, or its distribution in smaller functional settings, such as neighbourhoods, schools, or workplaces.

With regard to the choice between a coethnic partner from the host country and an imported partner, a number of studies have mentioned the role of traditional values and the wish for 'unspoiled brides' among men (Lievens 1999; Çelikaksoy et al. 2006; Reniers 2001). Gender imbalances within an immigrant population are also seen as partially responsible for male immigrants importing their brides (Straßburger 2000). No less important is additional power in the household for the men marrying immigrating partners (Reniers 2001). For women who select their partners from abroad, the pressures of their families have been named the most crucial factor behind the decision (González-Ferrer 2006). This factor is the brides' parents, who express their loyalties to their kin and traditions by marrying their daughters to grooms from the same country of origin (Reniers

2001; Haug 2002). Apart from the potential influence of the bride's family, women themselves are said to improve their bargaining positions, as they are the ones who secure the entry into the western world and know the country in which the couple settles (Reniers 2001; González-Ferrer 2006; Lievens 1999).

The effects of the two individual-level variables on the chances of marrying exogenously, within one's own ethnic group or importing a partner from the sending country<sup>1</sup> will be examined in detail in the papers of this volume – (1) duration of residence in the host country or difference between the first and consequent generations, and (2) the level of educational attainment. As regarding the first factor, the growth in the intermarriage rates between the first and the second generation is mentioned by various authors (Schroedter 2006), but the findings are inconclusive for each and every ethnic group. It has also been shown for Germany (González-Ferrer 2006) that better educated immigrants, be they men or women, are more likely to marry outside their ethnic group (see also Schroedter 2006; Klein 2001), whereas only better educated men are also less likely to import their partners from their or their parents' countries of origin. Lievens (1999), for example, shows that in Belgium women who have the highest chance of being well assimilated also have the highest probability of being married to an imported partner, whereas among men the opposite is the case. Whilst for men arguments against choosing partners from the local migrant community were because of their being too modern and behaving too freely, for women, local immigrant men appeared too traditional, poorly educated, and often unsuccessful at work. The empirical question to be pursued in the volume is whether similar patterns could be confirmed for other European countries and how various ethnic groups differ in this regard.

### **Immigrant marriage patterns in Europe and outline of the volume**

Until now, there have been two main streams of research on ethnic intermarriage. The first kind are large-scale quantitative studies which, partially due to the data restrictions, tend to deal predominantly with the role of structural factors for immigrant marriage patterns (e.g., González-Ferrer 2006; Kalmijn/Van Tubergen 2006; Schroedter/Kalter 2008). The second kind are small qualitative studies that focus in depth on the role of attitudinal factors, like religious preferences or family practices, falling short of delivering a crucial test for the external validity of their findings (e.g., Atabay 1998; Toprak 2002). The papers of the current volume follow the former stream of research, aiming to lead to a general understanding of the marriage patterns across Europe, and should be regarded as a first step towards a comprehensive theory-driven analysis of immigrants' partnership patterns covering a wide range of possible influencing factors, applying sound methodological tools and cross-national comparative design.

Unlike in the USA (Qian/Lichter 2001, 2007; Meng/Gregory 2005; Rosenfeld 2002; see Kalmijn 1998 for an overview), research on marriage patterns of immigrants and their descendants in Europe remains rather scarce. A single large-scale comparative study by Lucassen and Laarman (2009), which presents a meta-analysis of the research findings

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1 The latter analyses will be conducted solely for Germany and Great Britain.

regarding the propensity to intermarry of various groups of immigrants and their descendants in Germany, France, England, Belgium, and the Netherlands stresses the importance of religion, colour, and colonial background in immigrants' marriage decisions. Migrants whose faith has no tradition in Western Europe, e.g., those from Muslim and Hindu communities, tend to intermarry at a much lower rate than those with a Christian background. The authors argue that colour or racial differences seem to be less detrimental for the propensity to intermarry. Ethnic differences in marriage patterns, however, exist and could, according to Lucassen and Laarman (2009), be influenced by the restrictive migration policies, which increase the pressure on the second generation to marry someone from the same country of origin as their parents.

It has been shown that in *Germany* the rate of interethnic marriages of immigrants from the former recruitment countries and their descendants has increased across cohorts according to official micro data from 1976 to 2004 (Schroedter/Kalter 2008). Men are generally more likely to have a German spouse than women, second generations are more likely than first generations, and Spaniards are most likely to intermarry whereas Turks have the lowest rates of interethnic marriages. Conversely, Turkish immigrants are most likely to have an imported spouse from the country of origin, 25% of second generation Turks do so, followed by the former Yugoslav immigrants (Schroedter 2006).<sup>2</sup> For second generation Greeks, Italians, Portuguese, and Spaniards, the corresponding rates amount only to 3%. Education is positively related to intermarriage: the higher the educational level is, the higher the probability that an immigrant has a German spouse or partner (Schroedter/Kalter 2008, González-Ferrer 2006, Haug 2002). Macro-structural effects like age specific sex ratio and population size of an immigrant group have been shown to partly explain differences between the nationalities in their probability to have a German spouse – at least for male immigrants (Schroedter/Kalter 2008). An analysis of the Integration Survey from 2000 for persons aged 18 to 30 with German, Turkish, or Italian ethnicity has shown that Islamic religion, in combination with high religiosity, seems to be a further important predictor of partner choice (Haug 2002).

The paper by *Frank Kalter and Julia Schroedter* in this volume explores for the first time patterns and determinants of transnational marriages among ethnic minorities in Germany with the large-scale data of the German Microcensus 1976-2004. Their findings point to the diminishing occurrence of transnational marriages over immigrant cohorts and generations for major immigrant groups. Of all ethnic minority groups, Turkish second generation immigrants are significantly more likely to opt for transnational marriages, followed by ex-Yugoslavs. The study discovers, however, that the factors that are proven to be important for the choice of partners within the host society (like education, sex ratio, or group size) are less likely to account for the choice of partners from the parents' country of origin. The authors conclude that taking religion, the degree of religiosity and social networks – variables that are not available in the microcensus – into account is imperative when attempting to explain the transnational marriage choices of ethnic minority groups.

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2 The rates of imported marriages are underestimated here because the rate relates only to those marriages in which one spouse immigrated to Germany *after* the marriage. Thereby, transnational marriages in which both marriage and the immigration of the spouse took place in the same year are not included.

For *Great Britain*, findings from the research using the Labour Force Survey data between 1979-1991 (Jones 1982, 1984; Coleman 1985, 1992, 1994; Berrington 1994) consistently show that Black Caribbeans and Black Africans have much higher rates of intermarriage than Indians, Pakistanis, or Bangladeshis, whereas individuals with mixed-ethnic origins boast the highest rate of intermarriage. Findings for the intergenerational assimilation of marriage behaviour indicate higher rates of interethnic unions among younger generations who were born in Great Britain. With regard to gender variation, the rate of intermarriage appears to be higher for men than for women across all ethnic groups except for Chinese. Berrington (1996) further shows that interethnic partnerships are more common in cohabiting unions and among individuals with a privileged socio-economic status. On the basis of the 1988-2004 General Household Survey, Muttarak (2007) confirms weaker ethnic endogamy among cohabiting unions and remarriages compared to first marriages, weakening ethnic endogamy over time, higher rates of intermarriage for ethnic minorities born in Britain, higher rates of intermarriage for individuals with high educational qualifications except for Blacks, and higher rates of intermarriage for ethnic minorities living in an area with a higher ratio of Whites compared to coethnics.

The paper by *Raya Muttarak* included in this volume extends the analyses of the General Household Survey from 1988-2006 to include an additional partnership option among immigrants and their descendants – an option of importing a partner from overseas. She presents evidence for an increased intergenerational assimilation in marriage behaviour among ethnic minority youth, who are more likely to marry a White British citizen and less likely to engage in the transnational partnership. Whereas the individual level predictors, such as age at union, marital status, educational degree, area ethnic composition, sex ratio, and educational homogamy remain significant predictors of one's partner choice, ethnicity continues to play a most decisive role. Black Caribbean, Black Africans, and highly educated Indians have increasingly high rates of interethnic union with a White British partner, whereas Pakistanis and Bangladeshis continue to lag behind in this respect, favouring a choice of coethnic partners imported from abroad. Overall, however, the study confirms an increase in interethnic partnerships between the White British and immigrant population in Britain.

Whereas the authors of the German and British case studies are able to build on existing research on ethnic marriage patterns in their respective countries, and can extend their analyses to include transnational partnerships, studies of interethnic marriage patterns in *Sweden* have been scant until present day, and have been focused primarily on the partnership choices of Swedish-born residents without making the distinction of their ethnic origin. Niedomsyl et al. (2009) used the data from 1990-2004 to show that male marriage immigrants stem from Western Europe and the Middle East, while women stem from Asia and Eastern Europe. Marriage immigrants forming partnerships with Swedes tend to be drawn from the high end of the educational distribution. Dribe and Lundh (2008) report that immigrants who are better educated, with longer duration of residence and who reside outside the major urban areas are more likely to partner with natives. Immigrants married to natives are also found to have higher employment probabilities and higher incomes, but no attempt is made to determine the direction of causality between marriage and economic outcomes. For first and second generation immigrants, Behtoui

(2008) finds that those with origins outside Northwest Europe and North America have smaller probabilities of intermarrying with natives.

*Aycan Çelikkaksoy, Lena Nekby and Saman Rashid* contribute to the discourse on immigrant partnerships in Sweden by exploring the determinants of the assortative mating by ethnicity and education, with a particular focus on the role of the individual, marriage market, and parental characteristics. Their results indicate that higher levels of country specific human capital are associated with lower ethnic and higher educational endogamy – a finding that the authors attribute to a shift from ascribed toward attained characteristics as a basis for spousal choice. Opportunities, captured by favourable sex ratios or relative group's size, contribute to both types of assortative mating, whereas the parental example in terms of ethnic or educational group crossing contributes to the explanation of their children's mating behaviour. Finally, the authors report significant differences by gender with regard to both types of assortative mating.

According to *Mirna Safi*, who contributed to this volume, quantitative research on intermarriage in *France* is very scarce, largely owing to the obvious data limitations. Some patterns are nevertheless obvious and universal for France, and similar to other Western European countries. Migrants of African origin and with a Christian religion tend to intermarry far more than migrants with a lighter skin colour but with a non-Western religion (e.g., Islam) (Lucassen/Laarman 2009). Another outstanding feature of the assortative mating among Muslim migrants is that it is almost always conducted within their own ethnic group (e.g., Moroccans marry Moroccans), which, according to Todd (1985), is attributed to the community-based family system. The latter factor seems also to be responsible for lower intermarriage rates among the Portuguese in France. While the Portuguese share the same religion with French or with other guest workers from predominantly Catholic Italy or Spain, they tend to keep close contacts with their home country through established networks. Conversely, Algerians in France, although Muslims and originating from the Maghreb region (similar to Moroccans) seem to have comparatively high intermarriage rates, despite the widespread collective negative image of Algerians that used to exist in France (Rosenberg 2006). Safi's study confirms strong differences in intermarriage patterns by ethnic origin, with European immigrants most likely to enter exogamous marriages, while non-Europeans opt for ethnic endogamy instead. Despite these general trends, some notable exceptions are both Tunisian men boasting intermarriage rates very close to those of European migrants and Portuguese whose intermarriage behaviour is more similar to Algerians than Italians. One of the most important conclusions of the French contribution is a pronounced intergeneration assimilation with regard to marital behaviour for all groups, apart from Turks and Portuguese.

All papers included in the volume call for gaining additional insights into the issue of ethnic intermarriage with datasets capturing attitudes, preferences, religious affiliation, and social embeddedness, as well as data designed to take individual unobserved heterogeneity into account. A need for data covering a whole variety of factors that might be able to affect partner choice among minority ethnic groups with a systematic distinction between individual resources and preferences (both at the structural and cultural level), third party influences, and structural constraints becomes even more salient as the analyses become increasingly differentiated with regard to possible partnership constellations, including transnational marriages and cohabitations. For example, a comparison of co-

habitation and marriage patterns, particularly among those minority ethnic groups in which cohabitation is unacceptable, might provide us with a better understanding of partnership decisions when it comes to spouses' individual choices (more pronounced in the case of cohabitation) vs. eventually forced marriage options. Finally, further comparative research in the area of interethnic marriage is urgently needed (for notable exceptions, see Model/Fisher, 2002<sup>3</sup>).

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3 Model and Fisher (2002), when comparing England and the United States, find that younger people and those who live in London are more likely to intermarry. Yet their study focuses solely on inter-ethnic unions between Black Caribbean and Whites without discussing the diversity of intermarriage patterns of other ethnic groups.

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Address of the author/Anschrift der Autorin:

Prof. Dr. Irena Kogan

Professur für Soziologie, Gesellschaftsvergleich  
Universität Mannheim  
Seminargebäude A5  
D-68131 Mannheim, Germany

E-mail: [ikogan@mail.uni-mannheim.de](mailto:ikogan@mail.uni-mannheim.de)