



Partnership preferences of the Belgian second generation: Who lives with whom?

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ABSTRACT

Divergent bodies of theory have devoted ample attention to ethnic intermarriage. Using the data from the Belgian TIES project (*The Integration of the European Second Generation*), this paper focuses on the young Turkish and Moroccan second generation in Belgium and, in contrast to other studies in the field, includes cohabitation in addition to marriages. Furthermore, it distinguishes not only partnerships to natives versus partnerships to non-natives but three types of partnerships: those to first generation partners, second generation partners and 'native' Belgian partners.

Our results show, first, that a large part of the second generation lives with first generation coethnic partners. We find secondly that most of the relations to Belgian-born persons are in fact relations to partners of second generation from the same ethnic background. We conclude that estimations of intermarriage/cohabiting unions based on relations to first generation immigrants seriously underestimate the extent of intra-ethnic partnerships. Thirdly, we find that not only individual characteristics but also the social environment impacts on the partner choice.

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1. Introduction

Divergent bodies of theory have devoted ample attention to ethnic intermarriage, exogamy and ethnic assortative mating. Marriage is often regarded as an indicator of the transmission of ethnically specific cultural values and practices. Song (2009: 332f) explains why intermarriage is considered so important for theorists: for them intermarriage is a practice which may fundamentally affect the boundaries between ethnic minority groups (Barth, 1969). Specifically, increasing rates of intermarriage might signal fading or shifting boundaries and decrease ethnic prejudices (Kalmijn, 1991). This should be similar for inter-ethnic unions in general, on which we focus here. In a nutshell, this article looks at patterns of

inter- and intra-ethnic cohabiting partnerships¹ of the descendants of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants (i.e. the second generation) in Belgium based on the Belgian data from the TIES project (*The Integration of the European Second Generation*). Despite Belgium's large ethnic population and the extensive literature in traditional immigration countries, there are only a few studies on intermarriage and interethnic unions in Belgium to date.

From the 'golden sixties' onward, Belgian migration statistics show a large and steady intake of foreign labour in the heavy metal and mining industries from rural areas of Southern countries, such as Turkey and Morocco. Increasingly, foreign workers were also contracted by employers in other industries, construction, and menial

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¹ We look at inter-ethnic partnerships comprising married and non-married cohabiting unions. We refer, however, to the stricter sense of 'intermarriage' to quote studies.

jobs. From the middle of the 1970s, Belgium adopted a restrictive migration policy and the since then main influx resulted from family reunification and later family formation (Reniers, 1998). This has profoundly changed the nature of foreign populations: from temporary guest workers to residing households and minority communities. Due to the timing of this migration and the relatively high fertility of the first generation immigrant population, the current Turkish and Moroccan communities in Belgium have an atypically young age structure (Lesthaeghe, 2000).

It is difficult to find numbers on foreign origin populations in Belgium, since most statistics are based on nationality rather than ethnic background. When considering more inclusive categorisation criteria the Turkish origin population is estimated around 2.4% of the total population in Antwerp and 3.7% in Brussels. For the Moroccan origin population this is 7.5% in and 12.9% in Brussels (Vandezande, Phalet, & Swyngedouw, 2011).

Findings based on the Belgian Census of 1991 suggest that there is a high share of marriages with a co-ethnic from the country of origin among those with a Turkish and Moroccan nationality who migrated to Belgium prior to marriage in the period between 1960 and 1990. The share of such cross-border marriage to a co-ethnic is higher for Turkish nationals (75% for men and 69% for women) than for Moroccan nationals living in Belgium (57%) (Lievens, 2000). Also, the second generation of Turks and Moroccans show relatively high and stable rates of marriage with a co-ethnic partner from the country of origin (Corijn & Lodewijckx, 2009; Lievens, 1997; Lodewijckx, 2010; Reniers & Lievens, 1997; Reniers, 1998). Similar results were found for the Netherlands: Moroccans and Turkish migrants were found to be (among) the groups least open to interethnic marriage and cohabitation (Kalmijn & van Tubergen, 2007). Therefore, this study explores further the partnership patterns of the two largest second generation groups in Belgium, the Moroccan and Turkish second generation. As the second generation in Belgium have come of age in the last years, it is a good time to study family formation in these populations. In addition, the process of union and family formation among ethnic minorities undergoes a rapid change in Belgium: they assimilate in terms of marriage age and number of children (Schoenmaeckers, Lodewijckx, & Gadeyne, 1999).

Many empirical studies have the shortcoming of merely focusing on “who marries whom?”, i.e. are limited to the concept of intermarriage and exclude partnerships or cohabitations (Song, 2009). In other words, this approach ignores important recent societal changes. Over the last decades, cohabitation has become a relevant form of living together (Corijn & Klijzing, 2001; Corijn, 2010). Today many Western countries provide alternative legal alternatives to marriage such as officially recognised partnerships (e.g. *Pacte civil de solidarité* (PACS) in France, *samenlevingscontract/contrat de vie commune* in Belgium). Literature on assortative mating on educational matching between the partners takes increasingly into account that young cohorts tend to live together first rather than directly getting married. Corijn (2010) shows that people living together before a possible marriage are generally higher educated and more often non-religious. Yet, due to

data limitations, to date there are only few studies on inter-ethnic partnering who include also cohabiting unions (Blackwell & Lichter, 2000; Corijn & Lodewijckx, 2009; Kalmijn & van Tubergen, 2007).

In addition, the operational definition of inter-ethnic union often collapses different “types” of partnerships. When differentiating by nationality, partnerships to the second generation are – depending on the country's degree of openness towards naturalisations – often collapsed with either first generation partnerships (when restricted access to nationality) or are assigned to the ‘native’ category (when open access to nationality). This second drawback related to the question “who marries whom?” Throwing light on these additional dimensions, our paper remedies this situation and thus contributes to the empirical literature in the field in two ways. First, we look at the more generally defined concept of union formation or partnership including marriages and also cohabitation. Secondly, we distinguish partnerships to first generation migrants, second generation and natives. In other words, we apply a more precise concept of inter-ethnic unions.

This relates to the first aim, which is of methodological nature, namely to compare definitions of inter-ethnic partnerships and its empirical implications: first versus second generation versus Belgian partners. In doing so, we define partnerships – or unions – as couples living together, married or unmarried. Couples that are legally bound but *not* living together are thus not considered. Although the number of non-married cohabiting couples among the Turkish second generation is still relatively small, the share is increasing not only for natives but also for Moroccans in Belgium, the Moroccan second generation and for those with “native” partners (Corijn & Lodewijckx, 2009: 22ff; Schoenmaeckers et al., 1999).

This article first reviews the literature in the field of inter-ethnic partnerships and then introduces the methodology of the study. We then present descriptive results on inter- and intra-ethnic partnerships in Belgium and estimate a multinomial logistic regression to model the factors facilitating interethnic partnerships and conclude in the final section. In other words, the second aim is to predict partner choices of the second generation and scrutinise the assimilation argument.

2. Literature review

As mentioned, many studies do not distinguish between first generation partners, second generation partners and native partners. Collapsing second generation partners as first generation or natives may cause problems for cross-country comparisons and for substantive reasons.² Conceptually, such approaches must over- or underestimate the true rate of inter-ethnic unions. In

² Apart from methodological reasons, the differentiation between these different kinds of partnerships also seems to be important for substantive reasons. It poses the theoretical question if partnerships between members of the first and second generation are to be considered as inter- or intra-ethnic marriages. This question, however, shall not be discussed here.

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