

“CONJUGAL MIXEDNESS” OR HOW TO STUDY MARITAL NORMS AND INEQUALITIES IN INTERETHNIC RELATIONSHIPS¹

BEATE COLLET²

Université Paris-Sorbonne

Research on mixed couples goes back to the early 20th century. Quantitative studies mainly use the term intermarriage and concentrate on integration or group barriers; other approaches speak of transnational marriage: mixed couples are seen as a consequence of migration. In this article, we will define conjugal mixedness as involving all sorts of interethnic or interreligious couples, even those who are not directly linked to migration. What makes them mixed is not their cultural differences, but the inequality between the majority and the minority partner. Prevalent in-marriage norms (endogamy) and conjugal inequality lead to social disapproval, which varies historically and depends on the societal context. Conjugal mixedness furthermore requires an intersectional approach; questions of ethno-cultural, racial or religious belonging are linked to gender, social class and migration. Illustrated by empirical examples in France, we show how conjugal mixedness is defined from the outside, i.e. through social perceptions or disapproval, and constructed from the inside (the couples' own experiences of mixedness in daily life and the adjustments they make). We argue that the way spouses deal with mixedness depends on factors other than ethnic belonging, namely gender, class and migration history.

Keywords: conjugal mixedness, intermarriage, inequality, migration, gender, culture, social class

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² Contact: beate.collet@paris-sorbonne.fr

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 20th century, intermarriage or mixed couples have consistently been a part of migration research. Whereas quantitative analyses stress intermarriage as an indicator of assimilation, qualitative research has emphasized specific intercultural combinations of mixed couples in specific national contexts. In the last decade, interest has been kindled afresh by connecting migration to family change in the age of globalisation.

Why are the social sciences interested in “mixed couples”? The latter are of course linked to international migrations and cultural diversity in modern societies, but perhaps even more importantly, they interrogate ethnic, racial and religious belongings: they reveal the globalisation of our own, private lives (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2014). People who intermarry are flouting the community norms that still play an important role in marital unions and family education. How can partners raised in families of different cultural backgrounds manage living together? What will their children’s education be like?

It is interesting to see how mixed couples in Quebec manage cultural and identity transmission (Le Gall and Meintel 2015), or how Chinese-British couples in the UK negotiate stereotypes (Hu 2016), or how foreign spouses of Muslim background face discrimination in Italy or France (Odasso 2016). These empirical inquiries yield an amazing wealth of material on how people deal with their particular situations. They broach the subject by looking at particular ethno-cultural combinations, but they do not study the characteristics these lifestyles share beyond the spouses’ specific cultural or religious affiliations. The question therefore remains as to how we might frame “conjugal mixedness” theoretically, by considering the intricate power relations that bring into play culture (nationality, ethnicity, race, religion, language), on the one hand, and, on the other hand, gender, age, migration, social belonging and state politics.

The goal of this article is to discuss “conjugal mixedness” as a concept, and the above-mentioned key elements that allow scholars to study mixed couples in various social contexts: what makes these couples different from other couples and what are the elements to consider in order to reach beyond the case study? We will proceed by first reviewing the other concepts used to analyse mixed couples’ experiences, and then suggest that mixed couples question community and marital norms. Secondly, we will show how they are studied empirically from the outside (how they are perceived by others) and from the inside (the couples’ point of view). Their conjugal choice risks incurring social disapproval, while having to make cultural, social and educational decisions for themselves and their children.

We will not, in this article, be presenting empirical work based on a single study. Rather, we will argue on the basis of statistical data and empirical material borrowed from different case studies done over the last years by various research scholars in France and elsewhere. However, we will also be using some statistical results of large representative surveys on the one hand, and, on the other hand, qualitative results obtained in a study on the marital choices of persons of immigrant descent with Muslim backgrounds carried out in 2008 among nearly 100 persons of whom a third had non-Muslim, French partners (Collet and Santelli 2012; Collet and Santelli 2016). As we are arguing from a French researcher’s point of view, we shall illustrate our demonstration using mainly empirical work on mixed couples in France. Nevertheless, the overall aim of this article is to delineate the theoretical framework of “conjugal mixedness” in general.

DEFINING “CONJUGAL MIXEDNESS”

Many empirical studies investigate so-called “mixed” or “intercultural” or “binational” couples or marriages. They stress the concrete forms these couples take but do not define their mixedness. Examining the few theoretical terms in circulation – “intermarriage” and “transnational marriage” – it turns out that they correspond to different research traditions or research fields. Talking about “conjugal mixedness” corresponds to a theoretical shift emphasizing social norms and applying an intersectional approach. In this section, we will discuss the different concepts, seeking to grasp their underlying assumptions and to characterise precisely what “conjugal mixedness” is about. The idea is to develop an analytical tool able to explore all kind of mixed couples’ experiences in any place and period.

“INTERMARRIAGE”: MAINLY A STATISTICAL APPROACH TO INTEGRATION PROCESS

The first studies on intermarriage were conducted in the United States as of the beginning of the 20th century. Julius Drachsler was one of the first to work out the method. Analysing marriage certificates in New York City and establishing categories that isolated immigrants, Jews and coloured people, he looked at how many of them married outside their group. “The intermarriage ratio” – as he framed it in his own words – “therefore obtained on the basis of facts collected from authentic marriage certificates, can be used as a good index

of assimilation” (Drachsler 1921: 18). To this day, many empirical studies have followed worldwide (Lieberson and Waters 1988; Tribalat et al. 1992). Most are statistical approaches which look at how immigrant, ethnic, religious or racial groups marry “out”. They distinguish men, women and different generations of immigrants, but all keep to the idea that intermarriage brings together spouses of different affiliations.

In the 1990s, the assimilation concept was challenged. Statistical work on intermarriage started to use different theoretical frameworks. Authors such as A. Portes and M. Zhou (1993) for the U.S., Miri Song (2009) in the U.K. and Mirna Safi (2010) in France, showed that there is no direct link between intermarriage and assimilation or integration. As a linear relationship between intermarriage and the integration process seems difficult to establish, researchers doing statistical analyses today argue around the idea of the “breakdown of intergroup boundaries” (Lichter et al. 2016: 58) or the ethnic diversity of the target countries.

Matthijs Kalmijn’s statistical studies on different intermarriage configurations in various countries (mainly the U.S. and the Netherlands) developed a new, more elaborate, theoretical frame on intermarriage. In one of the most cited articles in this field (*google scholar*), he argued that intermarriage must be studied by taking personal preferences, group belongings, marriage markets and third parties such as relatives or friends into account (Kalmijn 1998).

Data from the French national survey *Trajectoires et Origines* (TeO),³ bearing on the diversity of the French population, illustrate the specific configurations of mixed marriage in France. The survey shows that 37 percent of the immigrants who arrived in France as adults and whose couple was formed after immigrating – men as well as women – live with a member of the majority group (*i.e.* persons born in France whose parents were also born in France). But discrepancies between women and men are considerable. Female migrants more often than men form a couple with a majority member (47% vs. 31%), though disparities are considerable depending on national origin: immigrants whose national origins correspond to the usual waves of immigration most often form couples with persons from the same geographic area as them (Hamel et al. 2015: 304).

³ The *Trajectories and Origins* survey was conducted in 2008 by INED (National Demographic Institute of France) and INSEE (National Statistical and Economic Studies Institute) on a sample of 21,000 persons, representative of the population aged 18–60 living in ordinary households in mainland France.

The same survey also shows that the conjugal choices of immigrant descendants differ from immigrants'.⁴ For instance, the former are far more likely to choose a partner in the majority group, and that goes for women (62%) as much as for men (67%). There again, the overall percentage masks considerable disparities according to parents' national origins. Descendants whose parents came from one of the North-African countries, Sub-Saharan Africa or Turkey, less frequently form a couple with a member of the majority group: they choose partners among immigrants from the same geographic area as their own parents. In contrast, descendants of other national origins (South-East Asia, Europe and other countries), men as well as women, more often choose a majority group member (Hamel et al. 2015: 312–313).

To sum up, studies using the “intermarriage” theoretical framework yield an overall view of who marries whom. They are done by demographers and permit measuring macro-sociological phenomena comparing different migrants or minority groups (descendants) with regard to marriage or partnerships with members of the majority population. Empirical results in different countries reveal specific features related to the migratory context: groups may differ according to their sex-ratio or their migratory projects, they may also share a specific history with the target country (Rodríguez-García 2012). However, it is impossible to compare the statistics produced in different countries (Kalmijn and Tubergen 2006; Kalter and Schroedter 2010; Muttarak 2010): their categories and ways of framing their work are not harmonised. Furthermore, these studies do not allow for a deeper understanding of marital choices and how couples deal with cultural difference or social disapproval in daily life.

“TRANSNATIONAL MARRIAGES”, AN APPROACH LINKED TO MIGRATION IN THE GLOBALISED WORLD

Today, migration is a multi-directional phenomenon. Westernised countries, and to a larger extent, all economically rich countries or rich cities in developing countries attract migrants. The latter come for work or political reasons, but they also come to join family members or marital partners. At the same time, more and more people from European or Westernised countries take up residence in other parts of the world, in former countries of colonial dependency or in places where their countries have

⁴ Categories used for these statistical analyses consider that an immigrant descendant is a person born in France of whom at least one parent immigrated. It appears that the most “endogamous” nationalities are also those with the fewest descendants of only one immigrant parent.

established economic or scientific cooperation. All these relations contribute to the transnational formation of couples or international marriages.⁵

The theoretical shift came with this increasingly more globalized migration. Katharine Charsley and Lucy Williams framed it theoretically in their book on transnational marriages in 2012. Forming a couple is in itself sufficient reason for migrating, researchers speak about “marriage migration” (Constable 2003; Kofman 2004). Spouses cross borders to join their co-ethnic or out-group partner wedded in their home country before migrating, others migrate alone, and some form unions with nationals of the target country after arrival (Williams 2012). In most of the countries, transnational marriage seems to be a gendered issue. In France, for instance, in the period from 1999 to 2008, over 60% of the migrants arriving to join a French citizen spouse were women (Beauchemin et al. 2013).

Many of these transnational marriages are co-ethnic, spouses have a common ethnic origin. In France, in 2011, only 32% of all transnational marriages took place with a French person born in France, whose parents were also born in France, the others were married to French citizens with migrant backgrounds (Collet and Régnard 2011). Migrants have settled in France since the 1960s and their descendants are a part of the immigration society, but some of them have maintained close family and social ties in the home countries. One of their transnational practices is precisely marital prospection in the home country. Children marrying spouses from the home country is a common strategy, contributing to keep cultural and religious traditions alive.

Thus, inter-ethnic or mixed couples are only one part of these transnational marriages and they differ from co-ethnic unions on several scores: the immigrant spouse comes from a country other than the typical emigration countries and they met more often in France and less often in a family context than co-ethnic couples (Collet and Régnard 2011). Obviously, co-ethnic couples are also in inter-cultural relationships due to having been socialised in two different countries, but they generally do not experience social disapproval in their families or among the majority population. The data lead us to say that inter-ethnic or mixed couples should be considered separately as categories distinct from co-ethnic couples.

Many studies relate mixed marriages to migration (Rodríguez-García 2006; Ricordeau 2012; Peruzzi 2013; Lichter et al. 2016). However, not all mixed couples are transnational. In all societies, there are regional or religious minorities, whose marriage with others, especially with the majority population, might be regarded with disapproval. Immigrant parents may consider that their

⁵ The more usual term is still “marriage” despite the rise of non-conventional couple formation in European countries. EU immigration law only allows married people to apply for family reunification.

children should not marry out of their ethnic group as also the native majority population often believes that immigrant descendants have a “different culture”. Transnational marriage is an interesting categorisation, but it is not precise enough to characterize the specific situation of mixed couples.

FROM “MIXED COUPLES” TO CONJUGAL MIXEDNESS”

As we consider that neither “intermarriage”, nor “transnational marriage” are precise enough terms to define what “conjugal mixedness” is about, we need to further explain why it is necessary to develop an analytical tool. Let us first consider the adjective “mixed” and then introduce the different components of the “mixedness” concept.

Some researchers tend to define these couples more precisely by considering that “mixed” is an adjective which does not sufficiently indicate what it is that is being mixed (up). Depending on their approach, they talk about binational, inter-cultural, inter-ethnic, inter-racial or inter-religious couples (Thode-Arora 1999). These terms are in fact overly precise, giving precedence to a single factor, while in most cases it is not possible to isolate one criterion. Ethnic belonging for instance may accompany different ways of living a religious faith. We cannot stress “race” alone either, because that might mean overlooking disparities in culture and faith (Hu 2016). Furthermore, differences between spouses are not only linked to ethnic or cultural features, they are also gendered and socially determined. In heterosexual couples, gender difference interacts with social status and ethnic belonging.

Thus, we consider that using an adjective such as “mixed” makes it possible to take several factors and their interrelation into account: citizenship, nationality, culture, religion, “race”, social status, gender: “mixed” is an *intersectional term*. Disparity between the spouses may be more striking if a different religion accompanies cultural belonging. Marrying out is not perceived in the same manner in the international bourgeoisie, the working class or in the more rural parts of a country. A woman’s mixed couple is almost never received in the same way as a man’s. According to the intersectional approach, gender, class and “race” are interrelated power relations (Crenshaw 1989). In our book on mixedness, we suggested considering all the factors together (Collet et al. 2008). Thus, instead of simply describing these couples, we developed an analytical tool to study them.

A first, more theoretical approach was initiated by Robert K. Merton. His article “Intermarriage and the Social Structure” ([1941] 1964) did not link intermarriage to assimilation, but to the conformity or non-conformity to social

norms, and proposed considering several dimensions (caste, class and sex) in interaction. Merton further distinguished between two types of exogamy: conform to the marital norm (which can be found in the international aristocracy) and non-conform to the marital norm, as e.g. between a White and a Black spouse. If, as in this second instance, caste status is interwoven with questions of social class, a “reciprocal compensatory situation” (*Ibid.*: 149) may occur: “The negro male ‘exchanges’ his higher economic position for the white female’s higher caste status” (*Ibid.*). Merton’s intermarriage theory very strongly stresses the deviant character of mixed couples without saying explicitly that they contribute to transforming the social order. They provoke reactions in their social environment because of their non-conformity to marital norms; but they are also “normal”, because of the democratic and romantic values advocated in modern societies (Bensimon and Lautman 1974: 30).

Obviously, even in complex societies, community norms based on ethnic, racial or religious belonging still underlie private relationships. In-marriage norms – the obligation to marry within the group – are part of the social order. Marriage contributes to perpetuating family traditions, and the new generations are asked to find their place in a long line of family values. In democratic Western societies, where choosing one’s partner is considered to be part of individual freedom, these traditional rules nonetheless survive as the unspoken rules that prescribe social homogamy. The future spouse must naturally come from another family (due to the prohibition of incest), but should at least be recognisable as a member of the social and cultural group. Homogamy combines with endogamy – and not only in minority groups: we named it “socio-ethnic homogamy” (Collet, Santelli 2016). In-marriage rules are never completely hermetic; to a certain extent they allow and even need interacting with out-group members. Ethnic or religious considerations are interlaced with social achievement or gender rules that create variable degrees of acceptance. Nation-States also maintain in-marriage norms by establishing rules and laws concerning immigration as well as access to citizenship for the foreigner or minority spouse and sometimes even their children. In doing so, they contribute to creating the a-symmetrical relation between the spouses.

Taking these points into account, we propose defining “conjugal mixedness”⁶ in relation to the social order (norms), but we also must consider its intersectionality that brings into play race, class, and gender. However, by doing so, the differences between the two spouses must be reinterpreted as inequalities, which are not only

⁶ The neologism “mixedness” was first used by three British authors who worked on the intercultural parenting of children in mixed families (Edwards et al. 2010).

a question of socio-economic status, but mainly a question of power balance. Cultures, religions and languages are part of an international ranking of prestige and, from that standpoint, the two cultures in contact are not in equivalent positions: One is a native or part of the majority population, whereas the other is a foreigner or member of a minority. One of the partners thus shoulders the difference, while the other belongs to the “legitimate”, majority culture. Legal status, social perceptions or stereotypes, and gender positions also contribute to placing the two spouses in an a-symmetrical relationship. For empirical studies, this means that every particular case of conjugal mixedness must be analysed with regard to its specific, social, political and historical embeddedness, which feeds into the inequality between the two spouses. French-Algerian marriages afforded a high level of social disapproval during the Algerian Independence War, during the 1960s and even today, despite being numerous, they prompt more hostility than French-Moroccan marriages because of that conflictual past. A German-Algerian marriage in Germany does not face the same disapproval (Collet 1998).

Due to both their non-conformity to norms and the unequal status between the spouses, mixed couples are confronted with multi-situated unease or social disapproval on the part of family members, friends, colleagues or even the media. These so-called “third parties” push different arguments, those which support clear in-marriage rules and demand the cultural and religious transmission of common values, but also those that undermine the couple by insisting on their difficulties and predicting marital dissolution, hardship for the children (faced with discrimination), and other figures of doom.

It should nevertheless be noted that part of public opinion is in favour of mixed relationships, because they highlight universal/cosmopolitan culture and social change/progress. Mixedness is seen as a globalised value of the future, reuniting people from all over the world and opposing discrimination and racism. The force or weakness of disapproval will vary depending on the social milieu of the spouses, the historical context or the cultures in contact. But in all cases, a mixed couple by definition transgresses community norms and that simple fact is enough to trigger more or less sharp reactions in the couple’s social environment (Collet 1998; Varro 2003).

“Conjugal mixedness” therefore makes it possible to study all at once how unequal statuses are created, and furthermore, how social disapproval works outside but also inside the couple. Spouses in mixed couples are not exempt from prejudice, they may even have come together on the basis of stereotypes concerning gender rules or cultural values. Qualitative studies show that these couples have different ways of dealing with mixedness in daily life. They must

find ways to live with their constitutional inequality. To confront discrimination, they develop specific strategies and intercultural modes of conjugal adjustment. We will now extend our exploration by looking at the concrete elements that produce the unequal status between the spouses and by giving some empirical examples that show how the couples themselves deal with their “conjugal mixedness”.

STUDYING CONJUGAL MIXEDNESS FROM THE OUTSIDE/INSIDE

When two persons fall in love they are driven by common affinities, which causes them to disregard their social and cultural differences. Only when confronted to others’ reactions, do they realise that their couple is somehow “special”. They may be asked about possible conflicts or difficulties, doubts may be expressed as to the sincerity of their liaison. Sometimes spouses are not aware that the group they belong to has expectations as to in-marriage. Relatives, or the man on the street, but also administrations and institutions, remind them that falling in love outside their group and wishing to establish a life together might be a complicated adventure.

Conjugal mixedness is defined from the outside – by others – through racial, religious or cultural ascriptions linked to minority identities or to migration. An immigrant partner has to be admitted into the country and his legal status as foreigner carries basic restrictions. Gender rules and cultural stereotypes also enter into play and create the perception of a non-conform, exogamous couple.

But conjugal mixedness is also constructed from within through the spouses’ daily life experience. Qualitative studies in particular have emphasized this insider’s point of view. They study the special arrangements set up between the spouses and with their children: how do they experience mixedness? How do they handle the inequality and the disapproval that impact them from the outside? How do they organize their mutual adjustments in daily life?

STATUS INEQUALITIES DECREED FROM THE OUTSIDE

Conjugal mixedness is characterized by a series of inequalities. Ethno-cultural, religious or racial inequalities make for conjugal mixedness; gender and social class organise it further. The minority status of one of the partners, or the legal status of a foreigner when one spouse has immigrated, amplify their ethnic inequality. If the foreign partner comes from another Westernised country, from Europe or America, disapproval might be low – but still he/she is likely to face

discrimination on the labour market or due to his/her lack of language skills. If the partner comes from a developing country – even if he/she is member of a rich family there – or from a country with a markedly different culture (e.g. Japan) or is identified as belonging to a particular racial group (e.g. African-American) or religious group (Muslims), the environment will very possibly express displeasure. Stereotypes and discrimination transform differences into inequalities.

A difference in religious affiliation might augment the level of disapproval in the families concerned, especially when Islam is involved, due to the current, ongoing, geopolitical conflicts. As to racial belonging, it is never “only” a question of skin colour; it activates a whole range of stereotypes that harks back to slavery, segregation or colonialism and the long, social construction of the inferiority of black people.

In France, for instance, many mixed couples are formed with partners from the former African colonies. Although there are many inter-racial couples involving sub-Saharan Africans or Afro-Caribbean persons, very few studies in France have delved into them. Since Frantz Fanon’s pioneering work (1952), only few studies have taken the spouses’ differences in skin colour explicitly into account (Vinsonneau 1978; Coll 2007). Research in France has focused more on mixed couples with North-African partners, who combine cultural and religious inequalities (Streiff-Fenart 1989; M’Sili-Neyrand 1995; Puzenat 2008). These couples are the most numerous and encounter the high level of disapproval.

In the last years, research has concentrated more on the new immigrant spouses in mixed couples, especially women from the former Soviet block. They are almost all well-educated, having come to study or work in France or to carry out a marriage project after having prospected potential partners on the internet. Stereotypes present these women as “dominated”, but research shows that some of them negotiate their status in the couple quite successfully (Hervouet and Schiff 2017). These examples show us that all the different characteristics of mixedness – race, culture, religion, but also gender and social class – play out in various and sometimes very subtle ways.

Legal status has a direct influence on conjugal inequality and adds a special dimension in couples formed with a migrant partner. Mixed couples in which one of the partners is a foreigner face specific pitfalls, especially when the foreign partner is not yet a regular resident in his/her spouse’s home country. Foreigner status implies a series of administrative formalities in order to be in conformity with existing rules and regulations and exposes the foreign partner to the non-equivalence of their schooling or diploma, thus limiting their possibility to exercise certain professions. This was true in the 1980ties on a national level

(Collet 1998), and continues to be so on a European level. European Union laws strictly oversee and control marriages with non-E.U. foreigners, and a generalized suspicion has guided legal decisions since the beginning of the 1990s (Barats 1999). By supposing that a marriage is serving the purpose of immigrating rather than founding a family, these unions are suspected of complacency. By controlling the couples who request permission to bring their partner over by questioning each partner separately on the most intimate details of their private lives, the State is invading their privacy (Lavanchy 2013).

However, when one partner belongs to a different ethnic or religious community, conjugal mixedness also involves non-migrants who share the same citizenship. When they are young, minority group members interact with the majority population in school or in sport clubs, at university or at work when they are grown up, but also as neighbours or as clients in shops. They have many opportunities to meet and fall in love. Nevertheless, when it comes to founding a couple or a family, unwritten in-marriage norms make them refuse or hesitate to choose a partner outside their group (Collet and Santelli 2016). This seems to be true for minority groups as well as for the majority group. Even when the norm upholding endogamy is less stringent, it still is not “normal” to marry or live with a person belonging to an ethnic or religious minority. There are more mixed unions generally among descendants of immigrants than among immigrants *per se*, but some minority groups (descendants of Moroccan, Sahelian or Turkish immigrants) have lower rates of intermarriage compared to others, especially when a Muslim woman is concerned. The higher the educational level, the more likely descendants – especially male – are to enter into a mixed couple. Women are more likely to do so in a second union (Hamel et al. 2015).

Research on inter-religious couples stands out as a separate field. The issue has received attention from researchers in the social studies of religions in France since the 1970s, especially in the case of Jewish-non-Jewish couples (Bensimon and Lautman 1977), which seem to be numerous among the younger Jewish generation: one out of two marriages today is mixed (Allouch-Benayoun 2008). We also see that studies on inter-religious couples are not specifically linked to migration and, in secularised France, there aren't any official statistics based on religious affiliation anyway. Thus, studies concentrate more on identity, religious transmission or conversion (Lamine et al. 2008). Whereas couples uniting a Catholic and a Protestant are no longer at issue, marriage between a Christian and a member of another religion is still considered problematic from the clerical, institutional point of view. Officially, religious communities do not easily accept marrying outside the faith and try to keep the children inside the group. While institutional barriers are still high or even higher in

the last decade because of secularisation processes, the number of inter-faith couples too is on the rise.

We can conclude this section by arguing that conjugal mixedness is based on a series of inequalities which, combined, produce a cumulative effect. Social disapproval is a consequence of these perceived inequalities. Mixed couples challenge the social order, on a national level when a foreigner is involved, on a community level when religious or ethnic affiliations are the issue. It is interesting to note that these marital norms endure, though more and more couples disregard them. Nevertheless, if the “others” notice mixedness, this means that the tension between free marital choice and social control still exists. Social change modifies actual practices quicker than perceptions or social acceptance.

MANAGING CONJUGAL MIXEDNESS IN DAILY LIFE

Researchers are interested to know how couples manage their double culture, double religion, double language, etc. They also stress how they relate to others, especially their in-laws, relatives or friends and record the examples of discrimination experienced by the couple or their children. However, most of these studies are case studies, describing a specific cultural combination of mixed couple but not really attempting to interpret their observations on a more general scale that extends beyond ethno-cultural belonging.

Reviewing research over the last decade shows that results are not unequivocal when daily life practices are observed. Some general features can be noted pertaining to the couple’s residential context and to their conjugal life course. But that put aside, couples also have different ways of adjusting to each other, of dealing with their differences and of transmitting their cultural heritage to their children. Ethno-cultural belonging, gender and social class also enter the picture and change the options.

The place or country where the mixed couple lives seems to be one of the most important factors. National contexts are more or less multicultural, more or less tolerant to minorities. That is part of the history of immigration and of the policies targeting minorities. Globalised realities are emerging today the world over, even in countries where they were unusual before. Some European countries still have to overcome their regional differences and continue to foster a more or less fierce, national monoculture with low tolerance for different cultures or religions, which tends to be the case in Southern and Eastern European countries. Acceptance of mixed couples and families might be more difficult, especially when a non-European spouse is involved. It is difficult to implement minority, cultural choices; people comment upon or recommend ways of behaving in

accordance with the dominant culture. A thesis on Christian-Muslim couples in Greece showed a whole range of discriminations affecting them in their daily life (Papadopoulou 2015), a fact confirmed by a comparative study in Northern Italy and Eastern France (Odasso 2016). Other countries have developed political approaches based on multiculturalism (French Canada, the United Kingdom or the Netherlands) which are still effective despite recent reorientations (Le Gall and Meintel 2015). Such contexts also produce discrimination, but nevertheless provide more tolerant living conditions for mixed families, e.g. using a minority language or facilitating specific religious practices; various forms of new trans-cultures appear (Edwards et al. 2010).

Furthermore, the effects of conjugal mixedness are not experienced with the same degree of intensity during the different phases of conjugal life. It is strong in the beginning, but after the first few years, when the partners have got used to each other and relatives or friends on both sides have grown accustomed to the out-group spouse, disapproval ebbs. If the couple manages the challenges of daily life despite their inequalities – by talking, thanks to various compensations or through mutual understanding – social and family disapproval weakens. Important family events – the birth of a child, health problems, the passing of a spouse – on the contrary cause disapproval to resurface. At these moments, family members on both sides are likely to interfere. If the spouses are not able to overcome the constitutional inequalities of their mixed relationship, the consequence is separation. During divorce processes, cultural stereotypes reappear and exacerbate the conflict. While the conjecture of a high divorce rate is one of the strongest arguments against conjugal mixedness, only little research has been carried out on the divorce of mixed couples. Especially in France, from a statistical point of view, it is not easy to gather the data. Foreign spouses most often are naturalised and statistics do not register ethno-cultural belonging (Neyrand and M'Sili 1996).

Most of the qualitative studies put emphasis on these couples' cultural arrangements in the private sphere as to their family ties, religious or cultural options, language use or cultural transmission to children. Mixed couples develop what I have named "intercultural modes of conjugal adjustment" (Collet 2015). Comparing studies in several countries, I distinguished mainly three modes of adjustment: the minority partner adjusts to the dominant culture, or the majority partner adjusts to the minority culture or both partners seek an intercultural balance. What is striking here, is that all these arrangements depend on factors other than ethno-cultural or religious inequalities.

Gender, social class and personal experience with migration seem to determine much of how couples deal with each other's affiliations. Women tend to adjust by adapting to the man's culture, whether he is part of the majority or of a minority

group (Collet and Santelli, 2012). Patriarchal logics are still operative, as if women were used to leaving their family of origin and abandoning their cultural features, while men draw their spouse into their cultural universe. This rule is much less clear-cut, especially in modern, democratic societies, where women participate in the labour market and have emancipated life styles. Social status or education levels are a second important factor. If the levels are high, cultural and religious affiliations are thought about differently: cultural attachment is more symbolic and does not necessarily impact daily life. Conjugal mixedness allows exchanging on “us” and the “others” without taking things too personally. In the lower social classes, however, cultural belonging is mixed up with more difficult living conditions that curb the couple’s ability to take their distance from their respective groups (Philippe and Varro 1995). Ways of living transnationalism in daily life are different according to social class. A. Fresnoza-Flot showed for French-Filipino couples, that Filipino women of modest extraction have more financial obligations (remittances) towards their families than Filipino women from the higher social classes (Fresnoza-Flot 2016).

The third factor influencing the conjugal modes of adjustment is the migratory experience. We must formulate it as a hypothesis since no research has explicitly dealt with this factor. Managing daily life in mixed couples may depend on the way migration is linked to marriage. If the immigrant partner arrived for the purpose of marrying, s/he then has to go through the whole integration process while married: learn the language, find the job, make friends, etc. and the relationship has to withstand all these challenges at the same time. If the immigrant partner arrived for other reasons (studies or work) and met his/her partner only later, s/he “integrated” on his/her own before getting involved in the new, intimate relationship. This situation makes the burden on the couple lighter, since cultural attitudes (hesitation, hope, nostalgia, regret...) have been worked through ahead of time. In some couples, both partners have experienced migration: they met in one country and settled in another afterwards; mutual understanding in that case may be better.

We will not pursue the present review of existing, empirical material, but every case study could be thought over anew by searching for the effects of the residential context and the conjugal process on one side, and for the gender, social status and migration experience, on the other. Secondary analyses will certainly reveal new results.

TO CONCLUDE: NORMS AND THE PRACTICE OF CONJUGAL MIXEDNESS

Conjugal mixedness is a question of ethno-cultural inequality between partners but requires an intersectional approach: other sources of inequality such as legal status, gender, or the social standing of each partner must be considered. Taken all together, they produce more or less potent disapproval, depending on the context and historical period.

Social perceptions construct conjugal mixedness from the outside by producing disapproval or at least unease. Spouses have to deal with these representations in daily life and in their private relationship. Mixed couples amply demonstrate how the public and private spheres overlap and are interdependent. Nevertheless, the external criteria defining the mixedness of the couples are not always the ones that most influence their private life. As empirical studies have shown, ethno-racial inequality is socially discredited, but may not have a strong impact in private if the couple has overcome it and if it is not linked to particular cultural practices. Whereas a criterion such as religion might not even be noticed from the outside, but may confront the couple with difficult faith questions in private life. Intercultural arrangements can be of several kinds; they do not remain stable throughout the couple's history; they may change from one child to another.

Conjugal mixedness reveals how norms and practices are interconnected in (post)-modern societies. Social practice is ahead of cultural norms; people get married or live together even though their entourage is openly opposed or expresses doubts. Non-conform behaviour obviously reveals the existence of social and cultural norms, but also indicates that new norms based on different values are emerging. By marrying or living together, mixed couples and their children illustrate the social changes in society.

In all societies, people do not strictly observe social and cultural norms, if there is no official, legal prohibition or strict, political control. They may act according to values that lie outside or beyond their group affiliation. Their values are more international and humanistic, some people overcome the collective rules imposed by the group while respecting cultural heritage as their free choice. Mixed couples represent a social group with a highly-individualised life style, they negotiate their belongings and identities between themselves and with others, but, though not adamant about imposing cultural practices, they want to be free to choose.

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