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## **Mixed marriages between European free movers**

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## **Abstract**

In this paper I analyze some of the issues that enable the understanding of European intra-marriage as a social phenomenon, by presenting some preliminary empirical findings resulting from on-going qualitative research being carried out in Lisbon. This paper presents a very clear structure, as follows: firstly, I will explain how *free movers* may be seen as an emerging social group within the European matrimonial market. Afterwards, I will clarify how the term *European intra-marriage* better categorizes this new type of mixed unions. Thirdly, I will clarify what methodological procedures have been used so far. And finally, I will describe certain results that can shed light on some of the dimensions under evaluation with regard to European mixed unions. In the final section, I will provide some lines of research that need to be taken into consideration when investigating this subject further.

**Key-words:** European intra-marriage, free movers, European mobility, European social integration

## 1. European free movers as a new social type

Freedom of movement has been one of the EU's most ambitious goals in recent decades. Its policies have been directed at providing formal resources and institutional mechanisms for people to study, live and work outside their national member states. The strengthening of *European social integration* is the underlying goal of the EU's political discourse on mobility: its tone has progressively changed the conceptualization of European movement from that of an *international* phenomenon to an *internal* one. By moving, citizens are more able to perceive themselves as *European citizens* and create a *culture of mobility* that can adjust to the goals set by the Lisbon Agenda that require the EU to generate an economy with a more competitive and adaptable workforce.

Some of the policies encouraging and guaranteeing the free geographical circulation of individuals include the Schengen Agreement of 1985 and the Maastrich Treaty of 1992, which have increased movement from one country to another by eliminating passport and border controls. Other economic and social measures undertaken by the European institutions consist of the creation of a single currency (the euro), the setting-up of the EURES web portal for employment, and the European Health Insurance Card, which guarantees medical assistance throughout the EU (Recchi, 2008). All these strategies and services facilitate the internal migration flows of EU citizens and enhance their social integration within Europe.

In this context, one of the most important institutions for EU policies is education. As the Bologna process is revealing, citizens' educational credentials are being optimized and legally recognized in all member states, a process that is intended to safeguard fair and easy access to positions of employment anywhere in the EU. Likewise, the popularity of educational programmes such as Erasmus-Socrates (university students) and Madame Curie (researchers) has been on the rise since their foundation (King and Ruiz-Gellices, 2003; Moreira, 2006), representing other important tools for the creation and reinforcement of a *European social group* linked together by similar lifestyles, values and behaviours.

Having said this, who are the Europeans who move and whose movement illustrates the social mobility of today's EU? If we adopt their *educational credentials* as a social dimension, we can distinguish two mobile groups leading this process:

1) Non-qualified citizens – TRADITIONAL MIGRANTS: “guest workers” who migrate from South to North and from East to West.

2) Highly qualified citizens – NEW MIGRANTS: “free movers” or “Eurostars” (Favell, 2003, 2008).

Whereas, hitherto, traditional migrants’ lives and their social integration strategies have been closely investigated, this has not been the case for *free movers*. Born directly of the EU’s unrestricted freedom of movement, this emerging social type has recently been studied by Adrian Favell (2003, 2008) who has analyzed the social and political conditions amid which these citizens represent an interesting by-product of human mobility.

Who, then, can be characterized as a *free mover*? They are European citizens who freely use their right to move and reside anywhere within the EU. Unlike traditional migrants, they make individualized moves regardless of chain migration processes or the work recruiting necessities of some enterprises. As EU citizens, they cannot be discriminated against on the grounds of country of origin, gender or ethnicity, and they do not need to give up their nationality in order to settle in another European country. Free movers tend to have a higher educational level than traditional migrants, and normally come from a well-educated middle or upper class family background. The reasons to move can vary between work opportunities (25.2%), quality of life (24%), family/love (29.2%) and study (7%). Moreover, they also exhibit greater support for the EU and tend to feel more European. This self-perception and EU attachment is certainly related to the fact that they show a higher understanding and *savoir-faire* of the living and working conditions in different cultural settings (Recchi et al, 2003; Favell, 2003, 2008).

Free movers are, in a word, *privileged European migrants*. Their *social invisibility* partially contributes to their social integration and the avoidance of negative discrimination in their host country. However, even though they enrich destination societies with economic and cultural resources, their settlement can be hindered by certain difficulties related to the lack of social capital (at least in the short-term) and the consequences of an “extreme” freedom of mobility between home and host country that the EU provides. This may lead to feelings of permanently being and living in an “*in-between European space*” (see also Bhabha, 1994; Rodríguez García, 2006), where the co-existence of both local and global cultural affiliations can lead to a sense of

disintegration or superficial attachment to particular places and nations. As Favell (2008) stresses, freedom of movement in the EU still presents obstacles that go beyond the cultural and linguistic diversities among countries. When someone wants to move a step ahead from sojourn to settlement, his or her success rests on living a “divided compromise”, between a “denationalized cosmopolitan lifestyle” and an attachment to the host society. In this case, in order to have complete access to the services that are normally available to citizens (long-term financial planning, childcare, health care), *free movers* have to “renationalize” into the social system already existing in a particular European state. And it is precisely this *in-between* social position that characterises their singularity and weakness as a social group and that has to be continuously investigated.

## **2. On the assessment of European intra-marriage**

One question that emerges in this context – and that I have defended elsewhere (Gaspar, 2008) – is that *social mobility is a pull factor in the rise of European mixed marriages*. This idea is the rationale behind this paper: *free movers are emerging as a particular social group within the European matrimonial market*. In this sense, it is important to assess how these unions may create an *intra-European homogamy* that can become a crucial factor in the social integration between citizens and nation states.

However, with certain exceptions mostly based on case studies and statistical data (Varro, 1995; Lauth Bacas, 2002; Block, 2007; Braun and Recchi, 2008; Gaspar, 2008; Santacreu Fernández and Francés García, 2008; Scott and Seaton, 2008), this idea has hardly been investigated. Most studies that have focused on mixed marriages in Europe have centered on unions between European natives and guest workers (both European and non-European) (Cortina et al., 2008; Cretser, 1999; González Ferrer, 2006; Lievens, 1999; Neyrand and M’Sili, 1998; Kalmijn and van Tubergen, 2006; Klein, 2001; Rodríguez García, 2006; Rother, 2008; van Tubergen and Maas, 2007), in order to evaluate the degree of social integration of these communities when living in their countries of destination.

For this reason, and because I believe we are dealing with a somewhat different social phenomenon, I have proposed the use of the expression *European intra-marriage* to refer to marital unions between citizens from different national contexts inside the

EU (Gaspar, 2008). Nonetheless, not only *nationality* but also the *cultural environment of a person's upbringing* and *language differences* are criteria to be taken into account in order to evaluate how these partnerships are negotiated and built with the EU as the institutional support setting. As mentioned above, having a European nationality automatically offers a citizen various advantages: the right of residence, geographical mobility, civil rights, legally guaranteed freedom from discrimination, and easier access to employment in comparison to other groups of migrants. For this reason, it is expected that *European intra-marriages* are more likely to show higher levels of social acceptance and social integration than those between an EU citizen and non-EU partner (Rother, 2008; Scott and Seaton, 2008). In assuming that these unions are a consequence of EU mobility measures, one has also to assume that they are a sign of the growth and intensification of social group ties throughout Europe.

So what mobility strategies structure the meeting of these couples? European intra-marriages can be the result of either 1) the mobility of one free mover who meets a citizen from the society of destination (*free mover/national stayer type*) or 2) the mobility of two free movers from different EU countries (*free mover/free mover type*) (see also Piper, 2003; Scott and Seaton, 2008). This being the case, I believe that the *free mover/free mover* combination may lead to certain lifestyle, behavior and identity patterns that are closer to a *denationalized existence*, that is, “less national” and “more European” (Díez Medrano, 2008; Favell, 2008). On the other hand, a *free mover/national stayer* combination should exhibit a higher level of assimilation (Rother, 2008; Scott and Seaton, 2008). For a mobile citizen, having a partner from the society of destination represents easier and more rapid access to the social networks and economic resources of that nation state, which will provide him or her with a “privileged bridge” to social and cultural integration. In addition, when considering this *free mover/national stayer* social type, we also need to identify the *migration history of the partner belonging to the country of destination*. This distinction is particularly relevant because it can limit the threshold at which the social integration of a couple balances between a more “denationalized” or “assimilated” conjugal lifestyle (see also Rother, 2008).

This model has yet to be tested, along with some other social factors that may be involved in the marital and geographic trajectories pursued after the family has been formed: age at the time of migration, professional and work strategies, social capital

resources, the children's upbringing, and gender constraints are fundamental dimensions to be considered in the interplay of influences affecting intra-married European couples. This is the reason why, when analyzing these partnerships we have to look at all the dimensions that may trigger and promote these new forms of transnational family arrangements; in fact, many of the outcomes brought to light in traditional mixed-marriage investigations may not be adequate for an analysis of EU intra-marriage. That is why its internal and external dynamics may endorse and strengthen the creation of the European project at a social level.

The following sections seek to describe some of the characteristics of mixed marriages involving European free movers living in Lisbon. Issues concerning migration history, European identity, social integration, marital dynamics, the children's education, conjugal conflicts and future mobility plans will be addressed. My aim here is simply to present some of the preliminary outcomes of our on-going research that allow us to map an initial constellation of the features emerging among these new bi-national European couples. Moreover, the lack of research on the subject makes this first approach a good opportunity for exploring and developing further lines of inquiry.

### **3. Methodological issues**

As mentioned before, most research focusing on these relationships is quantitative in nature. Thus, the need for a deeper understanding of the motives and reasons for individuals forming such partnerships is fundamental. With this in mind, the methodology used in this research has been qualitative. A separate, semi-directed interview was held with each partner in order to control for gender and nationality. All interviewees were contacted by means of a snowball technique, through which a selected person gave information on other mixed couples that could also be interviewed. As none of the interviewees belonged to any kind of foreigners' association, social networks were the only source for contacts. To begin the process, general information was provided by e-mail and then an interview appointment was made with one of the partners. The other partner was contacted later, using the same procedure. The interviews took an average of an hour and a half and were mainly conducted at the interviewee's house or office, the interviewer's house or a café (in one case). The

interviews were carried out in Portuguese, English and Spanish, according to the language capabilities of each interviewee. All respondents gave their oral consent to participate in the study. In total, 6 individuals were interviewed (3 couples), according to a particular group structure:

- a Portuguese woman married to a German man (1 couple, 2 interviews);
- a Portuguese man married to a Greek woman (1 couple, 2 interviews);
- Europeans of different nationalities (a Dutch man and Spanish woman), married and living in Lisbon (1 couple, 2 interviews).

The socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewees were quite particular due to the fact that they were selected according to criteria based on the *free mover type*. For the six person sample, the mean age was 37.5 years (ranging from 32 to 42 years). All interviewees had high academic qualifications (bachelor's degree or PhD) and occupations adjusted to that level of qualifications (mainly scientific and intellectual professions or management in non-governmental sectors). The time of residence in Portugal varied: the Portuguese interviewees had been living in Lisbon all their lives, with mobility experience of 4 and 6 years in other European countries, whereas the length of stay of the other Europeans in Lisbon ranged from 18 months to 13 years. The experience of living in Europe reflected a fair degree of mobility, involving 1 to 3 different countries, apart from Portugal. The languages spoken were Portuguese, Spanish, German, Greek and Dutch, with almost all of them presenting trilingual skills. Finally, two of the three couples had children (one child each), who were 3 years old, were bilingual and had both the father's and the mother's nationality (dual nationality).

#### **4. Results**

In this section I will present some of the outcomes of these six exploratory interviews. As the sample includes a small number of cases, the results have to be interpreted more as individual data tools than consistent empirical findings on European mixed couples. The information will be explained using some descriptive guidelines focussing on specific dimensions related to: the beginning of the love relationship, self-perception in migration history and European identity, social integration, daily tasks in the marriage, the children's education, conflict and future plans. My aim here is not to



provide an analytical contribution to the understanding of this subject but rather to offer a preliminary description of some of the issues that, together, give a clear portrait of this new kind of family arrangement.

#### **4.1. The beginning of the relationship**

European free movers often meet their partners while studying under educational exchange programmes (King, 2002). Two of the couples in my sample got to know each other abroad while taking part in this educational mobility experience in a third country. Although a student's status and life experiences in a foreign country are normally marked by a transient and gathering environment, they also tend to contribute to the acquisition of *mobility capital*, characterized as “*the knowledge amassed through international mobility that increases one's potential ability to move abroad and assimilate into national and transnational structures. It may relate to the modifications of existing forms of capital (social, cultural, linguistic, economic or human) or it may involve the acquisition of a new type of capital resource (mobility capital).*” (Scott and Seaton, 2008:18)

Markus (German, 39) and Carlota (Portuguese, 32) met in Warsaw in 1998 when she was studying there a master after finishing her career and he was doing a training course in an enterprise. The relationship developed with different life experiences in England and Belgium, before they finally arrived in Lisbon some months before the birth of the first baby. The same academic background gave rise to the relationship between Athina (Greek, 38) and Paulo (Portuguese, 42): they met in London in 1995 when doing a master's degree at the same university. After two years of a shared life there, they decided to settle in Lisbon, where Paulo has a permanent job within the state administration.

However, there are other reasons that can push someone to become involved in an experience of mobility and that may, consequently, result in their meeting a foreign partner. Claus (Dutch, 36) met Marta (Spanish, 38) in Spain when she was his Spanish teacher. Some months before that, he had decided to leave his job in the Netherlands to embark on Voluntary Social Service in Guatemala. But before the Central American adventure, the first stop was Seville where he spent a couple of months learning the

language. The relationship only began some months later, by email and web messenger contact, when he was already living in Guatemala and Marta had come to Lisbon to entail a foreigner life outside her home town. After a long-distance love affair, Claus decided to move to Lisbon to start living with Marta.

All of my interviewees (with the exception of Paulo, whose temporary stay in London was characterized by the return to Lisbon), were *European free movers*: they either moved for study purposes (Carlota, Athina), job experience (Markus) or personal reasons that led them to pursue different life-paths (Marta, Claus), thus taking the opportunity that the EU offered them not to follow the traditional track sketched out in their own countries. Finding a European partner was a consequence of their decision to be mobile at the time in their lives (mid-20s and 30s) when the formation of a family is more likely to occur. There is, for this reason, an apparent association between *age at the time of mobility* and *family development*, which has already been documented by investigations on this subject (Kofman, 2004; Braun and Recchi, 2008).

#### **4.2. Migration self-perception and European identity**

*Do you see yourself as a migrant?* When asked, most European free movers are reluctant to consider themselves as migrants and can easily differentiate their situation from other traditional immigrants (Favell, 2008). According to Favell, this is related to the idea of chasing in Europe a feeling of freedom outside their national states (*denationalized European freedom*), a freedom that provides them an anonymous cosmopolitan existence. Most of my interviewees' discourse on their perception of mobility was pretty much the same: they were not *immigrants* but *Europeans* living elsewhere than in their original countries. They clearly stressed that the difference lay in the imposition of a life path for reasons of economic survival (*immigrants*) and the free choice of a personal and conjugal life (*free movers*).

*Carlota*: No, no, I've never considered myself as a migrant during all these years. I think I am part of a certain European citizenship. I am part of a European nation, I guess. I've never felt I was a migrant because that implies certain inferiority in relation to the nation you are in. In my case, in the case of people who go and study abroad, there is this feeling of extraterritoriality in which we feel a bit apart from the host country. But that it's not exactly migrating. (...) We were the European citizens there and whose friends were mainly European.

*Markus:* No, I don't feel like a migrant in an old fashioned way... that is a bit a feeling of submission... I think I feel different because I don't struggle a lot with the Portuguese context... I feel more like this is a nice place, we live here, so for me this is more a location, an emotional area of my life, but not really a professional part of it. And I think that makes it easier than for a classical migrant.

In some of my interviewees' discourse, their experience of mobility has been associated with a certain *European citizenship* and a *European identity*. This is consistent with other studies that have revealed that the more mobility trajectories people have, the more European they feel (Recchi and Nebe, 2003; Block, 2007). In a word, the gaining of *mobility capital*, to use Scott and Seaton's expression (2008), enhances the sense of attachment to Europe and the feeling of Europeanness: this means that the individual perceives the European space as an internal region (*feeling at home anywhere in Europe*) and acquires a specific *know-how regarding living* that is easily adjustable to the local knowledge of any other member state.

Also, something explicit in my interviewees' discourse was the view that European identity is a *complement* or an *additional layer* that does not compete with national identities. This idea has already been demonstrated in findings showing that only a small number of Europeans (10%) tend to put European identity above their national identity (Kohli, 2000). European identity, when people are asked for a more precise meaning, appears to be something one additionally adopts, without having a very strict definition of its content.

*Markus:* Yes, I feel very European but I couldn't say to what extent that is part of my personality... I couldn't say that I am 30% German and 30% Portuguese because that would mean that they compete with each other... And I feel that being European is a complement, it's a complementary identity...

*Marta:* I feel Andalusian, I feel Spanish and I feel European...

### **4.3. Social integration**

When asked about their social integration – family, friends, work – mixed European couples (both Portuguese and foreign) state that, overall, they feel fairly well integrated in Lisbon and Portuguese society. This feeling has something to do with their

*social invisibility* and the fact that citizenship of a European country implies, as said before, certain advantages when they are compared with other migrant groups. Markus, Athina, Marta and Claus have never had much difficulty in getting jobs consistent with their educational credentials, or felt discriminated against because of their nationality or cultural origin. In one way or another, all of them reported that they were living comfortably in Portugal owing to the fact that they had a native-born partner (Markus and Athina) or felt a cultural proximity since they came from a neighbouring country (Marta). Apart from Claus, who had only lived in Lisbon for a year, all the interviewees had a very good or excellent level of Portuguese.

*Athina:* I think I was very lucky in finding jobs according to my academic qualifications, jobs that I like. I was very lucky. And I have always been treated very well and the fact of being a foreigner has not been a problem to anyone.

*Claus:* Let's think: finding a job wasn't really hard. But of course I had the luck that Marta was already here, and she's also a teacher so she knows the city, she knows the schools, or a few of them. It wasn't difficult to find a job, they took me quite rapidly.

This level of social integration is not only due to the existence of a native-born partner, but also to a generally easy acceptance of other European nationalities in Portugal (that is, at least, to a non-discriminatory social discourse), and to the fact that these particular individuals all had educational capital with which they could compete and which they could develop within Portuguese society.

However, this level of integration has to be better explained. As with the other European free movers described by Favell (2008), there is a certain degree of *denationalization* in some of the patterns of behaviour and social network ties. When it actually came to friends and acquaintances, the foreigners stressed that their partners' friends became their friends and they remarked the difficulty of finding and joining intimate social networks outside those already belonging to the family.

*Marta:* Although I have lots of contact with Portuguese people, I do not have Portuguese friends; I only have one Portuguese friend, that's all.

This information bears out the idea that European free movers tend to develop an *in-between European space* in their lives that includes a constant flow of contacts and information between their home and host societies but that, simultaneously, creates difficulties in their social integration as regards access to certain *national services* and the lack of a social network capable of satisfying their needs in the country of destination. From the three couples interviewed, only Claus and Marta (*the free mover-free mover type*) expressed the near non-existence of Portuguese friends as part of their social groups. The other two couples (more Paulo and Athina than Markus and Carlota) indicated that, apart from a close group of other mixed couples, their social network included Portuguese friends and relatives belonging to the Portuguese native-born partner.

#### 4.4. Conjugal life

This section presents some of the main issues related to the conjugal life of mixed European couples, i.e. the organisation of household tasks, the children's education and conjugal conflict.

##### *a) Household tasks*

All the mixed European couples interviewed stated that they both shared the household tasks and that gender differences do not represent any constraint on the daily chores carried out at home. However, though the time spent on them is said to be fairly balanced, there seems to be a subtle specialization in *who does what*: the women tend to do the cleaning and spend more time on the laundry, whereas the men tend to cook and be more attentive to the children's needs.

Markus: I think Carlota is tidier than I am, so she clears up more. If it's a bit messy or so, it's usually more Carlota. I think I'm more attentive to our daughter, so I dress her more often, I talk more to her, I feed her, I put her to bed more... I also get up more at night when she cries because I have a lighter sleep, so I wake up much faster. And I'm quite happy to do that.

*The men's cooking territory* might symbolize the conquest of a new task in the domestic domain. Though men traditionally stay out of the kitchen and away from other household duties, a set of young contemporary males may be reinventing their roles by “choosing” to do certain *creative tasks* such as cooking. In fact, some of them have stressed that this enables them to relax and include some artistic activity in their household responsibilities. Likewise, the increasing dedication to the children's needs (clothing, playing, and sleeping) that men now display also indicates that new parental roles and values are being developed in childcare, with a more supportive investment and more emotional ties being made by contemporary fathers.

At first glance, then, mixed European couples, at least those with high educational credentials and ages stretching over the late 20s to 30s, tend to share everyday household tasks. A slight gender specialization seems to exist, though, as women tend to do more activities related to cleaning and the general running of the house and men more activities related to cooking and childcare.

#### *b) Children's education*

The children's education in families with a mixed national background is a particularly fertile domain for observing the rise of a forthcoming European society. Two issues that have become visible in my interviews are *the children's bilingual capabilities* and *the children's upbringing in a bi-cultural environment*. The four parents interviewed said that their offspring were “completely bilingual” in their mother's and father's national languages. From the birth of their children, all of them had paid great attention to developing a truly *bilingual home culture* where not only two languages were continuously taught but also the cartoons, music and books came from two cultural settings.

*Markus*: I would like her to speak two languages perfectly (German and Portuguese), so that can she progress and identify with both countries...If we stay here in Portugal I would like her to go to a German school because I would be afraid that her German would not be perfect. I want her to relate in German, it is important to me...

An interesting theme that also appears to be associated with the children's education is, as said before, the creation of an *environment for a bi-cultural upbringing*. Markus, for instance, believes the couple can develop a regional and bi-cultural attachment for their child (with much more resistance and suspicion on Carlota's side). This would imply not only transmitting equal linguistic skills but also dividing their lives between two European cities:

*Markus:* I try to build an environment between Germany (Berlin) and Portugal (Lisbon)... I think it would be good for our child if she has two geographical anchors. And I feel it is possible to build that, two places she can relate to. That's my objective for her. Essentially, that would be my ideal... And we don't want to have "Eurochildren". We want to have children raised with two European identities, but we don't want children that could feel everywhere and nowhere in Europe.

This discourse is particularly interesting because it reveals that "the ideal solution" for the children's education within a dual European family setting is not assimilation in one of the countries, but *simultaneous assimilation in both*. In Markus' eyes, given the difference in national background between the parents, this strategy seems to be fair and avoids the danger of raising children in a European *in-between space* that can only provide an artificial cultural terrain for their human development.

However, if the option is assimilation in the partner's country, as in Athina's case this solution is not even contemplated. As she recognizes, it is very likely that the Portuguese environment will prevail in her son's cultural development, becoming, in the end, dominant. This is the price to be paid for national assimilation that obviously subsumes the creation of a bi-cultural project to that of the country of residence.

*Athina:* He speaks Portuguese and Greek but he is not going to feel Greek the way I do. He's only going to feel Greek through me, through the relationship he has with me... I think here in Portugal I cannot teach him much more than the language... I try to take advantage of the summertime when we are in Greece with my parents to teach him a little more... Sometimes we go out with friends who also have mixed partners for him to be with other children that are also Greek. I don't want him to feel he is strange for speaking Greek.

According to the interviewees' discourse, the core strategy for the children's education seems, then, to lie between cultural assimilation in *one or two countries*. But this questions needs to be further investigated as it is not clear whether, in the end, children's upbringing in a bi-national geographical environment will turn out as an

experience of peripatetic living. In fact, some review studies (Le Gall, 2003) have been focusing precisely on the social and identity difficulties associated with children's upbringing in bicultural environments.

*c) Conjugal conflicts*

From these six exploratory interviews, it seems that there is not a unique set of conjugal conflicts within these couples. The reasons for disagreement invoked by my interviewees were quite diverse: if one couple assumed that the *family residence* was the main point of argument and tension (Carlota and Markus), another person ascribed the conflicts to *personal characteristics* (Paulo) or the *changing routines* derived from parenthood (Athina). However, though none of the respondents explicitly referred to *cultural differences*, one of them (Claus and Marta) expressed certain doubts as to whether the roots of conjugal disagreements were due to personal or cultural factors.

In the case that there is a clear refusal to pursue an assimilation strategy, the place to settle can be one of the principal causes of marital tension:

*Carlota:* The principal subject is where we should live. This is the principal reason for disagreement: how much time we have to spend here, how much time we have to spend there... At the moment the main conflict is whether to stay here or not. And that is very difficult. I think it is a question of cultural origin and the fact that he's out of his natural environment. When we moved to Lisbon, he bought an apartment in Berlin: that was a "statement". It was to mark his position.

In contrast, as we have seen, if a life path towards full assimilation has been taken, conjugal entanglements may be viewed as a reflection of personal characteristics or adaptation to new family constraints arising from the arrival of a child:

*Athina:* I think, basically, it is the birth of our son and the way we adjusted to it. Since he was born, we do not exist as a couple but only as his parents. And that scares me. (...) And that's the reason for our conflict.

Marta, in her turn, is dubious about attributing marital conflict to personal particularities:

*Marta:* There are certain things in his character that I didn't know about, and I'm not sure if they are due to our cultural differences or because it is his personality. I always have that doubt. Sometimes we simply do not understand each other... Sometimes it's like subtle things related to feelings, about the way you feel things.



Despite the fact that European cultures and values have common roots, this does not invalidate the assumption that there are certain *neighbouring countries* in Europe that are linked, as a region, by particular religious, social, economic and cultural specificities (e.g. Southern Europe, Eastern Europe and Scandinavia) and that present similar lifestyles, behaviours and mentalities. The cultural closeness of these nations, whose mentality reflects certain shared patterns, may facilitate the interaction and social communication between individuals involved in affective relationships. For this reason, even if mixed European couples do not seem to reveal a sole or unique cause of marital arguments; further research should assess the socio-cultural role of the factor *neighbouring and non-neighbouring countries* in Europe in the conflict in these marriages.

#### 4.5. Future projects

When asked about their ideal place to retire to, the foreign Europeans in my sample have different opinions and feelings about it. However, even if some of them initially resisted admitting it, the wish to return home is very clearly present (Athina, Markus and Marta).

*Athina:* I would like to go back to my home town. I would like to go back. When I think about it, even if I didn't end my days there, I would like someone to take me there once more.

In fact, even after people have decided to settle abroad, as in the case of Athina, the *myth of returning for good* remains very much alive, as has been demonstrated by other studies (Rodríguez García, 2006). Although this desire to go back home has also been temporarily suppressed by Marta, in the long-term she feels Andalusia is the natural place to return to: Lisbon is just part of a cycle that will be completed and one day come to an end.

Other interviewees, e.g. Paulo, think that they can create a *trans-cultural social space* (Lauth Bacas, 2002) or a *trans-national residency* (Rodríguez García, 2006) between both countries. Just as many other retired EU citizens nowadays live between two national places, normally having settled in the north and the south of Europe (King,

2002), he also thinks it is possible to divide the year into a long stay in his wife's country (Greece) and his own (Portugal). This bi-national retirement would enable him to have the best of both nations without the need to choose one, and would also support the creation of an *internal European space* in which a two-country residency would acquire the features of what was once a single, national residency.

If almost all of my interviewees had concrete geographical and emotional destinations in mind for their retirement, others, such as Claus, stressed the need to keep on moving from one place to another. He simply could not give a final answer to this question. The Netherlands were not mentioned as a place that he would like to go back to because he wanted to carry on living his *peripatetic worldwide existence* as long as possible.

*Claus*: I don't know... I cannot think of one place where I would like to stay forever. No idea. Still many things to see.

Taken to an extreme, the mobility offered by the EU may help to engender this *pursuit of a denationalized type of freedom* (Favell, 2008) in certain individuals who, by renouncing settlement in a particular place, continuously need to move and live in an *in-between world*, always enriched by different cultures and social environments capable of giving them a continuous sense of a cosmopolitan existence.

## **5. Final remarks**

This paper is a first exploratory assessment on mixed marriages between European free movers. EU intra-marriage represents a rich domain that allows us to analyze how new transnational families are being formed, and how Europe is being informally built "from below" through the conjugal practices of its citizens. This new phenomenon may indicate the rise of an *intra-European homogamy* linked by specific lifestyles, values and behaviors that is part of an emerging European social class (see also Díez Medrano, 2008). In all cases, these marital unions are also a sign of the

strengthening of social ties across EU member states that should not be disregarded when looking into the European social integration process.

Returning to the distinction I made above, EU intra-marriages may include 1) two European free movers (*the free mover-free mover type*) or 2) a European free mover and a national citizen (*the free mover-national stayer type*), which may entail different assimilation strategies regarding the country of residence, depending on whether it is the home country of one of the partners. Although the results presented here have to be interpreted descriptively and merely as a tool guide due to the limited sample size, some of the findings seem to point towards at least three types of assimilation strategy towards these couples' country of residence: a *family assimilation strategy*, a *bi-national family strategy* and a *peripatetic family strategy*.

The first type requires an assimilation effort expressly made by the couple and is linked to the clear social integration of the whole family into the host society, as appears to be the case with Paulo and Athina. The couple's issues related to careers, social network links and their child's education are said to be very much like those of the society of destination, with no apparent conflict resulting from their different national backgrounds.

The second type is a sort of middle term "living commitment" maintained between both partners' countries of origin. As Markus and Carlota reveal, in not having decided on the family's final place of residence, their assimilation strategies are shared between Portuguese society patterns and an *imagined Germany*, which, though distant, is lived and reinvented every day through symbolic values, social codes and behaviors. This is particularly evident in their child's education, in which they both invest a lot of effort to transmit the two national cultures on an equal footing. Also, their social network tends to be more *international* than Portuguese, and their temporary stays in Germany are rather frequent (4 or 5 times per year), much more so than Athina's in Greece (1 or 2 per year).

The third and last type involves assuming the host country as a *place of passage*, as Claus and Marta's discourse seems to indicate. In this particular case, a certain *detachment in the way of living* persists and the couple tends to acquire a family strategy based on an instrumental commitment within the society of destination. Only when it comes to the practical and factual details of daily life do they have to immerse themselves in the national institutional system to be able to satisfy their needs. Again,

their social support system is frequently characterized by non-native individuals who also contribute to sustaining this non-assimilated social condition and perpetuating a sort of experience based on a cosmopolitan living.

However, this typology has yet to be tested in the light of the *duration of settlement* in further investigations. As mentioned in other studies (Rodríguez García, 2006; Rother, 2008; Scott and Seaton, 2006), the longer the stay at a host society, the more assimilated the mixed family seems to be. In this respect, it has to be remembered that, in this sample, the length of stay in Lisbon varied between thirteen years (Paulo and Athina), four years (Markus and Carlota) and a year and a half (Claus and Marta). It is crucial, then, to understand what role this variable can play in a family's assimilation strategies in order to further ensure the legitimacy of the typology proposed in this paper.

Finally, it is important to learn from additional investigation how far the internal dynamics and conjugal processes of European intra-marriage are similar not only to other types of mixed marriages (between Europeans and non-Europeans) but also to monocultural marriages in general. When this research is carried out, a control for *educational credentials* should be taken into account, so as to evaluate whether the conjugal singularities that have emerged in these pages are strictly associated with the free movers' personal characteristics or whether they may also appear in other family arrangements having the same social class.

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