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Research Article

Partner selection patterns in transition: The case of Turkish and Moroccan minorities in Belgium

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Partner selection patterns in transition: The case of Turkish and Moroccan minorities in Belgium

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Abstract

BACKGROUND

The majority of Turkish and Moroccan minorities in Western Europe prefer transnational marriages over local co-ethnic and mixed marriages. Recent studies indicate partner selection patterns might be shifting after remaining unchanged for decades. However, it remains unclear to what extent changes observed in earlier studies have continued to carry on.

OBJECTIVE

This paper provides a comprehensive insight into the most recent partner selection trends of Turkish and Moroccan minorities in Belgium and assesses whether and to what degree known dynamics related to marriage age and educational attainment may change.

METHODS

The Belgian National Register data are analyzed, including all Turkish and Moroccan minority members who married between 2005 and 2015 ($N = 91,916$). After describing the prevalence of three partner types and their trends, multinomial logistic regressions estimate the effect of marriage age and educational attainment on partner choice.

RESULTS

The prevalence of transnational marriages declines for all minority members. Local co-ethnic marriages mostly absorb this decline, but a strong increase in mixed marriages is also observed. The influence of marriage age and educational attainment on partner choice has changed over the last 15 years.

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CONCLUSIONS

Results reveal a strong decline in transnational marriages, reinforced by stricter immigration policies but initiated by other – possibly attitudinal – mechanisms. Dynamics regarding ethnic endogamy are subject to change as mixed marriages are also increasing among women and the lower educated.

CONTRIBUTION

The comprehensive overview given in this paper reveals significant changes in partner selection. These changes influence immigration from Turkey and Morocco, demographic characteristics of the minority groups, and their relationship to non-co-ethnics.

1. Introduction

Belgium is characterized by large populations of Turkish and Moroccan minorities that originated in the context of labor migration in the 1960s (Schoonvaere 2013, 2014). Despite a moratorium on labor migration, immigration continued due to family reunification and, more importantly, marriage migration. The preference for a transnational marriage is a phenomenon observed among both the first and second generation. Lievens (1999) analyzes Belgian National Register data from 1991 and finds a high prevalence of transnational marriages among Turkish (around 70%) and Moroccan (around 55%) minorities. The prevalence of local co-ethnic marriages varies between 18.3% and 33.3%; mixed marriages are the least preferred.

The assumption that transnational marriages are motivated by tradition led to the expectation that this partner type would eventually become less prominent as more members of the second generation began looking for a partner (Esveldt *et al.* 1995; Böcker 1994). The second generation's better structural and social integration would alter its partner selection behavior. The wish for an ethnically endogamous marriage would be fulfilled by a local co-ethnic partner and followed by a growing openness toward mixed marriages. However, the majority of the first and second generation were still opting for a transnational marriage in the mid-1990s (Esveldt *et al.* 1995; Böcker 1994) and early 2000s (Descheemaeker *et al.* 2009; Timmerman, Lodewyckx, and Wets 2009).

Indications that partner selection behavior may be changing after remaining constant for decades have been relatively recent. Van Kerckem *et al.* (2013) study Belgian National Register data containing all second-generation Turkish minority members who formed a partnership³ between 2001 and 2008. Transnational partnerships were the most

³ The term 'partnership' refers to marriages and legally registered cohabitations, which are two types of unions officially registered in the Belgian National Register.

common partner type in 2001. However, they observe a steep decline over the next seven years, which is mostly absorbed by local co-ethnic partnerships. For men, transnational partnerships decline from 56.6% to 33.7% in 2008, while local co-ethnic partnerships increase to 48.5%. For women, transnational partnerships decline from 59.9% to 42.1%, and local co-ethnic partnerships increase to 46.8%. For men, this also led to an increase in mixed partnerships, from 7% to 14.3%. In their analysis of a similar dataset containing all endogamous partnerships of first- and second-generation Moroccan minority members formed between 2001 and 2008, Dupont et al. (2017a) also report a decline in transnational partnerships. Hence, these studies seem to indicate that local co-ethnic partnerships had become the most common partner type by 2008.

However, the information on recent trends in Turkish and Moroccan minorities' partner selection is not complete. Because these trends have only started to appear recently, there is little insight into their evolution and characteristics. Differences according to migrant generation, first or higher-order partnerships, and differences between cohabitation and marriage, for example, could be expected but have not yet been studied (Hartung et al. 2011; Dupont et al. 2019b; Lievens 1999). Furthermore, it remains unclear to what extent changes observed in earlier studies have continued to carry on. Therefore, we provide a detailed analysis of the most recent trends by analyzing the Belgian National Register data, including all marriages formed by first- and second-generation Turkish and Moroccan minorities between 2005 and 2015. We start by discussing the distribution of three partner types (transnational, local co-ethnic, and mixed), assess the most recent trends up until 2015, and explore differences according to ethnicity, generation, gender, and rank of the marriage. Finally, we build multivariate regression models to establish the effects of marriage age and educational attainment on partner selection and include interaction terms with marriage year to determine possible changes over time. As we will discuss, these effects – and especially their possible change – could reveal insight into the decreasing role of parents in the partner selection of their children and the increasing openness toward mixed marriages.

The continuous decline in transnational marriages while the opposite is happening for local co-ethnic and mixed marriages is significant for two reasons. First, until now, immigration from Turkey and Morocco was considered to be self-perpetuating because of the strong popularity of marriage migration. Hence, a continuing decline in transnational marriages could influence the characteristics of Turkish and Moroccan immigration and significantly alter the structure of minority populations. Also, the popularity of transnational partnerships has been placed high on the European political agenda because of policymakers' concerns about ethnic minorities' level of integration in the face of a constant influx of immigrants and economic immigration motives instead of familial ones (Leerkes and Kulu-Glasgow 2011). Second, the dynamics of partner selection are believed to be an indicator of processes of change among ethnic minorities,

such as assimilation and integration (Qian and Lichter 2007; Waters and Jiménez 2005; Lieberman and Waters 1988). Because marriage is seen as the most intimate form of social contact, and it connects individuals as well as their social networks, marrying outside of one's ethnic group is seen as a manifestation of integration, which diminishes ethnic boundaries and the growth of intergroup solidarity.

2. Turkish and Moroccan immigration

Turkish and Moroccan minority members are part of the two largest minority groups in Belgium originating from third countries⁴ (Schoonvaere 2013, 2014). Immigration started in the early 1960s because of a shortage of laborers as a result of the booming economy. This first immigration wave ended in 1974 when European governments imposed a moratorium as the economy underwent the postindustrial transition and additional low-skilled laborers became unnecessary. Male laborers were reunified with their families throughout the 1970s (Reniers 1999); this was the foundation for the second wave of (family reunification) immigration. The expectation was that immigration would end shortly as the number of family members that stayed behind would eventually subside. However, immigration has continued unabatedly since the early 1980s. This third wave consists mainly of people arriving as newlywed partners of minority members already living in Belgium. In 2006, about 250,000 and 140,000 individuals were living in Belgium with, respectively, a Moroccan and Turkish nationality at birth (Schoonvaere 2013, 2014).

Besides the similarities between these two minority groups (period of arrival, legal conditions, and cultural and religious characteristics), there are also differences, especially with regard to the characteristics of the migration and recruitment policies (Reniers 1999). Part of the Moroccan migrants arriving in the 1960s came independently, and not via official recruitment channels, in the search for better living conditions rather than in the context of official labor migration. This is mainly reflected in the more individualistic character of Moroccan immigration in comparison to the more family-oriented Turkish immigration, resulting in social networks characterized by lower levels of transnationalism and social cohesion among the former.

⁴ Third countries are countries outside of the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland. Croatia became an EU and EEA member in 2013 but is not considered a third country in this article.

3. Dynamics of partner selection

3.1 Transnational versus local marriages

The high prevalence of transnational marriages can be motivated by mutual interests of minority members residing in Europe and of family and friends living in the origin countries and is facilitated by the existence of strong transnational ties between them (Hooghiemstra 2003; Lievens 1999; Aybek, Straßburger, and Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu 2015). First, minority members often have a strong orientation toward the origin country. They consider partners in the origin country the most eligible since they have the same norms and values and are a better cultural fit compared to local co-ethnics, who often have a bad reputation (Sterckx and Bouw 2005). Second, socioeconomic conditions in the origin countries are important push factors for migration (Timmerman, Lodewyckx, and Wets 2009). Socioeconomics combined with European policies restricting migration opportunities from outside Europe (Caestecker 2005) make marriage one of the most accessible migration channels. This situation generates a large pool of possible partners in the origin countries and can create pressure on minority members to marry transnationally (Van Kerckem et al. 2013). Minority members in turn become more attractive marriage partners, potentially giving them a better chance of finding a suitable partner in the origin country than in the local community (Beck-Gernsheim 2007). Third, transnational marriages take place within transnational communities (Williams 2013), which find their origin in strong migration networks between the sending and receiving societies, established at the beginning of the Turkish and Moroccan migration. These migration networks consist of strong familial ties, which are created and maintained by continuous migration (De Haas 2010). In a context where marriage migration is one of the only ways to migrate, these transnational communities facilitate transnational marriages through the transnational ties.

Nevertheless, variation in the prevalence of transnational marriages is present, depending on numerous factors on a micro-, meso-, and macro-level (Kalmijn 1998). Because this article focuses on the influence of micro-level characteristics, we discuss only the individual differences.

Transnational marriages are more prevalent among the first generation because of their stronger orientation toward the origin country and stronger transnational ties compared to the second generation (Lievens 1999; Huschek, de Valk, and Liefbroer 2012). For the same reasons, transnational marriages also are more prevalent among Turkish compared to Moroccan minorities (Carol, Ersanilli, and Wagner 2014; Lievens 1999). Furthermore, minority members who remarry choose a transnational partner more often than those who marry for the first time (Dupont et al. 2019b). The local co-ethnic marriage market may be perceived as restricted when one has been married before due to

the stigma of divorce (Koelet et al. 2008). Turning to the origin country can then optimize their chances of finding a new partner.

Previous research suggests that transnational marriages are inspired by traditional motives as they are especially preferred by lower educated minority members (González-Ferrer 2006; Milewski and Hamel 2010). However, others report gendered motives for transnational marriages: Higher educated women are more likely to engage in a transnational marriage; the opposite is true for men (Lievens 1999). By choosing a transnational marriage, higher educated women from minority groups may gain more autonomy and power within the relationship because they are less subjected to the generally strong influence of their in-laws and because their partner is new to the resident country. Hence, women may choose this type of partner to satisfy modern goals, whereas men search within the origin country for more traditional spouses. Evidence for this hypothesis has mainly been found in qualitative studies (Liversage 2012; Timmerman, Lodewyckx, and Wets 2009). In their quantitative studies, González-Ferrer (2006) and Milewski and Hamel (2010) find no support for this hypothesis among Turkish minorities. Carol, Ersanilli, and Wagner (2014) do find some supporting evidence but question educational attainment as a proxy for traditional orientation as the interaction remained significant after controlling for religiosity. Hence, the choice for transnational marriages could also result from a lack of appropriate partners in the residence country (Straßburger 2003). While higher educated women may need to turn to the origin country to find a co-ethnic partner with a similar level of education, this is less true for men; it is more common for men to marry women with a lower level of education than themselves.

3.2 Mixed versus endogamous marriage

The prevalence of mixed marriages is generally low because of a strong preference for ethnic endogamy (Dupont et al. 2017b; Hooghiemstra 2003). Marriage is seen as a bond between individuals and their families, and the reputation of potential partners is essential for the preservation of family honor (Esveldt et al. 1995). Young adult behavior is therefore determined by an honor-and-shame system accompanied by a strong preference for endogamy. Third parties' involvement in partner selection is motivated by the central role marriage plays in the preservation of family honor. Social control is especially high for girls because the family system is characterized by a double standard regarding the importance of endogamy. From a religious point of view, Islam does not consider the children of a Muslim woman and non-Muslim man as Muslims, while this norm is less strict for the children of Muslim men in mixed marriages (de Vries 1987).

These levels of social control differ between minority members, which may explain two variations in the prevalence of mixed partnerships. It may explain, first, why men are

more likely to choose a mixed marriage compared to women (Dupont et al. 2017b; González-Ferrer 2006; Hooghiemstra 2003; Huschek, de Valk, and Liefbroer 2012) and, second, why the prevalence is higher among Moroccan compared to Turkish minority members (Dupont et al. 2017b).

Furthermore, the likelihood of choosing a mixed partnership is higher for the second generation compared to the first (Dupont et al. 2017b; Hooghiemstra 2003; Huschek, de Valk, and Liefbroer 2012). Second-generation minority members have been, for the most part, socialized in Belgium as they migrated at a young age or were born in Belgium. They are, therefore, more confronted with an alternative family model and could have more meeting opportunities with non-co-ethnic peers. This line of reasoning is supported by research showing that second-generation members have more liberal values regarding cohabitation, premarital sex, and divorce (Kalmijn and Kraaykamp 2018).

4. Possible mechanisms of change

Above we discussed known partner selection dynamics of Turkish and Moroccan minority members, which remained consistent for decades. However, two studies indicate that the prevalence of transnational partnerships may be declining, making local co-ethnic partnerships the most prevalent partner type (Dupont et al. 2017a; Van Kerckem et al. 2013). To a lesser extent, this decline can be accompanied by an increase in mixed partnerships. Before investigating whether these changes are fluctuations or indicate profound structural trends, we discuss some possible explanations for these changes.

Preferences concerning ideal partners have changed, both among adolescents and their parents (Descheemaeker et al. 2009; Sterckx et al. 2014; Van Kerckem et al. 2013). In the past, the belief was that the most eligible partners would be found in the origin country. Nowadays, minority members continue to look for ethnic endogamy, which they more often find in the local community (Sterckx et al. 2014) because they want a partner who knows what it is like to be a minority member. Furthermore, many parents and adolescents claim to have changed their minds about transnational marriages after witnessing relationship difficulties in this kind of marriage (Descheemaeker et al. 2009; Van Kerckem et al. 2013; Aybek, Straßburger, and Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu 2015). Several studies report a growing awareness of the possible risks associated with transnational marriages, such as unemployment and financial troubles, contradictory expectations, or social isolation of the partner migrant. These relationship difficulties result in a higher divorce risk compared to local co-ethnic marriages (Dupont et al. 2019a).

Based on the above we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: We expect a continued decline in the prevalence of transnational marriages, mostly compensated by an increase in the prevalence of local co-ethnic marriages.

The consistently high prevalence of transnational marriages has contributed to the strengthening of legal family reunification procedures in various European countries such as Denmark, the Netherlands, and Belgium (Beck-Gernsheim 2007; Caestecker 2005; Leerkes and Kulu-Glasgow 2011). These policy changes partially resulted from policymakers' concerns about minorities' levels of integration in the face of a constant influx of immigrants as well as concerns that the underlying motives for migration could be more economic. The policies establish a minimum age and include income, language, and/or housing requirements. They have been implemented in an attempt to reduce immigration in general and transnational marriages in particular (Carol, Ersanilli, and Wagner 2014; Leerkes and Kulu-Glasgow 2011). Stricter immigration policies were implemented in Belgium in 2011⁵ (EMN 2017), where they could have strongly influenced a change in the partner selection patterns of Turkish and Moroccan minorities.

Hypothesis 2: We expect a marked drop in the prevalence of transnational marriages after 2011.

Turkish and Moroccan partner selection is generally characterized by high levels of parental influence. However, the process has evolved from being initiated by parents and family to being initiated by the partners with parental consent (Descheemaeker et al. 2009; Hooghiemstra 2003). Parents no longer wish to take full responsibility for the selection of a marriage partner. Parents are supposed to have a strong preference for transnational marriages and high levels of social resistance toward mixed marriages (Sterckx and Bouw 2005). Hence, when parental involvement decreases, partner-initiated partnerships increase and are more likely to occur in the local marriage market. Since parental influence is especially high among those who marry at a young age, and marriage age can be considered to be a proxy for maturity and independence in choosing a partner (Lodewijckx, Page, and Schoenmaeckers 1997), younger minority members are generally more likely to marry transnationally because of higher levels of social control (Lievens 1999). We then formulate our next hypothesis:

⁵ On July 8, 2011, new migration policies were implemented in Belgium that contained several additional requirements to the right of family reunification (EMN 2017). Both partners must be 21 years old, and the partner residing in Belgium must have an accommodation suitable for the size of the family and must have healthcare insurance that covers all family members. In addition, the partner residing in Belgium must have sufficient, stable, and regular means of subsistence to cover the needs of all family members and to avoid them becoming a burden on the public authorities. The level of income is set at 120% of the living wage.

Hypothesis 3: We expect the negative effect of marriage age on the probability of transnational marriages to become smaller, in line with the decreasing parental influence on the partner selection of their children.

With regard to mixed marriages, the Turkish and Moroccan family systems are characterized by a strong preference for ethnic endogamy. Nevertheless, the prevalence of mixed marriages may be slowly increasing.

The growing size of young minority members reaching marriageable age could lead to an increase in the prevalence of mixed marriages as more recent cohorts are more likely to engage in a mixed marriage (Joyner and Kao 2005; González-Ferrer 2006). Younger cohorts are born and raised in Belgium. Growing up with non-co-ethnic peers may blur the ethnic distance and lead to more mixed marriages. Additionally, transnational networks between relatives may decrease in intensity, potentially reducing the strength of emotional ties and sensitivity to kin obligations (Esveldt et al. 1995; Huschek, de Valk, and Liefbroer 2012) and increasing autonomy in the partner selection process (Van Zantvliet, Kalmijn, and Verbakel 2014). The resident country's culture could also influence the ethnic identity of young minority members and possibly result in less emphasis on ethnic endogamy (Esveldt et al. 1995; Huschek, de Valk, and Liefbroer 2012).

Hypothesis 4: We expect a continued increase in the prevalence of mixed marriage while remaining the least preferred partner type.

Based on the assumption that social resistance toward mixed marriages is decreasing, we have formulated two hypotheses. First, we will test whether the effect of marriage age on the odds of entering into a mixed marriage decreases. Minority members marrying at an older age are more likely to choose a mixed marriage because they are less prone to the influence of third parties (Dupont et al. 2017b; Lievens 1999). Hence, the reduced effect of marriage age on the decision to enter into a mixed marriage could indicate a decreasing parental influence on the partner selection process, as well as an increasing openness toward mixed marriages.

Hypothesis 5: We expect the positive effect of marriage age on the probability of mixed marriages to become smaller.

Second, we test whether the effect of educational attainment on the odds of entering into a mixed marriage decreases over time. Higher educated minority members are known to hold less traditional norms and values concerning partner selection (Kalmijn 1998; Kalmijn and Kraaykamp 2018). Moreover, they are extensively exposed to the resident

country's value system during their education and have more opportunities to meet non-co-ethnic peers (Kalmijn 1998). If social resistance against mixed marriages is declining, mixed marriages may also become prevalent among the lower educated, reducing the positive effect of educational attainment.

Hypothesis 6: We expect the positive effect of educational attainment on the probability of mixed marriages to become smaller.

5. Methods

5.1 Data

The Belgian National Register is a unique data source that can be particularly meaningful when analyzing partner selection patterns of minority members because it contains sociodemographic information on all individuals born or officially living in Belgium. The advantage of register data is that in contrast to several previous studies (e.g., Milewski and Hamel 2010; Hartung et al. 2011; Van Zantvliet, Kalmijn, and Verbakel 2014; González-Ferrer 2006; Carol, Ersanilli, and Wagner 2014), it provides a 'robust' picture of demographic behavior and trends and eliminates sample size problems common in studies among ethnic minorities. However, register data contain only sociodemographic variables and therefore do not provide additional, more detailed information, such as values, motives, and beliefs.

We analyze an extraction of the Belgian National Register that was carried out by Statistics Belgium⁶ on March 1, 2018. The cross-sectional extraction includes all individuals, regardless of their birth country, who married between 2005 and 2015 and meet the following conditions: (1) having Turkish or Moroccan nationality at birth and (2) being a resident of Belgium ($N = 91,916$). Using nationality at birth is a sound basis for determining descent, but it has an important drawback: Turkish and Moroccan minority members born with Belgian nationality are not included, which means two groups of minority members are missing from our data. First, individuals originating from mixed partnerships – in which one parent has Belgian nationality (either by birth or acquisition) and one has Turkish or Moroccan nationality – are Belgian by birth, and their partner choices are therefore missing from our data. Second, from 1991 onwards, individuals with foreign parents automatically acquire Belgian nationality at birth if at least one parent was born and raised and is residing in Belgium (Caestecker et al. 2016). Given that someone can marry from age 18 and that we are studying up to and including

⁶ We are very grateful to Patrick Lusyne (Algemene Directie Statistiek – Statistics Belgium) for providing the data.

2015, the partner choice of individuals born in Belgium between 1991 and 1997 and with at least one parent meeting the above criteria is missing from our data.

The second inclusion criterion – being a Belgian resident – is defined as residing in Belgium at least one year before marrying. This way we exclude existing couples who migrated to Belgium after being married, and we differentiate between minority members marrying while living in Belgium (our research population) and marriage migrants, who migrated to Belgium because of their marriage. Migration motives are not included in the Belgian National Register. Therefore, we define individuals who migrate in the same year of the marriage or later as marriage migrants because registering a marriage gives transnational partners the right to migrate to and reside in Belgium (EMN 2017). This operationalization mirrors previous studies working on similar register data (e.g., Dupont et al. 2017b; Dupont et al. 2019b; Eeckhaut et al. 2011; Van Kerckem et al. 2013).

5.2 Operationalization

Marriages are categorized into three partner types: local co-ethnic, mixed, and transnational. The partner in a local co-ethnic marriage has the same nationality at birth as the minority member and is either a Belgian resident or a European Union (EU) member-state resident. The partner in a mixed marriage is a Belgian (or EU member-state) resident and has a different nationality at birth compared to the minority member. Transnational marriages are with a partner who lives in a third country and migrates to Belgium because of this marriage (a marriage migrant). As indicated above, we define individuals who migrate in the same year of the marriage or later as marriage migrants.

Compared to previous studies, we operationalize the three partner types slightly differently. We adjust the operationalization to a new societal context by taking into account a growing ethnic diversity and changing national immigration policies. First, the ‘local’ in local co-ethnic is not restricted to Belgium alone because Belgian immigration policies make a distinction between partners originating from the EU on the one hand and third countries on the other hand (EMN 2017). The former can, contrary to the latter, move and reside freely within the EU (Caestecker 2005). Second, mixed marriages are not restricted to marriages with partners born with Belgian nationality because more than half of the mixed marriages in the data are with non-Belgians. However, differentiating between marriages with non-Belgian and Belgian partners (e.g., Van Kerckem et al. 2013) was not meaningful in our analyses.⁷ Finally, transnational partners can originate from not only Turkey or Morocco but any third country. Nevertheless, 97.6% originates from Turkey or Morocco. We chose the transnational character of a marriage over the

⁷ Results available upon request.

possible heterogamy of the partners because of the Belgian immigration policies that regulate the possibility of forming a transnational marriage more strictly from 2011 onwards.

The migrant generation is constructed based on the stage in the socialization process at which one migrated as the socialization process influences the development of attitudes and values (Bronfenbrenner 1986). A distinction is made between three generations. The first generation migrated at age 15 or older. The 1.5 generation migrated between the ages of 6 and 14, and the second generation has been, for the most part, socialized in a Belgian context, as they migrated before age 6 or were born in Belgium. Because the trends in partner selection of first and 1.5 generation members are rather similar,⁸ we combine these two groups ($N = 31,902$ and $N = 5,539$, respectively) into what we will call the first generation. Because we focus on marriages formed between 2005 and 2015 (and the strong concentration of marriages between the ages of 27 and 40), the first generation identified here should not be confused with the first-generation labor migrants who came in the 1960s and 1970s or with family reunifiers who arrived in the 1970s. The first generation we observe are recent newcomers and obtained residence permits mainly for humanitarian or educational reasons or a variety of other reasons (victims of human trafficking, unaccompanied minors, refugees, etc.) (Eurostat 2016).

As indicated above, marriage age is often considered to be an indicator of the degree of freedom a person has regarding their partner selection (Lodewijckx, Page, and Schoenmaeckers 1997). Because this proxy is primarily meaningful for first partner choices, we opt for a categorical variable that compares respondents' age upon first marriage to that of their peers on average (i.e., first marriage at a younger, intermediate, or older age). Respondents that remarried are included in a fourth category. Because the multivariate analyses are restricted to the second generation, as explained below, marriage age is constructed only for second-generation minority members. Table 1 indicates the operationalization and distribution of these categories according to gender and ethnicity, based on the quantiles of marriage age within each group.

⁸ Results available upon request.

Table 1: Operationalization of marriage age for the second generation

	Turkish men		Turkish women		Moroccan men		Moroccan women	
	Age	%	Age	%	Age	%	Age	%
Younger age	< 23	18.72	< 21	18.87	< 25	19.11	< 21	15.57
Intermediate age	23–28	49.87	21–25	45.50	25–31	47.11	21–27	48.45
Older age	> 28	17.29	> 25	21.25	> 31	16.88	> 27	15.91
Remarriage	/	14.11	/	14.38	/	16.90	/	20.01
<i>N</i>		8,935		9,783		17,377		18,380

Educational attainment is based on the highest diploma obtained, retrieved from a dataset combining the Belgian National Register data and regional⁹ datasets on all Belgian residents' level of educational attainment on January 1, 2011. For residents of Wallonia and Brussels, the highest diploma obtained in Belgium is considered; for residents of Flanders, foreign degrees can be included. We distinguish four categories: no diploma, primary education, or lower secondary as 'low'; higher secondary as 'middle'; higher education as 'high'; and 'missing.' The missing category is included in the analyses because we have no information on the level of educational attainment of 16.94% of the data sample. As 82.75% of these missing cases belong to the first generation, we can assume they obtained a diploma in the origin country and are therefore missing from the data.

Marriage year ranges from 2005 through 2015 and is included to account for trends in partner selection over time.

5.3 Analyses

We start by discussing the distribution of three partner types and assess the trends in partner selection between 2005 and 2015. We explore differences according to ethnicity, migrant generation, gender, and marriage rank to obtain a comprehensive insight into recent partner selection behavior in Turkish and Moroccan minorities. Next, we use multinomial logistic regression models to assess the net effects of two predictors of partner choice: educational attainment and marriage age. By including interaction terms within marriage year, we determine whether these effects change over time.

⁹ Belgium is divided into three regions (Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels).

6. Results

6.1 Distributions

Table 2 shows the distribution of three partner types according to ethnicity and gender. For every subpopulation, the prevalence of transnational marriages is around 40%; the highest prevalence is for Moroccan men (49.08%). Among women, local co-ethnic marriages are slightly more prevalent than transnational marriages; the opposite is true for men. Mixed marriages are around 14% for every subpopulation and 10.12% for Turkish women.

Table 2: Distribution of partner type according to ethnicity and gender between 2005 and 2015

	Turkish men	Turkish women	Moroccan men	Moroccan women
Transnational marriage	43.88%	43.46%	49.08%	40.00%
Local co-ethnic marriage	41.61%	46.42%	36.78%	45.77%
Mixed marriage	14.51%	10.12%	14.14%	14.23%
<i>N</i>	14,783 (100%)	12,700 (100%)	36,359 (100%)	28,074 (100%)

Table 3 presents the distribution of partner type in more detail by also differentiating according to migrant generation and marriage rank. This offers a more comprehensive insight into possible differences according to individual characteristics. First, with regard to gender and ethnicity, the prevalence of mixed marriages is – as reported in previous research (Dupont *et al.* 2017b; González-Ferrer 2006; Hooghiemstra 2003; Huscsek, de Valk, and Liefbroer 2012) – lower among women, but only when considering first marriages. Furthermore, contrary to previous studies’ findings (Carol, Ersanilli, and Wagner 2014; Lievens 1999), the prevalence of mixed marriages is not higher among Moroccan minorities, nor is the prevalence of transnational marriages higher among Turkish minorities. The prevalence of transnational marriages is only higher among Turkish compared to Moroccan minorities when we consider women of the second generation.

With regard to generational differences, the prevalence of transnational marriages is lower among the second (vs. the first) generation. This confirms earlier findings (Carol, Ersanilli, and Wagner 2014; Dupont *et al.* 2017b). For mixed marriages, previous research suggests that the prevalence increases with successive generations (Lieberson and Waters 1988). Our results fine-tune this statement: Mixed marriages are more prevalent among second- compared to first-generation members, but only when they remarry.

Differentiating according to marriage rank shows that the prevalence of transnational marriages is higher among remarriages, confirming earlier findings (Dupont et al. 2019b). The difference ranges between 11.03 and 32.73 percentage points. Especially the first generation chooses a transnational marriage when remarrying. The prevalence of mixed marriages is lower among higher-order compared to first marriages, as reported by Dupont et al. (2019b), but only for the first generation. Among the second generation, and especially women, the prevalence of mixed marriages is similar or higher among remarriages.

Table 3: Distribution of partner type according to ethnicity, gender, migrant generation, and marriage rank between 2005 and 2015

	Turkish men		Turkish women		Moroccan men		Moroccan women	
	1 st gen.	2 nd gen.	1 st gen.	2 nd gen.	1 st gen.	2 nd gen.	1 st gen.	2 nd gen.
<i>First marriages</i>								
Transnational	46.97%	30.68%	50.03%	38.51%	44.41%	29.51%	46.24%	29.28%
Local co-ethnic	35.87%	54.52%	38.48%	52.78%	30.37%	55.40%	38.25%	58.42%
Mixed	17.16%	14.80%	11.49%	8.70%	24.22%	15.09%	15.52%	12.30%
<i>N</i>	2,704 (100%)	7,674 (100%)	1,723 (100%)	8,376 (100%)	7,183 (100%)	14,440 (100%)	3,854 (100%)	14,691 (100%)
<i>Remarriages</i>								
Transnational	73.76%	43.14%	61.06%	49.96%	77.14%	43.99%	62.16%	41.10%
Local co-ethnic	17.59%	35.21%	29.40%	32.69%	16.52%	39.90%	23.20%	39.01%
Mixed	8.65%	21.65%	9.55%	17.34%	6.34%	16.10%	14.64%	19.90%
<i>N</i>	3,144 (100%)	1,261 (100%)	1,194 (100%)	1,407 (100%)	11,799 (100%)	2,937 (100%)	5,840 (100%)	3,689 (100%)

6.2 Trends

We assess trends in partner selection from 2005 up until 2015. Regarding first marriages (Figures 1 and 2), the prevalence of transnational marriages declines among all subpopulations from around 50% to around 15% among the second generation and around 30% among the first generation. For the second generation, this decline appears around 2005 and is ongoing. Among the first generation, the decline starts later, with a marked drop around 2011. Correspondingly, local co-ethnic marriages become the most preferred first partner choice by 2015. Its prevalence increases from around 30% to around 50% among the first generation and from around 40% to 65% among the second generation. Mixed marriages are the least common in 2005. The prevalence increases, however, and mixed marriages are even as common as transnational marriages in 2015 among the second generation. They remain the least preferred among the first generation.

Some small differences aside, first marriage trends are very similar regarding gender and ethnicity. Especially generational differences are observed. However, Moroccan men of the first generation are an exception (Figure 2a). The prevalence of both transnational and local co-ethnic marriages increases while the prevalence of mixed marriages decreases.

Figure 1: Relative partner type trends in first marriages of Turkish minority (a) first-generation men, (b) second-generation men, (c) first-generation women, (d) second-generation women

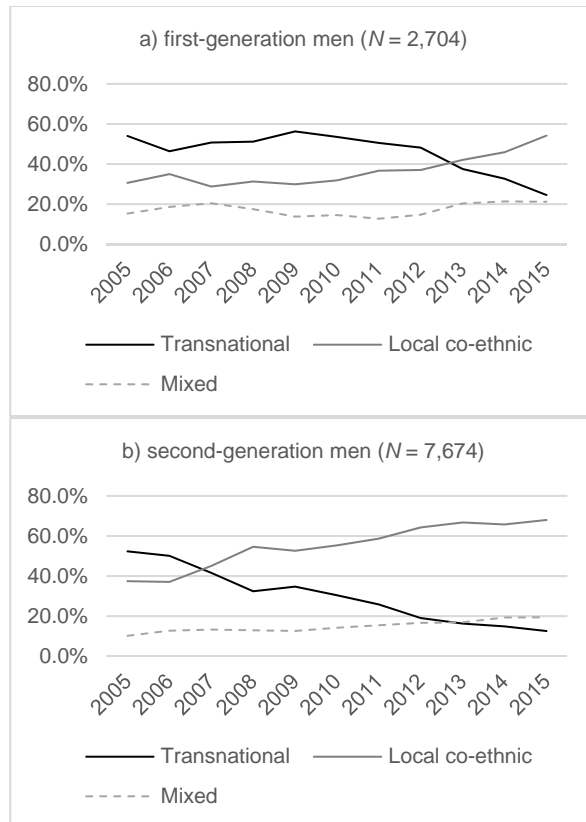


Figure 1: (Continued)

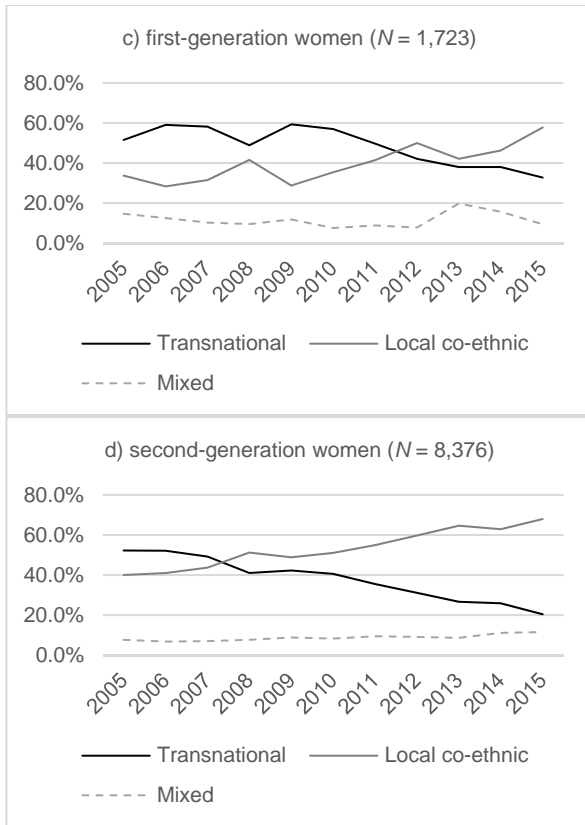


Figure 2: Relative partner type trends in first marriages of Moroccan minority (a) first-generation men, (b) second-generation men, (c) first-generation women, (d) second-generation women

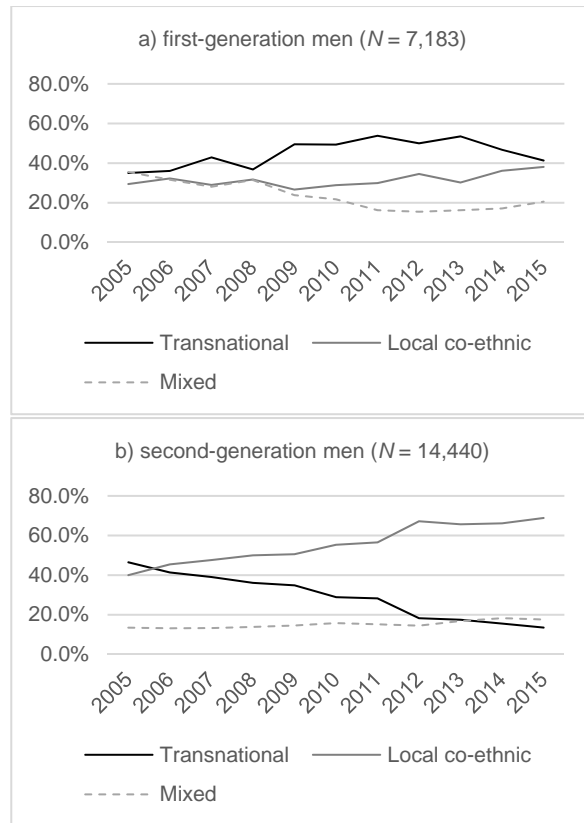
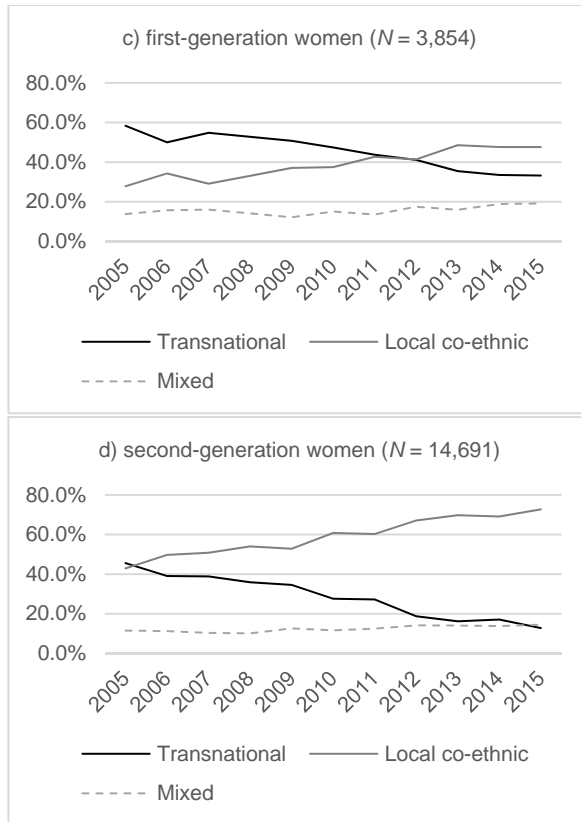


Figure 2: (Continued)



Figures 3 and 4 display the trends in remarriages. Regarding the first generation (Figures 3a, 3c, 4a, and 4c), around 80% opt for a transnational marriage in 2005. The prevalence declines to around 40% over the next 10 years, with a marked drop around 2011. The decline is smaller among Moroccan men: from 82.31% to 67.75%. The prevalence of local co-ethnic marriages increases, but transnational marriages remain the most prevalent type, except among Turkish women. The prevalence of mixed marriages is low in 2005, and despite an increasing trend, they remain the least preferred partner type in 2015.

The trends of second-generation minority members who remarry (Figures 3b, 3d, 4b, and 4d) show that the prevalence of transnational marriages starts high in 2005 but

declines rapidly, making local co-ethnic marriages the most common partner type by 2012. Mixed marriages also increase and become as common as transnational marriages.

Figure 3: Relative partner type trends in remarriages of Turkish minority (a) first-generation men, (b) second-generation men, (c) first-generation women, (d) second-generation women

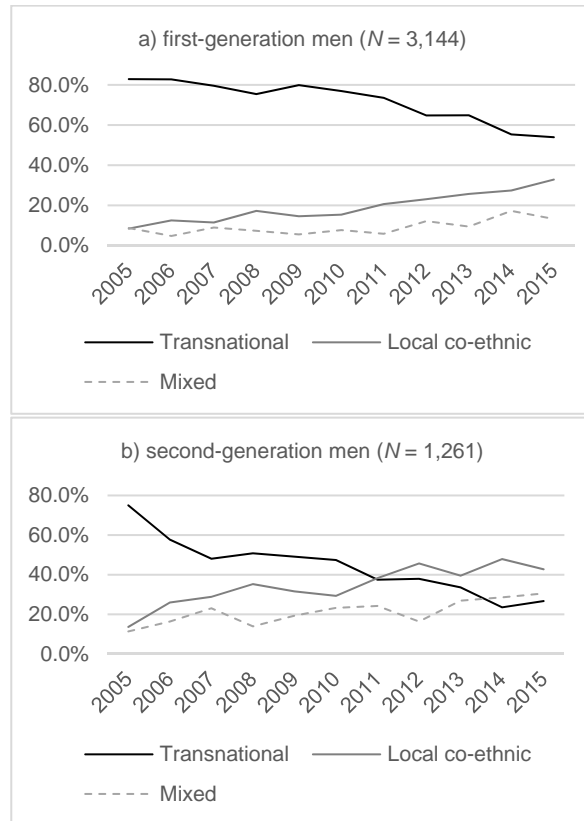


Figure 3: (Continued)

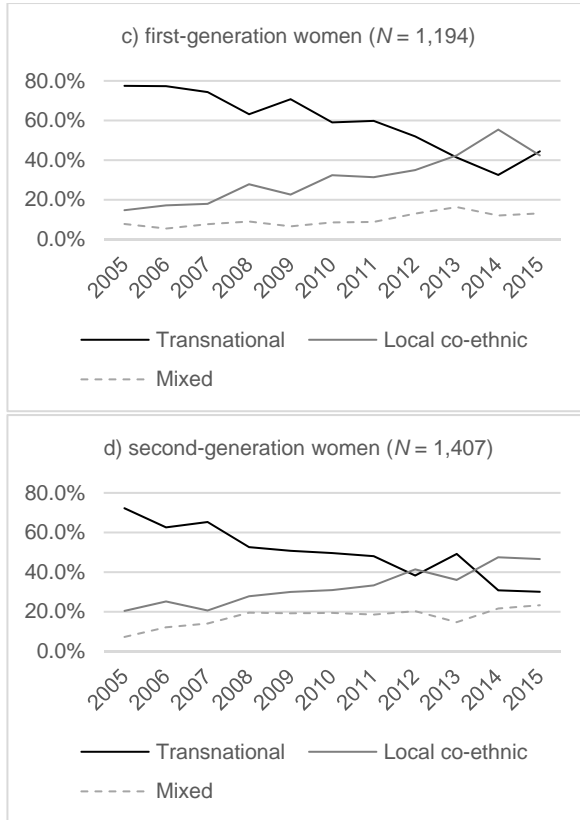


Figure 4: Relative partner type trends in remarriages of Moroccan minority
(a) first-generation men, (b) second-generation men,
(c) first-generation women, (d) second-generation women

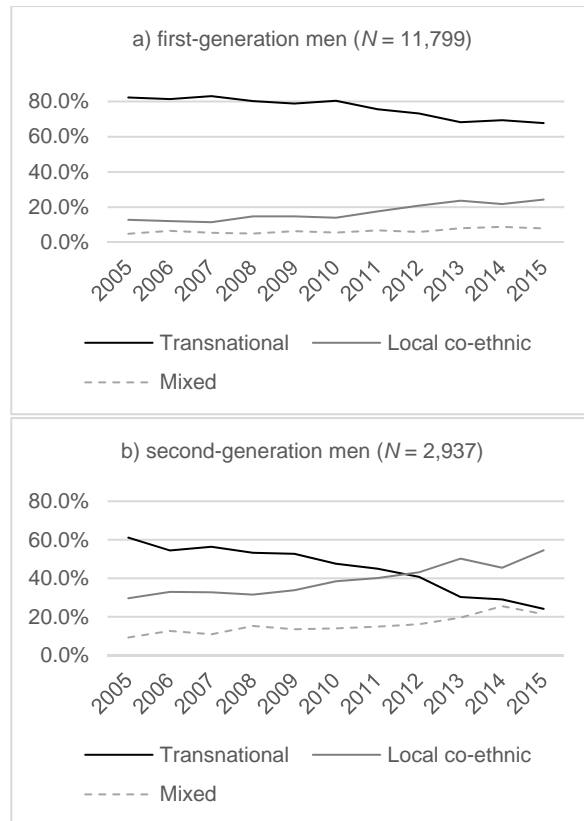
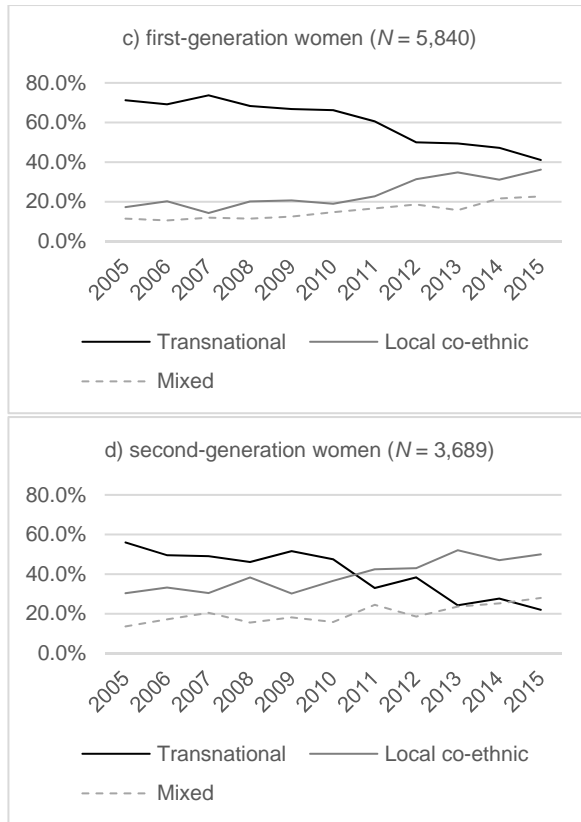


Figure 4: (Continued)



6.3 Multivariate analyses

The multivariate analyses assess the effect of educational attainment and marriage age on partner selection behavior of Turkish (Table 4) and Moroccan (Table 5) minority members. Since we are missing information on educational attainment of 34.42% of the first generation, we restrict the multivariate analyses to the second generation. We use separate models for each subpopulation (M0s) to assess whether effects differ according to gender and ethnicity, without having to include numerous interaction terms. We do include interaction terms between marriage year and marriage age (M1s) to test

Hypotheses 2 and 5. To verify Hypothesis 6, we include interaction terms between marriage year and educational attainment (M2s).

All minority members, except Moroccan men, who marry at a younger age, are more likely to opt for a transnational (vs. local co-ethnic) marriage compared to their peers marrying at an intermediate age (M0s, upper part Tables 4 and 5). This is also true for minority members marrying at an older age. The positive effect of marrying at a younger age declines over time, and the positive effect of marrying at an older age increases for Moroccans (M1s, upper part Tables 4 and 5). We make graphical representations of the expected log odds of choosing a transnational marriage, per year and age category, to show how the effect of marriage age changes over time. These graphs are based on the M1s in the upper part of Tables 4 and 5 and are displayed in Figure A-1 in the Appendix 1. The difference in the log odds of marrying transnationally between minority members marrying at a younger and an intermediate age disappears by 2015. For Moroccan men, the difference disappears by 2007 and then reverses, indicating higher log odds of marrying transnationally at an intermediate age.

We observe a positive effect of marriage age on the odds of choosing a mixed (vs. local co-ethnic) marriage among all subpopulations (M0s, lower part Tables 4 and 5). This effect decreases over time (M1s, lower part Tables 4 and 5). The graphical representations of the expected log odds of entering into a mixed marriage, per year and age category, show that all age differences disappear over time (Figure A-2). An exception to this is the difference between marrying at an intermediate and older age for women.

Regarding educational attainment, we observe a negative effect on the odds of choosing a transnational marriage (M0s, upper part Tables 4 and 5). Furthermore, the negative effect of having a higher (vs. lower) level of education becomes smaller (M2s, upper part Tables 4 and 5). This is also true for middle-level (vs. lower-level) educated Moroccans. Eventually, this reduces the educational differences in the log odds of marrying transnationally by 2015, as shown by the graphical representations in Figure A-3. For Moroccan men, the educational differences decrease but remain present.

The odds of entering into a mixed marriage are lower for minority members with a middle-level (vs. lower-level) education, except for Moroccan women (M0s, lower part Tables 4 and 5). Furthermore, there is a positive effect of being higher (vs. lower) educated on the odds of entering into a mixed marriage for women but not for men.

The positive effect of being higher educated on the odds of entering into a mixed marriage decreases over time, except for Moroccan women (M2s, lower part Tables 4 and 5). Nevertheless, the graphical representations of the expected log odds of entering into a mixed marriage, per year and educational level, relay a more complex picture (Figure A-4). There is no difference in the log odds of entering into a mixed marriage between male minority members with lower and higher levels of education in 2005.

However, the difference increases over time because the expected log odds of entering into a mixed marriage increases for the lower educated, while they stay the same or decrease for the higher educated. Among Turkish women, the log odds of entering into a mixed marriage decrease for the higher educated and increase for the lower educated, reducing the difference between the two educational levels.

Table 4: Log odds of multinomial logistic regression analyses: Partner type of the second generation, Turkish minority members*

	Turkish men (N = 8,935)			Turkish women (N = 9,783)		
	M0	M1	M2	M0	M1	M2
TRANSNATIONAL						
<i>Intercept</i>	0.36 (0.06)	0.38 (0.07)	0.45 (0.08)	0.41 (0.07)	0.35 (0.08)	0.42 (0.09)
<i>Year</i>	-0.21 (0.01)	-0.21 (0.01)	-0.22 (0.01)	-0.16 (0.01)	-0.13 (0.01)	-0.15 (0.01)
<i>Marriage age</i>						
Younger	0.22 (0.07)	0.34 (0.11)	0.24 (0.07)	0.26 (0.06)	0.44 (0.10)	0.25 (0.06)
Older	0.70 (0.07)	0.51 (0.14)	0.63 (0.07)	0.50 (0.06)	0.56 (0.12)	0.46 (0.07)
Remarriage	1.10 (0.08)	0.86 (0.15)	1.01 (0.08)	0.96 (0.07)	1.11 (0.14)	0.93 (0.07)
<i>Educational attainment</i>						
Middle	-0.27 (0.06)	-0.29 (0.06)	-0.37 (0.10)	-0.31 (0.05)	-0.33 (0.05)	-0.29 (0.10)
High	-0.70 (0.10)	-0.72 (0.10)	-1.12 (0.16)	-0.59 (0.08)	-0.60 (0.08)	-0.80 (0.14)
Missing	0.39 (0.12)	0.38 (0.12)	-0.09 (0.20)	1.29 (0.13)	1.36 (0.13)	1.58 (0.26)
<i>Year*marriage age</i>						
Year*younger		-0.04 (0.02)			-0.05 (0.02)	
Year*older		0.04 (0.02)			-0.02 (0.02)	
Year*remarriage		0.04 (0.03)			-0.03 (0.02)	
<i>Year*educational attainment</i>						
Year*middle			0.02 (0.02)			-0.01 (0.02)
Year*high			0.11 (0.03)			0.05 (0.03)
Year*missing			0.11 (0.04)			-0.04 (0.04)
MIXED						
<i>Intercept</i>	-1.20 (0.08)	-1.42 (0.10)	-1.35 (0.11)	-1.98 (0.12)	-1.96 (0.14)	-2.05 (0.17)
<i>Year</i>	-0.03 (0.01)	0.06 (0.01)	0.05 (0.02)	-0.04 (0.01)	0.02 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
<i>Marriage age</i>						
Younger	-0.60 (0.11)	-0.70 (0.19)	-0.31 (0.09)	-0.77 (0.17)	-1.25 (0.30)	-0.59 (0.15)
Older	0.97 (0.08)	1.44 (0.17)	0.73 (0.08)	1.35 (0.09)	1.56 (0.18)	1.12 (0.09)
Remarriage	0.97 (0.09)	1.00 (0.19)	0.67 (0.09)	1.62 (0.10)	1.58 (0.21)	1.39 (0.10)
<i>Educational attainment</i>						
Middle	-0.15 (0.07)	-0.15 (0.07)	-0.06 (0.14)	-0.23 (0.09)	-0.32 (0.09)	-0.12 (0.19)
High	-0.15 (0.11)	-0.19 (0.10)	0.18 (0.20)	0.38 (0.12)	0.23 (0.11)	0.63 (0.21)
Missing	0.28 (0.15)	0.26 (0.14)	0.28 (0.28)	0.77 (0.21)	0.75 (0.20)	1.40 (0.40)
<i>Year*marriage age</i>						
Year*younger		0.08 (0.03)			0.14 (0.05)	
Year*older		-0.12 (0.03)			-0.08 (0.03)	
Year*remarriage		-0.06 (0.03)			-0.04 (0.03)	
<i>Year*educational attainment</i>						
Year*middle			-0.02 (0.02)			-0.04 (0.03)
Year*high			-0.07 (0.03)			-0.08 (0.03)
Year*missing			0.01 (0.05)			-0.10 (0.06)
-2 Log likelihood	1,521.461	1,533.686	1,573.875	1,465.407	1,465.833	1,482.539

Note: *Local co-ethnic marriage as the reference category.

Table 5: Log odds of multinomial logistic regression analyses: Partner type of the second generation, Moroccan minority members*

	Moroccan men (N = 17,377)			Moroccan women (N = 18,380)		
	M0	M1	M2	M0	M1	M2
TRANSNATIONAL						
<i>Intercept</i>	0.42 (0.05)	0.45 (0.06)	0.60 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.05)	0.01 (0.06)	0.18 (0.07)
<i>Year</i>	-0.19 (0.01)	-0.18 (0.01)	-0.21 (0.01)	-0.17 (0.01)	-0.16 (0.01)	-0.20 (0.01)
<i>Marriage age</i>						
Younger	-0.16 (0.05)	0.19 (0.08)	-0.12 (0.05)	0.66 (0.05)	0.95 (0.08)	0.66 (0.05)
Older	0.91 (0.05)	0.68 (0.10)	0.84 (0.05)	0.53 (0.06)	0.30 (0.10)	0.48 (0.06)
Remarriage	0.98 (0.05)	0.75 (0.10)	0.92 (0.05)	1.02 (0.05)	0.87 (0.08)	0.98 (0.05)
<i>Educational attainment</i>						
Middle	-0.48 (0.04)	-0.51 (0.04)	-0.68 (0.07)	-0.25 (0.04)	-0.29 (0.04)	-0.49 (0.07)
High	-0.96 (0.06)	-0.99 (0.06)	-1.29 (0.11)	-0.58 (0.06)	-0.60 (0.06)	-0.94 (0.10)
Missing	0.16 (0.08)	0.13 (0.08)	-0.47 (0.13)	0.88 (0.09)	0.91 (0.09)	0.91 (0.17)
<i>Year*age</i>						
Year*younger		-0.09 (0.02)			-0.08 (0.02)	
Year*older		0.04 (0.02)			0.05 (0.02)	
Year*remarriage		0.04 (0.02)			0.03 (0.02)	
<i>Year*educational attainment</i>						
Year*middle			0.04 (0.01)			0.05 (0.01)
Year*high			0.07 (0.02)			0.09 (0.02)
Year*missing			0.14 (0.02)			0.00 (0.03)
MIXED						
<i>Intercept</i>	-1.10 (0.06)	-1.05 (0.07)	-1.06 (0.08)	-1.83 (0.07)	-1.75 (0.08)	-1.76 (0.10)
<i>Year</i>	-0.03 (0.01)	0.03 (0.01)	0.03 (0.01)	-0.03 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)
<i>Marriage age</i>						
Younger	-0.43 (0.07)	-0.48 (0.12)	-0.10 (0.06)	-0.43 (0.10)	-0.36 (0.16)	-0.25 (0.09)
Older	0.59 (0.06)	0.74 (0.12)	0.33 (0.06)	1.30 (0.06)	1.37 (0.11)	1.08 (0.06)
Remarriage	0.44 (0.06)	0.17 (0.14)	0.22 (0.06)	1.24 (0.06)	1.02 (0.11)	1.02 (0.06)
<i>Educational attainment</i>						
Middle	-0.17 (0.05)	-0.18 (0.05)	-0.22 (0.10)	0.01 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.06)	0.05 (0.12)
High	-0.02 (0.07)	-0.07 (0.07)	0.14 (0.13)	0.33 (0.07)	0.27 (0.07)	0.37 (0.13)
Missing	0.05 (0.11)	-0.01 (0.10)	-0.15 (0.19)	0.86 (0.12)	0.76 (0.12)	1.38 (0.23)
<i>Year*age</i>						
Year*younger		0.07 (0.02)			0.02 (0.03)	
Year*older		-0.07 (0.02)			-0.06 (0.02)	
Year*remarriage		0.01 (0.02)			0.00 (0.02)	
<i>Year*educational attainment</i>						
Year*middle			0.01 (0.02)			-0.01 (0.02)
Year*high			-0.04 (0.02)			-0.02 (0.02)
Year*missing			0.03 (0.03)			-0.12 (0.04)
-2 Loglikelihood	1,894.678	1,829.513	1,900.607	1,841.969	1,791.078	1,819.332

Note: *Local co-ethnic marriage as the reference category.

7. Discussion

Our results show that the partner selection behavior of Turkish and Moroccan minorities is changing after being constant for a long time. From the trend of transnational marriages, we can firmly conclude that the previously reported decline until 2008 indeed was the first phase of a strong downward trend, resulting in a gradually diminishing preference for transnational marriages up until 2015 (confirming Hypothesis 1). Although transnational marriages are still highly prevalent in 2005, by 2015, local co-ethnic marriages are preferred by all subpopulations when marrying for the first time and by the second generation when remarrying.

This strong downward trend reveals a new dynamic within Turkish and Moroccan chain migration. Until now, these immigration flows were considered self-perpetuating, as the majority of both the first and second generations chose a transnational partner. However, if marriage migration remains prominent among only first-generation minority members who remarry, it will both influence the characteristics of the migration flows, which are currently defined by family migration, and significantly alter the structure of the minority populations in Belgium.

We expected a negative effect of the implementation of restrictive requirements for marriage migration on the prevalence of transnational marriages, as observed in the Netherlands (Leerkes and Kulu-Glasgow 2011) and Sweden (Carol, Ersanilli, and Wagner 2014). Our results describe, however, a limited but reinforcing negative effect of these restrictive measurements on the prevalence of transnational marriages (partially confirming and nuancing Hypothesis 2) because the decline precedes the year of implementation, especially among the second generation. Hence, the restrictive measures may reinforce an ongoing declining trend already occurring due to a multitude of possible mechanisms (e.g., increasing community size, decreasing transnational ties and parental influence, or changing partner selection attitudes).

Furthermore, we confirm Hypothesis 3, expecting a decreasing positive effect of marrying at a younger age on the odds of marrying transnationally. This supports previous research hypothesizing the prevalence of transnational partnerships declines partially because parents exercise less control over the partner selection process (Van Kerckem et al. 2013; Huschek, de Valk, and Liefbroer 2012). An evolution toward more autonomy has also been reported in Turkey. Kâğıtçıbaşı and Ataca (2005) describe an evolution in family values, facilitated by processes of modernization, from family-initiated to partner-initiated partnerships between generations. Hence, both in the origin country and among minority members in Belgium, an evolution toward more individualization in partner selection may be present, possibly contributing to a decline in transnational marriages.

The prevalence of mixed marriages increases among almost all subpopulations. Moreover, when the second generation marries, mixed marriages are not the least preferred partner type; transnational marriages are. Hence, these results partially confirm Hypothesis 4.

Although ethnic endogamy is strongly adhered to, three of our results indicate that openness toward mixed marriages is slowly increasing. A first indication is a systematic increase in mixed marriages, especially among female minority members, which is unexpected as women generally experience higher barriers to marrying a non-co-ethnic partner than men. A second indication is the confirmation of Hypothesis 5, expecting a decreasing positive effect of marriage age on the odds of entering into a mixed marriage. This suggests a declining social resistance to mixed marriages as they are no longer exclusively formed by older, more mature, and independent minority members. Finally, a third indication is the partial confirmation of Hypothesis 6, expecting a decreasing positive effect of educational attainment on the odds of entering into a mixed marriage. The odds of entering into a mixed marriage with higher educated minority members decrease, while they increase so strongly among the lower educated that by 2015, their likelihood of choosing this partner type surpasses that of the higher educated. This finding contradicts previous studies, concluding that mixed marriages are especially prevalent among the higher educated (Hartung *et al.* 2011; Huschek, de Valk, and Liefbroer 2012). Feelings of belonging to the minority group and adhering to the norm of ethnic endogamy are assumed to be less present among higher educated minority members (Lieberson and Waters 1988; Kalmijn 1998). Furthermore, the higher educated are supposed to have more contact opportunities with non-co-ethnic peers compared to the lower educated. However, our results suggest these mechanisms may no longer be exclusive to the higher educated. It is likely that the social and religious norms regarding endogamy are becoming less strict, reducing the enabling effect of having higher educational attainment and making mixed partnerships more accessible to all minority members. Furthermore, it is possible that the contact hypothesis, as ascribed above, may become less relevant for second-generation minority members. Second-generation members, regardless of their educational level, receive educational training in Belgium at least until they are 18 years old, resulting in substantial interethnic contact with out-group members during their education. Lower educated minority members could, like higher educated members, meet a suitable non-co-ethnic partner during their education or establish friendship ties with non-co-ethnics, leading to more positive intergroup attitudes and a possible mixed partnership later in life (Pettigrew 1998).

The structural changes in the partner selection behavior observed here disclose much about the orientation of minority members. After being oriented toward the origin country for decades, the shift toward the local marriage market, including non-co-ethnic partners, is particularly relevant because, first, marriage migration has recently been the focus of

immigration policies and public debates in several European countries (Van Kerckem et al. 2013; Kraler 2010; Jørgensen 2013) as transnational partnerships are believed to hinder the integration process. However, our results indicate that a strong prevalence of transnational marriages is diminishing, possibly initiated by other mechanisms (e.g., increasing community size, decreasing transnational ties, or changing partner selection attitudes) and reinforced by strict immigration policies. Transnational marriage remains prevalent among first-generation minority members remarrying and second-generation minority members marrying for the first time at an older age. This could indicate that especially when there is a shortage of potential partners, minority members use their transnational networks to broaden their search toward the origin country. Second, the prevalence of mixed partnerships can be seen as a manifestation of integration, which diminishes social boundaries and can stimulate the growth of intergroup solidarity (Lieberson and Waters 1988; Qian and Lichter 2007; Waters and Jiménez 2005). Without defining exogamy as the main unifying force bridging ethnic differences, the increasing prevalence of mixed marriages could suggest that the social distance between ethnic groups in Belgian society may be decreasing slowly, especially when the prevalence increases among those minority members who were the least likely to choose a mixed marriage in the past: women, lower educated minority members, and minority members marrying at a younger age.

Of course, this study is not without limitations. A comprehensive insight into recent partner selection trends would benefit from including all minority members of marriageable age instead of only those who ‘successfully’ registered a marriage. Knowing which individuals marry and which do not and to what extent these numbers differ over time or between subpopulations would help to identify specific partner selection dynamics. For example, do minority members remain single if they cannot marry their transnational partner because of restrictive requirements or when they are confronted with a lack of suitable local co-ethnic candidates? Furthermore, using information on the educational attainment of Belgian residents available on January 1, 2011, has several implications. First, the number of missing values is high because, for minority members who obtained their diploma before migrating or who migrated after 2010, information on their educational attainment is not available. Second, the highest diploma in our analyses is not necessarily the same as the highest diploma obtained at the start of the partnership because our time frame ranges up until 2015. Third, it does not allow us to verify to what extent the observed partner selection trends covary with a possibly positive trend in educational attainment within the minority population. The same may be true with regard to an increasing trend in the average marriage age of Turkish and Moroccan minority members. Future research would benefit from taking such evolutions into account, possibly over a longer time.

Finally, analyzing register data has allowed us to comprehensively assess whether and to what degree the partner selection process of Turkish and Moroccan minorities in Belgium has changed over the last decade. It has not, however, enabled us to fully assess the possible mechanisms behind these changes, which creates several opportunities for future research. For example, do stricter immigration policies create socioeconomic and gender inequalities regarding the freedom to choose a partner, as reported in Dutch research (Leerkes and Kulu-Glasgow 2011)? To what extent is the ethnic distance between Turkish and Moroccan minority members and other ethnic groups declining, and why are lower educated minority members increasingly choosing a mixed marriage?

Studying Turkish and Moroccan minority members in Belgium is the equivalent of studying two minority groups in a small country. Notwithstanding our sample's specificity, however, its relevance lies in the fact that we identify trends that can be indicative of partner selection behavior of Turkish and Moroccan minorities in other countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden (Carol, Ersanilli, and Wagner 2014; Leerkes and Kulu-Glasgow 2011). Our comprehensive overview of recent partner selection trends shows that Turkish and Moroccan minorities' partner selection has structurally changed after being consistent for decades. Moreover, it nuances previous statements about the negative effects of restrictive immigration policies on the prevalence of transnational marriages. Our research thus provides greater insight into current partner selection decisions, which can be relevant for a wide group of minority members. It also identifies changes that influence immigration from Turkey and Morocco and demographic characteristics of minority groups, including their relationship to non-co-ethnics.

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Appendix

Figure A-1: Expected log odds to choose a transnational instead of a local co-ethnic marriage, per year and age category: (a) Turkish men, (b) Turkish women, (c) Moroccan men, (d) Moroccan women

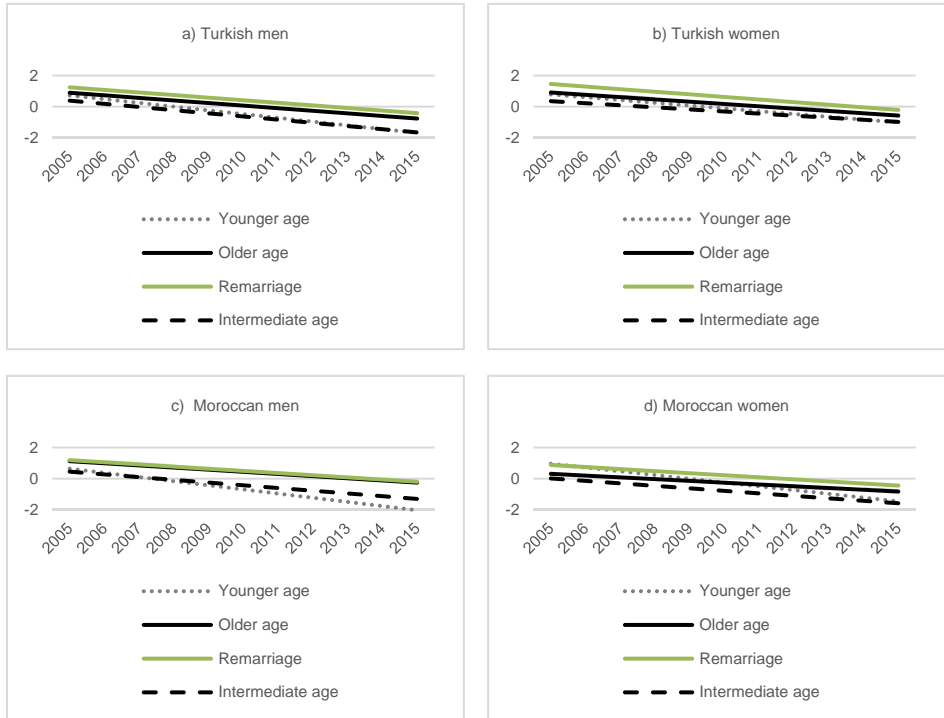


Figure A-2: Expected log odds to choose a mixed instead of a local co-ethnic marriage, per year and age category: (a) Turkish men, (b) Turkish women, (c) Moroccan men, (d) Moroccan men

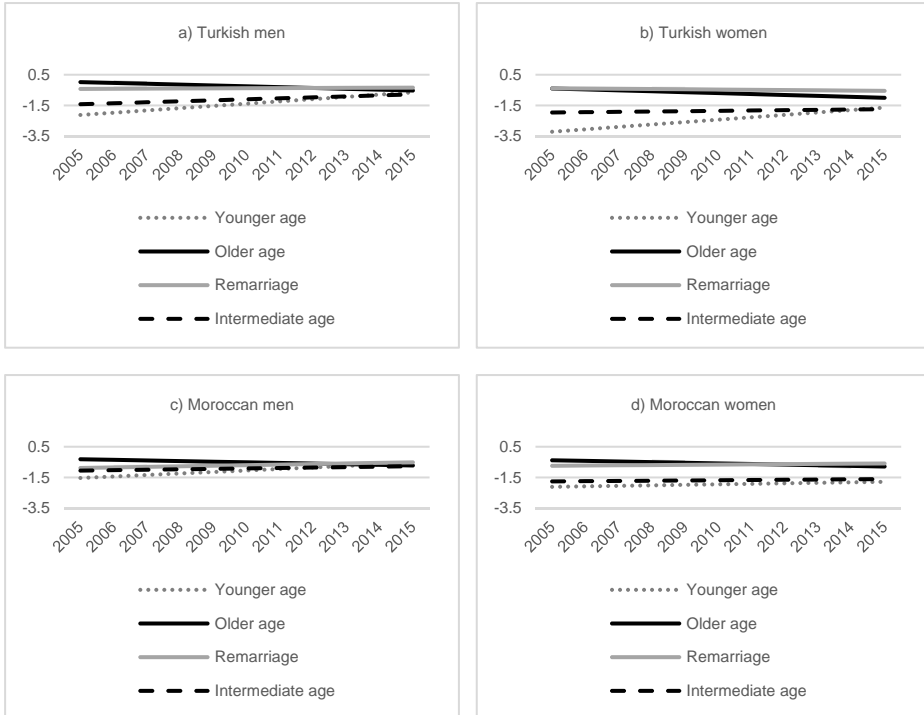


Figure A-3: Expected log odds to choose a transnational instead of a local co-ethnic marriage, per year and educational level: (a) Turkish men, (b) Turkish women, (c) Moroccan men, (d) Moroccan women

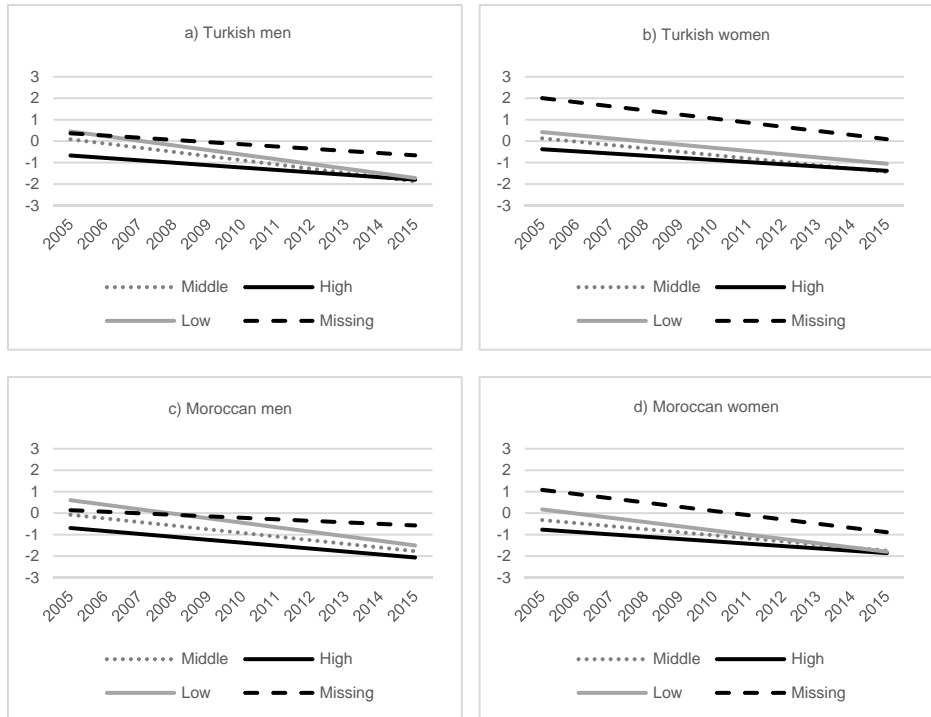


Figure A-4: Expected log odds to choose a mixed instead of a local co-ethnic marriage, per year and educational level: (a) Turkish men, (b) Turkish women, (c) Moroccan men, (d) Moroccan women

