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Editors: Koen Matthijs & Paul Puschmann
Family and Population Studies
KU Leuven, Belgium
hislives@kuleuven.be

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Partner Choices in Long Established Migrant Communities in Belgium

Emilien Dupont
Amelie Van Pottelberge
Bart Van de Putte
John Lievens
Frank Caestecker

University of Ghent

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to shed light on the partner choices of Moroccan, Turkish, Congolese, and Algerian migrants in Belgium. Three partner choices are distinguished: marrying a partner from the country of origin (partner migration), marrying a local co-ethnic partner, and establishing a mixed marriage. We focused on the role of migration history and transnational links, culture (religion, language), skin colour and structural characteristics of the district migrants live in (mainly community size) to gain further insight into the partner choices of migrants in Belgium. Our data comprise an extraction of the Belgian national register (2001-2008) and focus on first marriages among first, 1.5, and second generation migrants of Moroccan, Turkish, Algerian, and Congolese origin (N=52,142). We apply a multinomial logistic multilevel design to simultaneously incorporate individual and contextual effects at the district level. The main conclusion from this paper is that the partner selection pattern in early 21st century Belgian society still bears the traces of the starting conditions that migrant groups experienced when they first entered the country. While this continuity is important to understand the situation citizens with a migrant origin have to deal with today, it does not make change impossible. In fact, for the Turkish and Moroccan group, research recently showed a quite strong decline in transnational marriages and a modest increase in mixed marriages. These are indications that after 50 years of migration a transition towards full inclusion in Belgian society is not beyond reach. The conditions analysed in this paper, namely the strength of transnational networks, the cultural boundaries and the ethnic community size, may help to understand why this inclusion takes such a long period of time.

Keywords: Immigrants, Migration History, Migrant Origin, Belgium, Partner Choices, Transnational Marriages, Multinomial Multilevel, Patterns

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1 INTRODUCTION

Partner choice has often been used in research as a litmus test for assimilation and integration (Coleman 1994; Dribe & Lundh 2011; Lesthaeghe 2000; Waters & Jiménez 2005). High levels of ethnically mixed marriages are seen as manifestations of assimilation, while a high level of inmarriages could indicate a large social and cultural distance between the migrant group and the native population (Lucassen & Laarman 2009) and could hinder or even fully inhibit the integration process (Hooghiemstra 2001; Lesthaeghe 2000; Lichter, Carmalt & Qian 2011; Surkyn & Reniers 1997). Transnational marriages (marriages between a migrant and a partner from the country of origin established via a process of partner migration) could signal an even larger distance to the country of residence since it could express a yearning towards a more traditional way of life. Nowadays however, this view has been strongly criticized and questioned (Lievens 1997, 1999; Song 2009; Waters & Jiménez 2005). Choosing a partner from the country of origin should not always be considered as an expression of traditional behaviour, but can also be instigated by modern motives as it can, for example, empower women (Lievens 1997, 1999). In any case, high levels of partner migration indicate a persistent orientation towards the country of origin.

Partner selection patterns vary between different migrant groups, as it is to a large extent dependent upon group-specific characteristics of the migration process (e.g. transnational marriages seem to be influenced by the strength of the role of the family in the migration process, Reniers 1999), the social, cultural and economic differences between migrant groups and the native population (e.g. differences in religion, language and value orientation, cf. Kalmijn & van Tubergen 2006; Dribe & Lundh 2011), and structural opportunities within migrant communities (such as the local ethnic community size, cf. e.g. Kalmijn & van Tubergen 2006). To put it more strongly, the conditions under which migration patterns are established and the conditions which migrant communities experience in the decades after this starting point have a strong and lasting influence on the partner selection patterns, even until today.

In this paper we examine how these 'starting conditions' differ for migrant groups in Belgium and how these conditions have a lasting effect on partner selection patterns. Such a focus on meso- and macro-level characteristics requires a comparative framework. Because migration waves started around the same time for Congolese, Algerian, Turkish, and Moroccan migrants, these long-established migrant groups in Belgium constitute an interesting case for comparative study. Turkish, Moroccan, and Algerian migration started out as labour migration in the 1960s. Congolese migrants entered the country as students as part of the Belgian assistance to the decolonization (Schoonvaere 2010). We analyse differences between these groups in the prevalence of mixed marriages, local intra-ethnic marriages and partner migration by applying multinomial logistic multilevel analyses on partner selection data for the period 2001-2008.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

First we discuss partner selection patterns in general terms. In section 3 we apply these theoretical insights to the four migrant groups under study.

Generally, people prefer a partner who resembles them, a phenomenon called 'homophily' (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook 2001). The most important and most often occurring similarities apply to age, socio-economic status, cultural background and skin colour. For this reason ethnic groups, related as they are to cultural traits (religion, language, e.g. Dribe & Lundh 2011) and more visible characteristics such as skin colour (Kalmijn & van Tubergen 2006), may be separated by strong boundaries that are difficult to overcome. Since partnerships permeate the private sphere and are very intimate choices, group boundaries are most prominent and visible in this domain (Pagnini & Morgan 1990). These ethnic boundaries do however differ in strength. Alba (2005) distinguishes between bright and blurred boundaries. Bright boundaries are highly visible, while blurred boundaries are more covert and less salient. When group boundaries between different ethnic groups are weak, mixed marriages are expected to be more frequent as ethnicity becomes a less salient feature. When boundaries are strong, intra-ethnic marriages are more likely.

Yet, these boundaries can be overcome. The contact theory, founded by Allport (1954), and further developed and enhanced by Pettigrew (cf. e.g. Pettigrew 1997, 1998), gives us some understanding of the underlying process. The contact theory is especially salient to the topic of partner choice, as the theory states that especially long-term close relationships, as opposed to initial acquaintanceships, are more related to constructive contact. According to the contact theory, optimal intergroup contact requires five conditions: "The situation must allow equal group status within the situation, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and authority support (...) and it must have 'friendship potential'" (Pettigrew 1998, p.80). These conditions are potentially problematic for migrant groups in Belgium. Migrants, especially of non-European origin, are often disregarded, belittled, and even discriminated against (Van der Bracht, Van de Putte & Verhaeghe 2013; Vandezande, Phaet, & Swyngedouw 2011; Zeleza 2002). Equal group status may be the prevailing norm as governments install anti-discriminatory laws. In reality however there still exists a lot of discrimination and even racism impeding intergroup cooperation. As a result, mixed marriages can be expected to be rather rare. However, as not all migrant groups have the same religion, language and skin colour, we can also expect that group boundaries will differ in brightness. The differences between the groups analysed in this paper will be discussed in section 3.2.

This debate on contact and boundaries requires elaboration. Contacts and boundaries on the local marriage market are not the only determinants of partner selection. Another crucial factor is the strength of the contacts with the country of origin. For a marriage with a partner from the country of origin to take place, strong bonds are needed with the community in the country of origin because marriage negotiations are usually a rather delicate matter, especially when information on potential spouses is lacking or when it is ambiguous (Reniers 1999). Furthermore, the establishment of these partnerships requires complicated and intense negotiations given the emotional and physical distance between the spouses and their families (Reniers 1999). These negotiations are facilitated by mediating networks, or bonds between the sending and receiving communities. Because partner migration is strengthened by, and enhances in turn strong bonds between communities in the sending and receiving countries (Reniers 1999), partner migration will be the strongest among communities with tight networks.

From the very start of a migration process these networks are shaped by the specific characteristics of a migration process. Contacts with the country of origin are facilitated when the migration process started as a more or less involuntary 'state organized' and 'temporary project' (with return migration as the default option for the future), when family members are still present in the country and when migrants stem from strong (typically rural) communities. These are all factors that may stimulate the growth of a 'transnational social space' (Beck-Gernsheim 2007): networks between countries of origin and countries of destination. In case migrants came individually and without the intention of a quick return, contacts with the country of origin are less easily maintained. The importance of transnational links for the groups studied in this paper will be analysed in section 3.3.

Apart from the role of local boundaries and transnational links, structural - demographic - characteristics at the level of the district one lives in, also shape contact opportunities.¹ Structural barriers exist that could promote or inhibit the extent to which different groups can meet and get in contact with one another (Pettigrew 1998; Blau 1977, 1994). Blau's structural opportunity theory explains the regulation of relationships between groups on a macro-level. When meeting opportunities between groups are limited, individuals within that group will predominantly establish intra-group relationships. Even though it is possible that individuals wish to establish mixed marriages, structural characteristics could make intra-group marriages more likely. The structural opportunity theory can therefore explain choices which seemingly contradict individual interests and preferences (Blau 1994).

A crucial structural characteristic is community size. A large ethnic community offers more opportunities to meet co-ethnics. This has already been shown in many cases (e.g. Kalmijn & van Tubergen 2006; Teule, Vanderwaeren & Mbah-Fongkimeh, 2012). Meeting a co-ethnic in the district in which one lives is simply easier when the ethnic community is larger and thus includes a greater pool of possible candidates (Blau 1994). Moreover, the size of the ethnic community is likely to strengthen the possibility of performing social control. The latter is, in the case of the Turkish group, interpreted by Van Kerckem et al. (2013) as a force of *ethnic community pressure*, namely the "pressure ... to conform to those norms, values, and cultural practices that are deemed central to the ethnic group's

1 Within our analyses, we consider districts and not cities (for methodological reasons, see further). There are 43 Belgian districts in total which constitute the administrative level between municipalities and provinces in Belgium.

identity" (p.337). Therefore, local intra-ethnic marriages will probably be more prevalent within larger ethnic communities, while mixed marriages are less likely. We do not expect a clear pattern for partner migration, as large groups both stimulate partner migration (by stronger levels of social control) and inhibit it (because of the large local pool of intra-ethnic potential partners).

Community size is a crucial structural variable that is closely connected to the migration history of each group, as it is related to the size of the migration stream and the settlement pattern (spatial segregation). But there are more structural characteristics of the societal conditions experienced by migrant group that may play a role. When *diversity levels*, defined as the extent to which different ethnicities live in a given district, are more pronounced, the likelihood of relations between groups within that district increases (Blau 1994; Lievens 1998; McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook. 2001). Apart from its possible relationship with community size,² a high level of diversity within a district may weaken group boundaries and promote inter-ethnic contacts as it creates a condition in which group boundaries can be expected to be less easily protected. To put it simply, a 10% minority group will have more chance to have inter-ethnic contacts in the case where the other 90% belongs to different groups rather than to one group. For this reason, we expect that diversity promotes mixed marriages and impedes intra-ethnic marriages.

Another factor is *district size*. Large districts, or cities, are appealing to migrants for several reasons, such as employment and anonymity, and are therefore characterised by diversity (Amin & Thrift 2002; Hoekstra 2015). Especially in Europe, ghettoization is quasi non-existent (Wacquant 2008). In cities, migrants are never completely isolated as there is always a certain degree of diversity. Even in the poorer parts of the inner city, there is often a mix of migrants, older residents and younger households (Buzar et al. 2007). Apart from the community size and the level of diversity within the district, inter-ethnic contacts may be stimulated by the size of the district, as larger districts provide more anonymity. Minorities spread over a larger district will have less ability to perform social control over their members (cf. Van Kerckem et al. 2013). Put simply, a minority group will probably be more successful in establishing interethnic relationships in large, urbanised districts as group boundaries are typically less easy to maintain in these conditions. Hence we expect that within larger districts, mixed marriages are more prevalent.

A final structural factor is *sex ratio*. The chance to marry a co-ethnic is related to the number of different-sex co-ethnics within a local community. When there is a shortage of different-sex partners, partner choices have to be adapted (Blau 1994; McPherson et al. 2001). One has the choice of opting for a partner living in a different district (but contacts with co-ethnics living in different districts might not be easily established), a partner from the country of origin (partner migration), or search for a partner with a different ethnicity (mixed marriage). When the number of women versus men is balanced within the local ethnic community, the likelihood of finding a local co-ethnic partner is elevated (Gonzalez-Ferrer 2006; Kalmijn & van Tubergen 2006). In districts with balanced sex ratios a local ethnic marriage market may be more easily institutionalised as the logical first option to look at.

The importance of structural characteristics at the district level for the groups studied in this paper will be analysed in section 3.4.

3 TURKISH, MOROCCAN, ALGERIAN AND CONGOLESE MIGRANTS IN BELGIUM

In the next sections we discuss the specific situation of the Turkish, Moroccan, Algerian and Congolese migrants in Belgium. First we give some background information on these groups. After that, specific characteristics of these groups and potential consequences for the partner selection pattern will be discussed. We discuss 1. the migration history and transnational connections; 2. the significance of cultural characteristics (language and religion) and skin colour for social boundaries; and 3. structural factors (community size, diversity level, district size, and sex ratio). To conclude the theoretical framework, we consider individual characteristics (sex, generation, and age) that could influence the partner choice.

² One may expect that a high community size is associated with a lower diversity level.

3.1 BACKGROUND

The first large inflow of Turkish, Moroccan and, to a lesser extent, Algerian labour migrants was situated in the 1960s (Lievens 2000; Reniers 1999; Schoonvaere 2013, 2014; Surkyn & Reniers 1997).³ This was formalised through bilateral agreements between the Belgian government and the governments of the respective countries (for Morocco and Turkey: in 1964, for Algeria: in 1969) to cope with the shortage of workers in Western-European economies (Lesthaeghe 2000; Reniers 1999). After the formal migration stop in 1974, migration numbers kept on rising due to family reunification (predominantly in the 1970s) and family formation (started in the 1980s, also known as the wave of partner migration). From then on, the guest worker flow was gradually transformed into a permanent settlement. In 1996, after three decades of migration there were about 140.000 people of Moroccan and 82.000 people of Turkish descent present in Belgium (Eggerickx et al. 1999). Until today, family formation is still ongoing, and constitutes the most important route for residents of non-European origin to enter Western-European countries, and more specifically Belgium after immigration policies became even stricter (Caestecker 2011; Carol, Ersanilli & Wagner 2014; Demo & CGKR 2013). In 2006, there were about 250,000 Moroccans and 140,000 Turks present in Belgium (by nationality at birth, Schoonvaere 2010).

The Algerian group was much smaller: about 20,000 in 2006 (by nationality at birth, Schoonvaere 2010). Also its characteristics differ. Because of the strong colonial link between France and Algeria, the latter has been greatly influenced by France politically, economically, culturally, and linguistically (Lucassen & Laarman 2009). This resulted in a large influx of labour migrants, especially in the 1960s (Stora 1991; Tribalat 1995). Mixed marriages between Algerian and French residents were more frequent as the social distance between these two groups was to a certain extent reduced. Furthermore, Algerian migrants came in contact with European values and the structure and operation of the political systems which also led some migration streams to Belgium.

Congolese migration can be explained by the colonial link between Congo and Belgium. The history of the Congolese colonisation began in 1884, when Congo was allocated to Belgium (van Heelsum & Hessels 2006). Until 1908 it was a sovereign state, a private colony of King Leopold II of Belgium (Viaene, Van Reybrouck, & Ceuppens 2009). After the Congolese independence in 1960, Congolese migrants began arriving in Belgium when the circumstances in Congo deteriorated (Swyngedouw & Swyngedouw 2009; Viaene et al. 2009). Congolese migrants entered as students, business men, tourists, and diplomats (Schoonvaere 2010). During the 1970s and 1980s, Congolese migration streams continued, and in 1991 there were about 12,000 Congolese inhabitants in Belgium (Eggerickx et al. 1999). Worsening economic conditions due to political and socio-economic crises in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), stimulated migration to more prosperous Western-European countries (Losango-Nzinga 2008; Sumata 2007). Migration was particularly aimed at Belgium because of the colonial past (Sumata 2007; Zeleza 2002). This way, the asylum channel brought the rather delayed arrival of Congolese migrants to Belgium (Caestecker 2011). As a result, there were about 40,000 Congolese inhabitants in 2006 (nationality at birth, Schoonvaere 2010).

3.2 MIGRATION HISTORY AND PARTNER MIGRATION

The Turkish community in Belgium is characterised by strong network ties between the sending and receiving Turkish communities (Lievens 1999; Surkyn & Reniers 1997). These ties are inherently connected to the migration history. The greater part of labour migrants who settled in Belgium in the 1960s were already married before migrating (Schoonvaere 2013). It was only after the migration stop in 1974 that Turkish migration lost its temporary character and changed into a permanent settlement. The remaining families were 'stimulated' to join their partners in Belgium as commuting between Belgium and Turkey was severely limited or even impossible. Furthermore, labour migrants were predominantly recruited from the more rural areas in Turkey (Lievens 2000; Surkyn & Reniers 1997). Because these rural areas are characterised by stronger community ties, this enabled a close connection between the communities in Belgium and Turkey (Surkyn & Reniers 1997). These communities were to a certain extent re-established in the country of destination. Reniers uses the concept of 'transplanted' communities in this respect (1999).

3 Turkish and Moroccan migrant groups have been extensively studied in Belgium. Belgian literature is much more scarce on Algerian and Congolese migrants (Schoonvaere 2010; Swyngedouw & Swyngedouw 2009).

Network ties between the sending and receiving Moroccan communities are considered to be somewhat weaker compared to the Turkish ones (Lievens 1999; Surkyn & Reniers 1997). Partly, Moroccan migration was also inspired by 'socio-cultural' motives as Moroccan migrants were pulled by prospects of a better way of life in Western Europe, rather than only being pushed away from their country of origin (Reniers 1999; Surkyn & Reniers 1997). It was a rather individual project (Lesthaeghe 2000; Reniers 1999). Since these migrants were less inclined to return to Morocco, their migration was more permanent in character. Furthermore, migrants were recruited from bigger cities and capitals of provinces and therefore originated from more fragmented and heterogeneous communities. This heterogeneity concerns the marital status, educational level, religious-political orientation, and socioeconomic status (Lesthaeghe 2000; Lesthaeghe, Surkyn, & Van Craenem 2000; Reniers 1999; Surkyn 2000). All this may explain the somewhat weaker network ties between communities in Belgium and Morocco (Surkyn & Reniers 1997). Yet, it should be stressed that also Moroccan migration was also partly stimulated and organised by the governments, via bilateral agreements (supra).

Algerian migrants came in the context of labour agreements like Moroccan and Turkish migrants. However, Algerian migration was less of a family matter which resulted in an absence of strong networks between Belgium and Algeria (De Bock 2012). Furthermore, Algerians entered Belgium in much smaller numbers, resulting in smaller communities. While larger communities can slow down partner migration by offering a large pool of local intra-ethnic potential partners, some size was probably needed to set up and maintain strong connections with the country of origin.

Since Congolese migrants also entered Belgium in smaller amounts and were typified by greater variety - they came mostly as asylum seekers, students, business men, tourists, or diplomats - these migration streams were also characterised by weaker ties with the country of origin (Caestecker 2011; Schoonvaere 2010).

From this, we derive our first hypothesis: *we expect partner migration to occur most often within the Turkish group, followed by the Moroccan, Algerian, and Congolese group* (hypothesis 1). We expect such a pattern because of differences in the strength of the ties with the country of origin, and therefore expect it to be still observable after controlling for relevant structural (and individual) characteristics.

3.3 BOUNDARIES AND MIXED MARRIAGES

Research indicates that religion in Europe is a more salient factor for partner choice than colour or racial differences (Lucassen & Laarman 2009). That particularly Muslim migrants, such as those from Turkish, Moroccan and Algerian origin seem to experience a negative image in Belgium is in line with this claim (Van der Bracht, Van de Putte & Verhaeghe 2013). This is likely to limit the willingness to establish mixed marriages from the side of Belgian natives, as well as from migrants residing in Belgium. From this, we can expect that Congolese migrants are more likely to be involved in mixed marriages as they predominantly adhere to a Christian religion.

The cultural distance is most likely largest for the Turkish migrants, as Turkey was less strongly influenced by the dominant political systems and values in Europe due to the absence of a colonial past, leaving the dominance of Islam and the endogamous family system fairly intact (Lucassen & Laarman 2009). Algerians and Moroccans are more likely to experience less distance to European society (Reniers 1999), although it needs to be stressed that particularly the large Moroccan group also included many rural, lowly-educated guest workers whose situation was very similar to the Turkish immigrant group.

Another cultural factor that is a possible barrier separating the ethnic minority from the majority is the language proficiency. Dutch, French and German are the official languages in Belgium, and are the mother tongues of respectively 56, 38, and 0.4% of the Belgian population in 2005 (Eurobarometer 2006). The language barrier is the weakest for the Congolese group, as French is the official language in the Democratic Republic of Congo (CIA World Factbook 2015). The Algerian and Moroccan group occupy an intermediate position. French is the lingua franca in Algeria, a common language for people speaking different languages. French is often the language of business, government, and diplomacy in Morocco and serves as the second language (Lesthaeghe 2000). Unlike the three other nationalities, Turkish immigrants typically do not have any knowledge of any of the three official Belgian languages. We hypothesise that *these cultural factors make mixed marriages more probable for Congolese*

migrants and less likely for the Turkish, while the Algerian and Moroccan group take up an intermediate position (hypothesis 2a). Our next hypothesis elaborates on the language argument. If knowledge of the French language weakens boundaries, we should observe an *elevated likelihood of mixed marriages within the French-speaking communities (Brussels and Wallonia) for the French-speaking migrant groups (Congolese, Moroccan, and Algerian groups)* (hypothesis 2b). Besides cultural factors, we also take a more visible factor into account, the skin colour. The Congolese group is more dark-skinned compared to the Turkish, Moroccan, and Algerian groups. Therefore, we expect *Congolese migrants to establish fewer mixed marriages compared to Turkish, Moroccan, and Algerian migrants* (hypothesis 3).

3.4 STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS INFLUENCING THE PARTNER CHOICE

The most crucial difference with regard to the four groups is related to community size (see table 1). The highest average community size is observed for Moroccans, followed by the Turks. The average community size is much lower for the Congolese and particularly for the Algerians. Hence we expect that *local intra-ethnic marriages will be stimulated for the Moroccans and, to a lesser extent, for the Turks, while for the Congolese and particularly the Algerians local intra-ethnic marriages will be relatively more difficult* (hypothesis 4).

Differences in diversity level and district size are much weaker. Sex ratio is for these four large groups in very few districts 'very unbalanced'. There are some differences regarding the 'unbalanced category', which is higher for the Turkish and the Algerians. As the differences between the groups are albeit relatively small, we do not expect many consequences for the partner selection pattern. These variables are included in the analyses as control variables.

3.5 INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS INFLUENCING THE PARTNER CHOICE

Finally we turn to individual characteristics, which are included as control variables.

3.5.1 SEX

According to Lievens (1999) Turkish and Moroccan men have a somewhat higher chance to marry a partner from the country of origin. Yet, both sexes have motivations to choose partner migration, although the rationale behind it may well be very different. Men could prefer a less emancipated partner from their country of origin compared to women in Belgium (Beck-Gernsheim 2007; Lievens 1999; Reniers & Lievens 1997). Women on the other hand could choose a man from their country of origin because of the freedom and autonomy it offers (Hooghiemstra 2003). After all, women living in Belgium know the language, the customs and traditions by definition better than their husbands from the country of origin. This may result in a superior position of women (Beck-Gernsheim 2007).

Overall, studies indicate that men are more likely to establish mixed marriages compared to women (Hooghiemstra 2003; Kalmijn & van Tubergen 2006; Lucassen & Laarman 2009; van Tubergen & Maas 2006). One possible explanation refers to patriarchal traditions, by which women are more constrained in choosing their preferred partner (Hooghiemstra 2003; Lucassen & Laarman 2009). Third parties could be, for example, resilient to Muslim women marrying non-Muslim men since their children take the religion of the father and are therefore considered as 'being lost' for the family and Islam (Kulzycki & Lobo 2002; Lucassen & Laarman 2009).

3.5.2 GENERATION

We distinguish different generations on the basis of the length of stay in Belgium. The first generation migrated from the age of 16 onwards, and consists predominantly of the early labour migrants, students, people who migrated because of humanitarian reasons, and asylum seekers (Myria 2015). Migrated partners are not included since we only consider first marriages. The 1.5 generation migrated between 6 and 15 years old, and the second generation migrated either before the age of 6 or was born in Belgium.

The socialisation and assimilation theories state that a longer socialisation period in the country of destination is related to a more engrained integration (Alba & Nee 1997; Lievens 1997). Since the second generation has been in Belgium for a longer time than the first and 1.5 generation and therefore

grew up, went to school and acquired the language, this could impact the partner choice as well as the possibilities and opportunities of finding an eligible partner (Carol et al. 2014; Gonzalez-Ferrer 2006). Furthermore, we can assume that the ties between the migrant and the country of origin are growing weaker with the following generations (Lesthaeghe 2000; Surkyn & Reniers 1997). We therefore expect that the 1.5 and first generation have a higher likelihood of choosing partner migration compared to the second generation, and a lower likelihood of choosing a mixed marriage.

3.5.3 AGE AT MARRIAGE

The parental influence on the partner choice can be related to the age at marriage. Parental influence weakens as children grow older and become more independent (Lievens 1997; van Zantvliet, Kalmijn, & Verbakel 2014). Generally, parents desire a partner for their child with the same ethnic origin, preferably from the country of origin (Lievens 1997). Other studies in various countries have reported a higher likelihood of mixed marriages and therefore a lower likelihood of partner migration at a higher age at marriage (Kalter & Schroedter 2010; Kulzycki & Lobo 2002). From this, we expect that partner migration is more likely when marrying at a younger age, while mixed marriages are more prevalent at a higher age.

4 DATA

Our data comprise an extraction of the Belgian national register and include all partnerships among first, 1.5, and second generation migrants from third countries, which are countries outside the European Economic Area and Switzerland. The data covers the period between 01/01/2001 and 31/12/2008. Two conditions had to be met: (1) at least one partner is a resident in Belgium before the partnership, (2) with a nationality at birth from a third country. We only selected migrants of Turkish, Moroccan, Congolese, and Algerian origin, since they belong to the more established migrant groups in Belgium (N=52,142). We excluded remarriages and cohabitations, focusing only on first marriages.

We identify three limitations in this paper. Broadly, these limitations arise from problems with the data. The first problem is related to the automatic naturalisation of ethnic minorities in Belgium from the early 1990s onwards. Therefore, the second generation could be underrepresented in our dataset. When one parent has the Belgian nationality, children (incl. minorities) born in Belgium automatically receive the Belgian nationality at birth. In that case they are omitted from the second generation group, although they are technically a part of it. However, we expect that this is not a substantial problem, as the large-scale naturalisation programs occurred in the early '90s. Because one has to be at least age 18 to get married, we only lose a small amount of this group. A second limitation is the lack of socio-economic information, such as educational attainment available at the individual level. One last limitation related to the nature of the dataset is the focus on nationality at birth to discern a migrant group. Ethnic differences within migrant groups are therefore ignored.

5 VARIABLES

Our descriptive analyses can be found in table 1.

5.1 DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Partner choice is a three-categorical variable (1 = Partner migration, 2 = Local intra-ethnic marriage, 3 = Mixed marriage). Partner migration and local intra-ethnic marriages are both marriages between people with the same nationality at birth. Mixed marriages include all marriages with someone of a different nationality. This is not limited to partners with a Belgian nationality. The category 'Local intra-ethnic marriage' serves as the reference category.

Table 1 *Descriptive analyses by nationality groups*

	Turkish			Moroccan			Congolese			Algerian		
	Range	N (%)		Range	N (%)		Range	N (%)		Range	N (%)	
		Mean (Std. Dev.)			Mean (Std. Dev.)			Mean (Std. Dev.)			Mean (Std. Dev.)	
Partner Choice												
Partner migration	0/1	8251	(52.3%)	0/1	13067	(43.5%)	0/1	782	(20.9%)	0/1	961	(37.5%)
Local intra-ethnic	0/1	5728	(36.3%)	0/1	11567	(38.5%)	0/1	1687	(45.0%)	0/1	312	(12.2%)
Mixed	0/1	1802	(11.4%)	0/1	5412	(18.0%)	0/1	1281	(34.2%)	0/1	1292	(50.4%)
Individual												
Sex												
Men	0/1	7875	(49.9%)	0/1	16214	(54.0%)	0/1	1833	(48.9%)	0/1	1641	(64.0%)
Women	0/1	7903	(50.1%)	0/1	13832	(46.0%)	0/1	1917	(51.1%)	0/1	924	(36.0%)
Generation												
First	0/1	1671	(10.6%)	0/1	6299	(21.0%)	0/1	2588	(69.0%)	0/1	1204	(46.9%)
1.5	0/1	1513	(9.6%)	0/1	2080	(6.9%)	0/1	596	(15.9%)	0/1	132	(5.1%)
Second	0/1	12597	(79.8%)	0/1	21667	(72.1%)	0/1	566	(15.1%)	0/1	1229	(47.9%)
Age												
Younger	0/1	5538	(35.1%)	0/1	8379	(27.9%)	0/1	1011	(27.0%)	0/1	684	(26.7%)
Intermediate	0/1	6783	(43.0%)	0/1	15275	(50.8%)	0/1	1909	(50.9%)	0/1	1326	(51.7%)
Older	0/1	3460	(21.9%)	0/1	6392	(21.3%)	0/1	830	(22.1%)	0/1	555	(21.6%)
Marriage year	1-8	4.46	(2.29)	1-8	4.58	(2.26)	1-8	4.92	(2.33)	1-8	4.49	2.18
Contextual												
Diversity level	0.55-0.99	0.82	(0.08)	0.55-0.99	0.73	(0.08)	0.55-0.99	0.72	(0.08)	0.55-0.99	0.78	(0.08)
District size	41103-1048491	583577	(220420.34)	41103-1048491	793824	(220420.34)	41103-1048491	738035	(220420.34)	41103-1048491	554065	(220420.34)
Sex ratio												
Very unbalanced	0/1	840	(5.3%)	0/1	1661	(5.5%)	0/1	279	(7.4%)	0/1	195	(7.6%)
Unbalanced	0/1	6581	(41.7%)	0/1	7813	(26.0%)	0/1	743	(19.8%)	0/1	1350	(52.6%)
Balanced	0/1	8360	(53.0%)	0/1	20572	(68.5%)	0/1	2728	(72.7%)	0/1	1020	(39.8%)
Community size	0-16415	1019.33	(2244.86)	0-54991	1992.03	(6861.45)	0-8260	352.18	(1199.15)	3-2338	177.77	(434.24)
Region												
Flanders	0/1	8155	(51.7%)	0/1	8604	(28.6%)	0/1	388	(10.3%)	0/1	392	(15.3%)
Wallonia	0/1	3574	(22.6%)	0/1	5005	(16.7%)	0/1	1173	(31.3%)	0/1	1422	(55.4%)
Brussels	0/1	4052	(25.7%)	0/1	16437	(54.7%)	0/1	2189	(58.4%)	0/1	751	(29.3%)

5.2 INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL VARIABLES

Nationality is a four-categorical variable (1 = Morocco, 2 = Congo, 3 = Turkey, 4 = Algeria) with Moroccan migrants as the reference category. This variable was based on the nationality at birth.

Sex is a dichotomous variable with 'men' as the reference category.

Generation is a three-categorical variable (1 = First generation, 2 = 1.5 Generation, 3 = Second generation) based on the country of birth and the age of migration (see section 4.2). The second generation serves as the reference category.

The *age at marriage* is a three-categorical variable (1 = Young age, 2 = Intermediate, age, 3 = Older age). This categorization is dependent on the subpopulation. A distinction was made on the basis of nationality at birth and the sex. The cut-off points for each category, was based on the quartiles (respectively <0.25, between 0.25 and 0.75, and >0.75). The corresponding ages are depicted in table 2. Marrying at an intermediate age, is the reference category.

Marriage year is a metric variable, based on the year of marriage. Since our dataset is a selection within the Belgian national register, we have information about all marriages from 2001 until 2008. With this variable, we control changes in partner preferences through time.

Table 2 *Categories 'Age at marriage'*

	Moroccans		Turks		Congolese		Algerians	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Young age	<24	<20	<22	<20	<29	<25	<27	<22
Intermediate age	24-31	20-26	22-27	20-24	29-38	25-33	27-35	22-30
Older age	>31	>26	>27	>24	>38	>33	>35	>30

5.3 DISTRICT LEVEL VARIABLES

Community size measures the size of the migrant community in a district.

The *degree of diversity* is calculated using the Herfindahl index (Rhoades 1993). When applied to diversity, this index measures the sum of quadrats of the percentages of all nationalities residing in every district. A higher value reflects a more homogeneous ethnic composition in a district. In practice, a high index mostly indicates a district that largely consists of ethnic Belgians.

District size measures the total number of inhabitants within a district. Because larger districts often have a higher degree of diversity as well as a larger ethnic community, this variable controls for these effects.

The *sex ratio* is a three-categorical variable (1= Very unbalanced, 2 = Unbalanced, 3 = Balanced). It is based on the number of women divided by the number of men multiplied by 100. A balanced sex ratio indicates that the ratio women to men, or men to women ranges from 90-111 to 100. When the ratio is unbalanced there are between 75 and 90 men to 100 women or vice versa. In an unbalanced situation the number is lower than 75. The balanced sex ratio is the reference category.

The *region* variable divides migrants into those living in the region of Flanders, of Wallonia, and in Brussels. Those residing in Flanders serve as the reference category.

All the contextual variables, with the exception of the region and sex ratio variables, were transformed with their natural logarithm to account for skewness and were calculated on January 1st of the year the marriage took place.

6 METHOD

We explain differences between the migrant groups based on descriptive as well as multinomial logistic multilevel analyses. Within the multinomial analyses, marriage migration as well as mixed marriages will be separately compared to local marriages with co-ethnics. We assess whether the differences between the migrant groups found in model 1 are altered when controlling for contextual and individual factors (model 2), and dig deeper into the language argument by testing an interaction effect between nationality and region (model 3).

The inclusion of contextual characteristics requires a multinomial logistic multilevel design to properly include contextual effects, such as the sex ratio, diversity level, group size, and size of the district. The two analytical levels are: the individual level (N=52,142), and the level of the district nested in marriage years (N=339). Preliminary analyses (not shown) reveal that the level of district corresponds more accurately to the marriage market when compared to the level of the municipality. We therefore take the level of district as the higher level of analyses.⁴

The districts are nested within marriage years to ensure that the structural influences were prevailing at the beginning of the year one got married. However, we do not know when the partnership was established, only when the partners got married. Therefore, we do not have information on the structural influences that were at play when partners met each other.

7 RESULTS

7.1 DESCRIPTIVES

7.1.1 OVERALL DISTRIBUTION OF PARTNER CHOICES

Figure 1 *Distribution of partner choices according to nationality and sex*

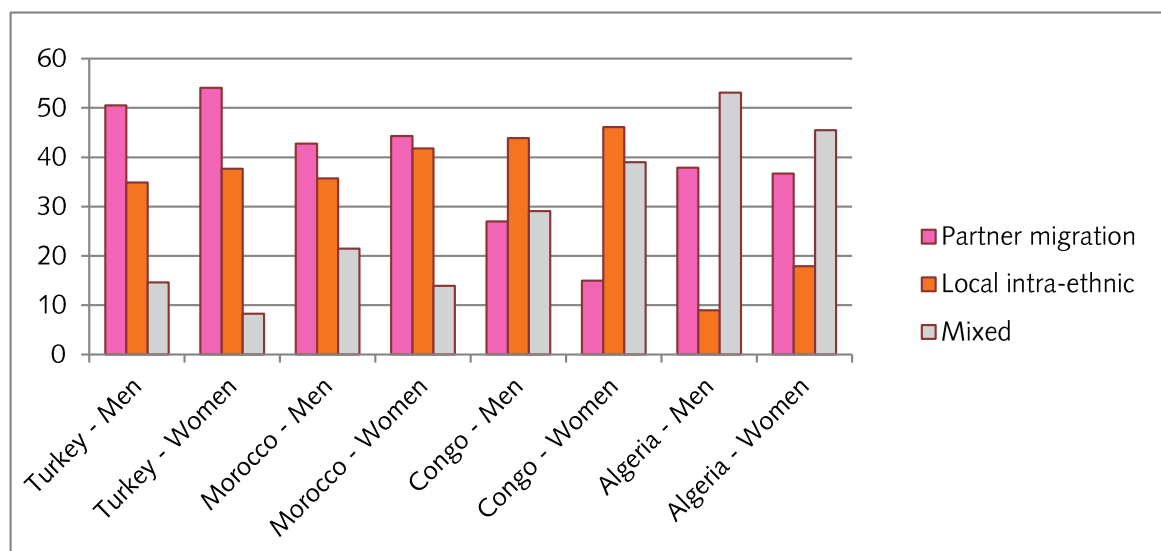


Figure 1 displays the distribution of partner choices for the four groups. There are profound differences between the groups in the way partner choices are distributed. We expected the highest rate of partner migration for Turkish migrants, followed by respectively Moroccan, Algerian, and Congolese migrants (H1), and this pattern is visible in figure 1. Partner migration is dominant within the Turkish group. The percentages are still high but less pronounced within the Moroccan and the Algerian group. While previous research showed that within the group of traditional labour migrants there was

⁴ We assume that changes take place as a national trend within Belgium. However, because of the limited number of years (8) (Stegmueller 2013) we cannot test the assumption that districts are nested within the marriage years and not the other way around. This will influence the interpretation of our results. Therefore, we have to speculate the nesting of districts within marriage years.

a significantly higher number of men who choose a partner from their country of origin versus women (Lievens 1999), our results show that within these groups, the sex difference has faded, if not vanished. Within the Congolese group, the majority who choose partner migration are men.

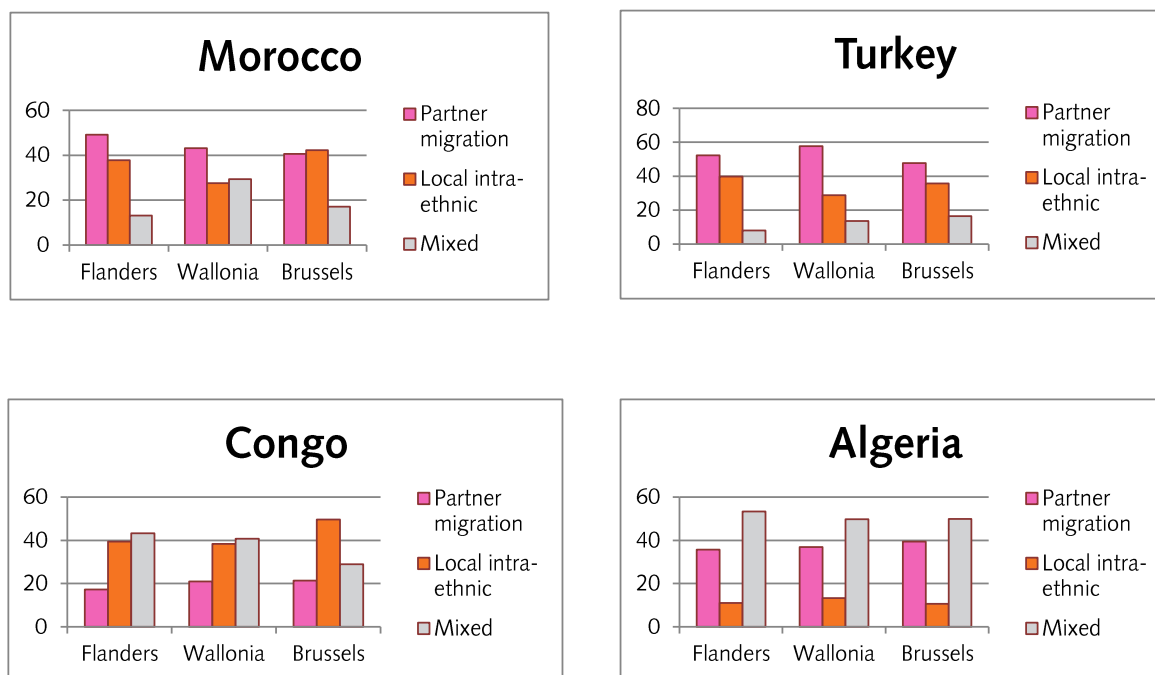
Table 3 Top 5 nationalities of local partners (intra-ethnic and mixed marriages)

Moroccans	Turks	Congolese	Algerians
Morocco (71.2%)	Turkey (80.4%)	Congo (62.6%)	Belgium (45.7%)
Belgium (17.2%)	Belgium (10.0%)	Belgium (21.5%)	Algeria (19.8%)
France (2.6%)	Morocco (2.1%)	Cameroon (2.0%)	Morocco (15.2%)
Italy (1.9%)	Italy (1.7%)	Angola (1.9%)	Italy (7.1%)
Algeria (1.2%)	France/Yugoslavia/ Netherlands (0.6%)	France (1.7%)	France (4.4%)

Furthermore, we expected the Congolese group to establish more mixed marriages compared to the other groups (H2a), while our alternative hypothesis suggested the opposite (H3). Figure 1 shows that mixed marriages are indeed quite frequent for the Congolese group, although the Algerians do show an even higher level of mixed marriages. We look at mixed marriages in some more detail by analysing the nationality at birth of the partner, presented in table 3. About 21.5% of the Congolese who marry locally do also marry a Belgian partner, while this percentage is much higher for the Algerians (46%). Mind that Moroccans who marry locally have hardly less chance (17%) to marry a Belgian, compared to the Congolese. Finally, the number of local intra-ethnic marriages is the lowest for the Algerian group, which is in line with their low community size.

7.1.2 DISTRIBUTION ACCORDING TO REGION

Figures 2 – 5 Distribution of partner choices for Moroccan, Turkish, Congolese, and Algerian migrants, according to region



Next we compare the partner selection pattern by region (figures 2 to 5). For the Moroccan group, we notice an elevation of mixed marriages in Brussels and particularly Wallonia. In Brussels, where most Moroccan migrants in our dataset reside, local marriages with co-ethnic are highest. Partner migration has the highest frequency in Flanders. The Turkish group displays the highest frequency of partner migration in Wallonia. Local-intra ethnic partner choices are most prevalent in the region where the

number of Turkish residents is highest, namely Flanders. Mixed marriages are slightly elevated within Wallonia and Brussels but are still very low. For the Congolese group mixed marriages are lower within Brussels compared to Flanders and Wallonia. This could be explained by the larger Congolese community residing in Brussels, making local marriages with co-ethnics more plausible. The Algerian group has the highest frequency of mixed marriages altogether, but these are not higher within the French-speaking regions.

7.2 MULTILEVEL ANALYSES

Table 4 displays the logodds ratios of the multilevel analyses of partner choices for all migrants. Since the dependent variable is a three-categorical one, the analyses consist of (1) the choice of marriage migration compared to the choice of a local intra-ethnic partner, (2) the choice of a mixed marriage compared to a partnership with a local intra-ethnic partner. The intercepts indicate an overall higher likelihood partner migration and a lower likelihood of mixed marriages compared to local intra-ethnic marriages.

Table 4 *Logodds ratios of multilevel analyses of partner choices of all migrants, reference: local intra-ethnic partner choice*

	M1				M2				M3			
	1=Partner migration		1=Mixed		1=Partner migration		1=Mixed		1=Partner migration		1=Mixed	
	Coef.	Std. Error	Coef.	Std. Error	Coef.	Std. Error	Coef.	Std. Error	Coef.	Std. Error	Coef.	Std. Error
Intercept	0.328***	0.031	-0.346***	0.038	0.846	0.555	-2.911***	0.462	1.113	0.599	-2.864**	0.523
Individual												
Nationality (ref: Morocco)												
Congo	-0.879***	0.041	0.279***	0.037	-1.283***	0.053	-0.728***	0.050	-1.678***	0.150	-0.633***	0.127
Turkey	0.218***	0.022	-0.330***	0.028	0.071**	0.025	-0.690***	0.032	-0.020	0.036	-0.680***	0.053
Algeria	1.205***	0.044	2.259***	0.044	0.407***	0.058	0.642***	0.059	0.119	0.133	0.496***	0.132
Women (ref: Men)					-0.138***	0.019	-0.478***	0.024	-0.138***	0.019	-0.479***	0.024
Generation (ref: Second)												
First					0.181***	0.025	0.591***	0.028	0.181***	0.025	0.590***	0.028
1.5					0.504***	0.034	0.313***	0.044	0.501***	0.034	0.305***	0.044
Age (ref: Intermediate)												
Younger					0.500***	0.021	-0.056	0.029	0.504***	0.021	-0.054	0.029
Older					0.457***	0.024	0.704***	0.028	0.457***	0.024	0.704***	0.028
Marriage year					-0.089***	0.010	-0.057***	0.006	-0.088***	0.010	-0.057***	0.006

	M1				M2				M3			
	1=Partner migration		1=Mixed		1=Partner migration		1=Mixed		1=Partner migration		1=Mixed	
	Coef.	Std. Error	Coef.	Std. Error	Coef.	Std. Error	Coef.	Std. Error	Coef.	Std. Error	Coef.	Std. Error
Contextual												
Diversity level					0.257	0.292	-0.597***	0.181	0.317	0.295	-0.528**	0.188
District size					0.065	0.050	0.483***	0.044	0.045	0.056	0.476***	0.052
Sex ratio (ref: balanced)												
Unbalanced					-0.064*	0.031	-0.046	0.031	-0.103**	0.033	-0.062	0.033
Very unbalanced					-0.042	0.052	-0.235***	0.054	-0.069	0.053	-0.239***	0.055
Community size					-0.153***	0.018	-0.518***	0.019	-0.142***	0.022	-0.509***	0.024
Region (ref: Flanders)												
Wallonia					0.199***	0.059	0.694***	0.040	0.131*	0.066	0.745***	0.051
Brussels					-0.004	0.120	0.578***	0.076	-0.089	0.121	0.551***	0.079
Interaction												
Congo												
Wallonia									0.318	0.163	-0.164	0.135
Brussels									0.547***	0.152	-0.058	0.125
Turkey												
Wallonia									0.169**	0.058	-0.217**	0.079
Brussels									0.119*	0.057	0.137	0.077
Algeria												
Wallonia									0.221	0.139	0.171	0.136
Brussels									0.620***	0.142	0.118	0.139
Variance												
Marriage year x district	0.136	0.018	0.136	0.018	0.081	0.012			0.080	0.012		

7.2.1 INDIVIDUAL AND STRUCTURAL VARIABLES

Before we turn to the differences between the migrant groups, we first examine the structural and individual control variables (model 2, table 4). Partner migration is related to community size. The larger the community size, the lower the chance to marry transnationally. This suggests the effect of a large pool of potential local marriage partners. Diversity and district size are not related to partner migration. More effects are present for mixed marriages. Living in larger ethnic communities makes mixed marriages less likely, which is most likely also the effect of the large presence of local ethnic marriage partners. Living in a diverse and larger district indeed promotes mixed marriages. This supports the idea that in these conditions group boundaries are less easily maintained.⁵

Looking at the individual variables, we observe that men are more likely to choose partner migration and mixed marriages compared to women. The results also show that both partner migration and mixed marriages are more prevalent among the first and 1.5 generation. For partner migration, this is expected, however the results on mixed marriages are surprising. This could suggest that second generation migrants strongly prefer local intra-ethnic marriages above mixed marriages and partner migration compared to the first and 1.5 generation. It could also indicate a firm detachment of the first and 1.5 generation from the local ethnic communities in Belgium. Additional analyses (not shown) reveal that on average, migrants from the first generation marry five years after arrival in Belgium, which is hardly enough time to connect to the local ethnic community. Furthermore, this first generation does not consist of the more traditional family reunifiers, but comprises students, asylum seekers, and people who migrated because of humanitarian reasons (Caestecker & Rea 2009; Myria 2015).

Finally, the results indicate that people who marry at a younger age, are more likely to choose partner migration as we expected. However, migrants marrying at a higher age are also more likely to marry a partner from their country of origin. They prefer mixed marriages above local intra-ethnic ones.

7.2.2 PARTNER MIGRATION

The results in model 1 reveal that the Turks and the Algerians have higher partner migration levels than the Moroccans. The high odds ratio for Algerians is related to the decision to use local intra-ethnic partner choice as the reference category, as this is a category with very low prevalence amongst Algerians (see figure 1). In case both local and mixed marriages are used as reference category, the likelihood of partner migration is significantly lower for the Algerians (results not shown). The Congolese migrants show a significantly lower level than the Moroccans. Adding the contextual and individual variables in model 2 changes the results somewhat. First, we see that the difference between Turkish and Moroccan migrants in the prevalence of partner migration versus local marriages has been reduced. This happens after we control for community size. For Algerians, the difference with Moroccan migrants in the prevalence of partner migration vs. local marriages declines strongly. Again, the inclusion of community size is the main culprit of these changes. The relatively low community size of both Turkish and Algerian migrants (vis-à-vis the Moroccans) stimulates partner migration. After controlling for this (and the other control variables) Turkish migrants still show a higher level of partner migration, and hence this indicates stronger transnational links, while Algerian migrants show (much) lower levels of partner migration⁶, showing their weaker transnational links compared to Moroccan migrants. The difference between Congolese and Moroccan migrants in the prevalence of partner migration versus a local intra-ethnic marriage has also been enlarged. These results confirm hypothesis 1.

7.2.3 MIXED MARRIAGES

The descriptive results showed the highest percentages of mixed marriages for Algerians, followed by the Congolese, the Moroccans and the Turks (see also model 1). Model 2 changes this picture. The difference between Algerian migrants and Moroccan migrants in the prevalence of mixed versus local marriages declines drastically after inclusion of the control variables, particularly community size. This shows, in accordance with hypothesis 4, that their small community size pushed Algerians to enter a mixed marriage – just like it pushed them to transnational marriages. But even after inclusion of the

5 The results for sex ratio are not straightforward to interpret. This may be related to the fact that the district is not necessarily the best geographic demarcation of a marriage market or that the underlying data are inappropriate (number of men and women of a given 'current nationality' irrespective of marital status is used as a measure).

6 See the remark on the reference category stated higher...

control variables Algerians have a higher likelihood of entering a mixed marriage compared to a local intra-ethnic marriage than Moroccans. We observe that the difference between the Turkish and the Moroccan group becomes larger after controlling for individual and structural variables. Again, this happens after we control for the community size, which is in line with hypothesis 4. Moroccans are less likely to have a mixed marriage because of their large local ethnic marriage market. Finally, mixed marriages were more prevalent among Congolese migrants compared to Moroccan ones in the descriptive analysis. However, we observe the opposite in model 2. Inclusion of the control variables (again mainly community size) shows that the chance to enter a mixed marriage is lower for the Congolese.

For mixed marriages we conclude that Algerians have the highest likelihood of entering a mixed marriage rather than a local intra-ethnic marriage, while the Turks and particularly the Congolese have the lowest likelihood. The Moroccans take up an intermediate position. The lower level of the Turks versus the Moroccans and the Algerians is in line with hypothesis 2a, and suggests the role of language and pre-migration affinity to the European culture. But the results are not completely in line with the idea that culture plays a dominant role in shaping partner selection preferences, as the French-speaking and Christian Congolese have the lowest levels of mixed marriages after controlling for contextual and individual variables. The results for the Congolese group are more in line with hypothesis 3 that stressed the importance of skin colour, although the low level of mixed marriages for the Turkish group does stress that skin colour is not the only important boundary marker.

Next, we dig deeper into the language argument (H2b: we expect an elevated likelihood of mixed marriages within the French-speaking communities for the French-speaking migrant groups). Our preliminary descriptive analyses only confirmed this hypothesis for the Moroccan group. The multilevel analyses (model 3) show that for all groups, the likelihood of mixed marriages versus local intra-ethnic marriages is higher in Wallonia and Brussels compared to Flanders. While structural characteristics such as the low community size for Algerian and Congolese migrants in Flanders promoted a higher level of mixed marriages (figure 2), controlling for these characteristics alters the pattern quite dramatically. In model 3 it is clear that also Algerians and Congolese migrants have less chance to enter a mixed marriage in Flanders. However, as mixed marriages are also more prevalent for the non-French-speaking Turks in the French-speaking areas of Brussels and Wallonia, hypothesis 3 cannot be confirmed. Inter-marriage is more likely in Brussels and Wallonia in general, not only for French-speaking migrant groups.

8 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This paper aims to shed light on the partner choices of Moroccan, Turkish, Congolese, and Algerian migrants in Belgium. Three partner choices are distinguished: marrying a partner from the country of origin (partner migration), marrying a local co-ethnic partner, and establishing a mixed marriage. We focused on the role of migration history and transnational links, culture (religion, language), skin colour) and structural characteristics of the district migrants live in (mainly community size) to gain further insight in the partner choices. We applied multinomial logistic multilevel analyses on an extraction of the Belgian national register including 52,142 first marriages of first, 1.5, and second generation migrants of Moroccan, Turkish, Congolese, and Algerian origin.

The Turkish group is characterised, from the very start of the migration stream, by strong links to the country of origin. It is a large group with quite large communities in Belgium. Immigrating Turks are typically not familiar with French or Dutch. The cultural distance with Belgium is large from the onset, being a Muslim country without a colonial past. Consequently, even decades after the start of the migration stream, this group has very high levels of partner migration and very low levels of mixed marriages.

The Moroccan group resembles the Turkish group, although in a less outspoken fashion. The very large Moroccan group has strong links to the country of origin, but there is much more variety: the migration can be typified as less family-driven and more strongly motivated by socio-cultural motives. There is a closer connection with European culture, partly due to the usage of French in Morocco. Also its partner selection pattern is somewhat less outspoken: there is less partner migration and there are more mixed marriages, although particularly the latter is inhibited by the large community sizes in which Belgian Moroccans typically live.

The Algerian group demonstrates the importance of structural characteristics. It is a small group, with small community sizes. This strongly puts a brake on local intra-ethnic marriages. Instead, the Algerians turn to mixed marriages. That they show high levels intermarriage after controlling for structural characteristics does however signify that this group is also culturally quite close to (some) Belgian inhabitants. Their French colonial past and their knowledge of French are potential explanations for this pattern. In any case, the results for the Algerian group show that also high levels of intermarriage for migrants from a Muslim country can be observed.

Because of the strong historical colonial ties between Belgium and Congo (Schoonvaere 2010), Congolese migration was directed at Belgium (Sumata 2007; Zeleza 2002). These migration streams have been crystallised around study migration (Caestecker & Rea 2009) which is a more voluntary and individual project. The Congolese group has weaker connections to the country of origin, especially compared to the Turkish group. Hence, partner migration is less popular. As the Congolese group is characterised by relatively small community sizes, also local intra-ethnic marriages are not strongly stimulated. Mixed marriages are quite prevalent. However, controlling for contextual and individual marriages alters this picture and shows that mixed marriages are in fact not very popular. This is in line with the hypothesis that stresses the importance of skin colour. In this respect, the difference with the observations made by Kalmijn & van Tubergen (2006) for the Surinamese and the Antillean group in the Netherlands is noticeable. Their conclusion is that in the Netherlands, culture (i.e. religion and language) seems to be more important than race and colour. However, before rushing to conclusions, it is important to state that of course other factors may be at play. It is not at all unlikely that the cultural distance between the Congolese and the Belgians is much larger than the cultural distance between the Surinamese and Antillean groups and the Dutch. For example, Dutch presence in these countries goes back until the 17th century, while Belgian presence in Congo only goes back to the 19th century.

The main conclusion from this paper is that the partner selection pattern in early 21st century Belgian society still bears the traces of the starting conditions that migrant groups experienced when they first entered the country. While this continuity is important to understand the situation citizens with a migrant origin have to deal with today, it does not make change impossible. In fact, for the Turkish and Moroccan group research recently showed a quite strong decline in transnational marriages and a modest increase in mixed marriages (Van Kerckem et al. 2013; Verhaeghe et al. 2012). These are indications that after 50 years of migration a transition towards full inclusion in Belgian society is not beyond reach. The conditions analysed in this paper, namely the strength of transnational networks, the cultural boundaries and the ethnic community size, may help to understand why this inclusion takes such a long period of time.

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