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**Towards a definition of European intra-marriage
as a new social phenomenon**

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Abstract

The following pages are a preliminary reflection on European intra-marriage as an emerging social phenomenon, and its potential cultural and institutional consequences on the EU consolidation and integration process. I will start by proposing a new expression – European intra-marriage – in order to better differentiate this “new” type of European family culture. I will then reflect on some of the features that better characterize the singularities that marriages between Europeans entail, so that, further on, we may distinguish an emerging “marriageable group” which has been on the rise among European citizens. Afterwards, I will analyse the possible consequences of European intra-marriage on the construction and establishment of a European identity; I will sustain that Europe, in this case, is probably being more influenced by the family than one might think. As a result, the Europeanization of cultural identities through multicultural families may play a supporting role in the creation of the EU alongside the institutional instruments of control wielded by political elites. If this is the case, we should pay close attention to a phenomenon that is simultaneously private and public and that may be consolidating a new form of European identity. In the final pages, I will summarise the main ideas developed here, as a way of clarifying the future research directions that may be fruitful for an understanding of European intra-marriage as an expanding trend.

Key words: European intra-marriage, European identity, multicultural society

1- European intra-marriage: an introduction¹

One of the main advantages of the European Union is that it gives its citizens the freedom to move from one country to another. The “Schengen Agreement” finally established the geographical mobility of Europeans beyond national borders, making access to other EU countries and three non-EU countries² much easier. This single European measure, along with a wave of migration in the globalized world and the rise of mass tourism, has significantly contributed to the social and cultural blending of different national groups. In fact, within the EU, the most common reasons for moving – work, education, tourism, self-fulfilment and emotional relationships – are becoming more frequent and are beginning to represent, especially to a younger and highly qualified segment of the European population, an enhancement of their life trajectories.

This social mobility may promote close personal contact, the consequence of which is an increase in the number of bi-national and intercultural families formed between citizens of different countries. In fact, it is reasonable to maintain that the rise in cross-border social contacts has a direct impact on the number of mixed marriages. Evidence of the increase in these marriage rates (both with Europeans and non-Europeans) from two EU countries with different migratory traditions and cosmopolitan lifestyles (France and Portugal), illustrate the development in the number of these unions. For France, according to INED, the number of mixed unions between 1996 and 2006 increased from 24 046 (8.6%) to 39 126 (14.3%), at the same time as marriages on the whole decreased from 280 072 (1996) to 268 100 (2006). For Portugal, which after the 1990s became a host-country with regard to immigration, results published by INE reveal that between 1996 and 2006 the number of mixed marriages also suffered a boost, with rates ranging from 823 (1.29%) to 5696 (11.9%), meanwhile there was a decrease in marriages rates in general (from 63 672 in 1996 to 47 857 in 2006).

The concept of “mixed marriage”, it may be noted, has been used differently to refer to matrimonial unions involving two people of different social and cultural backgrounds. Within scientific literature, we can find the concept of “intermarriage”

¹ This paper is the first report of a post-doctoral project investigating intra-European marriage in Portugal, carried out by the author at CIES-ISCTE, supervised by Anália Torres and financed by the FCT of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, Portugal. The author wishes to thank Anália Torres for her critical comments on an early version of this draft.

² Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

(Blau et al., 1982; O’Leary and Finnas, 2002; Kalmijn, 1998; Klein, 2001), “interracial marriages” (Aldridge, 1978; Quian, 1999; Santos, 2003; Spickard, 1989), “interethnic marriages” (Benson et al., 1981; Murguía, 1982), “interfaith marriages” (Kalmijn, 1991), “interreligious marriages” (O’Leary, 2001), “cross-border marriages” (Lauth Bacas, 2002), and the expression “mixed marriages” to designate these types of union within Europe, particularly in France (Albert and Guardiola, 2007; Rodríguez García, 2006; Neyrand and M’Sili, 1998). This reveals that various criteria and classificatory variables were adopted, such as those involving differences in country of origin, country of birth, nationality, ethnic group, religion, physical features or language (Albert and Guardiola, 2007). Overall, there is an absence of academic consensus on the notion of “mixed marriage”, which complicates acknowledgement of the criteria implicit in its meaning.

In this paper I will focus on European mixed marriages as an emerging phenomenon, to argue that, alongside the technocracy of the European institutions, the “*people’s Europe*” is being formed, at a private level, by these couples. Marriage between individuals who have different nationalities may create and stimulate different dynamics, strategies and forms of negotiation in a couple’s daily life and their children’s upbringing that are closer to an intercultural form of living and being within Europe. Cross-border relationships do in fact need bi-national adjustments in socialization, acculturation and the creation of interethnic identity processes, especially those concerned with the offspring’s upbringing. Some of the studies on intermarriage (Rodríguez García, 2006) have revealed that these couples tend to create certain conjugal dynamics, inserted into a “*complex socio-cultural hybrid space*”, where both partners interact not only within the society of residence but also in the “*diasporic settlement*” of other national groups living in a certain community. Moreover, not only the spouses but also the whole family network (affinal and consanguinal) has to be reorganized around two different geographical and cultural places, which brings new forms of re-adaptation to all generations involved.

Taking this idea as the starting point, one may then ask to what extent European mixed marriage constitutes a “new” and “private” phenomenon which is playing an important role in the creation of a “European identity” What, then, are the social, cultural and family particularities of couples intermarrying within a European context? Can they be distinguished from other, non-European, mixed marriages? And to what extent are we witnessing the emergence of a new form of conjugality that in a few

decades may turn out to be a significant vehicle in European social and cultural integration?

However, the notion of *mixed marriage* or its equivalent of *intermarriage* turns out to be extremely vague and imprecise if we wish to consider the specificity that may exist within European conjugal unions. In order to define it as a specific phenomenon, I propose here to make use of the expression *European intra-marriage* to refer to marital unions between citizens belonging to different EU national backgrounds³. I am using *nationality* as a criterion to evaluate the nature of a marriage that has to be negotiated, constructed and developed on a daily basis within a multicultural, social and political European space. The reason, then, why *European intra-marriage* may be sociologically relevant is that it may be a specific form of socio-cultural interchange between at least two European countries, with the political framework of the EU as an institutional setting⁴.

Broadly speaking, the word *nationality* represents the relationship between an individual and his/her state of origin and national culture. However, this concept has had different meanings within the social and legal sciences. Legally speaking, it affords the state jurisdiction over the person, and affords the person the protection of the state; it is, in a few words, the right of each country to determine who its nationals are by law. Thus, nationality is established at birth by a child's place of birth (*jus solis*) and/or bloodline (*jus sanguinis*), or it may also be acquired later in life through *naturalization*, condition which often implies the person's *citizenship* (the right to participate in the political life of the state, e.g. the right to vote or stand for election). Sociologically speaking, *nationality* relates to someone's affiliation to a certain *nation* or *ethnic group* with the same characteristics (language, religion, culture, history, etc). In fact, belonging to a particular country involves the existence of a *national mental programme* (Hofstede, 1994), which indicates that the way individuals think, act and feel in different situations is partly the result of what exists in the country where they live and were brought up. People from different countries tend to react in particular ways in diverse areas of their lives, e.g. in the family, at work, and in leisure activities. Moreover, the existence of a particular *national mentality* or *cultural way of being* is

³ The only existing use of the concept "intra-marriage", as far as I know, was made by Cretser (1999) in Sweden, to refer to unions involving two citizens of the same national origin.

⁴ By "EU countries" I am including not only citizens belonging to all the EU-27 nation states, but also those who were born and brought up in other political neighbouring European ' states (Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Switzerland) that have certain "privileged" political and social relations with the EU.

normally associated not only with a cultural background, but also with a common history and a particular mother tongue.

In this sense, the different uses of the word *nationality* both by the social and legal sciences, requires a distinction between that based on the *country of birth* and that on *naturalization* for the assessment of a European intra-marriage. If we take account of *naturalization* as well as *country of birth*, rates of intra-marriage may be over-reported due to cases where a spouse from a non-Community country emigrates to the EU, obtains citizenship, and then marries someone from his/her country of origin whose citizenship has not been changed. In the same way, cases of intra-marriage may be under-reported if an immigrant has become an EU citizen and marries a person originally belonging to the same host EU country. This being so, in order to avoid bias within the research, *intra-marriage* should only include those unions involving individuals born and brought up in two different EU countries, who have had the right since birth to a certain European citizenship.

Nonetheless, despite representing a fertile field of development for the social sciences, studies in marriage between Europeans are extremely scarce. Although some research has been carried out on intermarriage in Europe, only a few investigations focus exclusively on bi-national marriages between European citizens (Lauth Bacas, 2002; Varro, 1995). In fact, data and evidence relating to European intra-marriage are extremely difficult to obtain and tend to be mixed in with the overall results obtained from research on intermarriage. This is precisely the case of investigations focusing on interracial marriages in the Netherlands (Kalmijn and van Tubergan, 2006; van Tubergen and Maas, 2007), religious intermarriage between Protestants and Catholics in the Republic of Ireland (O’Leary, 2001), and cross-national intermarriage that includes members of immigrant communities in Sweden (Cretser, 1999), Germany (Klein, 2001), Belgium (Lievens, 1999), Portugal (Santos, 2003) and France (Neyrand and M’Sili, 1998). The only existing studies centred on bi-national European marriage involve French-German couples (Varro, 1995) and German-Greek families living in Athens (Lauth Bacas, 2002). They do not, however, conceptualize its nature and dynamics as a sub-group inside the category “mixed marriages in general”. Further investigation should include these types of marital union as such, as a way of understanding their possible conjugal singularities.

2 – Notes on the singularities of European couples

Intra-European marriages represent, then, an interesting social phenomenon for sociology and the related social sciences. Like any other category of couples, e.g. non-EU couples, the marital processes involved in the construction of marriages between Europeans require certain decisions regarding acculturation, the children's socialization, adaptation to different ethnic and cultural communities and other complex dynamics connected with the organization of everyday family life. Despite the dearth of research on this subject, we may infer certain general ideas that may be shaping the family-forming and conjugal mechanisms at play among European mixed couples.

First of all, having a European nationality gives a foreign EU spouse certain practical advantages: with regard to residence permits, EU citizens should have no difficulties as they can move freely from one country to another. The legal status of EU partners establishes secure basic conditions for them to live their lives (with regard to work, voting rights in local elections across the EU, “European status” etc.), making these citizens part of a *privileged migrant group*. This is why marrying someone from another EU country does not require the legal and security procedures applied to non-EU spouses, in order for them to obtain citizenship and freedom of movement across internal EU borders; European intra-marriage involves personal motives like love and affection and not legal and economic factors that might be implicit in certain other cases of international unions. Moreover, if the relationship breaks up, the European spouse can continue living in the host country with the same rights and duties as any other national citizen. This legal system guarantees the construction of a *cross-border geographical mobility* within the EU that, in time, turns out to be lived by both partners as a “*European in-between private and public region*” (Lauth Bacas, 2002).

Secondly, apart from having the same legal status, as defined by the EU, some European citizens may, however, be considered as having more or less *symbolic prestige* associated with their nationality. A study conducted by Stierna (2003) showed that ethnic European communities like the Swedish have made use of their high economic and social capital as a group when living in a host society like that of Madrid. This research revealed that the Swedish community was not stigmatized as an immigrant community, since it was socially recognized as a *foreign elite* belonging to the upper middle class within Spanish society. In fact, mixed marriages between Swedes and Spaniards normally involved individuals with a high class-position, with

Sweden (country of origin) or another socially “well-recognized” European country (e.g. France, Great Britain or Germany) representing a symbolic, educational and cultural reference in the organization of the family’s life.

Also, another piece of research focusing on the Swedish-speaking community living in Finland (O’Leary and Finnäs, 2002) has shown how this *high-status minority group* exhibits certain dominant and distinctive practices and lifestyles – in relation to higher education, their occupations and their leisure activities – when compared with the ethnic Finnish-speakers. These findings highlight the fact that *dominant minorities* can develop certain strategies to maintain and secure their class-related social privileges and ethnically-based social prestige, even when part of a wider exogamous group⁵.

As such, these results lead us to query whether European intra-marriages do in fact put together two nationalities that are socially perceived in a different manner. Beyond the initial *falling in love episode* and the attraction of an individual's personal features, to what extent does the further construction of the marital relationship imply, in some cases, a *dominant* and *dominated* way of living? What are the social conditions that enable the symbolic recognition of one nationality over another? If the existence of a *European nationality hierarchy* turns out to be a verifiable scenario within intra-married European couples, we may be finding a similar trend to that in the *racial hierarchy* (Fu, 2001) frequently found in the U.S. marriage market. This idea is not new and has been designated in the scientific literature as the *status exchange hypothesis* (Kalmijn, 1998). Firstly elaborated by Merton (1941) and Davis (1941) this expression is still used nowadays to refer to the fact that individuals with lower *ethnic prestige*, when offering a higher socioeconomic status, have more chances of marrying someone outside their own group belonging to one with higher *ethnic prestige*. In short, there is an exchange of *ethnic prestige* for *socioeconomic position* between the spouses. If this is so for European couples, it is necessary to clarify *what is exactly exchanged* and *how it is transmitted both in the marital relationship and the children’s socialization*.

Moreover, these families can be affected by other conjugally-driven forces like the *country of residence* of the couple or *gender differences*. The gender of the *dominating* and *dominated* partner seems to play, in fact, an important role in marital

⁵ Curiously, a similar trend was found by Varro (1993) in her study of American-French couples living in France, as 1) they benefited from a higher social representation (they were seen as belonging to a high class), 2) they were socially homogamous (socio-economically, educationally and professionally), 3) and they felt that it was an advantage to teach their offspring two of the most “dominant” languages (English and French).

and parental dynamics and strategies. In accordance with this idea, in an investigation involving American-French mixed couples, G. Varro (1993) found that the *dominant line of identity transmission* was mainly given by the father, regardless of his nationality and the level of attachment of the mother to her own culture. Hence, this might indicate that, beyond the “social prestige” associated with a certain nationality, the degree of dominance in the behaviours and decisions within the relationship can change according to the gender of the spouse in question.

Thirdly, the level of marital blending is also influenced by the frequency of social, cultural, economic and political contacts with *neighbouring countries* (Cretser, 1999) and with other privileged national communities that are present as *guest workers* (Cretser, 1999; Klein, 2001). In accordance with the first argument, data results produced by Eurobarometer 60.1 (2004) suggests that, in the overall answers to the item *Affinities with other countries*, cultural closeness – especially affinities related to geographical proximity and common mother tongues – is considered by Europeans to be socially more desirable. Also, the results of the research carried out in Sweden (Cretser, 1999) showed that Swedish citizens first chose members of the foreign communities originating in neighbouring countries as marriage partners, and only afterwards partners of another European nationality or from the USA. Data revealed that when Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Iceland) were combined for the period between 1971 and 1993, this category of mixed marriages represented 19.6% of all intermarriages for Swedish women and 32.7% of intermarriage rates for Swedish men. More specifically, approximately 20% of intermarriages including Swedish men were made with Finnish women, and to a slightly lower degree with Danish and Norwegian women; regarding Swedish women, the mixed marriage rates with Finnish men were also the most significant (8.7% for the period between 1971 and 1993), followed by other Nordic partners such as Danes and Norwegians⁶. This preference for neighbouring countries as a possible marriage market may be due to the existence of certain social and cultural commonalities which tend to bring together individuals who share a number of common beliefs, values, practices and languages.

⁶ Although marriages with people from neighbouring Nordic countries represent, in this study, the most important subgroup with regard to intermarriage rates, data suggests that they have been decreasing over the last decade, at the same time as marriages with other national communities from the West like the German, British, Yugoslavian and North American (for women) and Polish, Yugoslavian, German and North American (for men) have been augmenting (Cretser, 1999).

Another of the above mentioned factors influencing the level of European intra-marriage is the presence of *guest worker communities* (which, of course, might also include non-EU citizens) in a particular state. Generally speaking, this phenomenon is connected with traditional and recent flows of populations, like those involved in South-to-North migration during the 1960s and 1970s (Klein, 2001), and those that nowadays come from Eastern to Western Europe. It seems reasonable, then, to maintain that the opportunities among foreign groups for interaction and social acceptance can rise when the number of immigrants into a particular country is high and durable over a certain period of time. Persistent and continuous movements of migrants contribute to what Blau *et al.* (1982) term *heterogeneity* – i.e. the existence of different groups distinguished by a given parameter such as nationality, ethnicity or religion within a region or society – and are associated with the growth of mixed marriages rates. Citizens of countries with an enduring immigrant tradition are more likely to encounter persons with different national origins and cultural backgrounds, which might lead to opportunities of outmarriage.

Moreover, on the subject of the latter idea, greater numbers of mixed marriages can also be found in countries more exposed to modernization processes such as economic growth, industrialization, higher education, urbanization and institutional differentiation. These factors seem to promote greater autonomy and freedom with respect to peer groups when choosing a partner to marry. As some research has found (O'Leary, 2001), individuals who live under the influence of modern ideas and lifestyles may have different opportunities for contact with others holding more open attitudes towards various ethnic and cultural groups. In this sense, marrying outside one's own group is directly linked with the degree of heterogeneity existing in a particular country.

To wind up this section, these are some of the characteristics that should be taken into account when analysing the estimated singularities of European intra-marriage. Another question which now becomes relevant is, *What Europeans more foreseeably belong to a marriageable social group?* This is precisely what we shall look into in the following pages.

3 – Highly educated movers: an emerging “marriageable” European group?

As data and studies on intra-European marriage are almost non-existent, we should pay attention to the internal population movements that later on are liable to be directly reflected in the development of the incidence of these types of union. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that in the long-term an increase in the number of cross-national personal contacts will create a more culturally heterogeneous *terrain of marriageable people* where unions between two people with different national origins will become more frequent. So what, at the present moment, are the social characteristics of European internal mobility and who are the Europeans who nowadays migrate?

Studies carried out on intra-EU mobility tend to reveal quite limited rates of internal migration (only 4% of Europeans had moved a long-distance according to the 2005 Eurobarometer survey data). These rates are associated with certain differences between the North (more mobile) and South/East (less mobile). Despite these figures, short and long-distance mobility intentions in the near future within the EU are about 31% (EU25 mean). Those who reveal the intention to migrate to another EU country present certain demographic differences when compared to the group of Europeans who are less inclined to move: women are not so able to move as men; those who are single or single parents have a higher desire to move than couples with or without children; older people register less of an intention to migrate than younger people; and people with a lower level of education are not so likely to cross national borders as students or those with better educational accomplishments⁷.

This last group seems to correspond to at least two types of intra-European migrants that have been increasing in recent decades: *highly skilled workers* and *students*. In fact, both represent emerging forms of intra-EU migration, alongside low-skilled economic migrants, asylum-seeking refugees and international retirement migrants (Recchi et al., 2003; Eurobarometer 2005). According to some studies (Salt, 1992; Eurobarometer 2005), since the 1990s there has been an increasing demand for highly skilled individuals within EU borders, mainly constituted by *career expatriates* and what A. Favell (2003, 2008) labels as *free movers* (those citizens who take individual decisions to migrate for professional or personal reasons). These are

⁷ According to Eurobarometer 2005, those individuals who left full-time education at the age of 20 or above are considered “highly educated”.

professional, managerial and technical specialists who are integrated into multinationals, research and development centres, and tourism and marketing enterprises, and who, when taking advantage of the freedom of movement within the EU and the globalized European economy, are willing to move to another country. Mobility is conceived, then, as a logical step in a “career culture” where importance is attached to a personal predisposition to cross borders and quickly adapt to new experiences and international social environments. This kind of European mobility turns out to be part, in the end, not only of a “working culture” but also of an individualized life-path of well-qualified young citizens.

Alongside the policy measures taken by EU institutions to simplify the free movement of EU citizens (the Single European Act of 1986 and the Maastricht Treaty of 1993), one of the factors that is contributing most to the increase in highly qualified movers between EU states is the development of European educational exchange programmes. The attention and support devoted by the European institutions to these programmes comes along the goals set in the Lisbon Agenda (March 2000). For the EU, they demand the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, able to maintain economic growth and optimal levels of social cohesion. In order to achieve these goals, a skilled and adaptable labour force and easier access to the European labour market are necessary. Moreover, beyond these reasons, these educational exchange programmes play an important role in promoting European social integration and a European sense of belonging. In fact, by confronting the commonalities and diversities existing between different European states, studying across borders can be an excellent opportunity to prepare the ground for a future European generation capable of adapting to full market integration.

With their focus especially on a younger, university segment of the population, programmes such as Erasmus-Socrates and Marie Curie Actions (the latter directed at academic researchers) are encouraging a large number of highly-educated individuals to take the opportunity of a temporary stay in another EU country. According to data mentioned by King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003), from 1987 to 2000 there were about 750,000 tertiary-level students who spent 3 to 12 months studying abroad in Europe, and these numbers have risen substantially since that period. Moreover, with the exception of Bulgaria and Romania, there was an increase of 25% in foreign students enrolled at European universities from 1998-2003 (Moreira, 2006). Just to give a general overview of the figures recorded for some EU countries, during the academic

year 1999-2000 the UK was the host country for 20,705 students and sent 10,056 abroad; France received 17,890 and placed 16,824 abroad; the figures for Germany were 14,691 (in) and 15,715 (out); Spain 15,197 (in) and 16,297 (out); and Italy 8029 (in) and 12,421 (out) (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003). Although each country presents its own characteristics regarding the institutional support offered to international students, long-standing institutionalized contacts between the host country and the country of origin seem to exist in relation to cultural and historic processes of interaction, especially those related to language capabilities and a neighbour's influence (Moreira, 2006).

These mobility-promoting measures tend to create a socio-cultural environment that is extremely productive in mixing and integrating people belonging to a *European vanguard group*, that is, highly knowledgeable EU individuals linked together by a specific cultural and intellectual lifestyle. In fact, research has shown that international students tend to come from a slightly higher socio-economic family background than non-moving students (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003). They are, in short, an *elite of the elite* of students reaching the level of university education. Furthermore, the results of the study just mentioned have also revealed that the group of individuals who engaged in a European year abroad usually came from a more *cosmopolitan family origin* – it was more likely that they had parents belonging to different nationalities, had spent time travelling abroad before, spoke a foreign language and had more foreign students as friends in their home environment –, and this predisposed them to embark on a cross-national experience.

In this context, one might ask if nowadays - alongside European intra-marriage resulting from traditional South-to-North population flows in the 1960s and the 1970s - intra-European marriages are not being formed by a *highly-qualified educational elite of young Europeans*. In fact, it may well be that highly-educated European movers (both professionals and students) are emerging as a *marriageable group* within the EU in particular, and Europe in general. If this is the case, we may be witnessing the rise of what I term here *European homogamic intra-marriage*. Academic research has demonstrated that, in general, people tend to marry someone within their own social group (*endogamy*), with a similar ethnic, religious or socio-economic status (*homogamy*) (Kalmijn, 1998; Fu, 2001). If we consider *socio-economic homogamy* with regard to *educational status*, some studies suggest that highly-educated members of ethnic minority groups tend to outmarry more than their lesser-educated counterparts.

These results have been interpreted on the basis of both *opportunity* and *preference* factors; the first explanation simply states that highly-skilled people tend to move within social and professional environments which involve small numbers of individuals who also constitute *an educational elite* with respect to the population at large. The second interpretation maintains that these highly-educated people (both from majority and minority groups) tend to have a more universalist view of their life-style and social practices, and are thus less attached to certain peer groups (family, community) in choosing their marriage partners (Kalmijn, 1998).

This idea that *well educated individuals* represent an emerging *marriageable group* within the European context has emerged in Favell' study (2008) on *EU free movers*; as he found out, love was meant to be one of the reasons to cross borders and to leave the original country behind. Moreover, evidence related to this and that also gives an insight into the motives expressed by Europeans to make long-distance moves comes from the results of Eurobarometer 2005: among the principal reasons for migrating to another EU country 37% responses were given to the item "new job transfer" (44% of men reported it compared to 27% of women) and 18% of replies referred to the item "change of marital situation or partner". These findings were somewhat reversed by the data collected in 2006 by the PIONEUR group on intra-EU migration: although the motivation to move to another EU country may vary depending on the origin and destination, the main reason for migrating was, in the first place, "family/love" (29.7%: 21.8% for men and 37.4% for women), followed by "work opportunities" (25.2%: 33.1% for men and 17.6% for women), "quality of life" (24%: 24.3% for men and 23.6% for women) and "study" (7%: 5.9% for men and 8.3% for women) (Recchi, 2006). Therefore, there is some empirical evidence showing that love ties and family relationships are – particularly for women - a considerable reason for crossing national borders and going to live in another country. *Intra-European love* is, then, being one of the driving forces behind individual intra-EU migration and the reason for a person's stay – at least for a period of time – in a foreign culture. This is a symptom that, alongside the technocracy of European institutions, the *Europe of the people* is, at a private level, an emerging and unforeseen phenomenon that has hitherto been almost ignored by sociological researchers.

4 – Building a European identity through the family

One may then ask what social consequences are emerging from European intra-marriage in particular. Research has shown that mixed marriages are frequently seen as a sign of the successful integration of immigrants and foreigners in a host society, reducing the stereotypes among different groups (Kalmijn, 1998). On the other hand, outmarriage seems to be particularly likely to create a bi- or multi-ethnic identity among the children born within it (Stephan and Stephan, 1989). In fact, the patterns in the upbringing of mixed-heritage offspring have revealed the importance of several identity factors – choice of the name, religious socialization, linguistic/bilingual capacities, exposure to both cultures, country of residence, and (dual) nationality - in the creation of a bi- or multi-ethnic identity (Le Gall, 2003). Undoubtedly, children's upbringing and the acquisition of their identity are privileged sources for an analysis of the social dynamics of two different national cultures.

Despite the fact that these two phenomena are considered the main consequences deriving from intermarried couples in general, if we look specifically into the social consequences of mixed marriage in Europe, it seems reasonable to assert that these unions are a *producer of a European identity* and a *European sense of attachment* beyond the logical development of EU institutions. Marriage between Europeans may thus constitute, inside the EU, “*a by-product of its institutional construction – of its growing cultural networks of communication and exchange, its common economy and money, its political framework of governance and representation, its institutions of redistribution and solidarity (...), or its European-level organizations, from enterprises and unions to scientific associations and football leagues*” (Kohli, 2000:119). It should, in a few words, be considered an *unintended consequence of EU institutional and political actions* that is contributing to the European social integration process, either through daily conjugal mechanisms of cultural (re)adaptation or the upbringing given to the offspring. Furthermore, if these marital tendencies carry on acquiring significance and social visibility, one of the major challenges that may confront the future of Europe is a move towards a European transnational space in which intra-marriage gradually erodes our sense of ethnic and national belonging. Can a European identity replace a national identity? Or, on the contrary, can it represent a non-conflicting, supplementary identity to the national one? Can intra-marriage, in time, make Europeans more

European? And, also, how can a “new” ethnic European identity be created without a strong political state (like the EU) as a background support?

The idea that intra-marriage has an impact on the creation of some sort of European identity has only tentatively been demonstrated by research. In her study on French-German couples, G. Varro (1995) suggests that the children of these couples constitute the basis of a European identity. Also, another investigation carried out in France and Germany and cited by the same author (Varro, 2003) stated that, when asked, the offspring of mixed marriages were more likely to say they felt attached “equally to two different cultures” or more attached to an “international culture” or “European culture” than children from a homogeneous background (both parents with the same nationality), who mainly reported that they belonged to “a single culture”.

Moreover, the existing data from Eurobarometer surveys on feelings of attachment to Europe also highlights which social groups are keener to support the EU. Results have shown that a sense of identification with Europe varies in accordance with sex, age, social class and political convictions, as well as with the region of Europe (the level of Europeanness may be more prominent in some countries than others). When assessing *How European are European Union citizens?*, Special Eurobarometer 251 (2006) revealed that, from a socio-demographic point of view, respondents who were young, managers/directors, possessors of the highest level of education, urban residents and regular Internet users were those who exhibited the most “European” practices in their daily lives. This may indicate that it is inside this group that people with greater levels of attachment to Europe and stronger feelings of Europeanness are more often encountered. Furthermore, when asked about the benefits to their own country of belonging to the EU, 53% of EU citizens reported that it was a good thing (Eurobarometer 62, 2004), though these results were mainly given by citizens belonging to old Member States (85% in Luxembourg and 70% in Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium and Spain), with the citizens of new members expressing lower levels of support for their country's membership.

Regardless of the greater or lesser level of attachment to and identification with the EU by its citizens, the underlying “essence” of *what it is to be European* and the question of *whether there is a European identity* (why should it exist?) are extremely complex and controversial issues with no theoretical conformity within social science literature. Europeans do have certain shared *cultural meaning systems* - culture, religion, geographical location, history, tradition, ethnicity, monuments, and myths -

that may function as elements of attachment to Europe in general and the EU in particular. Also, the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union* constitutes a symbolic effort to bring together, for the whole of the EU, all the European tradition of democratic principles and values, respect for human rights and the rule of law so that it can function as an institutional framework for EU policy-makers to claim *unity in diversity*⁸. Although these shared symbols and common goals can help to reinforce a sense of belonging and attachment to Europe, they are not sufficient, on their own, to provide an understanding of the emergence of a European identity and society.

In fact, concepts like *Europeanization* and *European society* are often used in a misleading way to refer to issues related to *European identity*. In an attempt to clarify the meaning of the first two terms, Díez Medrano (2008) argues that, broadly speaking, the first concept refers to the direct or indirect impact that EU economic and political institutions have on national societies and its citizens' lives. Europeanization puts tourists, students, migrant workers and other individuals from different countries in contact, representing part of the social terrain where European solidarities and networks can grow; it can, in a word, be conceived as a trans-European group of contacts suitable for the exchange of goods, experiences and political activities, making the emergence of a *European society* possible. Examples of the widening scope of the Europeanization process are tourism, cross-border activities between neighbouring regions, the spread of various styles of cuisine, the creation of media communications related to Europe (the newspaper *The European*; the British SKY and French-German Arté television broadcasting services), the existence of a European Champions League for football, the film festival and 'Eurovision' song festival, and the other specific "EU symbols" such as Europe Day (9 May), the common flag and hymn, and the single currency (the euro).

These are examples of the Europeanization of our culture but they do not tell us anything about the creation of a *European society* or the emergence of a *European identity*. People may, in fact, have common patterns in their lifestyles and establish social contacts across national boundaries without that implying any reorganization of national social structure or the reshuffling of their identities. For a *European society* to come into being, *social groups* must be formed whose consciousness and behaviour can

⁸ It is important to remember, with Lowenthal (2000), that, alongside its "positive achievements", Europe also has various cultural and political obstacles – linguistic diversity, disparities of size and economic resources among its nations, negative cultural stereotypes vis-à-vis other nations, a common past based on "political ills" like war and genocide, and excessive centralisation by the European institutions – that obstruct the creation of a "*European identity*".

go beyond local affiliations and truly contribute to a unified feeling of identification with Europe. In this sense, I fully believe that EU citizens who intra-marry actually constitute an emerging social group whose emotional ties may, in the long term, make an important contribution to the rise of a *European society*. Evidence of this – I reiterate – has not yet been worked on, which makes it an extremely rich subject for further development on the sociological agenda.

Despite the fact that *Europeanization* is the first step towards the rise of a *European society* (Díez Medrano, 2008), it does not necessarily imply the creation of a *European identity*. Although the latter concept is extremely controversial and arguments for and against it have been presented in the academic literature (Kohli, 2000), it is necessary to define and assume it here as a working label in order to assess its present and future impact on European social integration. One of the proposals that move towards the defence of conceptualizing it as a *process in the making* is the expression advanced by G. Delanty (2002, 2005) of *pluralized cosmopolitan European identity*. This suggests that the sense and feeling of being European is illustrated more as a person's orientation towards the world and a cosmopolitan spirit, rather than towards a fixed idea of Europe. This expression presents an alternative that goes beyond the essentialism normally implicit in its conceptualization, by addressing the importance of citizens' beliefs and feelings towards other European countries and the recognition of diversity and cultural plurality throughout Europe; using Delanty's words, "*it means that citizens of one country consider the citizens of another 'one of us'; it means the recognition of living in a world of diversity and a belief in the fundamental virtue of embracing positively the values of the other*" (Delanty, 2005:18). The sense of "*cosmopolitanism*" stressed by Delanty rests upon a reflexive relation of one's identity that goes further than the political and institutional project of the EU and Europe as a whole and, to use the author's words, is connected with meanings that are "*within national and regional contexts, rather than beyond them on a supranational level. The Europeanness of these identities consists as much of the ways that values, interests and beliefs, modes of justification, etc. are mediated and negotiated as in a specific set of identifications*" (Delanty, 2005:20).

With regard to this latter idea, research into the internal dynamics of European intra-marriage can contribute to an understanding of whether the couples concerned and their children are building specific "*sets of European identifications*" that, in the end, can not only form a "*European social group*" but will also forge a "*pluralized*

cosmopolitan identity” with Europe as the symbolic background. Through continual and ritualized everyday actions and behaviours, intra-married citizens may be creating and inventing informal instruments that, on a larger scale, will strengthen the sense of belonging to Europe and to the transnational European space, in a way that will strengthen both civil and institutional EU representatives. Intra-European marriages could, then, be representing a solid laboratory domain for observing not only *how new types of family are being created* but also, *how Europe is being informally built “from below” by its own people.*

5 – Final remarks

The aim of these pages was to present an initial reflection on bi-national unions in Europe. Intra-EU marriage may represent a distinctive phenomenon with different characteristics from those pertaining to intermarriage between Europeans and extra-Community groups. Europe, as I believe, is being developed through conjugal and upbringing processes that are experienced and negotiated on a daily basis by these couples and may lead, in the future, to a wider and hybrid cultural space. This phenomenon, however, is still an object-in-the-making, since the EU is, with a greater or lesser degree of success, moving on. The social, economic and political construction of Europe, with the EU as a legitimizing actor at the head, is a dynamic and complex process whose construction has to be understood on the basis of various lines of individual, social and institutional action. Intra-European marriages represent a new form of *spontaneous affective behaviour* developed by civil society, that, alongside rational and instrumental political measures, may be playing an important role in the (re)definition of the idea of Europe.

Among the groups that may be taking charge of this process, a *highly educated European generation* shows higher levels of identification with the EU and appears to have frequent and continuous social contacts throughout the internal European space, which may be functioning as a privileged site of *emotional relationships*. If this assumption turns out to be correct, then Europe should be regarded as a process that is being carried forward by a well-qualified elite that may be developing particular expressions of a European identity and of Europeanization processes. In fact, if the *love reason* represents, as we have seen, one of the principal motives reported for moving

across national borders, we should seriously consider its social and political consequences on future European integration.

Accordingly, in further research it is important to evaluate two main directions of inquiry. In the first place, we should look into intra-marriage rates in order to assess the factors influencing their possible development; are these factors linked to a) emergent groups of EU free movers taking advantage of the social-political measures given by the EU to its citizens or to b) the “traditional emigration flows” between certain EU countries (e.g. from Portugal and Spain to France and Germany); or are they connected to c) “recent immigration flows” of populations between certain EU countries (e.g. from Poland to Germany and France; Romania to Spain and Portugal); or, finally, are intra-marriage rates related to d) neighbourly contacts between countries (the Swedes and Finns; Portuguese and Spanish; French and Germans)? All the factors mentioned may be involved to a greater or lesser extent in the emergence of bi-national unions, depending on which EU country is under analysis.

Secondly, it is also important to understand the internal dynamics and daily practices of intra-married EU couples and discover whether they are similar to intermarried couples in general or present certain singularities that justify the use of the concept advanced here. Both hypotheses are certainly linked to a potential contribution to a wider sense of belonging to Europe and are also linked to an emerging feeling of Europeanness developed by these couples. Do intra-European marriage makes Europeans more European? Or, in turn, do they reproduce – on the same level as any other intermarried couple – an increasing sense of belonging to and living in a “cosmopolitan space” and an “international culture”?

The lack of research capable of answering these questions makes this subject a particularly rich field for exploring and developing new lines of inquiry. In fact, there is not only a lack of individual investigation but also large-scale cross-national collaborative research that could be used to assess whether the ideas mentioned here can ultimately be corroborated.

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