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Towards building a conceptual framework on intermarriage

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Saya Osanami Tōrngren

[Malmo University, Sweden](#); [Sophia University, Japan](#)

Nahikari Irastorza

[Malmo University, Sweden](#)

Miri Song

[University of Kent, UK](#)

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Introduction

Studies of ‘intermarriage’ have grown considerably in the last several decades, especially in relation to western societies, which are increasingly multi-ethnic and diverse. With increasing migration worldwide, the availability of potential partners both within and outside national borders is, in theory, enhanced. The cultural diversity generated as a consequence of international migration has facilitated the unions of people from different countries, religions, races and ethnicities. The occurrence of intermarriage is, in fact, affected by the availability of partners within and outside national, religious, racial and ethnic lines; but also by the degree of commonality in social status, such as class, between the different groups, the existence of formal sanctions such as anti-miscegenation laws, and informal sanctions such as taboos associated with intermarriage (Lieberson and Waters, 1990).

International migration, however, not only enriches the diversity of migrant receiving countries but may also be seen to threaten their social cohesion and national identities. As microcosms of increasingly diverse societies that challenge people’s ideas of us and them, intermarriages remain, in many societies (and some regions within them), controversial, and even to some extent, transgressive. The difficulties and social disapproval experienced by some intermarried couples depend, to a large extent, on the status of the outsider (as defined by race, ethnicity, country of origin, religion, caste, class, gender, etc.) relative to the status of the insider, and they also vary across countries. In societies such as the US, Germany and

South Africa, intermarriages have been legally banned. Even though such laws do not exist today, the impact of such historical and legal sanctions are still profound. For example, in the US where the anti-miscegenation law that forbade black–white unions was in force in many states until 1967, black–white marriages still represent the smallest proportion of all types of marriage (Yancey, 2009). Even in a country such as Sweden, which never had an official anti-miscegenation law throughout its history, the fear of miscegenation was articulated and manifested historically, especially in relation to Swedish–Roma unions, through the widespread idea of degeneration of the superior Swedish race and culture (Hagerman, 2006). As in other societies, there are still hierarchical preferences in the ethnic and racial origins of a potential partner in Sweden, and the attitudes towards intermarriages are justified through persistent ideas of ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Osanami Törngren, 2011).

Behind the social disapproval of intermarriages and the actual likelihood of individuals and groups intermarrying lies the question of societal integration. Intermarriage is said to signal a lessening of social distance between the ethnic minority groups who partner with the majority group and to lead to integration, as elaborated in the famous study by Milton Gordon (1964). Intermarriage also weakens the cultural distinctiveness and salience in the future generation and contributes to the softening of negative attitudes, prejudice, and stereotypes against the out-group (Kalmijn, 1998). The idea of intermarriage as an indicator of a higher degree of social cohesion in a geographical area is well rooted in the intermarriage literature (see Giorgas and Jones, 2002; Kennedy, 1943; Price, 1982). Considering the availability of potential partners, integration, understood as a two-way process of mutual understanding and accommodation between the newcomers and the long-term residents (regardless their race, ethnicity, religion or country of birth) of a geographical area, seems a necessary pre-condition for the occurrence of intermarriage.

Studies of mixed marriages typically employ different definitions and measures for intermarriage, which makes a comparative exploration of it challenging. While we define intermarriages as intimate cohabiting relationships, regardless of their legal status, comprised of partners from different nationalities, religious affiliations and/or ethnic and racial origins, the wide variety of definitions and foci on intermarriage presented in the chapters of this special issue speaks to the difficulties of comparative exploration. In this introductory article to the special issue, we not only present the state of the art of the intermarriage literature but we also discuss the multiple conceptualizations and measures of intermarriage employed by the authors in this special issue. Furthermore, it has also been claimed that a conceptual framework to understand this phenomenon is still to be developed (Williams, 2012). Drawing on previous studies and the articles in this special issue, we take some preliminary steps towards building a conceptual framework of intermarriage, which advances our understanding of this increasingly diverse and varied phenomenon.

Although intermarriage as a topic of research has gained more attention in the non-English speaking European countries over the past decade, most research is still primarily carried out in the North American and British contexts. The articles that form this special issue are based on empirical studies conducted both in English and non-English speaking countries such as the US, Canada, the UK, Japan, Sweden, Belgium, France and Spain. They focus on the patterns, choices and outcomes of intermarriages, including the controversial association between intermarriage and integration. While our international and multidisciplinary selection of studies illustrates the increasingly diverse directions taken in the study of intermarriage, the articles focus on (and question) the relationships between intermarriage and integration from different viewpoints.

Different conceptualizations and measures of ‘intermarriage’

Despite the growing interest on this topic, there is no consistent way in which countries or scholars measure (Song, 2012) or name (Charsley, 2012) intermarriage. Certainly, what is meant by intermarriage can constitute quite disparate objects of study, so that this catch-all term can be applied in relation to relationships, including marriages, cohabitations, and in some cases dating, which are defined by ethnic, racial, religious (e.g. between Jews and Gentiles), national differences, or some combination of the above. Furthermore, analysts from different countries employ different understandings of concepts such as ‘ethnicity’, ‘race’ and ‘immigrant’, so that what constitutes ‘interethnic’ or ‘interracial’ unions is subject to debate within and across societies (Morning, 2014; Rodríguez-García et al., 2015; Song, 2015). Given the diverse understandings and conceptualizations of intermarriage, scholars are talking past each other much of the time.

Reflecting the disparate histories and demographics of each society, different terms have been used to refer to the phenomena of marriages (and partnerships) across borders and multiple definitions have been used for each term. Some of the factors behind these differences are as follows: (i) the category of study such as race, ethnicity, country of birth, citizenship and religion; (ii) differences in terminology across geographical areas (e.g. ‘race’ in the United States versus ‘ethnicity’ in Europe) and academic disciplines (e.g. ‘intercultural’ in Psychology versus ‘binational’, ‘international’ or ‘transnational’ in Sociology and Anthropology); (iii) country-level differences in the definition of a migrant (i.e. first versus second and next generations) and in data-collecting strategies. Based on previous studies, we have shown the main variable dimensions of intermarriage as shown in Figure 1.

<Insert Figure 1 about here>

Referring to the broader category of marriages between different social units, general terms such as ‘exogamy’, ‘heterogamy’, ‘intermarriage’, ‘cross-border marriage’ or ‘mixed marriage’ are used. More specifically, depending on the nature of the contextual boundaries as mentioned above and listed in brackets in Figure 1, marriages across borders may be referred to as ‘international’ (Jones and Shen, 2008; Piper, 1997), ‘binational’ (Irastorza and DeVoretz, 2015; Koelet and de Valk, 2014), ‘transnational’ (Charsley, 2012; Williams, 2012), ‘cross-national’ (Baker Cottrel, 1990; Cretser, 1999), ‘cross-border’ (e.g. Constable, 2012; Lee, 2012; Wang and Chang, 2002) ‘intercultural’ (Cools, 2006; Sharaievska et al., 2013), ‘cross-cultural’ (Falicov, 1995), ‘interethnic’ (Burma, 1963; Bizman, 1987; Furtado and Theodoropoulos, 2011; Lee et al., 1974), ‘interracial’ (Barnett, 1963; Gevrek, 2014; Monahan, 1970), ‘interreligious’ (Burchinal and Chancellor, 1963; Chancellor and Monahan, 1955) or ‘interfaith’ (Cila and Lalonde, 2014).

Terms such as ‘international,’ ‘binational,’ ‘cross-national’ and ‘transnational’, listed in the first column of Figure 1, have countries and citizenships as points of reference, indicating that spouses were born and raised in different countries and/or have different citizenships. The concepts ‘international marriages’, ‘binational marriages’ and ‘cross-national marriages’ have been used synonymously in the literature. However, many of the studies that refer to these types of unions as international marriages focus on the marriage market and human trafficking industry in East and Southeast Asia (e.g. Lee, 2008; Wang and Chang, 2002).

The term ‘transnational marriages’, on the other hand, has been used not only to describe couples in which partners were born in different countries or have different citizenships, but also to explain the attachments and behaviors that partners or couples may have in relation to their countries of birth and countries of residence. While Charsley (2012) defines transnational marriages as unions between people residing in different countries,

Williams (2012) narrows the meaning to marriages that take place within pre-existing transnational networks. Rather than presenting cross-border marriages as closed and categorical institutions (i.e. transnational versus non-transnational), Williams suggests that they can be placed on a continuum between those that are clearly transnational and those that are not: On one extreme, we have unions formed from transnational communities, while on the other we find marriages in which one partner has lost contact with their community of origin. In the middle of such a continuum – and this is probably the most common for current cross-border marriages – Williams places couples who show certain transnational tendencies through visits, regular Internet contact, etc. By thinking of transnationalism as a continuum, Williams highlights the evolving and changeable nature of cross-border relationships.

While the above terms clearly indicate that such marriages deal with a movement of people and crossing of a national border, the terms ‘interracial’ and ‘interethnic’ shift the focus away from migration. These two terms have often been used interchangeably in different parts of the world (and that is why we place them in the same group in Figure 1). While ‘race’ and ‘interracial’ are commonly used terms in the US, they are rarely mentioned in European political or academic discourses, where the concepts of ‘ethnicity’ and ‘interethnic’ have instead been used since World War Two (Goldberg, 2006; Montagu, 1950). Of course, disparate nations’ propensity to employ specific ethnic and racial terminology (if they do so) is structured by different histories, political institutions and demographic patterns (see King-O’Riain et al., 2014; Morning, 2014).

Confusion around the concepts of race versus ethnicity (and interracial and ‘interethnic’) also abounds in the literature. The divergent use and meanings of these terms arise from factors such as the availability of data, researchers’ understanding of these terms, empirical strategies in quantitative studies (such as an attempt to simplify the object of study), the geographical scope of the study, etc. Furthermore, the concept of ethnicity has not always

been used with appropriate rigor as some researchers apply it to sub-national groups while others do so to whole countries or larger geographical areas (Irastorza, 2010). For example, whereas the Chinese government recognizes more than 50 ethnic groups in China, most studies conducted in Europe, North America and elsewhere refer to the Chinese as a single and homogeneous ethnic group.

The multiplicity of terms discussed above reflects the fact that studies of intermarriage have tended to focus on one single dimension of dichotomous ‘difference’, e.g. religious difference, or differences in nationality, or ethnic and/or racial difference. In fact, most couples inhabit relationships in which various dimensions of experiences and identification may be either shared or different in relation to one another, rather than being mutually exclusive. So a couple may be binational, interethnic or interracial, and interreligious, or only some of those things (see Caballero et al., 2008). By referring to intermarriage as ‘cross-cultural’ marriages, other scholars see intermarriage as couples where spouses come from different ethnic, racial, religious, social, or nationality groups (e.g. Falicov, 1995). The term ‘culture’ becomes an overarching concept that covers all kinds of differences between the spouses. Certainly, the terms ‘intercultural’ and ‘cross-cultural’, often used in studies with a more psychological focus, have addressed issues intermarried couples may face due to their disparate cultural backgrounds (e.g. Greenberg, 1996; Harmsen, 1999; Hegar and Greif, 1994; Pascoe, 1991).

There are not only different conceptualizations used by scholars, but also diverse ways of measuring intermarriage. As noted in the chapter by Song (this volume), the criteria for which unions constitute ‘interethnic’ unions (the term used by the Office for National Statistics in the UK) can obscure (and even distort in some cases) our understanding of the prevalence (or not) of such unions. For instance, in a report entitled ‘Mixed Unions in Canada’ (2011), based on the National Household Survey, mixed unions are defined as

couples in which one partner belongs to a visible minority group and the other one does not, or those in which partners belong to different visible minority groups. The Employment Equity Act of Canada describes visible minorities as people who, not being aboriginal, are neither Caucasian in race nor white in color (Statistics Canada, 2011). The visible minority population in Canada consists mainly of the following groups: South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese. Statistics Canada replaced the terms ‘race (ethnicity)’ by ‘population group’ in 2009. However, the 2016 census still contains an open, self-reported question on ethnic or cultural origins of the reference person’s ancestors.

Like in Canada, the term ‘mixed’ is used in France but with a different connotation: it refers to couples in which partners come from different countries or have different citizenships. This definition does not recognize ethnic or racial differences (or even differences in birth countries when the definition is based on citizenship and naturalized immigrants are involved) and, therefore, has been criticized by different scholars (e.g. Collet, 2012; Filhon and Varro, 2005). In contrast with the UK, US, and Canada, the French republic does not recognize or legitimate the notion of ethnic and racial differences. Moreover, asking about ethnicity is considered illegal there. While there can be an overlap, nationality cannot be a reliable proxy for ethnic or racial status. Therefore, the number and experiences of ‘mixed’ couples in France are very difficult to document.

The same is the case in Sweden, where all residents living in the country over a year are registered in the population register. This register does not provide information on individuals’ ethnicity or race, and the studies of intermarriage are based on either citizenship (see Cretser, 1999) or country of birth (see Dribe and Lundh, 2008, 2010; Irastorza and Bevelander, 2014; Niedomsyl et al., 2010; Stenflo, 2001), and sometimes on the individuals’ parental origins (e.g. Celikaksoy et al., 2009; Statistics Sweden, 2010). Moreover, only

information on legally married spouses or common-law partners who have children is registered with Statistics Sweden. Thus, the data on common-law couples, including mixed couples with no children, is missing from the marriage register.

As shown above, the ways in which specific countries operationalize intermarriage often reveals a particular conception of majority and minority status, or the distinction between 'native' versus 'foreign'. The use of citizenship or a place of birth as a measure of intermarriage, therefore, can obscure ethnic differences or commonalities between a couple, and some unions may be recognized wrongly as mixed (e.g. an Iranian with Swedish citizenship marrying an Iranian with Iranian citizenship) while others may be overlooked and are effectively invisible (e.g. a Swedish-born, second-generation Iranian marrying an ethnic Swede). The examples presented above illustrate that, depending on the geographical scope and the availability of national data, intermarriage may be variably defined, making international comparisons of this phenomenon very difficult.

Previous studies on intermarriage

Based on the idea that intermarriage facilitates the integration and cohesion of societies, the literature on intermarriage can be broadly categorized into three streams: the likelihood and patterns of intermarriage, intermarriage and migration, and intermarriage and social and economic integration. The first line of studies focuses on the occurrence of intermarriage, and on preferences and choices of marriage partners. Studies on intermarriage and migration question how migration policies can affect marriage migration patterns and the development and the mobility of binational relationships. Finally, researchers on intermarriage and integration address specific questions on integration such as how intermarriage is connected to different types of social and economic integration.

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Who marries whom?

The occurrence of intermarriage is said to depend on the availability of the partner, assortative mating, and existence of formal and informal sanctions. According to the assortative mating theory, intermarriage is self-selected; in other words, it is more likely to happen among individuals of similar socio-demographic and human capital characteristics such as age, education, income and socio-economic background and also phenotype (Chiswick and Houseworth, 2011; Epstein and Guttman, 1984). However, this hypothesis by itself is not able to explain the actual occurrence of mixed marriages. This is what leads many scholars to ask questions regarding who marries whom and what the individual and societal factors that facilitate or hinder intermarriage are.

Studies mapping the patterns of intermarriage in multi-ethnic societies are of social and political importance because intermarriage has been regarded as a key indicator of integration. Marriage is one of the most personal and intimate social relationships that individuals enter into in their lives. Unlike other types of social relationships, marriage is a field where, as Gordon states, ‘the member of the ethnic group may if he wishes follow a path which never takes him across the boundaries of his ethnic structural network (Gordon, 1964: 280)’. Historically, outmarriage was not only officially forbidden in some countries, but those who did intermarry (including White individuals) without an official sanction could also be subject to denigration (see Twine, 2010 on White women who partnered with Black men in Britain), abuse, and often a lowering of their social status (see Merton, 1941). The policing of endogamy was crucial for the maintenance of racial boundaries and the preservations of the putatively superior qualities of the White ‘race’ (Davis, 1991; Spickard, 1989).

Most extant studies on intermarriage have tended to be demographic analyses of who marries whom in a variety of contexts. Research shows that those who live in a more diverse residential area, and who have more interracial and interethnic contacts, are more apt to

commit to intermarriages (Muttarak and Heath, 2010); related to this, ethnic groups encounter different opportunities to meet co-ethnic partners (Blau, 1977).

Human capital, time elapsed since migration, as well as migrants' own age-ethnic-religious group and sex ratios have also been cited in the literature as factors that affect individuals' probability of intermarrying (e.g. Gevrek, 2009; Meng and Gregory, 2005; Meng and Meurs, 2009). While some scholars argue that intermarriage is more likely among middle-class White and ethnic minority people (Jacobs and Labov, 2002), others have found that the association of higher education and the propensity to intermarry is not constant across all ethnic minority groups (see Muttarak, 2007).

Many analysts agree that the generational status of 'migrants' is significant in that second-generation individuals are, not surprisingly, much more likely to marry out than are the first generation (Kalmijn, 1998). Nevertheless, we also know that such a propensity varies across different ethnic minority groups. For instance, Muttarak and Heath (2010) found that ethnicity (and gender) matters considerably in Britain, where Chinese and Indian origin Britons are more likely to intermarry than Britons of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin.

Societal attitudes towards intermarriage and preferences and choices of marriage partners are also influential factors shaping the occurrence of intermarriage. With a few exceptions (e.g. Gonzalez-Ferrer, 2006; Kalmijn and Luijkx, 2005; Kalmijn and van Tubergen, 2006; Muttarak and Heath, 2010; Osanami Törngren, 2011; Rodríguez-García et al. 2015), such studies have been predominantly conducted in the United States (e.g. Dunleavy, 2004; Everts et al., 2005; Goldstein and Harknett, 2006; Johnson and Jacobson, 2005). These studies show that those who have prior interracial contact or have established friendship over racial and ethnic boundaries are more likely to be positive about intermarriages and also more likely to intermarry. Moreover, they conclude that educational attainment or class may also affect the attitudes towards intermarriage.

Societal attitudes may not only affect the mating of mixed couples but also their marital stability. While there is an abundance of studies on the likelihood of intermarriage, little is known about what happens once the honeymoon is over. Are these relationships as stable as homogamous ones? What are, if any, the additional internal and external challenges faced by these couples? According to the few studies on binational couples' marital experiences, relationships in which partners were born in different countries are more likely to dissolve than their counterparts (Cao et al., 2008; Kalmijn et al., 2005; van Huis and Steenhof 2003). These scholars explain this finding by appealing to ethno-cultural differences; however, they do not explore what aspects of partners' cultural backgrounds matter for predicting their probability of remaining married or separating. This is an example of the simplistic idea of cultural difference that is often used in explanations of marital dissolution.

Intermarriage and migration

Studies on marriage and migration also investigate the role of transnational networks on the formation of binational couples. The literature on transnational marriages focuses mostly on marriages established within the same ethnic and religious groups across national borders (e.g. a Pakistani living in Denmark marrying a Pakistani living in Pakistan, and bringing the partner to Denmark).

With a tendency for more strict immigration control worldwide, marriage and family reunification migration provides one of the easier migration paths in most countries. In response, many European countries are adopting measures to restrict marriage migration. Some of these measures include the establishment of minimum age and financial assets (as it happens in Denmark) for spousal sponsorship or the assessment of the basis of the marriage, i.e. love versus an opportunity for migration (this is, for example, the case of Switzerland or Spain). In many European countries, couples and the prospective partner who will cross the

border are required to demonstrate their ‘integration’ potential before they are granted permission to enter. Integration policies which have been introduced to encourage and oblige settled and newly arrived immigrants to learn the language, take part in civil and economic activities, and to some extent adjust to majority cultural norms, have also become a concern in immigration admission policy for family reunification (Wagner, 2014). Language or citizenship tests, setting the minimum age, or requiring certain financial assets are instituted to ensure a degree of ‘integration’ before entry into the host country. ‘Sham or bogus marriages’ is a publicly debated issue, and especially debated across the European Union (EU) with legislation and guidelines on how to prevent them (see, European Commission Justice 2014). Then, how is the formation and consolidation of mixed unions shaped by state policies?

Studies on intermarriage and migration have investigated the experiences of couples that cross national boundaries (for example, a Japanese citizen marrying a Dane and migrating to Denmark) (e.g. Charsley and Shaw, 2006; Gonzalez-Ferrer, 2006; Williams, 2010). Some of the questions addressed by these scholars concern how migration policies can affect marriage migration patterns, and the development and mobility of binational relationships.

Finally, state policies on migration and intermarriage not only influence the formation and development of mixed relationships but may also affect the integration of the foreign-born into the host society as well as the social cohesion of a community. It is difficult to know whether (and how) migration policies affect the integration process of marriage migrants; however, research attempting to answer this question concludes that integration is not furthered because of the restrictive policies or the restricted number of migrants coming to European countries (Bonjour and Kraler, 2015).

The right to migrate and settle due to marriage is construed as the right of legal residents of the country, but different degrees of entitlement to family migration are given to

different categories of people, constructing a stratification and hierarchy within the states' population (Kraler, 2010). Studies show that regulations on marriage migration put pressure on both the sponsoring spouse and the one who migrates, creating a 'position of dependency' (e.g. Eggebø, 2013; Kraler, 2010). Some academics have also investigated the basis of binational marriages and the potential implications of this on their relationships. For example, Corijn (2009) and Timmerman (2006) cite the motivation to marry (i.e. love versus instrumental migration) as an influential variable for the divorce of binational couples.

Intermarriage and 'integration'

A third stream of literature on intermarriage, and what is possibly becoming the most controversial, explores the correlation between intermarriage and migrants' social and economic integration into host societies. But what do scholars mean when they talk about 'integration' in relation to intermarriage? Are they referring to the assimilation of newcomers or ethnic minorities into the (White) mainstream, as has traditionally been theorized? Or are they alluding to the social cohesion of a community? Is intermarriage a product of a well-integrated society or does intermarriage facilitate social cohesion and integration?

The debate on the positive correlation between intermarriage and integration dates back to the 1950s, when Marcson (1950) questioned the use of intermarriage as an index of assimilation as suggested in previous sociological studies. A number of scholars (e.g. Bastide, 1961; Hwang et al., 1997; Song, 2009) have since criticized the automatic association between intermarriage and integration that has prevailed in the intermarriage literature, especially in quantitative studies. Yet the legacy of Gordon's view of structural assimilation, which focuses on the process of ethnic minorities' entrance into the mainstream society, is still dominant in studies of intermarriage. For example, recent analysts such as Alba and Nee

(2003) and Lee and Bean (2004) still regard intermarriage as the ultimate 'you have made it' test of integration. The rationale behind this idea is that intermarriage with a person belonging to the majority group will speed up the acculturation of the foreigner; in turn, this will provide them with better tools to integrate into the host country or mainstream society. However, the positive association between acculturation and integration has been contested, or at least qualified, by the theory of segmented assimilation of Portes and Zhou (1993).

The more recent literature (see Rodríguez-García [2015]; and Safi's [2008], Rodríguez-García et al.'s [2015], and Song's [2009] empirical studies in France, Spain and the UK, respectively) has also questioned whether intermarriage consistently results in wholly positive outcomes for minority partners (and their children), such as social inclusion and acceptance by her/his partner's family and friends, and the other assumed benefits from affiliation with a White partner. Furthermore, Rodríguez-García et al. (2015) argue that the relationship between intermarriage and integration is multidirectional or segmented: i.e. relevant for some aspects (e.g. acquisition of nationality or the learning of official languages, a form of human capital acquisition) but not for others (e.g. shortening the amount of time it takes to find a job or contributing to migrants' greater social participation, such as involvement in associations). Moreover, they show that the link between intermarriage and integration should consider various control factors, such as country of origin, length of residence, gender, and social class. In addition, they argue for the need to consider the bidirectional nature of processes of integration and to include other aspects of integration related to everyday life, such as the acquisition of new values and norms, new cultural practices, ways of thinking, or life satisfaction – all traditionally omitted in the literature owing to the difficulties of measuring them. Thus, these more critical studies of the purported link between intermarriage and integration have pointed out the diversity of potential outcomes of intermarriage for the multiple integration paths of migrants and their offspring.

Despite the predominantly positive perspective on growing intermarriages, we know very little, still, about the educational and labor market outcomes of children of mixed unions, and how the outcomes may differ according to the specific ethnic backgrounds of mixed couples (see Panico and Nazroo, 2011; Platt, 2012). A study in Sweden shows that having one native-born parent is important in labor market success; interestingly it is shown that having a native-born father will lead to a better labor-market achievement than having a native-born mother (Behtoui, 2004). This example illustrates how the gender dynamics of intermarriages can affect the outcomes of children of such unions.

In fact, the benefits of having a native-born partner on the labor-market participation of migrants are actually a source of debate. Most scholars agree that intermarried migrants are more likely to be employed and to have a higher salary than intramarried migrants. However, while some scholars explain these gaps by the ‘intermarriage premium hypothesis’ (e.g. Behtoui, 2004; Gevrek, 2009; Meng and Gregory, 2005; Meng and Meurs, 2009), others conclude this is due to self-selection (e.g. Kantarevic, 2004; Nekby, 2010). A third group of scholars (see Irastorza and Bevelander, 2014) argue that these hypotheses are not mutually exclusive and are, actually needed to explain intermarried migrants’ labor market achievements when compared to those of intramarried migrants.

In short, we need to problematize and further investigate the assumed link between intermarriage and ‘integration’, especially as we still know relatively little about the conditions and experiences of what many contemporary forms of intermarriage entail. Future studies need to move in two directions. First, integration – and the relationship between this and intermarriage – should be analyzed as more processual and intergenerational, rather than a process that occurs during an individual’s or a group of individuals’ lifetimes. While the starting point of this process is usually clear (the migration of an individual or a family), the various dimensions of ‘integration’ have no obvious, definitive end-point. Second, more

empirical studies are needed to measure intermarried migrants' participation in the economic, socio-cultural and political spheres of 'host' countries, including their membership in co-ethnic and transnational networks.

Traditional understandings of intermarriage are not able to explain emergent unions and partnerships which do not easily fit the neat and usual binaries of majority/minority, or 'native' and migrant – not because such statuses do not exist societally, but because such statuses on their own cannot properly account for the ways in which they can combine with other modes of belonging within increasingly diverse societies.

Our contribution: Towards building a conceptual framework for the study of intermarriage

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As discussed above, due to the lack of consistency among scholars and policy makers in defining and measuring this phenomenon, a theoretical framework for the study of intermarriage is still to be developed. In order to fill this gap in the literature, we take some preliminary steps towards building a conceptual framework of intermarriage.

One of the most challenging tasks in building a conceptual framework of intermarriage is to develop a model that would be broad enough to include all the modalities of intermarriage (as those shown in Figure 1 and discussed in our definition of intermarriage), the factors affecting each modality and their potential consequences. Below we present some ideas about how to address this task.

The three streams of literature presented in the previous section can be broadly classified in studies that look at the factors affecting the occurrence of intermarriage and those that focus on the consequences of intermarriage at the individual or societal levels (see Table 1). The papers that form this special issue are based on empirical studies conducted in Europe,

North America and Asia and illustrate the four different, but interrelated, dimensions of this matrix.

Factors affecting and consequences of intermarriage at the societal and individual levels are not rigid or mutually exclusive; in fact, they sometimes overlap or complement each other. Not only do individual and societal-level factors coexist but some factors shaping intermarriage may, at the same time, be consequences of intermarriage. For example, the variables included in our table ‘attitudes towards intermarriage’, ‘number of intermarriages’, ‘integration and social cohesion’, and ‘immigration and marriage policies’ can be treated both as a precondition for the occurrence of intermarriage or as a result of intermarriage.

Furthermore, aspects such as multiple citizenship and the growth of mixed children may result in new ideas of racial and ethnic belonging (i.e. the Japanese American community in the US) and citizenship, and may reinforce, or in some cases, blur, or redraw racial and ethnic boundaries. This can, in turn, affect attitudes towards intermarriage and the occurrence of it.

The article by Rodríguez-García et al. in this special issue constitutes a good example of the complementarity between individual and societal-level factors affecting intermarriage. The article deals with the socio-cultural dimension of integration and examines, on the one hand, prejudices and prescribed preferences that the exogamous couples formed by immigrants and native Spaniards experience from their families and the wider society and, on the other hand, prejudices and mate preferences verbalised by the members of mixed unions themselves. The authors find that both members of exogamous couples tend to suffer social discrimination regarding the crossing of ethnic and racial borders. Furthermore, ethno-racial prejudices and discriminatory attitudes also exist among intermarried couples themselves. In this way, the article challenges the idea that intermarriage clearly erodes social and ethno-racial boundaries and negative attitudes between groups.

How do the individual-level factors such as partners' age, education and their socio-economic background (including class or caste) affect intermarriage? Partners' religious affiliations, preferences for certain races and ethnicities and families' attitude toward intermarriage are factors that may also affect not only the occurrence of intermarriage but also the nature and the composition of mixed couples, and their marital stability (Fisman et al., 2008; Kalmijn, 1998). Migration factors, more specifically, years since migration¹, have been cited in the literature (Stevens et al., 2006) as factors that affect intermarriage between foreign-born and a locally born people (i.e. binational couples). Celikaksoy's article pays attention to the multigenerational migration factor and focuses on the next generation by looking at household formation behavior of native-born individuals. The article pays attention to individual, parental as well as structural marriage-market characteristics, where the main focus is the relationship between individual and group-level education and out-group household-formation behavior. The article challenges the indicated positive, linear, straightforward relationship between education and marriage to the majority group postulated by the cultural adoption and residential segregation arguments as discussed in the paper. Furthermore, it draws attention to preferences of ethnic endogamy and shared experiences for those who are at the top of the educational distribution in line with the positive assortative matching argument. In addition, the results are analyzed and discussed with a focus on gender and several different types of households.

Most studies looking at societal level factors affecting intermarriage and its consequences for society focus on the 'context of reception'². Furthermore, to our knowledge, the effects of intermarriage for the context of origin have been ignored in the literature. Some of these consequences may be as follows: demographic changes such as an aging population due to the migration of younger generations and a gender-imbalanced population in cases of gendered marriage migration (e.g. Filipino or Thai migration); change of family values and

norms influenced by the new and outsider member of the family; and changes in the forms of citizenship and numbers of citizens.

We argue that these processes may, and should, be analyzed from the perspective of the 'context of origin'. When binational couples constitute the object of study, the context of origin refers to the birth country of the foreign-born partner while the host country – and country of residence of the couple – constitutes the context of reception. However, in the case of conational mixed couples, these two concepts refer to the ethnic enclave, town, neighborhood or religious group partners belong and marry to³. As claimed by Jaworsky et al. (2012), the context of reception is conceived at the national level even though immigrant incorporation, policies and local people's attitudes towards immigrants vary considerably across physical and political spaces within nations. A list of societal-level factors on the context of origin and the reception can be seen in Table 1.

The culture or norm of marriage, attitudes towards intermarriage, the number of intermarriages and the size and age cohort of the co-ethnic community (as a proxy for the availability of potential co-ethnic partners) are factors related to intermarriage among different modalities of mixed couples both in the context of origin and reception. We have added three factors, namely, the patterns of migration, the culture of marriage-migration, and poverty and job opportunities in the context of origin as factors that may affect the occurrence of intermarriage between binational couples. The patterns of migration of a geographical area, understood as tendency and practice of the population of a certain region and country to migrate, may influence an individual's decision to migrate and to establish a relationship with foreign partners. The patterns of migration and the practice of marriage migration – i.e. the practices of their inhabitants (most of the time, women) marrying outside their country or region – are often related to economic factors. This is for example, the case of female

migration from Asian countries like Thailand or the Philippines to Europe or to richer Asian countries such as Japan and Korea.

Two articles of this special issue address how societal attitudes and structures regarding difference influence patterns of intermarriage in the context of reception. Osanami Törngren's article analyzes the role of interracial contacts on attitudes toward interracial marriages in Sweden. Contact hypothesis assumes that the more contact individuals have across the racial and ethnic lines, the more tolerant and open individuals become to persons of different racial and ethnic background (Allport, 1979). Osanami Törngren defines interracial contacts and marriages as interactions between someone of white European background and someone of a background not considered white European (i.e. African or Middle Eastern) in the Swedish context. She concludes that the amount of prior interracial contact affects attitudes towards interracial marriages positively in Sweden. The results indicate that integration, which is a two-way process, is a precondition to a more positive attitude towards intermarriages in general.

In an attempt to portray the complexity that is often missing in the research on international marriages, Morgan et al. document the highly varied experiences of international couples in Japan, by cross-classifying the couples' current social status (high or low) with the marriage migrant's reasons for migration. Morgan et al.'s typology of intermarriages in Japan reveals not only the hierarchical attitudes about ethnic and racial 'others' which are prevalent in Japanese society, but also the varied socio-economic status of the couples which lead to privileged intermarried couples enjoying some degree of inclusion and acceptance, while others with far less human and cultural capital do not. Morgan's article shows how the individual and societal level factors affecting the occurrence of intermarriage at the context of origin and reception are interconnected with the consequences of intermarriage such as the economic integration of the foreign-born partner.

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Intermarried migrants' 'integration' into host societies has been the most studied and controversial sub-topic among the consequences of intermarriage at the individual level. Based on the idea that the relationship between intermarriage and integration is multidirectional or segmented (Rodríguez-García et al., 2015) (and on other empirical studies on intermarried migrants' social and economic integration presented in the literature section), we have included four areas of study on intermarriage and integration: economic, socio-cultural, political and identity-related. The article by Koelet and de Valk in this special issue addresses the question of intermarried migrants' social integration into the host society. These authors consider social loneliness, as a symptom of the deficit of social integration. They examine European binational couples, consisting of one native (Belgian-born) and one foreign-born European partner, and they look at the effect of having a native-born partner on the social networks and social loneliness of European migrants living in Belgium. Their results reveal that European migrants with a native partner in Belgium experience more feelings of social loneliness than the native Belgian population, and European migrants have a smaller local network of family and friends. Koelet and de Valk's article challenges the idea that integration is easier for European migrants who experience less geographical distance and who are perceived to be culturally similar. They focus on a population with legitimate mobility across countries and with purported cultural proximity as important in the light of the European context, and point to the need to address the variable and multidimensional aspects of 'integration'.

As far as we know, the political and identity-related aspects of intermarried migrants' integration have not been addressed in the literature until recently (e.g. Boyd and Couture-Carron, 2015; Rodríguez-García et al., 2015). Some of the key questions to be asked in relation to the putative link between intermarriage and integration are as follows: Are there differences in the political participation and belonging of intermarried versus non-

intermarried migrants in the host country? Furthermore, how do intermarried couples identify their children? By examining the case of multiracial people who are parents, Song's article in this issue examines the identification and partnering patterns of multiracial people, i.e. the children of interracial couples, in the UK. Looking further down the generations, given the growing commonality of mixed people, how do 'mixed' people in different countries think about and experience their roles as parents? What particular concerns arise for such couples in particular societal contexts? The case of multiracial people poses some thorny questions for theorizing on intermarriage, as it is not clear what would constitute intermarriage for multiracial people (most of whom are part White in Britain).

Finally, some other important topics that we have identified as potential consequences of intermarriage for individuals are the transnationalization of mixed families, multiple citizenship and divorce. Irastorza, in this special issue, analyses the divorce patterns of binational couples in Canada, the US and France and also uses the term binational to describe couples formed by partners who were born in different countries. She also controls for religious differences and for parental-origin as a proxy for ethnicity. Her results reveal country-level differences in the significance of some key variables (namely, religion, intermarriage and the foreignness of the partners) previously identified in the literature as factors affecting the marital instability of intermarried couples; and challenge the idea of 'culture' as a factor affecting binational couples' marital stability.

Some conclusions

The different ways that scholars and governments measure and define intermarriage, as well as the variable availability of data, makes the task of observing and analyzing intermarriage from an international perspective very challenging. However, these very difficulties illustrate how no one dimension of 'difference' (e.g. ethnicity or race, nationality, social class) can be

assumed, a priori, to be of paramount importance over another, as a number of factors surely combine in shaping the experiences of mixed unions in disparate contexts.

In this introductory chapter of the special issue we have taken the first steps towards building a conceptual framework of intermarriage, one that is so far missing in the literature. We have explained how different analytical levels and sub-topics often overlap, complement and inform each other. The articles presented in this special issue address the phenomenon of intermarriage based on empirical studies in Europe, North America and Asia, and they illustrate how individual and societal factors interrelate to each other affecting both the occurrence and the consequences of intermarriages.

All the articles address the interactions and integration between migrants – and their children – and the local population through intermarriage. The articles focus on different aspects of integration such as the economic, societal and cultural aspects and the findings of each article show how the relationship between integration and intermarriage is not a given, but rather fragmented and partial in some cases. The articles by Rodríguez-García et al., Osanami Törngren and Morgan et al. focus on attitudes towards intermarriages and their results question the straightforward connection between intermarriage and integration. Koelet and de Valk, and Irastorza's articles challenge the idea of cultural proximity as an explaining factor for integration and marital stability. Finally, the two articles by Celikaksoy and Song address the need to further examine what integration and intermarriage mean for future generations in increasingly diverse societies.

By addressing intermarriage from different perspectives, the articles included in this special issue illustrate the conceptual framework that we have outlined in this chapter. This special issue contributes to developing this field by achieving a more comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional experiences and outcomes of 'intermarriage',

including the nature and degree of 'integration' of mixed couples and their families, and the wider implications of intermarriage on a growing number of societies around the world.

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¹ Note that time elapsed since migration may also be understood as a multigenerational factor that affects both the individual and societal levels.

² This concept was introduced by Portes and Böröcz (1989) to describe the economic, political, legal and other aspects of immigrants' reception in the host country. In this paper, we narrow it down to address specific aspects of the host country or the host community – such as culture of marriage, attitudes towards intermarriage, the size of the co-ethnic community and the number of mixed marriages within that context – that may affect or be affected by intermarriage.

³ Note that, in the literature, the context of origin among non-migrants often relates to the offspring of migrants and minority groups and the context of reception describes the culture of the majority.