Call for papers
International conference on intermarriage and mixedness
Paris, November 12 – 13, 2015

NEW RESEARCH CHALLENGES ON INTERMARRIAGE AND MIXEDNESS IN EUROPE AND BEYOND

Research on intermarriage has existed since the beginning of the 20th century. Depending on the country, it was part of different research fields: migration, family, religious or racial studies. Existing empirical studies generally circumscribe their analysis to one minority group in one country. But what are the common aspects of all these case studies on intermarriage? This international conference aims to review and discuss contemporary research in order to build up our stock of common knowledge and develop our theoretical conceptualization on intermarriage and mixedness.

Multiple theoretical concepts have been used to refer to mixed couples or their children: intermarriage, identity, integration, assimilation, multiculturalism, etc. New concepts have also been used, such as “mixedness” in the UK (Edwards et al. 2012) or “mixité” (Varro 2003; Collet et al. 2008) in the French context. A common definition of the phenomenon is that these unions involve distant social groups which are constructed in time and place through specific categories: “nation”, “race”, “culture”, “ethnicity” or “religion” (Merton 1964; Achard 1998) and that their children construct their personal identity taking their parents’ belongings into account. Previous research was done from two standpoints: from outside or inside the couple or family. The first has looked mainly at the others’ (persons and institutions) perception of these unions, families or children and social norms. They are considered as different, and inspire more or less disapproval. The second approach has dealt with intercultural management inside these families (Varro 1984; Collet and Santelli 2012), and with specific family or personal identities (Unterreiner 2015). Thanks to the meeting of researchers specialized in the field, we intend to get beyond these basic definitions of mixedness and establish a new common theoretical ground based on contemporary innovative research findings.

Beyond migration

Interrmarriage or conjugal mixedness is a complex phenomenon, not a simple cause or consequence of migration. “Mixed” couples are the consequence of geopolitical, economic, racial and gender power relations beyond the citizen / foreigner opposition, which also exists within multicultural societies between persons from different ethnic, racial or religious groups. Nevertheless, marriage migrations (Constable 2003) and transnational families (Charsley et al. 2012) have become the centre of attention in recent years. In the European Union and every member state, but also in countries like the US or Canada, the idea that marriage migration serves other reasons than love or founding a family has surfaced. The union of nationals and foreigners have become “suspicious”, a political issue leading to new interest in this research field. How can such State logics be analyzed and how do couples and the children of these unions deal with this specific constraint?
Beyond assimilation

Several studies on mixedness have shown that the intercultural arrangements couples work out together do not necessarily promote integration in the mainstream (Song 2010; Rodríguez García et al. 2014). Since contemporary societies are becoming more and more multicultural, it is difficult to decide who integrates whom to what (Safi 2011). Mixedness is thus not a simple question of cultural assimilation. As individuals, couples or parents, they develop their own ways of dealing with potential national, ethnic, racial, cultural or religious differences, and have educational projects for their children (Collet 1998; Varro 1998; Caballero et al. 2008). It is thus essential to study each partner’s and the children’s points of view (Unterreiner 2014).

Beyond marriage

Research on mixed “unions” generally implies long-lasting heterosexual relationships, which could be materialized by marriage. However, as historians have shown, these unions did not always legally materialize. In addition, the birth of a child is not synonymous with being raised by a mixed “couple” transmitting a mixed identity. Family life is changing: one might be raised within a single parent family, a blended family, or an extended family. Genetics and education are not synonymous either. It is thus essential to take this complexity into account.

New challenges in the study of mixedness

Mixed partnerships experience specific challenges; it is not only a question of mutual understanding. Their ways of managing difference within the couple might depend on the external perception of these families and the different institutional obstacles to overcome. When group boundaries are strong, entrenched in power relations -- slavery (Da Costa 2007), an Empire (e.g. Saada 2007; Aspinall 2013) or war (Blackshire Belay 1996; Virgili 2009; Caballero 2012) for instance -- mixed unions and their descendants face strong external opposition, to say the least. In our democratic societies, how do these past power relations influence current “mixed” unions and the descendants of these unions?

Since September 2001, the belief in a “clash of civilizations” between the Westernized world and the Middle East or Muslim countries has emerged. In this context, Muslim populations in many immigration countries face growing islamophobia (Scott 2007; Bunzl 2007; Taras 2012). Given country based past power relations (e.g. the French Empire, the British Commonwealth), migration waves (from Turkey to Germany, the Maghreb to France, or Pakistan to the UK for instance), and state conceptions of religion within society (i.e. the French ideology of “laïcité”), how do “interreligious” couples (in terms of background, beliefs or practices) deal with the external perception of their marital and family choices and how do they overcome potential conflicts?

Parallel to contemporary issues of race relations, gender and the evolution of gender relations are the main research questions related to mixedness. If past research focused on gender relations within heterosexual couples (Streiff-Fenart 1989; Collet 2010), new research directions have cropped up in recent years. Binational, same-sex unions (Salcedo 2013) and the descendants of these unions, blended families, or the international marriage market connecting foreign women and Western men (Bottero 2015), all raise the question of the intersection of “race”, “social class”, and “gender” (Crenshaw 1991).
In order to meet these new contemporary challenges in the study of mixedness, the conference particularly welcomes papers based on innovative empirical findings dealing with the following issues:

1) Research comparing two or more countries combining qualitative and quantitative methods;

2) New challenges in couple and family relations regarding the intersection of multiple power relations (religion, race, ethnicity, class, gender);

3) Studies on the external perception of mixedness (public policies and discourses, discrimination, laws, etc) and how it impacts spouse relations, family life, and children;

4) Mixedness with regard to changing gender relations and family arrangements (transnational relationships without cohabitation, divorce of mixed couples, mixedness in blended families).

**Organisation:** Dr. Beate Collet, associate professor, Université-Paris Sorbonne, GEMASS et Dr. Anne Unterreiner, Post-doc OSC, Sciences Po, Paris.

**Scientific Committee:** Richard Alba (CUNY Graduate Center, New York); Pierre Demeulenaere (GEMASS, Paris); Rosalind Edwards (Southampton University); Olivier Galland (GEMASS, Paris); Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels (Kent University, Brussels); Josiane Legall (CSSS, Montreal); Deirdre Meintel (Montreal University); Ann Morning (NYU, New York); Mirjana Morokvasic-Muller (ISP, Nanterre); Charlie Owen (IOE, London); Ettore Recchi (OSC, Paris); Mima Safi (OSC, Paris); Emmanuelle Santelli (Centre Max Weber, Lyon); Patrick Simon (INED, Paris); Gabrielle Varro (Printemps, Saint Quentin en Yvelines).

The conference will be held on November 12th and 13th 2015 in Paris.

Interested participants are invited to send a paper abstract (250 words max) by June 30, 2015 to: Beate.Collet@sorbonne.fr and anne.unterreiner@sciencespo.fr. Proposal should contain the title of the paper, an abstract, which clearly mentions key concepts, research question and empirical investigation, and key words. We also need complete name, institutional affiliation, discipline and e-mail address. Acceptation will be given before end of July; papers are expected by mid-October (3000 words max). The entire event (papers and discussions) will be in English.

**References**


