

# Challenging differences: The case of the Greek-Finnish marriage



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A mixed marriage can be understood as a challenge. By embodying the question of difference, it challenges the social, cultural and symbolical values of a given society. This paper reviews the question of difference as a threefold phenomenon. I will start by discussing the ontological and social levels of the notion of "mixed marriage". In the second part of my paper, I will present empirically how the question of difference is dealt with in the Greek-Finnish marriage<sup>1</sup>.

## **A scientific approach to the question of difference and mixity**

In the preface of their book, Rosemary Breger and Rosanna Hill claim that the cross-cultural marriage is often understood "a priori as problematic" (1998, X). This presumption is usually integrated with ontological and social arguments that relate to the question of ethnically and culturally different marriages. The social reactions

have always a certain impact on the individuals that have contracted a marriage with a person outside their community or country.

The concepts of originality and particularity encapsulate the essence of the question of difference (Neyrand and M'Sili 1996, 13, 31). They express the specific nature of a mixed marriage, but they also position it otherwise than an ethnically, socially or culturally homogeneous marriage in a given social context.

Despite the contemporary idea of "freedom of marriage" as it is understood in the occidental societies as part of the individual freedom, mixed marriages are still perceived as "extra-communal unions" (Neyrand and M'Sili 1996, 19–21). The historical and social representations of mixed marriages reveal a certain suspicion or even an overt hostility towards them.

According to Gérard Neyrand and Marine M'Sili, historically mixed marriages have been prohibited, stigmatized or marginalized. These negative reactions were based on the questions of religion, race and communal identity (1996, 20). Mixed relationships have also been limited and punished with laws: the interdiction of having contact with foreigners and forbidden persons, the restraint of crossing the national frontiers and the

refusal of the marriage by the local authorities are clear examples of how societies have handled the question of mixity in the past (Barbara 1993, 18–19).

What are the reasons behind these negative social attitudes and reactions? The fear of difference and its consequences could be one possible answer. Behind this fear is the question of integrity of a particular community. As Jocelyn Streiff-Fenart puts it bluntly, mixed marriages "disturb the social order" and "endanger the reproduction of the familial identities" (1989, 129). In fact, these unions of individuals representing two different groups or communities question first of all the conception of 'normality' and then the perception of the boundaries of a given group.

The concept of normality refers here to the possible social representations or notions of a so-called 'normal marriage'. A 'normal marriage' would not include the multiple difference factors; instead it would be somewhat based on distances like a mixed marriage (Neyrand and M'Sili 1996, 15, 19). That is to say a "normal marriage" is always seen as a homogamic union. Historically and contemporary, 'homogamy' has referred to resemblance. For example during the occidental medieval times, fam-

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ilies contracted alliances by marrying their children to each other (Neyrand and M'Sili 1996, 24). Perhaps familial alliances are less frequent in the modern societies, but the "homogamic norm" still exists as the choice of the spouse conforms to the "identity proximities" (see social milieu, profession, age, social pressure). Homogamy is consequently seen as "an assurance of the success of the marital life" (ibid. 23–25).

The concept of 'heterogamy' measures (objective) social distances between the spouses (social class, age, geographical distance, etc.) (Streiff-Fenart 1994, 227). But the use of the concept seems to be problematic in the case of the mixed marriages. Streiff-Fenart (1994, 227–228) and Gabrielle Varro (1994, 216) believe that their subjective dimension must be noticed. According to Streiff-Fenart, because of this mentioned dimension, the concept of "mixed marriage" cannot be synonym for the concept of "heterogamy". The concept includes "the social groups' evaluation of the appropriate or improper character of the union of its members" (1994, 228). Varro sees "mixity" as a "subjective term" that "designates the way of living heterogamy" (1994, 216). Instead of accepting the influence of the social groups as a fact, she questions the studies of mixed couples, which include in every case the social and ethnic references (1994, 219).

Before becoming a community of nations, Europe was already a continent of transnational and international transitions and migrations. After having sent and received migrants, refugees and ex-

patriates, it has to face today the question of multicultural and multiethnic community. Mixed marriages are not anymore a marginal phenomenon, because people of different origins live together sharing neighborhoods, schools, workplaces and common interests (see hobbies, political opinions, religion, etc.).

Despite the multicultural trajectory of the modern European societies, collective and distinctive notions of Self and Other, of Us and Them stand firm. The notions can be understood as "relational" and "situational". In other words, the definitions of "outsiders" and "insiders" seem to change with the political and socio-economic tendencies in how they affect the relationships between different groups. The definitions reflect the personal or collective use of them, but also their specific context (Breger and Hill 1998, 8).

Breger and Hill point out the question of perception of difference and suggest that groups and individuals often ignore the similarities that unite them or the common things they might share (ibid.). But Us and Them reach their specific signification only by opposing to each other, like Zygmunt Bauman reminds us. Only the strangers seem to challenge this dichotomy (1999, 70).

The social position of the mixed couples can be compared to that of the Baumanian strangers. Both mixed couples and strangers call into question the oppositions and the divisions created by individuals and different boundaries. Consequently the social order and the group identity lose their prior meanings and have to be redefined

otherwise. Like Bauman writes, the boundaries are actually fabricated, as well as the oppositions are artificial (Bauman 1999, 70).

I have hitherto discussed the originality and the particularity of the mixed marriages in communities and societies. The impact of the social representations and stereotypes on the life of the mixed couples is quite evident. But how do social, cultural and ethnic differences affect the everyday life of the spouses?

Catherine Delcroix and Anne Guyau call the mixed marriages "spaces where men and women try actively invent solutions to a priori insoluble problems" (1994, 250). The French research tradition often uses the metaphor of "laboratory" when referring to the mixed marriages. According to Neyrand and M'Sili, the metaphor refers to the "difficulty to manage the differences" (1996, 27). For Augustin Barbara, a mixed marriage offers a ground for observation concerning the encounter, the relationship, the daily marital practices and the divorce (1993, 25). To sum up, the metaphor reflects the functioning of the mixed couple through crises and stakes (Philippe 1994, 222). All these researchers believe that this kind of "laboratory" helps to understand better the homogamic or homogeneous marriage.

### **Lived and experienced differences in the relationship and the family life**

In the case of the Greek-Finnish marriage, the spouses acknowledge very early the question of dif-

ference. The spouses comprehend the many distances that separate them. They also understand the differences existing between them. The originality of the Greek-Finnish couple lies in its position in the larger familial context. It forms a culturally, socially, ethnically and religiously mixed unit in the homogeneous social reality of the Greek family (see Järvinen-Tassopoulos 2004).

### *First reactions to expected differences*

The question of difference emerges when the families become aware that their child is in love with a stranger. The future spouses must confront the reactions of their parents, relatives and friends. The first reactions of the respective social environment implicate the notions of difference and mixity (Delcroix et al. 1990, 144; Varro 1995, 44). They crystallize into stereotypes that reproduce collective images that reflect on individuals. The stereotypes work in favor of (hypothetic) boundaries that exist between different groups (Breger and Hill 1998, 11).

The Finnish parents were mostly concerned about the future of their daughter. They worried about her possibilities to study and work as well as her adaptation to a foreign culture. In these concerns underlies the question of women's position in the Greek society. The parents were also unhappy to see their daughter leave her home (country).

*...my mother didn't want me to come, because she thought that Greece was like a one-horse town,*

*although she had never visited it, ...and then the cultural differences were discussed... primarily she was afraid that I won't be able to work and I'll be a housewife without any income or any support, and I'd be in a prison, which is quite possible, too! That one has no possibilities and is trapped...* (Laura, a 40-year-old textile engineer, 17 years in Greece)

The image of a Greek man is mostly made of stereotypes and it is in some cases racist. This image does not reflect for example the relations between Finland and Greece (see history, politics, religion, etc.; Varro 1995, 33; Barbara 1993, 48–57), but it is made of prejudices that are often based on ignorance. Nevertheless, the comments reflect the different social milieu of the speakers (cf. Streiff-Fenart 1989, 78, 81). In the life stories, parents and friends called the Greek boyfriend with names like 'dark man', 'black', 'wog' and even 'gigolo' and 'dancer'<sup>2</sup>. The keenest on criticizing the husband-to-be were the Finnish fathers and male friends.

Despite the traditional Greek Diaspora and the impact of the mass tourism in Greece, the Greek parents had difficulties to accept a stranger as a daughter-in-law<sup>3</sup>. Their concerns always represented the standpoint of the family. The arrival of a foreign woman would have "broken the equilibrium" of the family (Barbara 1993, 45). The parents seemed to find unacceptable the "autonomy" and "emancipation" of the youth in the choice of the spouse (Streiff-Fenart 1989, 27). It seems that the most important matter for them was to preserve the familial com-

munity from changes. In other words, a marriage with a stranger meant modification of the familial tradition and alteration in the functioning of the family. A foreign woman was seen as a threat to the cohesion of the family and to its traditional continuity (cf. Varro 1995, 41).

In the biographical data, the Greek parents emphasized mostly the ethnic and cultural differences between Greeks and Finns. However, some of them mentioned the lack of dowry<sup>4</sup>. Others demanded a Greek fiancée or wanted to arrange a marriage with one (cf. Semafumu 1998, 114). Some parents had seen mixed marriages break down and had reservations about them. Generally, the Greek family had difficulties to identify in any possible way the Finnish woman, because she was simply "out of context" (see social status, wealth, family; Yamani 1998, 162). Therefore, the parents saw her as a 'foreigner/stranger' (xeni), 'tourist girl' (touristria)<sup>5</sup>, 'disreputable', but also as poor.

*I was the first woman brought home (...)* There is no way that his mother could accept a foreigner, no problem if I had been a Greek, in the beginning it was very hard for them to understand that I am a foreigner... (Virpi, a 33-year-old unemployed secretary, 10 years in Greece)

The picture of the foreign candidate changed when the parents met him/her. The collective representation transformed into an individual image. The ethnic differences did even give way to ethnic similarities ("He is like a Finn!" said one Finnish future father-in-law.). The Finn-

ish parents received the Greek boyfriend in a polite way and usually manage to have a good opinion on him (despite the fact that they did not always share a common language; some parents did not know any foreign language).

In the majority of the cases, the Finnish girlfriends were warmly welcomed to the Greek 'patriko' (father's house). But the first encounter often needed some preparation: many husbands had to negotiate and even argue with their parents about the foreign girlfriend. Even if the parents continued to have doubts about the mixed marriage, the sons always won (cf. Streiff-Fernart 1989, 39)! If there were other mixed marriages among the relatives of the husband, it eased the situation of the Finnish bride-to-be. If the husband or someone in his family had lived abroad, the families had a more positive attitude about 'foreignness'.

### *In the bosom of the community*

Language skills are necessary in the communication process with others. In the beginning of their relationship, the spouses spoke a foreign language (other than their respective mother tongue) together. In some cases, the couples spoke only Greek or they continued to use a foreign language. This can be explained by the lack of knowledge of any other language except the mother tongue.

Mastering the Greek language becomes necessary while communicating with the parents-in-law. Speaking with hands and shoulders is not enough. It is also tiring to listen to a flood of words when one is unable to understand any of

it (cf. Waldren 1998, 42). In most of the Greek-Finnish families, Greek was the major language spoken at home. In some cases, the couples maintained the language of communication used before moving to Greece (Finnish, German, French and Russia).

Many of the children were to some extent bilingual. Their knowledge of Finnish depended on their mother's ability to speak it daily (In few cases, the husband or the mother-in-law was against the use of Finnish at home.) and her patience to teach it likewise to every child (cf. Varro 1984).

*My girls learned Finnish and they can speak and write it. They visited Finland every year. I read them stories; I had a lot of Finnish books. But then with my son, at some point I didn't have the patience to speak so many languages (Finnish, English, and Greek), because it got me confused. Back in Finland I spoke Swedish with my father. Well I'm a little bit annoyed by the fact that I didn't speak Finnish to my boy... (Doris, a 55-year-old housewife, 33 years in Greece)*

But communication is not only about words and speech. It is also non-verbal, social and cultural. Silence forms a large part of it and so do intonations, looks, gestures, etc. (cf. Lesbet 1995, 58). The most important thing is to find ways of communication without colliding with the spouse or the family members (Delcroix et al. 1990, 147).

It is possible to think that a mixed child is born into a bi-cultural environment whereas his/her parents have to create a livable

cross-cultural space to share between them. But how bi-cultural is the life of a Greek-Finnish child? The choices made by the parents seem to be less individual than communal. In addition to the patronymic last name, children are named after their father's parents. Some women had difficulties to accept the name tradition and refused it, while others had a positive attitude towards this form of communal affiliation. Furthermore, some mothers negotiated a Finnish first name (often along with the Greek name) or a Greek first name, which was not in the family.

*...first of all I was so fanatic and we argued about the two first names, the second one is my mother-in-law's and the first name is Maria, because we liked it, no one said anything, no one commented or was hurt, but now I must say that I should have been wiser and give my mother-in-law's name. Back then I was so against it that it was impossible to do it... (Kirsti, a 29-year-old housewife, 10 years in Greece)*

It is rather obvious that a Greek-Finnish child belongs to the Greek familial community, because he/she shares its religion and names. But the sharing goes beyond the apparent signs of belonging. The grandparents participate very often in the upbringing of the children. How is it then possible to raise a child as a bi-cultural being in an extended family? Usually mothers stayed at home with the children and guaranteed this way a more Finnish upbringing and the learning of the Finnish language. The children learned Greek manners and customs and the Greek

language with their father, grandparents and at school.

### *Gender roles in the couple and the family*

Kirsten Refsing writes that the so-called cross-cultural marriages "bring together the different cultural worlds and experiences of men and women" (1998, 193). In the Greek-Finnish case, the Greek cultural perspective dominates, because the family lives in Greece. The roles of men, women and children vary in different societies (Delcroix et al. 1990, 148), but they are also gendered differently. According to Varro, the gendered roles between the spouses (and one could add the other family members) determine more the choices and the behavior in the couple than the intercultural issue (1995, 43).

The division of labor is quite traditional in the couple. The Greek husbands are usually the 'breadwinners' (even symbolically) and the head of the family. The Finnish wives' role in the family is more complex: they are responsible for home and children, but many of them also work. Others stayed at home and some worked occasionally. Generally, the women had more domestic help from their mother-in-law than from their husband (see "cross-generational help", Rotkirch 2000, 120–124).

In the familial community, the ties between the members are strong. The relations between the spouses and the parents are more "generational" and "hierarchical" than "independent" or "equal" (cf. Sissons Joshi and Krishna 1998, 180–181). In the Finnish women's case, the first step to establish ties

with the community was to contract a (religious?) marriage. They became spouses, but also daughters-in-law. The second step was to accept the name tradition and respect it. The young parents had an apparent right to choose a different name, but sometimes the familial ties suffered from their decision. The third step was to accept the new roles in the family. After the wedding, the parents-in-law treated the bride 'as their daughter' and some of them expected her to call them 'mother' and 'father'. In fact, the phrase 'as one's daughter' is interpreted as a way for the mother-in-law to show her son that she has accepted the (foreign) bride. But it is also an expression of love and it ties the Finnish woman closely to her parents-in-law. The relationship between the Finnish daughter-in-law and parents-in-law should be "deferential" (cf. *ibid.*).

*It was quite difficult for me and only the last years I've started to call her like that, (the mother-in-law) was complaining, but I didn't know about it in the first place. I even made the mistake of calling her Mrs. Katina and she started to yell at me. Back then I heard it for the first time that I must call her mama. I've been avoiding it, but now and then I call her mother... (Nelli, a 35-year-old housewife, 8 years in Greece)*

### **Dealing with differences: compromising, accepting, tolerating**

In the last part of my presentation, I will shortly examine how the

Greek-Finnish couple deals with the question of difference. Many misunderstandings and arguments can be provoked by lived and experienced differences. Then I will show how the problems between the spouses and/or the family members are solved and how differences can be tolerated and even accepted.

Within the years, the relationship between the spouses undergoes many changes. Romantic attachment that led to marriage (Khatib-Chahidi, Hill & Paton 1998, 54) has slowly changed into marital love (the marriage being the fulfillment of love; Haavio-Mannila 1999, 71).

The "subjective experience of love" varies (Haavio-Mannila 1999, 72) and so does the subjective experience of differences. The women felt differently about the cultural differences and how they affected the marital conflicts. Some believed that they played an important role, while others thought that personal differences caused the disagreements and disputes in the couple. These cultural and individual explanations alternated within the years of marriage. It is also possible to think that these explanations reflect somehow the question of "compatibility" between the spouses (Jallinoja 2000, 11). That is to say, if the differences (as problems) between the spouses are always internalized (as personal) or externalized (as cultural, social or ethnic), they might not harm the general conception of compatibility of two individuals. The relationship can be thus preserved intact, despite the many differences.

Bauman writes about the ambivalence of love and how a certain unattainability of the loved

one keeps the love alive (see Jallinoja 2000, 37). In a general way, this positive tension in love is understandable and desirable. But in a mixed marriage, too much ambivalence and difference cause only disharmony and misunderstanding.

Communication problems, the question of religion, financial situations, gender and social roles provoked conflicts in the Greek-Finnish couples. Nevertheless, the spouses learned to compromise (see Järvinen-Tassopoulos 2004). The 'fanaticism' of the youth and the need of being right (and having the last word) changed slowly into a mutual understanding and a certain degree of tolerance of differences.

*My husband has accepted the fact that he has married a foreign woman who cannot be from her ideas or otherwise Greek. I function with Finnish principles. I accept that there are things that go against my conceptions, but I understand that he has been brought up like that and he has the right to think in another way. The edges have rubbed off and there are no more collisions. And if there were, they are just like soft balls!* (Eira, a 46-year-old housewife, 14 years in Greece)

But love and the well being of the couple are not only matters between the spouses (cf. Jallinoja 2000, 24). The attitude of the familial community affects in many ways the couple's life. The negativity of the Greek family may discourage the Finnish woman, but also put the Greek man in a strange position between his wife and the

community. Family, relatives and friends may constantly interfere in the couple's life (both in bona fide and mala fide). This interference reflects well the clash between a "self-oriented culture" and a "communal culture", the definition of marriage "based on extended family ties" and "based on the union of two individuals" and finally the many images and stereotypes the Greek community and the Finnish spouse may have of each other (Alex-Assensoh and Assensoh 1998, 106).

Sometimes the husband started to spend more time with his family and even changed his behavior to be less different with his socio-cultural milieu. The wife felt that she had become a burden to the husband and an outsider in the Greek familial community.

*Now and then we quarrelled, in the beginning we went at it hammer and tongs. Our quarrels started when we came to Greece, because he got back to his own milieu and (abroad) we had been both on a neutral ground. But when we came here, I started to understand that it is quite difficult to be between the family and the community. Sometimes I felt that he was rejecting me a little bit, but he didn't know...* (Noora, a 31-year-old store manager, 10 years in Greece)

The question of including and excluding the relatives is a considerable issue in the life of the Greek-Finnish couple (cf. Alex-Assensoh and Assensoh 1998, 108). The wife's adaptation problems and the external social pressure can aggravate the marital conflicts.

The wife may work her disappointment and anger by incessantly arguing with the husband who understands her or refuses to do it. The dependency of the Finnish woman and her need for constant support and company can have a negative influence on the everyday life of the couple. The husband cannot always stand the pressure. Sometimes he suffers from the serious disputes with his family. Despite all the problems, the Greek husband can be seen as a "cultural broker" (Breger 1998, 142) or even a social negotiator and representative of the foreign wife in the community and the society. Wanting it or not, he is involved in his spouse's adaptation process.

*In a way (the Greek spouses) have to be our representatives in the society, because we behave and think differently. They must explain all the misunderstandings about the behaviour and the words (so misunderstandings happen, no matter how one tries?) oh yes and especially the cultural differences, (the spouses) have to conciliate these differences, makes excuses for us and defend us...* (Ritva, a 51-year-old teacher, 27 years in Greece)

The cross-generational cohabitation is a concrete example of the difficult relationship between the mixed couple and the Greek family. In many cases, the couple lived the first months (or even years) with the parents-in-law or they all lived in the same block. Sharing an apartment or a house was often difficult, because the couple could not live its own life and the spouses

es had to accept the house rules made by the parents. Very often the mothers-in-law had their own pair of keys to the couple's apartment. The Finnish daughters-in-law interpreted this as "interfering" (see Björklund 1998, 132) but also as violation of their privacy (cf. Sissons Joshi and Krishna 1998, 176).

*...(the mother-in-law) tried at our home too, but I forbade it by telling her that I want to cook, clean and wash, there are part of my obligations, I want to take care of them, was I in a hurry or not, I don't want her help and afterwards she understood it and left me alone, she didn't make that mistake again and I'm grateful for that. She has no keys and she never comes without calling first, so she is very thoughtful... (Pirta, a 34-year-old employee, 8 years in Greece)*

Some couples solved the cohabitation/privacy problem by moving to their own apartment or to another block (cf. Streiff-Fenart 1989, 65). Usually the Finnish women confronted their mother-in-law and tried to establish clear physical/symbolical boundaries between her (and the family) and the couple.

How did the spouses find solutions to the conflicts between them? After serious altercations and crisis, the women's primitive reaction was to leave the country and get a divorce. The question of leaving contains however the question of custody. Generally leaving the country would have meant leaving the children behind.

To stay together and to keep the family intact, the couples need

resourcefulness in their life. The question of the difference may be seen as a challenge, but the spouses may also want to prove wrong the differences and the negative social anticipation (Breger and Hill 1998, 25–26). Like Delcroix et al. write "communication, imagination and tolerance" are needed on an everyday basis in a mixed relationship (1990, 154). The Finnish women acknowledged their position as strangers in the community, but they refused to take full responsibility of their marriage (cf. Varro 1984, 80). They saw the success of a cross-cultural marriage depending on both spouses.

*Well I guess that in order to become a stable and happy union, the Greek (spouse) must be different from other Greeks, he must be more broadminded, he has been abroad and he wants to adapt and change. And likewise the Finnish (spouse) must show more perseverance and adapt so that the marriage could have all the chances to become a perfect and happy one, which is not always the case in the everyday life, but if both want to take one step behind, then I think that the Greek and Finnish (spouses) complete each other, at least in our marriage, I am very satisfied and I can bend too... (Kirsti)*

Like in their couples, the Finnish women needed to discover "terrains of concordance" with their family-in-law (Lesbet 1995, 59). This demands respective tolerance of social, cultural and ethnic differences and acceptance of dissenting opinions. According to Chantal Bordes-Benayon, the de-

gree of tolerance of the families may create complications in the couple's life, but the couple can survive the problems (Chouchan 2000, 183–184). Usually communication based on concordance between the family members developed within the years. In more hopeless cases, the couples met very little together the parents-in-law and some daughters-in-law communicated with the Greek grandparents only for the sake of the children.

Streiff-Fenart sees the mixed marriage as a "real laboratory of communication between cultures". It can be a "privileged place of tolerance of difference" or a "sounding board" of every intercultural misunderstanding and conflict (1989, 13). In the Greek-Finnish case, the spouses had to take care of their relationship and give it realistic aims (see Järvinen-Tassopoulos 2004). In Sofka Zinovieff's study the foreign wives interpreted the breakdown of the marriages with Greeks resulting from the "large degree of fantasy and illusion" (1991, 217). An "unrealizable romanticized image" of the spouse (Alex-Assensoh and Assensoh 1998, 110) can complicate the mixed couple's life.

Realism in the Greek-Finnish marriage meant adaptation to the internal and external pressures and expectations. The Finnish newcomer had to clarify her position in the familial community both to the husband and the Greek family members. The solutions are easier to find "feet on the ground" than "having one's head in the clouds".

*In my opinion one should think over and consider from different*

*angles, but of course love is the most important thing, it must be ok and then consider other matters too, absolutely, and then it is easier to succeed one's feet on the ground than have one's head in the clouds and then fall suddenly, because it can happen... one must live in the reality and if there is a problem, one should try to work it out...*" (Laura)

## Conclusion

In front of the negative attitudes of the social environment (families, friends, communities, societies), the mixed couples tend to put a high premium on love. In the case of the romantic love, the interdictions make the sense of love even more powerful (Jallinoja 2000, 68). In the case of a mixed marriage, love can even become an ideological statement<sup>6</sup>. The partners overrate their relationship based on love while confronting the opposition of their families. The opposition may favor a romantic view of the couple (Streiff-Fenart 1989, 99) and the partners see their mutual love as a niche, which can exist even without the consent of the social environment.

Regardless of the communal opposition, the mixed couples form "outposts of intercultural encounter" (Streiff-Fenart 1989, 12) in the contemporary societies.

Their originality should not be understood as something devaluating the social order, but as a new form of tolerance of the differences. The strength of the mixed marriages lies in the concept of "mixity" which is still often an enigma both for the present and the future multicultural societies.

In the societies, where the immigration policy is based on assimilation (e.g. France), the mixed marriages are seen as "indicators of integration" of the foreign spouses. By contracting a marriage with a native, a foreigner would show his/her desire to establish in the new society (Varro 1995, 38)<sup>7</sup>. Even if integration means adaptation in this case, adaptation has also meant assimilation of the mixed family according to the local cultural and social values (Streiff-Fenart 1989, 8). Therefore assimilation does not really privilege mixity.

According to Dominique Schnapper, "the notion of mixity is relative to time, society and milieu (Chouchan 2000, 181–182). The concept of "mixed marriage" itself has many definitions (see Järvinen-Tassopoulos 2004). "Mixity" defines the "cultural heterogeneity" and "distance" between the spouses (Neyrand and M'Sili 1996, 142)<sup>8</sup>. But is this definition accurate? Should it not mean the co-existence or even the cross-ex-

istence of cultures in a mixed marriage?

Varro and Djaffar Lesbet write that the discourse of mixity emphasizes the "political metaphor" of the mixed marriage, favors "contrasted representations" and in a way questions the integration of the couple and the family (1995, 19). In other words, it still reflects the separation of individuals into different groups, communities and societies. But in reality, the mixed marriages attest that the acceptance of difference is possible in many ways.

A mixed marriage unites individuals that represent different social and familial dimensions. It shows that communication and social relations between different groups are possible to some extent (Streiff-Fenart 1989, 21, 8). The modern institution of marriage has gone through many changes and different variations have replaced its unique institutional representation. The mixed marriage is one of these variations. It should not be seen as a threat to the monocultural and homogeneous community or society, but as a possible space of negotiation and cross-existence. In part, it could elucidate the dialogue between cultures and help to visualize further a multicultural society of acceptance and tolerance<sup>9</sup>.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I have collected for my Ph.D dissertation 39 life stories among Finnish women who are married and live permanently in Greece.

<sup>2</sup> I interpret the concept of "dancer" as referring to the alleged laziness, low work morals and unreliability of the southern man.

<sup>3</sup> The concept of "stranger" highlights very well the problem of "inclusion" and "exclusion". (cf. Stichweh 1997, 6).



- <sup>4</sup> Without a dowry, there is neither secured future nor economical benefit for the family (cf. Friedl 1986, 49, 51; Salamone & Stanton 1986, 107–112).
- <sup>5</sup> It is possible that 'touristria' contains implicit connotations that refer to the imagined notorious reputation of the foreign tourist women in Greece. They are said to be "of the road" in opposition to the domestic image of the Greek women (Zinovieff 1991, 216–217).
- <sup>6</sup> Philippe criticizes the ideas of "love marriage" and "encounter by chance". She believes that they create a false image of the mixed marriage. She demands a more objective analysis of the concept (1994, 221–222).
- <sup>7</sup> This can also be understood in a negative way. The authorities always fear the false marriage contracts (Varro 1995, 39).
- <sup>8</sup> Furthermore the conception of mixity changes and grows along with the color of the skin, the geographical distance, the nationalities, etc. (Neyrand and M'Sili 1996, 18–19).
- <sup>9</sup> Delcroix et al. see the solutions found in the mixed "laboratory" (couple) a possible source of "inspirations" for politics and society (1990, 144).

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