



Multicultural Marriages and Family Life

**Elli Heikkilä
Institute of Migration
Finland**

- Newly-created social links between people across national borders due to international migration and tourism are some of the most notable features of globalization -> individuals encounter more and more widely one another in different environments
- The role of social media plays its own part in connecting people – person can be very international and reached internationally even at home
- One of the consequences of easier access to other countries and increased intercultural communication is the increased incidence of multicultural marriages

- While international migration flows increase all the time in the global level, the propensity to meet an international partner even in one's country of birth increases
- In Finland, foreigners prefer cities as 84 percent of them who moved to our country in 2013 chose to live in urban municipalities.
- Differences in language skills affect the level of endogamy
- Marriage may be a consequence of international migration, but also the cause of migration

- Multicultural marriage may eventually function as a "bridge between different cultures" (Lauth Bacas, 2002)
- Viertola-Cavallari (2004) emphasizes that in a multicultural marriage, the immigrant spouse becomes a part of the non-immigrant family, and that such integration is nearly mandatory, if the marriage is to last for example for the sake of future children. Socially, multicultural marriage works as a status passage as well: it functions as a strong and effective mechanism for turning a stranger into "one of us" in the eyes of a specific kin group (Lauth Bacas, 2002)

- Sjöblom-Immala (2013) has noticed that the university and high school students' attitudes in Finland are positive towards marriage migrants: the more the person has contacts to immigrants the more positive is also the attitude toward this group of immigrants.
- Viertola-Cavallari's (2004) idea of a catalyst: Her premise is that the greater the number of foreign children-in-law, the more open, multicultural and tolerant of difference the family becomes, and through them, the mindsets of more distant relatives, of friends, and of acquaintances likewise change. Little by little, the whole of society changes. We may predict that the same will happen, to some extent, in the immigrant's home country, where the couple will spend time with the immigrant spouse's family and friends.

Statistics of Multicultural Marriages

- Multicultural marriages in Finland are defined as marriages between a foreigner and a permanently residing citizen of Finland

Statistics of 2013

- 1 698 multicultural marriages for Finnish women
- 1 984 multicultural marriages for Finnish men
- Totally 3 682 multicultural marriages

- **Finnish men** had marriages most often with citizens of Thailand (379 marriages), Russia (364), Estonia (115), China (100) and Philippines (90) in 2013
- **Finnish women** had marriages most often with citizens of Turkey (124 marriages), United States (98), Sweden (91), Great Britain (88) and Russia (66) in 2013

-totally there have been **27 441 foreign-born women** who were married to Finnish-born men in 2013

-when looking **foreign-born men**, the number has been **21 112 persons** married to Finnish-born women in 2013

- According to Oksi-Walter (2004), a multicultural relationship provides the building blocks for a rich, multifaceted marriage and for personal growth. Though it involves many risks, it is also an opportunity for a more fulfilling relationship. Fully different cultures and circumstances of growing up that define each spouse individually can still leave room for interaction among the couple and their family that will produce a "third culture". Moreover, since there are simply no routine responses, and they cannot easily make decisions on the basis of assumptions, a multicultural couple arrives at solutions with greater awareness.
- There is also a concept of dual biculturalism which characterizes a symmetrical process of acculturation to the culture of both partners. Those who pursued this strategy emphasized their respective sets of cultural values, rules, norms, and behaviors to be learned and transmitted to their children (Crippen & Brew 2013, 269).

Family life: in a multicultural marriage, the following topics can be challenging

- 1) **Values:** what are core values in the family. Differences in values may lead to differences of opinion, to misunderstandings etc. Important to discuss about values already during dating time. Values are connected for example to equality, family size etc.
- 2) **Importance of language:** what is the mutual language; is it the language of only one spouse or maybe so-called third language?
- 3) **Meals:** what type of food and drink to be consumed, its preparation, mealtimes, table manners, and so on
- 4) **Sexuality:** birth control, virginity, premarital relations, makeup, family size etc. Some or all of these issues may be taboo, which would discourage their discussion beforehand.
- 5) **Gender roles:** each spouse has his/her own ideas about what are the roles of the spouse in a family

- 6) **Friends:** it is recommendable to have friends who are also in multicultural marriages, with whom one can share experiences. Such friends would understand the problems faced by the couple and can give positive feedback for the couple's solutions.
- 7) **Relatives and in-laws:** different conceptions of the family, a patriarchal family, thoughts about helping relatives for example sending remittances, in which countries to spend holidays, in which country to live etc.
- 8) **The upbringing of children:** upbringing approaches differ according to religion and nationality. One problem arising from different cultural codes is the question of the christening and naming of children. From which language they will be drawn; what language or languages will the children be taught etc.
- 9) **Religion and celebrations:** what role religion plays within the family; does the family celebrate Christmas, Easter, Ramadan etc. if the spouses have different religious background (Lauth Bacas, 2002; Interracial Marriages 2005; Viertola-Cavallari, 2004; Youakim, 2004: 159).

-Basic dimension and negotiation: in which country to live?

-Heli Sjöblom-Immala's research dealing with this topic **To stay or to go – Migration propensity of the multicultural families within Finland and abroad**

-Funding from the Foundation for Municipal Development

- According to Jaana Anglé's dissertation **Being an Immigrant's Spouse in Finland: Narrative Research on Long-lasting Multicultural Marriages** (2014) the reasons for living in Finland have been for example high standard of living and safety; education for children etc.
- Many interviewees were emphasizing that they admire their spouse's courage and openness to move to Finland
- None of Anglé's interviewees' foreign-background spouses didn't know for example Finnish language and culture beforehand while moving to Finland

Everyday Experiences within Multicultural Marriages

- Finnish spouse and his/her networks can help to find a job for a foreign partner
- Finnish spouses have been helping in everyday life like visiting administrative offices etc.
- Some Finnish partners say that it takes efforts to act as an interpreter for the spouse
- Disorientation experienced in a new environment leads to informational dependence
- The language barrier is another challenge; often in the beginning of a marriage, the couple uses a language foreign to both, such as English, German and Spanish

- Loneliness and language difference are major problems among spouses who have come to Finland because of marriage
- Communication between partners is very important and it is good have humor and positive attitude (for example Angle's dissertation; cf. Carine Cools's dissertation)
- Basic language training would be good to begin in the foreign spouse's country of origin, before he or she moves to Finland
- Also, the immigrant should, as soon as possible, become informed about Finnish society and his/her basic rights
- Though there is no formula for the success of a multicultural marriage, adopting an open and realistic attitude from the beginning the relationship will prevent many misunderstandings

- For each member of the family, multicultural families can promote broader and stronger social and cognitive skill sets, as well as personal strengths such as cultural adaptation, intercultural effectiveness, greater interpersonal flexibility and less ethnocentric attitudes. Presence of more than one culture within a family provides greater richness and variation in potential solutions (see Crippen and Brew 2007: 112).

**Multicultural marriages building bridges
(Monikulttuuriset avioliitot sillanrakentajina)
-seminar serie**

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Thank you!