Trouwen over de grens. Achtergronden van partnerkeuze van Turken en Marokkanen in Nederland
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Summary and discussion

Contrary to expectations, immigration from Turkey and Morocco did not come to an end once the majority of families had been reunited in the Netherlands. Around the turn of the last century it became clear that a new group of immigrants were settling in the Netherlands, namely partners of the offspring of the first generation of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants.

The fact that Turks and Moroccans who have grown up in the Netherlands still choose a partner from their parents’ country of origin is difficult to reconcile with the development that this generation has gone through in the period since their parents came to the Netherlands. In this dissertation I have tried to determine how this choice should be understood. First, however, I have mapped out the developments in the partner choice of both groups.

Summary

Partner choice on the map
In order to study these developments I used data on all Turks and Moroccans who were settled in the Netherlands when they married and who were still living in the Netherlands as married partners in 2000. This gave a study population of around 81,000 persons. These data were drawn from the municipal personal records database for the year 2000 as administered by Statistics Netherlands (CBS). The study revealed that marriages with indigenous partners are relatively rare in this group (4% of the total). Around 18% of the study population are married to a partner of the same ethnic origin who was already residing in the Netherlands. However, no fewer than three-quarters of all Turks and Moroccans found their partner in the country of origin. While this is undoubtedly a high proportion, it must be remembered that the figure relates to the total married population in the Netherlands. It thus consists both of Turks and Moroccans who came to the Netherlands in the 1960s and later married, and of their offspring who had sometimes only just married at the time of the study.

If we compare the marriages that have taken place at different periods since the 1960s, there seems to be a growing tendency to look for a partner in the Netherlands. However, even in the 1990s it was still the case that the majority of Turks and Moroccan married
a partner who was still living in the country of origin prior to the marriage. There are only a few small differences between the two ethnic groups and the two sexes here. The proportion who married a partner from the country of origin in the second half of the 1990s varies between 61% and 70%. If we compare the marriages concluded by the second generation (born in or emigrated to the Netherlands at a young age) with the marriages of the first generation (people who emigrated to the Netherlands at age 18 or older), we also see a gradual reduction in interest in a partner from across the border. Between 56% and 71% of the marriages of the second generation are with a partner from the country of origin. There is a difference between the two ethnic groups within the second generation; Turkish men and women of this generation have more often found their partner outside the Netherlands than Moroccan immigrants. There are few differences between the sexes within an ethnic group; it is therefore not the case that (many) more men than women emigrate to the Netherlands in order to marry.

Possible explanations
The study of the background to people's choice of a partner from outside the Netherlands was centred around family sociological approaches to the partner choice issue. A distinction was made between factors that play a role at the structural level (the wider environment), the socio-cultural level (the immediate environment) and the personal level. The idea was that the choice of a life partner is the result of a personal judgments which is influenced by factors in the wider and immediate environment. Migrants are no different in this respect from other people choosing a partner, although they are to some extent in special circumstances which can also have an influence on the choices they make. The study devoted attention both to the general processes that play a role in partner choice and the specific circumstances of migrants.

Backgrounds to cross-border marriages: the wider environment
In order to gain an insight into the influence of the wider environment on partner choice, three periods were compared. The circumstances of migrants have changed greatly, and yet there is virtually no difference in the three periods as regards the degree to which Turks and Moroccans choose a partner from the country of origin. In every period this choice is made more likely by a combination of (other) circumstances.

In the period up to 1975 the high proportion of men who married a partner from the country of origin can be attributed mainly to the lack of women from their own ethnic groups in the Netherlands: this alternative was simply not available. Moreover, these men were strongly focused on the country of origin. Although the women eventually migrated to the Netherlands, the marriages were generally not entered into with a view to migration; on the contrary, the initial expectation was that the man would return to the country of origin.
In the subsequent period (1975-1990) there was a good deal of family reunification. This led to an increased focus on a future in the Netherlands and helped to restore the gender balance within the Turkish and Moroccan marital groups in the Netherlands. Nonetheless, the proportion of marriages within these groups hardly increased. This must be attributed to a combination of three trends which characterised this period: a) improved communication between migrants and the country of origin; b) a further deterioration in the economic conditions in the countries of origin; and c) limited opportunities for migration other than via marriage.

In the most recent period (1990 to the present), a gender balance between the two groups has largely been achieved. At the same time, the distance between the marrying couples and the country of origin has increased compared with earlier periods. It therefore seems reasonable to expect a fall in the proportion of 'migration marriages'. A fall has indeed occurred compared with the earlier periods, but it is not large. The fact that so many people still marry a partner from outside the Netherlands has to do with a number of factors which apply specifically for this period: a) the continuing high migratory pressure; b) the maintenance of the transnational ties; and c) the increasing qualitative imbalance between the sexes within these ethnic groups in the Netherlands. This latter aspect is a result of the fact that the integration of second-generation Turkish and Moroccan boys and girls is taking place at different rates and in different directions.

Backgrounds to cross-border marriages: the immediate environment
The study of the relationship between social setting and partner choice concentrated on the second and intermediate generation of Turks and Moroccans. The focus group method was used for this. This revealed that the structure of and mechanisms operating within the social setting of which young people form part display elements of both change and of stability when compared with the social setting of their parents. Precisely this combination of change and stability leads to the possibility of marrying someone from outside the Netherlands being kept open.

One important change is that it is becoming more and more accepted for people to choose their own marriage partner. At the same time, however, there is still a heavy taboo on extensive contacts with the other sex. This combination of increased acceptance of individual freedom of choice and limited opportunities to meet members of the opposite sex leads young people to keep open the door to the country of origin; quite simply, it increases the chance of finding a suitable match.

Another important observation is that, while there may be a trend towards more individual partner choice, this is not accompanied by declining importance of family input. Young people show strong family loyalty and regard choosing a partner as a joint undertaking. The strong ties which exist between the first generation and the country of origin mean that this family loyalty smooths the path towards choosing a partner from that country of origin.
One change that mainly affects girls is that education is now an important element in their youth. This has major consequences for their later lives; in the first place, it leads them to marry later; secondly, it causes girls to develop a different perspective of their future. At the same time, the ideals cherished by parents, potential marriage partners and the community with regard to the ideal marrying age of women, and the ideal role division within the marriage, are hardly changing at all. The girls who are changing most - those with a higher education - consequently have a very limited choice of partner when they are ready to marry. This leads them to keep an eye turned to the country of origin - though they are only interested in specific categories of potential marriage partner there.

Backgrounds to cross-border marriages: personal preferences

The focus group discussions with young Turks and Moroccans concentrated mainly on their views on marriage and partner choice. They revealed a gap between the sexes within the two groups. This proved to be one of the main reasons why there are so few marriages between them and why so many marriages take place with a partner from outside the Netherlands.

In the first place, there are wide differences in the way that boys and girls spend their time. Boys spend most of their time outside the home, where they are not very strongly bound by behavioural rules. Girls spend much more time inside the home and are expected to conform to all manner of rules in public. These two worlds develop separately from each other. In general, young people are not greatly in favour of the developments they see happening with the other sex. The two sexes tend to grow apart during the teenage period rather than towards each other, with the result that when the time comes to choose a partner they have too little in common to find each other interesting. There is an impression that it is precisely the availability of potential partners in the country of origin that stands in the way of a rapprochement.

When these young people are asked about the most important criteria when choosing a future partner, it initially seems as if there is a high degree of correspondence between the sexes. For example, an Islamic background, and usually also similar backgrounds, are at the top of the list for both sexes. However, there are also a number of clear differences. For example, girls are much more interested in relational aspects, whereas boys place the emphasis on characteristics which (in their eyes) are favourable for the role of their future wife as a mother and as a daughter-in-law. The girl's reputation is also of crucial importance for the boys. These differing wishes on the part of boys and girls need not of themselves be an obstacle to marriage. However, the young people interviewed have the impression that this is the case. The boys assume that the girls are seeking more modern partners than they themselves are or wish to be; the girls, for their part, find that the boys do not have very much confidence in their qualities as carers and also that doubt is cast (in their eyes usually wrongly) on
their good name. The presence of a potential of marriage candidates in which all
categories of young people eagerly construct an ideal image on account of the great
distance between them, appears to help sustain their negative image of each other as
potential marriage candidates.

Finally, the discussions revealed a gap between the sexes when it comes to their ideal
view of future married life. Once again, boys and girls were found to share a number
of ideals. The majority are in no doubt that they will one day marry and have children.
They are also agreed that family will continue to be an inextricable part of their life,
including after their marriage. Moreover, they assign an important role to their religion
and culture in the structuring of their future. For all these reasons they have a negative
or at best sceptical attitude towards mixed marriages. Both sexes, incidentally, are
unconvinced that migration marriages are ideal in all cases.

Notwithstanding these overlaps between the future ideals of the two sexes, there are
also a number of differences. Many girls, especially those with a higher education
background, develop a preference for a partner relationship that is based on equality
and discussion. Some girls also wish to continue working after marriage, as a reflection
of all the efforts they have made to complete their education. At the same time, the girls
say that most of the males from their ethnic group in the Netherlands permit themselves
all manner of freedoms, but assume their traditional roles after marriage. The boys
themselves admit that they attach great value to traditional family relationships. They
are not all negative towards the idea of their future wife having paid employment, but
are in general not exactly thrilled by the idea. The combination of fear about the ability
to realise their future ideals with a partner from their own group in the Netherlands,
and the hope that a partner who is able to migrate to the Netherlands because of a
marriage will be more likely to meet their wishes, are among the reasons that both
boys and girls do not reject the idea of a migration marriage out of hand.

Discussion

Personal choice, wider social consequences
This research has shown that the majority of Turks and Moroccans who marry choose
a partner from the country of origin. This results in a particular profile of the migrant
population. Thus the age group up to 25 mostly consists of Turks and Moroccans who
grew up in the Netherlands. By contrast, more than a third of those in the 25-35 age
group spent their youth in the country of origin. The children of these marriages (i.e.
the vast majority of the next generation) will be brought up by a parent who only got
to know the Netherlands during adulthood. This shows how such a personal question
as choosing a partner can have important social consequences.
In 2001 approximately 6,500 Turks and Moroccans came to the Netherlands to marry. Marriage migration has for some years been the largest source of immigration to the Netherlands from Turkey and Morocco. In recent years the government has sought to take a firm grip of this form of immigration. The rules for allowing partners to migrate to the Netherlands have been tightened up time and time again and the expectation now is that in the near future it will become all but impossible for Turks and Moroccans living in the Netherlands to marry a partner who still lives in the country of origin. In formulating the requirements to be met by applicants wishing to bring over a marriage partner, the Dutch legislator has placed the emphasis on income (and also age). The envisaged effect is twofold: on the one hand to limit the volume of immigration, and on the other hand to stem the negative consequences of integration. The assumption is a) that the income requirement will mainly affect those who are interested in a partner outside the Netherlands; and b) that the income requirement will limit immigration by those with the least potential to integrate, i.e. those with a very low level of education.

It can be concluded from my study that the envisaged effects are likely to be achieved only partially. Some of those who are unable to meet the requirements will turn their focus to the marriage market in the Netherlands. This is the envisaged effect; it limits immigration and in most cases is favourable for the development of children born to these marriages. It remains to be seen, however, whether the income requirement will lead to the envisaged selection. After all, it is mostly those with a higher education level who are able to meet the income requirement. My study shows that the next generation which is inclined to marry a partner from the country of origin, contrary to expectations, consists of people with both low and higher education levels. In addition, the study does nothing to suggest that people with a higher education level tend to be more interested in partners with a higher education level than in other potential partners; boys in particular hardly seem to take this into account at all. The main effect of the income requirement will therefore be that people with a high education level are given precedence over those with a low education level, with the possible side-effect that those with a lower education level who are unable to meet the income requirement will have few chances of getting married at all. The measures will have little direct influence on the characteristics of the influx.

What the study also shows in particular is that marriage migration can never be controlled completely. Partner choice is a process that is very closely related to social and personal factors.