

Does Social Embeddedness Influence Union Formation Differences Among the Turkish and Moroccan Second Generation in the Netherlands?

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Introduction

Among the many decisions that young adults face, union formation choices (e.g. when to start living with a partner, whom to choose as a partner and whether to marry or to cohabit) are among the most important. These choices are not made in a social vacuum, but influenced by other social actors. In the past, the influence of the family of origin on union formation decisions has received most attention (Axinn and Thornton 1993; Axinn and Thornton 1996; Starrels 2000; Thornton 1991). However, relatively little is known about how non-family networks influence union formation decisions. Those other social actors of influence consist of friends, acquaintances and institutional contacts.

For migrant youth it is particularly important to study this issue as the views and behaviours within this larger social network may differ from those in the family (Haug 2005), in particular if this network contains many people from the native population. Furthermore, union formation choices of migrants can shape their future prospects in the receiving country, e.g. by marrying early they might not complete their education but start working or start a family.

Studying this issue, we focus on second generation Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands. Studying these ethnic groups is particularly interesting given that it is not clear whether the mechanisms that influence family formation among the native population also operate among the children of immigrants born in the receiving country (second generation). In addition, since the second generation makes up a growing proportion of the total young adult population in the Netherlands, their union formation choices will influence future population developments. Turkish and Moroccan children of migrants are particularly likely to be exposed to a wide range of different ideas about union formation (De Valk 2006; De Valk and Liefbroer 2007). Their parents come from familistic and patriarchal societies, where partner choice is strongly determined by the

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parents and where marrying in the early twenties and having children soon afterwards is universal (Bernhardt et al. 2007; Çelikaksoy, Nielson and Verner 2003; Nauck 2002a; Nauck 2002b). This contrasts with the situation in the Netherlands and in other European countries where a change in family values and an emphasis on individualization is reflected in new and heterogeneous family formation patterns (postponement of commitments such as marriage and childbearing, increasing cohabitation and divorce, low fertility) (Corijn and Klijzing 2001; Elzinga and Liefbroer 2007). The exposure of second generation Turks and Moroccans to these opposing views and family formation is reflected in their union formation patterns. More than half of the second generation chooses a partner from the country of origin, and traditional family characteristics of the partner's family are one of the most important issues in choosing a partner (Çelikaksoy, Nielson and Verner 2003; Nauck 2002b). In addition, early marriage and early entry into parenthood are still very common (Bernhardt et al. 2007; De Valk 2006; De Valk and Liefbroer 2007; Nauck 2002a). However, there are some indications that new patterns of family formation are occurring within the second generation as well (Hooghiemstra 2001; Strassburger 2003). To enhance our understanding of the factors that influence these decisions, this paper tries to answer the following research question:

Does the level of social embeddedness into the Dutch society influence union formation decisions of second generation Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands?

This paper contributes to the literature by focusing on four aspects of union formation instead of just one, in particular on the timing of union formation, union type (cohabitation/ marriage), partner type (first or second generation partner or native) and the level of homogamy between partners. Studying multiple aspects of the union formation process will allow for a fuller assessment of the importance of social embeddedness into the Dutch society than is possible by focussing on just one aspect. Secondly, by studying the influence of social actors outside the family, we will broaden our understanding of the type of actors that influence union formation decisions. Thirdly, specifying these social actors by making a distinction between strong and weak ties adds a new approach to the study of network influence on union formation.

Hypotheses

(I) Social embeddedness

Some members of immigrant groups show more affinity to the mainstream culture surrounding them than others. One assumption, often stated, but rarely empirically studied, is that social embeddedness into the new country facilitates adaptation to behaviours and values that are dominant in the new country (Esser 2001; Hagendoorn, Veenman and Vollebergh 2003), which might include union formation behaviour. Social embeddedness into the mainstream society comes about by interpersonal contact with native friends and acquaintances or through more indirect contacts, e.g. within the community and neighbourhood or in communication with institutions, that promote information access.

Applying this general assumption to second generation Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands, would imply that second generation Turks and Moroccans with many contact to Dutch persons will be more exposed to dominant ideas and behavioural patterns within Dutch society than those with few contacts. This reasoning leads to the following general hypotheses about social embeddedness:

The stronger the social embeddedness into Dutch society of Turkish and Moroccan second generation young adults, the more their union formation behaviour will resemble that of Dutch young adults. The stronger their social embeddedness into Dutch society, the more likely they are

(Ia) to postpone marriage (timing),

(Ib) to opt for unmarried cohabitation, at least temporarily (union type)

(Ic) to prefer someone from their own generation or a native (partner type)

(Id) to be more homogenous to their partner with respect to achieved characteristics such as education (homogamy).

(II) Strong vs weak ties

Social embeddedness is a generic concept that incorporates many different types of social contacts. However, not all kind of contacts with native Dutch and their institutions may be equally important in influencing the union formation choices of second generation young adults. Granovetter (1973) introduces a useful distinction between two types of social ties, weak and strong ties. Strong ties consist of family members and close friends

and weak ties of acquaintances. Those social ties are a form of social capital and offer opportunities and constraints for the individual actor. Weak ties often function as bridges to connect social networks that otherwise would not be in contact and can facilitate information gathering, diffusion of new ideas and integration of communities (Granovetter 1983). The more weak ties people have, the more access they have to information and resources and the more embedded they are in society. Strong ties usually are more important to generate social and emotional support, and act as a major support system in times of need.

Given the centrality of the family in the lives of people in general, and among migrants from Turkey and Morocco in particular, it can be expected that strong ties are more relevant for decision making concerning union formation than weak ties. Therefore, having strong ties to Dutch society may be much more important for these kind of decisions than having weak ties to Dutch society. Having close native friends offers the possibility to closely observe alternative behaviours and having an alternative support network of native friends can increase the likelihood of choosing a behaviour that resembles that observed among these native friends. Following this argumentation we would expect strong ties to be of higher importance than weak ties with respect to union formation decisions. This leads to our second hypothesis.

The union formation decisions of second generation Turks and Moroccans having strong ties to Dutch society are more likely to resemble those of native young adults than the decisions of second generation Turks and Moroccans who have no or only weak ties to Dutch society.

Data and methods

To test our hypotheses we will use data from the first available TIES country data set. TIES stands for “The integration of the European second generation”. The TIES survey is a European comparative survey which investigates the trajectories of the descendants of immigrants from Turkey, Morocco and Ex-Yugoslavia as well as of a native control groups in 15 cities in eight European countries (<http://www.tiesproject.eu>). For the survey 10,000 respondents aged 18 to 35 years were interviewed in summer 2007.

The data of the Netherlands is the first to become available and contains information on second generation young adults of Turkish and Moroccan descent and of a native

control group. The sample size is made up of 500 persons per group, and half of it was collected in the cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam respectively.

Social embeddedness will be measured in terms of having weak and strong ties to Dutch society. To measure weak ties, we will use information about the ethnic composition of the neighbourhood in which second generation migrants live, the ethnic composition of the schools (primary and secondary) they attended, and the ethnic orientation of clubs they participated in. To measure strong ties, information on the ethnicity of the three best friends and on the ethnic composition of the wider friends' network will be used. In addition, the ethnic composition of the family network will be taken into account. In particular, it will be important to examine whether both parents originated from Turkey and/or Morocco or not. To control for other important influences on union formation choices of young adults, variables on individual characteristics such as education, age and parental background will be included in the models.

The analysis will be divided into a descriptive and an explanatory part. First, descriptive information on each of the four union formation aspects will be presented, comparing second generation Turks and Moroccans with the native population (in as far as this is possible). Next, multivariate analyses will be presented in which the hypotheses on the influence of social embeddedness will be tested. These explanatory analyses will focus exclusively on Turkish and Moroccan second generation respondents.

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