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Transition to adulthood of second generation women and men of Turkish descent in France: attitudes and practices towards the first sexual intercourse

Introduction

International migrants face the twofold challenge of integrating into the host society and reconciling sometimes conflicting social and cultural demands from their country of origin. For immigrants from countries with a Muslim tradition who moved to Western Europe, the demographic patterns in Western European destination countries are often quite divergent. If we can observe important demographic changes in the emigration countries, such as an increase in the age at the first union and a fall in the fertility rate, these changes are quite recent trends and concern younger cohorts and recent emigrants respectively. A large share of the immigrants, who live in Western Europe today, left their country at a period when these changes had not occurred yet. In their host countries, immigrants find themselves confronted with an individualistic society, a growing diversification of living forms, and persistent low fertility as opposed to strong family ties, universality of marriage, and higher fertility in their countries of origin. Hence, their children grow up in a context where a contradiction between different cultural norms may appear between the generations within the families.

Today, around 3 million of Turkish immigrants live in Western Europe. France has been one of the countries which received immigrant workers from Turkey from 1960 on. More than 20 years after they came to France, very few immigrants from Turkey have become French nationals. Professionally, they still mostly hold working class positions, with a significant group of independent workers, i.e. shopkeepers and craftsmen. Like Moroccan women, few Turkish women attempt to integrate into the job market, contributing to the highest unemployment rate among immigrant women. With no qualifications and poor French language skills, opportunities seem limited for them. Family networks, residential concentration, and associative structures are all contributing to the social organization of the Turkish community and make up a pool of resources. Although not being the most prominent immigrant group in terms of numbers, such pattern makes the Turkish community visible in the public sphere and tends to isolate its members from other groups (Algerian, Moroccan, Portuguese, and Sub-Saharan African). Around 220.000 Turkish immigrants live in France and their share among the immigrant population is growing. Today, the descendants of the first immigrant workers are in the phase of the transition to adulthood and family formation.

A project called The Integration of the European Second Generation (TIES) has been launched in 2003 in order to pay special attention to the women and men of the second generation who live in eight Western European countries.

Our paper is on the transition to adulthood of women and men of the second generation of Turkish descent in France. We focus on the transition to a first intimate relationship, i.e., the first sexual intercourse. The goal of our paper is to explore the pattern of this transition among Turkish immigrants' descendants and youths of French origin. We employ data both on actual behavior and on attitudes.

Framework

Our main research question is: Does the transition to adulthood of descendants of Turkish immigrants in France resemble the one of Youths of French origin? If not, what are the differences and their causes? We work with two competing hypothesis: If the patterns of these two groups are similar, this supports the hypothesis of socialization. That is that the influence of the values, norms and behaviors at the place where the individual has been growing up is most influential. Since the survey we work with addresses exclusively migrants' children who were born in France, the data set is an excellent source in order to test the socialization hypothesis. Contradicting to this, we hypothesize that the behavior of young women and men of Turkish descent is similar to the behaviors of young men and women in Turkey, thus

indicating that they maintain links with their parents' country and adopt the new values and norms of their parents' country of origin. If this is the case, this would support the hypothesis of the maintenance or of the production of some kind of Turkish sub-culture.

Till the 1960s in France, first sexual intercourse occurred at the same time as marriage and as departure from parental home. But the postponement of the access to the first stable job has transformed the experience of being youth. The phase of the transition to adulthood became much longer and progressive: multiple events lead towards autonomy and independence. The increase of the age at first union formation also deeply transformed the sexual norms, while women's movement has changed gender norms. Hence, a first intercourse now occurs much before the first union: it constitutes one of the first events that lead teenagers progressively towards adulthood. The age at the first intercourse is on average about 17 years and is now the same for both men and women. Even though youths' sexuality is accepted by parents, the first intercourse still represents an event that emancipates them from parental control. That does not mean that parents do not control their children's sexual and affective life at all anymore. Parental control simply became different: pre-marital sexuality is accepted, but pregnancy is not supposed to occur before a stable union has been formed, whereas the latter one is not supposed to exist before the completion of education and the access to a stable job. The timing and the order of these different events are still subject to parental control. If parents do not put pressure on their children anymore for them to get married, they now try to avoid their children to form a union and have a child too early.

For descendants of Turkish immigrants, whose parents come from a country where extra-marital sexuality is not allowed and where marriage is universal, sexuality may more frequently be a crucial stake. Descendants of Turkish immigrants have to manage the contradiction between their parents' expectancies and of the dominant sexual norms of the French society.

Data and method

Until recently, France had no statistical data which could be used to describe and analyze the second generation. The only census data collected referred to the nationality and country of birth of individuals. Administrative sources do not give more information than nationality, and, in most cases, handling of this variable is not published in tables. The contours of "immigrant" populations were often defined on the basis of the legal nationality of a person and this has only recently been changed.

We use a new data set on The Integration of the European Second Generation (TIES). The survey is being carried out in France, The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Austria, and Switzerland. France is one of the first countries in this project where the data is available for analysis. The French sample includes about 500 persons with one or two parents born in Turkey. The respondents themselves were born in France. The number of persons with two parents born in France in the sample is 351. The age of the respondents is 18 to 35 years and they live in two cities, these are Paris and Strasbourg.

The French part of the TIES survey contains questions on the age at the first intercourse, which allows employing event-history techniques, and questions on the norm of virginity. This offers the possibility to describe both the practices and the opinions of Turkish descendants on sexuality, and we will see how they navigate between these two opposite patterns. Finally, we will see in how far attitudes are a predictor for actual behavior.

Preliminary results

Preliminary analysis of the data suggests that persons of the Turkish community maintain patterns of these transitions as they are common in Turkey, but not necessarily in France.

The first results show that the transition to adulthood among women and men of the second generation of Turkish descent resembles more the patterns in Turkey than those of French in France. Young Turkish migrant descendants, for example, leave the parental home later than native French and are more likely to have a direct marriage than a non-marital cohabitation. The connection to the marriage market in Turkey – as can be seen in a very high rate of marriages with spouses originating from Turkey - and, accordingly, the maintenance of values and norms seems to be confirmed by the attitudes towards a “white wedding”. The norm of virginity at the marriage was abandoned in France in the 1960s. For the Turkish second generation, virginity is still the shared norm, as the findings from the TIES survey show. Consistent with findings for Turkey, women are more attached to the virginity norm in their declaration than men. These findings are also consistent with former observations in France in the 1960s.