



THE CHANGEABLE STATUS – TRANSFORMATION OF INTRANATIONAL ETHNICALLY MIXED MARRIAGES INTO INTERNATIONAL ONES

Mateja SEDMAK

Science and Research Centre of the Republic of Slovenia, Koper

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The paper deals with ethnically mixed marriages as with a special form of intercultural contact at the interpersonal level of the everyday life of ethnically mixed couples and with the issue of changing status of mixed marriages. The empirical study, dedicated to the phenomenon of mixed marriages, was limited to the multicultural and multilingual area of Slovene Istra, which excels due to its specific ethnic heterogeneity. The great socio-political changes that took place in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s (disintegration of once common national entity, Slovenia's attainment of independence, new political demarcation) led, however, to the involuntary change in the status of ethnically mixed marriages, which eventually transformed from intranational mixed marriages into international ones. If ethnically mixed families had been once faced primarily with the issues of interlingual and intercultural accommodation, they are now confronted with additional burdens of the partner and family life (phenomenon of split loyalties, increasing nationalism, permanent or temporary breaks in family ties.). Here, however some very diverse strategies of (mixed) families' survival and adaptation to the resulting social situation are exposed. The empirical study, which was carried out with the collection of auto/biographical stories in the period from May to December 2000, sets out, as a central determinant of influence, the ethnical affiliation of the mixed marriage partners, the element of (non)autochthony and the social distance between the diverse ethnic groups.



Mateja Sedmak, Science and Research Centre of the Republic of Slovenia, Garibaldijeva 18, 6000 Koper, Slovenia. E-mail: mateja.sedmak@zrs-kp.si

INTRODUCTION

The paper's main aim is to present some of the basic results of the empirical study¹ carried out on the population of ethnically mixed marriages in the geographical region of Slovene Istria in the period from May up to December 2000 (Sedmak, 2001a). The research into the phenomenon of mixed marriages was approached with a presumption that ethnically mixed marriages are a specific form of intercultural contact/confrontation at the interpersonal level of an ethnically mixed couple. In an ethnically mixed marriage, different linguistic systems, values, norms, customs and diverse practices of the everyday life are thus confronted.

In the research process, an emphasis on the microlevel of the study interest was prevalent, where mainly intimate and interpartner relations, the subtle family microclimate, diverse practices of everyday life and (auto)perceptions of a mixed marriage were exposed as particularly interesting ones. With the application of the qualitative auto/biographic method or, to be more precise, with a collection of life stories of different individuals with an exclusive experience of living in the ethnically mixed marriage, I attempted to identify the nature of the process of intercultural confrontation at the microlevel of the everyday life of ethnically mixed couples, the outcome of this intercultural confrontation, the practices of the mutual intercultural adaptation and accommodation, and finally, the impact of the current political events (disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, attainment of independence by Slovenia, and war in the Balkans) on the quality of life of a mixed family (Sedmak, 2002a), (Sedmak, 2002b).

However, according to the paper's main aim I shall hereinafter dedicate myself mostly to the issue of status of the single ethnic groups living in the research area and the impact of the mentioned status on the auto/perception of ethnically mixed marriages. Moreover, special emphasis will be put on the mixed marriages status' changes and the consequences which followed the mentioned status shifts. In this regard special attention will be put on presenting the impact of the broad social-political changes (in the 1990s) on the life of individuals living in ethnically mixed marriages/families, and on the changes that the new political demarcation has brought to their marriage and family life.

A decade of great social and political change (which has not fully ended as yet) has left an indelible trace on the individuals' lives – the disintegration of a once common state and the formation of new national entities have caused changes in the status of ethnically mixed marriages. The appearance of the new political demarcation is thus accompanied by an involuntary transformation of intranational ethnically mixed marriages into international ones. The usual procedures of

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interlinguistic and intercultural adaptation, accommodation and/or assimilation of an ethnically mixed pair are further joined, due to the above mentioned changes, by additional partner and family stresses (temporary/permanent breaks in family contacts, a rise of split loyalties, increasing intolerance, nationalism and xenophobia, etc.).

Finally, the elements of (non)autochthony, national affiliation and with it associated social and cultural distance between single ethnic groups prove to be key determinants in dealing with the issue of ethnically mixed marriages in the region of Slovene Istra.

THE RESEARCH AREA AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The selection of Slovene Istra for the case study research is not coincidental. The territory studied is denoted by a specific demographic structure that has evolved as a result of very diverse historical, political, economic and social processes. The area of study interest is defined by ethnic and linguistic pluralism as well as by cohabitation of the autochthonous Slovene population and autochthonous Italian minority and various immigrant groups (Serbs, Croats, Montenegrins etc.) from the republics of the former Yugoslavia that immigrated to the region particularly in the 1970s, mostly due to economic reasons. The ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity, with indicated elements of multi/intercultural society is further supplemented by legalized bilingualism (of the Slovene and Italian languages) as well as by historical and socioeconomic links with the cross-border states (Darovec, 1992).

Geopolitically speaking, the region of Slovene Istra is from the West and East marked off by Italian and Croatian national territories, while a special kind of geographical demarcation and openness at the same time is delineated by the littoral position of this territory (access to the Adriatic Sea) that administratively covers the municipalities of Koper, Izola and Piran). The bordering position and with it linked cross-border/international contacts, everyday migration processes and territorial concentration of diverse ethnic groups in the marked off region of Slovene Istra have been reflected in a relatively high number of ethnically mixed marriages.

The research was carried out with the aid of combined methodological approach (quantitative and qualitative methodology). However, in the present paper the emphasis will be put on the presentation and analysis of qualitative data (Sedmak, 2001b). Life stories have been collected with the aid of 25 mixed couples and one individual (together 51 persons), where one of the partners was of the Slovene nationality and the other of the autochthonous Italian minority or a national of the republics of former Yugoslavia (Serb, Croat or Bosnian).² The fact of belonging to a particular nationality was assessed

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on the basis of both subjective and objective indicators – on the basis of auto-identification and on the basis of the ethnic identity of their parents. The selected informants were thus the holders of an exclusive experience of living in an ethnically mixed marriage and from it originating behavior (Denzin, 1998). In the selection of informants, however, I attempted to get as close as possible to Morse's directions that only those informants are appropriate "... who have the desired knowledge and experience, capability of reflection and articulation of this behavior, who have enough time for an interview and are ready to participate in the study." (1998, 67). Finally, all interviewed informants from the republics of the former Yugoslavia were the first generation immigrants who immigrated to Slovene Istra as children or in the period of early adulthood; only very few of them came to Slovenia due to a Slovene partner whom he/she met before in the place of birth or some other place.

Due to the lack of statistics on the exact numbers of ethnically mixed pairs/families while selecting the research sample, a combined sampling approach was used (e. g. a random selection and the snowball strategy).

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NATIONAL AFFILIATION AND INTERETHNIC SOCIAL DISTANCE

The nature of intercultural contact at the interpersonal level of an ethnically mixed marriage differs in view of the national affiliation of individuals living in mixed marriages. National affiliation, however, proves to be the key determinant also in the process of defying the changes that embraced mixed marriages/families in the last decade of the 20th century.

The characteristic of Slovene Istra is a dichotomy at the level of autochthonous – immigrant ethnic groups, which has a crucial impact on the auto/perception of separate ethnic groups and, consequently, on the auto/perception of ethnically mixed marriages. For a better and more holistic understanding of the phenomenon of mixed marriages in Slovene Istra and changes faced by mixed family members in the recent period let us give first a short presentation of the Italian ethnic group as well as the other immigrant groups and changes they experienced after War World II regarding their status, perception by the local social context and autoperception by members of the mentioned ethnic groups.

The Autochthonous Italian Minority

The Italian community as an autochthonous ethnicity with a legally recognized minority status is defined by a special status, which is a result of various formal and administrative measures as well as general social climate. In relation to the Italian ethnicity, however, a kind of duality can be perceived.

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In the post-war period (after World War II) the Italians and the Italian language were often equated with fascism. This perception had consequently a negative impact on the general perception of the members of Italian minority as well. In the post-war years, particularly after 1953 (when it became absolutely clear that Slovene Istra was not going to belong to Italy), a mass migration (the so-called exodus) of the Italian inhabitants to the Italian state was taking place (Darovec, 1992). The mentioned negative perceptions, which could be to some extent felt in interethnic relations (in accordance with the informants' accounts) until the 1970s, can be detected in the following narration:

"At school, yes, and outside it. You should have seen those people spitting and throwing stones at me, calling me a fascist... We, the children, didn't have a clue what fascist meant... The very same people are now arranging for their kids to join Italian schools." (45-year old female member of the Italian minority)

The already mentioned duality in relation to the Italian minority is implicitly indicated in the above statement (inclusion of Slovene children in schools with Italian language of instruction). Apart from the members of Italian minority being equated with fascists and fascism, we can at the same time bear witness to a kind of obvious presence of the Italian minority and the Italian language, which is the result of a number of circumstances. In the studied area, the official bilingualism which can be seen in the form of bilingual inscriptions at every step was enacted some time ago (The Osimo agreement, 1975), the Italian language and literature is being taught in Slovene schools from the first year of primary school till the end of secondary education (altogether for 12 years), there are kindergartens and primary and secondary schools with Italian language of instruction functioning in Slovene Istra (which are often attended also by Slovene as well as immigrants' children) and Italian minority has a representative in the Slovene Parliament. Additionally, the relationship with the Italian ethnicity is supplemented by daily migrations to Italy (due to studies at the Trieste University, work, shopping activities), cross-border dispersed kinship networks of local population, and last but not least, the dealt with region was under the Italian occupation from 1918 up to 1945. During everyday informal contacts we often bear witness to a loose and self-evident interaction between Italian and Slovene languages; especially older inhabitants of otherwise Slovene nationality, who spent their youth at the time when this region was under Italy, are making use of the Italian (Trieste) dialect as a prevalent means of everyday communication.

However, the period of the last twenty years could be seen, as far as the Italian minority is concerned (in the case of immigrant population we can detect, at the same time, the very opposite process), as a time of normalization, in the sense of diluteness of the nationalist intolerance toward Italian ethnicity and of restoration of multiethnic cohabitation.

The determinant that differentiates the Italian ethnic minority living in Slovene Istra from the local Slovene majority is above all or merely language. The area of habitation, culture, everyday life practices, feeding habits, norms and values are in fact the same for both stated groups. Slovene Istra is experienced by members of the Italian minority as their home, as a place of their family roots, as the place to which they belong. In the accounts given by the members of the Italian minority living in ethnically heterogamous marriages, we can detect explicitly expressed loyalty to the Slovene state and the sense of belonging to the place of their habitation. Moreover, the Italian language is at the same time exposed as the only or as one of the few signs of individual and collective ethnic identification.

"If we're talking about culture and, let's say, the people who lived here, if looking at the generation of their parents, they knew about Trieste once, but didn't know about Ljubljana. Whatever they produced, they always went there, for it was there where things were sold. And then, I mean, then it came, after the war, this change, but Trieste was for everybody before then. It was one culture, the same, when talking about feast days and things. I mean, I don't know, food, customs on feast days, let's say, most of them are the same, because the place was like this, either from the other side to here, or from here to there. (...) Yes, there ain't much difference here, I mean. Because they were always going here and there, here and there, and this for so many years..." (50-year old member of the Italian minority)

The in-depth interviews made with Slovene-Italian mixed pairs show a clearly expressed tendency of the members of the Italian minority (in comparison with the immigrants from the former Yugoslavia married to Slovenes) to preserve their mother tongue in intrafamily communication and moreover, to transfer their mother tongue to their offspring. This tendency can be partially explained by the existence of legal bilingualism in this region (the element of self-evident presence of Italian language) and also by a lack of intergroup cultural distance, if not cultural uniformity, between the Italian and Slovene ethnicities, where merely language is set out as the only element of group identification and differentiation.

The prevailing pattern of partner and family communication in Italian-Slovene mixed marriages is thus a simultane-

ous use of both language systems, where the Italian partner speaks to his/her children in Italian and the Slovene partner in Slovene language (see also Gomezel Mikolič, 2000; Furlan, 1999). Consequently, the children are mostly bilingual. It may be interesting to add, however, that among female (and not male) members of the Italian minority we are faced with an explicit wish to speak to their children "all the time" in their mother tongue. If the majority of males and females who came from the republics of the former Yugoslavia and married Slovene nationals are linguistically assimilated to the point when they speak to their children only in Slovene language or in some sort of mixture of both language systems, especially the female members of the Italian minority often stress that they can talk to their children in no other language than Italian.

As far as language as such is concerned, a kind of duality in the case of the Italian minority could be noticed again: on the one hand, language is perceived and consequently used merely, as a means of expression, where different language systems are used with the aim to achieve the best possible informative efficiency (in this case the spontaneous code-switching depending on different conversation contents and different linguistic situations could be noticed), or, on the other hand, a very conscious preservation of Italian language as one of the most important elements of group identification/differentiation that must be preserved "at any cost". The general awareness of the complexity of the linguistic situation as well as tendency to preserve the Italian language within a mixed family communication is more often identified among higher educated people, while the tendency to preserve the Italian language is often closely associated with the wish to preserve the Italian ethnic community as such.

In this regard, it must be exposed that the (otherwise completely unproblematic) linguistic situation in the Italian-Slovene marriages has proved to be problematic in those cases, in which the Slovene partner is not a local, a native living in the bordering area of Slovene Istra, but an intrastate immigrant from other (central) regions of Slovenia. In these cases the more or less radical conflict situations could be identified, when using the words of the Slovene partner, "strangers in their own houses", due to the presence of the Italian language in family communication. The accounts of the interviewed people indicate that in this kind of conflicting situations it is the women who assume a more active role in the process of stabilization of family life and adaptation to their partners. As for instance, a woman from the continental part of Slovenia married to an Italian enrolls in the Italian language course, assents to the husband's wish to give their son the Italian name "Andrea", although this name is used exclusively for females in the Slo-

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vene language and Slovene environment, which in fact "troubles her a lot", and gets her children to attend a school with the Italian language of instruction, while at the same time a female member of the Italian minority married to a Slovene national from the central part of Slovenia takes pains to speak to her children in Slovene, etc.

Finally, for a better understanding of the status of Italian-Slovene ethnically mixed families let us expose a typical reaction by a broad family network to the decision that a family member will enter an ethnically mixed marriage; this reaction can be described as neutral or positive, for marriage to the member of the Italian minority (for the Slovene parents born and socialized in the cultural context of Slovene Istra) is in fact marriage to a local or "one of us".

The Immigrants from the Former Yugoslav Republics

If, from the point of view of the changes related to the Italian minority status, a turn took place in the last 50 years from negative to a more positive or neutral perception, then it can be roughly said that the immigrants from the former Yugoslav republics, living in the region of Slovene Istra, have been subjected to the very opposite process.

The period of cohabitation of different ethnic, linguistic and religious groups under the same roof of former Yugoslavia was after World War II imbued with the principles of brotherhood and unity and the ideology that fostered the promotion of class equality above ethnic differentiation. Between the censuses of the 1950s -1980s, the inhabitants of Slovenia and Yugoslavia were, generally, massively declaring themselves as *Yugoslavs*, with the purpose to obliterate the boundaries and cultural differences between separate national groups and to strengthen the concept of national and ethnic equality. The period from 1945 to the 1980s was therefore the time of extensive blending of ethnic groups and relatively high incidence of ethnically mixed marriages.

The 1970s were described by a Slovene woman married to an Italian in the following manner:

"...Almost everything was based on the principle of brotherhood and unity, which was not only a theory but ...was just true.

Here we were constantly involved in events taking place in other republics, in the issue of nationality in other republics. Koper hosted a congress on minorities, an international congress on minorities, Trieste the same. In that period, the Slovene community in Italy held its first conference on ethnic groups. (...) This was the period of the first true opening up in this place, of socialism, of internationalism, class equality that was being brought forth here,

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also in view of contacts with people across the border, which meant contacts with Slovenes and Italians. (...) I think that this period was very much in favor of mixing. And I think that this was the period of a great number of mixed marriages and mixed pairs. Nobody said anything about national pureness. (...) You were not hiding your identity but were simply broadening your identity with somebody else's. And at that time this Yugoslav idea meant, well, it didn't mean that you didn't know who you were, but that you wished to enrich your Slovene identity with something else."

Immigration to Slovene Istra from the former Yugoslav republics continued through the entire post-war period, and it reached its peak in the 1970s, when due to the accelerated construction of factories, a substantial need for (most often manual) labor arose in Slovenia. The majority of (predominantly male) immigrants that eventually lived in ethnically mixed marriages came to Slovene Istra in this period as economic immigrants and only then joined in wedlock. Some of them were seamen who during their stay in the Port of Koper met their future wives. Still, among the exogamously married men we can detect a relatively high level of spatial mobility prior to their marriage and settling down; only a few interviewed came to Slovene Istra for the very sake of the future spouse that he or she had previously met in his or her own cultural environment.

Many informants explicitly stress the difference between then and now, the difference between being nationally unburdened in a once common state and the increasing nationalism as well as xenophobic intolerance, which was supposed to show itself very rapidly after the period of the Slovene attainment of independence in 1991.

However, to avoid potential attempts to idealize this particular period, we must not overlook the people's narrations, which show that even prior to the great political changes in the 1990s a negative attitude towards immigrants and occasionally a very high level of ignorance, stereotypes and prejudice could be felt among the Slovene, i.e. the majority population. Among the Slovenes, f. i., a belief was widespread that all those who lived south of the Slovene boundary were *Bosnians*. As *Bosnians*, different ethnic groups were marked, as f. i. Serbs, Croats, Macedonians etc. To be a *Bosnian* meant to be a stranger, an inferior person, it was a denotation for the people who did not wish or were unable to adapt to the local way of life, language and customs. And the intolerance of the local population could be felt particularly in relation to those who had not assimilated in terms of the language.

When we speak about the immigrants from the former Yugoslavia we have to tackle, in order to avoid potential gene-

ralization, the national (ethnic) groups separately. The different degrees of intercultural and social distance that can be detected between the Slovenes and other nations of the former Yugoslavia have a crucial impact on the attitude towards separate national groups as well as on the incidence and nature of life in ethnically mixed marriages.

The theory of social closeness/distance sets out the meaning of similarity of language, religion, ethno-cultural values as well as historical relations of ethnic groups and the impact of the stated factors on the incidence of heterogamous marriages (Milić et al., 1981). As early as at the beginning of the 20th century, Drachler came to the conclusion that fusion is taking place faster and easier between those ethnic groups between which the religious, racial or/and cultural boundaries are less strong and clear (1921). In accordance with Petrović's (1986) model of the Associating Index, the interethnic and social closeness is the greatest between the Slovene and Italian and the Slovene and Croatian ethnicities.

Before we briefly present the characteristics of the single ethnic groups of immigrants let us expose the response of the family and kinship net regarding the mixed marriage of their members; the mentioned family reaction is also interesting and it reflects the general degree of (non)acceptance. If the response of the primary social network is mostly neutral or even positive as far as Slovene-Italian mixed marriages are concerned, we are faced, in mixed marriages between Slovenes and immigrants from the former Yugoslavia, also with less favorably disposed responses by directly involved families:

"...And then my mother began to rub my nose in the dirt by saying, well he's from down there, the south, and you know what the mentality of these people is like. She certainly wasn't thrilled by him. I think that she was simply afraid that he'd persuade me and take me down there, and that if anything would go wrong, he'd take the children away from me, too. Yes, this was the problem with my mum. She simply wasn't sure about them. But his folks seemed very happy to get a Slovene girl to join the family. Still, after a couple of years they weren't so thrilled any more by me being a Slovene. I think that they'd much prefer having one of their own kind." (36-year old Slovene woman married to a Bosnian Croat)

Responses by the primary social network are very different and are at the very beginning often marked by religious and cultural differences, prejudices, fear of their mentality, etc. Quite a common feature is, however, that after the initial period of intolerance and distrust the potential prejudices disappear and the partner-immigrant is self-evidently included into the network of the kinship-family relations.

An explicitly positive family response is usually encountered in those cases when an ethnically mixed marriage is entered by a male immigrant, whose family has migrated to the region of Slovene Istra as a whole. Marriage of the family member with a local (Slovene) girl is perceived by the primary family as a family or group success and as a step forward towards final acceptance into the new environment.

From the perspective of Theory of social distance, the social and cultural distance is the smallest, as already said, between the Slovene and Croatian ethnicities. The reason for this can be discovered in numerous circumstances: geographical proximity, tradition of cross-border informal and merchant associating, shared Catholic faith, congeniality of ethno-cultural characteristics, etc. It is not surprising, therefore, that a prevailing perception is detected not only in Croats themselves (auto-perception) but also in other ethnic groups (perception by others) that the Slovenes are generally more tolerant towards the Croats than towards other immigrant groups and that mixed marriages between Slovenes and Croats are generally the least problematic.

Geographical and social-cultural distance between Serbs and Slovenes is on the other hand also exposed at the interpersonal level of mixed marriages. In this group of ethnically mixed marriages, numerous intercultural differences are set out, the most explicit among them being: *orientation of the Slovenes towards the future* (denying yourself something today in order to have for tomorrow), *orientation of the Serbs towards today* (all that matters is to enjoy ourselves now), *attitude towards money* (Slovenes are less prodigal with their money), more open *expression of feelings* in the Serbs, well known *Serb hospitality and different perception of privacy* (guests are welcome at all times, coffee-time with neighbors, lesser need for privacy and intimacy) and *traditional roles perception as far as gender is concerned* (home is to be cared for and children educated by women, exclusion of women from men's company etc.). Here is a story of a Slovene woman married to a Serb man which exposes the mentioned prevailing intercultural differences:

"There are differences in the way of thinking, in education, food, in the way of life ... the way of life that seemed most different at the beginning. (...) they all live differently, just all of them, they know how to enjoy life. They are not interested in tomorrow, or at least this is how it used to be, for today it's a bit different already, as the crisis is getting bigger and they simply have to care. (...) they used to live just for today. If they agreed to go out, then it had to be so, and they really enjoyed themselves, to the end, I tell you. And it just wasn't important if tomorrow they would have enough money for a loaf of bread. We were much different ... planned in a way. (...) But after some ten years I

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even began to envy them in a way. (...) Education at our home was completely different. You did not show your feelings outwardly. Emotionally I was somehow more contained and perhaps a bit too much ... how should I say ... stiff-necked. (...) But in their house the emotions were shown so openly that I was ... so to speak ... shocked. When I came there for the first time, his brother went down on his knees, mumbled a few words and then embraced me. What the hell, I said to myself, has he gone bonkers? Now I really don't know which one is supposed to court me. You get a feeling that's really absolutely out of this mind. (...) They're incomparably more emotional, that is it. And they are not ashamed to show their feelings either." (40-year old Slovene woman married to a Serb)

In accordance with Petrović's typology (1986), the social distance between Slovene and Bosnian ethnicities is similar to the social distance between Slovenes and Serbs, and in this case the religious differences could be particularly important. However, Communism, as the prevailing ideology of the former Yugoslav regime, was not explicitly favorably disposed to the religion as such, although religion and religious practices were not systematically prohibited and neglected. The outcome of this ideological orientation was, however, a lesser impact and influence of religion and religious doctrine on the people's mentality and their everyday life, which made it easier to join in ethnically and religiously mixed marriages between f.i. Muslim Bosnians and other nationals of the former Yugoslavia.

In mixed marriages between Slovenes and Muslim Bosnians living in the study area, a certain duality can be again detected: while marriages between Slovene men and Bosnian women seem relatively unproblematic, the marriages between Bosnian men and Slovene women are exposed as those, in which the intercultural differences are most distinct. The complexity of the latter case is concentrated at the point of different gender perception (expectations associated with wife's and mother's role in the family). A more traditionally socialized Bosnian man living in mixed marriage with a Slovene woman is confronted with an evident need for a certain redefinition of (until then unquestionable) perceptions of family and gender roles, division of labor, etc., which then proves a central point of the interpartner conflicts and personal disappointments. The mentioned observation is witnessed by the following statements of a 36 years old Slovene woman and her 38 years old husband:

"Sometimes he says to me, for example, a wife in Bosnia wouldn't do this. I don't care, I tell him, I'm in Slovenia and not down there. But if I wasn't working full time, everything would be most probably very different. Because

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he knows, of course, that if you work you can't come home and have a meal cooked at the same time. Okay, you can prepare something a day before, but not always. (...) I, too, come home half starved, but have to wait for the meal to be cooked, the same as him. We'll eat okay, I say, if not at six, then at seven, and if not at seven, then at eight. And this is quite normal everywhere, where women are away from home all day." (the Slovene wife)

"... But, I say, our mentalities don't match yet. I see this, for I've been here for fifteen years. We were not made for each other. It's no use, even if you try. (...) I say, well, for the moment we don't go well together, we're a mixed marriage. This is just not it. We can be patient, but it doesn't work, it doesn't. Perhaps I could get better used to a woman from Bosnia, maybe not quite used to her, but I'd certainly get on with her better than with this Slovene woman. This is just not it. (...) But, I say, the mentality of some, let's say Bosnians ... it's not so important of what religion you are, as the mentality stays always the same. (...) The system of all Bosnian mothers is to teach their daughters to become wives, I mean, this is the first thing, to become housewives. (...) First of all they must learn to make this and this soup. After all, this has a good side to it, hasn't it. (...) And, let's say, a wife, you go to work, you come home, is there anything to eat? Nothing! What a bloody shame, and what are you here for then? You're not here to be a slave, but you should know what your tasks are in the house, that you have to take care of something. Everyone does what she can, why not... And this is of course expected from a wife. But I, for example ... there's no chance for me to cook something, no chance. Some cold meats, yes, but then I rather go out to eat. Simple..." (the Bosnian husband)

The different perceptions of gender roles and the greater patriarchal orientation of the Bosnian men are further joined by their different attitudes towards money, spare time, friends and privacy, greater hospitality and resistance to emotions, etc.

WHEN INTRANATIONAL MIXED MARRIAGES BECOME INTERNATIONAL ONES

"The Earth was created by God, while the boundaries must have been the work of the Devil." (47-year old Serb married to a Slovene woman)

Political and social changes that took place in the territory of the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, symbolically and factually strengthened the distance between the former Yugoslav republics. Slovenia's attainment of independence, the disintegration of former Yugoslavia and a good decade of war that has not been fully brought to an end, these are the events

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that had a great impact on the lives of ethnically mixed marriages. If mixed pairs were occupied mainly with the issues of intercultural and linguistic adaptation and attempts to bring into line the different languages, values, life styles, customs, etc., then they were confronted, in the 1990s, with additional burdens of the partner and family life caused by the changed political situation. The new national demarcations led to the (involuntary) change in the status of mixed marriages/ families, which were transformed from intranational ethnically mixed marriages into international ones. This shift in their status, however, confronted the mixed partnerships with numerous new situations and strategies of survival in the thoroughly changed conditions.

The first responses by individuals living in ethnically heterogamous marriages were, at the time when it became absolutely clear that the changes taking place in Slovenia were final and irreversible, very diverse: from agreeing with the process of disintegration and independence of Slovenia, great surprise ("I didn't expect it", "If I knew I would have stayed in Australia", etc.) to great distress. Among the first issues that mixed families had to confront after the independence of Slovenia were those associated with the acquisition of Slovene citizenship. If members of the Italian minority were generally the least affected ethnicity as far as the consequences of Yugoslavia's disintegration are concerned, we can still detect, in this particular group as well, certain disillusion, problems and disagreements linked to the process of acquiring the young state's citizenship. About the complexity of this situation speaks the case of an Italian man born in Croatia and married to a Slovene born in Italy; in the case of the mentioned couple the wife reached Slovene citizenship automatically while the husband was subjected to the long and unpleasant bureaucratic procedures.

The immigrants married and living in Slovenia were also confronted with the situation when they had to apply for the citizenship of the Republic of Slovenia. If this procedure seemed relatively self-evident to the majority of the interviewed people, there were completely different reactions by mixed parents, when they had to apply for the citizenship of their children born in mixed marriages in Slovenia. In this context let us underline that a newly born child could be given the national affiliation (in the period before 1991) in accordance with his/her parents' wishes (i.e. after his/her father or mother), or the child's national affiliation was defined utterly bureaucratically in accordance with the momentary inspiration of a civil servant. Thus it is not surprising that two children born in Slovenia to the same parents are quite often the bearers of two different national affiliations (that of mother and that of father).

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"But then I was shocked when he told me that we have to apply for the Slovene citizenship for our daughter, really. Because, when she was born, she was automatically what her father was." (44-year old Slovene married to a Croat)

The special type of crises situations for ethnically mixed families could be found in the cases of split loyalties, which some immigrants are faced with. Such is the case of a man of Serb nationality who according to his wife's words did not want to apply for the Slovene citizenship within demanded time due to his "nationalistic feeling, pride, obstinacy and ideals". However, the consequences of his (non)action are felt by the entire family, for the husband cannot get a job without the Slovene citizenship, and neither can he get financial compensation for being unemployed. As a result of the fact that the wife is also unemployed, the family has found itself in a critical economic situation, which has in turn led to the inter-partner and family conflicts.

The process of establishment of the new national entity was in the 1990s accompanied by the processes of raising Slovene national awareness, the reinstating of Slovene identity, and attempts to differentiate from the other nations of a once common state. The processes of identification and differentiation were simultaneously accompanied by increasing nationalism, xenophobia and tendency towards cultural and linguistic purity.

According to informants' accounts, the war in the Balkans and the general discontent, which followed during the period of great economic and political changes, affected mostly the Serb immigrants, although immigrants – members of other nationalities also bear witness to the increasing intolerance towards them.

"Let me tell you what's happening here now, after the war. In Slovenia, we mainly think that we and the Croats are all right, but the Serbs ...no chance. That's how people think. (...) Although that Serb over there is as guilty as I am, except that he's a Serb. Croats, and Bosnians, and Macedonians are not snarled at, they aren't. But the Serbs, that's different. Am I right or not? This is precisely what's happening, if talking about nations." (49-year old Slovene woman married to a Croat)

The burden of the collective Serb guilt, however, has also affected the family members of Serb immigrants:

"Yes, at work. And it was coming from the people that in fact knew nothing at all, that had probably never been outside Slovenia. And I think that this was the reason for their reaction, for their way of thinking. But I mostly ignored all that taunting, or avoided it, because it was easi-

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er. I mean, I couldn't argue with them about their insinuations that the Serbs were then the enemies who occupied our country, that this was horrible and what wicked people they were. And automatically he (*her husband, auth. annot.*) was wicked as well. I just couldn't get it into their heads that I had never had any conflicts with them whenever I was in Serbia, that nobody called me names, that nobody humiliated me or made me feel like a piece of crap, that I never experienced anything negative." (40-year old Slovene woman married to a Serb)

The nationalistic intolerance is being experienced particularly by linguistically unassimilated immigrants. If Serbo-Croat language was considered the official Yugoslav language that the Slovene children were at that time taught during their primary school education and the presence of which was somewhat self-evident, the tendency towards using the Slovene language in public as well as private situations has now become even more obvious:

"Those times, when we came here, everything was different. Depending on the company. Nobody bothered you. But now when this war came, it is very different. They look funny at you, because of your language. Then they didn't look funny at your language." (35-year old Bosnian woman married to a Slovene)

Ethnically mixed wedded couples are particularly stricken by intolerance in relation to their children. About the significance of a person's surname as of that particular marker around which nationalistic intolerance is concentrated, speaks the following statement:

"I've said it so many times that I'll give them my surname, because they're suffering. A lot. Yes, we all have my husband's surname. (...) I had some problems with my older son. There are some people in Lucija, quite a rich family, with a daughter, and my son used to play with this girl. (...) And this girl once said to her mother who just came by, this is H...ć that I was telling you about, he's a good friend. And her mother says, oh, you're that H...ć (*a boy surname, auth. annot.*). Yes, he says. Well, that's not so bad, says she, some people's family name is even "shit", isn't it?" (41-year old Slovene woman married to a Bosnian)

Together with the increasing intolerance we can detect various strategies of adaptation to the new situation and the tendency to establish a renewed normalization. In the desire to spare his daughters unpleasant moments in their lives that they could possibly experience due to their "unsuitable" surname (acquired after their Bosnian mother), the following thought entered their father's mind:

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"This *ć* in the surname as it appeared in my daughters' school report ... well I simply changed it into *č* (*č indicates a Slovene, ć a non-Slovene surname, auth. annot.*), so that they were no longer P...*ć* but P...*č*. And I changed it everywhere else. This seemed reasonable to me, for the letter *ć* doesn't exist in Slovene language at all. When the girls will be looking for a job, I think people will be more tolerant towards them this way." (40-year old Slovene married to a Bosnian woman)

Broad social changes have led also to the intrafamily intolerances and conflicts. The diverse views and opinions on the current political events, war, the people responsible for it, national issues, etc. are the central issues of their disputes. At the same time the confrontations with the stated issues are accompanied by very emotional feelings – some of the immigrants have lost their relatives, property, etc. in the recent war. However, in this regard ethnically mixed couples are frequently claiming that they have never allowed the social-political situation to exert any influence on their families' lives. In this context they tend to underline: "Politics is one thing, while life is a different matter!"

In the wish to avoid the influence of negative social climate on the quality of mutual relations, many ethnically mixed couples opt for the tactics of avoiding critical topics.

"In our place these things were simply pushed aside. It's true that he follows politics, but not me. I don't want to have anything to do with it. Never, and I don't want to speak about these things either. I can of course have my own opinion, but it mustn't influence my family in any way. I wouldn't allow this. Because once I began ... But I consciously pushed politics aside, and it just doesn't interest me. Until this can possibly endanger the existence of my family." (40-year old Slovene woman married to a Serb)

The restoration of the new national entities in the territory of the once common state and the new divisioning into *us* and *them* has been experienced by the interviewees very emotionally, where the international boundaries are perceived mainly as an impediment in the spatial mobility and as an obstacle in maintaining (previously self-evident) kinship relations.

The southern boundary with their first neighbor, i. e. Croatia, seems particularly problematic, for the division of previously unified geographical entity has broken off the traditional historical, commercial and social links between neighboring towns and villages.

"I'm here, I'm a Croat, born in Croatia, and here somewhere, in front of my nose, runs a border. But this border is in fact an obstacle, a huge obstacle. Whether this will remain so also tomorrow, next week, I really don't know, but

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today this is still a great obstruction, isn't it? And in the moment when this started, some very unpleasant situations were experienced during the people's conversations ... And their thoughts were very different." (49-year old Croat married to a Slovene woman)

If the maintenance of kinship relations all over Yugoslavia and the relatively frequent visits at least a couple of times a year was at that time a self-evident practice by the majority of mixed marriages, these habitual rituals of kinship relations maintenance were (at least temporarily) now interrupted due to the war, the links rendered difficult due to the problems with petrol, required visas and with them connected expenses. These objective obstacles, however, were further joined by people's subjective negative experiences, such as: "a very unpleasant feeling when you have to apply for a visa to go home", dissatisfaction over the procedures practiced by bureaucrats, customs officers, etc. For a few years lasting isolation of the occupied areas led to the numerous individual distresses – one of them being, for example, the statement by a Croat who due to the war could not attend his brother's funeral.

About the broken off kinship ties and their causes speak the following statements:

"I used to go there every year, three or four times, until customhouses were built. Now we have three of them: Slovene, Croat and Serb customs. And you can just imagine how much you lose there. Before they were built, I got there in four hours, now it takes me seven or eight." (60-year old Serb married to a Slovene)

or

"And first of all you have to pay for visa, which costs forty Deutsch-marks per person, then you have to pay for special car insurance, which is 150 Deutsch-mark, this year a bit less, thanks God. For some time you had to pay 4 Deutsch-marks for a liter of unleaded petrol down there, but you were lucky if you got it at all." (40-year old Slovene married to a Serb)

In the place of birth of the partner who emigrated to Slovenia, a weekend house used to be often built by mixed pairs with a wish to establish a mobile way of life at two locations after their retirement. The war and some very bad memories of it, however, often totally thwarted these wishes.

One of the characteristics of this period is, after all, also a quick activation of the family-kinship supportive system in the form of material and financial aid to the relatives, the refugees from war zones being taken to their relatives' residences here, etc. Numerous informants emphasize that the experience of war, want and stresses have brought their families even closer.

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"Even in summer, when we were down there, it wasn't easy because of the money, but they're so poor and don't have any (...), she didn't get her pension, and we helped her, I mean I fully support this. I rather have a thing or two less for myself, now we should repair the bathroom, but who cares, we'll manage without it, too. They have nothing, nothing to warm their flat up, and the winter's here already..." (44-year old Slovene woman married to a Serb)

"Then the war came, and we had them as refugees in our place. For some time there were even fifteen of us, his mother and sister with husband and kids..." (42-year old Slovene married to a Croat)

The very special dimension of the obstacles with which mixed couples are faced in the process of normalization of kinship contacts and ties, however, is indicated by the post-war feeling of guilt and resentment – the partner who immigrated to Slovenia is on the one hand confronted with feelings of guilt because he was away from his homeland during the period of crisis (war), while on the other hand he is also faced with the reproach of his family who is letting him know the following: "If you were not fighting for us then, then don't bother to come now."

"... That family of his: you didn't help, you didn't do anything ... you should fight, anyway, and things like that. Well, we did send a tolar or a Deutsch-mark to his relatives, and some petty things if we could, but you simply can't send them all God knows what. And now they are often saying, you didn't help then, so don't bother now either ..." (41-year old Slovene woman married to a Serb)

CONCLUSIONS

When analyzing the changeable status of ethnically mixed marriages in Slovene Istra in the period from World War II up to the late 1990s, we are facing two opposite processes: in the case of mixed marriages between Slovenes and members of the autochthonous Italian minority we can identify a shift from a more negative towards a more positive perception, while in the case of mixed marriages between Slovenes and members of nations of the former Yugoslav republics we can detect the opposite processes, that is to say, a shift from a more positive to a relatively negative perception. However, in the late 1990s and at the beginning of the new Century (when talking about the social position of immigrant groups) the process of normalization of the social climate and interethnic relations in general began. The presented autobiographical narrations of people involved in ethnically mixed marriages in this regard clearly expose the importance and influence of the macro level of social life (the impact of social, political and historical

circumstances) on the micro level of interpersonal relations, or to be more precise, on the (quality of) life of ethnically mixed partnerships and families.

NOTES

¹ The presented case study, which was carried out amongst ethnically mixed pairs in the area of Slovene Istra, is a part of the empirical research for the doctoral thesis entitled "Ethnically mixed marriages as a form of interpersonal cultural contact" (Sedmak, 2001a).

² Ethnically mixed marriages were selected among the Slovenes and members of the stated ethnic groups for the reason that the stated ethnicities represent the most numerous national groups living in the region of Slovene Istra.

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Promjenljivi status – promjena miješanih brakova iz unutardržavnih u međudržavne

Mateja SEDMAK
Znanstveni i istraživački centar Republike Slovenije, Koper

U članku su predstavljene rezultati empirijskoga istraživanja izvedenoga među etnički miješanim parovima na multietničkome području slovenske Istre u razdoblju od svibnja do prosinca 2000. godine. U istraživanje koje je provedeno kombiniranim metodologijskim pristupom (tj. anketiranjem i kolekcijom auto/biografskih priča) bili su uključeni parovi iz miješanih brakova između Slovenaca i pripadnika autohtone talijanske manjine, odnosno imigranata iz republika nekadašnje Jugoslavije. Glavni je cilj članka pred nama utvrditi promjene statusa etnički miješanih parova/obitelji koji su posljedicom širih društvenih, političkih i povijesnih događaja. Unutar tih okvira, kao ključni se pojavljuju autohtoni, odnosno doseljenički status neslovenskoga bračnoga druga, nacionalna pripadnost partnera u mješovitim brakovima i međuetnička kulturna bliskost/udaljenost. Posebno zanimljivo razdoblje za istraživanje jest vrijeme velikih društvenih i političkih promjena devedesetih godina prošloga stoljeća. Raspad nekada zajedničke države, osamostaljenje Slovenije i teritorijalna razgraničenja uzrokom su nedragovoljnih promjena statusa etnički miješanih brakova/obitelji koji se od unutardržavnih mijenjaju u međudržavne. Dok su se partneri u miješanim brakovima u razdoblju prije tih velikih društvenih pomaka bavili nadasve pitanjima međujezične i međukulturne prilagodbe, u razdoblju nakon osamostaljenja Slovenije prisiljeni su suočavati se s još dodatnim stresnim i konfliktnim situacijama (rastućim nacionalizmom, prekidima rodbinskih veza, fenomenima podvojene lojalnosti i dr.) što dovodi do najraznolikijih strategija održavanja na životu partnerskoga i obiteljskoga života.

Veränderlichkeit und Veränderungen in Mischehen infolge politischer Wandel

Mateja SEDMAK
Wissenschafts- und Forschungszentrum der Republik Slowenien, Koper

Der vorliegende Artikel präsentiert die Ergebnisse einer empirischen Untersuchung, die von Mai bis Dezember 2000 unter ethnisch gemischten Ehepaaren auf dem multiethnisch besiedelten Gebiet des slowenischen Teils von Istrien durchgeführt wurde. An der Untersuchung, bei der nach einer kombinierten Methode vorgegangen wurde (Umfrage und Sammlung (auto-)biografischer Aussagen), nahmen Partner aus Mischehen teil, die einerseits aus Slowenen und

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andererseits aus Mitgliedern der autochthonen italienischen Minderheit bzw. Zuwanderern aus den ehemaligen jugoslawischen Teilrepubliken bestehen. Das Hauptziel dieser Arbeit besteht darin, Veränderungen im Status gemischter Ehepaare/Familien zu ermitteln, die eine Folge allgemeiner gesellschaftlicher, politischer und historischer Wandel sind. Innerhalb eines solchen Rahmens erweisen sich der autochthone bzw. der Zuwandererstatus des nicht-Slowenischen Ehepartners, ferner die nationale Zugehörigkeit der Partner in Mischehen sowie interethnische kulturelle Nähe bzw. Distanz als ausschlaggebende Faktoren. Ganz besonders interessant ist die Zeit umfassender gesellschaftlicher und politischer Wandel in den 90er Jahren des 20. Jahrhunderts. Der Zerfall des einstigen jugoslawischen Staates, die Abspaltung Sloweniens und die territorialen Neubildungen sind die Ursachen für unfreiwillige Veränderungen des Status von ethnisch gemischten Ehen bzw. Familien, deren ethnische Identität nun nicht mehr innerhalb eines Staates liegt, sondern über die Staatsgrenzen hinausgeht. Während sich vor diesen großen gesellschaftlichen Umwälzungen die Partner in Mischehen vornehmlich mit Fragen der sprachlichen und kulturellen Anpassung beschäftigten, waren sie nach der Abspaltung Sloweniens gezwungen, sich mit zusätzlichen Stress und Konflikte auslösenden Situationen (erstarkender Nationalismus, Abbruch der Familienbeziehungen, Loyalitätsspaltung u.a.) auseinanderzusetzen. All dies resultierte in unterschiedlichsten Strategien zur Erhaltung der Partnerschaft und des familiären Zusammenhalts.