Abe W. Ata [1]

ADJUSTMENT AND COMPLICATIONS OF CATHOLIC AND INTER-FAITH INTERMARRIAGES

Literary perspectives

Intermarriage is arguably the best indicator as to whether a particular group is fully integrated and accepted in the mainstream community. Being the most committed, if not intimate, of relationships it reveals that there is no prejudice between members of the host/mainstream and migrant/minority communities. This suggests that inter-faith dialogue and tolerance are an integral part amongst these communities as reflected within interfaith families. Secondly it means that guardians of the ethnic/minority traditions have lost hold on their members, and in particular those from the first generation in relation to members of the second generation.. (Birrell and Healy, 200).

In the case of Australia in the field systematic studies of inter-faith marriages are on the rise. Studying such intermarriage would help us look at the merging of the two communities at personal and a societal level, in identity, religious conversion, dress code, upbringing of children, and national aspiration. It will also shed some light on the evolution of the Australian family whilst the community is in transition not the least at a political level.

This is of particular interest because it is viewed as one of the last stages towards full integration and the proximity to which one group relates to another. (Price, l994) Intermarriage is viewed as an index into full acceptance of both partners into the wider society. (Blau et al., l982).

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Protagonists have produced evidence that such intermarriages will preserve and strengthen the boundaries of one's identity; others have likewise argued that it will ultimately weaken and erode it. (Stephan, l989; Quadagno, l981).

Literature relating to this has not been explored any more than marriages where motives are mixed, and convenience proscribes living together and establishing households. (Penny and Khoo, l996).

Follow-up studies have shown that it is possible to embody multiple identities, and that parts of ones customs are preserved. (Vosburgh l990). In l993 Price studied intermarriage rates for the second generation of inter-ethnic marriages and found that it was higher by 10 - 60%, depending on the type of ethnic community.

Likewise the grinding tensions of intermarriage, not the least inter-religious cohesion versus inter-communal destiny, may be unique and a source of fascination with regards to multi-cultural societies like Australia.

Inter-church marriages in the context of this study means the marriage of couples from a Catholic and another Christian church background. This involvement refers to those who identify themselves with a Christian church by affiliation, baptism, parental background or childhood upbringing. This broad definition is not restricted to the churches strict requirements of the couple to be baptized Christians from different traditions. Neither does it mean that the couple has to actively participate in the activities of their respective church.

Methodology

A sample size of 100 people formed the basis of analysis. They were selected from Victoria with the majority being residents of Melbourne. The number, though considered small for a comprehensive study, has been exhaustive over a period of several months with a sizeable known number declining to be interviewed. There were 45 male and 55 female participants of which 72% - a majority -were born in Australia; 6% in Europe; 7% in Asia and 15% in the Middle East. Of those born in Australia only 58% gave the same response; of the Asian born 15%; of the European group 8% and of the Middle Eastern group 19%.

Table a Sex and Religion of participants*

Males	*45%*	*Females*	*55%*
Catholic	36%	Catholic	33%
Non-Catholic (Christians)	9%	Non-Catholic (Christians)	22%
Total	45%	Total	55%

Other demographic data reveal that 85% have obtained the Australian citizenship; the remainder are either migrants or decide not to initiate a requested for naturalization. Of the former group 72% were born in Australia compared with 58% of their partners. The remainder cited Europe (mainly East Europe), non Muslim Asia; the Middle East and other Muslim countries including Pakistan and Malaysia. Of the total participants 72% were able to speak English at birth; the others (28 %) spoke other languages including Armenian, Arabic, Turkish, Macedonian, Albanian, Italian, Spanish, French, Croatian and Bosnian. The pattern has changed so that 86 % use English mostly at present; and only 14% do not.

Socio-religious Perspectives

As couples inch closer to one another in the early days of knowing one another, misunderstandings may not be of a serious nature. The first days of encounter may invite them to double their energy to work around perceived difficulties and other issues of conflict. They would be inclined to defer resolution around inter-faith status, readjusting earlier relationship with members of their own community especially those who do not take kindly to such marriages, until perhaps the birth of their first child.

Students of Comparative cultural and ethnic studies are keen to show that to non Western more traditional societies the 'intermarried' couples appear and act as a solid unit, despite residual inner feelings of tension, especially during crises and catastrophes. The abundance of unexpected problems associated with family members living different lifestyles results primarily from the psychosocial allegiances to one's psycho-religious upbringing which was once nurtured alongside members of one's previous extended family. (Ata, 2000, p56)

Behind the various perceptions of the status of their inter-faith marriages lies a range of common techniques to resolve the differences within the marriage. As these kinds of marriages become accepted the terminology of newer approaches and mechanics of resolution mechanisms develop.

The reactions collected in this study are placed under the selected terms below.

1. Conversion or annexation:

The accepted definition here is when one spouse converts to the life and faith of the other by choice, or because of an offer one is made unable to refuse.

In order to assume safely that this option has an advantage of avoiding friction due to religious differences such conversion has to be pressure free, sincere and one's total and ultimate choice.

Short of that the spouse who has given up their religion and faith may face ongoing problems. They may find that they have replaced familiar ways of thinking and feeling with new ones. In time they may feel resentment of having been pressured into conversion however thoroughly the conversion ritual may have been explained to them beforehand. It may invite the thought of their marriage being a struggle in which both consider themselves the main winning players, or such that only one partner maintains his or herself as part of total annexation, forcing the other into irreparable submission.

One participant who felt angry commented: "*You can't marry a chicken and a rooster. It is not on*"

Missing out on nostalgic practices associated with their 'religious' tradition was expressed by another participant: "*We seem to go to whatever function his community puts on,*" the children sense that it is a one way traffic, but for how long …

2. A policy of ignoring and withdrawal:

Both partners withdraw from organized religious activities. They may also have ceased to open religious discussions and to avoid them when obvious within their household. How successful is such a long term decision is any ones guess. Later in life and particularly after the birth of their first child one of the partners with an activated nostalgia will become more active – possibly in attempting to tie her child's into their original faith. In so doing they will find out that it would be hard for suppress their spirituality, and to ignore their differences for long.

3. A strategy of diversity and plurality in faith:

In this situation both partners have several choices. One of them might decide to go to a religious service one week and to an alternative one the successive week and so on. In affiliating with both denominations they might choose to attend the successive services together. With the support form one another and their respective institutions they might even join each others church.

With this understanding they honour the uniqueness and wholesomeness of each faith, choosing not to 'homogenize' religious differences. Not only have they made the creation of lifestyle and family environment an opportunity to honor both traditions, but they have already paved the way for their children to thrive in such a rich life. This pathway choice can be seen in several statements expressed by a thoughtful member:

It is a case of creating healthy boundaries; a sort of religious pluralism that allows considerable overlap in world views; in ensuring peaceful coexistence and complementing the life of one another.

4. Compromising and negotiating:

In this situation both partners have chosen to leave their affiliated religion and move into a new one a happy medium where they will meet each other half-way. For some it is an open-ended story. For others it replicates an unfinished symphony – a case where partners makes certain promises and eventually back pedal so as to keep the upper hand if circumstances did not favour them. With that outcome, one has to ask, if marriage was only a power struggle why does one have to marry at all?

It is estimated that 30% of intra-faith couples select this option – so that a Catholic-Greek Orthodox couple switch over to the Anglican or Uniting Faith, and so on. No accurate figures have been secured as to percentage of inter-faith couples, e.g. Muslim-Christian, or Jewish-Muslim, making this kind of conversion.

Moving alongside these changes concerned religious and social scientists have developed a 'Belief System Selector' kit – a test designed to help couples locate a faith group that matches their religious and spiritual belief system. By securing a high rating each or both spouses would hopefully be self-assured of getting along with their select faith group…

Taking an opposite direction towards compromise both couples select to severe their affiliation all together with their respective faiths. Whether this may guarantee a resolution of religious and cultural differences which operate on a sub conscious level, one can not be certain. On a conscious level they know that placing an effort to resolve irritants due to such differences might not be justified. Letting things slide for the present is obvious amongst those who feel that their commitment to their religion is at low ebb anyway, and that it plays a small part in their life.

Such a move may also trigger double the burden of resolution particularly if both of the families of origin have become upset at the decision.

5. Pastoral/Ecumenical yielding:

The couples endeavor to integrate their faith traditions and spiritual guidelines into their family life. They may do so in a creative, incremental way that develops into a common ground which unites the family members. This merger may not satisfy conservative denominations who tend to view such processes involve dangerous compromises by a 'past' member of their congregation. Why would our members end up being 'born again' but not their partner remains a moot question.

6. Versatile Outlook/Worldview:

Couples choose to remain respectful and none judgmental of each other's religious tradition. Their willingness to give one another total religious freedom of practice is another way of setting ground rules to make communication pleasant and safe.

With respecting the 'otherness' of others, that is, not being inclined to make the other like oneself, they move to reduce all major differences into the lowest common denomination. They reason that unity within diversity adds more richness and beauty to marital life and when raising children.

Going their own way in celebrating different religious ways and holy days separately may enrich family environment, but could trigger crises, because it may reduce the amount of time that they spend together and reduce the level of companionship in their marriage. Complaints of this sort were voiced by many including those who were not able to tolerate what they saw as a need to bond their relationship with that of their children.

Said a skeptical woman:

I keep wondering why our kids find it more confusing to make sense out of going to one church one week and another place of worship recommended by their father. How can we make a decision on whether to baptize them in which church, both of them or none at all, without feeling any regret! And where will we educate them in a secular or religious school. May be it is good that the kids are still young and as we identify potential problems and state our position honestly things will be O.K. We won't dismiss our faith; we agreed from day one to accommodate each other's feelings. And so we will put each other's feelings before the dictates of out religious beliefs.

For women, Catholic, Anglican, Greek Orthodox or many others, the effect of coming to a new home is closely intertwined with adjusting to a new lifestyle with a different religious and cultural aura. Adjustment here means a psychological and behavioral adaptation, a coming of an age to another established system without being predictable as to consequences. It does not necessarily mean adoption of religious practices and behavior even though the leaders of the community to which the Muslim spouse belongs normally require the partner to declare publicly their conversion to Islam at the time of Marriage. This may not mean a total assimilation into the mainstream group, but is generally accepted as a signal of compliance. The spouse may not be pressured to interact with members of the other groups or to function in an active role where circumstances would allow it.

Mixed marriages have invariably evoked extreme reactions from the many cultures which suddenly find connecting bridges between them. Dormant emotions ranging from fear of the unknown, impregnation of cultural purity, destabilization of the community's identity to outright xenophobia find their way to the surface. Perhaps the most difficult problems which the couple faces are the changing roles of each of them as a result of expectations towards and from their community and their partners.

The changing patterns of living are unavoidable as changes are forced on them or assumed by one of them. Like mono-cultural and same religious marriages, all things

being equal, the relationship, otherwise known as power base, between the spouses, is never totally equal. In making decisions, or by reason of domestic, financial and house chore circumstances the family goes through various life stages. How willing and adaptable is each spouse towards the other will decided on the success of their ability to assimilate each new challenge.

But in addition what same religion couples encounter within the majority of this group (74% born overseas) is the need to make additional adjustments to new cultural demands which they have never been used to. This potential for a still greater problem becomes real if one of the spouse was brought up in a modern culture and the other in a traditional one. One can see this clearly when the wife is expected to perform a traditional role at home but she decided that she is backed by the new culture to establish a place for herself outside the domestic environment.

This specific point conjures up a possibility that the religious polarization may itself raise additional anxieties and crises. It may also be precipitated by the personality types of the spouses, and may thus lead to an exaggeration of differences.

It is appropriate to note here that differences between male and female participants widen in regard to permitting their children the choice of their own religion. Of the University educated almost 51% will give permission compared with 40% of those with secondary schooling education. Likewise, almost 28% of the latter group gave a 'no response' compared with 17% of the former. Despite these differences, there was no level of significance in the relationship.

It is also understood that the wife as a newcomer must do most of the "melting" if she is to gain access to the activities and structures of the host community.

It has been variously suggested in the literature (Hartley, l996 et al) that women may marry out to avoid sexist and other patriarchal attitudes. For example, Greek women in Australia avoid marrying Greek males as they are seen to embody narrow and old-fashioned notions of gender roles. Out-marriages of this kind that is between Greek women and non-Greek men are more likely to survive than in-marriages.

With regard to the Australian culture, hard data predicting the survival of inter-religious marriage compared to single religious marriage is not available. In time, both the time factor and sufficient numbers of intermarried couples will make such an analysis possible.

Unpleasant features of Catholic – non Catholic Christian Marriages

Restrictions regarding certain gender roles range from those imposed by the community at large, and which are, influenced by the religious community, to those,

which are self-imposed so as to avoid disharmonies with an overwhelmingly probing neighbourhood. Whatever the commonality in food, modes of discipline and national celebrations may be between the couples, new nuances of communications and expectations and adjustment begin to take shape. Statements to this effect often arose during the interviewing stage. Subtle differences in the lifestyles between the two religious communities were highlighted. Modern vs. traditional backgrounds of the couples and the cultural expectations intertwined with gender roles, as well as the shifting of attention from the husband to the children was equally cited. The extent of restricted or liberal behavior, an adventurous or family oriented outlook and freedom of expression are all deeply in the two communities of the spouses.

A high proportion of spouses had experienced upheavals in their lives before they became married, perhaps in addition to the pre-migration related hardships experienced by the population at large. This may have triggered the need for them to push for change in their lives. It may also be that they were drawn to their counterparts because they shared similar problems. Others may have looked for a calmer atmosphere where calmer lives are experienced and where historical stereotypes of one community towards the other would be fairly secondary to other aspects.

In this context it would seem true to say that statistically intermarriages of this kind show that couples occupy a middle point between a too religiously fundamental and exclusive tradition and a too liberal one. That is the case where a spouse chooses another because of the colour of, or the symmetry, their physiognomy. Rather they involved partners who felt that at the end of the day their intermarriage may be manageable, often referred to as 'modified patriarchy", without slipping into serious problems.

Differences in the bereavement patterns and rituals between various religious communities for example occupies a centre role in highlighting conflicts or otherwise. (Ata, l994).

Assessing the nature and extent of unhappiness in marriage with any accuracy is a difficult venture. If at all possible one could introduce variables which would elicit information about marital adjustment, companionship and conflicts.

Although the group under investigation escapes what its counterpart during the nineteen eighties has, namely arranged type marriages, they seem to encounter different kinds of pressures. The community's unwritten declaration of non-interference in securing the wife's rights following the wedding may still hold but to a minimal degree. An open-ended question was posed to couples in order to elicit information of this nature. (Tables 1 and 2 outline their responses in both aggregate and full statements.)

Table 1 Unpleasant features

Question: "Your partner's religion is different from yours.
What do you like least about this?'

	Muslim / Christian	Catholic / non-Catholic
1. Apathy; absence of religion, bonding and sense of sharing celebrations and common activities; children's uncertainty	35%	32%
2. Incompatibility of backgrounds; conflicts; external pressures; closed mindedness; mistrust; fundamentalism.	17%	19%
3. Nothing to mention; don't know.	19%	18%
4. No answer	30%	32%

A sizeable percentage of the responses relate to pressures triggered by the immediate society or ones background as conditioned by affiliation to their religious and cultural community. A total of 18 (approximately 17%) individuals perceived that their married life was made unpleasant at least in part by outside forces including their immediate religious community, family and friends and the wider community. The figure rises only slightly to 19% for the Catholic/other Christian couples. This contrasts with 35% and 32% respectively (for responses on their own situation and in general) who attributed that to an absence of shared activity, common purpose of living and aspirations as a unified household. (Category 2 above)

It is of interest to note that only 11% of the participants in a previous Christian Muslim study attributed marital pressure to the lack of shared activity. This may be attributed to either not giving importance to both spouse engaging in the same activity together; or conversely that the majority do so, and therefore it is not much of an issue except for a few.

Very few participants indicated that there were no differences any more between them because neither spouse practice their own religion, adding that their parents did not approve of their marriage because their grandsons may become totally Catholic or a Christian from another faith.

The largest group, approximately one third, declined to provide any revelations on matters unpleasant.

Fearing that inter religious marriages may shake the basis from which they draw their support, some ethnic Christian religious leaders have voiced concern about the growing vulnerability of the local family. This is attributed mainly to the mass media in general and mixed marriages in particular.

A Melbourne based community leader cautions:

Mixed (inter-religious) marriages effect many harmful situations and dissent between couples. It is not easy for their parents to turn a blind eye to their marrying son or daughter

converting to each others religion. This will lead to a household of evil, one which produces tension and hatred; subsequently ending in destruction including children. Add to that a Christian woman will not accept polygamy or divorce as non Christians do. The slightest disagreements may lead to divorce. ..

Problems in the above categories are human related thus suggesting the continuing strength of, and certainly pressure from traditional ties and are not due to problems associated with shared decision making. They also seem to rank higher than the expected harsh economic difficulties, freedom of movement, additional burdens of bringing up children, and the like.

A psychological approach to explore the nature of these responses to deeper strains may be in order here.

Of great interest is the pattern of responses, which contrast markedly with those obtained during the study of the eighties? In the earlier study most of the complaints were directed at the husbands maintaining little interaction, as they believed in the separation of the sexes. Wives in that study did not complain about the excessive freedom of their husbands compared to the minor freedoms they were given. In the current study there was no mention of this.

In both studies pressures from the surrounding community were identified but for different reasons. In the former study for example obligations towards relatives and the larger family network was mentioned as a main source of unpleasantness, whereas for this study it was the undeserved stigma and lukewarm behaviour which disrupts their relationship.

This was not surprising given the relatively free environment which the Australian culture provided for the male/ female relationships to develop.

Concern about the future of their children and problems associated with their acceptance and identity caused a not too insignificant concern. Such uneasy feelings may have been compounded when the participants were uncannily caught between the desire to appease their parents and a deepening affection to their partner.

Many observed that when their parents were highly religious and profoundly affiliated with their ethnic community they offered more support to them entering into an inter faith inter cultural marriage. This is in conformity to another study carried out in America which also reported that parents who were deeply ethnically oriented but only nominally affiliated to their religion offered more resistance to their children entering an inter faith inter cultural marriage. If would seem correct therefore to assume that highly religious people tend to accept spouses for their sons and daughters from a different ethnic background so long as they are also religious. Whereas parents who are more ethnic but less religious seem to care less about their

sons marrying a Christian spouse so long as the spouse is of the same ethnic affiliation; Italian, Palestinian, Dutch, and others.

Specific uneasy feelings are mentioned below. Those whose answers were too far fetched from the subject matter constituted 7 people (approximately 7%). The following statements are examples of each of the above:

1. Regarding Apathy:

"He (my son) doesn't know what [he] really is. He feels he belongs to both religions. There is no support from anyone around. About their well-being, and at school it is like a different place altogether."

"The society doesn't agree with this. Our kids have already mental insecurity. What kinds of problems will they face when they grow up? Right now they have been to church … Next time to the mosque. And no one asks questions about them going only to this or that place."

2. Reactions from relatives/friends:

"My parents. They were angry because their daughters married into the other religion. They make them feel like strangers. There is total displeasure from everyone especially when differences (conflicts) take place. It is as if they feel justified. They say didn't we warn them all the time"

3. Reactions from the community:

"Inability to become fully part of the community. The children will be victims of misunderstanding. ".

"Most of the (community) do not like it. They look at us in a condescending way. Some do respond but after they do a lot of adjustment. We change and our children develop new things, and customs, and so we will never adapt completely. Besides, there are no open-minded people within our community to make friends with".

"A just and humane community would be supportive to all of its members without any exception. We are all exceptions here".

4. Disapproval from one's own religious community:

"It's the attitudes of Christians towards people like my wife. They don't want to know them or have any relationship with her because they think she was forced to change her religion. She got ex-communicated and she is not happy about that. We only hear the gossip…"

"It's all because of fanaticism. Each religion (religious community) wants to draw the children to them. This is nature. You just can not go against it or change it."

"My wife tries to convert me to her religion".

5. **Incompatibility of cultural/religious background:**

"One's freedom is gone. Just like that, especially if she is a female Christian. She can move by herself, and all their eyes will be on her (in Arabic = kul eyunhum aleha)."

"The marriage will not be 100% perfect. Sometimes we agree but not always especially when we cannot come to an understanding."

"Adapting to the lifestyle of my (Christian) wife and her upbringing is too difficult. I do not encourage it".

"There are quite a few problems. Nothing specific."

Such responses are not uncommon and closer to home for those who have tied the knot, yet for those outside of this kind of bonding, common heritage and the sharing of common concerns remains a catch cry for unity in the struggle for national liberation. Those who believe in such views include Esposito (l997, p 36) who says "despite important differences of belief and practice, there is shared heritage of faith and value: belief in God, the prophets, revelation, moral responsibility and accountability, divine reward and punishment, and social justice can be a strong source of mutual respect and co-operation".

The survival of the Christian minority may be dependent on the strengthening of mutual understanding between the two communities and forging a national type alliance. How much of this will be needed to survive marital discord is difficult to estimate.

Making a conscientious decision to intermarry with preparedness to face various cultural stigmas may not make life easy or even tolerable. This is evidenced in the figures above. Almost 16% of the group felt that inter-religious marriages were worse than marriages of the same religion. Unanticipated expectations of managing unforeseen difficulties could be a key factor. Unable to find religious or cultural support this group offers advice to future generations that both they and the society may just not be prepared to accommodate them comfortably as full members.

Pleasant Features of Catholic non Catholic Christian Marriages

Fulfilling one's aspirations of bearing children soon after marriage is the most highly prized attribute, not only for women but also for the rest of the extended family, neighbours, friends and the community at large. The sensitivity of these issues is not to be belittled. Gadalla (p.328) makes this point clear:

The fear of being a 'barren' woman is not eliminated until the first pregnancy has occurred. From month to month after marriage, the new bride hopes and prays that she does not menstruate, for she has been told that missing the menstrual period is a sign of pregnancy. The eagerness of the bride's parents, husband and in-laws for this sign is not any less than that of the bride herself, for all of them are anxious to see that the bride is not barren.

The full effect of this sign on the parents of intermarried spouses is yet to be investigated. But the centuries old effect of this statement could not have been totally ignored by this newly emerged group.

Table 2   Pleasant Features

Question: "Your partner's religion is different from your. What do you like most about this?"

Muslim / Christian Responses(*)		Catholic / non-Catholic Responses(*)	
1. Don't care/don't know; no answer	31%	1. Exposure, understanding, tolerance, compromise, acceptance and empathy	48%
2. Exposure to new culture, ideas and perspective on life; compromise and forgiveness	41%	2. Departure from religious adherence; secular living and independence	21%
3. Other general comments including religion is not relevant; food; commitment, and spouse converted to 'my religion'	28%	3. Both religions are similar; no difference between them	26%
N/A		4. Absolutely nothing	5%

The individual responses in the sample were re-coded into the broad categories listed above.

Comments about love, passion and dynamics of the relation, and not the monetary benefits, complement it later on. Data regarding the families' perception that there is no harm in having more children than originally planned is not being presented in this study.

As one would expect in relation to this question the responses were so varied that they had to be aggregated to categories. The fact that half of this group (41% and 48% respectively) indicated responses such as cultural exposure and religious tolerance; reduction of hatred between the two communities; love, understanding and liberal lifestyle and relationships, is a promising sign. There is a clear-cut emphasis on family relationships transcending one's traditional stigma and expectations. In contrast to the previous study, showing that 29.3% stressed having children as a most pleasant thing about their marriage, this group failed to rate at all on this issue. (Ata 200)

What is of significance is the recording, albeit a small percentage, of a 5% response from those who found no pleasant features in their marriage. Speculation on those who gave no response (a sizeable 31%) towards mixed marriages is left to the reader. Our immediate suggestion is that the partners no longer find tangible differences between the two faiths; and even if they do it no longer plays that much of a big role as is the case with the Christian Muslim marriages. What could have triggered a response was a question focusing on the cultural or racial differences. This point will be dealt with in the two latter chapters.

Select statements of the above categories are listed below:

Cultural exposure and tolerance:

"We care about each other's cultural backgrounds and traditions. It helps doing away with fanaticism amongst the religious society – in my opinion. We now take time out to talk about our differences. It is funny though we try to celebrate their religious holidays, but they don't do ours as often".

"These marriages make the bond between them stronger. I knew nothing about the other (Christian) religion initially. It is good. . It makes people convert from a world of darkness into a world of enlightenment. You begin to see how the other people live and that makes you more tolerant. It also removes barriers between religious and cultural communities, and melts the difference, lessens the tension and fanatic behaviour".

Exposure, understanding and liberal life at home:

"My love (relationship) to my wife was based on love and contentment. This is why there is no misunderstanding and this is why I change my religion". Life now for us is open and not restricted"

"It creates an opportunity to seek each others opinion. This will remove barriers between both religions. It (marriage) is good as long as it is built on understanding. For me it was a chance to learn more about Christianity and a great opportunity to bridge the gap of suspicion between the two religions. The difficulty though is to come to terms with all opposing views."

"It takes hard work, and commitment but it takes us out of our limited worlds. This is crazy because the rest of the community cannot open up to the difference. And therefore couples must be educated so that their marriage will be complete and successful"

Support from the Family:

"My husband's family was with us all the time. No signs of disapproval, no nothing. Every one knows a bit about each other's beliefs. All my children are Christians and accepted by (my) husband's community."

Other general comments:

"It depends how people manage their relationship". For her (the bride) to convert into her husband's religion everything will be O.K".

"Marriage is a matter of fate. Traditional marriages are not ideal".

"People with mixed marriages identify more with Australia and less so with their religion".

"It is less expensive particularly if the wife is a foreigner".

"It is cool. It is the real thing. I worship my God and he worships his. Never thought about it really".

"Religion is no measure of friendship. I have many friends, and this will bring people closer to each other than religion. Also if the wife accepts her husband's religion all problems will disappear".

No pleasant features:

"Just write down nothing. No comments. The fact that we argue over religious issues and how to bring up our children makes me wonder that I should have married from the same religion. When we got married religion was no big deal. Now (we are older) it is important just like that" etc.

Conclusions

One conclusion, which could be made out of the patterns of these responses, is that this group has few illusions about marriage and is being frank about their feelings. References to polarization of roles were minor thus signifying an increased effort by partners to deal with the role strains perpetuated by those around them. Frustrations are naturally brought together with new changes together with an increased awareness and availability of options. The way and skill of handling conflict within the household are quite crucial in the way interfaith marriages are sustained. Failure to handle defensiveness, belittlement, and periods of seclusion, criticisms, repertoires and routines can spell a speedy death to such marriages.

Another was a strong relationship between the degree of expectation from the church or culture towards couples before marriage. Thus if a particular church or ethnic community placed an expectation that the couples are expected to raise their children in the traditions of their particular culture or church, severe problems will arise. Moments of stress were expressed especially when the couples refused to resort to lying about such a conformity as a means to get a blessing for their marriage.

The findings strongly suggest that for the Catholic and other Christian marriages the transition for those who decided to take a step in that direction in much smoother

than their Christian Muslim counterparts. Clearly though this did not mean a smooth integration of the irreconcilable differences or accommodation of religious and cultural complexities for either group.

As one would expect in relation to this matter the responses were so varied that they had to be aggregated to these categories. The fact that half of this group (41% and 48% respectively) indicated responses such as cultural exposure and religious tolerance; reduction of hatred between the two communities; love, understanding and liberal lifestyle and relationships, is a promising sign. There is a clear-cut emphasis on family relationships and transcending one's traditional stigma and expectations. In contrast to a previous study on Christian Muslim intermarriages in Australia showing that 29.3% stressed having children as a most pleasant thing about their marriage, this group failed to rate at all on this issues. (Ata 2000).

What is of significance is the registry, albeit a small percentage, of a 5% response from those who found no pleasant features in their marriage. Speculation on those who gave no response (a sizeable 31%) towards mixed marriages is left to the reader. Our immediate speculation is one where the partners no longer find tangible differences between the two faiths; and even if they do it no longer play that much of a big role as is the case with the Christian Muslim marriages. What could have triggered a response was a question focusing on the cultural or racial differences.

When asked about whether they find 'same religion marriages' are better, worse or the same as 'mixed religions' in Australia differences between Catholics and other Christian participants were of major concern. The differences between the two groups stand at 3 to 1 in ratio; that is 64% of Catholic compared with 22% other Christians reported that they have not been discriminated against as a result of their mixed marriages. Surprisingly perhaps these differences between the two groups are non-significant by the 8 Chi Square Test.

Depending on one's liberal leanings, responses towards Catholic and other Christian marriages have been encouraging. The decision that cross-religion marriages are better than or same as mono-religious ones almost drew a respective response of 45% and 41%; 14% reported uncertainty. Their reaction was a variation on a theme; one an interviewer who mused smartly summed that up: "it all depends on how much one invests in it."

Pleasant features were equally varied. The highest proportion of responses (27.4%) comprised reactions relating to cultural exposure and tolerance between the two communities. This was followed by 22.1% who indicated that they enjoyed love, understanding and liberal life at home.

Emotional strains and behavioral problems due to cultural and religious differences emerged as a potential but not a universal cause of tension between some spouses.

Most of these were mentioned by at least one partner, particularly as the person being interviewed perceived the differences. A few of these were serious and unresolved. They related to the community's negative reactions, and less so because of incompatibility in personality, polarization of roles or absence of love at the beginning of marriage. The ratio of those who cited negative reactions by the community to those who cited incompatibility of backgrounds was two to one. The reactions were perceived to come from relatives, friends, community at large and one's own religious group. They were also highlighted as the most unpleasant features about the marriages. In the local context of our society these ratios are relatively robust and fairly healthy when comparative results are brought to the fore. In a comparative study of Australia's Muslim Christian marriages (Ata 2003) the ratio of those citing pressure from the surrounding community and incompatibility of backgrounds was five to one respectively.

A sizeable percentage of the responses relate to pressures triggered by the immediate society or ones background as conditioned by affiliation to their religious and cultural community. A total of 18, approximately 17% of individuals perceived that their married life was made unpleasant at least in part by outside forces including their immediate religious community, family and friends and the wider community. The figure rises into 19% when the question focuses on Catholic/other Christian marriages in general. This contrasts with 35% and 32% respectively (for responses on their own situation and in general) to respondents who attributed this to an absence of shared activity, common purpose of living and aspirations as a unified household.

Those who believe that adjustments in behaviour are not too easy to identify or observe contend that they mostly take place in private. They note that 'in some aspects of their lives a couple may adopt Australian behavioral norms, in others, those of the migrant partner. Some couples may take a third approach, called "the third space", in which individuals are freed of some cultural constraints and allow the creation of cultural identity on an individual level.' (Penny and Khoo, 1996: 26; Joshi 1995: 92).

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S u m m a r y

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ADJUSTMENT AND COMPLICATIONS OF CATHOLIC AND INTER-FAITH INTERMARRIAGES

The increasing occurrence of intermarriages across international boundaries is an impact of globalisation frequently overlooked. Intermarriage is arguably the best indicator as to whether a particular group is fully integrated into and accepted by the mainstream community. The article looks at the problems and challenges associated with religious intermixing with a particular emphasis on Catholic and other Christian marriages. How the "religious" communities deal with these marriages over the next few generations will be of importance, not only for the community in focus, but also more broadly for interfaith and intercultural affairs.

Key Words: Australia, *intermarriages*, integration of particular group into mainstream community, *Catholic and other Christian marriages*, Muslim–Christian marriages.

Р е з и м е

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ПРИЛАГОЂАВАЊЕ И КОМПЛИКАЦИЈЕ У КАТОЛИЧКИМ И МЕЂУВЕРСКИМ МЕШОВИТИМ БРАКОВИМА

Често се недовољно обраћа пажња на чињеницу да у свету има, као последица глобализације, све више мешовитих бракова. Сматра се да су мешовити бракови најбољи индикатор да ли је нека одређена група интегрисана и довољно прихваћена у већинској заједници. У овом чланку се разматрају проблеми и изазови повезани са „мешањем" припадника различитих верских заједница, са посебним нагласком на бракове између католика и других хришћана. Питање како ће се верске заједнице односити према овим браковима у следећих неколико генерација биће врло значајно не само када је реч о заједници која се посматра, већ и за шире аспекте међуверских и међукултурних односа.

Кључне речи: Аустралија, мешовити бракови, интеграција групе у ширу заједницу, бракови католика и других хришћана, хришћанско–муслимански мешовити бракови.