

The Europe Union and the Impact on Mixed Nationality Relationships in Northern Finland

Carol J Brown-Leonardi:

Contemporary Western families are complex and fluid, and don't mirror the commonly accepted image of the nuclear family. Today's families are blended and manoeuvre the family experience in a range of social settings. But despite this, the institutions of 'family' and 'setting up a household' maintain their powerful prerogatives rooted in law and society. Thus, the family unit is important, as it functions to safeguard accepted social norms and values and establish cultural interaction and co-operation. Modern family life is multi-layered, couples choose to marry or co-habit, decisions are determined by choice to conceive or remain childless through contraception or infertility. Financial independence and dependence are a result of individual preferences. Once a couple comes together the family decision to participate in the labour market may alter. Many women to change their work behaviour to accommodate child care, which overlaps, interlocks, and shapes the relationships and identities within the family unit as carers, workers and the cared for. This situation can sometimes be exacerbated by negotiating long-distances relationships where a partner stays abroad for work, or by family units that live near extended family members that play key roles in the daily family life.

Brexit has affected the perceptions and decision-making of mixed nationality couples to stay and live permanently in the countries where they reside. Finland is an egalitarian society, known for its transparency and gender equality, in which women's equality is actively implemented and celebrated both in the workplace and the household. Finland joined the European Union in 1995 and is the only Nordic country to have embraced the Euro currency. The European Union has brought many changes to Finland with open borders and EU migration. As the world's northernmost country, it's geographically made up of sub-arctic terrain in the North, and rolling countryside and lakes on its mainland as well as modern cities and towns. The country is unique because of its bilingualism and biculturalism, which defines the geographical regions in Finland. Its interaction with neighbouring countries has brought about the absorption of those cultures, which has created a variety of Finnish cultures and dialects instead of one common culture. In the sub-arctic region there are the Saami indigenous population and the Finns embrace Northernness as a fundamental part of their identity. In Western Finland, the Finns identity is understood as the Swedish speaking Finns, and in Eastern Finland the Finns identify themselves as the 'Finnish speaking' Finns. Nevertheless, since joining the European Union it appears that the concept of a standard Finnish language and identity has been constructed to promote political homogeneity to create social cohesion and to draw boundaries between 'us' and 'them'.

The United Kingdom has its geographical regions and contested borders in which there exists a melting pot of cultures and identities following the British Empire and partnership in the European Union. This has brought people and their cultures from faraway places together to be absorbed into British culture. The British identify themselves through the characteristics associated with their regions; for instance, a person from Essex or Liverpool may assert their identity through their apparels, dialects, and accents. Indeed, contrary to Finland, regional identities are well defined, isolated, and sustained through oral narrative and national heritage. However, the concept of what it means to be British remains unclear for some members of society and continues to be debated. Over the last twenty years there has been much political and constitutional change, which has resulted in the intensification in self-professed national identities in terms of Scottishness, Welshness and Irishness. In contrast to Finland's promotion of bilingual and bicultural communities, foreign cultures are absorbed by osmosis to become

British culture, such as polo, tea and British curry. However, Scotland, Ireland and Wales have their own official languages and instead are redrawing the boundaries and in anticipation of ending three centuries of political co-habitation with the United Kingdom as a single entity, particularly after Brexit. Hence, the Brexit negotiations and the discussions over borders with England neighbours has forced Britain to re-examine its position on the world stage and to re-think what it means to be British.

The European Union process of expansion through the inclusion of new member states, is one of the many driving forces for Britain's exit due to increased migration (Jenson and Snait, 2016). Brexit has created an uncertain future for EU citizens' right to live and work in Britain and generated fears about the right to residency, risk of deportation, and loss of rights to gain passports. This has affected the perspective of many co-habiting and married couples and families in mixed-nationality relationships. I'm interested in Finland and the United Kingdom because of the sharp contrasts that characterises the concept of regional and national identity. My current research examines the concept of nationality, by exploring the multiple cultural identities that exist within these relationships. In this case identity is explored for the way that identities change with the activities and relationships that make up daily life. The dominant national culture expressed inside the household is also examined to illustrate how cultural differences in family dynamics influence fundamental concepts and important questions related to the concerns and accomplishments in a post EU society. Thus, the aim is to give insight into how each partner in the relationship understands, communicates, and perceives how they're included into European, Finnish and British society, and the impact on their sense of national identity as they continue to live and work in Finland or Britain.

This is significant as the research explores how the idea of national identity, and how it's interpreted in terms of structuring and shaping a sense of self and family life in their evaluation of social 'belonging' and 'settlement'. Furthermore, a focused examination of how the Finnish partner's history and culture influences the British partner gives further insight into how the foreign wife or husband see themselves in the constructed imagined unity of Finnish society. This is important as it will give further understanding into the decision-making processes within the family unit. This is particularly significant for those couples who have children, who have automatic rights as EU citizens, although one parent may not have the same status as non-EU citizen. In short, the research examines the impact of these anxieties on relationships, family unity and working life. It will examine how the European Union has affected the ideas associated with migration, for example, making sacrifices for the dream of financial success, home ownership, education, and career prospects.