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Close Encounters?

The Intersection of Faith and Ethnicity in Mixed-Faith Families

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Close Encounters?
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ABSTRACT

The encounter and intersection between faiths, cultures and ethnicities in families where parents have different faith backgrounds are areas of social interaction about which we know little, although the number of such families is growing in the UK and globally. Mixed-faith families reflect the multi-cultural and multi-faith character of society and are thus spaces where individuals develop and negotiate multiple identities in relation to faith, ethnicity, gender, education—among other factors. Based on ethnographic data gathered during a recent study at the University of Warwick, this article presents a case study to examine what kind of cultural repertoire young people could draw on and whether this fostered 'multiple cultural competence' in them. The study also seeks to show how parents negotiated the practice and belief of their respective traditions and how children in such families perceived and formed their own religious and social identities.

Introduction

This article reports data from a recent three-year ethnographic study (2006–2009) at the University of Warwick, which investigated the identity formation of young people in mixed-faith families. The intersection between faiths,

cultures and ethnicities in such families is an area of social interaction which is beginning to be the focus of academic research in different national contexts (see e.g. Voas, 2009; Froese, 2008; Rodríguez García, 2006; Bangstad, 2004; Ata, 2003; Speelman, 2001), and the number of such families is growing in the UK (see e.g. Census 2001; Owen, 2007) and globally (see e.g. ARIS, 2001; Milan & Hamm, 2004). [1] Mixed-faith families both reflect, and contribute to, the multi-cultural and multi-faith character of society and thus constitute spaces where individuals negotiate multiple identities in relation to faith, ethnicity, gender and education. Using data from our study, we examine what kind of cultural repertoire young people could draw on and whether this fostered 'multiple cultural competence' (see Jackson & Nesbitt, 1993) in them. We do this by presenting one family as a case study. We also examine how parents negotiated the practice and belief of their respective traditions and how their children perceived and formed their own religious and social identities.

The question of how faith, culture and ethnicity relate to one another is highly pertinent in the context of mixed-faith families, especially in cases where parents are from different ethnic backgrounds as well as different faith backgrounds. We have set out the linkage between these three parameters in detail in a previous article (see Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010), following Bhikhu Parekh (2000) and others who see them closely intertwined and separable only for analytical purposes. Briefly, from this perspective, culture is embedded in a particular ethnic community, with religion and culture

interacting with, and influencing, one another, both on the societal and on the individual level.

The present article is organised as follows. We first provide an outline of the research project in order to situate the data in relation to our aim and objectives. We then introduce the notion of 'multiple cultural competence' and consider whether it entails a wider and more secure cultural repertoire, before introducing the case study and discussing the young people's competence and repertoire in the light of the theories presented earlier in the article. We conclude by summarising pertinent points arising from the project.

The Research Project

Our three-year study (2006–2009), funded by the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council), investigated the religious identity formation of young people in mixed-faith families, using ethnographic research methods. Its central concern was the experience of families in which parents came from different faith backgrounds, who, for the purposes of this study, presented any combination between Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. In particular, we explored the questions of how young people in such families come to identify themselves in relation to their parents' faith backgrounds and which factors influenced their own religious beliefs. How upbringing and religious learning (e.g. in religious education at school and supplementary classes) affected young people's religious identity was one of

the key questions underlying our research. The study was designed to extend across the UK, with data to be collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with individual family members.

The study is described elsewhere (see e.g. Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010b), as are the challenges encountered during fieldwork, which required some adaptation of the original research plan (see Nesbitt & Arweck, 2010). We aimed to explore the parents' views of their children growing up with two faiths and to compare these with the young people's own perceptions; to assess what impact religious socialisation and education had on young people's religious identity; and to feed into debates on 'faith communities' and 'religions' and how these are depicted in religious education syllabuses and textbooks. These objectives were embedded in the research questions, which asked about factors, such as gender, locality, religious commitment, education, what role these played in forming young people's religious identity and how the young people and their parents' took account of them.

Earlier empirical investigation of religious socialisation and identity formation (e.g. Jackson & Nesbitt, 1993; Nesbitt, 2000; Gent, 2006)—and by others, e.g. on mothers' influence on children's religious identity (e.g. Pearce & Axinn, 1998), inter-cultural parenting (e.g. Katz, 1996) and intermarriage (see references cited above) informed the project, as did the theoretical frameworks of 'narrative identity' (e.g. Ricoeur, 1990), 'integrated plural identities' (Østberg, 2000) and children's agency (e.g. James & Prout, 1997).

Our data, from 28 nuclear families (two Hindu-Sikh, ten Hindu-

Christian, six Christian-Sikh, ten Christian-Hindu), consist of 185 interviews, of which 112 were conducted with adults, 73 with young people. The parents' ages ranged from early 30s to late 40s. The young people's ages ranged from 6 to early 30s.

Multiple Cultural Competence

Mixed-faith families both reflect, and contribute to, the multi-cultural and multi-faith character of wider society. They can be considered as spaces where family members develop and negotiate multiple identities with regard to faith, ethnicity, gender, education, etc. Such families may thus be regarded as microcosms for processes which occur in wider society. Such processes include the way parents in mixed-faith families accommodate the practice and belief of their respective traditions in everyday family life and the way they facilitate their children's religious and social identities. They also include ways in which the children integrate their religious learning at home with religious education in school and any experiences with religion in the wider community.

We examine the question whether the young people in our study can be said to possess what Robert Jackson and Eleanor Nesbitt (1993, pp. 174–178) called 'multiple cultural competence'. Such individuals know how to act and which discourses to deploy in different social and cultural settings. Individuals acquire this competence by being exposed to, and by interacting with, different social spheres of their lives.

For the young people in our study this exposure entails a range of cultural, social and geographical spheres, which are more varied, given that their parents are from different faith (and in the majority of cases from different ethnic) backgrounds. These spheres comprise: the home; the place where the family lives (village, town, neighbourhood); the type of school the young people attend (community, faith or independent school); possibly supplementary classes (e.g. Sunday school, *madrasa*, language or dance classes, etc.); other relatives and where they are located; the young people's peers; links with the respective religious communities, for example, through places of worship and associated activities. These spheres represent both actual (physical) and virtual spaces where both adults and young people encounter and negotiate boundaries—whether clearly defined or not—and move between different social settings.

However, individuals also develop a sense of place—in the physical sense. Citing existing literature (Chan & McIntyre, 2002; Newman & Paasi, 1998), Jonathan Scourfield et al. (2006) state that individuals accomplish this through their identification of symbolic boundaries operating at different levels. A subjective sense of place is constructed largely in relational terms: for example, through inhabitants' grasp of the relationships between important symbolic indices such as 'here' and 'there', 'home' and 'away'; 'us' and 'them' (see Cohen, 1985, cited in Scourfield et al. 2006). The work of Doreen Massey points to the close connection between physical and social spaces, when she comments on the link between material and immaterial (or

symbolic) boundaries. She argues that geographical places do not have single, unique 'identities', but different kinds of boundaries operating at various levels (Massey, 1994, pp. 155–156, cited in Scourfield et al., 2006).

The way different aspects intersect with one another shapes individuals' identity and identification with different spaces—understood here in terms of the strength and character of their emotional attachment to these (see Scourfield et al. 2006, p. 578). Therefore, a factor, which is important for our context here, emerges from the literature on place, space and community: individuals' experience of their home locality is inevitably social, arising out of their interactions with others around them. (see Scourfield et al. 2006, p. 579)

There is a further aspect to these interactions: boundaries—whether clearly demarcated or not—are linked to particular viewpoints and the extent to which individuals are aware of them. Boundaries relate to where individuals stand, literally and figuratively speaking. Boundaries are perceived from the point of view of both observer or outsider and insider. Outsiders become aware of boundaries—because they exclude, while insiders may draw boundaries to exclude—whether they do this consciously or not. However, the same individuals are both outsiders and insiders to varying degrees, according to different settings. There is thus a dynamic between boundaries which are drawn by virtue of *where* individuals are and boundaries which individuals themselves draw, by virtue of *who* they are or want to be.

Most of the young people in our study were unaware of any thresholds that they crossed from one sphere of their lives to another. Yet they were aware of differences within the extended families and religious communities. Most were also aware that particular contexts or situations brought some aspects in them to the fore more than others. For example, those who had a South Asian parent said that being in school made them feel more English, while being with the South Asian part of the family or being in a Sikh or Hindu place of worship made them feel more 'Indian'.

These comments reveal aspects of individuals' identities, which particular contexts move into the foreground. Both research (e.g. Nesbitt, 2004; Østberg, 2000) and theory on identity (e.g. Ricoeur, 1990) point to the malleable and fluid nature of identity. Identity formation is an ongoing process, with particular social situations or contexts bringing particular aspects of identity to the fore, as the young people's reports about feeling more 'English' or 'Indian' illustrate.

None of the young people interviewed gave any indication that the presence of two faiths in their family caused any clash between religions or cultures. However, they reported social settings where they experienced a sense of exclusion, for example, not being able to speak the home language of one side of the extended family or missing out on what they perceived as the social and personal benefits of attending a place of worship regularly. When asked what they thought about having parents from different faith backgrounds, young people usually indicated that this was an odd question:

they responded with either a shrug or comments such as 'it's normal', 'I love them' or 'they are my parents, I don't know any different'. To them, their family life did not involve explicit negotiations of boundaries in relation to culture or religion.

One of the reasons for this is that the idea of being different (whether in terms of religion, ethnicity or culture) did not figure prominently in the majority of the families. This was because most parents were distanced from their respective religious backgrounds, either because they had not been deeply socialised into it or because they had decided to detach themselves from it. (see also below) Therefore, although parents wanted their children to know about and experience religion—preferably a wide range of religions—only one promoted her religion strongly. Consequently, the young people did not feel any parental expectation to follow a particular religious path. However, one teenager was aware of his mother's innermost wish for him to follow her religious tradition (Islam) and an eight-year-old felt an emotional tug realising that his (paternal) grandmother felt strongly about her Hindu tradition and might be upset if he decided to adopt his mother's religion (Christianity).

Young people reported a sense of feeling different when people—fellow students or teachers at school—made remarks about them which clashed with their own perceptions of themselves. Such remarks were often related to their appearance which in turn related to their religious identity. For example, 16-year-old Jasmin identified with Islam, but her teacher,

assumed her to be 'white Christian'. [2] In some cases, the young people took these remarks as racist or experienced them as bullying. For example, ten-year-old Rikki was offended when a pupil at his school made what Rikki reported to be racist remarks. In his appearance, Rikki took after his Punjabi Sikh mother—with black hair, dark skin, brown eyes—rather than his white British father. He did not see himself in terms of skin or eye colour in relation to his parents and siblings, so having his appearance remarked upon in this way hurt his feelings. Issues of difference and sameness are significant in the social and personal development of young people in general, as Robert Winston's study of 'millennium children' (see BBC1, *Child of Our Time*, 26 August 2007) indicated, and have greater import for young people whose dual ethnic and religious heritage can give rise to a mismatch between a) how they feel about themselves and how others respond to their physical appearance them and b) how they perceive themselves and what they look like. The case of Jasmin is an example of the former; an example of the latter is a teenager who strongly identifies with her Sikh Punjabi mother, but who had inherited her British father's 'English looks'.

Multiple Cultural Competence and Repertoire

Jackson and Nesbitt's notion of multiple cultural competence denotes the skill which young people acquire to negotiate their identities within the different social settings in their lives. Based on her study of young Pakistani Muslims in Norway, Sissel Østberg (2000) extended this into the notion of

'integrated plural identities'. Both concepts describe individuals' ability to incorporate different cultural and religious aspects in themselves, store them in a cultural and religious inventory and retrieve what is appropriate in a particular context. This is where the spatial and non-spatial intersect.

To illustrate with an example from our study: 14-year-old Rohini's parents were from a European Christian (mother) and Hindu Gujarati (father) background. When Rohini spent time with her mother's family, she was her mother's daughter: she understood her mother's first language (French), went to Mass, joined the local church choir, sat at table and used knife and fork, wore slippers in the house, etc. When she spent time with her father's family, she was her father's daughter: she liked spicy food, ate it with her fingers, went barefoot and sat cross-legged, was at ease in a Hindu temple, knew the etiquette of a Hindu wedding, etc. She felt more European in the former setting and more Indian in the latter, but neither raised any issues for her. She identified as British, with England being her home. Upon further enquiry, she explained about her parents' backgrounds, which accounted for her being mixed race. When asked about her religious identity, she put herself in the agnostic/atheistic category, but indicated openness to change. At the same time, she noticed her parents' subtle ways of practising their beliefs. Yet none of these elements, which formed Rohini's identity, were filed in discrete compartments, involving conscious efforts to retrieve their contents.

The above suggests that those who possess multiple cultural

competence can draw on a wide repertoire, deploying different parts of the repertoire, as required by different contexts. The question is whether young people growing up in a mixed-faith family automatically acquire a wider repertoire than young people growing up in a single-faith family. If this is the case, another question arises: whether that repertoire is likely to be less secure, because young people in mixed-faith families may only be partially inducted into particular cultural and religious spheres or, to use Danièle Hervieu-Léger's concept of religion as a chain of memory (2000), because the chain of memory may be fractured. The comments above point to the way identity relates to repertoire.

To address the first question—whether the young people in our study acquired a wider repertoire, compared to their peers from single-faith families: both parents and young people suggested that this was the case when discussing the advantages of being a mixed-faith family. Most parents thought it made the children more open-minded, flexible and tolerant. Some young people echoed this, when they referred to having access to two cultures and compared their views and life-styles with those of peers from single-faith families. (see also Arweck & Nesbitt, under review) They also displayed at least some knowledge of both religions or cultures, even if their exposure to (and interest in) them was minimal. (see also Arweck & Nesbitt, to be submitted)

However, how secure young people's repertoire was depended on how much young people were interested in religion in general and thus

engaged with religious matters and how parents kindled and then nurtured this interest. Most parents had adopted a strategy which left religious nurture to school and life in general, including family gatherings. (see also Arweck & Nesbitt, to be submitted)

As to the relationship between identity and repertoire, as pointed out earlier, these interact with one another and are expressed through multiple cultural competence, as Østberg's concept of 'integrated plural identities' suggests. Identity is continually shaped by social processes and particular social situations bring particular aspects of identity to the fore; this means that knowledge of, for example, which behaviour is appropriate in which context is a function of both identity and repertoire. The more individuals identify with a particular religion, the more likely it is that they have a wide repertoire which relates to this religion and the more secure this repertoire is. For example, one young person in our sample, ten-year-old David, strongly identified as a Christian (in this case Mormon), following his mother's religion. Being actively nurtured in Mormonism at home and in Sunday school, he had detailed knowledge about Mormon theology and practice and he was clear about his position and responsibilities within his family and church community. On the other hand, his knowledge of his father's religious background in Sikhism was limited. In contrast, nine-year-old Margarita did not identify with either parent's (nominal) religion (Sikhism/Christianity), experienced no explicit nurture either at home or elsewhere and felt on uncertain ground when discussing religious matters.

The Case of a Mixed-Faith Family

This family was chosen as a case study, for two reasons: a) it is closest to the kind of family we aimed to involve in the project (both parents and a brother and sister pair of the right ages) and b) we were able to conduct interviews with all four family members. However, it needs to be stressed that, overall, our data do not point to a typical profile which characterises mixed-faith families or individuals. Therefore, this case study is not representative of the families in our sample—none of the families in our sample would be—but it allows us to describe some issues and processes which this family has in common with other families in our study. The following is based on interviews conducted with both parents and their son and daughter. As already pointed out, all the names are pseudonyms.

The parents

The father, Jack, was from a White British Christian (Methodist) background, the mother, Sukhi (short for 'Sukhvinder'), from an Indian Punjabi Sikh background. For this family, as for the majority of the families in our study (23 of the 28 in our sample), different religious backgrounds combined with different ethnic backgrounds. Jack was born in the UK; Sukhi was very young when her parents immigrated from India in the late 1960s. Jack was self-employed, running his own business; Sukhi was a teacher. They lived, with their 14-year-old daughter Monika and their ten-year-old son Rikki, in an

industrial city in the Midlands, which is characterised by a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic population.

Jack was brought up in a practising Christian household. However, when he had reached his mid-teens, he did not want to go to church any more. He was now leaning towards Humanism, because, he stated, 'I am not an atheist or agnostic', and was interested in Buddhism. Sukhi's upbringing had initially immersed her fully in the Western way of life, which involved little religious practice or education at home or in the community, except for occasional family events, such as weddings and funerals. Although her mother had continued with some of her religious practice, this had been of a private nature. As the local Sikh community lacked a *gurdwara* at that time, any gatherings happened in front rooms or hired halls. In an effort to fit into the host society, Sukhi's father had discarded the outward accoutrements of his Sikh identity, such as the turban. However, by the time Sukhi had reached her teens, a *gurdwara* had been set up in her home town, which revived the Sikh tradition in her family. Her father felt strongly that the family attend once a week. Sukhi accompanied her parents and siblings to the *gurdwara*, mainly because her father wanted her to. However, not having been nurtured in Sikhism, she felt like an outsider; although she spoke Punjabi, she did not understand what was read or recited. [3] Having been exposed to Christianity through her Church of England school, she felt greater affinity with the Bible, because, she said, 'I understand that. I do not feel comfortable in a *gurdwara*.' She now attended church occasionally, when work

commitments and family life permitted, but had still not found a spiritual home.

Sukhi's siblings and father (her mother was no longer alive) had links with a *gurdwara*. Although her brother had at first embraced a Western lifestyle, he had had an arranged marriage in India; his children spoke Punjabi at home and the family occasionally visited the local *gurdwara*. As the only son, the brother took responsibility for looking after Sukhi's father. Sukhi's brother and father lived a good hour's drive away, while her sister lived in the same city. Therefore, Monika and Rikki had more contact with their aunt's family than their uncle's family. Family celebrations brought everybody together, with some of these taking place in a *gurdwara*.

Jack's family (three sisters and their parents) lived several hours' drive away. Most of his family still practised Christianity. As with Sukhi's family, the connections with this side of the family were maintained through visits, often prompted by special days, such as birthdays or anniversaries. Religion played a secondary role in the gatherings of both sides of the family, even when they occurred in a place of worship (*gurdwara* or church).

Sukhi and Jack celebrated Christmas and Easter with their children without any particular reference to religion. Further, they had decided not to have any rites of passage for Monika or Rikki, such as christenings or naming ceremonies, because they did not want to set the children up for either religion. This illustrates the strategy which most parents in our study had adopted: to keep the choice of religion open for their children. Similarly, Jack

and Sukhi chose names which did not refer to either's religious or cultural tradition. However, they wanted Monika and Rikki to have full exposure to both faiths, indeed all faiths, so that they could make an informed choice, but they had no expectations regarding which religion the children might choose, if any. And although Jack and Sukhi thought it desirable for their children to attend Punjabi classes, as part of the exposure to both cultures, neither actually did. There were several reasons: the children had extra-curricular (mainly sports) activities; Jack and Sukhi thought that the standard of *gurdwara* Punjabi classes was too low; neither Monika nor Rikki had yet expressed a strong wish to learn Punjabi, although they had encountered situations where they felt excluded, because they did not speak the language.

The children attended a Church of England (secondary) school, which the parents had chosen for its academic standards, its mixed ethnic intake, and its character as a faith school. As mentioned, like most parents in our study, both Jack and Sukhi relied on the school to expose Monika and Rikki to a wide range of religions and to give them the educational grounding which would allow them to choose.

A number of factors contributed to privileging the Christian element in this family: Monika and Rikki's Church of England school, their involvement in Guides and Scouts (whose meetings took place in a church hall) and Sukhi's affinity with Christianity (rather than with Sikhism). That Christianity was dominant in the family was, as Sukhi commented, 'not a problem—only when I think about it'. She wondered at times, especially at

gatherings with *her* family, whether her children had enough from her background in their repertoire: 'If I think about it, is the balance there? When we go to family functions, I think my children are uneducated in certain areas; I need to tell them about things. I think, "I'm not doing this right"—that's when it is a problem.'

Monika

The interviews with 14-year-old Monika showed her to be open to and interested in discussions about religious matters. She enjoyed her occasional Sunday school attendance, not least because friends attended, too. She also helped out with a group of younger children who met in the church hall, when she felt she could spare the time. Although she envied her Indian cousins who went to the *gurdwara* regularly, she found that *gurdwara* visits 'can get a bit boring, because I can't understand Indian'. Contexts where Punjabi was used made her feel excluded, but, although she said she would like to learn Punjabi, she was too busy too commit herself to classes.

Given her parents' reliance on school, Monika's knowledge about religion was informed by what she learnt in Religious Education. She felt that the range of religions covered should include more than Christianity and Islam. Discussions about ethical and philosophical questions interested her, especially because they revealed differences of opinion among her peers. For a project on 'ultimate questions', Monika had interviewed her mother and one of her close friends and had then recorded her own thoughts in her

exercise book. These showed that she had engaged with these questions and the comments by her interviewees. Monika found it frustrating that such questions could ultimately not be answered and at times she had a sense of not being able to comprehend fully aspects of particular religions, such as Islam.

However, she could appreciate both the communal side of religion and the personal gains of belonging to a religious community. She could see that going to church and the *gurdwara* looked after a person's inner life and contributed to 'being good and trying not to think bad things'. She also understood that some guidance could be derived from such practice. She prayed before she went to sleep—when she remembered. Her image of God was that of a hand—'because he helps people', she explained.

Although she had some knowledge of Sikhism she blended this with practices from other traditions, as the following interview (with its mention of prayer five times a day, a Muslim requirement) illustrates:

> A: … if you follow the strict Sikh rules, ... they have to wear a turban, which is sort of their head covering ...
> Q: So, those who follow strict Sikh rules don't cut their hair?
> A: Yeah. So, if they ... take *amrit*, a nectar ... colour thing, and it's basically like taking *baptism* and ... you really *do* have to be strict, ... about what you do and whether you consider taking it. [...] I don't think I would be able to take *amrit* ... with the way I want to lead *my* life … [4]
> [Being a strict Sikh] You have to pray five times a day or something ... or three [times] ... You have to *not* cut your hair, which I think would be impossible for me ... because I ... I like my hair ... […] [Also] you have to wear a turban [as a woman as well] yeah, so ... you'd have to wear the traditional ... wear [clothes] ... I remember doing this in RE ... [but] I forgot it.

This extract also shows Monika's reluctance to commit herself to one tradition—both because this did not fit with her preferred lifestyle (for example, being able to cut her hair to the length she wanted) and because she wanted to have a foot in each camp. If asked 'what is your religion?', she commented, 'I'd say, I'm more of a Christian, but I ... I would class myself as a Sikh as well and I'd like to be called a Sikh as well.' In comparison to some peers, she said: 'I don't think I'm taking religion as serious as I would like to.'

Monika objected to being labelled in terms of Census categories—'why do I have to be put in a box?' she asked, but if required to do so, she would describe herself as 'White/Asian', because, she said, 'I am mixed race.' It meant having two different cultures. 'I would put both together or [one] on top of the other—because I live in England and I'm a bit more Christian. I think I would put White/Asian first.'

Rikki

Ten-year-old Rikki's main interest was in sport. Football matches on Sunday morning were far more important to him than going to church. He found church services boring, ''cause the vicar is always speaking' and 'cause some of the stuff we … children don't understand'. Being in Scouts took him to the church hall and occasional church services. He was also aware that his father's family had connections with a church, but he saw these in terms of their roles (for example, his grandfather helped out with church accounts) rather than in terms of their spiritual or religious lives.

Very occasionally, Rikki attended Sunday school. He did not see the need to go to church, because he took his father as his role model. He had only scant knowledge of Bible stories—'It doesn't really *mean* anything', he said—and this extended to religion in general. He 'kind of' believed in God and his idea of God seemed inspired by popular culture: he looked a bit like Santa Claus, he said—'like the one in *The Simpsons*'. On the other hand, Rikki was aware that the family had a stronger link with Christianity than with Sikhism and his knowledge of Sikhism was limited. For example, when referring to a wedding he had attended in a *gurdwara*, Rikki had not followed the ceremony as much as he had enjoyed the social side of it and could therefore not say what happened. He knew about some practices—that footwear had to be taken off on entering the *gurdwara*, what the seating arrangements were and that one's head had to be covered—but was hazy about others. He picked out elements that interested him, like the *kirpan* (the sword), which he mentioned whenever the interviews touched on Sikh practice. [5]

Rikki concluded that 'We are not really religious in the Sikh world', but his maternal uncle's family 'are more Indian than we are', because 'they wear that special bangle [*kara*], I can't remember what it's called'. Yet he did not consider them to be full Sikhs: 'if they were', he said, 'they … wouldn't cut their hair at all [...]. They would always wear a *kirpan* … wear some shorts under your trousers, baggy trousers [*kachha*] which … like are tight at

the end and a special top over the thing.' He was uninquisitive about his relatives' Sikh practice and never discussed Sikhism with them. Like his sister, Rikki felt excluded in contexts where Punjabi was spoken, for example, in a sports club which had a number of Punjabi speakers.

As to his own religious identity, Rikki indicated that he did not really have a religion, but that he would tick 'Christian' on a survey sheet, if he had to tick something. He associated going to church with the opportunity to get into a good school. Religion was 'kind of' important, because 'it can stop you from […] being naughty … say, like stealing or something … …] [or] you won't […] swear or stuff … *a lot*.' Beyond that, religion was not important nor were questions about life or death. Rikki was similarly uninterested in his parents' respective religious backgrounds, and in his relatives' Sikh-ness. He did not discuss religion with his parents, unless he needed help with homework.

His answer to questions about his religious identity and beliefs varied, according to the presumed identity and expectation of the enquirer, 'because it may *offend* someone', he stated. If a Christian asked, Rikki would say he was a Christian. If a Sikh asked he would say, he was Sikh. If a Jew or a Muslim asked, he said, ''cause I am a stronger Christian than I am Sikh, I'd probably say, "I'm Christian".' Again, this points to the fluid and malleable nature of identity and how individuals display aspects of their identities according to the social context they find themselves in. Like his sister, Rikki

saw himself in dual terms, as Indian/English.

Discussion

The above suggests that Monika and Rikki displayed different levels of 'cultural and religious competence'. Both adjusted to their different social contexts and situations, negotiating between home life, contacts with both sides of the family, school and their peers (which included their Indian cousins), and the wider community (visits to the church or *gurdwara*). Monika and Rikki were less culturally competent in some situations than in others and were aware of this at times (as were their parents); for example, both felt excluded when Punjabi was spoken and they could not follow the conversations. On the other hand, neither felt sufficiently motivated to learn Punjabi and thus to avoid this kind of exclusion. Monika was also aware that her knowledge of religion was partial, when she pointed out that RE focused on Islam and Christianity. In other contexts, Monika and Rikki were less aware that they lacked cultural competence; for example, Rikki indicated that he felt self-conscious and uncomfortable in unfamiliar places of worship, which could be interpreted as a sign that he did not know what was expected in terms of behaviour and conduct.

While Monika had developed a sensitivity for religion, which allowed her to attune herself to and pick up religious signals from her context, religion and religious people were unimportant in Rikki's life world. By

contrast, Monika saw different social settings (including school) as opportunities to learn about other people's views and practice and to experience a sense of belonging through communal life. She felt equally at home in the church and *gurdwara* setting and felt she had a foot in both—indeed, wanted to be part of both. She also understood religious commitment and what this involved. However, in order to be able to maintain her involvement in both religious settings, she was reluctant to give her full commitment to either Christianity or Sikhism. This combined with her unwillingness to adopt aspects of the lifestyle associated with those who are fully committed, in terms of dress or hairstyle. Although Monika showed greater cultural competence than her brother, she can probably not be considered a religious or cultural virtuoso in mastering the different cultural registers in the present stage of her life. [6] Rikki's relative indifference to religion made church services enforced duties, while visits to the *gurdwara* provided social (and culinary) experiences.

Jack and Sukhi relied, besides school, on the children absorbing cultural and religious knowledge from other relatives. Beyond them communicating basic rules, such as the protocol on entering a *gurdwara*, religious learning would happen when relatives interacted with another and taught the children, indirectly, about their respective customs and practices. Sukhi felt that she herself lacked the competence to inform her children about Sikhism, because it had hardly figured in her own upbringing. Thus, in

Hervieu-Léger's terms, there was a fracture in the chain (of religious memory) between the previous generations (between Sukhi and her parents). Given that the overall social context around Monika and Rikki tended to be secular, exposure to religion occurred through school (RE, daily acts of worship, church services, peers), occasional attendance of supplementary classes (Sunday school, Scouts, Guides), occasional visits to places of worship—and it was at these points that the chain had a chance to continue and religion was transmitted in some way. Therefore, scholars (see e.g. Voas, 2009; Froese, 2008) who suggest that lack of interest or lack of grounding in a faith is the *result* of growing up in a mixed-faith do not sufficiently trace the chain of transmission. Our data show that the break in the chain occurred in the parental section of the chain, preceding marriage and starting a family. However, this break precludes neither their nor their children's capacity to develop spiritual or religious sensitivities.

The family described here shows that culture, ethnicity and religion do not come in neat or consistent units. Both Monika and Rikki were reluctant to express their identity in terms of the categories devised for survey sheets. Both attested to hyphenated identities—White/Asian (Monika) and Indian/English (Rikki)—when the point was pressed. Both felt strongly that the two backgrounds (British/White and Indian/Punjabi/Sikh) were inseparably present within them. For Monika, race (ethnicity) included culture and religion.

Further, both Monika and Rikki were working out where they might stand, in relation to their peers and in relation to relatives on both sides of the family (whether adults or children), again pointing to the importance of social positionality in the formation of identity. While Rikki found it impossible to cast his mind into the future and imagine what kind of a person(a) he might become, in three or five years, Monika conveyed the sense that her views would consolidate over time. Both age and gender are factors in this process (as is the range of aspects already referred to)—all making for a complex picture.

Conclusion

We have sought to show how faith, culture and ethnicity intersect in mixed-faith families and what role they play in the identity formation of their young people. This intersection makes for a complex and dynamic picture. Our data do not support a typical profile of mixed-faith individuals and families, but they suggest links between religious identity, cultural repertoire and multiple cultural competence. We have shown that the cultural repertoire on which the young people could draw is (at least potentially) wider, compared to young people from single-faith families, but that the extent of this repertoire varies. As a consequence, young people have different degrees of multiple cultural competence. By using one family in our project as a case study, and referring to the cases of other young people in the study, we have shown various aspects shaping young people's perceptions, including parents'

strategies with regard to the religious nurture of their children.

This study confirms and underlines a number of points: it reinforces previous findings about the ongoing nature of identity formation and stresses that this is not a linear process. While it was most evident in young people's development, the evolving aspect also became apparent in the accounts of parents. Our data further reinforce that identity is strongly linked to the interaction with others (with 'self' also acting as an 'other')—hence Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity. The 'identity story' unfolds as individuals navigate through life.

Further, given that no distinct profile of mixed-faith families emerges from our data and given the fluid nature of religious identity, teachers and any professionals working with young people and families need to be wary of stereotypical views. Our research suggests that for the majority of the families taking part in our project, religion tended not to be a major issue; it formed a dimension in these families, but was not dominant. Parents indicated that 'cultural' issues were often more troublesome than religion. By this they meant the conventions and customs which related to particular religious festivals or events rather than their religious content. These were often expectations by particular parts of the extended family or community.

However, although religion did not feature prominently in the families taking part in our project, the parents' respective faith backgrounds still informed the moral and civic values which guided their lives and which they wished to instil in their children. Parents often pointed them out as traits

common to all religions, considering them universally applicable guiding principles, such as tolerance, respect, treating others as one would like to be treated oneself, consideration, kindness and being unselfish. Although citing these as generic values, parents had extrapolated these from their own respective faith backgrounds.

With parents on the whole relying on school to teach their children about religion, our study suggests that school has an important role in educating young people about religion. Finally, the comments which participants made about physical appearance highlight issues of difference and sameness in relation to individuals' identity and in relation to others' perceptions, reflected in the way individuals feel about themselves and in others' remarks, with difference and sameness often presenting two sides of the same coin, but standing in tension to one another, as individuals both want to stand out from and be part of their peer group.

While the study has limitations with regard to the nature of its sample and geographical reach, it points to important issues in a population which is predicted to rise significantly in the years to come.

Notes

[1] The references indicated here chart the rise of mixed-*race* rather than specifically mixed-*faith* couples and individuals. However, the rise of the latter can be extrapolated from Census data (see e.g. Scottish Executive Statistics, 2001; Voas, 2009, esp. Table 1)

[2] In line with the guidelines on ethical research, as endorsed by the University of Warwick and relevant professional association (e.g. British Education Research Association, British Sociological Association), all participants in our study were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Therefore, all the names used in this article are pseudonyms.

[3] The language of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh scriptures, is linguistically complex, with

various influences from North Indian dialects and languages, which does not make the text readily accessible, even to Punjabi speakers. (see Nesbitt, 2005, pp. 35–36)

[4] *Amrit* is the water used in Sikh initiation ceremonies. 'Taking *amrit*' means to be initiated, a rite which is often referred to as baptism. Monika's reference to nectar refers to the fact that water which is used for the ceremony has sugar added to it. (see Nesbitt, 2005, p. 10, p. 57)

[5] The *kirpan* refers to one of the five Ks, to which those initiated into Sikhism are expected to adhere. The other four Ks are *kesh* (uncut hair), *kangha* (comb), *kachh* (cotton breeches), and *kara* (steel/iron bangle). (see Nesbitt, 2005, p. 57, p. 51)

[6] We are *not* using the term 'virtuoso' here in the Weberian sense, denoting particular capacities which can only be attained by shamans or ascetics (see Gerth & Wright Mills, 1974, pp. 287–291), but in the sense of someone who has specialist knowledge in a particular field and the skill to deploy it expertly, like a musician who, having mastered his instrument and musical composition, can bring this mastery to bear on the interpretation of the piece he plays.

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