

Children from mixed migrant-native families in the UK and France: what shapes their identities?

Topic and theoretical focus

Research on the transmission of identity and cultural practices in mixed families in different social contexts is important insofar as there is currently a discrepancy between the importance of social diversity and heterogeneity in migrants' behaviour in the destination countries on the one hand and our understanding of it on the other hand. This especially concerns mixed families, as the most intimate sphere where different cultures can meet. This topic has been investigated before, as it is essential to understand the processes that affect the shaping of identities in a diverse society (Obućina and Saarela 2019; Soehl 2016). Nevertheless, there is limited research comparing the impact of a country's context on this process (Finnäs and O'Leary 2003). Considering the results of a growing body of migration studies focusing on the impact of contextual factors on immigrants' and their descendants' lives in the destination countries (Finnäs and O'Leary 2003; Knies et al. 2016), we expect the destination context also impacts the inter-family practices and thus shapes the second generation immigrants' self-identification and identity.

We investigate what determines mixed-families' children's self-identification and their cultural markers and practices in the UK and France. The immigration and integration contexts of France and the UK and their approach to diversity are historically opposite (Favell 1998). Thus, research on these two countries gives a unique opportunity to compare remarkably different legal and cultural contexts. The countries' political, cultural, and institutional contexts also translate into different data collection strategies, such as a lack of information on ethnicity and origin influenced by French republican colour-blindness and a strong British focus on collecting ethno-racial data countries (Lietaud 2021). This further leads to limited research on topics relying on ethnic data in France.

We first ask (RQ1) how children from mixed migrant-native families self-identify regarding their ethnic and cultural identity. Then, we investigate immigrants' descendants' cultural markers, namely their preferred language and practised religion and their determinants. To do that, we ask (RQ2) what language parents in mixed-families transmit to their children in childhood, (RQ3) what language individuals from mixed-families speak in adulthood, and (RQ4) what religion individuals from mixed-families follow in adulthood. We test four unexclusive hypotheses regarding the dynamic affecting intergenerational transition in mixed families.

The first hypothesis (H1) is that the dominant culture determines the power dynamic in a family – thus, children identify with the culture to which they are more exposed (Stephan and Stephan 1989).

The second hypothesis (H2) is that the patriarchal structure determines the power – thus, children identify with the father figure (Koh et al. 2009).

The third hypothesis (H3) is that children identify with the parent with whom they have spent more time in childhood (Casey and Dustmann 2010; Milner and Gregory 2015).

The last hypothesis (H4) is that the bargaining tool in mixed couples is an individual's socioeconomic status (education, labour market status, income); thus, children adopt the identity (and cultural markers) of a parent with a higher status (Obućina and Saarela 2019).

Data and Methods

We take advantage of the two rounds of the Trajectories and Origin (TeO) data collected in 2008-2009 and 2019-2020, offering a unique opportunity to investigate ethnic data in France. We employ them in comparative research, additionally using the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) wave 1 (2009-2011) and 9 (2017-2019). UKHLS data are adjusted to be suitable for comparative research with cross-sectional data collected from individuals rather than households. We chose waves 1 and 9 as these data were collected relatively concurrently with TeO data and included questions regarding individuals' ethnic and cultural identities, which are key for our analysis. Our sample includes individuals born to mixed families, including one parent born in the country of data collection (the UK and France, respectively) and one born abroad.

We run a series of multivariate analyses separately analysing French and British data (stratifying analysis by the sex of a parent). For our first research question, our outcome variable is categorical, and respondents can identify with the culture of non-migrant parent (French/British), migrant parent (other country), or other. For our second research question, the outcome variable is binary – parents spoke only French/English (0) or only a minority language or both languages (1). For our RQ3 and RQ4, our outcome variables are also binary, representing the individual's use of the language (or following the religion) of a non-migrant (0) or a migrant (1) parent. Our explanatory variables include parents' sex, their socioeconomic and demographic characteristics and origin, individuals' time spent with parents, individuals' socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, and regional characteristics, including, e.g.,

the ethnic composition of the area where individuals live. Thanks to the use of two time points,¹ we also compare the (potential) change in determinants and descendants' identification with one of the cultures in which they were socialised in.

Moreover, as robustness checks, we also run our analysis on a broader sample of individuals from mixed families, including any combination of parents' origin, and on a sample of individuals from single-parent families to ensure we correctly isolate different determinants in our original sample. We also compare outcomes for children from the same family and children from patchwork families.

Main preliminary findings and discussion

Currently, we are waiting for access to some of the data used in this project (TeO2 data), thus we present preliminary results for our RQ1, RQ3 and RQ4 for the one time point (TeO1 data and UKHLS wave 1) and sans TeO2/UKHLS wave 9 analysis, robustness checks, change in time, and analysis of local area characteristics. However, our previous experiences with these datasets suggest that additional analyses are feasible, considering data quality and sample sizes.

Our preliminary results demonstrate variation in the self-identification and in the use of the immigrant parent's origin language and religion followed. The results already point out evident disparities between countries, which we will further examine. We are yet to test all our hypotheses, however, based on the preliminary results, we tentatively infer that the UK context is more influential for children of mixed-families in identifying with the dominant culture and country of residence, confirming H1 for the UK. So far, we also confirm the theory that women are guardians of the minority culture, as they are more likely to transfer their origin culture to their children. Our results, however, suggest that this is linked to the time mothers spent with children in their childhood, which tentatively confirms our H3.

More specifically, in regards to the RQ1, the majority (53.5%) of respondents in France identify as French only, while almost one-third identify with another country (31.7%). In the UK, about the same share of respondents (56.1%) identifies with the UK as in France, but only 4.1% identifies with other countries (the remaining respondents chose not to identify with a country)². While we will further analyse this, we hypothesise that the UK results regarding the identification with a country are linked to a stronger identification with one's ethnic background. These results are not associated with parents' origin in any country.

¹ This is possible in the UK thanks to The Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Boost Sample that was included in the UKHLS sampling between the two data points.

² Our sample size is $N = 3,117$ for the TeO1 data and $N = 2,145$ for the UKHLS wave 1.

Considering our RQ3, the prevalence of individuals speaking (also) a minority language in France is higher than expected (26%), however it is lower than preliminary results show for the UK (43.5%). Mothers predominantly transmit language in both countries.

Finally, in our preliminary results answering RQ4, we demonstrate links between the gender of a parent and a child in France, with daughters more often following the mother's religion and vice versa. In the UK, this association is not that clearly divided by the gender of a parent and depends on the particular religion. Nevertheless, religious practice among respondents in both countries drops compared to their parents, with more individuals not declaring any religious denomination.

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