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Identity loss or identity reshape?

Religious identification among the offspring of 'Christian-Muslim' couples

Abstract

Previous research on interreligious marriages has indicated that they tend to cause both ethnic and religious 'dilution' and 'loss', but these concepts are misleading and cannot explain different and often contradictory identification processes. Based on qualitative in-depth interviews with 66 sons and daughters raised in families where one partner is an immigrant from a majority-Muslim country and the other is Italian, this article explores offspring's religious identities. The article counters the notion that there is a univocal process of religious 'loss' among 'mixed' offspring. Three different identification processes are found: 'Islamic', 'non-religious' and 'spiritual'. In the first case, the identification with the Islamic faith of the Muslim father leads the offspring to discuss identity in terms of opposition to a 'Western-secularised' way of living youth. In 'non-religious identifications', offspring downplay the role of religion, preferring to emphasise their bi-ethnicity. The third type of narrative ('spiritual identities') shows the elaboration of an anti-dogmatic position on religion, sometimes more syncretic, sometimes more holistic. Results suggest that offspring's identities are much more complex and characterised by a reshaping, rather than a loosening, of religiosity.

Keywords:

ethnic dilution, interfaith families, interreligious marriages, mixed couples, offspring identification, religious pluralism

Introduction

Based on qualitative in-depth interviews with 66 sons and daughters raised in families where one partner is an immigrant from a majority-Muslim country and the other is Italian, this article aims at exploring offspring'sⁱ religious identity. Often categorised as 'Christian-Muslim', these couples represent an emblematic case study of 'mixedness'ⁱⁱ since they incorporate two layers of differences: religious, as one partner has been socialised into Islam and the other into Christianity, and ethnic, as a whiteⁱⁱⁱ Italian partner is married to a non-white immigrant partner. Despite this interplay between two levels of differences, in the public and, often, in the academic debate, religious difference is often assumed to be the primary conflictual dimension between partners (Ata 2003; Bangstad 2004; Allievi 2006; Al-Yousuf 2006; Roer-Strier and Ben Ezra 2006; Saraceno 2007). I cannot debate extensively here the deep controversies related to the language used to analyse the phenomenon, but I will briefly explain the decision to use the term 'mixed'. On the one hand, as Song (2015a, 2) pointed out, "the terms 'mixed' and 'multiracial' [...] seem to imply the existence of pure 'races' that can combine into a race mixture". On the other hand the risk of using a more precise term is to attribute an *a priori* difference to the couple. In accordance with other scholars (Edwards and Caballero 2008; Varro 2003; Collet 2012), I thus refer to the term 'mixed' to encompass the multiple differences (regarding ethnicity and religion) which characterise the participants of our study. What 'mixed' is about, becomes exactly the core question on which each study of intermarriage should finally reflect. When do family members experience their differences, that is to say, are these differences meaningful for them and if so, how?

Most of the research on religiously and ethnically^{iv} mixed marriages is focused on couples' interactions and parenting styles as the main way of exploring how partners deal with their background. Despite a growing number of 'mixed' offspring, their 'voice' is often drowned out, giving centrality only to couple's negotiations. To analyse the way offspring raised in these families represent their identities fosters relevant questions at the interplay of the sociology of migration, religion and family, because this could indicate what pluralism (in particular, but not only, religious pluralism) is producing concretely in the family context among generations. Research focused on mixed offspring identities has emerged only in the last twenty years (Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2005; Murad 2005; Edwards, Caballero, and Puthussery 2009; Arweck and Nesbitt 2010; Song and Gutierrez 2015a,b) and it is increasing in different European countries (Odasso 2016; Cerchiaro 2016; Unterreiner 2017; Apitzsch 2018; Rodríguez-García et al. 2018).

Existing literature indicates that mixed marriages tend to weaken the transmission of religion to the next generation (Voas 2003), and cause the "dilution" or "inevitable loss" of ethnic identities (Song and Gutierrez 2015b). This article will question and debate the assumption according to which mixed marriages imply the "loosening" (Voas 2003) or "dilution" (Song and Gutierrez 2015b) of the parents' backgrounds in the next generation. In doing so, it focuses on how offspring growing up in families where mother and father have different religious backgrounds discuss their own religious identification.

The following section inserts my contribution within the literature on mixed families, countering the notion of 'dilution' and 'loss' associated with offspring's identities. We will then introduce a 'research methodologies and participants' section to help the reader in framing the findings within the Italian social context. The analysis describes three religious identities that have been observed among the offspring in the study. In light of the research results, the conclusions discuss the relevance of our findings for the literature on offspring with parents from different backgrounds.

Growing up in a mixed family: countering the notion of ‘dilution’ and ‘loss’

Mixed families represent one of the best indicators of social distance between groups in terms of ethnic and religious differences (Kalmijn 1998, Sherkat 2004, Voas 2009b; Maffioli, Gabrielli and Paterno 2009). They reflect the broader multicultural society and represent spaces where individuals develop and negotiate multiple identities (Varro 2003; Arweck and Nesbitt 2010). Scholars have looked at mixed couples and families as a sort of ‘social laboratory’ in which to study both the relationship within the family context (the intercultural practices of the partners, the challenges of parenting), and the reaction of the social context to breaking the endogamic rule (the processes of stigmatisation and ‘otherness’). Over the past decade, international interest in mixed marriages has been stimulated by research focusing on parenting as a privileged space in which to observe partners’ negotiations (Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2005; Murad 2005; McCarthy 2007; Edwards, Caballero, and Puthussery 2009; Arweck and Nesbitt 2010; Song and Gutierrez 2015a,b; Cerchiaro et al. 2015, Cerchiaro 2017). However, there are still few studies which focus on what effect these processes of mixed parenting produce on the offspring’s identity. Existing research investigates whether children of parents with different ethnic and religious backgrounds can develop a healthy/conflictual identity (Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2005; Caballero and Puthussery 2008), often assuming that generational transmission implies ethnic “dilution” and cultural “loss” (Voas 2003; Song and Gutierrez 2015b). Other data suggest that the identities of the mixed population reveal the fluidity of ethnic and religious boundaries (Alba and Nee 2003; Lee and Bean 2004; Qian 2004; Bratter 2007). Voas’ (2003) statistical analysis in England suggests that religion tends to be lost as a result of interreligious marriages but he concludes that “the theory that mixed marriage is the motor of mainstream religious decline should be tested in a qualitative investigation” (92). Recent research in Britain suggests that the significance of parents’ heritage is variable and

depends on different social contexts and biographical trajectories. While parents' backgrounds could be of great significance to some mixed people, it could be less significant to the lives and identifications of others (Caballero et al. 2007; Song and Gutierrez 2015). In their study of how multi-ethnic parents articulate narratives of 'ethnic dilution' and 'cultural loss' in relation to the socialisation of their children, Song and Gutierrez (2015, 697) conclude that the "cosmopolitan outlook of many multiracial parents is not conceptually synonymous with a conventional notion of ethnic dilution (which suggests a dilution into a rather homogeneous whiteness), but instead should be seen as a dilution into diversity".

Some studies focus their analysis sharply on interreligious couples and families, helping to question the monolithic link between intermarriage and 'loss' or 'dilution' of partners' religious backgrounds. In his anthropological study of Christian-Muslim families in Cape Town, Bangstad (2004) argues that the high frequency of inter-religious marriages, as well as the high frequency of inter-religious marriages involving Muslim-born females, can only be explained by reference to a field characterised by socio-religious fluidity. He concludes that hybridity is the norm and "Islam is non-determinative in the making of these identities" (ibidem, 349). Al-Yousuf's study of Christian-Muslim families in Britain suggests that faith identifications (of parents and children) were more likely to be treated as autonomous and personally negotiable in the context of marriage. The author stated that "children construct their identity using the materials given them, even contradictory ones" (327). In the same direction go the findings of the study of Arweck and Nesbitt (2010) on young people's identity formation in families where mother and father have different religious backgrounds (Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh). The study advocates that religion tends not to be a major issue in their lives. Despite this, the authors state that "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" (ibidem, 28). They stressed the concept of "multiple cultural competence" (Jackson and

Nesbitt 1993, 174–178) to highlight that these young people learn how to act and which discourses to deploy in different social and cultural settings. These specific multicultural competences are acquired by interacting within different social spheres of their lives.

These studies, taken together, indicate that the assumption according to which mixed families imply a ‘dilution’ or ‘loss’ of parents’ backgrounds is deeply problematic since it cannot explain different and often contradictory processes of identification.

In particular, we still have little knowledge of the following interrelated aspects:

- the impact of a social milieu characterised by the strong stigmatisation of migrants (specifically of Muslims) on young people’s identification with the minority culture;
- to what extent religious pluralism is an issue they incorporate and identify with;
- the various ways they represent their own religious identities;

Through in-depth biographical interviews the paper will explore how offspring personally narrate their own identities. In particular, the article will focus on how they deploy their personal discourse on religious identity.

THE STUDY: Context, Methodology and Participants

Mixed marriages, racism and Islamophobia in Italy

Mixed marriages between members of a dominant and a radicalised minority group, like the ones analysed in this article, particularly challenge the assumption that these marriages are overexposed to conflicts due to their religious differences. Especially in Northern Italy, where the data were gathered, couples with a partner from a majority-Muslim country represent an emblematic case-study within the phenomenon of mixed marriages because, in the social space of the family, they incorporate racial, ethnic and religious differences represented as strong and conflicting in the public hegemonic discourse (Saraceno 2007; Allievi 2006). The position of Catholic and Islamic

religious authorities, openly suspicious of this type of relationship, and the weight of the rhetoric of the right-wing populist party Lega (the former 'Northern League', firmly established in northern Italy) are important in understanding the context of external pressure and hostility which characterise the everyday lives of these families. During recent years, the Lega party has explicitly built its political actions around the public visibility of Islam. Examples are the daily disinformation campaigns, anti-Muslim demonstrations ridiculing the prophet Mohammed, and protests against the building of mosques (on this point see Allievi 2012).

According to the last two national censuses of 2001 and 2011, mixed marriages are increasing in number^v. There were 198,347 in 2001 and 320,234 in 2011, which is an increase of 61.5%. The latest data from the National Institute of Statistics show that Italian women in mixed marriages more frequently marry men from majority-Muslim countries such as Morocco, Albania, and Tunisia (see <http://demo.istat.it/>, accessed 15 October 2020). As demonstrated by recent empirical research (Odasso 2016; Cerchiaro 2016), in the north-east of Italy especially, a mixed marriage between a white Italian woman and an immigrant man from North Africa is perceived as a taboo. The stigma that associates male migration with the 'theft of women' is, indeed, directly related to Islamophobia and racialisation of immigrants. The fear of uncontrolled immigration joined with the fear of the loss of a supposed 'national identity' are key arguments which convey, in the public space, a monolithic 'Muslim identity' as the emblem of otherness, reinforcing the paradigm of the 'clash of civilizations' suggested by Huntington (1996). A recent example is an article that appeared in the Italian newspaper "Liberio" after the terrorist attack of June 3rd 2017 at London Bridge perpetrated by an Italian man, Youssef Zaghba, son of an Italian mother and a Moroccan father. The article, entitled "Dear Italian women, to marry a Muslim man is dangerous and foolish",^{vi} exemplified the stigmatisation of this kind of couple, chosen as an example of the 'Islamic invasion' and 'Western weakness'. The above information offers important elements to understand the context of external

pressure and hostility which characterise the everyday lives of the family members, which is often recalled in offspring's narrations.

Methodology and participants

The interviews analysed in this article draw on data from two qualitative studies (2010-2013 and 2015-2017) focused on the everyday life of mixed families, with an attempt to go beyond the descriptive factors of difference (national, cultural, ethnic or religious) which characterised partners' backgrounds.

We carried out 66 individual interviews with the offspring of 40 nuclear families living in Northern Italy. They were between 16 and 34 years old^{vii}. Interviews focused on their identity constructions touching a wide range of topics related to family dynamics, school and friendships. Interviews were conducted in their homes, following the approach of Daniel Bertaux (1998), who defines the life stories of the interviewees as *récits de vie*. These are generally biographical in-depth interviews in which, through the use of open questions, the aim is to shed light on "the interviewees' world" within their universe of meaning (ibidem). In order to make the respondents feel freer to express themselves, all interviews were conducted individually, in the absence of other family members^{viii}. In view of the particularities of the Muslim presence in Italy^{ix}, characterised as it is by fragmented ethnic groups, the choice of the sample was not limited to couples where the migrant partner came from one ethnic-national group: migrant partners came from Morocco (18), Senegal (6), Egypt (5), Palestine (4), Algeria (3), Tunisia (2), Syria (2).

Of the 40 families involved, in 32 cases the couples consisted of a migrant man and an Italian woman and in just 8 cases of a migrant woman and an Italian man. This numerical imbalance has two main explanations: 1) the Quranic norm, affecting the orthopraxis, which prohibits a Muslim woman from marrying a non-Muslim man^x; 2) the marriage market and the characteristics of migration flows^{xi}.

Religiously speaking, in seven cases one partner converted to the other partner's religion. In five cases it was the Italian mother who converted to Islam. In these families, all family members declared that they were practicing Muslims. In one case it was the migrant man who converted to Catholicism and in one other case it was the Italian man who converted to Islam. In these last two cases both conversions were declared to be just 'formal' conversion because both partners self-defined as non-religious. The first one converted "to facilitate the marriage in church" and the second one so as to be able "to register as a married couple in Morocco".

The article considers data from the interviews realised with the whole group of 66 offspring, of whom 30 were female and 36 male. I will focus on offspring interviews with the objective of shedding light on how these people construct their own identity narration.

FINDINGS

Offspring religious identification

In this section I will focus on how offspring deal differently with their parents' backgrounds in order to elaborate a discourse on their own religious identity. Due to the necessity to synthesise the results, I offer a 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) of the two most representative narrations for every type of identification process, those which include more elements of discussion. These narrations allow us to exemplify how religion is differently deployed in offspring's discursive constructions. In order to avoid confusion we do not go deeper into every variable that characterised our sample (gender and age have of course an impact on their narrations) since the attempt of the article is exactly to reduce complexity by focusing on those identification processes that are common to all interviewees. From our findings I identified three main types, which must be understood as different ways of deploying a discourse on religious identity. Although this is not the focus of our article, elements of ethnic identifications will emerge as interrelated aspects in offspring identification and

will be discussed through our data. These three types are 'Islamic identities', 'non-religious identities' and 'spiritual identities'. They provide us with a clearer picture to problematise the notion of religious 'loss' and 'dilution' established in the literature that I outlined earlier.

Islamic identification

The first group of narrations underlines a binary representation of religious identity strongly rooted in the traditional-institutionalised view of religion and in the narration of religious identity as something given and fixed. This type of representation concerns 13 offspring involved in the research. It appears more clearly in families where the Muslim father maintains a strong religious stance (much more than the mother) with regard to the transmission of his religious identity, or in the cases of Italian mothers converted to Islam. The Quranic precept according to which only the father's religion can be passed down is recalled in children's narratives to explain the patrilineal transmission of religion as a duty rooted in Islam.

Both Yousra and Mohammed, below, highlight their reaction to a stigmatising social environment as reinforcing their collective identification with the minority parent's culture.

Since in Islam your father has to transmit his own religion to his children we were raised in my father's religion. We of course know my mother's religion, Catholicism, but we just practice one, Islam. You have to choose what religion to follow. We go to the Mosque, we follow Ramadan, we all pray, also, if not always as strictly intended. [...] Especially now Islam and Muslim in general are not seen in a good way. I struggle to explain what Islam really is about and I get angry when I listen to people's discourse about Islam and Muslim as if they were all terrorists and crazy murderers. [...] I feel half black, half African, different from my Italian peers. I mean, I am Italian too...but I don't

live like the majority of Italian peers who just care about having fun, drink and whatever...I see that the more they speak badly about Islam and Muslims the more I become proud of my Islamic faith and I feel I am a Muslim. For example... when I was in high school we had several discussions on the veil. When I started wearing it I think it was also a way to respond to those who saw it as a symbol of submission. It was my choice.

(Yousra, 22years old, daughter of Algerian father and Italian mother)

I am Muslim....because my father is Muslim and my mother converted too. [...] We are a Muslim family. And I am an Italian-Muslim. It's simple [...] We never had problems about religion in our family. Other people who dislike our religion make problems. I believe we have to explain what really Islam is about. It is helping the poor with charity, it is about sacrifice, about renunciation, like in Ramadan. It is about "purifying" themselves. And of course this makes me different from all my Catholic peers that are basically non-religious. [...] When I was in high school, I felt less religious than now. It is something that has grown up over time. I think that the hate against Muslims that I've breathed for years had an impact on this...

(Mohammed, 28 years old, son of Syrian father and Italian mother converted to Islam)

There is a strong connection between the narration of their own religiosity and the minority culture of the Muslim parent. In Yousra's words the intersection of ethnicity and religion clearly emerges as a central aspect of her identification with the minority culture of her father. She emphasises her "Africanness" or being part of a new "second generation" of Italian-Muslims. Yousra and Mohammed both emphasise a 'reaction' which is connected with a progressive strengthening of

Islamic roots in opposition to a hegemonic model of youth. These narrations can be linked to the notion of 'reactive identity' (Vetik, Nimmerfelft, Taru et al. 2006; Allievi 2012) as a subjectivity formed in the process of constructing an 'us–them' relationship. As Allievi (2012) stated, "reactive identities produce conflicts, especially conflicts on and about symbols, and particularly religious symbols, because they are well placed to be exploited and used like a flag" (384). This is particularly evident in Yousra's discourse about her choice of wearing the veil. To declare herself as Muslim involves the use of a religious symbol as part of a wider process of identification. As their words suggest, Yousra and Mohammed are two examples of offspring who denounce Islamophobia and racism and claim a different way of being and living an 'Islamic youth' far away from a 'Westernised' model.

Non-religious identification

The second group of narratives, predominant in 18 offspring, show in the foreground the most advanced process of secularisation, where offspring downplay the relevance of religion both in their family life and in their inner life. They can recall the fact that their parents have already overcome their former religious identities, moving progressively to a symbolic space where religious practices are privatised or no longer present. This does not mean that these offspring were educated without any religious notions, but that religious practices were not a relevant part of their everyday family life. None of our 66 offspring defines himself/herself as a practicing Catholic although some of them explain, "I should be Catholic because I was baptised but [...] I do not feel I am Catholic because I never practiced" or, again, "I said I was Catholic when I was at primary school...but it was just to be like my classmates". In these narrations it emerges how baptism was a decision adopted by their parents more to facilitate their integration with peers^{xii} and to avoid conflicts with the Italian family of the indigenous parent rather than from a religious allegiance. We can debate, thus, if these

identifications should be more properly framed as 'non-religiosity' or as a sign of "soft secularisation" (Garelli 2016). However, our aim here is to point out that these offspring do not narrate any religious feelings as a relevant part of their identity. Their self-narrations are more focused on other elements of identification/differentiation such as the skin colour and language.

I'm neither Muslim nor Catholic. I've notions of both religions but I feel far from religions. I defined myself by other things. Religion's never been an issue in the family...I mean a problem. I feel mixed yes...because I feel both Senegalese and Italian, because of my name, because my skin is darker and everybody asks me where I come from... and I have to explain I was born here, my mother is Italian and I've always had the Italian citizenship. When you're a child you realise that there is something different in you. That there are two worlds in you. Growing up I realised that I was in the middle of two sides... but I've never perceived religion as a central part of things. [...] I'm not interested in gaining a deeper knowledge of Islam or Catholicism, no. I'm more interested in learning Wolof^{xiii} for example. You know... I don't define myself as a religious person...but I get angry if I hear hate speech about Islam and Muslims...because people don't know anything...so I defend my father's background because it is also mine...but not for the religion...it is more about racism in general... get it?

(Amadou – 33 years old, Senegalese father and Italian mother)

Well. To simplify I used to say I was Catholic but I am not a practicing one. But I don't go anymore to church, and I don't feel to believe in God...get my point? Although I was baptised etc... my parents just told me that I was free to decide which religion to choose. And so do I...you know...like a lot of my friends and peers I don't think I am a very

religious person. [...] I see that religions in this period are just dividing people... I think. It is a pretext, of course, it is not about God but... I think this influences my progressive distance from religions. I feel more open, freer, without prejudice, and it is all to my family's credit. But they've never pushed me in a religious direction and I currently think not to be a religious person at all. [...] Instead I feel my Moroccan side. And this is much more important to me. The question for us children of parents of different origins is: where am I now? Who am I...I mean? It flows in your veins...

(Francesca – 17 years old, Italian father and Moroccan mother)

The impact of the social context and the public hegemonic discourse of a 'war of religions' is once more present in children's narratives. In these offspring a stronger attempt to maintain a distance from any religious identification is predominant. They perceive religions as a source of conflict and division and they give more importance to other ethnic issues such as bilingualism, the racialisation process and racism^{xiv}. Some of them emphasise the fact that their absence of religious feelings is something diffused among their peers, as confirmed in the recent research on the religiosity of young people in Italy (Garelli 2016)^{xv}. In their narrations ethnicity appears in the foreground with a clear attempt to underline their consciousness of having a mixed heritage, a feeling of being part of 'two worlds'.

Spiritual identification

In this last group of narratives offspring emphasise the common ground of the two religions, claiming the chance to express their spiritual feelings beyond polarised religions^{xvi}. They construct a narration where an individualised-holistic representation of themselves prevails. These narrations represent a large majority of my interviewees since 35 offspring could be grouped into this type. In

these identification processes, we found both cases where the Italian mother was a practicing Catholic and where both parents identified themselves as Catholic and Muslim but, during their marriage, turned to a more privatised form of religiosity and declared that they did not attend any more either Church or Mosque. The fact that 28 interviewees out of the 35 in this group are over 24 years old suggests that the more offspring grow up, the more they refuse a dualistic vision of religion and deepen a different way to 'feed their spirituality' beyond an institutionalised representation of religious identity.

You can't reduce this discourse into labels even if people force you to express it in 140 characters. [...] We are human beings [...]. My parents taught both my brother and myself their religion without pushing us in one direction. They actually spoke more about God than about religion...s. They believed it was a way to feed our spirituality without obliging us to choose one religion...they've always said to us...you will decide when you become older...and I've never decided...because there is nothing to decide. I just believe in God. God is always the same. In every religion. Those who're sure they believe in the right religion are far from God...in the past I did fasting during Ramadan with my father and pilgrimage with my mother. We celebrate together all religious festivity at home.

(Omar-Paolo, 24 years old, Moroccan father and Italian mother)

I am more a spiritual type...I mean...I was baptised. But it was not a fair decision at that time...because it was made for external pressure. My father didn't agree...I just think I don't care about being Muslim or Catholic. I think God is the same. The rest is division, dogmas...and politics I think...and my experience teaches me to go to the essential...not

to follow who says you have to belong to this or that religion. That's not what I'm looking for. [...] I took the best from the two...love from Catholicism, Christ's sacrifice for the others...and the idea of purification, in Ramadan for example...to give up on something...above all when you have too much. And the sense of fraternity that is stronger. People are more individualistic here. That's why I feel more European...than Italian...but maybe more a citizen of the world...

(Clara – 28 years old, Moroccan father and Italian mother)

I am a shaman. I feel in contact with something more... my friends and I speak a lot about inner life... I believe there is something more in this life. We mix the words...for example...in my group I have friends from Morocco, Albania and Egypt. [...]We mix words and life styles from other cultures. [...] To have a father from Morocco and a mother from Italy gives me a different perspective on things. I feel more connected with the world, with music...some lyrics in rap music are of course like a prayer for me...and nature, the contact with it...and this is not just about being Moroccan, Italian or Muslim or what else...this is my view of life...

Interviewer: you also mean in a religious sense

Yes. I mean that God, it's not about how you pray or where you pray...I make my own prayers...

(Farouk – 17 years old, Algerian father and Italian mother)

Farouk's words are meaningful. He defines himself as a "shaman", connected with a series of symbols that portray his 'view of the world', a sort of identity compass that goes beyond religions seen as given entities. He puts together making music, a closer contact with nature, multicultural

friends, the making of his own prayers, likewise a musical composition. What these narrations have in common is a self-made spirituality unanchored by institutions, a vehicle of identity as a 'unicum' that brings together a syncretic experience of feeding their inner life beyond 'dogmas' (see Clara's words which combine "love from Catholicism" and "the idea of purification in Islam") and a cosmopolitan representation of the self beyond ethnicity (see the recurrent expressions "citizens of the world" and "we are human beings" that refuse the white/black dichotomy). In this sense, recalling the perspective of Vertovec and Cohen (2002) on "cosmopolitanism" as a "practice" and "competence" (11), they recompose the different aspects of their own identities, claiming them as a part of a new way of living in modern pluralistic societies where they actively contribute to reshaping the concept of belonging in itself. There are deep traces of a spirituality that is connected with the religious pluralism they have experienced in their family but which is reinterpreted as something beyond a binary vision of religious and ethnic identities.

Conclusions

The article sheds light on children's identities, showing how they can deal differently with their parents' backgrounds in order to develop their own religious identity. In 'Islamic identification', a strong identification with Islam leads these children to discuss religion as a fundamental part of themselves, in opposition to a 'Western-secularised' way of living the relationship with religion and of approaching youth in general. This occurs in families where the Muslim father affirms the importance of a patrilineal transmission of religion in Islam. It is also the case in families where the mother has converted to Islam and the family members all identify with the Islamic faith. Although in our group of interviewees we had the case of a Muslim man who had converted to Catholicism, in this family the offspring do not identify themselves as religious people. These examples seem to confirm the conclusion by Arweck and Nesbitt (2010b, 84) which stated that "parents with a strongly

religious stance are likely to want to pass this on to their children". These children incorporate the notion of 'otherness' and, by affirming their Muslim identity, they deny the demeaning hegemonic image of Islam and Muslim migrants in the social context they live in. In general, above all in offspring with a dark phenotype, there emerges a recurrent narration where they stated how the hegemonic representation of 'Italian whiteness' led them to experience stigmatisation and to be perceived as foreigners/migrants by the Italian social context.

The result of growing up in a mixed family, in the greater part of our data about religious identification, demonstrates the attempt to overcome the problematic/conflictual idea of 'belonging'. The consequence of a stigmatising public discourse on Muslim and migrants is recurrent in all the narrations. Offspring often try to reconcile the polarisation of identities where the two poles are not the two religions but rather two opposed worldviews: Western values against Islamic extremism. They could do this by keeping their distance from their parents' former religious identities and by refusing to define themselves as religious persons. In offspring who defined themselves as non-religious people, there is a greater emphasis on ethnic identity, expressed as being part of 'two worlds'. Particularly relevant for our purpose is the third type of narrative, relating what we called 'spiritual identities', which represents almost two-thirds of the whole sample and seems to become stronger the older offspring become. These narrations show the development of a high reflexivity, a process that recalls what Roeland et al. (2010) call "religious purification", intended as a process that defines differences and incompatibilities between religious traditions as side issues to go to a 'pure' direct religious experience. These young people appear to have elaborated an anti-dogmatic position, sometimes more syncretic, sometimes more holistic. They construct a religious discourse that is also a political discourse, as noted in Murad (2005) about mothering in a mixed couple. They go to the 'pure' religion that consists in the sacred and one's personal relationship with it. "A 'pure' religion, central to which there is 'real' sacrality", as stated

in Houtman (2016, 7). These offspring are, in this sense, new ambassadors of that “spiritual revolution” (Heelas et al. 2005) and part of that “generation of seekers” which turns to a more “reflexive spirituality” (Roof 1999). They are able to re-compose the different aspects of their own identities, claiming them as a part of a new cosmopolitan competence for living in modern pluralistic societies where they actively contribute to reshaping the concept of belonging in itself. They claim to be free to combine different elements of identification taken from their parents’ backgrounds into a new symbolic system which escapes social expectations and its normative vision of ‘coherence’. Although our qualitative study does not have any claim to be representative, offspring’s narratives give us an important element for discussion that needs to be further investigated. In particular, in accordance with Arweck and Nesbitt (2010b), we demonstrate that the ‘chain of transmission’ strictly links religion with ethnicity as part of the same process of identity construction. Moreover, our findings suggest that the notion according to which offspring identities imply ‘loss’ or ‘dilution’ of ethnic and religious identities is deeply problematic and too monolithic. My deep investigation generally demonstrates that there is not a univocal process of religious loss but rather the reshaping of religious feeling. The strengthening of Islamic identities indicates both the link with the patrilineal transmission of Islam and a process of reaction to a stigmatising social context about Muslims. In ‘non-religious identification’ offspring focus more on their bi-ethnic identification, suggesting that religious decline does not imply also a decline of ethnicity. ‘Spiritual identification’ demonstrates, instead, a reconfiguration, rather than a loss, of religious identity because offspring recombine different religious symbols in a new syncretic, ‘spiritual’ landscape.

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ⁱ I decided to use the word 'offspring' instead of 'children' or 'young people' since it defines more properly the interviewees aged between 16 and 34 years who constitute the empiric data of this article.

ⁱⁱ The concept of 'mixedness', as Collet (2012, 63) pointed out, implies that "differences between the partners due to their cultural and social affiliations or gender roles are not equal and also influence the transcultural hybridisation process, sometimes even hindering it considerably."

ⁱⁱⁱ Following Song and Gutierrez (2015b), we use the term 'white' when referring to people whose phenotype is 'Caucasian', of European ancestry, and who are not associated with the migrant stereotype in the public imaginary. All the boundaries of 'white/black' have been variable historically and in disparate societies. In Italy citizenship is based on the principle of *jus sanguinis* and so it is inherited through the parent-offspring tie, but it can be acquired also by marrying an Italian citizen (*jus conubii*). Mixed marriages are, thus, often stigmatised as a factor which puts at risk an assumed 'purity' of the 'Italian white identity'. This overlapping among 'blood', 'nation' and 'citizenship' reinforces the social construction of "white [...] defined as the absence of any racial mixture" (Bratter 2007, 842).

^{iv} The use of the term 'race', above all in the European context, is still deeply problematic since it is connected with the nineteenth century theorisation of different human races and the historically associated racial persecution. Without going more deeply into the different uses of race and ethnicity between the US and Europe, in this article I thus use only the term ethnicity, referring to shared cultural aspects such as language, ancestry, practices, and beliefs.

^v ISTAT data: <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/3847> and <https://www.istat.it/it/censimenti-permanenti/censimenti-precedenti/popolazione-e-abitazioni/popolazione-2011>

^{vi} Article published in the daily newspaper “Libero” on June 7th, 2017.

^{vii} All interviews were preceded by the signature of an informed consent form. In the cases of participants below the age of legal majority a fully informed consent was obtained from their parents.

^{viii} The average duration of each interview was between 3 and 4 hours. In the case of offspring below the age of legal majority a fully informed consent was obtained both from them and from their parents. All interviews were originally fully transcribed in Italian.

^{ix} According to the latest ISTAT data, of a total figure of 5,144,440 foreigners residing in Italy (January 1st 2018), Muslims are approximately 1.5 million, equivalent to 28.2% of the total foreigners. The data assume religious belonging from the nationality of the migrants, which tells us little about the real religiosity of these people. In general, the Muslim presence in Italy, compared to the Turkish one in Germany or the Maghrebian one in France, is characterised by a large number of countries of origin. In descending order, the largest number of Muslim migrants come from Morocco (about one third of Muslim presences), followed by Albania, Tunisia, Senegal, Egypt, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Algeria. They are mostly settled in Northern Italy because of the employment offered by the industry present in the region.

^x For both religions, the transmission of faith to descendants is central, and it is in religious transmission that conflicts are narrated both between partners and between families of origin and the social context. The Quran only allows Muslim men to marry women from “the people of the Book” (kitabiyya), i.e., Jewish or Christian women (Quran 5,5). This is because, according to the Quran, only the father's religion can be passed down. “There are several justifications for this view. First is the preservation of the Muslim community. If Muslim women marry outside the Muslim community, this would hinder the growth of the Muslim community as a whole. Second, the father establishes religion for his children” (Yahya and Boag 2014, 487).

^{xi} The latest ISTAT data (2015), referring to 2014, show that Italian women in mixed marriages marry most frequently men coming from North Africa, while men in mixed marriages marry more frequently women from eastern Europe and Latin America.

^{xii} According to the most recent research on the religiosity of Italians aged between 18 and 29 years old, over 90% of them received baptism and first communion (Garelli 2016).

^{xiii} The language spoken by the major ethnic group in Senegal.

^{xiv} The social perception of their difference, which we can define as ‘social visibility’, would need a separate analysis focused on their stigmatisation experiences. Briefly, we can highlight how the question of the skin colour as a marker of ‘non Italianness’ was reported above all as linked to their darker skin colour and, indeed, it emerged more strongly in offspring with a parent from Senegal. Despite this, as reported in my previous article (Cerchiaro 2017) also the fact of having a non-Italian name or surname was an important element in producing their feeling of being perceived as ‘non-Italian’.

^{xv} Although, as we highlighted in note 11, there is a high percentage of baptised people (90%), the data show that weekly attendance at the rites is decidedly lower, involving just 13%. Among these young people the ‘non-believers’ grew by five percentage points in just a few years, going from 23% in 2007 to 28% in 2015.

^{xvi} Although this article is not the place to summarise the long and controversial debate on the categories of ‘spiritual and ‘religious’, it is important to briefly clarify the use of the terms and my position in the debate. However far the shift towards inner-life spirituality diagnosed by Houtman et al. (2012) and Campbell (2015) has advanced meanwhile, it is still a controversial issue that stimulates a rich debate around it. Some authors (Ammerman 2013; Zinnbauer et al. 1997) have contested the separation of the categories ‘religious’ and ‘spiritual’, arguing that the last should be understood as a moral rather than as an essential category. Houtman and Aupers (2007), analysing the data from the World Values Survey, interpreted the “neither-Christian-nor-secular outlooks” (Houtman et al. 2012, 29), suggested a New Age spirituality rather than “fuzzy fidelity” (Voas 2009a, 167). Unlike Voas, they conceptualised these spiritualities as a third option beyond the common polarisation of traditional religions on the one hand and science, reason and secularism on

the other. According to Houtman et al. (2012, 29), the term 'spiritual' is used as a "third corner of a triangle rather than a mixture of traditional theistic Christian religiosity and non-religiosity".

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