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'Ticking the Ethnic Box': The experiences of minority ethnic young people in rural communities

Philomena de Lima

Synopsis

Until recently 'ethnicity' and especially 'race' have rarely been issues associated with rural communities, and the 'invisibility of whiteness as an ethnic signifier' has tended to lead to a lack of problematising the concept of ethnicity within the rural frame of reference. Small numbers, diverse backgrounds and dispersed households combined with the lack of recognition afforded to the diversity of heritages which may exist in rural communities can make life challenging for all minority ethnic households living in rural areas. However, there are additional pressures on young people growing up in a rural context where there may be few opportunities for socialising with others with a similar cultural background and strong pressures exist to assimilate to the so-called 'mainstream culture'. Drawing on research undertaken mainly in the context of the Scottish Highlands, it is argued that while it is important for the education sector generally to focus on addressing experiences of racism met by minority ethnic young people, there is also a need to explore and encourage the deconstruction of 'white ethnicities', in order to facilitate a more inclusive approach to the issue of identities in rural communities and Scotland generally.

Introduction

The image of the 'rural' as homogeneous and 'a good place to live' is deeply embedded in popular culture, exercising a powerful influence on the way in which rural life is perceived and at times experienced. The 'purity' of the rural has frequently been contrasted with the 'pollution' of the city, the latter often closely associated with the presence of visible minority ethnic communities (Lowe, 1983, cited in Agyeman & Spooner, 1997). However, these perceptions of 'rural' are increasingly being challenged due to the impact of globalisation, demographic changes (e.g., declining and ageing population) and the out-migration of young people, which have been identified as some of the significant drivers of change in rural Scotland, and especially in areas such as the Scottish Highlands and Islands. Against this background, encouraging migration from other parts of the UK as well as from overseas as part of the population regeneration strategies is being actively promoted by agencies such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE, 2005). This changing policy emphasis combined with the ongoing academic discourses to challenge and recast the meaning and perceptions of 'rurality' from merely denoting 'physical space' to the 'symbolic

significance' of rurality within which social and cultural characteristics are bound up, provide important opportunities to address the issues of ethnicity within rural contexts (e.g., Cloke & Little, 1997; Jedrej & Nuttall, 1996; Neal & Agyeman, 2006).

Drawing from previous research undertaken by the author (Arshad & Syed, 1998; de Lima, 2002; de Lima, Mackenzie, Hutchison & Howells, 2005a) on issues related to minority ethnic households in rural areas, and particularly in the Scottish Highlands and Islands, this paper will set out the context by providing a brief overview of discourses on ethnicity within the rural context, highlighting key issues that have emerged from the lived experiences of rural minority ethnic households generally, and providing a brief background on demographic trends.

This will be followed by a discussion of minority ethnic youth experiences of life in rural communities, including the constraints in exercising identity choices, the role of education in addressing issues of ethnicity and identity, as well as the adaptive strategies employed by young people and their families in asserting and maintaining their identities, while at the same time adapting to the communities in which they reside. The paper will conclude by highlighting the importance of taking into account the multidimensional aspects of all young people's identities, as well as providing opportunities for the deconstruction of 'white ethnicities', not only to prepare young people for life in an increasingly globalised and cosmopolitan world but also to facilitate the process for developing a more inclusive understanding of identities.

'Rural' and 'ethnicity': Challenging discourses

The multidimensional aspects of individual and group identities and the need to move beyond fixed and rigid notions of racialised identities have been consistently emphasised by a number of authors and are supported by growing research (Anthias, 2001; Brah, 1994; Hall, 1995, 1997; Robinson & Gardner, 2004). The use of the term 'minority ethnic' in this paper reflects a recognition of the fact that Britain is a society comprising many different ethnic groups, of which the Scots, Welsh and the English are also ethnic groups: 'Everyone has an ethnicity. To use

ethnicity to discuss the location of black people is inaccurate' (Bhavani, 1994, p.5). However, the tendency to conflate 'ethnicity' with 'non-white' has resulted in little or no understanding of the 'racialised identities of the ethnic majority' (Nayak, 1999, p.177). Dyer (1997) explores this in some detail by focusing on the ways in which images and cultural narratives privilege 'whiteness' while 'non-white' is racialised and accorded less status:

The sense of whites as non-raced is most evident in the absence of reference to whiteness in the habitual speech and writing of white people in the West. We (whites) will speak of, say the blackness or Chineseness of friends, neighbours, colleagues, and customers or clients, and it may be in the most genuinely friendly and accepting manner, but we do not mention the whiteness of people we know. (p.2)

The predominant assumption is that 'whiteness' is ubiquitous and requires no explanation. It is seen as the norm; by contrast 'non-white' is defined as 'the other' and, as Dyer (1997, p.2) goes on to argue, the 'assumption that white people are just people, which is not far off saying that whites are people whereas other colours are something else, is endemic to our culture'.

The assumption that racialised identities apply to mainly 'non-white' people combined with images of 'rural' as homogeneous and bound by a 'common rural culture' has tended to be used as an 'exclusionary device' in discourses and policies related to rural areas, resulting in the marginalisation of some groups and individuals from a sense of belonging to rural places, on the basis of a variety of factors, including their ethnicity. Indeed 'ethnicity' until the last few years, has rarely been seen as having any relevance in rural contexts:

For white people 'ethnicity' is seen as being 'out of place' in the countryside, reflecting the Otherness of people of colour. In the white imagination people of colour are confined to towns and cities, representing an urban, 'alien' environment, and the white landscape of rurality is aligned with 'nativeness' and the absence of evil and danger. The ethnic associations of the countryside are naturalised as an absence intruded upon by people of colour. (Agyeman & Spooner, 1997, p.199)

Developing the evidence base

Growing research since the mid-1990s, initially much of this in England, has sought to challenge the mythology of a common rural culture and demonstrate the ways in which such

conceptualisations of rural have served to marginalise some individuals/groups from a sense of belonging, particularly focusing on ethnicity and culture (e.g., de Lima, 2001; Dhalech, 1999; Kenny, 1997; NCVO, 2000). Furthermore, this research consistently showed that the rights of minority ethnic households/individuals to service tended on the whole to be neglected, especially in a context where organisations emphasised 'numbers rather than needs'. Their small but growing number, the dispersed and diverse (ethnically and in terms of social class) nature of rural minority ethnic households resulted in an absence of their perspectives in policy, planning and delivery of services, compounding their sense of social and cultural isolation. Without exception research in the 1990s and turn of the 21st century highlighted the difficulties of getting ethnicity and race equality issues on the agenda due to either the persistence of the 'no problem here' attitude given what was perceived as the presence of small numbers of minority ethnic households/individuals and the lack of economies of scale in addressing social inclusion issues, or a 'colour blind' approach that emphasised that 'everyone is treated equally'.

Research on ethnicity in a rural context has evolved considerably since the early 1990s, falling into a number of categories (see Robinson & Gardner, 2004, for further discussion): emphasis on the 'politics of recognition' (e.g., Jay, 1992); focus on the dominant images of rural landscapes as exclusionary (Agyeman & Spooner, 1997); action research with a focus on the 'politics of redistribution' (Chakraborti & Garland, 2004; de Lima, 2001; Dhalech, 1999); challenging the emphasis on the portrayal of rural minority ethnic groups as homogeneous and exploring the role of place and context in creating diverse experiences both positive and negative (de Lima *et al.*, 2005a; Robinson & Gardner, 2004, 2006); and more recently publications that have sought to explore and deepen our understanding of the role of rural places on issues of identity and ethnicity within a context of a changing countryside (Chakraborti & Garland, 2004; Neal & Agyeman, 2006).

Moving beyond the 'numbers game': Experiences of rural minority ethnic households

Although the experiences of rural minority ethnic households/individuals have been changing in the last few years, largely due to the influence of legislation, such as the Race Relations (Amendment) Act (2000) (CRE, 2003), the issues that have consistently emerged from research can be broadly summarised as follows:

- (i) Minority ethnic groups, though small in

number, diverse and dispersed, have a presence across all local authority areas in Scotland, and until very recently remained 'invisible' in the rural policy context (Chakraborti & Garland, 2004; de Lima, 2006; de Lima *et al.*, 2005a).

- (ii) The chances of being a victim of a racist assault are higher pro rata in rural areas or in areas with a small number of minority ethnic groups than in urban areas with larger concentrations (Rayner, 2001, 2005).
- (iii) Minority ethnic groups continue to experience high levels of social exclusion. They have poor access to services, employment and lack access to information and advice services. They are rarely consulted on policy and service delivery issues and have little or no involvement in local governance structures (Chakraborti & Garland, 2004; de Lima, 2004, 2006).
- (iv) It is increasingly recognised that rural minority ethnic households/individuals are heterogeneous and not just passive victims of discrimination. Rather, their lives are characterised by diverse experiences, displaying a variety of adaptive strategies across different rural communities and national contexts within the UK (de Lima *et al.*, 2005a; Neal, 2002; Robinson & Gardner, 2004).
- (v) There are methodological and ethical implications in researching small, diverse and dispersed populations in rural contexts.

Demographic trends: Minority ethnic presence in the Scottish Highlands and Islands

The two main sources of data on Scotland's rural minority ethnic groups are the 1991 and 2001 Census data (see de Lima, 2006, for further information). The size of the overall minority ethnic population in Scotland increased from 1.25% in 1991 to 2% of the Scottish population in 2001. Since devolution there has been an effort to develop a more consistent urban/rural classification framework, providing a better basis for understanding settlement patterns (see Scottish Executive, 2004, p.24). However, the small minority ethnic population size in rural areas raises issues of confidentiality and ethics, as well as highlighting the importance of exercising caution with regard to drawing conclusions from data sources, such as the Census, in the light of disclosure control measures adopted to protect individual confidentiality (see GROS, 2003a). For example, the practice of combining ethnic categories to ensure confidentiality results in the masking of diversity amongst minority ethnic households, as more detailed data (e.g., on gender, age and economic activity) is presented using a restricted

'simple' five-category classification, in contrast to the 15 categories used in the Census. Consequently, 50% of the minority ethnic population in the Highlands and Islands were classed as 'Other', obscuring the wide range of diverse ethnicities that characterise the rural minority ethnic populations (GROS, 2003b). Furthermore, since 2004 and the expansion of the European Union the situation with regard to the presence of other ethnic groups mainly from Eastern Europe in Scotland, and rural areas in particular, has increased considerably (for further discussion, see de Lima, Jentsch & Whelton, 2005b).

The 2001 Census recorded a presence of minority ethnic households in every local authority and health board area in Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2004, pp.25-26). However, the Scottish minority ethnic population is mainly urban: 88% living in urban areas, with smaller percentages dispersed throughout the more remote and rural areas of the Scottish mainland and islands: for example 6% in small towns, and 6% in rural areas (Scottish Executive, 2004, p.24).

With the exception of one ward in the Highlands, the minority ethnic population comprised a small proportion of all wards in the Highlands and Islands. Based on an analysis of the 2001 Census (GROS, 2003b), the minority ethnic share of the Highlands and Islands population had increased since the 1991 Census and comprised about 0.8% (2,926) of the population. They had a significantly younger age profile (more than 80% were less than 50 years old) than the population as a whole and approximately 50% were born outwith the UK. Although there were slight variations in the ethnic composition of the minority groups across the different local authority areas of the Highlands and Islands, diversity was the norm. People of 'mixed' minority ethnic background constituted the largest category (between 24% and 27%) of the minority ethnic population across local authority areas. A significant number of people were in managerial/professional positions; however, the two minority ethnic groups with low qualifications were the Chinese and Pakistani/Bangladeshi and other South Asian groups, with a tendency amongst these groups to be employed in the hotel/catering and retail industries.

Minority ethnic young people in Scotland - overview

Moving on to consider the experience of minority ethnic youth more specifically, an audit of minority ethnic research in Scotland in 2001 (Netto *et al.*, 2001) had the following to say about minority ethnic children and youth:

Although the proportion of young people in the minority ethnic population is larger than in the majority population, their views and experiences have been under-researched. Little is known of their educational and career aspirations, an area which is of obvious importance given the current concentration of minority ethnic people within a limited range of occupations, industries and types of business. The lack of attention to children's views and experiences of social care services is also of concern. (p.164)

Changes driven primarily by the race equality legislation and policy initiatives such as the Scottish Executive's anti-bullying policies and social inclusion/community regeneration initiatives, and the emphasis within these initiatives on 'lifecycle' based approaches, have provided potential opportunities to focus on minority ethnic children and young people within the context of education amongst other sectors. The Scottish Executive funding of two thematic Social Inclusions Partnerships (SIPs) on minority ethnic youth has generated research focusing on the experiences of young people (GARA, 1998; Graham & Hill, 2003), and more recently, the availability of disaggregated statistics on ethnicity is gradually improving, as agencies are being encouraged to analyse outcomes of policies on equality on groups in the context of, for example, Community Regeneration Outcomes (see <http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk>, as well as the school census, Scottish Executive News Release, 16 March 2001).

However, despite these initiatives, the process of mainstreaming equalities and race equality in particular has not been a smooth process and is far from consistent. Policy-makers and practitioners at a local level in many rural areas in particular appear to experience difficulties in target setting, making it problematic to develop a better understanding of the extent to which ethnicity acts as an exclusionary device reinforcing the marginalisation which some minority ethnic groups may already be experiencing.

The growing body of research focusing specifically on minority ethnic children and youth within the education context has tended to take place in predominantly urban settings (e.g., Arshad *et al.*, 2004; Graham & Hill, 2003; Save the Children, 2002). Arshad *et al.* (2004, p.14) note the challenges posed for schools in addressing issues of diversity and anti-racism in a context where minority ethnic pupils made up one in every 25 pupils in Scottish schools and where the population is characterised by 'considerable ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity among this small population'. The underlying assumption that addressing diversity

and discrimination is not relevant to schools with predominantly 'white' children including rural contexts has been challenged over the years (Arshad *et al.*, 2004; Kerry, 1998; Nayak, 1999), and more recently, particularly in the context of globalisation, the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees and changing migration trends, which are affecting rural as well as urban areas (de Lima *et al.* 2005b, 2007).

However, consistent with previous findings, Arshad *et al.* (2004, p.2) argue that the claim that 'Scotland has an inclusive education system has not been proven', and they go on to suggest that the 'evidence to date, however, highlights significant institutional barriers that render minority ethnic communities invisible or marginalised with regard to their cultures, languages, faiths, policy, research and provision'.

Researching the experiences of minority ethnic youth in rural communities

So, what are the experiences of minority ethnic young people in rural communities? Although in certain respects the experiences of minority ethnic young people are not that different from young people in general growing up in rural communities with regard to issues of transport, access to social and leisure activities and the desire to leave the area for work and study, there are also some significant differences, mainly associated with issues around culture and identity.

The following sections of the paper draw on three research projects on minority ethnic households undertaken by the author between 1998-2005, in the Scottish Highlands. There are three common issues across all the projects in relation to methodology. Firstly, given the small size and the dispersion of minority ethnic households across the Highlands, the use of traditional random sampling methods was not feasible; consequently the emphasis was on opportunistic, but purposive sampling, reflecting, as much as was feasible, different ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds and geographical spread. Snowballing and working through a variety of groups/agencies on the ground were the main methods used to make contact with participants.

Secondly, minority ethnic households were often reluctant to get involved in research due to concerns about maintaining anonymity/confidentiality, especially where numbers are small. In this context building trust was a time-consuming, but important, aspect of undertaking research. Thirdly, semi-structured, mainly one-to-one interviews, but also pair-depth interviews in a small number of cases, were used in all three projects.

The focus of the study undertaken in 1998 was on the views of 14 minority ethnic parents in relation to the primary school education their child/children were receiving in Highland schools, and included issues related to language provision, the curriculum, awareness of other cultures and experiences of racism. Although there were some gaps in nationalities, for example, lack of Chinese parents, the sample reflected a wide range of nationalities, including those from India, Japan, the Philippines, and Pakistan, East, West and South Africa and the Caribbean, reflecting the diversity of the minority ethnic population in the Highlands. This study was undertaken as part of a larger Scottish study funded by the Centre for Education for Racial Equality in Scotland (CERES), formerly based at the Moray House Institute of Education, presently located at the University of Edinburgh (see Arshad & Syed, 1998).

The second study on which this paper draws was undertaken in 2001, and was part of a wider evaluation of the Highland Social Inclusion Partnership (SIP) on young people, undertaken in collaboration with the University of Stirling (de Lima, 2002). The main aim of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of minority ethnic young people with regard to living in the Highlands. The topics explored included school/educational experience, community and family, identity, experience of racism, social and leisure activities and lifestyle issues.

Eighteen participants, between 12-18 years of age, participated in this study. All, except four, were born in Britain and Northern Ireland; the majority were born in Scotland and in the Highlands. Apart from one, most of the young people interviewed had lived in the Highlands for at least three years and in most cases for most of their lives. With regard to ethnic background, they represented a diverse group: Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, and East, West and South African, with just under half coming from mixed heritage backgrounds. The majority of the participants lived with both parents at home, with a very small number living in single parent households or with a step-father/mother and their 'biological' mother/father and only one living on their own.

And finally, the third study from which this article draws was undertaken between 2003-2004 (de Lima *et al.*, 2005a). Its main focus was on exploring post-school education choices and experiences amongst minority ethnic households. Although there were 112 minority ethnic people, aged between 16 and 60, the majority were between 20 and 50, from diverse ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds and geographical areas. The study used a combination

of methods: semi-structured interviews, focus groups and questionnaires. However, for the purposes of this paper, information is drawn from a small minority (around six) of young people aged 16-19 who participated in the interviews, mainly due to their experience of being at school being recent, and also because issues of identity (the main topic of this paper) appeared most relevant to this group.

Overall the sample sizes, especially with regard to young people, were small, and although it is important to avoid making generalisations, the issues highlighted by this research have been consistently supported by other similar research in the UK, and provide a basis for further exploration and research.

Policy and practice - Bridging the gap

Although there are some initiatives addressing the issue of diversity in rural areas, these tend to be largely dependent on the commitment of individuals, and the experience of Kerry (1998) in England continues to be relevant at the present time:

During the period when a governor was appointed with special responsibility for them, pupils began to be integrated into the school, but with the departure of this individual, management and governors moved closer to ignoring them again... Compliance with legislation (e.g., Race Relations Act 1976; the Children's Act 1989) depended in large measure upon the agent (in this case the governor/researcher) who was prepared, and able, to confront the passive attitudes that prevailed. (Kerry, 1998, p.62)

The lack of consistency and the dependence on individual professionals to address ethnicity/race equality policy and practice rather than these being institutionally embedded, combined with the prevalence of different views amongst professionals on the most appropriate approaches to addressing race equality within the school context, results in minority ethnic pupils having variable experiences across the sector often within the same local authority if not school (Arshad *et al.*, 2004; Kerry, 1998). This has been evident in the Highlands with regard to, for example, addressing bilingualism and racism, as well as in ensuring that parents have appropriate information about how the school system functions, as reflected in the following two quotes from the study involving parents with children at primary school:

My children went to two different schools and encountered two different experiences. In one school they had to deal with a fair amount of

racial abuse which wasn't dealt with properly by the school. However when they went to [...] they had a more positive experience and the school atmosphere was more relaxed and friendlier. (Parent with primary school children, of Pakistani origin, Highland, 1998)

The head teacher was really nice. She took the children and introduced them to the class and made them feel at home. They did make us feel welcome and gave us a paper on the Scottish education system in Japanese. (Parent with primary school children, of Japanese origin, Highland, 1998)

Parents with primary school children appeared to receive conflicting advice on how they should address issues of bilingualism and learning English. In a number of cases parents reported that they were discouraged by teachers from speaking to their children in their mother tongue at home as this was perceived as delaying their children's acquisition of English, yet in other cases, parents were actively encouraged to speak to their children in their mother tongue whilst at home.

In general, rural schools have tended to express unease about gathering data on ethnicity when they may have one or two pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, for fear of making them even 'more visible'. While understandable, this dilemma highlights the urgency of addressing the issue of ethnic categorisation by de-coupling the association of ethnicity with those who are defined as the 'other' or those who are 'non-white' and focusing on the deconstruction of the category 'white' ethnicities. Recognition that all individuals have some form of ethnic identity, though some may belong to a majority community whilst others are minorities, is an important first step in challenging the commonsense assumption that underpins public discourses on identity as being 'fixed'. It would also provide the basis for institutions (including education) to start addressing issues of flexible, multiple and changing identities, as well as developing a more nuanced understanding of power relationships which are at the core of experiences of discrimination within and between groups.

While policies designed to address the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) 2000 Act have been a driving force for change and consistency (CRE, 2003), evidence suggests there is some way to go:

On a continuum from a non-existent to a comprehensive and integrated system of multicultural and anti-racist education, the

documentary evidence suggests that a significant proportion of the sample schools are in a position of providing partial and somewhat ad hoc provision in terms of multicultural and anti-racist practice. (Arshad *et al.*, 2004, p.67)

Applauding the efforts made by some schools (including those in areas with small numbers of minority ethnic pupils) to embed race equality, Arshad *et al.* (2004) go on to suggest:

...that the capacity and the incentive to develop and to apply anti-racist perspectives are not dependent on the presence of high levels of minority ethnic people. It is likely that visionary and committed school leadership has been the main driver for developing the school's work in multicultural and anti-racist education. (p.67)

In addition to legislation, the issue of diversity within the rural schools has been brought to the fore since 2004 due to the scale of East European migration into rural areas (see de Lima *et al.*, 2005b; de Lima, Chaudhry, Whelton, & Arshad, 2007). While this is resulting in local authorities having to take diversity and to some extent race equality more seriously than they have hitherto done so, for example, by addressing issues such as English language teaching in schools and in the community, it also reveals the underlying tendency to respond to 'numbers' rather than the rights of all individuals to the same level of provision.

Addressing diversity - Maintaining identities

Studies undertaken in relation to rural minority ethnic households and young people have consistently highlighted the fact that the discussion of ethnicity or race equality in schools as well as education more generally continues to take place within fairly limited parameters, that of language provision, and occasionally in relation to religious education or talking about one's culture (de Lima, 2001, 2002; de Lima *et al.*, 2005a); this is consistent with the findings of research conducted by others (e.g., Arshad *et al.*, 2004). In the Highlands in a small minority of cases parents of primary school children reported that their children were encouraged to do a project on their culture and in a few instances parents were invited to the school to talk to pupils about their culture, including displaying cultural artefacts (e.g., traditional dress and food). Leaving aside what some might argue the questionable practice of involving parents in activities which may be described as limited and promoting the 'bhanga and samosa' cultural stereotypes which have long been discredited, even these types of involvement of parents were exceptions rather than the norm. In addition, within the context of religious education

young people from minority ethnic backgrounds remarked on the predominant emphasis on Christianity:

No very closed minded except for religious education but we only seem to do Christianity, there's all these other things like Sikhism and Hinduism and everything, all on the walls and everything, but we don't actually seem to do any of them. (Young female, of Indian origin, 2002)

With a few exceptions, the lack of recognition or sensitivity to the cultural needs of children and young people was consistently raised by parents as well as young people. The overwhelming view was that schools did not take into account their cultures, for example in relation to specific dietary needs such as the importance of 'halal' meat or the avoidance of certain foods. In the context of secondary school young people reported that in home economics classes they were expected to work with ingredients (e.g., 'non-halal' meat or beef) which were considered to be taboo in their culture.

The ability to practise one's religion was considered to be more difficult because of lack of access to places of worship and the diversity of the minority ethnic population in rural areas. In this context families have adapted and taken a pragmatic approach, adhering to those aspects which seem practical to maintain, and often households celebrated not only their own religious festivals but also the Christian festivals so that their children did not feel left out. What minority ethnic households reported as frustrating was that while they were prepared to make an effort to understand and participate where practical in the cultural traditions of the host community this was rarely reciprocated, reflecting, it was felt, a lack of interest in the culture of 'others' and strong underlying 'assimilationist' tendencies. Acknowledgement by the schools and more publicly of other non-Christian religious festivals was perceived by minority ethnic households as well as young people as important in enabling children and young people to sustain aspects of their cultural values and traditions, as well as in demonstrating that the schools and communities respect and value diversity in beliefs. Parents and young people emphasised the importance of seeing social inclusion as a two-way process: minority ethnic households adapting to aspects of the majority communities as well as majority communities making an effort to understand and accommodate aspects of minority ethnic culture.

As previously discussed, in a rural context there are few opportunities for young people to engage in activities which promote, sustain and value their

culture; consequently increasingly, minority ethnic households have taken steps to address these issues. For example, recently Muslim parents in the Inverness area have come together with assistance from some public and voluntary agencies to promote activities for children and young people from Muslim backgrounds. The Indian Association and the Chinese Association have for a number of years been organising celebration of their respective religious/other festivals, as well as family outings and opportunities for families to come together and socialise.

In addition to organising events households use a variety of methods to overcome social isolation and maintain links with their cultures; these include travelling great distances to access relevant facilities -- for example, families have reported sending their children to cities, a round trip which may take up to six hours, for mother tongue classes on a Saturday, organising private lessons for their children to be taught to recite the Quoran, use of the internet to maintain relationships with relatives living at a distance and visits to family and relatives overseas and within the UK.

Ticking the ethnic box - Inclusion and challenges of maintaining identity

It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the growing literature that exists on youth and identities in general. However, research on children who were from visible minority ethnic backgrounds or from a different culture in the South Wales valley where the population is predominantly 'white' found that issues of identity were perceived as being negotiated in 'racialised contexts' (Scourfield, Evans, Shah & Beynon, 2005), reflecting earlier research in mainly 'white' areas in England and Northern Ireland (e.g; Connolly & Keenan, 2002; Troyna & Hatcher, 1992). The issue of maintaining self-esteem and a sense of identity in the absence of others from a similar background is felt acutely by young people living in rural areas and can be a source of anxiety for parents. This is brought into sharp focus in relation to pressures on children and young people growing in predominantly 'white monocultural' rural environments to conform. For example, Sutherland (2004), growing up in Orkney as a 'black' child, vividly describes his ambivalence about growing up on the Island and the lengths he went to, to be accepted by his peers:

I developed an intense ambivalence about Orkney and its people. On the one hand, I felt very much a native and was treated as such, while on the other, I was denied the possibility of real integration because of my perceived otherness.[...] I expended all my energy

deflecting attention by telling racist jokes and being more daring than even the most deranged head cases. (Sutherland, 2004, p.5)

In the absence of local opportunities to maintain their culture, there can be intense pressure on families and young people to be seen to be 'assimilating' in the public domain. For example, parents may choose anglicised names for their children and young people will often feel embarrassed to speak to their parents in their mother tongue: 'I speak in Swahili, but the children don't reply in Swahili they reply in English. My son got to the point of asking me not to speak to him in Swahili' (Parent with primary children, of African origin, 1998). The dominance of a 'drink' culture in many rural communities can also result in restricting public spaces for young people who do not drink: 'Everyone here seems to be obsessed with drink; it's the main focus for the weekends. And most conversations revolve around I got drunk last night and then wandered down the road' (Young male, of Bangladeshi origin, 2005).

In the face of strong pressures to conform many young people struggle to maintain the fine balance between their cultural norms and practices and those of the majority community. The assumption that racialised identities apply to mainly 'non-white' people can be even more evident in rural areas and experiences of young people brought up in the Highlands reflects how culture and/or religion plays an important role in defining notions of 'belonging' and 'identity' as well as the pressures to assimilate. For example, a young person when asked if he saw himself staying on to study in the area replied:

I would definitely not choose to stay here. I have been here all my life and would choose to go away as far as possible. It is very hard to keep your identity and your culture. It is nearly impossible, if you want to be accepted you feel forced to be like the others in the main culture. You feel so alone: that is one reason why I feel I would like to go somewhere where there are more Asians. Here in some senses I feel like a foreigner. I do not feel I fit in. People's society here is so different. I am a Muslim and they do not understand what it is to be a Muslim.

He went on to elaborate further:

If schools and colleges don't know about other cultures, they won't value other cultures. The schools and Scotland as a whole are 'culturally illiterate'. If (adults and teachers) are culturally illiterate themselves they are not going to be able to talk and value others' cultures are they? They

cannot value something they are not aware of. (Young male, of Bangladeshi origin, Highland, 1998)

Young people from minority ethnic backgrounds in the Highlands have consistently found the issue of identity problematic. The exclusive nature of ethnic categorisation, for example in the Census, was frequently commented on by young people from minority ethnic households in the Highlands. Questions on ethnicity were described as being constraining and unhelpful and they consistently emphasised the lack of choice when asked to categorise themselves by ethnic group: 'They should have many boxes, you know, just not a couple but many boxes. Because you're forced to choose between such closed minded boxes' (Young female of Indian origin, Highland, 2002).

Although the majority of young people did not identify themselves as being an 'ethnic minority' and perceived themselves as being no different from other young people - difference, particularly their 'visibility', was frequently foregrounded in their interactions with their peers:

When asked I usually don't know what to say. It's not like we're from Pakistan or anything because we've only been there like twice and don't really speak Urdu fluently and we're not completely Scottish either. People expect that you come from another country and that you've just been here like for three years or something. (Young female, of Pakistani origin, 2002)

I get a lot of people that ask and a lot of times at school they ask 'where are you from?' And, I say from Inverness and they say, 'well how come you are a different colour?' And I say like well my mum and dad were from India. But I am from Scotland and have lived here all my life and my parents happened to have come from India. People should step back and think about what they are saying rather than stereotype people all the time. (Young female, of Indian origin, 2002)

For many young people their 'visibility' can also frequently become the basis of racist name-calling and bullying:

There was one guy who told me to go back to Africa, 'you don't belong here - go back to Africa', that kind of thing and saying horrible things about Africa, you know just trying to annoy me. Say they were doing a topic on Kenya, a real ramshackle house would come past and they'd say 'Look there is [my] house' and remarks like that. (Young male, of South African origin, 2002)

When asked how they would describe themselves, the majority of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds chose to identify themselves in 'hyphenated' terms, e.g., 'Scottish-Indian' or 'Scottish-Chinese'. Whilst most of them expressed their hyphenated identities in a number of ways - for example in terms of nation, geographical location, where they were born or lived most of their lives or in relation to their parents' origins - a small number also identified part of their identities in religious terms, e.g., Muslim-Scottish.

These findings reflect the complex, but flexible and constantly changing nature of identity, as well as the use of 'bi-cultural' terms highlighted by Saeed, Blain and Forbes (1999) in their study of identity among young people of Pakistani origin in Glasgow. Challenging the simplistic binary categories used to describe identity, they argue: 'Furthermore, this identity could challenge those who continue to use the simplistic discursive oppositions of British/Immigrant or indeed black/white. In short, an identity which is inclusive rather than exclusive, and intelligent rather than simplistic, needs to be fostered' (p.840). However, as Saeed *et al.* argue, whilst the employment of hyphenated identities amongst the young people of Pakistani origin may reflect their use of identity in flexible ways, if there are to be fundamental changes in the way identities are conceptualised and enacted out, there also needs to be '...an equivalent flexibility in indigenous white formulations of what constitutes legitimate inclusive identity' (p.841). To achieve this there is a need to challenge the tendency to reify 'race' as a difference that is difficult to surmount and its reliance on simplistic notions of equating 'blacks' as victims and 'whites' as oppressors.

Conclusion: Moving towards inclusive identities, deconstructing 'white'

'We are all, in that sense, ethnically located and our ethnic identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are' (Hall, 1995, p.258). The predominant tendency to focus on the ethnicity of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds whilst ignoring the ethnicity of 'majority white' young people not only reinforces the invisibility of 'whiteness' and fails to address issue of power, but also problematises minority ethnic groups. It also fails to provide a platform from which issues of identity as being multiple and flexible can be explored and discussed as being relevant to all young people in rural communities, and provide them with the skills required to function in a world which is increasingly diverse, whether they choose to stay on in rural communities or move to urban areas.

Although, as previously highlighted, the research

from which this paper draws has involved small samples making it difficult to generalise, it does nevertheless make an important contribution to the debate on ethnicity and identity, which has tended to be largely conducted within an urban frame of reference, as well as providing a basis for further research.

It has highlighted the importance of opening up the debate on what constitutes 'legitimate inclusive identity' by arguing that it is important to challenge the previously discussed tendency to conflate ethnicity and 'ethnic minorities' with 'non-white'. Education and schools in particular play a significant role in '[...] the production of racial identities via the curricula, beliefs, values and attitudes propagated. In this sense, they cannot be regarded as institutions which passively reflect or mechanically reproduce social relations of race' (Nayak, 1999, p.185). The tendency 'to disavow the racial exclusivity of white ethnicity', as argued by Rutherford (1997) cited in Nayak (1999, p.177) on the one hand, 'but never to analyse or try and understand it [...], on the other hand, has meant that we know and understand very little about the "racialised identities" of the "white" majority'.

Based on ethnographic research in the North-east of England Nayak (1999, p.178) explored the 'meaning of whiteness in young people's lives', and argues that 'far from being monolithic, white racial identities are complex variable social phenomena' (p.184). He goes on to highlight the ways in which the emphasis on multiculturalism can result in feelings of being left out among the 'ethnic majority' by failing to engage with 'whiteness':

Here whiteness is construed as normative, the blank canvass of experience [...] The perception that some teachers had was that white, working class students had no culture, yet this was in direct contrast to how young people experienced 'Geordie' identity within their locality. (Nayak, 1999, p.186)

Nayak's (1999) research highlights the importance of developing an understanding of ethnicity/ race and identity as social constructs which are complex, multifaceted and changing, as well as recognising the highly contingent nature of ethnicity and race with regard to geographical location as well as institutional sites (e.g., school, community, etc.). He demonstrates how storytelling, local historical research and auto/biography are valuable mechanisms which could be used by schools (but also more generally within a community context) to engage with pupils from the so-called 'ethnic majority', to deconstruct 'white ethnicities' in a way that is both positive and constructive in addressing

issues of ethnicity and race. If education more generally and schools in particular are going to have a real impact with regard to addressing issues of ethnicity/race and discrimination in rural areas, then providing people with the opportunities and tools with which to explore the contextual nature of white Scottish ethnicity, as well as the multifaceted (regional, gender, class and so on) forms of identity young people inhabit, is critical to developing a more inclusive identity, which is located in a deeper understanding of the contingent nature of ethnicity as well as the power relationships within which ethnicities are embedded.

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