UNIVERSITY OF PADOVA

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Final Dissertation

The intersectionality of social identities and bicultural belonging among Muslim young adults in Italy: An exploratory study.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The present qualitative study sought to examine the intersectionality of social identities, specifically ethnic, religious, and national identities, to understand bicultural belonging among young Muslim adults residing in Italy. This meticulous investigation focused on further comprehending how bicultural belonging developed, which is primarily grounded on the theory of social identity, as posited by Tajfel (1981), basing the knowledge to gauge the role of a social group in the reconciliation of social identities. This study aimed to bridge the gap in the existing literature (Cesareo, 2022; Rizzo et al., 2022) by exploring social identities to advance our understanding of how they interact, coexist, or come into conflict, which subsequently influences the trajectory of individuals' identity development and corresponding bicultural belonging. A sample of 100 Italian-Muslims (aged between 18 and 26 years) was recruited and individually interviewed online. Thematic analysis was employed to derive themes from participants' responses to open-ended questions, and identity maps were analyzed to address our research questions. The findings indicated that young adult Muslims go through a reflective phase to reconcile their social identities, subsequently harmonizing their multiple identities as they evolve with age. Additionally, the study highlighted the strong association between ethnic and religious identities, as a substantial number of participants viewed these identities as intertwined, with a sizeable percentage of participants reporting to be religiously devout believers. In succinct, the intersectionality of social identities, whether integrated, parallel, or conflictual, holds crucial significance in fostering bicultural belonging. Lastly, the study offered suggestions for future research and policy implications.

SUMMARY

Muslims have resided in Europe for an extended period, owing to their relocation from various regions of the world. Similarly, Italy experienced a significant increase in immigration from countries where Muslims predominate in the past twenty years. Based on Pew research center data (2020), Muslims make up about 4% of Italy's population, thus making them a minority in the country. The heterogeneous Muslim community in Italy comprised diverse immigrants from North Africa, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey, and other countries, who embraced distinct sectorial faiths within Islam, encapsulating Muslims as a minority in the country. Current research-oriented discourse primarily focused on the bicultural assimilation of Muslim immigrants, encompassing inquiries regarding their attire, ethnic affiliation, ethos, and religious practices (Rizzo et al., 2022).

Muslims in Italy played a significant role in creating, understanding, and encouraging interreligious interaction. Despite being a minority, their faith surpassed the notion of religion in the country. It is imperative to underscore that the study endeavored to investigate the diverse social identities, and how participants develop bicultural belonging within communal groups linked to their ethnic, religious, and cultural roots. Subsequently, this will aid in comprehending the reconciliation strategies of their social identities in a multi-layered contextual setting, while concurrently fostering bicultural belongingness with multiple social identities.

The opening chapter provides an overview of immigration to Europe, encompassing both historical and contemporary trends. It also delved into the current state of immigration in Italy. Furthermore, the chapter explores the topic of Muslims in Europe

and Italy, presenting a comparative analysis that spanned from the past to the present. This comparative approach aims to provide a holistic understanding of Italian Muslims. Additionally, the chapter shed light on the sociohistorical context of Muslim immigrants in Italy. Lastly, the chapter touches upon the bicultural belonging of Muslims in Italy.

The second chapter of this study provides a comprehensive overview of its theoretical foundations. The chapter commences with the study sample on emerging adulthood. Later, it moves on to elucidation of the social identity approach, which accentuated the implications of culture, identity, and a unique perspective for understanding identity through the lens of social representation. For young Muslims raised in Italy, a hyphenated sense of belonging to their ethnic values, mainstream culture, and religious context of origin, in parallel with the cultural context of the host country, permeated their lives. Moreover, the chapter elaborates on social identities, which encompassed national, ethnic, and religious identities, and delved into the factors that contribute to the greater significance of coexisting identities in the lives of Muslim Italians. The chapter also explores Muslim religious practices, contextualized, in Italy.

The third chapter elucidates the research methodology, which encompassed research objectives, participant information, procedure, and tools employed to gauge the constructs. Subsequently, the fourth chapter presents a comprehensive summary of the findings addressing four of the research questions. Finally, the concluding chapter expands upon the study findings, and limitations, by emphasizing potential future recommendations and policy implications.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This qualitative investigation aimed to investigate the role of subjective and social factors in the intersectionality of social identities regarding ethnicity, religion, and nationality in young adults of Islamic faith who were either born, raised, or presently residing in Italy, and how they cultivated their sense of bicultural belongingness over time, which is a multifaceted and intricate process. Specifically, the study sought to explore the personal experiences of the study participants regarding their religious background considering their coexisting identities, with a focus on the identity reconciliation strategies employed by young Muslim adults between the ages of 18 to 26 years, who resided in Italy. The research is significant in its attempt to explore the participants' subjective experiences of their identities and interactions with their religious and cultural backgrounds, and how they reconciled to develop bicultural belonging in various contexts.

1.1 Immigration to Europe: history and current trends

More than 3 percent of people on Earth live outside of their birth country, which equates to 232 million people. According to IOM (2022), the estimated number of international migrants is 281 million, which contributes to the migratory flows that entered Europe in 2019 when compared to the past ten years increasing the migrant population from 2.8% to 3.6% in the world. Europe had specifically gone through a dramatic increase in

immigration following World War II as many countries looked to rebuild and replenish their populations (Steiner, 2023). In recent times, immigration become a contentious political issue in Europe, with certain countries exhibiting outrage and hostility towards refugees and immigrants. Nonetheless, a substantial number of individuals from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia continue to migrate to Europe, seeking better economic opportunities and refuge from war and persecution. The demographics of migrants are shaped by various factors, and immigration to Europe remained a complex topic even today (Bonizzoni & Belloni, 2023). The reasons behind migration to Europe are multifarious and comprise push and pull factors, including economic prospects, political stability, and cultural exchange, from the early days of European expansionism to the contemporary era of globalization (Bagovas et al., 2023).

The history of immigration to Europe, contemporary trends, difficulties, and possibilities brought on mass immigration, especially from the Global South in the early twentieth century. To this time, the upsurge in immigration has been attributed to transformations in demographic, labor scarcity, and geopolitical considerations in Europe. These modifications are currently intimately linked to industrialization and globalization, as migrants represent a dynamic force in global economy (Cesareo, 2022).

Europe experienced a significant refugee ‘crisis’ over the past decade. During the initial industrial period, the migration in Europe was predominantly local, as individuals moved from southern Mediterranean countries to Northwestern Europe (Bonizzoni & Belloni, 2023). Various reasons, such as political unrest, military wars, and economic

downturns in nations like Syria, Afghanistan, regions of Southeast Asia, and Iraq, have contributed to this situation. Consequently, millions of people had been compelled to leave their homes and seek refuge in Europe, placing their lives in jeopardy (Bilgic, Ali, & Pace, 2017). Immigration brought potential and challenges to Europe. On the one hand, it may support population variety, economic expansion, and cultural interaction. On the other hand, immigration may also lead to social, economic, and political difficulties, particularly when it was seen as a threat to national identity and to the welfare system (Kahanec & Zimmermann, 2008).

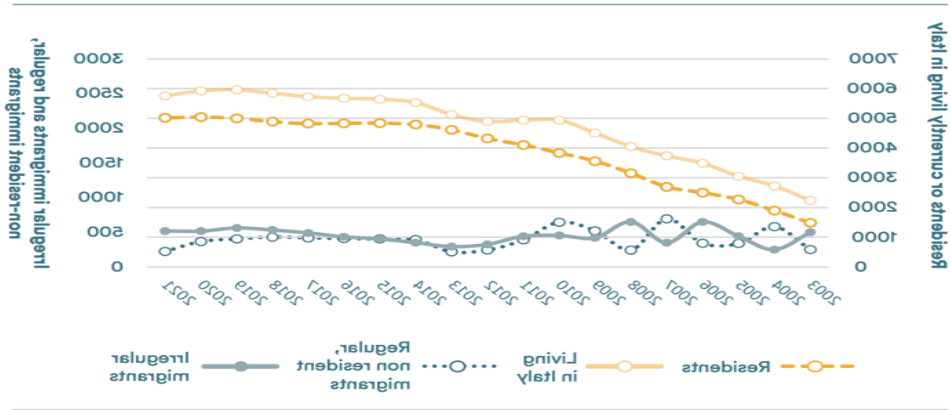
Interestingly, a considerable number of migrants came from countries with colonial and unique bilateral relations. The diversification of migrants can be attributed to globalization and ongoing economic inequality. Consequently, the ethnic, religious, and cultural composition of Europe had undergone notable changes to advance diversity. Historically, after Christianity, Islam is the second-largest religion in Europe, and is experiencing exponential growth due to accelerated immigration (Buonfino et al., 2007). In Europe, both religions carried an extensive history. Even though there has been numerous difficulties and disputes related to immigration to Europe, immigrants have had a tremendous impact on the cultural and economic landscape of the region. Despite having increased difficulties with the Muslim populations that have been living in Europe, a range of other religions are also flourishing, as of today, the continent's population becomes more secular on one side and religiously diverse on the other side concerning immigrant identity.

1.2 The state of immigration in Italy

Italy is sparingly new in terms of the influx of immigrants, who profited immigrants from the country's economic boom and the initial immigration regulations. It was a country of emigration during the post-World War II era, and up until the middle of the 1970s, a trend that had a significant impact on a portion of its economic, social, and political history (Kahanec & Zimmermann, 2008).

During the oil crisis of 1973–1984, when England, Germany, and particularly neighboring France blocked their borders to immigration, immigration in Italy started to take off, which is relatively recent. Nonetheless, the first significant migration waves occurred later, between 1984 and 1989, when between 700,000 and 800,000 individuals immigrated to Italy. On the basis of data from the 2000s onwards, the distribution, as of January 1, 2003, to 2021, by status, of foreign nationals in Italy (in thousands) has been shown to be slightly increased. Since then, the flows had been gradually growing, with a sharp rise in the foreign population during the past two decades (Zincone, 2006).

Figure 1. *Distribution of residing foreign nationals in Italy*



Source. ISTAT (2021), Annual report

In recent times, according to ISTAT (2021), around 5.2 million registered foreigners, and immigrants without Italian citizenship, lived on Italian territory as of 1 January 2021, making up 8.7% of the total resident population. Over 3.4 million foreigners are not from Europe. Romanians made up most of the foreign population (20.8%), followed by Albanians (8.4%) and Moroccans (8.3%) in terms of population. From 2003 through 2021, the immigrant population in Italy grew, stabilizing in recent years, and then declining by 0.1% in 2018.

Recently, immigration became a topic of contention due to evolving policies in Italy. Italy implemented a stop-and-contain approach toward incoming flows and has established stringent exclusion criteria for citizenship, resulting in heated discussions lately (Cesareo, 2022). However, Italy has also developed comparatively lenient provisions, in the past, for undocumented immigrants in various social sectors to enable them to work. This approach has made Italy one of the few European countries to acknowledge the necessity of an active entrance strategy (Finotelli & Sciortino, 2009). Nonetheless, the integration patterns of immigrants are perceived as sluggish by natives, and preserving diverse co-existing ethnic and religious identities were viewed as a threat to the host culture and society in general (Algan et al., 2012).

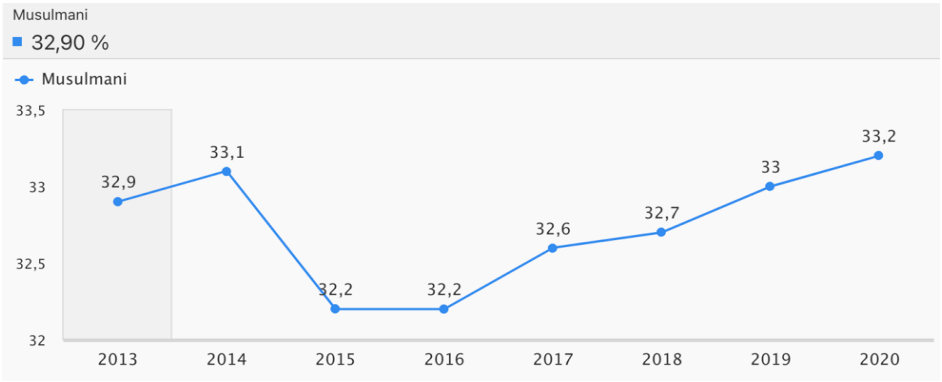
The impact of immigration brought about significant changes in Italian society, affecting its social, cultural, economic, and political milieu. Finding the ideal balance between the requirements of Italian society and those of immigrants is now being worked on by the country (Boeri et al., 2011). The divergent social practices, cultural-linguistic traditions, grappling, and resolving internal socio-political conflicts within the Italian

state served to highlight the entirety of diversity and demonstrate that it is possible for diverse people to coexist (Triandafyllidou, 1999).

1.3 Muslims in Europe and Italy

The religion of Muslims (Islam) is acknowledged to be the second-largest religion in Europe and Italy, although the precise number of Muslims is still subject to dispute as it is complex to define religious affiliation for the Muslims residing in Europe due to the intersectionality of social identities, which reflected how they identify themselves. Among the 25 million Muslims who live in Europe, more than one in ten reside in Italy, as Islam is the second most popular faith after Catholicism. The distribution of Italian Muslim immigrants, as illustrated in Figure 2, depicts a noticeable increase in the Muslim population from 2013 to 2020. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of Italian Muslim immigrants, who were actively engaging in religious observance, has experienced a notable upsurge (Gattino et al., 2016). Yet, it cannot be taken for granted that the Muslims in Europe exhibit varying degrees of religious dedication from the past to the present era.

Figure 2. *Distribution of Italian Muslim immigrants from 2013 to 2020*

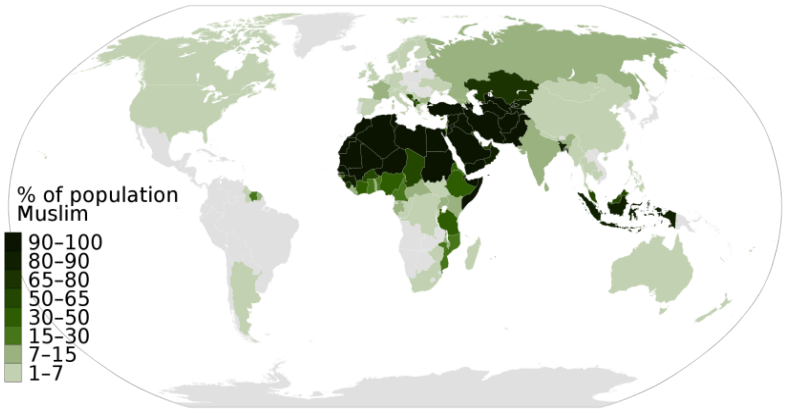


Source. Openpolis (2021)

According to Pew Research Centre (2017), there is an increasing number of second-generation Muslims living in Europe, which encouraged contemporary researchers to investigate how Muslims deal with the difficulties of integrating their religious faith with European communities, specifically with the dichotomy of identity (Crul et al., 2012; Voas & Fleischmann, 2012).

The Islamic religion in Muslim-majority countries is impacted by local history, culture, and socio-political circumstances, making it challenging to differentiate between cultural and religious elements. The manifestation of this fact is clearly discernible in Figure 3, wherein the proportion of adherents of Islam is conspicuously illustrated across different countries. Few studies (Phalet et al., 2018; Rizzo et al., 2022) highlighted the day-to-day struggles of second-generation Muslims in terms of religious and ethnic practices versus the social context in which they are living; however, further research is warranted.

Figure 3. *Countries highlighting the Muslim majority on a world map*



Source. IOM (2022)

Among all other European countries, Italy's history of Muslim immigration is contemporary in its growth (Allievi, 2014). A substantial number of asylum seekers from predominantly Muslim countries had migrated to Europe in recent years. From the year 2010 to 2018, an estimated 3.7 million Muslims came to Europe, with 1.3 million of them receiving refugee status in addition to the 2.5 million migrants who entered legally as employees and students (Eurostat, 2021). The Italian Muslim population in 2020 accounted for 2.7 million, or 4.9% of the country's total population, which included both permanent residents and Italian citizens, and is expected to increase in the coming years. (Openpolis, 2021).

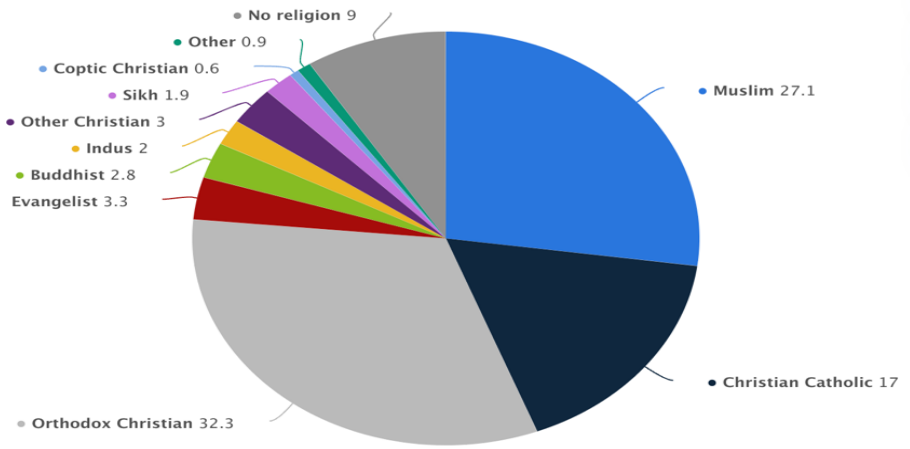
The revival of Muslim religious identity in Europe resulted in a deeper understanding of faith and a stricter observance of religious practices, which has engendered Islam as a religion to become a defining mark of identity for many European Muslims in more recent times (Rizzo et al., 2020). While some Muslims do not explicitly showcase their religious practices and ethos in their daily activities, there are others, for whom their Muslim identity played a substantial role in shaping their everyday lives and who are open about their religious beliefs and practices. It is worth exploring the various forms of Muslim identity and subjective religious observance in different contexts to provide valuable insights into this complex phenomenon (Zúquete, 2018).

1.3.1 A comparative understanding from past to present: Who is Italian Muslim?

Islam's advent to Italy has significantly altered the country's religious landscape. Islam was brought to Italy through immigrants, like in other European countries. Italy had started to draw Muslims during the 1970s and 1980s, from North Africa and Albania. In

the following Figure 4, the current distribution of Muslims religious adherence among the population of Italy in percentage is discernible, along with the presence of alternative religions being exercised in the country, as of the year 2021. Almost a third of the 3,987,100 immigrants in total, or around 6% of the Italian population, are Muslims. The Muslim community has a wide range of ethnicities, languages, and cultural traditions (Tacchini, 2020). So far, Moroccan Muslims are the largest foreign Muslim community, with 400.000 people, followed by Albania (202.000), Bangladesh (112.000), Pakistan (108.000), Egypt (102.000), Senegal (93.000), and Tunisia (92.000). It further divides Muslims who are both born inside and outside of Italy. It further comprises religious sect division: Sunnis, Shiites, and Sufis. About half a million are the offspring of Muslim couples with at least one Italian citizen parent who gave birth in Italy (Ciocca, 2019).

Figure 4. *Distribution of practiced religions in Italy*



Source. Eurostat (2021), Annual report

Italian Muslims are unique and comparatively connected to other referentiality facets which explained their religiosity in juxtaposition. To elaborate on the viewpoint, Muslims' sense of national belongingness is (in some cases) heightened if the countries

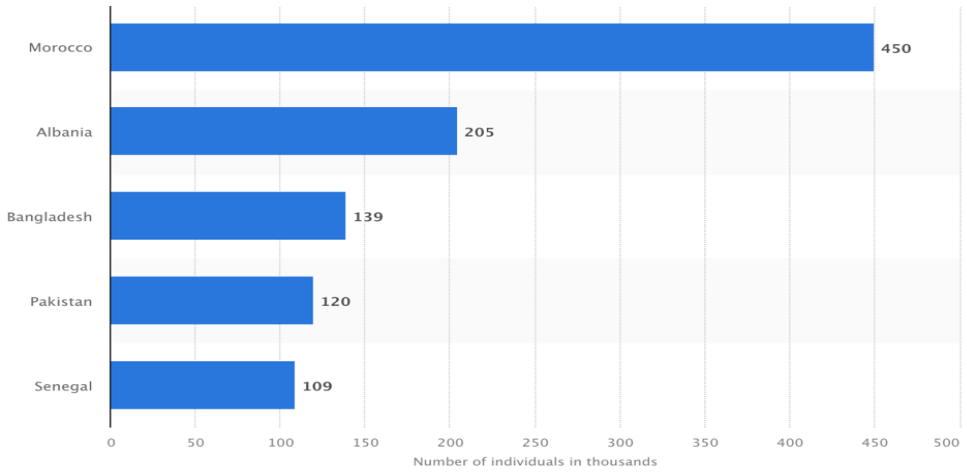
of their ancestry had a strong sense of national identity that borders on their personal/ancestral nationalism. Such feelings, which were initially sparked by Turkey, Morocco, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, are growing less strong with each passing generation, but never quite disappeared due to an intermingled ethnic affiliation of defining their religious identity, even if certain Muslim populations end up becoming citizens of Italy, as is frequently the case (Cesareo, 2022).

The integration process of Muslims in Italy warranted meticulous exploration - one aspect is whether they follow the same pattern as other immigrants. Another aspect could be the link between integration and identity development to decipher the role of their Islamic background in facilitating or impeding their identity development. In an Italian diaspora, the dichotomy of religious and national affiliation takes on greater significance. This is a crucial question that still must be answered. The religious affiliation in Muslim Italians encompasses more than just following a specific set of rules; rather, it is shaped by a complex set of customs, ethnic background, shared beliefs, and symbolic behaviors that others in the Muslim community use to define themselves and their relationships, which further explained the benefits and challenges of their bicultural belonging with the host country (Leszczensky, Maxwell, & Bleich, 2021).

It is challenging to come up with a clear definition of who are Italian Muslims and what it means to be a "Muslim," as this classification is based on a variety of subjective standards, which are in a constant transition. In Figure 5, it is apparent that the distribution of Muslims residing in Italy, as of 2021, is presented based on their most frequent countries of origin, measured in thousands. Although it is not perfect from a religious

standpoint, a broader group that can be labeled "people from Muslim countries" migrating to Italy can approximate this debate, to some extent. The diverse countries of origin from ethnic respect, and the speed with which migrants enter and settle in Italy, deserved special attention in understanding the migration cycle (Modood & Triandafyllidou, 2012).

Figure 5. *Distribution of Muslim population based on countries of origin*



Source. Eurostat (2021), Annual report

Many Muslims of the Islamic faith, predominantly hailed from Italy, bred, and brought up in the country, encountered a multitude of obstacles in their attempts to assimilate into the host society. Recent studies delved into the religiosity of young Muslim immigrants of Italian origin, revealing that the second generation of Muslim youth strives to reconcile their religious beliefs with the host society's values and cultural standards (Vietze et al., 2019). According to empirical data, second-generation Muslims defined Islam less in terms of customs and rituals (such as religious vigor; Fleischmann & Phalet, 2012) and more in terms of a spiritual, personal, and symbolic understanding of what it meant to be a Muslim (Skandrani et al., 2012). Therefore, it is of significance

to acknowledge that the Italian second generation is persistently facing pressure, which has led to a resurgence of religious practices as a coping mechanism.

Understanding the multi-layered context of Italian Muslims as more of a communal or individualistic faith, from the past to this contemporary period with the changing dynamics of religiosity in Muslims, brought out a variety of potential Muslim identities, which are further required to be researched and categorized, as a result of, individualized or communal religious practice. Studies had focused to understand the link between religiosity and Islamic rules about attire and external perception from an outsider's perspective (see, Alietti & Padovan, 2018; Giuliani, Tagliabue & Regalia, 2018). These studies pointed out that, although many outsiders perceive the hijab for women and covered body rule for men as a sign of faith, many Muslims in Italy choose to wear a certain attire of their volition. Yet, there is a disagreement about the overall effects of this individualization or communal association of practicing religion among Muslim Italians.

It is crucial to understand that there are several distinct forms of "belonging to Islam", which is defined with respect to ethnic affiliation and national belonging. It makes the reality of Muslim Italians more complex than observed. Assuming that everyone who is directly or indirectly of Muslim background adheres to the Islamic faith is not that straightforward. It is quite uncertain to understand the considerable fraction of the population following religion in practice of fundamental regiment, as nothing about the current situation allows us to predict whether this portion will grow in terms of practicing religion (Dassetto, Ferrari & Maréchal, 2007).

1.3.2 Sociohistorical context of Muslim immigrants in Italy

The Italian Muslim migratory cycle is quite nascent as compared to migration in Europe, and it also seems to be unique due to some of its inherent qualities (James, 2008). The variety of countries of origin and the influx of people entering Italy and settling add work to the migration cycle, which impacted the socioeconomic and historical context of Muslims in Italy (Baldassar, 2001). Due to multiple factors, the religious influence had already been felt by the first generation, without the need for familial brought-up or the procreation of a second generation to which the first generation sought to impart its own religious identity. In a few cases, devout Muslims place great emphasis on conforming to state protocols and cultural environments that allow them to practice their faith in a proper manner. This implied that religion strengthened the positive effect of being a part of the Islamic community on the involvement of immigrants in their host societies, or, at the very least, minimizes negative consequences linked to national identity (Annalisa, 2010).

Van Bergen, Feddes, and Ruyters (2017) conducted research on young Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands, a socio-political setting in which Muslims, who were the largest minority and are particularly represented as "the negative other," stand for beliefs whose religious ideas were at odds with those of the West. Most members of the Muslim community are first-generation immigrants who are still deeply connected to their home country (ethnic affiliation) on a socio-emotional, traditional, and linguistic, level (Bagavos et al., 2023). Many individuals within their ethnic community strived to strike a balance between adopting the best of both worlds without sacrificing their ethnic identity or faith allegiance.

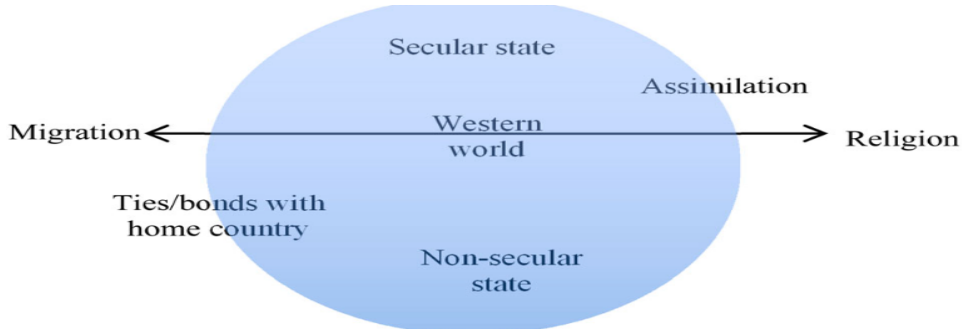
It is true that Muslims want to profit from the social and economic advantages of living in Italy by also not surrendering or altering these aspects of their identity in any manner to reap the benefits from their host country (Stefano, 2003). This involvement makes them lucrative members of civil society. For instance, there are a few Muslim organizations that are established with the explicit goal of acquiring a middle ground ("Intesa") between Muslim immigrants and state laws to protect the rights of Italian Muslims by allowing them to possess cemeteries for conducting funerals and halal markets. However, the goal of granting Italian Muslims equal footing in Italy's religious economy is not fully achieved due to the limited permissions to practice religious faith, which significantly hinders their complete participation in Italian society and reasons them to feel disconnected from the country (Just, Sandovici & Listhaug, 2014).

The immigration process concerned social issues, such as integration, security, and employment rate. It elucidates the subject of the assimilation of Italian Muslims into the social framework, including their involvement as taxpayers and their access to state employment, particularly in white-collar professions. The extent of Italian Muslims active contribution to the social fabric remains ambiguous (Jose, 2005). Islam is gaining a foothold in Italy - the presence of Islamic institutions such as mosques, Sufis, community centers, and converts in Italy reflects the growing participation of Italian Muslims. It further attempted to mobilize and unite the Islamic community, which nurtures shared economic and social objectives, and additionally, promotes inclusion in the form of acceptance of their ethnic, national, and religious diversity while living in the host country (Zincone, 2006).

1.3.3 The role of religion in the lives of Muslims living in Italy

Religion holds significant importance for Muslims residing in Italy and is regarded as a fundamental element of their self-awareness. While many individuals followed their parental faith, others do so voluntarily, despite some contesting the necessity of religious affiliation. There are numerous circumstances where following a religion is mandatory, and it demonstrates a connection with migration and home culture, as can be seen in Figure 6. Some scholars argue that culture had its conjoined roots in religion, and this can also be seen in Western contexts, where Christianity is reflected in different cultural aspects such as school plays, holidays, and so on (Lipnicka & Peciakowski, 2021). Religious integration of Muslims is steadily seeping in, as prayer halls, temples, and ethnic prelate. Furthermore, there is a noticeable rise in the construction and development of mosques (Cesari, 2014; Modood & Triandafyllidou, 2012). When Muslim immigrants of the same faith settle in Italy, they typically form a social network with the local population of the same faith who also share an affiliation with the same religion, thereby forming a cohesive social network.

Figure 6. *Interaction between religion and migration*



Source. Eurostat (2021), Annual report

According to Roy (2010), the representation of Italian Muslims' identity is in a state of limbo between the polarities of positive and negative, which consequently caused a strain on their relationship with the ethnically affiliated country alongside their efforts to assimilate into the host country. This situation usually results in a heightened level of tension between the individualistic and communal aspects of the Islamic faith, as both extremes are diametrically opposed on the spectrum. Hence, Italian Muslims are diverse, and their practices are based on different factors and influences. For them, religion is more than just inheritance: it covers a broad array of feelings and pursuits connected to their religious belief system, perceived to surpass the mere-ness of human existence, and finding spirituality in the specific way of Islamic living.

1.4 Bicultural belonging of Muslims in Italy

Early studies had made the assumption that immigrants will eventually be affiliated with the host society through a standard unidirectional process as they receive economic and social safety (Gordon, 1964), which drastically nullified over time. The concept of belonging is "desiring to be or having the want to be associated to the other longing to be something/someone other" (Pendakur, 2003). According to Nguyen and Benet-Martnez (2007), bicultural belonging showcased patterns of cultural identification and perceptions, offering a link between the two cultures to which they belonged.

The bicultural belonging of Italian Muslims delineated the relationship between their faith, ethnicity, and degree of acculturation especially pertinent to the Italian context, where most of its citizens still identify religiously as Catholics (at least in accordance

with mass socialization), and where even among immigrants, most people are Christians (especially Orthodox). However, second, in the population are Muslims. The latter, nonetheless, are at risk of being stigmatized even after acquiring Italian citizenship, whilst the former may depend on a largely positive attitude of acceptance (Ricucci, 2020).

Blending two cultures seems to be particularly difficult for Italian Muslims in the Italian socio-political setting, characterized by intense cultural irresolution, desolation, and deficit of emotional ties when an immigrant goes through a conflictual identity.

1.4.1 Role of identity and bicultural belonging

Integrating one's multiple selves into a homogenous image of self is a key issue in teenage and emerging adulthood, especially for the expanding population of "citizens" who identify themselves as bicultural (Erikson, 1963; Syed, 2010). For individuals who grew up in diverse environments, the development of an integrated bicultural identity was an important and essential aspect of their identity (Schwartz et al., 2015). Constructing one's identity is a lifelong endeavor, particularly important in bicultural identity formation. It involves establishing meaningful connections between past experiences and the present self (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

Interestingly, there is a longitudinal study with Muslim ethnic minority early adolescents (sample size of 2000 participants mostly comprising Turkish Germans), conducted by Fleischmann, Leszczensky, & Pink (2019), they examined multiple identities trajectory over three waves. The findings indicated that there are predominantly positive associations between ethnic, religious, and national identity among minority

youth to facilitate bicultural belonging. However, experiences of frequent discrimination tend to decrease their German identity and influenced the sense of bicultural belonging.

Moreover, Sartawi and Sammut (2012) conducted an ethnographic study that emphasized the importance of bicultural Muslim-British identities. Their research findings demonstrated that the conflicting ethos of these two identities generates conflict in the covert moments of daily life. In a similar vein, Ozyrut (2013) investigated bicultural belonging in terms of how Muslims in the US and the Netherlands created a self-narrative amid their national and religious identities, reflecting both their uniqueness and the context in which they lived. Previous studies pointed out the significant influence of identity development and bicultural belonging in the lives of migrant Muslims, using common theories on biculturalism and acculturation in support of their claim (e.g., Ward et al., 2018). It is still hazy to understand how dual identifiers feel about their bicultural belonging because there has been scant evidence in recent studies on the relationship between identity and bicultural belonging (Wiley et al., 2019).

1.4.2 Cultural socialization among Muslim youth living in Italy

A large proportion (approximately 54%) of Muslim youth living in Italy is mostly from the first generation, and the remaining proportion is from the second generation (Giuliani & Tagliabue, 2018). It takes ample time for Muslim youth to adapt to Italian socio-cultural awareness because of their close linkage with ethnic and religious connections. Peer groups among Muslim youth are an important socialization tool, in addition to the

essential function of the family, which may affect how youth from immigrant families maneuver between a heritage-cultural community and host country (Karatas et al., 2020).

Unlike parents, second generations of young immigrants are a part of fluid and multi-ethnic cultures that go beyond the notion of the heritage country's culture and norms and are not perceived by them as a homogenous vessel (Rosina, 2021). It is plausible that the significant value that Italians attribute to religion alongside their indifference towards the presence of Muslims could potentially clarify the perception of Muslims' bicultural identity as being incompatible with the cultural conventions of Italy (Giuliani & Tagliabue, 2015).

Another study, conducted by Venditto et al. (2022) found that participants with a combination of Italian and Muslim cultures see their identity as positive, adaptable, and situational. This supports Fleischmann and Phalet's (2018) observation that there is no inherent conflict between European national identities and Muslims' religious identities. Therefore, the present study aimed to look at the intersectionality of social identities to which one may belong and feel a sense of bicultural affiliation. Social identities had been shown to be helpful in fostering group membership (Glasford & Dovidio, 2011).

Thus, it is crucial to validate and comprehend the experiences associated with young immigrants' social identities in a diverse environment. This study particularly emphasizes the significance of co-existing social identities, with time-specific pathways (for instance, day-to-day life) that can enhance bicultural belonging to facilitate young immigrants, especially those who experience high levels of identity confusion or bicultural exclusion in the light of Italy's growing population diversity.

CHAPTER 2

IDENTITY FACETS AMONG MUSLIM YOUNG ADULTS FROM A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

The necessity to establish a purpose for one's existence requires the identification of oneself, which is an inevitable task. For individuals residing in countries different from their own heritage culture, identity (as influenced by social, ethnic, political, and psychological factors) becomes a crucial aspect. The classification of Italian immigrants is primarily based on their faith, nationality, or ethnicity. However, immigrants with a Muslim background encounter challenges in expressing their theological beliefs while residing in heterogeneous societies, which results in an intriguing amalgamation of ethnicity, nationality, and identity development.

2.1 Emerging Adulthood

Research on the identity development of Muslim adolescents and emerging adults emphasizes the importance of considering their development from an interpersonal, context-specific, multinational, and fluid perspective (Ahmed, Patel, & Hashem, 2015; Fine et al., 2012; Kumar, Seay, & Karabenick, 2015). This could be a result of the prominence of their multiple identities in a dominant culture. Mid-adolescence to late adolescence is a crucial time for identity development in terms of creating the idea of self (Erikson, 1968; French et al., 2006), thus young people are not only coming to terms with their social group association but also figuring out how each of their identity groups fits

into a cohesive whole. Rarely empirical studies that look at both identities simultaneously are found in the literature on co-existing social identities and their ramifications (e.g., Frable, 1997; Turner & Brown, 2007). However, proponents of intersectionality theory (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2012) contend that social identities are "mutually formative."

Between the ages of 18 and 29 years, there is a developmental stage known as emerging adulthood. According to Arnett's theory (2007), in the past fifty years, there has been a highlighted focus on the period of life between adolescence and early adulthood. The developmental phase of the early 20s in young adults is a time window when individuals are focused on their own identity in the reflection of the pursuit of education, employment, and marriage. Young adults in this time frame rely on crucial judgments regarding their emotional and professional endeavors on how these multi-layered context mesh with their sense of self (Douglas, 2005). Alongside, they gravitate toward steady commitments in both their subjective and occupational lives as they enter emerging adulthood. The immigrant population in Italy originating from collectivistic cultures, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Morocco, tends to make life decisions based on customs and elder guidance, which contrasts with the upbringing of young adults in Western countries (Chaudhary & Sharma, 2007).

Emerging adulthood as a transitional developmental stage had widely been researched in Western adolescents, whereas there had been relatively few studies on individuals from minority groups in terms of their diverse ethnic or religious affiliation to buttress its generalizability. According to a recent study (Ricucci, 2019), second-generation immigrants in Italy shift to adulthood faster than their Italian peers of Italian

descent. In fact, young immigrants experience a phenomenon known as the migrant's paradox, where they strictly adhered to timelines for starting employment and family, often before their peers who delay these markers of transition to adulthood.

Emerging adulthood has also been explored from the lens of comparative analysis. Based on the comparison between American youth of the 1960s and those of the 2000s, young Muslims in Italy are mostly placed in the middle of the continuum, where the phase of transition to "adult" roles reaches a later maturation point of their lives. The age ranges between 18 and 29 years is seen as a time for reflection and life exploration because it is the time of life when major changes in personality, attitudes, beliefs, and ethos occur (Arnett, 2007). Therefore, we purposefully selected participants within a certain age range for our study, with consideration given to the impact of their immigrant background on the transition from childhood to adulthood.

2.2 Theorizing Identity: Social Identity Approach

Understanding how and when multiple identities activate in each setting is at the core of identity theories. The most significant contribution to identity development is based on developing the relationship between one's self-concept and the social groups to which one belongs and comes from the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). What precisely defines identity formation, then, is a question related to the notion of 'self'. The self is recursive in social identity theory because it can serve as an object and may be classified, named, or defined in certain ways in reference to other social categories or contexts (Cast et al., 1999). According to Social Identity Theory (SIT; Turner et al.,

1987), identification with one's group not only provides a sense of belonging but also maintains or improves one's self-esteem (Ajrouch, 2004).

2.2.1 Social Identity Theory

Various theories and research investigations have been devised regarding the concept of identity. In terms of social identity, the potential hazards to an individual's self-worth or welfare can be alleviated by reinforcing one's connection to a collective that fostered a heightened degree of rapport (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

SIT elaborated on the act of identifying oneself as a group member of a larger community sharing similar ethos, values, and norms, which played a vital role in identity development. It further provided a lens of how people are present within a larger social environment and perceive ingroup versus outgroup since their innate or learned experiences; it, moreover, sets a foundation for a consistent sense of who they are or how they define themselves in a social context (Grotevant, 1992; Josselson, 1994). According to researchers (Swanson, Spencer, & Petersen, 1997), the formation of one's identity is a crucial part that occurs throughout adolescence and continues until young adulthood, and whose resolution provides a foundation for adult behavior.

According to SIT (Tajfel, 1981), an individual's perception of group membership and the accompanying emotional affiliation with the sense of self are both necessary for the development of identity. Tajfel further asserted that an individual's feeling of group affiliation contributes to their sense of self-worth and how they make sense of the world;

thus, those who uphold favorable definitions of group members in terms of religiosity, ethnicity, and nationality, would also demonstrate high self-esteem (Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997). Yet, if the social environment in which young immigrants live did not place importance on the ethnic or religious group, and the individual subsequently encountered bias or discrimination, they may exhibit lower self-esteem than members of groups who are not marginalized (Ahmed, et al., 2009).

Individuals from immigrant backgrounds belong to social groups that influence how they react to a variety of situations, from ethnicity to religion. The impact of religious, national, and ethnic identity on psychological well-being can be depicted in young adults' self-concept, which is often influenced by their religious or ethnic affiliations (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007). We argue, grounded on Tajfel's social identity paradigm, that the distinctive features of a group membership irrevocably tied to a religious or ethnic association (especially when compared to other ideological belief systems) may be crucial to understanding why religiosity is frequently adopted with such strong commitment as compared to ethnic affiliation. Empirical evidence supported the idea that religious affiliation may be crucial to fostering personal well-being (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2007); therefore, we take our research sample bounded to participants who were born or raised in a Muslim household to dig into the influence of social identities and bicultural belongingness.

Tajfel's SIT has predominantly served as the foundation for a large portion of developmental research that had explored ethnic, national, and religious identification among teens and young adults (e.g., Phinney, 1989). Here, we briefly explore SIT to shed

light on the development of co-existing social identities from late adolescence to young adulthood, and how its concept of ingroup versus outgroup influenced the bicultural belonging of the participants in our study. Several studies have sought to address the co-existing social identities that individuals adopt, as well as how these identities are psychologically organized across multi-layered contexts (see, for instance, Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Ciocca, 2019; Hogg, & Williams, 2000). An equilibrium between these social identities is vital for bicultural belongingness to bestow confidence when faced with unpredictability and to boost self-esteem.

2.2.2 Culture, identity, and social representations

The perception of migrants is often based on stereotypes and an inaccurate depiction from a Eurocentric viewpoint (Hinojo, 2021). The literature extensively and rigorously discussed the identity and sense of belonging of individuals with migration backgrounds. In the development of Moscovici's social representation paradigm (1963) and Tajfel's SIT (1979), research and practice theories primarily centered on the self and disregarded the social environment. It made the case for their reciprocity by stating that *"how we identify ourselves in respect to the groups with which those representations rely on how we orient to representations"* (Elcheroth, Doise, & Reicher, 2011, p. 45). Theoretical connections exist between social identities and representations. Consequently, it is essential to acknowledge that social identities are, in essence, social representations, as emphasized by Younis and Hassan (2018).

Duveen (2007) proposed that social identity is established when a social representation can no longer be communicated to explain group membership, which reveals a common set of hegemonic images, or a shared cultural background. The social representation highlights, “Do young Muslim immigrant's religious and ethnic identities merit categorical dichotomy?”. Recent research pointed out that, instead of being "hyphenated," as social identity theories suggested in the past, Muslim young adults think of them as "hyphenated" from a third place that is unique, theological in nature, and inseparable (Sartawi, & Sammut, 2012; Stubbs & Sallee, 2013). This raises the question of whether identity is global in scope as it encompassed theological, ethnic, gender-based, and cultural issues that Muslim migrants deal with as they form their social identities.

Hence, the social representation approach and SIT both offered a way to comprehend the subjective hybridity in Muslim young adults, which may be a part of a "third space" inside their national, ethnic, and religious identities that encapsulated the conception of identity for them.

2.3 Social Identities

Recently, there has been a revived discussion on the utility of social identity in the lives of migrants; see Jenkins (2014) for a refutation. The concept of social identities was extensively employed in research endeavors aimed at comprehending integration, acculturation, and bicultural belonging. The current study shared these goals, adopting a qualitative approach. Social identities such as ethnic, national, and religious identities are perceived as incompatible and conflicting in a multi-layered context. However, in

contrast to Holtz et al.'s (2013) research findings, we argue that the supposed conflict between national ethnic and religious identities is an inherent aspect of the "identity" notion, particularly when explicitly referring to Italian Muslim young adults.

From an academic perspective, the understanding of social identities dated to the early 20th century when migration accelerated globally from the South to the West. The initial studies tried to address the question, “How can we comprehend individuals with multicultural origins and their interlinked hyphenated social identities?”. It is assumed that immigrants would ultimately adopt the mainstream culture (national); which formed the foundation of acculturation theory. Identity is not just a matter of acculturation for modern Muslim immigrants; rather it is a serious conundrum, as a lack of integration and belongingness is perceived to be a modern-day national crisis (Moscovici, 2012; Norton, 2013).

Therefore, it is essential that we critically examine how we define "identity" for Muslims who were born and raised in Europe, specifically in Italy. Indeed, while acknowledging the social identities that are present both within the individual and simultaneously navigating the context of migration, the current state of knowledge regarding the interaction between these identities remains limited (Ramarajan, 2014).

2.3.1 National identity

There are ongoing deliberations across Europe regarding the integration of Muslims at the national level (Statham & Tillie, 2016). A fundamental aspect of social identity entails

national identification, which is derived from a certain degree of affinity with the host country (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Phinney et al. (2001) define national identity as "*belonging to the wider [i.e., receiving] society*" (p.109). Immigrants have complex social identities that encompass both national and ethnic identities. Given that social identities are connected to ideological traditions, a national identity involves more than merely identifying oneself as part of a specific national group (Reicher, 2001).

In the sphere of immigration, the development of national identity is a progression that commences when immigrants have dwelled in the host country for nearly ten years or intend to establish permanent residency therein (Maalouf, 1998). Immigrants who evinced greater openness to civic engagement foster a unified national identity with the indigenous population and are inclined to encounter affirmative experiences with their national identity. Since immigrant communities are burgeoned in a host country, because they shared a common ancestry, religion, or mother tongue, new immigrants may connect with other immigrants despite having their own unique ethos and views about the host country. Intergenerationally, immigrants who are native-born of the country may identify with one another based on their nationality (Khalidi, 1992).

In many European countries, Muslims are less likely than heritage-wise natives to identify strongly with the country; this is a crucial factor in promoting social cohesion, as it facilitates the formation of meaningful connections among those who share a common bond. Nonetheless, shared national identity is vital for social cohesiveness and stability (Fleischmann & Phalet 2018; Reeskens & Wright 2014; Schulz & Leszczensky, 2016). As a result, it is crucial to address the concern of what elements bolster Muslims to

identify with a host country. Several studies, in recent times, explored the impact on immigrants' sense of national identities, such as citizenship and birthplace (Karlsen & Nazroo, 2013; Maxwell & Bleich, 2014), and of shared experience and cultural interchange (Hochman & Davidov, 2014).

The idea of belonging, which often arose through ethnic bonding, and in which new immigrants pull towards their socio-cultural membership, could not be fully expressed by the citizenship of the host country in discrete (Vietze et al., 2019). In the absence of supportive socio-national circumstances, another association may take primacy as is seen in Europe, where religion, in the case of Muslims, became the affiliation that united immigrants based on shared socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, regardless of the nationality of the host country, including Egypt, Iran, Bulgaria, Palestine, Pakistan, and Turkey (Ramadan, 1999).

Many scholars argue that religious identity predominance existed due to various factors, including the amplification of national identity through the sense of acceptance, and belonging fostered by the dominant culture. Young Muslims may not contact with locals as much as other non-European origin minority because they surround themselves with other religious or ethnic minorities (Leszczensky & Pink 2017), and they may also be less likely to interact with the natives who are culturally literate (De Vroome, Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2014; Fleischmann & Phalet, 2018). However, the connection between religion and national identity is similar for Muslim immigrants as it is for other immigrant religions, and integration efforts in Europe may lead to an increase in Muslim youth's identification with their home countries (Leszczensky, Maxwell & Bleich, 2021).

As social identities co-exist and hyphenate, it is obtrusive to perceive them as one of the social identities encompassing the entire identity formation. In addition to immigrants integrating into society, the state or the government understands that the identity of migrants is a complex concept and that they will have loyalties - to other members of their community and to their religiosity or traditions (Zaal et al., 2007). The concept of parallel identity arose from a citizen's loyalty to their host country, posing the question of its role, which is addressed in the present research, about the integration of the Muslim population with Italian society.

Muslim young adults observe the psychological, social, and political ramifications when their national identity is vigorously challenged by the prevailing context through state institutions, conventional interactions, and/or media representation. It raised tensions between ethnicities, nationalities, and religions, which may render balancing the hybridity of social identities a particularly complex task (Suarez-Orozco, 2005). However, then even, young immigrants do develop a national identity as an affiliation with the country's current citizens, instead of just focusing on their ethnic or religious heritage, especially among second and third-generation young adults residing in Europe. Thus, identity development is constructed by how Muslims frame themselves among others, and that links to national identity in its entirety (Poortinga, 2010).

2.3.2 Ethnic identity

Ethnic identity formation is a crucial developmental task for both ethnic minority and majority youth (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Many factors, such as socioemotional stability, self-concept, and academic motivation have been repeatedly related to ethnic identification (Yasui, Dorham, & Dishion, 2004). Individual decisions and attitudes play a crucial role in the gradual construction of one's ethnic identity. Ethnic identity is "*the part that concentrates on the subjective experience of belonging to a group or culture of the immigrants.*" (Phinney et al., 2001, p. 23). There is a general agreement among researchers that ethnic identity must be treated as a multifaceted construct, even though they may not always agree on the precise elements of ethnic identification (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

The social identity viewpoint is frequently used in developmental research while examining ethnic identity as a pivotal element (Spears 2011). The developmental stage at which belonging to an ethnic group is assimilated into a sense of self is depicted as a crucial component of one's self-identity (Verkuyten, 2016). The process through which one is thought of as being akin to ethnic membership is the focus of the social identity perspective. The thought process affiliated with ethnic identification is more “we as a member of the community” than “I am a member of the community”. This underscores that experiencing positive emotions with regard to one's ethnic affiliation is not necessarily equivalent to ethnic identity as defined by SIT (Tajfel, 1981).

For young immigrants, developing their identities is a difficult undertaking (Rumbaut, 1994). They navigate the difficult process of scrutinizing their social identities

in relation to their religiosity, countries of immigration, and ethnic minority groups (Phinney, 1992). Young immigrants who have been raised by their parents and who are introduced by them to the language, traditions, and religious practices of their ethnic affiliation are likely to carry traits throughout their lives, although this process transitions from time to time and is subjected to evolve or devolve (McCoy, 1992).

There are a multitude of factors that play a significant role, such as the community, family, peers, and personal qualities, all of which have an influence on how each ethnic identity element develops and how they are associated with one another holistically. Adolescents from diverse ethnic origins undergo a complex process in establishing their ethnic identity. This is compounded by the challenge of having multiple social reference groups. Studies have shown that this process involves a significant trajectory, encompassing the search, conflict, and resolution stages (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2009).

2.3.3 Religious identity

The way a person, a community, or a culture views itself undoubtedly affects their religion and their religious beliefs. At a subjective level, the desire to identify as a member of an ethnic minority group may very well influence the extent of religious engagement (Ajrouch, 2004). Religious identity is a cohesively continuing process; it is not a rigid phenomenon. During the last ten years, social scientists have extensively explored the topic of identity. Yet, studies on identity development have generally overlooked the contribution of religion to forming both identities as a sense of self and associated group membership (Khan, 2010).

Recently, the increased focus on inclusion brought revived attention to social identities. Muslims, ethnically representing different countries, have a significant role in the religious landscape that became more diversified in European Muslims' religious identity. In identity formation, the ethnic background is also viewed as a source of religious identity for "Muslims" as being ethnically affiliating to a Muslim country. The migrant descendants' affiliation with the ethnic group as a social identity grows due to their increased knowledge of their ethnic and religious norms (Phinney, 1992).

The concept of " Muslim" encompasses an association with a reference group for self-concept (see SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Furthermore, a negotiated influence of norms, race, genealogy, ethnicity, citizenship, and culture forms Muslim identity as individuals create their religious identities while transitioning from one developmental stage to the other. Religious affiliation differs from generation to generation and subjective familial values. In addition to that, the practice of the Muslim religion in Europe plays a vital role in immigrants' sense of self and community attachment than it did in their native countries, where it could have been taken for granted or at least given less weight (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007). This is especially true for immigrants who relocated from a community where they were the religious majority (true for first-generation migrants) to one where they are now a member of a minority religion, such as Indian Hindus, Israeli Jews, Pakistani Muslims, or Vietnamese Buddhists who immigrate to the United States.

Examining the impact of religious identity on psychosocial functioning is an essential component of managing multiple identities, particularly given the significance of religiosity in the self-concepts of many young adults (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007). Furthermore, in a society where individuals and groups were frequently targeted due to their religious beliefs and affiliations, understanding the role of religion in shaping one's identity is of utmost importance (Wellman & Tokuno, 2004). Based on a social identity paradigm, we suggested that the distinctive traits of a bicultural belonging have irrevocably tied to a religious belief system (especially when contrasted to other ideological belief systems) and were crucial to explaining why religiosity is frequently adopted with such devotion and valor.

Some are ardent Muslims who adhere to specific "scriptural hermeneutics" (Duderija, 2008) and believe that performing Islamic practices is the only way to be a Muslim, whereas others tend to adopt the viewpoints of liberal or moderate Muslims who value various and multiple forms of Islam. Muslims associate being a "practicing" Muslim with being a "good" person. Some Muslim believers view being a Muslim as solely based on one's belief in Islam's fundamentals (Hassan, 2008), while other Muslims are deeply attached to both their national and their ethnic identity while establishing their Islamic identity and adopting the customs of their host country (Bayat & Herrera, 2010).

The diversity of the association of Muslim immigrants and their religious identity in several European countries has increased, including in the Netherlands, France, Germany, and Italy (Pew Research Center, 2017). Understanding how the first generation

of Muslim immigrants, who have personally experienced migration, perceive their Muslim identity, and adjust to their new surroundings is essential for developing a sense of belonging to the host country and their religious faith. Inclusion is even more crucial for second-generation immigrants born and raised in Western nations (Sirin & Fine, 2008). Yet, second-generation Muslims in particular face a hard time negotiating their religious identity when simultaneously obligated by their community to reconcile their sense of ethnic and religious affiliation with their national identity (Sirin & Balsano, 2007). Although not all Muslims may consider themselves orthodox, many believe that adhering to Islamic obligations is a crucial aspect of their Muslim identity which, in turn, allows them to view their spirituality in conjunction with worldly aspirations.

According to Verkuyten et al. (2012), there is conflicting evidence in the literature about whether religious dissemination strengthens or weakens Muslim minority adolescents' national and religious identities. Earlier studies on minority youth indicated that religious indoctrination is connected to greater levels of religious identification, which are then linked to civic engagement and peer competence (Seol & Lee, 2012). However, a subsequent study reported that Muslim minorities in Europe had balanced social identities related to better adjustment and attitudes toward the public (Fleischmann & Verkuyten, 2016).

An interesting perspective of looking at Muslim identity is from the lens of the dichotomy between Islam and the West (perceived by the masses). As found in previous research, Muslim identity reflects individuals who adhered to and practiced Islam, which

isolated them from the cultural traditions and norms of the host country (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003). The reason is that, although Muslims come from many different countries and cultures, day-to-day life plays a significant role in the development of Muslim identity (Ahmed & Akhter, 2006; Al-Ghorani, 2008). Examples included ablution, head coverings, food restrictions, Ramadan fasting, and prostration. In certain situations, a Muslim's behavior reveals his or her religious affiliation outrightly, but sometimes there is a spillover of ethnic or national ethos in defining religiosity (Muslim Public Affairs Council, 2005).

To sum up, religious identity has been observed to serve as a protective factor in the lives of young migrants, providing them with a social support network. It attributes to the fulfillment of the desire for bicultural belongingness among religious minorities (Butler-Barnes, Martin, & Boyd, 2017). In the current climate, Muslim migrants are often viewed as a potential threat to the host country due to their religious beliefs. It is crucial to comprehend the correlation between religious identity and successful adaptation (Kumru et al., 2019). However, recent research overlooked the significance of religious identity, particularly bicultural belongingness among religious minorities (Cheah, Gürsoy, & Balkaya-Ince, 2021). Thus, our research concentrated on examining the social identities of young Muslim adults and how they established a sense of bicultural belongingness by reconciling the concurrent identities.

2.4 Cardinal Practices of Muslims in Islam

The second most practiced religion in the world after Christianity is Islam, one of the three Abrahamic monotheistic religions. The Quran is a sacred holy book for Muslims, which provides the fundamentals of religion. All the Quranic revelations that Muhammad, in the eyes of Muslims, received directly from God are recorded in the Quran. The hadiths, which range in degree of validity, are additional crucial texts. The hadiths are collections of Muhammad's deeds, facts, and occurrences from his life. They also include all of Muhammad's discussions and answers to the inquiries that people posed to him as a prophet (Mawdudi, 2004).

Consequently, optimistic statements, attitudes, and mental conviction in deep devotion to the practice of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), faith in Islam, consequently, leads to contentment and internal peace for believers of Islam. Muslims perceive religion as a complete code of life (Al-Jaza'iri, 2003). All of them require mankind's submission to Allah as the one creator. As a result, the cardinal religious beliefs are to be considered considering the fundamental tenets of Islam: believing in the oneness of God (Allah); confessing to angels; adhering to the teachings of the prophet Muhammed; trusting in Allah's prophets; having faith in the last day and adopting a predestination mindset (Hassan, 2008).

Cardinal faith rituals practiced by Italian Muslims encompass five fundamental pillars of Islam to testify one as a Muslim, and must be fulfilled to be in the circle of Islam: none has the right to be worshipped but God and Muhammad are Allah's Apostle;

to offer Salat (the compulsory congregational prayers) dutifully and perfectly; to observe fast the month of Ramadan; to pay Zakat (Compulsory Charity), and to perform Hajj; a Pilgrimage to Makkah (Ali, 2005).

2.4.1 Contextualizing Italian-Muslim identity

According to the conceptions of Islam, a Muslim's identity has strong ties with the cardinal practices of Muslims, and that is created through the interaction of a number of discourses, including religious texts, the understanding of the texts and Islamic traditions by religious leaders and followers, Muslim ethnic cultures intertwined with ancestral heritage, and social, cultural, economic, and political issues in both the Muslim's country of origin and that of their hosting residence (Basit, 2009). In a specific context, regardless of their level of observance of Islamic rites like salat and offering prayer, those who identify as Muslims are referred to be Muslims in Western society (Halstead, 2004).

Muslim young immigrants appear to be aware of the numerous obstacles they face when navigating their religious faith, ethnic tradition from their parental or ancestral lineage, and civic engagement in the host country (Sirin & Fine, 2008). To provide an explanation for the state of "being a Muslim", other elements (such as financial and social stability) are frequently placed above religion (Al-Ghorani, 2008). However, the understanding of "What it means to be a Muslim" is a mixture of multi-layered contexts, encompassing social, cultural, and political issues. This has led to the involvement of academics from many disciplinary backgrounds in the study of understanding Muslims

in a larger scheme of context (Cesari, 2009). Due to the multitude of factors that impact the development of Muslim identity, there exist a plethora of constantly evolving and situational approaches to embodying Muslim identity, as indicated by Esposito (2010).

2.5 Role of multiple identities among young adults

There has been a paucity of research exploring the interrelated nature of the distinct but interdependent components of Muslim identities, including their ethnic, national, and religious affiliations, and their contribution to understanding bicultural belonging (Brewer, 2010). Although previous research emphasized the significance of identity threat, in particular perceived discrimination, for the compatibility of young immigrants' multiple social identities, it is still unclear how co-existing social identities affected their sense of belongingness to each one or multiple identities from adolescence to young adulthood (Britto, 2008; Giuliani, Olivari, & Alfieri, 2017; Giuliani & Tagliabue, 2015; Verkuyten et al., 2012).

2.5.1 Multiple social identities

Negotiating multiple social identities is one of the primary developmental tasks. Additionally, identity researchers acknowledge that young immigrants create social identities that are linked to their overall well-being, leading to a sense of belongingness. There is a growing body of research on identity and well-being conducted by scholars

across culturally diverse situations (Stuart et al., 2010). A foundational study by Sirin and Fine (2008) implemented a mixed methods approach to specifically focus on exploring the interplay between American and Muslim identities and how it was impacted by experiences of religious practices. They administered a survey and identity maps to 97 Muslim Americans between the ages of 18 and 25 years old. The results revealed that 60% were able to successfully integrate their Muslim and American identities, while 32% depicted parallel identities, and only 8% were coded as conflicted identities.

From a global perspective, if we see a Muslim community, it can be described as a diaspora or a geographically scattered population that is bound together by a shared social identity; this led to young Muslim immigrants having a stronger sense of belonging to the Muslim community, which becomes more apparent by their interactions in different Muslim-diaspora environments (Cheryl, Al-Mateen & Aneeta, 2004). In another study by Sirin and Fine (2007), 200 Muslim American participants between the ages of 12 and 18 years were involved in participatory action research utilizing focus groups and identity maps. The study found that 48% of participants out of 200 kept their social identities discrete and experienced a "parallel" identity, which may be a reason that they transitioned from adolescence to teenage years

Young immigrant Muslims are surrounded by diverse environments that affect how well they can assimilate and adapt to the host country's culture and values; finding harmony to equalize all identities can be challenging, on the other side. Additionally, the contexts that have the greatest influence on a young individual's development—family, friends, ethnic belonging, and society as a whole —are frequently diverse and can both

be sources of strength and present challenges to identity development (Suárez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003). For instance, family members offered a sense of affiliation to religion and beliefs in addition to offering cooperation, community, and security. In the same line of sight, Vedder and colleagues (2007) found the complex relationship between Muslim immigrants' acculturation experiences and their ethnic affiliation influencing their psychological well-being.

Our study intends to delve into the possible beneficial or detrimental pathways in terms of understanding the intersectionality between multiple social identities and participants' sense of bicultural belongingness linked to them. In particular, we explore the conflictual or co-existence of social identities as well as how the subjective configurations of young immigrants' multiple social identities impact their bicultural belonging pertinent to multiple social identities.

2.5.2 Do they coexist, or do they conflict?

According to previously conducted research in European settings, immigrants have a more difficult time acculturating to the host country's culture while dealing with prejudice and simultaneously balancing various aspects of their identities (Bhatia & Ram, 2009; Britto & Amer, 2007; Duderija, 2008). Immigrants often fail to acquire a bicultural identity, characterized by a resolute inclination to uphold their own cultural heritage and religion, while simultaneously showing scant interest in engaging with and assimilating with the host society. This predicament leads to a paradoxical identity crisis. In the European context, prior research on Muslim communities overlooked the relationship

between bicultural identity and immigrant well-being outcomes (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2004; Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Heim et al., 2011; Stevens et al., 2004; Vedder et al., 2007; Verkuyten, 2007).

Another study delineated the experiences of adult Muslim immigrants, situated in Italy, both first and second-generation, regarding their bicultural belonging and perceived prejudice. This study is quantitative in nature, utilizing a sample of 205 Italian Muslims across different age groups (18-72 years old), and employed quantitative measures such as the inclusion of in-group in the self, perceived discrimination, and acculturation attitudes scale, to compare their social identities. The findings also indicated that there are significant differences between first and second-generation immigrants, where the first generation solely demonstrated a negative association between discrimination and their national identity, whereas the second generation exhibited an indirect mediating link of discrimination with national and religious identities (Giuliani & Tagliabue, 2018).

Another study by Giuliani, Tagliabue, and Regalia (2018) highlighted how the reduced awareness of the practices of religious Muslims in Italy may help explain why Muslims' religious and ethnic affiliations are not seen as incompatible with Italian cultural norms. Given the potential convergence between national and religious affiliations of Muslim immigrants, alongside their commitment to the civic values of the host country, it is possible that a nexus exists between social identities. Therefore, the present study contributes to the bridge the gap between varying findings regarding the interplay of social identities and bicultural belonging among immigrants.

CHAPTER 3

THE CURRENT STUDY

The present study is part of a larger research endeavor called "IMAGE Project: Identity between Religion and Culture," coordinated by Professor Ughetta Moscardino together with Dr. Chiara Ceccon from the Department of Developmental Psychology and Socialization at the University of Padova, and conducted in collaboration with Dr. Charissa Cheah from the University of Maryland-Baltimore (USA). The main objective of this project was to gain insights into how Muslim young adults who were born or have resided in Italy for a minimum of 10 years form their social identities (national, ethnic, and religious identity) and subsequently develop bicultural belonging. The investigation specifically aimed to comprehend the transitional stage of identity development during emerging adulthood, as the project's target age group is in between 18 to 26 years old young adults.

3.1 Rationale, study design, and research questions

This thesis aimed to broaden existing research on the intersectionality of social identities encompassing national, ethnic, and religious identities. It did so by conducting a qualitative analysis of participants' responses to semi-structured interviews and the identity maps these young adults were asked to draw to obtain a pictorial representation of how they reconciled their multiple identities.

There is a persistent conceptual conflict between religious affiliation and bicultural belonging among young immigrants during the transitioning phase of their identity development, although these two aspects were intimately linked to one another. Nationality and ethnicity, when integrated with a wide range of religious symbols, served as the basis to project significant bicultural subtleties, thereby conveying a bicultural heritage affiliation. On one hand, it could be argued that religion plays a fundamental role in providing a stable foundation for culture. On the other hand, the integration of religious values may be irrevocably permeated into daily decision-making, irrespective of the cultural influence (Switkiewicz, 2020).

Ethnic and religious identity have a significant role in influencing young immigrants' sense of bicultural belongingness. However, there has been a lack of extensive research to comprehend the contextual factors that contribute to detachment from the host or ethnic community, ultimately affecting psychosocial adjustment (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2017), specifically in the context of Muslim immigrants. Research on the intersection of social identities in young adult immigrants is in its nascent stages (Panah, 2017). Therefore, it is crucial to further investigate social identities, which conflict with a strong sense of bicultural belonging to one's heritage culture with the host country (Giuliani, Tagliabue & Regalia, 2018). When a young adult experienced a sense of belonging to multiple social identities, the thoughts, ideas, morals, and behaviors that are common to each of these identities may be seen as either conflicting or harmonizing with one another and subsequently cultivate bicultural belonging.

It is imperative to comprehend the intricacies associated with an individual's ability to identify with and conform to two opposing social identities, such as religious and national when they are deemed incompatible (Haslam et al., 2009). Relatively little attention had been paid in recent research to the intra-individual tension that may be experienced by young immigrants, encompassing parallel or conflictual identities, despite the fact that it had been strongly evidenced in the literature over the years that intergroup conflict (Tajfel, 1981) can be a significant source of shaping group and individual behavior. Therefore, the present study investigated social identities from a reference point of bicultural belonging of young Muslim adults residing in Italy.

The study aimed to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the complex balance of social identities present among young Muslim adults. These identities are primarily influenced by their religious, national, and ethnic backgrounds, and are subject to change in different contexts of their daily lives. The study also delved into the process by which these young adults adopt a bicultural sense of belonging, despite their coexisting social identities. To achieve this aim, a qualitative technique was utilized, which involved the use of a semi-structured interview comprising open-ended questions as well as the drawing and interpretation of an identity map (Sirin & Fine, 2007). The following research questions guided the present study:

R.Q. 1: *How do young Italian Muslim adults harmonize their social identities?*

When examining social identities, particularly national, ethnic, and religious identities, the focus of interest lies in the means by which young adults reconciled

indivisible social identities while developing a sense of bicultural belonging in the context of their Muslim background. Sirin and Fine (2007) pointed out the constant rift to reconcile multiple social identities, and the difficulties young immigrants go through in developing bicultural belonging, forging their "mixed" identities. The studies that examined cultural heritage (ethnic), mainstream (national) orientations, and religious identity has been noticeably underrepresented. The extant literature that has been concentrated on social identities pointed out that when Muslim immigrants perceive their religious and national identities, it augments anxiety symptoms and is not perceived as harmonious with national identity (Verkuyten et al., 2012; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007).

Nonetheless, it has been established that multiple identities can co-exist or come in conflict with each other, as it is complex and multifaceted for young adults from post-migration contexts (Britto, 2008; Giuliani et al., 2017; Giuliani & Tagliabue, 2015; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2012), but studies have infrequently taken into account how multiple yet mutually exclusive Muslim immigrants harmonize their social identities. The pertinent research conducted in the United States, Germany, and New Zealand (Panah, 2017; Sirin & Fine, 2007; Stuard and Ward, 2011) respectively, has revealed that the amalgamation of social identities is a complex process, as a significant proportion of individuals resort to parallel and conflicting identities. This can be attributed to various factors such as migration history, discriminatory experiences, and generational status. Interestingly, these findings align with the study undertaken in Italy by Giuliani and Tagliabue (2018), which highlighted the negative correlation between religious discrimination and national identity. Following the findings from similar studies, it is

reasonable to expect that when considering multiple social identities (national, ethnic, and religious), the schism we are most interested in, is how young adults reconcile between indivisible social identities alongside developing a sense of bicultural belonging attached to each of them in the context of their Muslim background.

While the intersectionality of social identities is established in the prior literature (Lipnicka, & Peciakowski, 2021), to our knowledge, no study investigated how the intersection of social identities, consequently developing bicultural belonging in Muslim immigrants as emerging adults, in specific to the mapping of social identities are harmonized. Due to the paucity of research on social identities in the Italian context, we did not put out any specific hypotheses; rather, we anticipated that our participants would execute a dynamic process of reconciling their social identities in light of this data and project bicultural belonging, which will set a foundation for future research.

R.Q. 2: *How do young Italian-Muslim adults define their religiosity, and what does it mean for them to be Muslim?*

Religion is an important social group that is less noticeable in prior research. Immigrant young adults who took part in a large-scale study pointed out religiosity as fairly significant in their life, despite being a predominant identity that is not easily apparent to others (Pearce & Thornton, 2007). The present study aimed to understand the intersection of social identities in which one of the cardinal social identities is the religious one.

Based on the available evidence, the religious identification of Muslim young adults plays a significant role in their everyday lives of practicing religion ritualistically, since

it satisfies their social identity goals for uniqueness and bicultural belonging (e.g., see Vignoles, 2011). Given that Muslims are diverse in the practice of their religion, the term "Muslim identity" is contingent to change based on a multi-layered context and subjective reflection of religion (Sirin & Fine, 2007). Nonetheless, the literature pertaining to identity development (Cheah, Gürsoy, H., & Balkaya-Ince, 2021; Fleischmann, Fenella, and Phalet, 2018) misses out to explore the impact of religious practices on the bicultural sense of belonging of young Muslim adults. Consequently, this research question aims to evaluate the components of religiosity that either contribute to or detract from the sense of bicultural belonging among young Muslim Italian adults to their religious group.

In this research question, we anticipate identifying the ways that Italian Muslims choose to define Islam as a religion not only in terms of practice and core beliefs, but also with an exploratory eye toward observing the impact of religiosity on their behavior, collective action, value systems, and ethos. Based on limited literature, we aim to explore the multifarious sense of religiosity of Muslims and subjective character-sketches, which will elucidate their religious orientation and depicts their definition of being called a Muslim. Previous studies found that Muslims are more likely than Christians to perceive low harmony between religious and national identities; therefore, we base this expectation on prior research (Ciocca, 2019; Panah, 2017; Sirin & Fine, 2007; Stuard & Ward, 2011) to understand on how Italian Muslims defined their religiosity, and its pertinent role in understanding their bicultural belonging.

R.Q. 3: *How does bicultural belonging affect young Italian Muslim adults' religious identity in relation to their ethnic identity?*

Multiple social identities, including ethnicity, nationality, and religion, all contribute to the development of an individual's overall identity. For members of ethnic minorities, integrating the two cultures into one 'self' is not only a practical expectation, but it also fulfills a desire to acquire acceptance and a sense of belonging from the host country (Ben-Shalom & Horenczyk, 2000). It may be advantageous for immigrants to gradually diminish their identification with their heritage cultural practices and religious beliefs because such identification does not facilitate their assimilation into the host country primarily due to differences in values, customs, and traditions (Jia, 2004). Immigrants possessing a greater degree of ethnic and religious congruity exhibit a diminished social identity that is tethered to the host nation (Pettigrew, 2008).

Moreover, it is important to understand that families in the diaspora frequently attempt to instill "cultural values embedded with religious practices" in their children, which can later engender problems in their personal life choices when they are transitioning from adolescence to young adulthood. This raises the notion that immigrant youth may not be in the best situation to reflect beyond their ethnic values and customs, as they find it difficult to subside their religious affiliation with the ethnic customs (Duderija, 2007).

In migrant communities, ethnic identity arose from the "space" between the dichotomy of the identities stretched between the host culture and the immigrant culture

(Howarth et al., 2014). Research has consistently demonstrated that synchrony between ethnic and religious identity, as it exhibits favorable psychological outcomes including self-confidence (Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1996; Smith et al., 2005). Similarly, Verkuyten and Yildiz (2007) study highlighted a strong positive correlation between Turkish and Muslim identification, indicating that being a Muslim is a centrally important element of what it means to be Turkish in the Netherlands. Contrastingly, Dommelen et al. (2015) found a negative relationship between Muslim and ethnic identity. The relationship between ethnic and religious identity had been briefly explored in prior studies; it is therefore imperative to take into account the influence of religion on ethnic identity to better comprehend the intricate process of bicultural belonging.

Based on the information at our disposal, we hypothesize that participants hailing from South Asian countries, in contrast to those with Middle Eastern ethnic affiliations, are likely to emphasize the significance of their ancestral heritage and the cultural traditions of their respective countries which play a vital role in the regiment of religious practices. In particular, we anticipate observing an effort from the participants to "deculturize" religious rituals from their lives to calibrate the divergent, yet segregated understanding of religiosity and ethnic group membership.

R.Q. 4: *Do young Muslim-Italian adults notice a progressive/regressive change in their religious identity over time as a result of bicultural belonging?*

Contemporary studies (Giuliani, Tagliabue & Regalia, 2018; Kumru et al., 2019) presented mixed findings pertinent to the bicultural belonging of Muslim youth in Italy.

Indeed, there are multiple possibilities and intricate contexts that contribute to the explanation of bicultural belonging in terms of the progression or regression of religious identity over time and with maturation. In a study conducted by Stuart and Ward (2011), a mixed-method approach was employed to gather data from 36 Muslim young adults through open-ended survey responses, interviews, focus groups, and projective techniques. The findings revealed that 27 out of 36 participants defined their religious trajectory as centered around achieving a sense of peace and purpose, actively engaging in religious activities, and expressing themselves as Muslims.

The process of bicultural belonging raised the question of when it comes to defining 'Italianness'; side by side, following how they practice religious rituals and fundamentals. There are significant disparities in how migrants navigate their religious identity and beliefs to deal with the conflict arising from multi-layered contexts and to develop a sense of belonging, which is subsequently modified across the course of the developmental phase from late adolescence to emerging adulthood. The version of transitioned religiosity is not evidenced in the previous studies (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; LaFramboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). While some biculturals are able to integrate their two cultures, others go through the disputed rift of redefining their religiosity and simultaneously maintaining their dual cultures and identities in parallel (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002; Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2007), as the previous literature gives us a contrasting viewpoint.

According to a number of studies, having a bicultural belonging is best for one's psychological well-being and religious affiliation (Berry et al., 2006; Paterson & Hakim-

Larson, 2012; Goforth, 2014). Based on the limited literature and considering the developmental trajectory of young Italian Muslim adults, we expect to find increased levels of religious connectedness among young Muslim adults to have a positive impact on their religious identity development. This is anticipated to be demonstrated by a shift away from fundamentalist beliefs towards greater openness to diverse cultures, acceptance of differences, and embracing humanity as an essential aspect of their faith.

3.2 Participants

The study included 100 young adults with Muslim immigrant origins, of whom 43% were born and raised in Italy (second generation) and 57% had lived in Italy for at least 10 years (first generation), as shown in Table 1 where the participants' main socio-demographic characteristics are described (in detail) numerically. The gender ratio was almost equivalent, as there were 55% female participants and 45% male participants. Additionally, the participants were ethnically diverse, originating from 12 different countries: Pakistan (52%), Morocco (24%), Bangladesh (6%), Egypt (4%), Turkey (4%), Palestine (3%), Senegal (1%), Tunisia (2%), Algeria (1%), Gambia (1%), Kosovo (1%). Ninety-six percent of them were from monocultural families, while the remaining 4% had one Italian parent. Approximately 140 individuals were approached to participate in the study, of whom 100 consented to partake (participation rate: 71%). It is noteworthy to mention that no participants opted to withdraw their participation during the course of the interview.

Table 1. *Sociodemographic characteristics of the study sample*

	M	*SD*	*Range*
Age (in years)	22	2.6	18-26
Gender			
Female (%)	55%		
Male (%)	45%		
First Generation (%)	57%		
No. of years in Italy	14.7	4.06	10 and over
Students (%)	65%		
Workers (%)	49%		

Note. $N = 100$

The inclusion criteria for participation were as follows: (1) being aged between 18–26 years; (2) being born in Italy or abroad with at least one parent who was born abroad; (3) being raised in a Muslim household; (4) for foreign-born participants, having resided in Italy for at least 10 years and/or having finished at least one full cycle of education. We did not include young participants seeking asylum or with refugee status, since the process of identity formation is distinct for recent or newcomer immigrants (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2007).

3.3 Procedure

The Ethics Committee of the School of Psychology accorded this study its ethical approval (protocol n. 4914). Data were collected online by myself and other two psychology students (one with an Italian, the other with a Pakistani background) between August 2022 and February 2023. Participants were recruited using the snowball sampling

method via social media announcements in groups and cultural and recreational associations.

To make it easier for participants to understand the purpose of the study and their contribution, recruiting flyers were sent to them via email. The researchers who collected the data received training in culturally sensitive data-gathering techniques, which made up the study team. Special care was given to avoiding selecting participants with a high level of religiosity associated with religious or community centers to prevent an implicit bias attached to stronger religious affiliation.

The project's description and an informed consent form were included in a brochure that was emailed to potential participants after initial contact had been made when they had expressed an interest in taking part in the study. The consent forms were shared with the researchers via email after being digitally signed by the interested participants.

After receiving consent, the participants were instructed to draw an "identity map" of their identity using written instructions that were the same for everyone; no template was provided to receive the raw nuances in their identity maps. Therefore, it was made sure in the instructions that there were no specifics as to what to draw. The date and time of the interview were decided upon after receiving the identity map through email (usually after two days). A semi-structured interview was subsequently carried out individually via an unrecorded video conversation using the Zoom platform. It should be noted that Italian, English, and Urdu were the languages spoken during the interview. Moreover, the interviewers entered participants' responses to the surveys on the Google Forms platform, and the open-ended responses were separately typed into a word processing program.

During the interview, which lasted about an hour (range = 60-90 min), topics like religious identity, national identity, ethnic identity, bicultural belonging, and trajectory of religious identity over time and maturation were all discussed along with an icebreaker question. The last open-ended questions were posed as a way to wrap off the interview on a positive or neutral note: *"Do you believe your Muslim identity has changed over time?"*. Towards the very end, the interview finished on a good or neutral note by thanking the participant for his/her time and contribution to the study.

3.4 Measures

To address the research questions for this study, we used a qualitative approach involving semi-structured interviews and identity maps, as described below.

3.4.1 Demographic information

The researcher duly filled out the questionnaire during the interview, based on the participants' responses in order to furnish demographic information pertaining to their age, gender, ethnicity/race, birthplace, and immigration records.

3.4.2 Semi-structured interview

The four research questions were addressed by analyzing participants' responses to six open-ended questions as illustrated in Table 2, as a part of a semi-structured interview,

which was transcribed by the researchers to explore the recurrent themes emerging from the narratives.

Table 2. *Interview protocol*

Research Questions	Pivotal Constructs	Open-ended Questions
R.Q. 1: How do Muslim Italians harmonize their social identities?	Intersectionality of social identities Identity Maps: Illustration of bicultural belonging pertinent to dominant social identities	"How does being Muslim impact/influence your everyday life?" "How do you reconcile being Muslim with being Italian/living in Italy? "Can you describe the map you drew?"
R.Q. 2: How do young Muslim adults define their religiosity, and what does being Muslim mean to them?	Contextualizing Muslim identity	"What does being a Muslim mean to you?"
R.Q. 3: How does bicultural belonging affect young Italian Muslim adults' religious identity in relation to their ethnic identity?	The relevance of ethnicity in religion	"Do you think that your ethnic origin background (e.g., Pakistani, Tunisian, etc.) shaped the way you live your religiosity?"
R.Q. 4: Do young Muslim adults notice progressive/regressive changes in their religious identity over time as a result of bicultural belonging?	Self-acceptance – the trajectory of religious affiliation	"Has your Muslim identity evolved/devolved through time? If so, how? You can also refer to specific episodes."

Note. RQ = Research Question

3.4.3 Identity map

In this study, we used a projective methodology referred to as "identity map" in order to elucidate the manner in which individuals depicted their social identities. This particular approach is informed by the scholarly works of Milgram (1976), Wilkinson (1999), and Winnicott's "Squiggle game" (Stuart & Ward, 2011). An identity map is a projective approach that encouraged participants to create visual representations of various social identities. The authors proposed that the identity map is a non-textual technique for deepening our comprehension of people's lived experiences through pictorial representation. The identity map can, if the exercise is done properly, reveal which components of the participant's identity were essential to them, whether they are positive or negative, the groups to which they belong, and the ways in which the subject perceives numerous social identities.

To elicit responses directly from the participants, during the interview the researchers requested an explanation of the drawing that had been produced. This portion of the interview also encompassed a specific time when participants' views, difficulties, and concerns with regard to the research questions were to facilitate the exploration through the free interpretation of their drawings from their own perspective.

A qualitative classification approach created by Sirin & Fine (2007) was utilized to analyze the identity maps. The technique entailed interpreting the drawings by their description and placing it in one of three categories: "Integrated," "Parallel," or "Conflicted." A fully "blended" and non-conflicting Muslim and national identity is referred to as an integrated identity. One feels simultaneously identified with multiple

social identities, and pertinent bicultural belongingness with the dominant social identities burgeons a unique sentiment connected to each social identity.

We continued with the categorization of the maps based on the visual components and the pragmatic or emotional justifications offered by each participant. The coding technique, for example, required grouping participants into three groups based on prior research (see Sirin & Fine, 2007; Stuart & Ward, 2011). The four interviewers individually coded 15% of the maps (n = 15) before discussing any ambiguous situations to get a consensus of 100%. Moving to analysis, the researchers then encoded the remaining maps.

An integrated map, for instance, depicted the section of the map that clearly overlaps the areas representing the two separate affiliations. Imagine a map that represents circularity, with the core item being the self, and all other "aspects" surrounding it being of comparable proportion, such as objectives, ethnic culture, interpersonal interactions, etc (see; Figure 7).

Figure 7. *Integrated identity map - fluidity between social identities.*

The participant identified herself as Turkish-Italian; in contrast to a parallel identity, she expressed how she adapted her identity by acculturating to the context: *"I feel like I don't want to box up myself into one group: ethnicity or religiosity, but I rather want to embrace all of my selves altogether and am open to celebrating differences".* However, a general consistency in identity is evident. This did not imply that an integrated identity never expresses any pertinent identity conflict or confusion (Fine & Futch, 2014; Ward & Stuart, 2011).

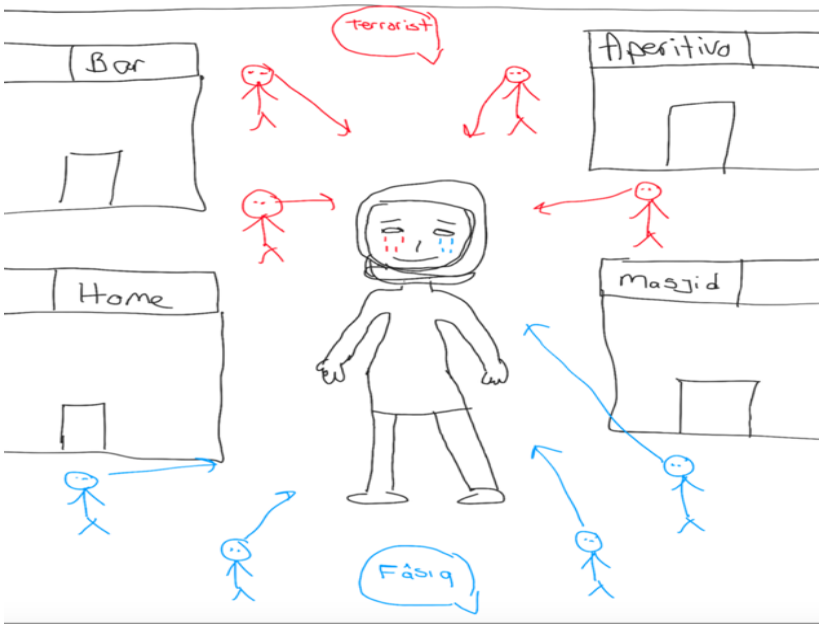
The term "parallel identity" referred to the harmonious integration of two distinct and separate identities in a subject's regular activities. Parallel identity describes the independent representation of Muslim (or ethnic) and national identities on a map. It is possible to visually divide the page into two sections by drawing a line along the center, two different circles, or other such shapes. Even if these two identities were ultimately combined by the "self" in some way, in our study, dualistic maps were referred to as parallel identities (see, Figure 8). A typical example is a tree that has been divided in two.

Figure 8. *Parallel identity map - two nonconflicting divisions*

A parallel identity map exhibited a definite divide into two segments (schism) when compared to an integrated identity map. An ethnic Pakistani self and an Italian self, as well as the way of living that is unique from the setting, were stated as follows: *"A life with my friends is more like immersed into Italian culture"* and *"my life in the Pakistani community,"* in the description of a parallel identity map. This dichotomy is formed by the subject on their own initiative, which distinguishes it from merely adopting a role based on contextual everyday societal pressures. The phrase "*I live two lives as the Pakistani, whereas the other life makes friends and lives life in accordance with Italian culture"* was used by the participant to characterize her parallel identity.

Finally, a map is categorized as "conflictual" if there are obvious indications of animosity, tension, dissociation, or irreconcilability between the social identities. In our study, we classified conflictual maps that depicted discomfort and rift between being a Muslim and being Italian. We also classified conflictual identities based on the maps (see, figure 9) that amply demonstrated perplexity, confusion, and ambivalence regarding one's identity. With images of incarceration, phrases with bad meanings, and negative emotions, the contradictory identity maps looked to be negative from a visual standpoint, which can be seen in the description of the artwork (see Figure 9); for example, one participant stated: *"I feel like I am kind of dangling between both worlds in between two mindsets and am tense about it*".

Figure 9. *Conflicted identity - conflict and bewilderment*



3.5 Analytic plan

To analyze the qualitative data resulting from the interviews and identity maps, a thematic analysis of the participants' answers to open-ended questions was carried out. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic method that is used to find patterns of thematic consistency in the data and to index them into macro-categories useful for studying trends and interpreting the results of qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To answer the first research question, which examined how participants integrated their social identities associated with their bicultural belonging, frequencies, and percentages for the three categories from identity maps as well as four thematically deduced categories were determined. We did a thematic analysis of the content of the participant's responses to the questions, "*How do you reconcile being a Muslim with living*

in Italy?"; *"What is the impact of being Muslim on your daily life?"; "Could you explain your identity map?",* to understand how they navigated their dual belonging in day-to-day life.

To address the second research question, *" How do Muslims define their religiosity, and what it means for them to be a Muslim in Italy?"*, participants' sense of religious identity was explored, that is, how they perceived themselves as Muslims when hailing from a Muslim background as religiosity is subject to change due to multiple influential factors in the lives of young immigrants.

To address the third research question, participants were asked to answer the following question: *"How does bicultural belonging affect young Italian Muslim adults' religious identity in relation to their ethnic identity?".* Participants' responses were then thematically analyzed, and calculations were made to determine the categories' frequencies and relative percentages.

The fourth research question comprised five main themes from which the frequencies and percentages were derived to comprehend how Muslims defined the trajectory of Muslim identity. We did a thematic analysis of the content of the responses to the fourth study question, unraveling how their identity evolved or devolved over time, *"Has your Muslim identity evolved/devolved over time?* in order to better understand the Muslim identity of young people living in Italy.

Excel and R software were used to compute descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) for the variables relevant to this study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1 Overview

The following table 3 outlines the targeted codes and categories of the themes that emerged from a thorough thematic analysis of the participants' responses to the interview questions, as elaborated in great detail in Chapter 3. It offers specific codes and categories that are aimed towards particular research questions, coupled with inter-rater reliability for the themes that are deduced from the responses of participants,

Table 3. *Targeted codes and categories*

Research Questions (RQs)	Key Elements & Determined Inter-Rater Reliability	Focused Codes	Categories-Conceptual Themes
RQ1 Part (a)	Reconciliation of Social Identities, pertinent to Bicultural Belonging (The inter-rater reliability is 100%, deduced from 10% of the sample)	"Balance between both"; "not conflictual"; "attire is Italian"; "merger of religious beliefs"; homely feeling linked to Islam and Italy"	Equalizing - Being Italian and Muslim are Intertwined
		"Two different sides"; "dichotomous as never meeting; "no midpoint for Muslims"; "change phases to satisfy each"; "difficult to be both"	Two Different Sides to the Coin: to be either an Italian or a Muslim
		"Judgmental to my attire"; "abstinence from prohibited things"; "discriminated for my beliefs"; "unable to pray in public spaces"	The Conflicting Relation with Italian Culture
		"Both are the same maybe"; "neither cold nor hold for both"; "being Muslim or Italian doesn't change much"; "don't care for both"	Neither affected by Italian nor being Muslim
RQ1 Part (b)	Muslims Everyday Life (The inter-rater reliability is 100%, deduced from 10% of the sample)	"Daily impact of way of living"; "performing ablution"; "observing Ramadan"; "covering one's body"; "no close contact with opposite gender"; observe abstinence to prohibited food and drinks"	Pervasive Routinization of Religious Practices

		“Judged my peers”; “people see appearances”; “difficult to observe Ramadan”; “not fully understood by Italians”; “hide my religious practices”; “negatively influence forming friendships”	Challenges in observing rituals and religious practices in day-to-day life
		“Avoid consumption of prohibited food items”; “cover my head (wear hijab)”; “not staying late at night”; “no alcohol”	Abstinence to religiously prohibited norms and practices
		“Do not pray”; “everyday lifestyle is very similar to Italian lifestyle”; “part of every culture”; “don’t dress like Muslim”; “follow Italian culture”	None or minimal influence on day-to-day life.
		“Not all are Talibans”; “verbal micro-aggressions”; “treat you as inferior”; “suffered with prejudice”; “experiences of racism”	Experienced discrimination in carrying out day to day religious practices
RQ1 Part (c)	Identity Maps (The inter-rater reliability is 100%, deduced from 15% of the sample)	“Aspects of Italian culture and Islam are similar”; “covering head but eat pizza with Italian friends”; “two coherent parts of me”; “everyday life is exactly the same”	Integrated Identity
		“Don't want to ignore both parts of me”; “embrace Italian culture and Muslim values”; “Italy is home and religion is lifestyle”; “can walk in both shoes”	Parallel Identity
		“Stuck between two mindsets”; “struggle to make a choice”; “two difficult and different pathways”; “confused of who I am”; “cannot be both”	Conflictual Identity

RQ2	Definition of being a Muslim (The inter-rater reliability is 80%, deduced from 10% of the sample)	“Observe prayer”; “adhere to the five pillars of Islam”; “internalization of strict discipline”; “abstinence from prohibition”; “belief in life after death.	Observant Muslim
		"Man of a pure heart”; "open to other cultures”, “accepting others with differences", "belief in humanity”; “less observant of rules and religious customs”; “follow the fundamentals of Islam”	Secular Muslim
		“Parental traditions to follow religion”; “blessed to be born in a Muslim household”; “observance more geared toward community”	Hereditary Muslim
		“Gave up religious practice”; “subjective reflection”; “not convinced by religion”	Suspended Muslim
RQ3	Religious Identity when viewed through the lens of Ethnic Identity (The inter-rater reliability is 75%, deduced from 10% of the sample)	“Identical to each other”; “cannot separate my ethnic values from religion”; “culture influences the experience of religion”	Infusion of Religion with Ethnicity
		“Reflection changed my perspective”; ethnicity is different for all”; “not following what told to me”	With Maturity, Reflective Transitioning from Ethnic Affiliation
		“Less influenced by culture”; “Religion and culture are two different things”; ethnic festivals and religious customs cannot be the same”	Dichotomous Understanding of Religious and Ethnic Affiliation

		“It's not religion but it's just culture”; “culture is not based on Islamic values”; “Islam comes first and then culture”.	Ethnic Affiliation in Exclusivity
		“My perception has changed as a teenager”; “I needed to know my religion better”; “Tried to separate my faith from my daily life”; “with age, learned the true essence of Islam”	Evolved over time as Religion- A comfort zone
RQ4	Muslim Identity Evolved/Devolved through Time (The inter-rater reliability is 80%, deduced from 10% of the sample)	“A learning process that made me re-evaluate my certainties”; “changed in the sense that when I was taught”; “changing my beliefs”; “idea of religion progressed”	Slight evolvement - Still in search of religious affiliation
		“Believer but not a practicing one”; “still a believer”; “felt more tied to religion”; “religion is my choice”	Evolving with the increasing sense of belongingness with religion
		“Little more aware”; “mixed with Muslim identity”; “influenced by my parents, and my religious affiliation”; “Muslim is subjective”; “perceived different image of Islam”	Fluctuating: Some religious practices are aligned, whereas some contradict.
		“Bookish understanding”; “question everything”; “logically see things; religion has faded”; “I am not a believer”; “religion is forbidden”	Devolved - alienation from becoming a practicing Muslim

Note. $N = 100$

4.2 Thematic analysis

4.2.1 Intersection of social identities and bicultural belonging

In reference to the first research question, "*How do young Muslim adults harmonize their social identities while living in Italy?",* we thematically analyzed participants' responses to three open-ended questions posed during the semi-structured interview. We analyzed the reconciliation of the social identities (as evidenced in Table 4), juxtaposed with identity maps drawn by participants, as well as how they responded to pertinent open-ended questions regarding their daily experiences as young Muslim adults living in Italy.

Table 4. *Recurrent themes about the reconciliation of social identities.*

Themes	*N (%)*
Equalizing - Being Italian and Muslim are intertwined	35 (35%)
Two different sides to the coin: to be either an Italian or a Muslim	34 (34%)
The conflicting relationship with Italian culture	20 (20%)
Neither affected by being Italian nor being Muslim	11 (11%)

Note. $N = 100$

As can be seen in Table 4, the thematic analysis revealed that 35 individuals out of 100, or 35% of the sample as a whole, perceived their social identities to be in harmony and coexisting with no apparent conflict. As one of the participants explicated, *"My physical attire looks very Italian. I don't think that I am living in a very different country from my ethnic background, but I can say myself a Muslim as well" (IM_53)*. This supported the reconciliation of their co-existing social identities as well as a bicultural belonging—being both Italian and Muslim—at the same time.

As bolstered by our findings, an equalized balance of social identities reflecting religion, ethnicity, and nationality may be motivated by the want for a higher purpose, leading to the need for self-regulation. It suggests unequivocally that 35% of participants from various ethnic origins are able to reconcile their social identities, alongside integrating them simultaneously. Another participant commented, *"For me, Italy is a homely feeling because I am who I am and who I become here. However, I am a Muslim, and I practice my religion the way it is supposed to be. I think this is how I balance it because living in Italy is my home and I practice religion voluntarily" (IM_62)*.

However, the interesting hook of the findings is that we simultaneously found 34% of participants going through turbulence in reconciling their social identities, which nearby equates to the theme, with 35% of participants equalizing social identities. As one of the respondents quoted, *"Being Italian and Muslim is difficult to be reconciled at the same time. I feel like I have to choose - one at a time. I don't see any meeting point between both, it is complex to explain. I have phases like I choose to become a conventional Muslim and then choosing to become Italian. There are two sides to me" (IM_38).* As demonstrated by akin responses, the quest for establishing a balance between one's Muslim and Italian identities can be viewed as two separate entities that do not require reconciliation. Rather, individuals may adapt to their self-perception in response to shifting contextual factors. This view regards social identities as binary, lacking any point of convergence, resulting in a dichotomy where one is either an Italian or a Muslim.

The third theme, “The conflicting relationship with Italian culture” included responses from 20 participants, equating to 20% of the total sample. One of the participants responded to explain the rift, *“They don't see abilities, intelligence, etc. and so the clothes become a struggle, in general, we always talk about women's clothes, regardless of the veil, my complexion is also a problem within Italian society. I use an Italian name when I represent the company, then when they see me, they wonder why I'm dark-skinned. I've had many interviews on the phone with the name S. (IM_01)”*. To sum up, participants mentioning this particular theme emphasized the challenge of reconciling their Muslim and Italian identities, which was primarily hindered by discriminatory encounters and the scrutiny of societal members.

The fourth and least frequent theme was how the participants’ Muslim identity was "Neither affected by being Italian nor being Muslim." The participants mentioning this theme were 11, equating to 11% of the total sample. A participant quoted, *“I am not much affected by being a Muslim living in Italy." (IM_96);* and another stated that, *"The Italian cultural side and being Muslim are not too much in opposition or intertwined." (IM_99).* Of note, the participants who fit into this category were second-generation Muslim Italians. Consequently, as illustrated in table 4, their numerical representation is limited, as being unaffected by their faith. Furthermore, they did not overtly express their adherence to orthodox Islamic practices and did not align themselves with the customs and principles they had assimilated over time from the host nation during their life in Italy.

To achieve a deeper comprehension of the process of reconciliation of social identities, as well as the bicultural affiliation of young Muslim adults residing in Italy, we employed identity maps as a means of gaining insight into the categorization of participants into three distinct groupings: those with integrated, parallel, or conflictual identities (see, Table 5).

Table 5. *Identity types based on categorically discrete maps*

Categories	Integrated	Parallel	Conflictual
N (%)	65 (65%)	21 (21%)	14 (14%)
Male (%)	28 (28%)	10 (11%)	7 (7%)
Female (%)	37 (37%)	11 (12%)	7 (7%)

Note. $N = 100$

Based on identity maps, the current study found that 65 out of 100 participants, or 65%, belonged to the "integrated" category. This category included participants whose social identities were fully merged in a non-conflicting way. The existence of multiple social identities within various social groups is evidenced by the fact that 65% of the participants' maps were classified as "integrated identity" across diverse cultural contexts, whereas 21% of participants were coded as “parallel”, as both identities were depicted as separate. In other words, they drew maps that showed the Italian and Muslim identities to be distinct from one another (for example, with a division running through the center of the page or as separate circles). Additionally, 14% of the individuals fell under the category of "conflictual" identity, indicating friction, animosity, or irreconcilability between their social identities and a rift to develop bicultural belonging.

In order to further explore, we look for gender differences. The percentages indicated that women (37%) have a greater tendency to possess integrated identities as

compared to their male counterparts (28%), based on "integrated" identity maps displaying an intersection between the areas where each identity was represented separately and merged (see, Figure 10).

Figure 10. *Gender differences in identity maps*

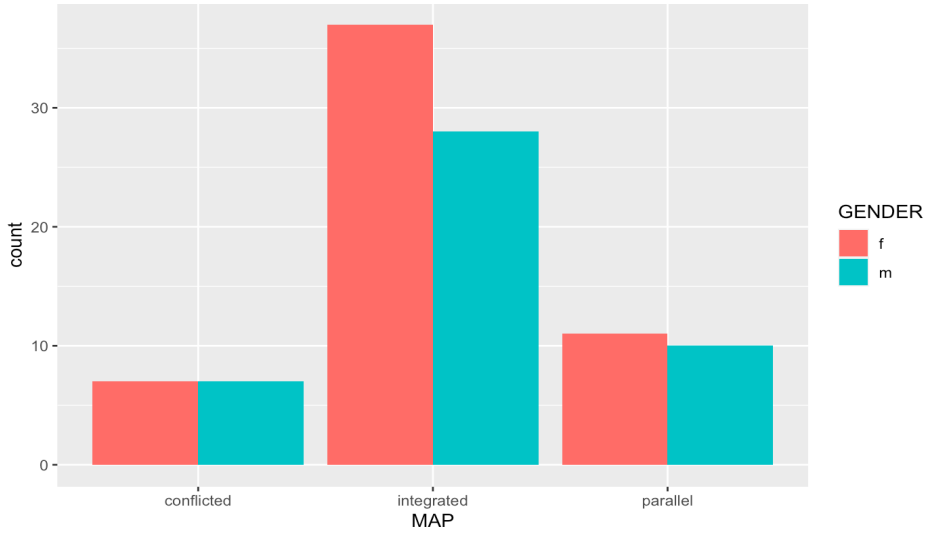
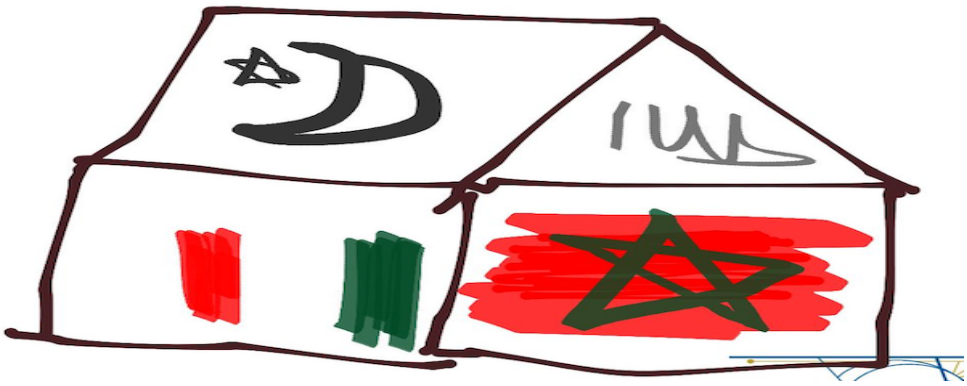


Figure 11 (Map A), drawn by a young male with Moroccan ethnic affiliation in which he symbolized the homely feeling of a house with the flags of Italy and Morocco: "*In the upper part, I drew the symbol of Islam and the Arabic inscription Allah because everything revolves around religion" (IM_89).*

Figure 11. *Map A – Clear fluidity as Integrated identity*

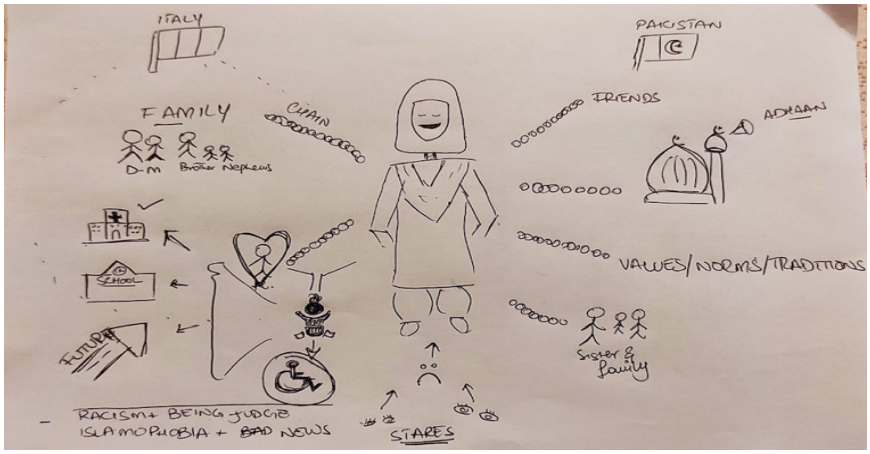


Moving onto parallel identity, a young woman of Italian birth and upbringing from Pakistani heritage culture is presented in Map B (see, Figure 12). She singularly represented distinct social identities. In the identity map, a female is shown who led an aware, yet embodied parallel identity. The junction of religion, nationality, and ethnicity is highlighted as the nonconflictual intersectionality of social identities (Giuliani et al., 2018). The participant further meticulously elucidated, which holistically sums up parallel identity, *"Life is divided into two halves: If I see Pakistan and being Muslim, I have an association with the country, religion, family & friends, and traditions. Conversely, Italy is my home. I have a family here - my husband and baby. Being Italian is a separate part of me because I see my home in this country in terms of education, and better future opportunities. I separately take this part, as Italian" (IM_62)*

In previous research, the differentiation between the integrated and parallel groupings was not always clear. One participant encapsulated this insight, stating *"I feel Italian and Muslim, side by side" (IM_63).* However, this particular study endeavors to make a distinction between a cartographic representation that conveys a consistent and current sense of belonging to national identity, in conjunction with a parallel depiction of two distinct identities. In Figure 12, a map is presented where two distinct "spheres" representing different identities can be observed at opposite ends of the page (Sirin & Fine, 2007). One of these spheres symbolized ethnic and religious life and was labeled as the "Islamic code of life", while the other represented better life opportunities and a consonant future in Italy. Although both spheres represented the sense of home for the

participant, they were parallel to each other. Based on identity maps (Sirin et al., 2008), we concluded that a majority of young Muslims had developed adaptive strategies to effectively manage and balance their social identities.

Figure 12. *Map B as parallel identity is divided into two halves*



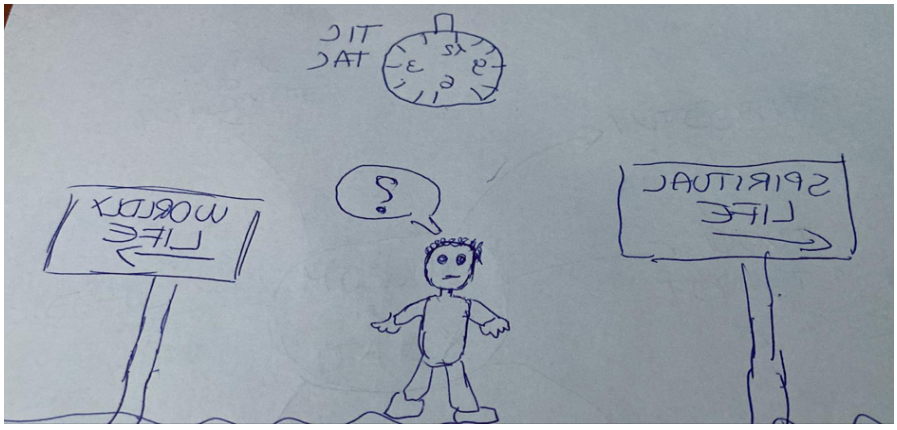
In the current study, it was observed that a small percentage of young Muslim adults exhibited conflicting identities and were assigned to a specific grouping. More than half of the participants in this research were first-generation immigrants (57%), who had previously resided in a foreign land associated with their cultural or religious principles. The present study corroborated previous research that employed identity maps, as 11% of the subjects' created maps that portrayed strife and a persistent battle between their social identities.

Identity maps with the "conflictual" identity (11%) reflected a conflict of valuing co-existing social identities as each goes up against the other. These identity maps expressed different emotions based on the participants' sense of self, which had an

impact on the drawing's outcome. This category was established for identity maps that amplified the conflict and struggle brought on by a differing social identity that heightens the conflict between religion, ethnicity, and nationality in relation to the individual's identity development.

Concluding it on conflictual identity, Map C (see, Figure 13) was shared by a young boy, of Pakistani descent, who expressed the struggle attached to social identities when they are dichotomous in nature as he labeled his life in Italy, *"worldly*" versus the ethnic and religious affiliation *"spiritual"*. He described how he found himself trapped and confused in choosing one, as according to him, both cannot coexist. This conflict between choosing one over the other put him in a conflicted identity dilemma. He described his maps, *"I drew two aspects: one is the worldly life and another one is the spiritual life and there is a tick-tock of the clock. As time moves ahead, I draw myself conflicted in choosing which world. If I give up on worldly life, I will lose the spiritual world. I am worried about what to choose (IM_49).*

Figure 13. *Map C depicted conflicted identity as anxious and confused*



After conducting our analysis, we noticed that the majority of study participants (65%) constructed an "integrated" identity map. Although they employed diverse methods to address and reflect upon the entirety of their social identities, and sometimes even explicitly expressed an ongoing process of self-discovery, there was an active and occasional struggle to manage the co-existence of identities that obstructed bicultural belonging. A participant of Pakistani origin articulated how he had to continually exert effort to maintain the integration of his identity encompassing his nationality, ethnicity, and religion in his daily life, "*I managed to create one identity, at the beginning I happened to keep two, one for the Italian and one for the Pakistani world and then over time I managed to build one and be who I am in front of everyone*" *(IM_04).*

Furthermore, we transitioned to thematic analysis of responses to the open-ended question, *"What impact does being Muslim/a have on your daily life?"* to dig deeper into the types of identity, drawn by participants in their identity maps, as depicted in table 6 to understand their everyday life to comprehend their bicultural belonging based on maps.

Table 6. *Daily experiences of Muslim young adults residing in Italy*

Themes	*N (%)*
Pervasive routinization of religious practices	40 (40%)
Challenges in observing rituals and religious practices in day-to-day life	26 (26%)
Abstinence from religiously prohibited norms and practices	19 (19%)
None or minimal influence on day-to-day life	17 (17%)
Experienced discrimination in carrying out day-to-day religious practices	13 (13%)

Note. $N = 100$

As 40 out of 100 participants believed that being Muslim had a daily influence on their way of regimenting and interpreting religion, our findings showed that Muslim young adults followed religion through with "Pervasive routinization of religious practice". Islam affects how young adults conduct their life in accordance with their religious values, rituals, and beliefs. The implementation of a certain routine in the daily lives of participants can affect their religious ideals and principles. This is particularly true for those who follow Islam, as they strive to align their moral values with their religious teachings in order to behave in a manner that reflects their faith. It is worth noting that individuals who participated in the study, despite residing in Italy and possessing varying cultural values, believed that their affiliation with Islam had a significant influence on their daily conduct and decision-making. A participant of Pakistani descent enumerated all the instances in which her being Muslim had an effect on day-to-day living: *"It has a great impact. I pray 5 times a day, even in going out and living a normal day. The fact of wearing the veil; I struggle to find right clothes " (IM_15).*

In response to this question, a participant of Pakistani descent mentioned the sense of security and comfort that practicing Islam gave her in her day-to-day life: *"I pray, I read the Quran, I try to live my life according to the rules of Islam. In everyday life I think about what would be right to do, this gives me light-heartedness on the one hand because we always rely on Allah and feel protected by a shield." (IM_19).* It is crucial for them to uphold religious values in the face of everyday life struggles and to embrace cultural norms, but only to the extent that they align with their Islamic beliefs and values.

The fact that individuals of South Asian heritage spoke about their structured religious practices was particularly noteworthy. A participant quoted, *"It has a strong impact because it's part of my daily routine anyway to have to pray five times a day, to always have abolition, it has a strong impact even the way I relate, present myself, what I decide to look in you, even my interests, the way I dress (IM_21)"*. Of the 40 participants who were classified within the thematic category, "Pervasive routinization of religious practices", 31 drew a map pertaining to the *"integrated"* category, 5 drew a *"conflictual"* identity map, and the remaining 4 drew a *"parallel"* map.

The second overarching theme was, "Challenges in observing rituals and religious practices in day-to-day life". In their comments, one-fourth of the participants (26 out of 100) reported that daily religious activities were impeded by various obstacles. These obstacles were typically experienced by those who actively practiced religion, hindering the scheduling of prayers, observance of Ramadan, and other religious practices. Our findings are consistent with Tajfel's social identity theory, which suggests that young adults are motivated to differentiate between the in-group and out-group based on characteristics that favorably distinguish the in-group. (Tajfel, 1981). One of the participants responded, "*Living as a Muslim in Italy is difficult to maintain a daily life balance, even for yourself, your faith becomes a private thing, but your community of origin would like you to be more visibly Muslim, while they you as an outsider and exclude you from the social context" (IM_04)*

Supporting the theme, the participant stated, *"It used to be a lot because when I would put the veil on and go out, you could see it right away. on the street people and*

children would get scared, they would hide behind their parents or when you walk people would honk at you; they hurt you. I had a hard time because they didn't want veiled girls (IM_05)". Of the 26 participants who gave such responses, 2 drew "*conflictual*" identity maps, 4 drew *"parallel"* maps, and 20 drew *"integrated"* maps.

Moving to another theme, 19 out of the participants—or 19% of the total—were determined to practice "Abstinence from religiously prohibited norms and practices." Participants emphasized that having a Muslim identity had an influence primarily on the religious standards that must be followed (such as abstaining from eating pork or drinking alcohol, etc.). A participant was cited as saying, "*I don't eat Pork, but only because it's bad for you. The Koran tells you what you should do but if you don't do them, it doesn't do anything (IM_07).* Of the 19 participants who gave such responses, 3 drew "*conflictual*" identity maps, 4 drew *"parallel"* maps, and 12 drew *"integrated"* maps.

Simultaneously, "None or minimal influence on day-to-day life" is one of the themes in which 13% of respondents said their daily religious practices had no or very little influence on their day-to-day lives, either because they did not practice, or because their daily lives did not include adhering to prescribed religious practices. As one of the participants quoted, *"I live my life on my own terms. I am not conservative about religion, so I think my everyday lifestyle is very similar to the Italian lifestyle. I meet with my friends, go out with them, and party" (IM_45).* Of the 17 participants who gave such responses, 2 drew "*conflictual*" identity maps, 4 drew *"parallel"* maps, and 11 drew *"integrated"* maps.

The last coded theme, which was inferred from the responses of 13 participants, was "Experienced discrimination in carrying out day-to-day religious practices". Throughout the theme, Muslims experienced discrimination in their daily life. Participants experienced discriminatory experiences from Italian natives in carrying out religious norms, practices, and values. One of the participants highlighted*, "I don't deny people's prejudice, mainly due to the fact that I wear a veil. There are verbal micro-aggressions, but I'm used to it by now." (IM_72).* It further burgeoned the idea of how the co-existence of social identities influenced their day-to-day life with a Muslim background. Of the 13 participants who gave such responses, 5 drew "*conflictual*" identity maps, 4 drew *"parallel"* maps, and 4 drew *"integrated"* maps.

Young Muslim adults try to overcome conflictual identity and strike a balance between their feeling of national and ethnic belonging, which moves towards integrated identity, their struggles are compounded by the fact that they live in a social and political climate that is characterized by a rise in religious discrimination (Sirin & Fine, 2007). Thus, the other research questions focus on analyzing Muslim, ethnic, and national identities separately.

4.2.2 How Muslims defined themselves

The term "Muslim" refers to those who follow Islam as their religion. The Arabic word "Islam" denotes one who submits to God and those who "believe in the oneness of God".

Religion influences how identity is developed in Muslim immigrants, which leads to a religious positioning of "self" in emerging adulthood (Sirin et al., 2008).

The second research question was, "*How do young Muslim adults define their religiosity, and what it means for them to be a Muslim?",* as table 7 shows the recurrent themes derived from the responses of our participants.

Table 7. *How Muslims defined themselves*

Themes	*N (%)*
Observants: Astringently regimenting to day-to-day practices and following religion by book	42 (42%)
Secularists: Not a day-to-day practicing Muslim, but truly believes in the fundamentals /pillars of religion	37 (37%)
Hereditary: An individual's membership comes from ancestral lineage	16 (16%)
Suspended: Once believers of religion who gave up practice due to their subjectively recognized reasons or reflection	5 (5%)

Note. N = 100

For the first theme (Observants: Astringently regimenting to day-to-day practices and following religion by book), 42 out of 100 participants—or 42% of the entire sample—were those who observed basic prayer and were adhering to the five pillars of Islam as given a complete code of life as a result of their own decisions, followed by the internalization of a strict discipline and routinization of religious practices. In the words of one of the participants, *"It is living a lifestyle that is based on Islamic principles every day. Islam is all about following the right path in life and not choosing the wrong path that displeases God" (IM_40)*. Thus, our findings showed that Muslim young adults from an immigrant background were observant in their practice.

For the second theme (Secularists: Not a day-to-day practicing Muslim, but truly believes in the fundamentals of religion), 37 out of 100 participants, equating to 37% of the total sample, were those who believed that being a Muslim simply means being a "*man of pure of heart*," "*open to other cultures and accepting others with differences*", "*believe in humanity as synonymous to religion*" and who are less observant of rules and religious customs on a daily basis, but truly believes the core fundamentals of religion. As one of the participants' responses summarized the thought behind the theme*, "After being a human, I see myself as Muslim. Being a Muslim is about being respectful and being kind. Being a nice and kind person is a way of being a better Muslim. For me, whoever is Muslim must respect others" (IM_22).*

In reference to the third theme (Hereditary: An individual's membership comes from ancestral lineage), 16 out of 100 participants, equating to 16% of the total sample, were those individuals whose religious affiliation came from parental traditions, demonstrating an observance that was more geared toward being part of the community. The association with religion is truly based on hereditary lineage. One of the cited participants explained the religious orientation of secularist Muslims*, "Religion is given by my family. It represents to me the sense of family like when there are holidays or Ramadan or when we all pray together" (IM_70)*. The response depicts that participant defined religion from a hereditary lineage that was not based on a subjective reflection of religiosity, but rather following a religion out of compliance with the community.

Concerning the fourth and last theme (Suspended: Once believers of religion who gave up practice due to their subjectively recognized reasons or reflection), 5 out of 100

participants, equating to 5% of the total sample, were those who were once believers of religion, but they gave up practice due to their subjectively recognized reasons or reflection. From the least frequent theme, one of the participants quoted, *"I don't identify myself as a Muslim anymore, I don't feel like saying it's mine" (IM_02).*

4.2.3 Religious Identity when viewed through the lens of ethnic identity

Social identities encompass both national and ethnic identities. Ethnic identity in the context of ethnic minorities refers to a person's sense of belonging to their ethnic group. According to the Pew Research Centre (2018) survey, in the European countries polled, the majority of Muslim respondents indicated that they identified most with their ethnic identity rather than with being European.

The third research question was, *"How does the bicultural belonging of young Italian Muslim adults affect their religious identity in relation to their ethnic identity?",* and the recurrent themes are reported in Table 8:

Table 8. *Ethnic affiliation in the reflection of religious identity.*

Themes	*N (%)*
Infusion of religion with ethnicity	44 (44%)
With maturity, reflective transitioning from strong ethnic affiliation	23 (23%)
Dichotomous understanding of religious and ethnic affiliation	20 (20%)
Ethnic affiliation in exclusivity	13 (13%)

Note. N = 100

The first theme (Infusion of religion with ethnicity) was found among 44 out of 100 participants (44% of the total sample). These participants showcased religiosity and ethnicity as being interlinked as one and could not be demarcated as two. In addition to being connected to religious practices, they imbued it with ethnic membership in terms of shared customs and traditions. One of the participants quoted, *"Yes, it is precisely one because I am Bengali and Muslim. I can understand my religion because of being Bengali" (IM_13).* Our findings bolstered the previous findings, as a sense of "we" and "us" was implied like "*I am glad to be a Moroccan Muslim*" for an ethnic identity to be considered both from the perspective of religiosity and ethnicity.

The second-most prevalent theme was identified among 23 out of 100 individuals, or 23% of the entire sample: "With maturity, reflective transitioning from strong ethnic affiliation." These individuals had undergone a transformation in which they had redefined ethnic values and religion to reclaim them from a place of subjective reflection. They identified themselves as an ethnic member of their community as they decided to adhere to some ethnic values and reject others. With deliberate decision-making, these participants gave up some or most of the sentimental and ancestor-related ethnic traditions or rituals. It was a gradual self-reflection; they were able to separate religion and ethnicity as two distinct concepts. One of the participants mentioned, and clarified the theme's all-encompassing understanding, *"I think that having Pakistani ethnicity comes from a culture and we think that it is a part of religion, but actually No" (IM_37)*

In reference to the third theme (Dichotomous understanding of religious and ethnic affiliation), 20 out of 100 participants, equating to 20% of the total sample, were those

participants who consciously perceived religiosity and ethnicity as two different entities and were positioned on different fundamentals. The participants' religious and ethnic identities were maintained separately, with a clear distinction between the two components. The choice to associate with one entity and dissociate from the other was a reversal of the implicit learning regarding the segregation of religion and ethnicity as distinct entities, which is critical for reflecting upon ethnic membership from the outset. One of the participants gave a statement that perfectly encapsulates the whole idea*, "I don't think that my Turkish background really impacts my religious beliefs. Turkey in itself is a divided state in terms of religion so I see it separately (IM_35).*

The fourth and least frequent theme (Ethnic affiliation in exclusivity), found among 13 out of 100 participants, equating to 13% of the total sample, were those who were strongly associated with their ethnic group and effortlessly followed all traditions, customs, and values wholeheartedly apart from their religiosity. It is evidenced that, when residing in host countries, Muslim immigrants practice the religion that unites them and differentiates themselves from the host country by mutually associating themselves with their ethnicity. The entire idea best captures the theme and is summed up in one of the quoted participant responses, *"There are so many things that I don't even realize because the religion that we live as Pakistanis, it's not a religion but it's just culture" (IM_15)*.

4.2.4 Muslim identity evolved/devolved through time

The fourth research question was, "*Do young Muslim adults notice a progressive/regressive change in their religious identity over time as a result of bicultural*

belonging?". The following are the five predominant themes that were coded from the interviews, as shown in Table 9 below:

Table 9. *Transitioning of Muslims' religious identity*

Themes	*N (%)*
Evolved over time as Religion- A comfort zone	30 (30%)
Slight evolvement - Still in search of religious affiliation	26 (26%)
Evolving with the increasing sense of belongingness with religion	24 (24%)
Fluctuating: Some religious practices are aligned with the faith, whereas some contradict - subject to change	11 (11%)
Devolved - alienation from becoming a practicing Muslim	9 (9%)

Note. $N = 100$

The first theme (Evolved over time as Religion- A comfort zone) was shared among 30 out of 100 participants, equating to 30% of the total sample. One of the participants expressed, *"I think my religious belief has become firmer because I find comfort and peace in believing my religion. I think it is making me a better human over time" (IM_48).* Based on their acquired knowledge of religion through their subjective reflection and developed changing perspectives over time, these individuals showed a higher affiliation with religious beliefs, burgeoned out of their voluntary practice; and they felt satisfied and fulfilled with this affiliation. As stated by one of the participants, *"As a child, I used to experience religion with shame. Whereas now I am proud of my faith" (IM_99).*

The second theme (Slight evolvement - Still in search of religious affiliation) was found among 26 out of 100 participants, equating to 26% of the total sample. One of the participants stated, *"I'm trying to learn how Islam can be integrated with my being Italian and a better Muslim, it's all about me" (IM_12),* and another quoted, *"When I was a child,*

I practiced more and thought less (a classic thing), then growing up you begin to believe in it by truly reflecting on it" (IM_100).

These participants demonstrated a change in religiosity as it somewhat altered with time and maturity in terms of their changing views and behaviors, which consequently predisposed their identification with religion from the viewpoint of critically analysing the religious values and beliefs. One of the participants quoted, *"This is a path that requires time: I am still on it. I want to continue on this path of research and deepening, maybe I will change" (IM_84).*

A total of 24 out of 100 participants, or 24% of the sample, emphasized the third theme (Evolving with the growing sense of affiliation with religion). These participants were going through a transitional period as they discovered a sense of identity and belongingness to religion, which was an acquired experience to segregate ethnic values and customs from religious rituals and faith-based beliefs. A participant's relevant quote summarizes this theme, *"I knew some things and as I grow up, I am learning more and feel more associated with religion" (IM_28).*

The fourth theme (Fluctuating: Some religious practices are aligned with the faith, whereas some contradict - subject to change) was found among 11 out of 100 participants or 11% of the sample as a whole. The development of affiliation or disassociation with religion in terms of practice and attachment to belief systems was shown to fluctuate among the small group of participants throughout the course of time and maturation. The continual change, as well-expressed by one of the participants, created a conflicting identity, *"I experienced a lot of conflict between my affiliations" (IM_91),* and another

stated, *"It is changing on a daily basis; swinging periods when I practiced less or more. But I am understanding what is right" (IM_87),*

The fifth and least frequent theme (Devolved - alienation from becoming a practicing Muslim) referred to estrangement from adopting a Muslim lifestyle. Out of the total sample, a small proportion of 9% of participants associated with the theme under investigation. As participants matured, they exhibited dissociation from religion, possibly as a result of not feeling obligated to adhere to religious practices that were dictated by communal customs. Consequently, individuals tended to express their spirituality in a more subjective manner, as opposed to adhering to traditional religious practices. To conclude, one of the participants holistically described the transition in religiosity, "*I think it devolved from the time when I was a practicing Muslim. Today, I have no influence (ID69),* and another stated, *"I am a half-believer but not a practicing one" (ID11).*

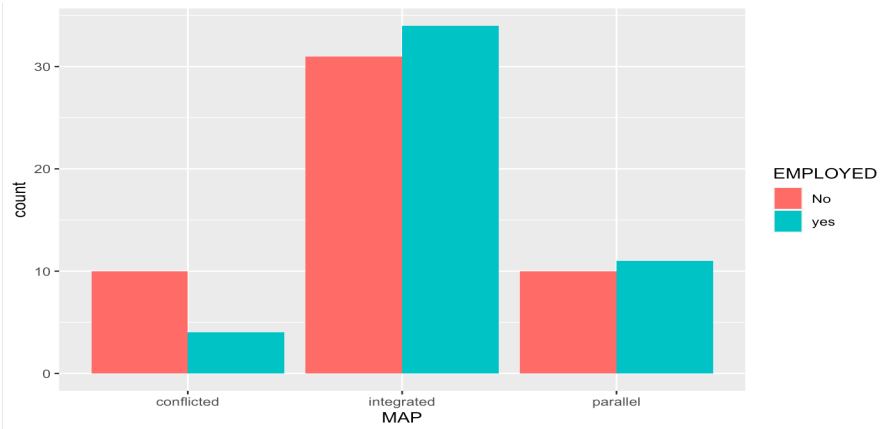
4.3 Supplementary analysis

Beyond the ambit of the present study objectives, a few additional analyses were conducted to deepen our understanding of how participants' educational level and employment status were reflected in their identity maps (see Figures 14 and 15).

Referring to the employment status of the participants, 49 out of 100 individuals were employed, while the remaining 51% of participants were unemployed. Figure 14 shows the 3 types of identity maps based on employment status. Participants who were employed were more likely to draw integrated identity maps, which offers preliminary evidence in favor of integrated identity formation. Of interest, in the conflictual identity,

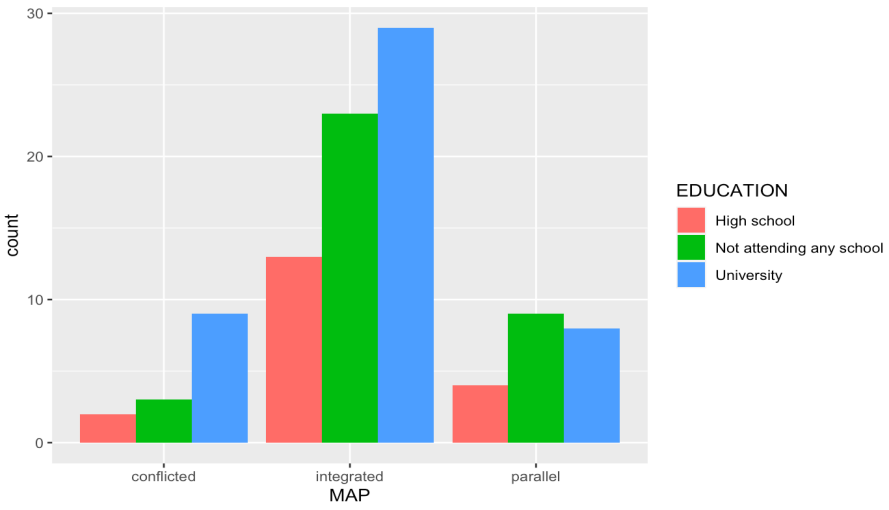
most participants were unemployed, whereas the majority of participants drawing parallel identity groups were employed.

Figure 14. *Identity maps across participants' employment status (N=100)*



In our second additional analysis, when compared to other levels of education, university students made up a significant proportion of our participants. University students were overrepresented in the conflicted and integrated identity groups, whereas a high proportion of participants not attending any school were found in parallel identity.

Figure 15. *Identity maps across educational levels (N=100)*



CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.1 General comments

The current qualitative study was conducted with the objective of developing a thorough understanding of the intersectionality of social identities and bicultural belonging among Muslim young adults in Italy, who were aged between 18-26 years. The findings of this study provide insights into how Muslim young adults navigate their manifold identities, and how they reconcile the varied cultural expectations and demands placed upon them by their family, peers, and society at large. The implications of this research may inform future policies and offer a starting point to design interventions aimed at promoting the well-being and inclusion of Muslim young adults to enhance their bicultural belonging.

Words like "hybridization of identity," "multiple identities," and “hyphenated identities” have been recently employed in contemporary research (Lannutti, 2014) in the context of exploring the identity of young adults with bicultural belongingness. According to Dusi and colleagues (2015), social identities in diverse contexts are distinct from one another, and the intersection of social identities is vital for Muslim immigrants as it triangulated religious, ethnic, and national identities to inhibit conflict in co-existing social identities by fostering the role of bicultural belonging. To achieve the study purpose, we utilized semi-structured interviews to address 4 research questions, supplementing it by collecting 100 identity maps. Subsequently, we categorized these identity maps based on participants’ descriptions to best capture bicultural belonging.

The primary objective of the first research question was to investigate the intersectionality through which young Muslim adults reconcile their social identities while residing in Italy. To answer this question, we thematically analyzed participants' responses to two open-ended questions and their identity maps. In response to the first open-ended question, 35 out of 100 (summing up as a majority) study participants believed that their Italian and Muslim identities were intertwined, harmoniously reconciling their social identities, and encouraging bicultural belonging. Intact social identity promoted a sense of personal well-being, including higher self-esteem and a balanced connection with co-existing social identity affiliations (Britto, 2008; Mossakowski, 2003), which supported the current findings. The reconciliation theme was also evident in the findings are consistent with the work of Sirin and Fine (2008), whose research demonstrated that participants' bicultural belonging balanced their social identities; their results indicated 65% of integrated identity, 21% of parallel identity, and 14% of conflictual identity maps were coded.

However, the second frequent theme of the open-ended question (i.e., "Two different sides to the coin: to be either an Italian or a Muslim") presented almost equivalent frequency, as 34% of the participants stated through their responses how they perceived being Muslim and Italian as dichotomous and parallel to their beliefs, customs, and ethos. Thus, they struggled to experience reconciliation between both of them. Our findings reflected on Muslim youth as deliberately opting for either Muslim identities or their Italian ones, instead of striking a balance between the two distinct identities. This trend could be attributed to the impact of the family, religious beliefs, or the prevailing

socio-political conditions. Alternatively, it could indicate that due to the fact that religion, such as Islam or other religious beliefs, is an all-encompassing aspect of believers' lives as opposed to mainstream cultures, that are specific to geopolitical contexts.

Most of our participants were either in high school or university, a transitional stage of developing awareness of ethnic diversity. Emerging adults are observed to determine their ethnic or religious association through their involvement in social activities on a day-to-day basis, which facilitated their diverse exposure, as per the research conducted by Umaña-Taylor (2004). The qualitative nature of the research has enabled us to obtain a profound comprehension of the primary determinants that underlie the apparent inconsistency between the initial and subsequent themes. Hence, as evidenced by the identity maps, 12 of the 34 participants experienced a parallel identity, while the remaining identity maps were categorized as either integrated or conflicted.

Researchers have argued that since social identities cannot be understood in isolation, a full knowledge of identity from the perspective of the "whole person" is necessary (Heim, Hunter, & Jones, 2011; Van Geel & Vedder, 2010). Communal affiliation and the way it connected Muslim young adults' coexisting social identities are other significant factors that merit empirical study. For instance, numerous female participants in their responses emphasized the importance of familial or ethnic values as the overarching factor; as a result, they were required to uphold a communally acceptable image in order to identify with and gain acceptance in the community (Tajfel, 1981). However, beyond their ethnic or religious values, individuals were not received with open arms, leading to discord and discrimination as evidenced by the theme, “The conflicting

relation with Italian culture". The results of this study are consistent with the data collected by the Pew Research Center (2018), which revealed that nearly seventy percent of the Italian population holds a negative bias towards immigrants who follow the Muslim faith, leading to discriminatory treatment.

The results of thematic analysis, in reference to the reconciliation of Muslim identity while living in Italy, indicated that female participants exhibited a greater propensity for drawing identity maps, despite being subjected to a higher degree of communal expectations in contrast to their male counterparts (see also Gennari et al., 2017; Stevens et al., 2004). Thus, it is noteworthy to find that our participants employed a diverse array of pragmatic approaches to preserve their bicultural belonging in order to navigate and regulate the interpersonal aspects to facilitate integrating their social identities.

Drawing on the findings of the second open-ended question, 40 of the 100 participants reported that a "Pervasive routinization of religious practices", in comparison to other social identities, contributed more to the religious identity. As they were believed to be devout believers, a sizable portion of the participants were ethnically from South-East Asian countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh. It is clear that the connection between ethnic and national identities depends on the everyday life chosen in the host country (Berry et al., 2006). This clearly demonstrated that Muslim young adults have come to terms with following a lifestyle that is religiously permissible; however, they were not in conflict with the host country's culture, as 32 out of 40 drew integrated identity maps.

It is of great interest to investigate the adaptive strategies employed by young individuals in order to balance various aspects of their lives. This was particularly relevant among 26 out of 100 participants, who expressed common themes such as, “Challenges in observing rituals and religious practices in day-to-day life" and “Abstinence to religiously prohibited practices”, which align with the dichotomy discussed in the initial open-ended question, "To be or not to be Muslim". The constant struggle to practice religion can threaten one's identity (Turner & Brown, 2007). These results provided additional evidence for our conclusion, as participants have identified complex socio-political and migration contexts as the primary obstacles to religious practice, which in turn impedes the development of bicultural belonging (Bhatia & Ram, 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2007; Thomas & Sanderson, 2011).

Verkuyten (2007) argued that immigrants are able to establish an "oppositional identity" and distance themselves from the host country; alternatively, young adults become indifferent to their ethnic and religious affiliation but still possess a sense of allegiance towards the new society. It was evident in a few of our participants as reflected in the theme, “None or minimal influence on day-to-day life”. To conclude the findings of the first research question, it is important to understand the complexity of social identities from the lens of bicultural belonging and how Muslims' religious and ethnic affiliation is viewed as contravening in the context of first-generation immigrants.

The second research question examined various perspectives through which Islam was perceived by Muslims, as well as the significance of their Muslim identity and the diverse sources that influenced it, and what motivated or inhibited them to be called

Muslims. The findings suggest that the formation of social identity is significantly influenced by spirituality and religious identity (Evans et al., 2010). Thematic analysis indicated that individuals who identified as Muslims tended to define their religiosity via the strict adherence to their faith on a daily basis, which was labeled "Observants". Interestingly, most of the participants who described their religious orientation as “Observants” illustrated their drawings as parallel identity maps. For these participants, their religious affiliation superseded their ethnic identity, and they viewed it as a fundamental reason for their existence to engage in religious practices and refrain from partaking in customs and rituals that are religiously forbidden. In support of our findings, Ramadan (2004) contended that Islam is practiced on fundamental beliefs shared by Muslims regardless of their varying cultural or ethnic background.

However, nationalistic and ethnic affiliations played a significant role in achieving religious identity among participants who identified themselves as Muslims but did not adhere to religious practices on a daily basis. These participants were themed as "Secularists”, as quoted, *“Being a Muslim is more like kindness and humanity” (IM_32).* Additionally, the influence of religion was heavily dependent on one's strong adherence to fundamental beliefs, which were instilled early in life and became an integral part of one's identity for some participants. Consequently, this influence is reinforced by young Muslim migrants' ethnic groups, particularly first-generation immigrants, who viewed their religiosity as hereditary and rooted in ancestral lineage.

Finally, a small percentage of participants was classified as "Suspended" due to a conscious shift in their religious beliefs and sentiments. These individuals expressed a

desire to live a life free of restrictions and abstentions, and as a result, chose to renounce their religious beliefs. To sum up, given the wide range of identities that co-exist within individuals, these identities cannot be completely separated from one another (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007); therefore, we cannot perceive religious identity in isolation from other social identities. A combination of other social identities with Muslim identity plays a crucial role in shaping the definition of Muslim (Britto, 2008), classified by their subjective religiosity and bicultural belonging.

The third research question investigated the impact of bicultural belonging of young Italian Muslim adults influence their religious identity in relation to their ethnic identity. Prior literature indicates that ethnic identity is correlated with day-to-day activities related to typical family life in the host country, as well as familial association, revealing extensive perspectives on family life in the ethnicity sphere (Parke, 2004). The results showed that 44 out of 100 participants associated ethnicity with religion, which suggests that they had blended religious and ethnic affiliation as both represented the same. A potential reason could be that a large proportion of our participants were from South-East Asia, and it is evident to notice that culture and religion are associated with one another; therefore, there was a need for it to maintain a connection with their valued ethnic culture.

Conversely, 23 out of 100 participants compared their strict ethnic culture to other co-existing cultures of others with immigrant Muslim backgrounds and found that many customs contradicted the teachings of Islam, so they slowly began to dissociate between the two to begin perceiving them as separate entities, themed as, “With maturity, reflective transitioning from strong ethnic affiliation”. Young adults mature and advance

in age, they tend to reflect upon their social identities to attain a state of harmony. This entails the disentanglement of idealistic customs and rituals, which subsequently enables them to gain a broader perspective as these individuals articulated a sense of discordance with their ethnic traditions and manifested discordant relations with their familial kin, owing to a divergence in generational and cultural perspectives.

Furthermore, other participants sought to segregate previously permissible cultural practices and exclusively adhered to religious prescriptions as two different strands to pursue and were clear-headed about it from the very beginning, surfacing to a tiny proportion of individuals who exclusively and effortlessly followed ethnic customs and considered their ethnic identity as discrete from religious. Hence, ethnic identification is vital for reconciling other social identities and promoting bicultural belonging (Berry, 2006).

The fourth research question addressed whether young Muslim individuals perceived a shift in their religious identity as progressive or regressive due to their bicultural affiliation. The findings indicated that a significant number of Muslim young adults had perceived an evolution in their religiosity over time, while a few had experienced a devolution in their religious beliefs. Moreover, the participants emphasized their relationship with religion as more comprehensive, singular, and profound. The term 'religiosity' is frequently utilized in lieu of expressions like 'spirituality' or 'faith', resulting in numerous misinterpretations (Jones, 2018). Therefore, it is noteworthy that the majority of the participants had attempted to separate culture, values, and ethnicity from their religiosity, irrespective of whether it had evolved or devolved over time.

To conclude, the transitioning phase of religion had a profound impact on ethnocultural consumption and promoted critical reflection, which allowed for a deeper understanding of faith, customs, and norms as all of these entities are distinct in nature, irrespective of whether transitioning led to evolution or devolution of their religiosity.

5.2 Limitations

The present study encompassed several limitations that need to be taken into account when interpreting the results.

First, the cross-sectional design of the study does not allow to test causality or investigation of the trajectory of identity development across the interdependent connections among personality, psychological well-being, and interactions between parents and peers, which contributed to the development of social identities and their bicultural belonging among emerging adults. Future studies may follow up with young adult Italian Muslims at different points in time to tackle experiences of segregation and discrimination.

Second, the use of a qualitative approach and, more specifically, semi-structured interviews involve a degree of subjectivity in data analysis which may lead to bias in the interpretation of participants' accounts. To increase reliability, multiple independent judges were involved in the creation of the coding scheme and in the coding process, yielding good levels of inter-rater reliability. However, possible social desirability effects which may have influenced the interviewees' responses cannot be ruled out.

A third limitation is the recruitment of participants via convenience sampling, a method that may give rise to a sampling bias, thereby limiting the generalizability of study findings. In the future, if the present study is replicated, conducting research on a representative population of Muslim-Italian young adults is desirable to increase validity.

Finally, although identity development is a critical process, there is a dearth of knowledge regarding migration history related to acculturation and adaptation processes (Vedder et al., 2007). Consequently, further research within Europe is essential to explore the intricacies of the link between Muslim reconciliation of social identities and possible cross-country differences in developing bicultural belonging. Moreover, other variables, such as acculturation, perception of governmental attitudes toward Islam, and national policies related to immigration could be relevant in shaping the intersectionality of social identities and a sense of bicultural belonging.

5.3 Implications for Policy, practice, and future research

The findings of our study imply that it is crucial to provide support for young Muslim immigrants to pursue the path of integration, as it leads to a leaner process of reconciliation of social identities and pertinent bicultural belonging. In order to achieve this, several initiatives, at a policy and practice level, are suggested to be taken into account by the Italian government. Firstly, they may consider assisting Muslim ethnocultural community organizations to prevent cultural loss; consequently, promoting ethnic identity, and allowing for their way of life to flourish and blend in with the

mainstream culture. Secondly, policies and programs are suggested to be developed to encourage immigrants to actively participate in the daily life of mainstream society, thereby avoiding isolation and alienation. Finally, the government should create policies and programs to educate the general population about the value of diversity, and religious differences, and encourage the acceptance of Muslim youth from diverse ethnic backgrounds. For instance, multicultural education in schools, which entails representing diverse communities as they coexist within Italian society, is an important step towards achieving it.

In the individual context of Muslim young adults, familial upbringing and ethnically oriented communities impact the co-existence of social identities, especially within day-to-day interactions. It is important to applicate integrated identity by learning the art of balancing the best of both worlds, particularly when there are multiple social identities to be appreciated and mastered by being open to diverse cultural and religious nuances.

Future research may opt to focus on investigating the correlation between family dynamics and the development of social identity among first and second-generation immigrant youths, which could potentially lead to the development of evidence-based interventions aimed at facilitating a stable and non-conflicting transition into adulthood. Moreover, the majority of research examining Muslim-origin youth has primarily focused on identity development in itself; hence, it would be interesting to understand social identity development from the perspective of mental health and psychological well-being of Muslim young adults.

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