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**Bridging Cultures: Exploring Bicultural Belonging Among Muslim
Youth in Italy**

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INTRODUCTION

The intersectionality of social identities and bicultural belonging is a multifaceted phenomenon that has gained increasing attention in contemporary scholarship, particularly within the context of immigration. As immigration continues to shape the demographic landscape of Italy, the experience of Muslims in Europe has become increasingly relevant, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of bicultural belongingness. This qualitative study aims to investigate how the second generation of Muslim immigrants in Italy has cultivated their sense of bicultural belongingness along with their religion over time.

This work is part of a larger research project, “IMAGE-identity between culture and religion”, coordinated by Prof. Moscardino (DPSS, University of Padova). The main objective of this project is to delve into the role of individual and social factors in the development of the identity among young adults of Muslim faith who were born, raised and/or currently reside in Italy.

The dissertation is composed of three chapters. The first chapter outlines the theoretical framework on identity formation in immigrants, with a focus on bicultural identity integration among Muslim youth. Chapter two describes the study’s aim, research questions, participants, measures and procedures, providing a detailed overview of the research methodology. This chapter is followed by results and discussion, presents the findings of the study and discusses implications for understanding bicultural belonging among Muslim youth in Italy.

Chapter 1

Biculturalism and identity

Understanding one's identity is as essential as determining a purpose for existence. All kinds of identities are encompassed within one individual including their cultural, religious, and social identities. However, this interplay extends further as individuals adopt another identity through processes like immigration, globalization, and cultural exchange. This can lead to the challenge of blending different identities, encompassing ethnicity, nationality, and religion. This duality emphasizes the importance of bicultural integration and adaptation.

1.1 Identity Formation in Immigrants

Identity is an essential part of human beings (Lewis, 1990). The process of identity formation in immigrants is multidimensional in both classical and contemporary theories. Erikson (1968) proposed in his theory of psychosocial development that identity formation is a key task for individuals' life that is more critical from the stage of adolescence to adulthood, which is also named "identity vs role confusion". According to Erikson, a coherent sense of self emerges by exploring different roles, values and beliefs. This is more complex for the lives of young people from immigrant backgrounds due to the added layer of navigating both their country of origin and their new host country.

Social identity theory proposed by Tajfel (1981) explained the role of group

membership in shaping one's identity in the context of ethnic and cultural identities. This theory further elaborates on the distinction between in-groups (groups with which one identifies) and out-groups (groups perceived as different). Being part of an in-group, such as family, peers, or community, fosters a sense of belonging and enhances self-esteem. The current study aims to explore how these multiple identities—ethnic, national, and religious—interconnect within the context of Italian Muslim youth.

Second generation immigrants who were born and raised in the host country to immigrant' parents often undergo a critical process of identity formation. This process known as acculturation, involves adopting aspects of the host culture while retaining elements of the origin culture (Berry, 1997). Berry proposed four strategies in his acculturation model of identities that immigrants might adopt, namely assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization. Adoption of each strategy reflects different levels of interaction with both the host and heritage cultures, leading to impacting identity development.

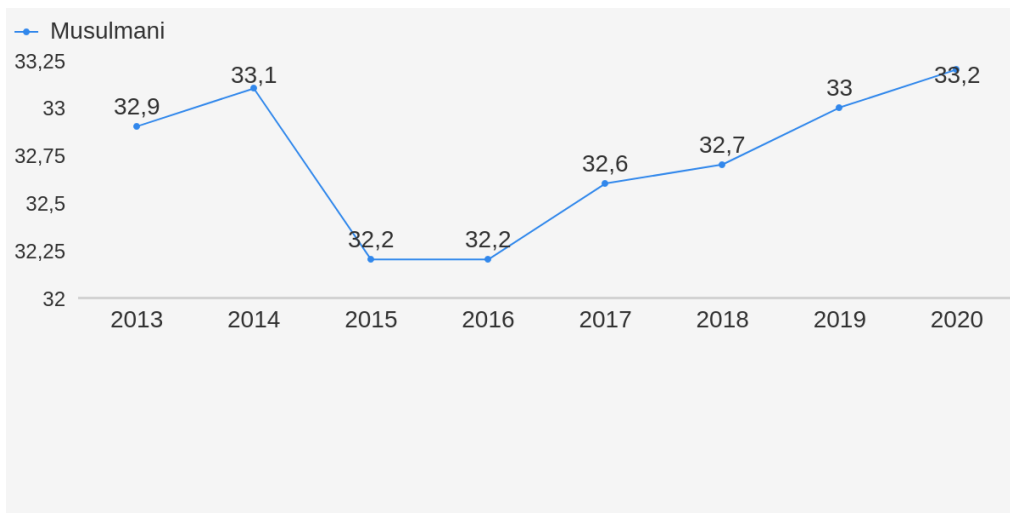
During identity formation, immigrants often face unique challenges including experiences of discrimination, social exclusion and the pressure to conform to the dominant culture (Phinney, 1990). These experiences make individuals feel torn between maintaining their heritage culture and adapting to the host society. Research has shown that the stress associated with these challenges can also impact mental health and well-being (Berry, 1997).

1.2 Italian and Muslim Identities

National and religious identities are two core aspects of an individual's overall sense of self. Italian national identity is deeply intertwined with Catholicism, where 75 percent of the population self-identifies as catholic and the Catholic church plays a prominent role in Italian society, politics and education (Doxa, 2014; Farisina, 2011). The Islamic religion is monotheist, but it is diverse in its practices among Muslim majority countries, characterized by local history, culture and sociopolitical circumstances in such a way that it is difficult to differentiate between cultural and religious elements (Rizzo et al., 2020).

Through the process of immigration, like in other European countries, the Muslim population in Italy has grown, making it 4.9% of the total population in 2020, driven by asylum seekers and legal migrants from predominantly Muslim countries (OpenPolis, 2021). Specifically, there has been a slight increase in the percentage of Muslims in Italy from 2013 to 2020, with notable fluctuations during this period (see Figure1).

Figure 1: Distribution of Italian Muslims Immigrants from 2013 to



(OpenPolis,2021)

Italian Muslims account for 6 percent of the immigrant population, originating from different countries like Morocco, Albania and Bangladesh, carrying with them diverse cultural traditions, languages and ethnic backgrounds (Tacchini, 2020). Religious identity for Muslims is closely linked to their ethnic background and provides a sense of self and community attachment in non-Muslim western societies (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007; Phinney, 1992).

For young Muslims immigrants, identity is a protective factor and a source of social support in navigating a bicultural belonging. Second generation Muslim immigrants face unique challenges in the process of reconciling their religious beliefs with the cultural norms of the host society. Recent studies found that these young Muslims are more likely to adopt a more personal and symbolic understanding of their faith and slowly move away from traditional customs and rituals (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2012; Skandrani et al., 2012). The pressure Muslim youth face in balancing their

religious identity along with holding Italian societal rules has led to a resurgence of religious practices as a coping mechanism (Vietze et al., 2019). In this study, we will examine the strategies that young Muslims adopt to reconcile their Italian and Muslim identity in everyday life.

1.3 Bicultural identity integration in Muslim youth

The concept of bicultural identity integration (BII) refers to the process where individuals perceive the compatibility of their two cultural identities either as harmoniously integrated or as conflicting and compartmentalized (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). BII is a critical aspect of identity formation for second generation immigrants as they navigate the cultural landscape of both their heritage and Italian society. The successful integration of both Italian and Muslim identities varies and is influenced by many factors such as religious practices, social integrations and parental influences. Studies have shown how second-generation immigrants often face challenges in reconciling their host country norms with their heritage culture, significantly impacting their psychological well-being and social belongings (Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Giuliani & Tagliabue 2018).

For many young Muslim immigrants, negotiation of multiple social identities (Ethnic, national and religious) begins at a young age and continues into young adulthood. While religious identity provides a sense of belonging reinforced by family and community bonding, national identity provides affiliation with the host country which can sometimes conflict with an individual's ethnic and religious affiliations

(Phinney 1992). Religious identity encompasses a significant part of young Muslim's self-identification and a source of community belonging which further complicates the dynamic interplay between different social identities.

Co-existence or conflict of these multiple identities often depends on the societal context and degree of discrimination or acceptance young Muslims face in the host society. Harmonious bicultural identity develops when a young immigrant feels accepted and valued within the host society (Vedder et al., 2007). Conversely, identity conflicts arise when prejudice, discrimination and sense of exclusion are experienced by minorities, making their heritage culture and religion a form of resistance against assimilation pressures (Bhatia & Ram, 2009). This phenomenon is evident among second generation immigrants who try to integrate their host country's identity while simultaneously retaining the norms of their ethnic and religious communities. The country's socio-political climate and the prevalent public discourse surrounding Islam influenced the process of BII. Limited understanding and negative portrayal of Islamic practices can increase the perceived incompatibility between religious and national identities (Giuliani et al., 2018).

CHAPTER 2

THE STUDY

This study is part of the large project called “IMAGE: identity between culture and religion” coordinated by Professor Moscardino and Dr. Chiara Ceccon (DPSS, University of Padova) in collaboration with Dr. Charissa Cheah (University of Maryland-Baltimore, USA). The overall purpose of this project is to investigate social identities (national, ethnic and religious) and bicultural belonging among Muslim youth who were born or have resided in Italy for a minimum of 10 years.

2.1 General aim and research questions

The current study aimed to understand the transitional stage of identity development among Muslim young adults as the target age group of the participants is between 18-25 years. The participants were administered an online semi-structured interview, including both closed-ended questions (drawn from existing questionnaires) and open-ended questions. Moreover, they were asked to draw a map of their identity to obtain a pictorial representation of how they reconciled their multiple identities.

The following research questions guided the present study:

R.Q .1: What are the identity processes that occur in young Italian Muslim adults?

Formation of multiple social identities is not an isolated phenomenon, but it is influenced by the religious, ethnic and national background in a person’s life span. The intersectionality perspective proposed by Sirin and Fine posits that multiple social

identities intersect to shape the experiences and identity formation of Muslim youth. This intersection is influenced by the historical and social context. Previous research among Muslim American youth revealed that individuals often exhibit a strong identification with their Muslim identity, which is frequently integrated with a strong sense of American identity (Sirin & Fine, 2007; Tahseen & Cheah, 2018). Based on these findings, we expected to find a similar pattern in the Italian context.

R.Q.2 What are the strategies Muslim adults adopt to reconcile their social identities in daily life?

Negotiation and reconciliation of different social identities is a complex process for Muslim youth living in Western countries, where the dominant cultural norms and values may sometimes conflict with their religious beliefs and practices. Individuals who face discrimination either at the individual or at the public level, in the form of islamophobia, may experience feelings of incompatibility between their Islamic and national values. This in turn can result in difficulties mediating their multiple identities (Balkaya et al., 2019). Hence, we anticipate that young Italian Muslims who experience high levels of societal discrimination are less likely to reconcile their dual identities (Italian and Muslim).

2.2 Participants

This study involved 20 young adults with a Muslim immigrant background. The inclusion criteria were as follows: 1) being aged between 18-25 years; 2) being raised in a Muslim household; 3) being born and raised in Italy or having resided in Italy for at

least 10 years. Of these, 55% were born and raised in Italy (second generation) and 45% had lived in Italy for at least 10 years (first generation) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants

| | M | SD | Range |
|---------------------|----------|-----------|--------------|
| Age (in years) | 22 | 2.4 | 18-25 |
| Gender | | | |
| Female (%) | 65% | | |
| Male(%) | 35% | | |
| First generation(%) | 45% | | |
| N.of years in italy | 15.2 | 2.6 | |
| Student(%) | 80% | | |
| Worker(%) | 20% | | |

N=20

Participants were from diverse origins, with the majority being from Morocco (55%), followed by Pakistan (25%), Tunisia (10%), Turkey (5%), and Bangladesh (5%). All participants belonged to monocultural families.

2.3 Measures and Procedure

This is a mixed-method study involving a semi-structured interview with both closed- and open-ended questions, as well as identity maps. For the purposes of this dissertation, I focused on participants' drawings of identity maps and their responses to an open-ended question.

Identity maps are a projective method inspired by Milgram (1976), Wilkinson (1999), and Winnicott's Squiggle game (Stuart & War, 2011). According to this method, identity maps reveal positive or problematic aspects of the self, the groups to which one belongs, and the ways in which multiple social identities are experienced through a

symbolic element (Sirin & Fine, 2008).

The open-ended question analyzed for this dissertation aimed to tackle participants' subjective experiences related to their multiple social identities. Hence, the following question was asked during the interview: How do you reconcile being Muslim with being Italian/living in Italy?

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the School of Psychology (protocol n. 4914). I collected the data over a three-month period (between February 2024 and April 2024). In doing so I intentionally avoided conducting interviews during the period of Ramadan, which occurred in March 2024, to prevent any potential bias. Participants were recruited using snowball sampling techniques through social networks posting announcements.

A recruiting flier that detailed the purpose of the study was sent via email to the participants. Those who agreed to participate were subsequently sent a consent form, along with a request to create an identity map. An identity map is a visual representation of one's cultural and religious affiliations, in this case focusing on young adults' Muslim and Italian identities, and how these identities co-existed. Once the consent was obtained and identity maps were prepared, a time and date for the interview were scheduled.

Interviews were conducted via the zoom platform in an unrecorded video call lasting approximately 40-60 minutes. During the interview, both open-ended and closed-ended questions were addressed to explore the significance of being Muslim, reconciliation of Muslim and Italian identity, impact of religious identity on daily life

and experiences of perceived discrimination. Responses to closed-ended questions were recorded using google forms while the answers to open ended questions were noted in separate documents. Before the start of the interview participants were reminded of the contents of the consent form, particularly emphasizing the guarantee of anonymity.

2.4 Data Analysis

Identity maps were analyzed using a qualitative classification approach Sirin & Fine, (2007). By interpreting the description given by participants during the interview, with the help of another member of the research team, each identity map was coded into one of three categories: “Integrated”, “Parallel” and “Conflicted”. In our study, we identified a map as integrated when it represented a fully blended and non-conflicting Muslim and national identity; Parallel when both identities were depicted and explained separately; conflicted when there was an obvious indication of tension, hostility or irreconcilability of the social identities.

Answers to the open-ended question were analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative analytic method effective for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns and themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this analysis recurrent across participants responses were identified. To ensure the reliability of the coding process, a second researcher independently coded the same interviews interrater agreement was 75%.

CHAPTER 3
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Identity maps

The first research question aimed to explore how young adult Muslims in Italy navigate their different social identities. For this purpose, we used identity maps and analyzed participants' descriptions provided during the interviews. With the help of another member of the research team, we coded 20 identity maps into the 3 categories proposed by Sirin & Fine (2008). The frequency of each identity type—integrated, parallel, and conflictual—is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Identity types based on identity maps drawn by participants

| Categories | Integrated | Parallel | Conflictual |
|------------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| N (%) | 11 (55%) | 3 (15%) | 6 (30%) |
| Male (%) | 4 (50%) | 2 (25%) | 2 (25%) |
| Female (%) | 7 (58.33%) | 1 (8.33%) | 4(33.33%) |

N=20

More than half of the participants depicted an integrated identity, meaning that they effectively reconcile their Muslim and national identity without conflict. As regards gender, almost two-thirds of female participants described their identity as integrated, while males more frequently endorsed parallel identities indicating a

separation of their social identities.

Figure 2. Integrated identity map

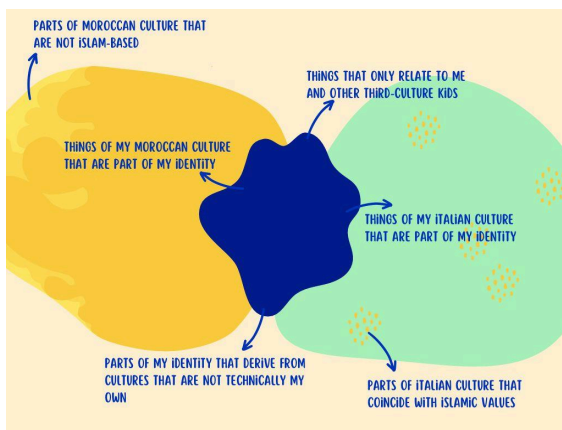


Figure 3. Integrated identity map



Examples of identity maps in Figures 2 and 3 represent how participants integrated their identities differently. The identity map presented in Figure 2, demonstrates how the participant integrated their personal life with ethnic, Muslim and Italian culture. This map was drawn by a female of 22 years, who was born and raised in Italy but had a strong affiliation to her ethnic culture, namely Morocco. The participant described parts of Italian culture that coincided with Islamic values, which fit seamlessly into her identity, reflecting a harmonious relationship between two cultures. *“I designed with three colors: blue represents my identity, dark yellow represents Moroccan culture with Islamic values, and light yellow represents the non-Islamic aspects of Moroccan culture that also play a small part in my identity.”*

Green represents Italian culture. The yellow dots on the green represent parts of Italian culture that coincide with Islamic values. I feel that I have four aspects to my identity: some are connected with Moroccan identity and others with Italian culture, one part reflects my experience as a third-culture kid, and another part derives from cultures that are not technically my own”.

This participants' map and accompanying narrative suggest that their identity is a dynamic blend of their Moroccan heritage, Italian upbringing and unique personal experiences. Individuals with integrated identities merge their cultural and religious affiliations into a cohesive self-concept without experiencing significant internal conflicts (Sirin & Fine 2008).

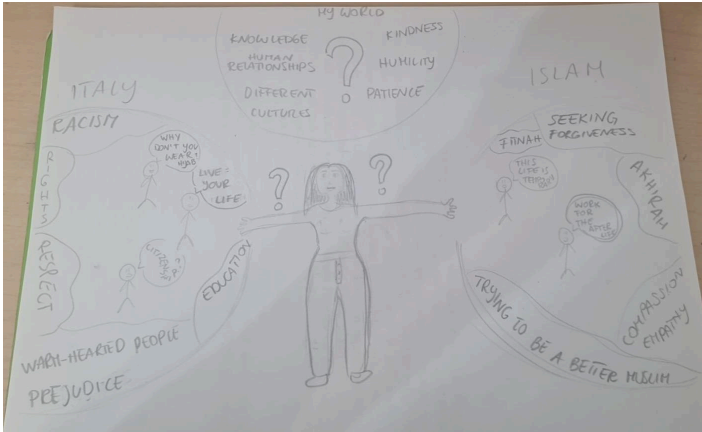
The second identity map (Figure 3) gives a vivid representation of how the participants harmoniously integrated their Moroccan and Italian cultural identities, with Islam serving as the central element that connected all aspects of their life. This map was drawn by a female originally from Morocco who had been living in Italy for the past 17 years. The participant's map features a heart at its core, symbolizing the interconnectedness of various facets of their identity, such as culture, family, school, social life, and friendships. As described by the participant: *“I put a heart, as you can see, connecting all the points. One of these points is the connection between Italian culture and Moroccan culture because I take a bit from both. However, everything I have committed to—friendship, school, social life, and family—is connected to my religion and my well-being. For me, Islam means well-being in every aspect. Therefore, when I choose what to share on social media, which school to attend, which friendships*

to form, and what cultural elements to embrace, I simply connect it all to Islam for my well-being". This pictorial representation along with description of her identity emphasizes the participant's belief that all these elements are intertwined through their commitment to Islam, which they equate with personal well-being. The heart symbol and participant's narrative suggest a deep connection between their social identities, proposing that for the individual, identity integration is synonymous with inner peace and well-being.

Moving to conflicting identity, one-third of the participants were coded into this category. They described a sense of inner conflict when reconciling their Muslim identity with their Italian culture. The map in figure 4, drawn by a girl with Moroccan roots, shows the inner conflict while navigating two distinct worlds. The participant positioned herself in the center of the map, surrounded by elements representing Italian culture and Islamic values that symbolize a clear tension between these two forces.

She described the pictorial representation as follows: *"I put myself in the middle of these two worlds, so I feel like I'm being pulled by two forces. However, if I had to be honest, I feel like my religion will always be the strongest pull for me because it reflects my priorities. We are living in this world, but the real world is hereafter. So, at some point, I will have to choose, and I will choose my religion. When I had to describe my world, I didn't really know what to include because it's a question I ask myself every day"*.

Figure 4. Conflicting identity map

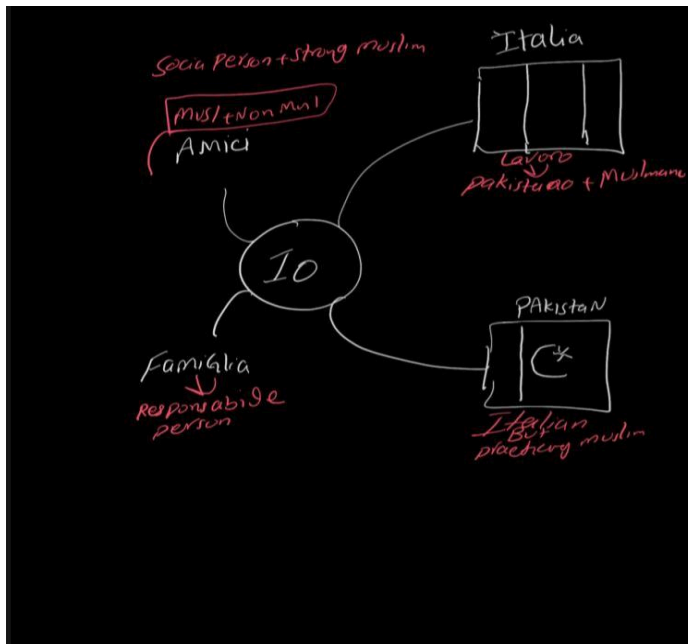


This description reveals a prioritization of religious values over cultural assimilation. Both the graphic representation and the description suggest that the participant perceived a looming choice between these two aspects of life with a strong inclination towards their faith as the ultimate guiding force.

Finally, parallel identity maps were observed in a minority of the participants in this study sample, with a predominance of male participants. Parallel identity is characterized by the ability of individuals to maintain distinct cultural and religious identities in parallel rather than merging into a singular cohesive identity. Figure 5 shows a parallel identity depicted by male participant of Pakistani origin, who described it as follows: *“In the map, I see myself at the center. On one side, under the Italian flag, I represent my life here in Italy, where I am considered Pakistani and Muslim. On the other side, under the Pakistani flag, I reveal my Pakistani roots and the experience I had there, where I am seen as Italian but also recognized as a devout Muslim. In the friends section, I show how I am open and friendly with everyone, but also how I am close to my Muslim friends, sharing a strong religious practice together. Finally, in the*

family section, I represent my strong family bond, demonstrating my responsibility and dedication to my family”.

Figure 5. Parallel identity map



The map and its description reveal a balancing relationship between his two sides, social relationship showcasing a dual approach while the participant-maintained openness and friendliness with people from various backgrounds.

3.1.2 Open-ended question

The second research question aimed to explore the strategies used by young Italian Muslim adults to harmonize their social identities. For this purpose, a thematic analysis was conducted. As shown in Table 3, four themes were identified based on participants' responses.

Table 3. Themes emerging from answers to the question on how individuals reconcile their social identities

| Themes | N(%) |
|--|---------|
| Equalizing - Being Italian and Muslim are intertwined | 7 (35%) |
| The conflicting relationship with Italian culture | 5 (25%) |
| Two different sides to the coin: to be either an Italian or a Muslim | 4 (20%) |
| Neither affected by being Italian nor being Muslim | 4 (20%) |

N=20

Thematic analysis revealed that over one third of the sample perceived their social identities in an equalizing manner, without experiencing any conflict. One of the participants stated that *“It has been a gradual process for me. It's all about finding balance between religious beliefs and the environment I live in. Like upholding Islamic practices such as prayer, fasting while participating in traditional Italian customs”*. Another participant with a different background stated that *“I try to find a balance between my Muslim and Italian identity through respecting the laws and norms of the country, while at the same time, I preserve my cultural and religious traditions”*. Hence, participants from various ethnic origins were able to reconcile their various social identities while integrating them simultaneously.

About one quarter of participants showed a conflict in harmonizing their social identities in the Italian context. For them, being Muslim and being Italian were two different sides that could not be reconciled. As one the participant explained *“Honestly it is not easy to merge both identities and like living in Italy with Muslim identity. As when I am with my non-Muslim Italian friends enjoying life but it feels different*

sometimes because I have to remind myself that I am Muslim like the food I eat, places I visit with them” Another participant said that *“Yes it was hard to reconcile, like making friends being Muslim is not easy. Even when I am outside, I can't do the prayers sometimes, even on the holidays of our religion we can't do them outside. I think with time things have changed, but not so much”*. Overall participants who referred to this theme, stated the difficulty in harmonizing their identities, usually shaped by experiences of discrimination and societal judgments.

In our study, an equal proportion of participants fell into the third and fourth themes, indicating two different perspectives: being either Italian or Muslim, or being unaffected by either Italian or Muslim identities, respectively. Participants state that for them being Muslim and being Italian are two separate entities that did not need to be reconciled. They often shift their identity according to circumstances. The individual perceived themselves as dichotomous, and there was no midpoint that conjoined these two identities, so one felt either Muslim or Italian, as stated by participants themselves: *“For me they are two completely different things. I also have an Italian life but the majority of my life is shaped by Islam”*; *“So many different things you can't link them together, two different cultures and traditions. If I have to choose one thing, I choose Muslim first; in case, I respect my religion first”*.

The last and fourth theme (i.e., being unaffected by either identity - Italian or being Muslim) was mentioned by less than one quarter of the participants. These individuals expressed themselves in the following way: *“For me it's not difficult and it also depends on the people around you. I think that in Italy there are people who respect*

other cultures. In general, it wasn't very difficult to practice my culture, whether it's Bangladeshi or Muslim, in Italian society.”; “I do not try to reconcile them. It doesn't weigh on me to be Muslim and live in Italy. For example, I've never had issues with wearing the veil or regarding my faith to be accepted”. These individuals have reached a state of identity integration where their cultural and religious identities coexist without external pressure. They find it easy to practice their religious and cultural traditions within Italian context, often attributing this ease to the respect and acceptance they confront in their social environments. It emphasizes the variability in how individuals perceive and experience their dual identities, showing that for some, being both Italian and Muslim does not require reconciliation but is a seamless aspect of their lives.

3.2 Discussion

The aim of this qualitative study was to investigate the bicultural belonging of young adult Muslims in Italy and the strategies they adopt to reconcile their multiple social identities (ethnic, religious and national). To this end, a mixed method approach was used involving semi-structured interviews with both closed and open-ended questions and identity maps that were administered to 20 participants of different cultural backgrounds who were born or raised in Italy.

To achieve the study purpose, we categorize participant's identity maps based on their pictorial representation and description. The results showed that the majority map reflected an integrated identity in which Muslim and national identities were merged in a non-conflicting manner. These findings reveal that many individuals reported a

successful process of identity integration by coexisting their social identities harmoniously without any conflict. This observation is aligned with studies that were conducted in other countries such as among young Muslims in New Zealand and the United States using the same procedure. (Sirin & Fine 2007; Stuart & Ward, 2011).

However, it is also important to note that 30% and 15% of the participants were categorized by conflicting and parallel identities respectively, revealing the complexity of identity negotiation. While many participants had successfully integrated their identities, these variations reveal that other also experienced tension and non-overlapping identities. These findings align with previous studies by Sirin & Fine (2008) and Verkuyten (2007), which highlighted the complexities and variations in how Muslim youth navigate their diverse social identities. While some individuals successfully integrate their national, ethnic and religious identities, others experience tension or compartmentalization of these identities. The results of this study suggest that Identity negotiation is not a uniform process; rather, it varies depending on the social context. Identity integration can be challenging for some, especially when individuals face societal pressures, discrimination, or cultural differences that make the harmonization of identities more difficult.

Another relevant finding was that female participants were more likely to have integrated identities compared to their male counterparts, who showed a higher tendency for parallel identities. This gender difference could be due to various experiences and strategies in navigating identity processes, demanding further exploration in future studies. A study conducted by Fleischmann and Phalet (2018)

revealed that female Muslim immigrants display higher levels of identity integration as compared to their male fellows. This difference may be because women in Muslim countries face overt symbols of their religious identity, such as wearing the hijab, and thus develop more integrated identities as they actively navigate their roles in both their religious and national contexts.

As regards participants' responses to the open-ended question investigating the strategies for reconciliation of different identities among Muslim youth, thematic analysis revealed a diverse array of strategies that were categorized into four main themes. Specifically, approximately 35% of the participants were able to equalize their identities, where being Muslim and being Italian were not seen as conflicting but as complementary parts of the self-concept. These results are consistent with the notion of bicultural identity integration, which states the capacity to combine elements of both cultures without experiencing internal conflicts (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). One participant described identity as a gradual process of “*upholding Islamic practices such as prayer and fasting while participating in traditional Italian customs*”; another participant emphasized the importance of respecting Italian norms while maintaining cultural and religious traditions. This shows that for some Muslims in Italy, integration of identity is a dynamic and active process where individuals refine their social identities as they gain autonomy and explore new social contexts (Arnett, 2000).

About one-fourth of the sample mentioned that they found it difficult to reconcile their social identities in Italian society because of discrimination and judgements of others. One participant expressed their thought on the challenge of these identities “*It*

was hard to reconcile, like making friends being Muslim is not easy. Even when I am outside, I can't do the prayers sometimes, even on the holidays of our religion we can't do them outside". These experiences of difficulties were discriminatory practices, Islamophobic attitudes and broader societal challenges faced by Muslims in Western countries, which can strengthen identity conflicts (Abbas, 2007).

Interestingly, the reconciliation of identities was not seen as necessary or desirable for a significant proportion of the participants, with less than a quarter falling into this category. These individuals either navigated their dual identities separately or remained unaffected by the potential for conflict. They may feel secure in their identities due to supportive surroundings that accept diverse identities. According to Verkuyten and Yildiz (2007), individuals who experience less societal pressure are more likely to maintain distinct identities without feeling the need to reconcile them. This can lead to a sense of comfort in navigating diverse identities without perceiving any conflict. The idea of "Bicultural competence" supports the notion that identity reconciliation is not always necessary, suggesting that individuals become adept at managing their multiple identities in different contexts without integrating them into a single, cohesive identity as discussed by Laframboise, Coleman, & Gerton (1993).

The current study has several limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the findings. The first limitation refers to the small sample size and lack of broader demographic diversity in terms of age, gender and socioeconomic status, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future studies may involve larger more diverse samples to enhance the representativeness and robustness of the results.

A second limitation is self-reporting bias; the heavy reliance on self-reported data may lead to inaccuracies due to participants' tendencies to present themselves in a favorable light, misunderstand questions, or provide socially desirable responses, which can compromise the validity and reliability of the findings. This is especially true when discussing, where individuals might have underreported negative experiences or exaggerated their ability to reconcile conflicting identities.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting valuable insights into the complexities of identity negotiation among Muslim youth in Italy. The results revealed the multifaceted nature of bicultural identity integration and emphasized the diverse ways in which individuals navigate their religious and national identities. Future studies might investigate the long-term effects of identity integration on psychological well-being and social belonging, offering deeper insights into the experiences of second-generation immigrants of Islamic faith in Italy.

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