

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Religious transmission and cultural negotiation in first-generation Muslim migrant parents in Italy: A qualitative study

Anna Miglietta¹  | Dalia El Brashy¹ | Roberta Ricucci²

¹Department of Psychology, University of Turin, Turin, Italy

²Department of Cultures, Politics and Society, University of Turin, Turin, Italy

Correspondence

Anna Miglietta, Department of Psychology,
University of Turin, via Verdi, 10, 10124
Turin, Italy.
Email: anna.miglietta@unito.it

Abstract

This study investigated the interplay between acculturation and religion in the religious transmission of first-generation Islamic parents in Italy. Based on the model of the Big Four Religious Dimension (BFRD) the study took a multidimensional approach to religiosity to gain a detailed understanding of the different facets of religiosity and their contribution to the overall process of cultural adaptation and intergenerational transmission of religious values. Eleven first-generation Muslim parents (nine women; mean age: 48 years) participated in a semi-structured interview. Results showed that the tension between the desire to 'raise good Muslims' and for their successful integration in a non-Muslim context challenges different facets of religiosity opening spaces for cultural negotiation which leads parents to reconsider how religious rules and identity are passed on to second generation and to develop a more conscious approach to religiosity in migration. The ability to connect religious values and identity with the context of life was greater when parents have developed a balance between the dynamics of integration in the Italian or cross-cultural spaces of everyday life and the spaces reserved for Muslims and had a high level of cultural capital. Practical implications for implementing policies of cultural and religious pluralism are discussed. Please refer to the Supplementary Material section to find this article's [Community and Social Impact Statement](#).

KEYWORDS

acculturation, children of immigrants, first-generation migrants, Islam, parenting, religiosity, religious transmission

1 | INTRODUCTION

For some years now, the demographic and socio-cultural fabric of Europe has been changing, partly as a result of the numerous waves of migration that have brought millions of people, raised in different contexts, to the European territory. An expression of ethno-cultural pluralism is religious pluralism, whose growth throughout Western society has fuelled debate on the extent to which religious identity should be displayed in the public sphere. Arens, Baumann, Liedhegener, and Müller (2014) reported that immigrants may benefit from a kind of indifference by the host society to the language they use, the customs they maintain, and the traditions they respect, and to some extent even to the religion they profess. Indifference ceases, however, when rights and customs are challenged. An invisible (but with real effects) barrier exists between what is allowed and what is not; between what is familiar and what is perceived as distant and incompatible with the host society (Allen, 2010). Muslims in Western society are perceived as crossing boundaries within which the presence of immigrants may be accepted or at least tolerated (Ricucci, 2017).

According to a common narrative, Western society's understanding of human rights, freedom, and self-direction contrasts strongly and irreconcilably with Islamic values and lifestyles (Perocco, 2018). This narrative is accompanied by the image of religion omnipresent in daily practice in Muslim-majority countries despite the fact that, on a closer examination, differences exist in the way Islam is practiced and how religious rules guide all spheres of life in the Maghreb, for example. Nevertheless, the outward signs of religious affiliation through strict adherence to rules on dress, food and drink, and gender relations set a boundary between the Muslim minority and the social majority. From values to social behaviour, Muslims—at least those who call themselves strict believers—are driven by religious laws (i.e., sharia) to guide their entire lives in all personal and social habits, evaluating every decision (at home, at work, in looking for a partner, in business, and in politics) in light of religious instructions and the imam's advice. Consistently, evidence suggests that for Muslim in the diaspora religious values shape worldview by becoming a lifestyle (Izetbegovic, 1993) that is expressed in a strong sense of ethnic identity (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). However, culture and religion are kept distinct in secularized Western society (Pew Research Center, 2018), and Muslims' sense of ethnic identity is constantly challenged by the assimilation efforts of the host society. These efforts are mainly aimed at the second generation (Güngör, Fleischmann, & Phalet, 2011) and, in the case of long-term migration, overlap with the efforts of Muslim parents to pass on their values to the new generations (van Beurden & de Haan, 2020). Indeed, religious transmission is a central task for Muslim parents in raising their children, but part of the socialization of the new generations takes place in a cultural context that offers values and models of behaviour that openly contradicts, if not devalues, Islamic traditions. Taken together, these factors place immigrant parents in the paradoxical situation where the task of cultural transmission becomes more difficult just when they perceive it to be particularly important (Phalet & Schönplüg, 2001, p.186).

Within this frame and considering the perspective of acculturation—that is, the process of cultural and psychological change due to lasting contact with people from different cultures (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936)—it becomes clear to what extent the outcome of religious socialization in Muslim families is closely interwoven with the social environments in which they participate, many of which have become increasingly anti-Muslim since September 11, 2001. Although Muslim communities living in Europe were targeted before the well-known events, it was mostly in the context of their social integration (school, work, interfaith marriages, etc.). Attitudes toward this religious group have fundamentally changed after the attacks by Islamic terrorists in the U.S. and Europe, and the

Western view of Muslim migration has taken a security approach that views the Islamic religion as a threat to Western culture.

Studies on the acculturation experiences of Muslim migrants in the diaspora have examined the relationship between religious identification and affiliation with the culture of the host society (Triandafyllidou, 2002; Vertovec & Rogers, 2018) and the dynamics of religious visibility and the similarities and differences in religious behaviour across generations (Guveli & Platt, 2023; Kurien, 2021; Molteni & van Tubergen, 2022). Broadly speaking, research suggests that a context where Islam is not welcomed may reinforce religious identification (Güngör et al., 2011), which also serves as a strategy for coping with the life as an immigrant in a new context (Molteni & Dimitriadis, 2021). This suggests that the value gap between the West and Islam is not bridged by assimilating Muslim immigrants to Western values of openness to change and self-determination (Schwartz, 1992). Rather, a retention of conservative values such as tradition, conformism, and security can be observed (see Saroglou, Delpierre, & Dernelle, 2004, for meta-analysis).

2 | RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS AND INTERGENERATIONAL RELIGIOUS TRANSMISSION IN MUSLIM FAMILIES

When dealing with religion and religious identity, studies and research in the psychology and sociology of religion cluster the various way of expressing and managing religious life into general categories that should be overarching for any religion (Hill, 2005; Saroglou, 2011). Following Glock's (1962) study, there are five dimensions to consider when examining personal religiosity: Belief system, motivation (faith), religious experience (emotional involvement), rituals, and social organization (religious practice).

From the field of the psychology of religion, a theoretical model that takes a multidimensional perspective is that of the Big Four Religious Dimensions (BFRD; Saroglou, 2011). The model identifies four main religious dimensions: *believing*, *bonding*, *behaving*, *belonging* that reflect as many psychological processes. In short, the dimension of *believing* refers to the cognitive aspects of religion including a close-minded versus an open-minded approach to religiosity, while the emotional aspects that connect people to each other and to transcendence are expressed by the dimension of *bonding*. Differently, *behaving* expresses the moral aspects of religion including religious norms about sexuality and social behaviour, while *belonging* refers to the social and identity aspects of religion that meet the psychological need for collective identity and social self-esteem (Saroglou et al., 2020). The four dimension of BFRD correspond to the psychological functions of religious expression, and we can assume that they are also involved in defining the worldview, attitudes toward other groups, and personal identity of individuals (Saroglou & Cohen, 2011), as well as acculturation.

A recent comparative study on religious fundamentalism applied BFRD to data collected from 14 countries of various religious heritage (Catholicism, Protestantism, Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism/Taoism). The study findings showed that among the Turkish sample the dimension of *behaving* predominated, while the dimension of *belonging* was the lowest compared to the other populations (Saroglou et al., 2020). The predominance of *behaving* found in the Turkish Muslims is consistent with the emphasis on traditional morality, a typical characteristic of contemporary Islamic fundamentalism (Saroglou, 2016).

Although these findings are instructive, they cannot be directly applied to Islam in the diaspora. Here, an intergenerational perspective is needed to explain intrafamilial relations, the significance of the new generations' religious experiences, and their socialization outcomes. Moreover, the experience of permanent migration per se can be source of individual variation in religious expression, as well as in a closed versus an open-mind attitude to change. Overall, these are crucial questions for understanding the complex relationships that first-generation migrants and their descendants have established with the various environments of daily life and with their family's homeland, sometimes idealized or crystallized in a suspended period and linked to kinship ties and cultural traditions (Ambrosini, 2016; Bramanti, Meda, & Rossi, 2020).

3 | CURRENT STUDY

This study is part of a larger qualitative study on parenting in migration, with a focus on the transmission of cultural and religious values. Accordingly, all participants were parents of at least one adolescent child born and raised in Italy. The interview questions addressed issues about raising children in a non-Muslim social context and about the cultural negotiation that first-generation Muslim adults contend with in cultural adaptation.

The study takes as its starting point the cultural gap that exists between the secularized culture of Western countries and the central importance given to religion among those who come from Muslim countries. In the case of immigrant Muslim families, this gap has important implications for the intergenerational transmission of the cultural and religious beliefs to the second generation. Indeed, parents need to reconcile the willingness of supporting their children's adaptation and integration into the host society with the willingness of transmitting them a strong sense of ethnic identity (Hattar-Pollara & Meleis, 1995) and religious and traditional values which are not neither widespread nor well accepted (Ricucci, 2017). In such a framework, it is reasonable to expect Muslim parents to undergo a cultural negotiation that brings into play the various dimensions of religiosity and the ways in which they are expressed.

To analyse the negotiation process that first-generation parents go through, this study draws on the BFRD model (Saroglou, 2011) and focuses on the intertwining between religious dimensions and motivational drives that underlie the acculturation process, that is, cultural maintenance and cultural adaptation (Berry, 1980). In addition, we were also interested in how the religious dimensions relate to the stress experiences that arise through acculturation. Although this is an exploratory study, we approached it with several expectations. In particular, we expected that the dimensions involved in negotiation were that of behaving, belonging and believing. Indeed, we expected that the tension between the desire to 'raise good Muslims' in a non-Muslim society and the desire for successful integration of children in the new context would challenge parents to reflect on how to teach adherence to religion values (behaving) in a society that disregards them and, consequently, how to pass on a Muslim identity (belonging) to younger generations. Finally, we expected that the experience of settling down as a minority would also have the dimensions of believing in the direction of a less literal interpretation of religious belief.

4 | STUDY SETTING

Turin is the fourth most populous city in Italy (847,287 inhabitants as of January 31, 2022; ISTAT, 2022) and the center of the country's third largest manufacturing region. Starting in the years of Italy's economic boom (1960s), the city has been a destination for immigrants, first from southern Italy and then from abroad. According to the National Institute for Statistics (ISTAT) (www.istat.it), foreign residents (as of January 1, 2021) numbered 208,812 from 160 different countries, or about 15% of the resident population. The 2021 report on migrants residing in the Turin metropolitan area (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2021) stated that 98,718 (about 5.3% of the resident population) come from countries outside the European Union (EU), many of which from Morocco (21.8%).

During the second half of the 1970s, immigrants to Turin arrived in three main waves. The first included migrants from Africa (mainly Senegal, Eritrea, Somalia), the Middle East, Asia (Philippines), and South America, then from the Maghreb starting in the 1980s, besides Chinese, Peruvians, and Nigerians. In the early 1990s, migration flows arrived from Eastern Europe, with migrants from the former Yugoslavia, Albania, and Romania. Currently, Turin's immigrant population is changing in its demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural composition, more and more characterized by families with children: 23,262 children regularly reside in the Turin metropolitan area (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2021).

5 | METHOD

5.1 | Participants

The study took place in Turin in winter 2020-spring 2021. The interviews involved 11 Muslim migrant adults (nine women; mean age 48 years, range 43–60) who have lived in Turin for 25 years on average (range 20–32). All were first-generation immigrants who had migrated to Italy from North African countries. Table 1 presents the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample. All had graduated from school in their country of origin and all were parents of at least one adolescent child.

For all participants except one, Italy and Piedmont were the destination of migration. One participant had migrated to France before arriving in Italy. Migration was for economic reasons for the men, while the women migrated for family reunification. Although participants spoke Italian, all interviews were conducted in Arabic by a native-speaking researcher and then translated into Italian.

5.2 | Data collection

Data were collected via in-depth semi-structured interviews. A qualitative method was deemed best suited to probe the content of the dimensions of religion and to examine the complex dynamics of cultural negotiation.

Participants were recruited within the local Islamic community from public settings and personal contacts and through word-of-mouth. All were informed verbally and in writing of the purpose of the study and gave their written consent. The audio-recorded interviews took place in private homes where they were conducted between December 2020 and February 2021 by an Arabic- and Italian-speaking trained interviewer. The interview grid investigated demographics, family and immigration history, and transmission of cultural and religious values when raising children in a non-Islamic country. The interviews lasted 1.5 hr on average; participation was voluntary and no compensation for participation was offered. The study protocol was approved by the ethics committee of the local university.

5.3 | Data analysis

The audiotaped interviews were transcribed verbatim in Arabic and then translated by the Arabic-Italian speaking researcher who collected them; the translations were reviewed for accuracy by research team members. All

TABLE 1 Sociodemographic characteristics of the study sample.

ID	Sex	Age	Education	Country of origin	Years in Italy
1	F	53	BD	Egypt	29
2	F	51	BD	Egypt	23
3	F	48	BD	Egypt	20
4	F	49	BD	Morocco	26
5	F	46	PS	Morocco	27
6	F	53	NE	Morocco	26
7	F	45	SLC	Morocco	21
8	F	43	SLC	Egypt	21
9	F	54	BD	Algeria	22
10	M	60	BD	Egypt	32
11	M	54	BD	Egypt	31

Abbreviations: BD, bachelor's degree; NE, no education; PS, primary school; SLC, school-leaving certificate.

identifying information was deleted from the final transcripts. The transcribed interviews were subjected to qualitative content analysis using Atlas.ti 9 software (Muhr, 1997). We adopted a collaborative approach and an open and axial coding method to iteratively create thematic categories (Olson, Mcallister, Grinnell, Walters, & Appunn, 2016). Each researcher involved in this phase independently coded the assigned interviews. When there was no initial agreement on coding, agreement on final coding was reached through discussion in which disagreement was discussed and collaboratively debated to agree on the final coding.

A total of 58 codes were created for text analysis (coding a total of 841 quotations) In keeping with the study purpose, we focused only on the codes for:

- *Believing*: references to the cognitive aspects of religion
- *Bonding*: references to the emotional aspects of religion
- *Behaving*: references to the moral aspects of religion
- *Belonging*: references to the identity aspects of religion
- *Cultural maintenance*: references to the desire to preserve one's own cultural heritage
- *Cultural adaptation*: references to the influence of people, groups, and/or communities on changing practices and the desire to adopt cultural elements of the host culture
- *Acculturation stress*: references to stressful situations resulting from cultural negotiation between generations and with Italian society in general

6 | RESULTS

6.1 | Categories description: The big four dimensions of religiosity and the drivers of acculturation

We first examined the frequency of occurrence of each code used in the analysis. Consistent with previous research highlighting the relevance of morality in Islamic religiosity (Saroglou et al., 2020), that of behaving (e.g., *If you cannot marry, fasting becomes a necessary protection. Because fasting means not only abstaining from food and drink, but also from all sins, including a malicious look, your body becomes weaker and that helps the spirit*, Int. 11) was the religious dimension most cited by interviewees ($N = 157$). It followed the dimension of belonging, which clusters expressions of identification and participation in the religious community (e.g., *I want my son to marry to build a stable future. She [the wife] must be Muslim because she will raise Muslim children. If she were not a Muslim, I cannot tell her how to raise her children*; Int. 2). The high frequency with which this dimension is mentioned ($N = 117$) is consistent with the idea that religious identity is more important for Muslims in the diaspora than for Muslims living in Islamic countries, where religious affiliation is taken for granted.

In contrast, the topics related to religious beliefs (believing; $N = 87$) appeared less frequently in the respondents' speeches. As discussed in the introduction, believing refers to the search for meaning and truth, especially with regard to existential questions. The content in this category relates to two different aspects. On the one hand, the experiences of migration and intercultural contact led some respondents to confront with aspects of faith that they would never have questioned in their country of origin (e.g., *The children compare themselves with their Italian peers and ask you why others can do certain things that our religion forbids [...] Then sometimes they ask you questions about faith... like about Jesus and the fact that for them he is God*; Int. 1). On the other hand, other respondents highlighted the distinctiveness of Islamic culture compared to Italian culture (e.g., *Our religion has taught us to be lenient, not to be strict with our children, but to talk to them and explain to them what is wrong, without pretending that nothing has happened, as Italian families sometimes do*; Int. 7).

Going ahead, the less frequent dimension appeared in respondents' speeches was bonding ($N = 28$), who refers to emotional aspects that connect people to each other and to transcendence (e.g., religious rituals) and motives and

functions, such as emotional regulation and attachment security. The speeches in this category mostly referred to strategies to awaken an emotional attachment to religion in children (e.g., *We didn't force our daughters, but we talked about it [the veil] since they were little, and maybe they put it on during religious occasions because they felt it was something familiar*; Int. 1).

Regarding the dimensions of acculturation, respondents referred to cultural adaptation several times ($N = 116$), which is not surprising given the number of years participants have lived in Italy (25.3 years on average). Indeed, this dimension includes the experiences of approaching the host culture that occur during the acculturation process (e.g., *The change began when I started meeting new people ... Especially when the kids started kindergarten ... I realized that it's cold here and you need to put on a jacket that covers you, so I started wearing the little veil and maybe the skirt, but then I realized that it was not comfortable to walk around in a skirt* (Int. 1)). The second most cited acculturation dimension was Cultural maintenance ($N = 106$). Again, the result was not surprising, as this category refers to the widespread desire of migrants to preserve their cultural and religious references. For these interviewees, culture also included religion or overlapped with it (e.g., *The veil helps to maintain this sense of [Arab and Muslim] identity*; Int. 2).

Finally, the category of acculturation stress ($N = 87$) included quotations about stressful experiences in cultural negotiation, especially the need to reconcile the centrality of religion in the lives of Muslims with the secularized environment in which they and their children live (e.g., which also serves as a strategy for dealing with life as an immigrant in a new context: ... *(at home) you are not alone when you educate. You educate and the environment educates with you, but (here) the two teach opposite things [...] I said to my son, "What is a sin for us is not a sin for them. This is their culture and I can don't say that it is an uneducated girl, because this is normal for them*; Int. 3). In many cases, respondents emphasized that the gap between the values and rules taught in Islamic families and those of Italian society is burdensome for the second generation (e.g., *How can a teenager maintain his values when everyone around him does not, he compares himself to them and feels like a minority?*; Int 10).

6.2 | Cultural negotiation and religious transmission

To clarify the role of religious dimensions in acculturation, we focused on the interconnections between the four religious dimensions and the three acculturation dimensions in the participants' speeches.

Table 2 shows that the most numerous co-occurrences between acculturation drivers and religious dimensions concern cultural maintenance with behaving ($N = 38$) and belonging ($N = 34$). As we discussed in the previous paragraph, behaving and belonging refer to the normative part of religion—which is expressed in the observance of moral rules regarding food, dress, behaviour and sexuality—and the identity part of religion respectively. In the case of Muslims, the two dimensions are closely interwoven, as adherence to moral rules defines belonging group. The co-occurrence of these two dimensions with the desire for cultural maintenance indicates that it is a priority for

TABLE 2 Acculturation categories and religious dimensions: occurrence and co-occurrence counts.

	Cultural maintenance (CM) $N = 106$	Acculturation stress (AS) $N = 87$	Cultural adaptation (CA) $N = 116$
Believing $N = 87$	20	8	7
Bonding $N = 28$	9	2	2
Behaving $N = 157$	38	26	24
Belonging $N = 117$	34	17	17

Note: N denotes code frequency.

respondents to preserve their religious identity and pass it on to their children, an identity that manifests itself outwardly through a very specific lifestyle:

I wanted my daughter to appear with her Arab and Muslim identity. The veil helps maintain that sense of identity. So I took care of the veil, prayer, and fasting. When she wanted to take it off in the eighth grade, I stopped her. (Int. 2)

In line with their desire for cultural maintenance, when talking about the realm of morality, interviewees prioritized an impersonal conception of morality typical of collectivist societies of origin and emphasized the cultural conflict in their encounter with Italian society:

When you come to a Western country you are faced with that openness that is typical of their culture such as the mixing of men and women that you find here, in our countries of origin it is limited and in this you find a strong cultural conflict. (Int. 11)

This approach inevitably orients parental practices toward a normative education of religious observance that involves both dimensions of behaving and belonging:

The Italians educate their children well, they tell them what is wrong and what is right (...) The only difference is that we have to put our children on the halal path. (Int. 4)

In this context of cultural maintenance, the number of co-occurrences between this acculturation driver and the dimension of believing ($N = 20$; see Table 2) is not surprising. Indeed, believing refers to the content of the faith that is passed on to the new generations. In a migration and minority context, as is the case with Islam in Europe, parents feel the urgency to pass on religious content in full, to raise good Muslims in a foreign land:

All things concerning Islam must be taught to the children. It is not an option because you live in Italy. (Int. 8)

Furthermore, the need to resist assimilation pressures on the second generation often leads parents to harden their belief system toward religious orthodoxy:

When my son wanted to do what his friend did, I explained to him that his friend was a Christian and our traditions are different from his, and that we Muslims cannot do these things. I taught him our traditions and explained to him that he must respect the traditions of others as it says in the Quran where it says, "we have our religion and you have yours." (Int. 6)

However, this commitment is often a source of acculturation stress for second-generation youth. It is no coincidence that behaving and belonging are the two dimensions of religiosity that were most frequently associated with acculturation stress in the interviews (AS/behaving; $N = 26$; AS/belonging; $N = 17$; see Table 2). If the boundary of belonging to the Islamic group is represented by the observance of moral religious rules, it is precisely the observance of these rules that represents a point of friction in the second generation's relations with Italian society and makes it more difficult for young Muslims to fully integrate into the society in which they were born and live, and to build networks:

There are a number of things that made my son feel bad... like... the (Italian peers) constant asking about why he cannot drink alcohol like they do. Even now they keep asking the girls if they are not too hot with their veils, etc. (Int. 1)

Thus, the need to ensure children's integration collides with the desire for separation arising from the pursuit of cultural maintenance opening up a space for cultural negotiation that involves again the dimensions of behaving and belonging (CA/behaving: $N = 24$; CA/belonging: $N = 17$). In this context, however, it should be noted that cultural adaptation for the interviewees is not so much activated by a personal need for integration, but is rather functional for the integration of the second generation:

When my kids went to school, I did not want them to feel so different from their peers because kids look at each other... so I let them eat non-pork, but I told them to say the name of Allah. (...) I did not want to say no to everything. I thought that God is merciful and that He knows that we live in an environment that is foreign to us. (Int. 3)

Interestingly, negotiation seems to have little influence on the dimension of believing (CA/believing: $N = 7$; see Table 2). In fact, the interviews show that negotiation is not about the type of religious content to be passed on, but about *how* religious rules (behaviour) and identity (belonging) should be passed on in order to be accepted by the new generations. On this topic, the participants agree that there is a problem in the parent-child relationship in Muslim families. In particular, participants agreed that the (*cultural*) *gap* between first-generation parents and second-generation children *creates problems* (Int. 5) as Muslim parents often feel unprepared to understand the cultural diversity of their children and feel their authority challenged:

(Conservative parents) tell their children in the wrong way that some behaviours are wrong, they don't explain why, they just impose it. In the adolescent phase the child says to you "why can my friends and I can't" and therefore his values go against his desires. (Int. 2)

In this perspective, participants agreed that authoritarianism needs to be replaced by a more dialogue-based approach that is more conducive to the effective transmission of Islamic values in a non-supportive societal context:

I indirectly taught him to despise cigarettes. The same goes for alcohol. Once we even got off the bus because it smelt of alcohol. And from then on, he also began to despise it. Then in high school I tried to smoke with his friends. He came home and kind of wanted to tell me... You know, that inner conflict that won't let you rest... so he told me, I told him "it doesn't matter that you tried it, sometimes you have to try things to decide what attitude you want to have. Did you like it?" He told me "no mum, that's disgusting." (Int. 3)

However, a dialogue-based attitude on the part of parents presupposes that they are open to their children's questions and also know how to give convincing answers when asked about the specificities of their religion:

When I went to Egypt I bought CDs on religion and books on how to answer children when they ask difficult questions like God exists and what he is like, because here [in Italy] the child asks you questions that you would never expect and that you don't know how to answer. (Int. 1)

The need to explain religion to their children meant that participants were confronted with the need to deepen their personal knowledge of the Islamic religion. Interestingly, many of the respondents directly attributed the emergence of this need to the migration experience, pointing out that this would probably not be the case in their home country:

One thing I liked here is the freedom to learn things in religion, which I felt more here than in Morocco. In fact, I started going to mosques and learning things about Islam that I had not learned in Morocco. I felt that here I had the freedom to learn many things. (Int. 7)

Mosques and Arab schools play a pivotal role in disseminating Islamic culture in the Muslim community in the diaspora. In, the Arab schools in the mosques, the children learn Arabic and deepen their religious knowledge:

My children learned but my husband and I also learned a lot about Islam and Islamic prayers thanks to lessons that they did in the mosque (Int.4).

Within this framework, a greater knowledge of religion probably enabled some of these parents to combine a desire for cultural maintenance with a greater awareness of the spiritual significance of their religious beliefs. This helped them to find the cultural synthesis needed by the second generation to reconcile the religious values of their culture of origin and the Western values of freedom and self-determination:

... he came to Italy and was imam in the mosque. This enabled him to teach Islam to our children. But still, he did not force his daughters to wear the veil. (Int. 2)

7 | DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Religion in emigration plays a central role in the dynamics of migrant insertion. As an element of identity and a resource to draw on when responding to the difficulties and novelties of new life contexts, the religious sphere constitutes a recurrent theme in the biography of migrant inclusion (Foley & Hoge, 2007).

This study investigated the interplay between acculturation and religious dimensions in the religious transmission of first-generation Islamic parents in Italy. The starting point of the study was the observation of the discrepancy between Islam and the West in terms of the centrality of religion and how this discrepancy affects parental acculturation decisions in terms of cultural transmission and, consequently, the degree of participation of the Muslim population to the plural society. Within this frame, the study addressed the intertwine between the two acculturation drivers of cultural maintenance and cultural change and the four religious dimensions identified in the BFRD model (Saroglou, 2011). The aim of this research was indeed to highlight how the need to 'raise good Muslims' (van Beurden & de Haan, 2020) in a Western context challenges the way Muslim first generation approaches religion and religiosity. We have taken a multidimensional approach to religiosity to gain a more detailed understanding of the different facets of religiosity and how they contribute to the overall process of cultural adaptation and of inter-generational transmission of religious values.

As expected, the negotiation process challenged the dimensions of behaving and belonging through which the tension between the desire to pass on one's religious and cultural distinctiveness and the desire for one's children to be integrated into the society in which they live is expressed. Contrary to expectations, however, the cultural negotiation did not seem to include the dimension of believing, that is, the cognitive aspects of religiosity. Rather, the negotiation process was about how beliefs and behaviours need to be passed on to the younger generation in order to ensure belonging in the long term.

Taken together, the results show how religious transmission in Muslim households takes place in accordance with the surrounding context, that is, with the characteristics of a minority religion and, above all, a minority that is not always seen with a positive attitude (Idos-Confronti, 2023). The parents interviewed showed the ability to connect religious values and identity with the context of life. This ability is greater when parents have developed a balance between the dynamics of integration in the Italian or cross-cultural spaces of everyday life and the spaces reserved for Muslims (e.g., prayer spaces, socialization activities in Arabic, meeting places for Muslim migrant women) and have a high level of cultural capital. In this perspective, parents work on the aspects of behaviour and belief: in the first case (behaviour), equipping their children with logical, social-emotional and civic skills useful for interacting in different contexts of life and with heterogeneous social groups; in the second case (faith), debunking commonplaces (often emphasized by non-Muslims) and teaching them how religious belonging—including Islam—can

be lived in many ways without abandoning it, but never renouncing being good citizens: indeed, the highest value is to be and prove to be a good citizen who actively participates in the process of social integration (Bossi & Marroccoli, 2023).

With this more conscious approach, parents were thus able to achieve several goals. Firstly, not to abandon their parental role in religious transmission and to make it visible within the community of emigrants and the community in the country of origin. Secondly, they were to provide their children with knowledge and arguments that help them to mediate between the practises and values rooted in a predominantly Muslim context (and still alive in some family circles) and the expectations of a social context characterized by secularization, the primacy of self-determination and independence. A vivid example of this is the wearing of the veil: the parents interviewed conveyed to their daughters both the religious and the identity-forming significance of wearing the veil—a meaning that is often misunderstood in a non-Muslim context—and gave the daughters themselves the freedom to adhere to it or not. The third aim was to avoid polarization between assimilation efforts and ethnic-religious segregation.

Indeed, parents' encouragement of children's participation in the activities of mosques, Arab schools and other community activities promotes adherence to moral imperatives and protects the younger generations from the pressures of assimilation and devaluation from the majority group and counteracts feelings of alienation and loneliness, which are often harbingers of negative psychological and behavioural consequences that can lead to deviance and maladjustment.

Overall, this study offers insights for future work. For example, a future area of focus is the relationship between religious dimensions and acculturation in second-generation Muslims and the dynamics of integration. A recent study on second-generation Muslims in Italy and Belgium suggested that 'some second-generation Muslims do not want to give up their cultural and religious traditions and practises but rather want to express them in a social context that is generally reluctant to embrace Islam and its followers' (Rizzo, Testa, Gattino, & Miglietta, 2022). The BFRD model may prove useful in examining new generations and understanding how religious dimensions vary with the degree of cultural integration. In addition, future research may look at religious groups to deepen our understanding of how religion is involved in acculturation.

8 | LIMITATIONS AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study has several limitations, many of which relate to the study sample. Overall, the small sample size precludes generalizing our findings. In addition, the sample consisted of migrants settled in Italy for more than 20 years on average. This implies that all participants were familiar with the Italian context and culture. If on the one hand, this prevented us from grasping the dynamics of cultural negotiation when it takes place, on the other hand, it allowed us to grasp the reconstruction of the negotiation process and how it is understood and interpreted by the participants themselves. Moreover, the sample was imbalanced for gender and educational level, as it consisted mainly of highly educated women. The gender imbalance was due to the limited availability of men from the local Muslim community for interviews. While the high level of education and the fact that the sample was mainly identified in community settings such as the mosque and the Arabic school allowed us to access complex reasoning that highlighted the respondents' negotiations, it does not allow us to understand the ways in which religion is transmitted in Muslim families with low cultural capital and without opportunities for confrontation in a 'co-ethnic and co-religious environment' as experienced by those who actively participate in mosque initiatives outside prayer times. The results obtained are consistent with other research findings that emphasize the role of cultural capital and participation in associations as positive factors for bicultural integration and the transmission of values (and religion) mediated by contextual factors and the dynamics of change in religious identity from one generation to the next.

Another limitation is that the relationship between religion and acculturation was not the focus of the study and therefore not all related aspects were thoroughly explored during the interviews; future research will need to address this relationship more directly.

From a practical perspective, our findings underline the importance of adopting policies that foster cultural and religious pluralism and enable Muslim migrants to feel they are a socially recognized part of the larger society (Honneth, 1995), thus minimizing the risk of social withdrawal and cultural separation. As previous studies have reported (Adida, Laitin, & Valfort, 2016), intercultural and interreligious policies, together with initiatives of civic participation addressed to first-generation migrants, will have a positive effect on their own social insertion and help their children feel they belong to the society they are growing up in.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ORCID

Anna Miglietta  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8571-5093>

REFERENCES

- Adida, C., Laitin, D., & Valfort, M. (2016). *Why Muslim integration fails in Christian-heritage societies*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press.
- Allen, R. (2010). The bonding and bridging roles of religious institutions for refugees in a non-gateway context. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 33, 1049–1068. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870903118130>
- Ambrosini, M. (2016). Protected but separate: International immigrants in the Italian Catholic Church. In D. Pasura & M. B. Erdal (Eds.), *Migration, transnationalism and Catholicism* (pp. 317–335). Palgrave Macmillan: London.
- Arens, E., Baumann, M., Liedhegener, A., & Müller, W. (2014). *Integration durch religion? Geschichtliche Befunde, gesellschaftliche Analysen, rechtliche Perspektiven [Integration through religion? Historical findings, social analyses, legal perspectives]*. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Berry, J. W. (1980). Acculturation as varieties of adaptation. In A. Padilla (Ed.), *Acculturation: Theory, models and findings* (pp. 9–25). Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Berry, J. W., Phinney, J. S., Sam, D. L., & Vedder, P. (2006). Immigrant youth: Acculturation, identity, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology*, 55, 303–332. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.2006.00256.x>
- Bossi, L., & Marroccoli, G. (2023). “we are alone”: Intergenerational religious transmission and the effect of migration in Italy. *Religions*, 13, 293. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040293>
- Bramanti, D., Meda, S. G., & Rossi, G. (2020). Migrations and intergenerational religious transmission: Issues from international literature. In L. Zanfrini (Ed.), *Migrants and religion: Paths, issues and lenses. A multidisciplinary and multi-sited study on the role of religious belongings in migratory and integration processes* (pp. 569–588). Leiden: Brill.
- Foley, M., & Hoge, D. (2007). *Religion and the new immigrants: How faith communities form our newest citizens*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Glock, C. Y. (1962). On the study of religious commitment. *Religious Education*, 57, 98–110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0034408620575407>
- Güngör, D., Fleischmann, F., & Phalet, K. (2011). Religious identification, beliefs, and practices among Turkish Belgian and Moroccan Belgian Muslims: Intergenerational continuity and acculturative change. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 42, 1356–1374. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022111412342>
- Guvelli, A., & Platt, L. (2023). Religiosity of migrants and natives in Western Europe 2002–2018: Convergence and divergence. *European Journal of Population*, 39, 9. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-023-09660-9>
- Hattar-Pollara, M., & Meleis, A. I. (1995). Parenting their adolescents: The experiences of Jordanian immigrant women in California. *Health Care for Women International*, 16, 195–211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07399339509516171>
- Hill, P. (2005). Measurement in the psychology of religion and spirituality: Current status and evaluation. In R. F. Paloutzian & C. L. Park (Eds.), *Handbook of the psychology of religion and spirituality* (pp. 43–61). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Honneth, A. (1995). *The fragmented world of the social: Essays in social and political philosophy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Idos – Confronti. (2023). *Dossier statistico immigrazione* [Data migration report]. Idos.
- ISTAT. (2022). *Il Censimento permanente della popolazione in Piemonte* [The permanent population census in Piedmont]. <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/253517>
- Izetsbegovic, A. A. (1993). *Islam between east and west* (3rd ed.). Plainfield, IN: American Trust Publications.

- Kurien, P. A. (2021). 'Culture-free' religion: New second-generation Muslims and Christians. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 36, 105–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2021.1894742>
- Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali. (2021). La presenza deimigranti nella città metropolitana di Torino. Report statistico [The presence of migrants in the metropolitan city of Turin. Statistical report]. <https://www.integrazionemigranti.gov.it/AnteprimaPDF.aspx?id=6092>
- Molteni, F., & Dimitriadis, I. (2021). Immigrants' religious transmission in Southern Europe: Reaction or assimilation? Evidence from Italy. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 22, 1485–1504. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S12134-021-00815-3>
- Molteni, F., & van Tubergen, F. (2022). Immigrant generation and religiosity: A study of Christian immigrant groups in 33 European countries. *European Societies*, 24, 605–627. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2022.2044067>
- Muhr, T. (1997). *ATLAS.ti: The knowledge workbench: Visual qualitative data, analysis, management, model building: Short user's manual*. Berlin: Scientific Software Development.
- Olson, J. D., McAllister, C., Grinnell, L. D., Walters, K. G., & Appunn, F. (2016). Applying constant comparative method with multiple investigators and inter-coder reliability. *The Qualitative Report*, 21, 26–42.
- Perocco, F. (2018). Anti-migrant islamophobia in Europe. Social roots, mechanisms and actors. *REMHU: Revista Interdisciplinar Da Mobilidade Humana*, 26, 25–40. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1980-85852503880005303>
- Pew Research Center. (2018). *Being Christian in Western Europe*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/05/29/being-christian-in-western-europe/>
- Phalet, K., & Schönplflug, U. (2001). Intergenerational transmission of collectivism and achievement values in two acculturation contexts: The case of Turkish families in Germany and Turkish and Moroccan families in The Netherlands. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 32, 186–201. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022101032002006>
- Redfield, R., Linton, R., & Herskovits, M. J. (1936). Memorandum on the study of acculturation. *American Anthropologist*, 38, 149–152.
- Ricucci, R. (2017). *Diversi dall'islam. Figli dell'immigrazione e altre fedi (Different from Islam. Children of immigration and other faiths)*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Rizzo, M., Testa, S., Gattino, S., & Miglietta, A. (2022). Religiously flexible: Acculturation of second-generation Muslims in Europe. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 91, 127–137. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2022.09.007>
- Saroglou, V. (2011). Believing, bonding, behaving, and belonging: The big four religious dimensions and cultural variation. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 42, 1320–1340. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022111412267>
- Saroglou, V. (2016). Intergroup conflict, religious fundamentalism, and culture. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 47, 33–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022115621174>
- Saroglou, V., Clobert, M., Cohen, A. B., Johnson, K. A., Ladd, K. L., Van Pachterbeke, M., ... Tapia Valladares, J. (2020). Believing, bonding, behaving, and belonging: The cognitive, emotional, moral, and social dimensions of religiousness across cultures. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 51, 551–575. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022120946488>
- Saroglou, V., & Cohen, A. B. (2011). Psychology of culture and religion: Introduction to the JCCP special issue. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 42, 1309–1319. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022111412254>
- Saroglou, V., Delpierre, V., & Dernelle, R. (2004). Values and religiosity: A meta-analysis of studies using Schwartz's model. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 37, 721–734. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.PAID.2003.10.005>
- Schwartz, S. H. (1992). Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 25, 1–65. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(08\)60281-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60281-6)
- Triandafyllidou, A. (2002). Religious diversity and multiculturalism in Southern Europe: The Italian mosque debate. *Sociological Research Online*, 7, 76–91. <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/7/1/triandafyllidou.html>
- van Beurden, S. L., & de Haan, M. (2020). 'I want good children, also for this country': How Dutch minority Muslim parents' experience and negotiate parenting, parenthood and citizenship. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 41, 574–590. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2020.1806805>
- Vertovec, S., & Rogers, A. (Eds.). (2018). *Muslim European youth: Reproducing ethnicity, religion, culture*. Routledge: New York.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

How to cite this article: Miglietta, A., El Brashy, D., & Ricucci, R. (2024). Religious transmission and cultural negotiation in first-generation Muslim migrant parents in Italy: A qualitative study. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 34(3), e2792. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2792>