

## How Gelatin Becomes an Essential Symbol of Muslim Identity: Food Practice as a Lens into the Study of Religion and Migration

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### ABSTRACT

Identity negotiation is an essential process in the immigrant experience and, since “we are what we eat,” food can play an important role in the creation, presentation and maintenance of these negotiated identities. In this article I argue that by choosing which religious/cultural food practices to continue and which ones to alter, by choosing to label them in particular ways or to relegate them to specific places and times, my informants show the vast and varied ways that Muslims negotiate their identities in two distinct contexts of reception (COR): Paris, France and Montreal, Canada. I also suggest that these contexts of reception have a significant impact on the way that immigrants live their religious lives in the host society and that food practice is one avenue to investigate these effects. Consequently, through an ethnographic exploration of the experiences of Maghrebine Muslim immigrants in Paris and Montreal I contend that food can act as a lens into, and critique of, larger trends in the study of religion and migration.

### KEYWORDS

migration, food and identity, Maghrebine, Muslim, context of reception, Paris, Montreal, practice

### Introduction: Religion, food, identity and migration

Food plays a significant role in identity formation. According to Michel Foucault it is through food that we distinguish ourselves from animals (1990, 99). Leon Rappoport takes this notion further. In applying this idea to religion, he suggests that what most religions agree on is the need to differentiate humans from the animal world and that this distinction is made most obvious in food practices (2003, 111). In fact, Mary Douglas states that it is only humans who do not eat simply based on nourishment. She asserts that “unlike livestock, humans make some choices that are not governed by physiological processes. They choose what to eat, when and how often, in what order, and with whom” (1984, 3).<sup>1</sup>

1. Similarly, Rappoport posits that food is the ultimate distinguishing mark between the human and the animal world because when examining human food ways, and

Food's ability to mark off boundaries between "us" and "them," an essential process in identity formation and maintenance, goes beyond distinctions between "us" and the animal world though; we also form boundaries within and between human social groups through food.

These daily mundane choices that we make around food, highlighted in the quotation from Douglas' work above, serve to create boundaries between groups and to solidify the relationships within those boundaries: food serves a dual function of solidarity and separation (Anderson 2005). Identities are then created around specific group membership, a membership that is often represented by and, in fact, sometimes based on, that group's food choices and preferences. After all, "we are what we eat," and we accordingly have a tendency to label people in certain ways based on their food practices. Not only do we identify others based on what they eat, we can also use food as a means of presenting identities we desire to hold: "therefore, one may argue that it is not only a matter of "you are what you eat" but "you eat what you wish to be" (Brown 2015, 43; Kalcik 1984, 54). This potent symbolic power of food to present particular identities at particular times and in particular contexts can therefore be harnessed by the individual as a tool in their identity presentation; a process which becomes essential in immigrant settings.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Paris, France and Montreal, Canada<sup>2</sup> this article will address the role that food plays in identity negotiations and migration dynamics for Maghrebine Muslim<sup>3</sup> immigrants in these two locations.

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specifically the practice of fasting, we can see that humans are the only creatures to regulate their food habits in such a distinctly social/cultural way (2003, 112).

2. The results presented here are based on two separate data sets. In Paris, I conducted thirty-three semi-structured interviews with adults between the ages of eighteen and sixty-five as well as numerous unstructured conversations with members of the Maghrebine (Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian) immigrant community in the city. All semi-structured interviews were conducted with informants who live and/or work in the twenty districts of central Paris, between 7 July 2012 and 20 December 2012. Twenty-seven of my informants were first generation Maghrebine Muslims, while six were second generation, born in France. My Paris informants consisted of fourteen males and nineteen females. In Montreal, I conducted thirty-two semi-structured interviews with adults between the ages of twenty-two and seventy-three, and again, engaged in multiple unstructured interactions with members of the Maghrebine immigrant community there. The informants with whom I conducted semi-structured interviews were primarily first generation Maghrebine Muslims (thirty-one of my thirty-two informants), with only one second generation informant. They consisted of twenty-two females and ten males. On top of my interview material, I also conducted over 800 hours of participant observation in both locations (a total of 1600 hours) and recorded those experiences in extensive field notes and journals which also make up the data set. When quoting from my informants throughout the article all names and identifying marks will be left out for the purposes of anonymity.
3. Maghrebine here, and throughout, refers to someone who comes from one of the three countries of Algeria, Morocco or Tunisia. I limit the Maghrebine region to

First, considering the role that food plays in identity formation and maintenance, I discuss how these processes become especially prevalent in immigrant contexts. In fact, food takes on a particularly important role in identity negotiation when immigrants find themselves in a minority position in their host society, or Context of Reception (COR).<sup>4</sup> Using the work of religion and migration scholars, particularly the work of Phillip Connor (2010; 2014) as theoretical grounding, and my own research as evidence, I go on to show how these COR influence these identity negotiations and the related religious food practices on which they are often based. I argue that these different COR result in immigrants in Paris, as evidenced by my data, acting in line with the religious/secular trends present in Parisian society, while immigrants in Montreal contradict the

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these three countries since they were all either protectorates or colonies of France and consequently provide the largest numbers of Muslim immigrants to both France and Québec. Moreover, when discussing the Maghreb with my informants these three countries were the ones that they included in their understanding of what constituted the “Maghreb.”

It is important to address what I mean when I use the term “Muslim” here and throughout my work. Falling firmly in line with Spradley’s (1979) category of “standard ethnography,” I attempted as often as possible to allow for the concepts and meanings, and definitions for that matter, of my informants to permeate the ethnographic description. Therefore, I did not impose a particular definition of Muslim on to my informants. I did not look for a particular “kind of Muslim” to interview but allowed my informants to define what being a Muslim meant to them. Talal Asad takes issue with this kind of definition of Islam in his “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam” stating that the idea “that Islam is simply what Muslims everywhere say it is—will not do, if only because there are everywhere Muslims who say that what other people take to be Islam is not really Islam at all” (Asad 2009, 3). Shabab Ahmed in his, *What is Islam?: the Importance of Being Islamic* interprets Asad and suggests that by Asad’s logic, “if Islam is simply what Muslims everywhere say it is, and if Muslims disagree in what they say Islam is, then there is no coherent concept or entity ‘Islam’ ” (2016, 269). Ahmed goes on to suggest that the anthropological definition which I use here, that is: “whatever-Muslims-say-it-is,” may be useful as “description but it is an inadequate concept in that it simply does not help us to understand any better; indeed, it proceeds on the basis that we cannot understand any better since there is no-thing there—which means: no coherent thing there—to be understood” (2016, 269). By allowing my informants to define themselves as Muslim in whatever way was true to them, it does not mean that I take these definitions as the basis of defining what Islam is as a concept. Instead, by including all people who labelled themselves as “Muslim” no matter what sectarian background, ethnic variation, or theological understanding of that identity they posited allows for an interesting insight into the many ways that one can “be Muslim.” Because of this the definitions of what it meant to “be Muslim” that my informants held were vast and varied which will become obvious throughout this article.

4. I use the term “context of reception” in line with other scholars of religion and migration (Cadge *et al.* 2013; Connor 2013; Connor 2014; Mooney 2013) to refer to destination societies, or host societies/communities.

trends found there. These findings directly challenge some of Connor's (2010; 2014) conclusions about religion and migration and reveal more nuance to some of the predictions that scholars posit about what happens for religious individuals when they migrate. Using food practice as a lens, I show that although in Montreal my informants increase their religious practices, and/or more specific practices become the focus of religious identity, and in Paris my informants often limit, and/or alter practices and identities more readily to fall in line with the present norms and expectations, surprisingly the communities in Montreal are often "more integrated" and the communities in Paris are less so.<sup>5</sup> Leading to my conclusion that food acts as a powerful tool for immigrants to use not only in their inevitable identity negotiations, but also in their efforts to "integrate" into/alongside the host society and national identity.

### **Trends in religion and migration: Food as evidence and critique**

in order to highlight the importance of food to identity negotiations in the context of religion and migration, I would like to engage the reader in a simple thought experiment: Imagine the last time you spent an extended period of time away from home in a foreign place. How long into your time in this "unfamiliar" place did you start thinking about the comforting foods of home? How much time passed before you started to plan exactly what you would eat first when you stepped back onto your home soil? If you were in this foreign place for a particularly long time, how many weeks passed before it became essential to you to find the necessary ingredients to make your favourite home comfort food? Did weeks, days, or hours pass before you came to the realization that "they" eat different things here than "we" do "back home"? How much time lapsed before specific foods started to become essential in your self-understanding and presentation?

While I have experienced multiple moments like this in my life, the clearest one occurred when I was living in Paris, France for this very research. A few weeks in to my time there, after sampling a healthy amount of French fare, all I wanted was pancakes and maple syrup. Not crêpes. Fluffy Pancakes. I had to have them. I had to make them. I had to invite friends over to present a little piece of myself to them on a plate. Now, do not get me wrong, I love pancakes, but I do not actually eat them all that often in Canada. They probably grace my breakfast plate every few months. But, when I was living in France, suddenly pancakes became more important to me and more vital to my presentation of

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5. Where integration means feeling "at home" in the COR, and/or able to claim the national identity present there, often leading to more civic and social engagement, including efforts to interact with members of the host community that do not necessarily belong to one's ethnic, cultural or religious group. In contrast to a situation where minority individuals feel uncomfortable in the COR, unable to claim a shared identity (often national identity) and therefore, often unable to engage with those who hold differing identities resulting in the choice to remain, to varying degrees, disassociated from the rest of society and the national identity present there.

my Canadian identity. I was the only Canadian in my social circle, in my neighbourhood, and sometimes it felt like in the entire city of Paris, and because of that, I felt that pancakes and maple syrup defined me to some extent. When I am at home in Canada, amidst the majority pancake, maple syrup eating Canadian populace, pancakes never enter in to my definition of self but, in Paris, they did.<sup>6</sup> I was the fluffy pancake-making, maple syrup-providing, Canadian. This anecdote, and the ones that I am sure the reader imagined while following my thought experiment, reveals that identity really comes into question when it is in conflict with, or contrast to, other identities. When one's identity changes from being one that is shared with the majority to one that is representative of a minority, symbols of that identity start to play a more significant role for the migrant.

This trend was highlighted by many of my informants in both Paris and Montreal. I had several informants suggest that specific religious food practices only became essential to their "Muslim" identity when they were in their immigrant location. For some of my Parisian informants this meant that even if they left some of their religious practices, and even their religious identity to an extent back home in the Maghreb,<sup>7</sup> food was a particularly resistant means of showing this identity in Paris. For example, I had informants who did not see themselves as practicing Muslims and yet engaged in "Muslim" food practices. One informant explained to me that she was not "*trop pratiquante*" (very practicing) and yet went on to explain that she felt Muslim because "*je fais, par exemple, le ramadan et je ne mange pas de porc.*"<sup>8</sup> The practice of eating halal meat also took on new meaning and significance for some of my Parisian informants. I had informants who explained that they learned about halal in France because in the Maghreb everything is halal and does not require reflection or consideration of what that term means.

*J'ai découvert la viande halal quand j'avais vingt ans, quand je suis arrivé en France. On m'a dit, Tu ne manges pas halal ? Mais c'est quoi halal ? Alors que j'ai vécu dix-neuf ans en Tunisie. Je n'avais pas compris. Donc j'ai compris qu'il y avait deux façons de tuer un*

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6. I acknowledge that not every Canadian eats pancakes and maple syrup. One would be hard pressed though to find a breakfast restaurant in Canada that does not have them on the menu, or a Canadian grocery store that does not have a maple syrup aisle. Furthermore, this equation of pancakes/syrup = Canadian is almost certainly a reflection of my time growing up in Ontario making maple syrup at the sugar shack in the woods at my friend's family farm. Not to mention the gallons and gallons of it that was sold at the farmer's market just outside the city where I lived for eight years as a young adult. Add to that the thousands of pancakes sold as vehicles for said syrup at the local, world's largest, single day, maple syrup festival which I attended religiously for much of my life. These experiences created a subconscious equation with these two food products and what it means to "be Canadian" for me, which only came to my consciousness once living in Paris in my late 20s.
  7. I will address this "decrease" in religious practice/identity later in this article.
  8. "I do, for example, [fast for] Ramadan ... and I do not eat pork."

*animal: l'électrocution ou l'égorger. Mais je n'avais jamais fait gaffe. Mais quand tu vis dans un pays musulman, tu ne te sens pas opprimé par quelque chose, tu ne te sens pas, moi, j'ai jamais senti que le porc me manquait. Je n'ai jamais senti qu'il fallait que je fasse attention à la viande que je mangeais, si elle était halal ou pas.<sup>9</sup>*

For this informant the practice of halal was not essential in the Maghreb because it was a given, because it was a part of everyday, non-contested life practice. It is only when “il y a besoin d'avoir une identité, d'appartenir à une communauté, de s'identifier à certaines choses. Et du coup on s'accroche à des choses connues, à des éléments communs qui font qu'on appartient à un groupe.”<sup>10</sup>

Halal becomes a “known thing,” a “common element” that helps a community to identify itself when in a context where its identity is challenged or in question. This is why, for some, halal became a more important practice in France than in the Maghreb.<sup>11</sup>

On the Canadian side of my study, a number of my informants in Montreal suggested that they were “more (religiously) practicing” in Canada than they had been in the Maghreb. For these informants, their identities as “practicing Muslims” were only highlighted in the Canadian context; it would not have been an identity that they mentioned in the Maghreb, as, according to them, there would have been no need to emphasize it there. For example, one man explained this trend to me as follows:

*J'ai remarqué ici au Canada, j'ai pratiqué ma religion plus qu'au Maroc. Bien sûr je fais ma prière, je fais le ramadan, les fêtes, les deux fêtes que l'on a. La fête du ramadan et la*

9. “I discovered halal meat when I was twenty years old, when I arrived in France. They said to me, you do not eat halal? But what is halal? While I had lived nineteen years in Tunisia. I did not understand. I understood that there were two ways to kill an animal. Electrocutation and to slaughter it. But I never paid attention [to it]. But when you live in a Muslim country, you do not feel oppressed by something, you do not feel, me, I never felt that I was missing pork. I never felt that I had to pay attention to the meat that I ate, if it was halal or not.”
10. “There is a need to have an identity, to belong to a community, to identify with certain things. And then we cling to known things, to common elements that make us belong to a group.”
11. The importance of food practice to religious identity was also highlighted by the ways that some informants understood the five pillars of Islam. For example, one informant, a young, second generation Algerian woman, listed the five pillars of Islam to me as follows: “D'une part, c'est faire la prière, ne pas manger de porc, faire l'aumône, fêter le mois du ramadan, et si un jour Dieu me l'accorde, inshallah, comme on dit chez nous, aller à la Mecque au pèlerinage [On the one hand, it's prayer, to not eat pork, to give alms, to celebrate the month of Ramadan, and if one day God allows it, God willing, as we say, to go to Mecca for the pilgrimage].” She expressed that her practice was simply the five pillars of Islam, as if this was the most basic and well-understood way of practicing and yet she forgot the shahada, and replaced it with the interdiction against eating pork. As is made evident in this example, food plays an essential role in religious, and cultural practice for the members of the community that I studied—so much so that one person forgot the most basic of the five pillars of Islam and replaced it with a food practice.

*fête du mouton; le sacrifice. Je pratique ma religion quotidiennement parce que je cherche les produits halal. Je dois me comporter comme un vrai musulman parce que je trouve que c'est une responsabilité. Ce n'est pas comme au Maroc parce que la plupart, puisque 99,99%, sont musulmans. Mais ici je dois pratiquer ma religion jour par jour, heure par heure par mon comportement, parce que je dois donner l'exemple aux autres.<sup>12</sup>*

For this informant, his identity as “practicing Muslim” was only highlighted in the Canadian context; as there would have been no need to emphasize it “back home” in Morocco.

In Jennifer Selby's (2012) work on Muslim communities in the suburbs of Paris we can see that some of her informants reflected this kind of pattern in their experiences in Petit Nanterre.<sup>13</sup> Her informants express, like mine do, how in the Maghreb you do not need to emphasize certain things, because everyone does them, but in France you have to emphasize these practices because they are what make you distinct (164-165). While for Selby's informants this trend is represented in prayer, dress, family values, etc., for my informants this emphasis on religious identity is signified by food practice. These examples are reflective of what I have previously called the minority status effect (Brown 2015). I argue that “minority identity status can lead to certain aspects of identity becoming more prevalent in the immigrant location than they might be in one's homeland” and that “food and food practice may be one area where this minority status effect may be particularly evident” (Brown 2015, 45). I explain there that while not eating pork, not drinking alcohol, fasting for Ramadan, or one's engagement with any other commonly understood “religious” food practice may not be essential to one's Muslim identity in a Muslim majority context, in a context where one's Muslim identity is the minority these kinds of practices take on a more symbolically important role in identity presentation (Brown 2015). This is especially true in circumstances where the opposite practices (that is, eating pork, drinking alcohol, *et cetera*) are foundational to the majority, host society identity.<sup>14</sup> Identities become particularly contested when

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12. “I noticed that here in Canada I practiced my religion more than in Morocco. Of course I do my prayers, I do Ramadan, the festivals, the two festivals that we have. The festival of Ramadan and the festival of the lamb; the sacrifice. I practice my religion daily because I look for halal products. I have to behave like a real Muslim because I find that it is a responsibility. It is not like in Morocco because the majority, almost 99.99% are Muslims. But here I have to practice my religion day by day, hour by hour by my behaviour because I have to give an example to others.”
  13. Selby specifically addresses the expectation placed on young women who migrate from the Maghreb to marry men in Petit Nanterre to be even more practicing than they were in the Maghreb.
  14. In my previous work I argue that these kinds of food practices are particularly important in France where food/drink and national identity go hand in hand (Brown 2015). I highlight there and elsewhere, in agreement with Marion Demossier (2010), that wine is so essential to what it means to “be French” that anyone who does not consume it, and worse yet, has an antagonistic attitude toward it, cannot possibly claim “French” identity.

the host society, or COR, insists that minority individuals de-emphasize difference in order to “integrate” or to “fit in” with the national identity and norms.

### **The impact of the context of reception on immigrant practice and identity**

while the immigrant’s minority status, and the experience of migration itself, leads to changes in particular food practices (and related identities), the place to which the immigrant migrates also has an impact on these things. Scholars of religion and migration suggest that the approach of these COR to religious diversity and immigration will inevitably influence the immigrants’ experience of and interaction with their faith (Beckford 2016; Bramadat 2009; Cadge et al 2013; Connor 2010; Connor 2014; Hirschman 2004; Levitt 2003; Levitt 2007; Mooney 2013). In what follows, I provide evidence for this suggestion and show how food practice is one realm in which immigrants mitigate the influence of the COR on their religious and cultural identities. In order to show how food highlights these trends in religion and migration I use my research as evidence for, and critique of, some of Phillip Connor’s conclusions in his work *Immigrant Faith* (2014).

Before addressing Connor’s findings, let me first turn to another essential work in the field of religion and migration which addresses the COR, and specifically their governance of religious diversity: Paul Bramadat and Matthias Koenig’s edited volume *International Migration and the Governance of Religious Diversity* (2009). Unlike Connor’s work, which claims to highlight the commonalities across contexts, the authors in this volume emphasize the distinctive characteristics of various host societies in the so called “West” in their approaches to interacting with and governing the religious diversity that is present mostly due to recent immigration. Most importantly, Bramadat in his introductory chapter to this volume suggests that there are three mitigating factors in any given COR’s approach to the governance of religious diversity within their borders:

First, the individual historical paths followed by each of these states as they entered the contemporary era have set up distinctive social, political, and economic conditions that have, in turn, strongly influenced the way religious diversity is interpreted and governed by policy-makers in each state (2009, 7).

Second, Bramadat argues that each state has its own relationship to, and history of, contemporary migration, as well as colonialism and each state has particular demographics in relation to migration because of these dynamics (2009, 7). The third mitigating factor which he proposes is that policies which govern religious diversity are not only influenced by these national forces but also by global or transnational ones (2009, 8). The way a given COR understands and responds to religious diversity can be influenced by the way other states do just that, or to the particularities of immigrant religions found in other contexts across the globe. States do not operate within vacuums.<sup>15</sup> I am in agreement

15. Two other chapters from this volume which are particularly relevant for, and related to my own work are Jocelyne Cesari’s (2009) and Micheline Milot’s (2009)



with Bramadat regarding these three mitigating factors and my work highlights how the context specific histories, policies, and the influence of global attitudes towards religious diversity are especially relevant to how immigrants live their daily lives in these nation states, as we will see below.

With those important considerations in mind, I can now address how the specific COR of Paris and Montreal (roughly extendable to France and Canada), during the two years in which I did fieldwork (2012–2013), alters the experience of some Muslim immigrants in those locations. Phillip Connor in his work *Immigrant Faith* addresses four themes in the study of religion and migration: (1) moving faith, (2) changing faith, (3) integrating faith, and (4) transferring faith (2014, 5). The impact of the COR is evident in each of these themes, but due to limitations of space and as a result of the type of data which I collected, I will focus principally on the themes of “moving faith” and “changing faith” below.<sup>16</sup>

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chapters. Cesari explores the various histories of interaction with and resultant policies around the governance of one particular immigrant religion in France, namely, Islam. She breaks this issue down into (1) “origin effects,” the things, both psychological/philosophical and physical, that immigrants bring with them from their home contexts, and, (2) “destination effects,” factors relating to French and European culture. She shows how the combination of these two creates the setting within which Muslim immigrants to France must live out their lives. Milot, in her chapter, focusses on three components of political life that she argues affect the expression and governance of religious diversity in Canada. These three components are: (1) Canada’s official Multiculturalism Policy, (2) the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as embedded in the Constitution, and (3) the bi-national history of Canada (105). By exploring these three policies she shows how immigrants to Canada tend to “out-integrate” immigrants to other Western contexts without such policies in place. These two chapters, along with all of the chapters in Bramadat and Koenig’s work illustrate that the contexts of reception clearly have an effect on the daily lives of religious immigrants within their borders.

16. Because of space, and insufficient multi-generational data, I do not address Connor’s third and fourth theme here. Connor’s third theme, “integrating faith” discusses how immigrant religion can act as both a help and a hindrance to integration, again often dependent on the COR in which the immigrant finds him/herself (2014, 74). He highlights the role of religion in providing the three Rs made famous by Charles Hirschman: Refuge, Respect and Resources (2004, 1206–1234). While immigrant religion may be able to provide the three Rs and consequent integration, this is unfortunately not always the case, or at least not always uniformly the case. While for most immigrants, religion may provide refuge, especially psychological, in the migration process, respect and resources may be further from reach. My work clearly supports this categorization of religion’s role in the integration process as I argue that in Paris, religion and religious practice were generally seen as hindrances to integration, at least, when integration is understood as assimilation. In support of this idea, my Parisian informants spoke of and engaged in transformations of their religious identities and practices as a means of showing their integration. Since religion became a hindrance, the removal of religion was a tool that my informants could use. Conversely, religion served as both a help and a hindrance in the Montreal context, showing the middle ground approach that Connor suggests is

When discussing “moving faith” Connor addresses the various ways that immigrant religion plays a role in the push and pull of the migration process itself. He explores the decisions that immigrants make about migration and suggests some trends for who migrates, where they migrate, why they migrate, and what role religion plays in all of these decisions (2014, 9). The pull factors in “moving faith” are particularly relevant here, specifically the place of religion in national identity in the COR.

Connor argues that while “the boundary line marking differences between immigrant and non-immigrant groups seems to be religious in Europe,” it is an ethnic line in the US (2014, 35). In fact, he goes on to suggest that while in the US being religious falls in line with being American, in Europe, clinging to religious practices makes you non-European; Canada apparently has attributes of both (Connor 2014, 39). These general attitudes towards the place of religion in society, and in the distinction between “us” and “them,” has a real effect on how the majority non-immigrant population will respond to and welcome immigrants in these host societies. Connor presents a tangible representation of this attitude of receptivity in various COR, by using the 2006 World Values Survey to show the percentages of people not wanting neighbours who are either immigrants or neighbours of a different religion.<sup>17</sup> When examining

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present in Canada (2014, 74). It was a hindrance to claiming secular national identity in Montreal and at the same time through the religious emphasis on hospitality allowed the immigrant to interact with and be transformed by his/her non-immigrant neighbours, an essential element to integration in Québec. In regards to the last theme, “transferring faith,” Connor shows how immigrant faith is often not transferred perfectly to the next generation (2014, 112). One can, consequently, understand why many immigrants go to such lengths to attempt to transfer at least some aspects of their faith to their children. For my informants, food practices were an essential means of this transference. For some, this was the main reason why they maintained, and often increased their religious food practice in the host context. This was a means of transferring, not only religion but also ethnicity, since these two things often went hand in hand. Connor shows how, rather than following a pattern of decline in religiosity as is found from first to second generation in other traditions and contexts, second generation Muslim immigrants in Europe tend to stay in faith and practice as much as their parents do (2014, 114). Since most of my work, focusses on first generation, I cannot directly support or critique this finding. That being said, my informants did speak about the increased religiosity of third generation youth living in the banlieues in Paris. They spoke about the fact that not only was there no decline in religiosity but in fact, younger generations were becoming *more* religious than their first generation parents and grandparents.

17. The fact that this data comes from the 2006 World Values Survey is important to consider. A great deal of discussion and conflict around immigration, and particularly Muslim immigration, has arisen over the past ten years since this survey. The rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), related terrorist attacks across the world, and the current refugee crisis (as just a few examples) will inevitably have an effect on the sentiments reflected in this survey. Because much of my data collection took place before many of these significant events occurred, the results from the 2006 World Values Survey are still relevant for my findings.

France and Canada, Connor's table shows that in France forty-three percent of informants suggested they would not want an immigrant neighbour; in Canada, the response was only five percent. Furthermore, only 2 percent of Canadian informants said they would not want neighbours who were of a different religion; in France, thirty percent would not (2014, 37). These figures paint a picture of Canada being a potentially more welcoming COR to religious minority immigrants than France.

My work supports the above picture, with several of my Parisian informants suggesting that no matter the efforts they made to show their "French" identity, they always felt as though, as Muslim immigrants, they would never quite be accepted as French.<sup>18</sup> One informant explained it to me as follows, he said, "*ça sert à rien de dire qu'on est français, parce que ça se voit immédiatement sur nous. Puisque les médias nous ont catalogués depuis x-temps, ça se voit immédiatement sur nous.*"<sup>19</sup> This informant explained that there is no point in claiming French identity when "it is seen on" him; that is, it is clear from his appearance that he is not what is considered "French." This informant went on to explain that he considered himself both, Muslim and French, but at the same time explained how he did not "feel French" and thus was "not French." While other informants similarly mentioned their physical characteristics as limiting them from claiming French identity, some gave other examples of traits that precluded them from calling themselves French. For example, one informant mentioned their "*façon d'être*" (way of being) as a reason why "*je passerai jamais pour quelqu'une qui est née en France. Quelqu'une qui est française, jamais.*"<sup>20</sup> For many of my informants, food practice was one "*façon d'être*" which excluded them from being accepted as "French." As one young, second generation Maghrebine woman expressed to me, "*La France c'est vin, fromage et baguette. Je mange que la baguette. Donc voilà. Je ne suis pas vraiment Française, Française.*"<sup>21</sup> As a result of these sentiments, most of my Parisian informants felt that their "integration/incorporation" was hindered/restricted, or sometimes even not worthwhile.

My Montreal informants all expressed sentiments reflective of the picture of Canada being a more welcoming COR than other places, especially in compar-

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18. Here we can see the influence of Bramadat's three mitigating factors when considering the approach of a COR to immigrant populations (2009). While space does not allow for a full exploration of these factors here, I just want to draw the reader's attention particularly to the colonial relationship between France and the Maghreb which cannot be ignored when considering the approach to national identity and who is included in the "we." The place of Maghrebine Muslims in the "French" national identity is especially influenced by this history.
  19. "It serves no purpose to say we are French, because it is immediately seen on us. Furthermore, the media has categorized us since x amount of time, so it is seen immediately on us."
  20. "I will never pass for someone who was born in France, someone who is French, never."
  21. "France is wine, cheese and baguette. I eat only the baguette. So there you go. I am not really French French."

ison to France.<sup>22</sup> For numerous informants in Montreal this had to do with the fact that in Canada “everyone is an immigrant” and they felt that one’s minority identities (whether religious, cultural, ethnic, *et cetera*) were not only accepted but encouraged. This view that “everyone is an immigrant” in Canada, leads to a stronger emphasis on the cultures and identities of origin for recent immigrants (also for Canadians in general, according to my informants).<sup>23</sup> Because of the idea that to be Canadian is to be an immigrant, the need to express the Canadian side of one’s identity is not as visceral as the need to go back in family history and experience to explain how one came to the nation full of immigrants. When explaining to me why one’s national identity of origin held such an important place in one’s politics of identity, one young woman explained it to me as follows:

*Parce qu’en général quand tu rencontres des gens ici, ce n’est pas important pour eux de savoir si tu es canadienne ou pas, parce que tu finis par l’avoir, mais ils veulent plus savoir : tu es de quelle origine ? Jusqu’à date avec la plupart des gens avec qui je parle,*

22. While my data paints a much rosier picture of Canada than France, and points to surprisingly positive perceptions on the part of Muslim immigrants to Montreal, Canada as a whole, including Québec, is not without its deep prejudices in dealing with Muslim and non-White immigrants, as well as its Native communities. For example, since the time of my fieldwork in Québec there has been a heightened awareness of the Muslim community there and an increased, visible, palpable prejudice towards it. My fieldwork is situated in a pre-Charter of Values (2013) Québec. This proposed Charter for Québec Values, which many viewed as a response by the PQ government to the “problem of the veil,” and Islam in Québec in general, was only one example of increased awareness of and prejudice toward Islam in the province. There has also been an increase in verbal and physical altercations between non-Muslim Québécois(es) and Muslims in Québec following various terrorist attacks in Canada and around the world. It seems clear to me, when looking at the history of Québec, and the history of Islam in Québec, that prejudice towards Muslims tends to ebb and flow in the province. There are moments in history where Muslims in Québec feel very uncomfortable, and discriminated against. On the other hand, there are moments in time where Muslims feel quite comfortable living their lives in Québec; they feel as though they can be both Québécois(e)/Canadian and Muslim and that experiences of prejudice are simply not the norm. Unfortunately, at the current moment in time (2016) the situation in Québec, as in the rest of the Western world, is one of heightened prejudice toward Islam. At the time of my research, there was an ebb in the prejudice felt by many Muslims living in the province. This fact inevitably affects the data I collected and reveals a different view of the relationship between Islam and Québec than what some might assume reading this research at this current historical moment in time.
23. “*C’est vrai, on se sent chez nous. Je me sens chez moi. Et quand on discute avec des gens, on dit, ‘oui, tout le monde est chez soi ici.’ On n’a pas le droit de dire, même pour un canadien de souche; même lui a été un immigrant un jour. Il a des ancêtres qui étaient immigrants, donc nous avons les mêmes droits*” [“It’s true, we feel at home. I feel at home. And when we talk with people, we say ‘yes, everyone is home here.’ We do not have the right to say, even for a Canadian born; even he was an immigrant once. He has ancestors that were immigrants so we all have the same rights”].

*on vient vraiment plus parler de ton origine. Les gens demandent plus ton origine. Parce qu'on finit tous par être des canadiens, parce que dans le fond les canadiens, ce sont tous des immigrants. Depuis 400 ans, c'est tout le monde qui a immigré. [Elle rigole.]*<sup>24</sup>

This is a distinct difference between the Canadian situation and the French situation. While in France the things that make you similar are the things that you must stress to show your national identity, in Canada it is the origins that make you different that ultimately make you fit with the national identity.

Moreover, my Montreal informants felt as though the highlighting of origins in national identity meant that there was a general openness to diversity, and to religious and cultural difference in Canada (or at least a perceived openness). One informant expressed to me that he was proudly Canadian and it was the acceptance of diversity in Canada that he saw as the “*richesse du Canada—une diversité qui fait que c'est un pays qui est riche, et ça donne de beaux mélanges, une mixité.*”<sup>25</sup> For others like him, the diversity of Canada, and more importantly the acceptance of this diversity, is what made them proud to hold this national identity. One woman explained to me at great length about an anecdotal experience that she and her children had undergone that led to a greater pride of Canadian identity; an experience which revolved around food. She explained how her son had gone to a school barbeque, and after explaining why he could not eat the meat that was prepared, the teacher went and bought him, and the other young Muslim students present, halal meat so they could enjoy the barbeque with everyone else. She went on to express how this solidified not only her own Canadian identity but also that of her son:

*C'est un barbecue pour tout le monde, tu manges, tu manges, tu ne manges pas, allez-y. Mais ce geste-là, ça lui fait une marque à l'intérieur jusqu'à maintenant. “Tu te rappelles l'année passée?” Donc maintenant, il cherche l'halal, il mange l'halal. Mais il sait qu'il est Canadien. Il défend son pays.*<sup>26</sup>

For this woman, and her son, this proof of acceptance of difference is what made them feel like there was nothing standing between them and claiming the Canadian identity. Throughout my time in the field in Montreal, I heard countless other examples like this one, of Québécois(es) going out of their way

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24. “Because in general when you meet people here, it is not important for them to know if you are Canadian or not because you finish by having it [Canadian citizenship] but they want to know more what your origins are. Up until now the majority of people that I speak with, we really just talk about your origins. People ask more about your origins. Because we all finish by being Canadians, because in the end, Canadians are all immigrants. For 400 years, everyone is an immigrant [She laughs].”
25. “The richness of Canada—a diversity that makes it a rich country and that gives beautiful blends, a mix.”
26. “It was a barbeque for everyone, you eat, you eat, you don't eat, go on. But this gesture, that made a mark on him up to this day. ‘You remember last year?’ So now, he looks for halal, he eats halal, but he knows that he is Canadian. He defends his country.”

to make sure that everyone in the group was accommodated, no matter their cultural or religious background. For the informants who delivered these stories, it was clear that these anecdotal experiences had a large effect on their own understanding of who they were and how they could relate to the broader Canadian national identity.<sup>27</sup> These experiences gave the necessary evidence to my informants that Canadian identity was for all, no matter one's origins, and therefore left them feeling able to fully "integrate" into Canadian life.

These factors in the COR have a direct influence on the second theme that Connor explores in his work: "changing faith." Through this theme he shows the various ways in which immigrant religion is not static. Connor previously presented two possible hypotheses about the COR's receptivity level and its effect on immigrant religion's changing faith: (1) welcoming contexts provide the space for religious immigrants to engage in higher religiosity than the host population, and (2) less welcoming contexts create an "us" versus "them" scenario which triggers hyper-religiosity (2010, 381). In this article, and throughout *Immigrant Faith* (2014), he argues, that when it comes to Muslim immigrants, less welcoming contexts, such as those found in Europe, lead to higher religiosity and religious outcomes in that community, while "more welcoming contexts are associated with lower immigrant Muslim religious outcomes" (Connor 2010, 394; Connor 2014, 60–61). His findings with regards to Muslim immigrants thus challenge his first hypothesis but support his second. Unlike Muslims in Europe, who do not seem to be religiously adapting, Connor suggests that in general, other "immigrants begin, on average, to resemble the new country's population, becoming more or less religious over time, depending on the national and local context" (2014, 55).

My findings regarding Muslim immigrants in both Paris and Montreal directly challenge and complicate these conclusions. While it may be true that Muslim immigrants in the *banlieues* (suburbs) of Paris, specifically second and third generation individuals, may be responding to the unwelcoming COR with hyper-religiosity,<sup>28</sup> this was not the case for several of my informants. In fact, most of my

27. Amiraux and Araya-Moreno (2014) suggest that anecdotal experiences have more power to change perceptions than grand, overarching stereotypes. In this, not only might the Muslim immigrant change his/her opinion of the "other" but the "other" may change his/her opinion about the Muslim immigrant within these interactions. In order for these anecdotal experiences to happen, there must be interaction among and between groups. The problem arises from the uneven distribution of Muslims in Canada; the majority of Muslim immigrants in Québec live in Montreal. While for a study such as mine, which is situated in Montreal proper, this is good news: there is plenty of opportunity for a Muslim immigrant to interact with non-Muslim Québécois(es). These anecdotal experiences are simply less possible in other regions of Québec, where Muslim populations are practically non-existent, allowing for the potential for overarching stereotypes to remain unchallenged.

28. This was a trend I did not directly encounter amidst my informants, but some spoke about the "problem" of second and third generation youth in the *banlieues*. My informants suggested that when in a position where one is not accepted as

Parisian informants were making adjustments in their religious identities and practices that reflected the national and local norm, as Connor suggested was normal for immigrants who were not Muslim (Connor 2014). Some would only decrease some practices and maintain others, while others would stop practicing all together, some would simply alter the way they engaged with certain practices, or they would change the way they labelled them.<sup>29</sup>

When I began my research in France I frequently heard the verb “*se méfier*.”<sup>30</sup> I was told by non-Muslim French and Maghrebine Muslim French that this verb often dictated how the Muslim community interacted with the non-Muslim community in France and vice versa; that is, that the relationship between the two was frequently distrustful. As a result of this utter “*méfiance*” there was often fear to practice traditions that may increase the tension or distance between the two communities. Consequently, the French context made some of my informants feel as though they had to decrease/alter their practice in an effort to highlight an “integrated French” identity, or simply to *not* highlight a minority identity. Whether they felt forced because of the non-Maghrebine non-Muslim French around them, or because the context provided other practices that were in conflict with their traditional home practices (that is, eating non halal *foie gras* because halal *foie gras* was non-existent), many of my informants felt like they must change some of their practices in order to attempt to live a fully “integrated” life in France.

I had people tell me that life in France was not as conducive to traditional, religious and cultural food practices as it was in the Maghreb. Informants explained to me that it was often simply because they would want to go out with friends and that was often in conflict with their religious practices; that is, by going to bars, out for food, *et cetera*. One man told me that he tried to maintain his practice in the French context, particularly eating halal meat and

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either French, nor Maghrebine (Moroccan, Algerian or Tunisian), some of these youth may deal with their inevitable conflicts of identity by grasping on to the one identity that is not questioned; that is, Muslim identity.

29. Several of my Paris informants engaged in this action of changing the category label of their food practice from religious to cultural. When examining my data, it seemed clear that my informants did this to two ends. First, I argue that for many of my informants if a practice was seen as “cultural” it was more flexible to change, whereas if it was “religious” it was seen as an obligation and therefore was resistant to alteration. With this in mind, my informants’ efforts to re-label their food practice as cultural rather than religious gave them the justification to change and/or leave those practices behind. Conversely, labelling commonly understood “religious” food practices as cultural also allowed some of my informants to continue to engage said practices in Paris. Because my informants felt like cultural identities and practices were slightly more acceptable in France than religious ones, by re-labelling religious food practices as cultural they felt that this might make them seem more acceptable to the non-Muslim community that they imagined surrounded them. This consequently allowed them to continue important practices without the stigma of “religion” attached to them.

30. To be wary of, or, to distrust.

not drinking alcohol, but it became too difficult for him to resist and he left both practices behind. Another informant explained that her decrease in practice came because of a distance between herself and her past, and this distance opened an opportunity for self-reflection not offered to her in the Maghreb:

*Je ne suis pas pratiquante. Quand j'étais en Algérie, je m'intéressais beaucoup à la religion, j'étais assez croyante. Mais le fait d'être sortie de l'environnement, du cocon familial, ça m'a permis de prendre un peu de recul, et je me suis complètement détachée de la religion. Je ne pratique plus. J'ai un rapport très distancié avec ma religion, qui est l'Islam.<sup>31</sup>*

The immigrant context allowed for a distancing from one's religious practice that was not possible, she felt, in the religiously-soaked Maghrebine context.

It is important to note that even if my informants changed, decreased, or stopped their religious food practices completely in Paris, this did not stop them from continuing to identify as Muslim in some way. As I stated above, all of my informants claimed Muslim identity to some degree. While they may have altered their practice in their immigrant context, and often altered the way they understood their Muslim identity as a result, this did not remove their identification as "Muslim" completely. Specific practices were sometimes the hinge on which the identity rested and sometimes they were not. In fact, food revealed how the terms and categories that we attempt to place on people are incredibly tenuous. We can see that, in agreement with Michel Desjardins, "in talking with people about the role that food plays in their religious lives it does not take long to appreciate that, even on a personal level, the categories developed by scholars are fragile constructs" (2012, 154).

Interestingly, when my Parisian informants were maintaining religious practices they were often food related ones. Food is potentially a more "politically/culturally correct" avenue for expression of religious identity than other religious practices. In secular contexts, where public signs of religiosity are often seen as problematic,<sup>32</sup> subtler/more private expressions of religious identity

31. "I am not practicing. When I was in Algeria, I was very interested in religion, I was quite believing. But the fact of leaving the environment, the family cocoon, that [fact] permitted me to take a bit of a recoil and I completely detached myself from the religion. I do not practice anymore. I have a very distant relationship with my religion which is Islam."

32. One only needs to open the paper on a given day to see the conflict around public signs of religiosity in secular states. For example, both France and Québec have, in the recent past, proposed or implemented various laws to ban the wearing of religious symbols in public spaces. In France there was the 2004 ban of the headscarf, along with crosses and turbans and other symbols of religious identification in state schools in France, as well as the 2011 ban on the niqab in all public places. Recently, the French Prime Minister suggested that the headscarf should also be banned in universities (it is not, at the time of this writing, banned in university settings). In Québec, in 2013 the then PQ government, under the leadership of Premier Pauline Marois, proposed the now infamous "Charter of Québec Values" (Bill 60). This Charter would ban the wearing of overly conspicuous religious symbols, i.e. the kippah, turban, hijab, or large crosses, for public-sector employees, such



may help the minority religious immigrant to engage with and express their identities in meaningful ways. For these informants, to not eat pork, to fast during Ramadan, to not drink alcohol, to buy and consume halal meat, or any combination of these practices, was often enough to mark off their Muslim identity in the Parisian context. More importantly, to change those practices was a clear way of trying to present an “integrated French” identity. Accordingly, there was a great variation of practice amongst my Paris informants. For example, concerning the conventionally understood “Muslim food practices,” my Paris informants engaged with them in the following way: Ramadan (twenty-four fasted/five practiced it from time to time/four did not), pork (twenty-four abstained/nine consumed it), alcohol (seventeen abstained/sixteen consumed it), halal (nine kept it strictly/twenty-four did not). As one can see from the diverse engagement with these practices, my Parisian informants lived out their religious lives and identities in vast and varied ways in this COR and often in line with the secular norm in Paris; whether these efforts were acknowledged or not is a separate matter.

The situation in Montreal was quite different. In Québec/Canada, where immigrants are seen as not only welcome, but an essential element to Canadian identity, my informants were not decreasing their practice to reflect the norm (especially the norm in Québec), but in fact were increasing it, or upping the identification ante, to show their religious identity. Since my Montreal informants felt as though their minority identities and related practices were accepted and encouraged in Canada, their engagement with the classic food practices that are often representative of Muslim identity was fairly consistent: Ramadan (thirty-one fasted/one did not), pork (thirty-one abstained/one consumed it), alcohol (thirty abstained/two consumed it), halal (twenty-seven kept it strictly/three kept it sometimes/two did not care). According to my informants, religious identities are considered acceptable identities to hold in the Canadian context, an acceptance that is reflected in the World Values Survey data I mentioned above, and as a result, religious practices can be labeled as such and continued in the host land.

In fact, in a context such as Canada where these, relatively well known practices are less contested than some other locations, other practices move to the forefront of practice and identity. For example, the issue of gelatin came up for many of my informants when speaking about Islam and food. For these informants, gelatin is a part of one’s religious food practice, and a part of what makes them Muslim in Montreal. In responding to my question about the relationship

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as teachers, nurses, doctors, civil servants and police officers. Bill 60 was never implemented in the province, as Marois called an election and lost, but its ripple effects are evident in the province. In 2015, Liberal leader Phillippe Couillard proposed a new religious neutrality legislation in Bill 62. In this Bill, reminiscent of Bill 94 which was tabled in 2010, people giving *and receiving* public services would need to have their faces uncovered, making the niqab and burka banned in these contexts. Overall, it is clear that overt symbols of religious identification are incredibly problematic in both of these contexts.

between Islam and food several of my Montreal informants would bring up gelatin immediately:

*Oui, seulement de la viande halal et on ne mange pas les yoghourts avec la gélatine. Il y a des personnes qui disent, ok c'est un petit pourcentage. Mais même ça, ça vient du porc, donc on ne mange pas la chose là où l'on trouve de la gélatine, par exemple. Parce que cette fois si c'est une petite quantité, l'autre fois on va dire ok, pour la gélatine il n'y a pas de problème, pourquoi on n'essaie pas autre chose? Donc il vaut mieux acheter ce qui est halal.<sup>33</sup>*

For these informants this mention of gelatin was one of the first, if not the first, link between Islam and food that they would bring up. Furthermore, because of this focus on taking the identity of practicing Muslim to the next level, some of my informants would become obsessive ingredient verifiers; making sure that every single ingredient in every single product they purchased was halal, without gelatin. They became the community of “ingredient checkers” in a world surrounded by those *laissez-faire* shoppers who throw anything in their cart.

*On a un problème de lire les ingrédients. Quand on est sur un rayon, on trouve des gens qui prennent les produits et les jettent dans le chariot. Nous, il faut les lire. S'il y a de la gélatine, s'il y a des produits qui sont péchés, alors c'est normal. Parce que la gélatine c'est la peau du porc qui se transforme en forme gélatine pour donner cette forme aux ice creams, aux yogourts pour lui donner cette forme, pour ne pas que ça se fende. Mais en réalité, c'est très déconseillé pour la santé.<sup>34</sup>*

Whereas in a place like France, the fact of keeping halal or not drinking alcohol was enough of a contested practice as to distinguish a particular identity, it was almost as if, in Canada, my informants needed something even more distinct with which to identify themselves, something more distinct to draw the line between “us” and “them.” Therefore, in contrast to Connor’s (2014) conclusion that Muslim immigrants would become “less religious” in more welcoming contexts, and “more religious” in less welcoming contexts, my examination of “Muslim food practices” shows that my informants in Paris (a less welcoming COR) actually alter/leave behind their practices to a large extent and my informants in Montreal (a more welcoming COR) increase their religious practices and stress their religious identities even more in the Canadian setting.

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33. “Yes only halal meat and we do not eat yogurt with gelatin. There are people who say ok it’s only a small percentage. But even that, that comes from pork and so we do not eat things where we find gelatin for example. Because this time it’s a small quantity, the next time we will say o.k, for gelatin there is no problem, why don’t we try something else? So it is better to buy what is halal.”
34. “We have a problem of reading ingredients. When we are in an aisle, we find people who take products and throw them in their shopping cart. For us, we must read. If there is gelatin, if there are products that are forbidden, so it’s normal. Because gelatin is pig skin that they transform into gelatin to give this form to ice cream, to yogurt to give it this form, so that it doesn’t split. But in reality, it is highly discouraged for one’s health.”

In bringing this article to an end, I would like to highlight some valuable conclusions which arose from the fieldwork that I have reviewed here. I argue that while the receptivity to minority immigrant identities may lead to an increase in religious practice/identity, it also leads to an increase in national identification and, as a result, integration efforts. While France may assume that by denying the religious identities of immigrants in the public sphere, those immigrants will integrate more successfully into French society, my work shows the opposite to be the case. In spite of the changes that my Parisian informants were making to their religious food practices and related identities, they still felt as though they were on the outside of the “French” identity. This often led them to conflicts of identity and relationship that simply were not present for my Montreal informants. In fact, my Montreal informants, because they felt as though their minority religious identities were accepted, not only highlighted more specific religious food practices as a means of presenting their religious identities, but also felt more “Canadian” and consequently more invested in this side of their multifaceted identities. In agreement with Margarita Mooney’s argument, “greater recognition of immigrants’ religious identities and organizations would probably improve the cultural and structural incorporation of immigrants in France” (2013, 110).<sup>35</sup> By comparing the experiences of Maghrebine Muslim immigrants in Paris and Montreal through the lens of food practice, we can see that more welcoming CORs can actually lead to “more incorporation” of minority religious immigrants, and less welcoming CORs can actually lead to minority religious immigrants distancing themselves further from the majority groups and identities.

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35. Mooney’s article is just one in a special issue of *International Migration* titled “Incorporating Faith: Religion and Immigrant Incorporation in the West” which addresses, among other things, the role of contexts of reception on immigrant religion (Mooney 2013, 99–112). The other article that directly addresses this issue is Wendy Cadge *et al.*’s work on “Religious Dimensions of Contexts of Reception” (2013, 84–98).

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