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EXPLORING THE DIFFERENCES IN RELIGIOUS  
BEHAVIOR OF IMMIGRANTS AND NATIVES IN  
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## **INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION, CHRISTIAN RELIGION AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION: EXPLORING THE DIFFERENCES IN RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOR OF IMMIGRANTS AND NATIVES IN EUROPE**

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### **Abstract**

This study aimed to point out the differences between the religiosity of immigrants and natives and how they hinder or facilitate immigrant social integration into the host society. The study took a multi-national perspective as the basis for analyzing religious views within Europe whereby both the natives and immigrants in European countries are evaluated and explanations for individual groups' integration trajectories are emphasized. With respect to a thorough scholarly analysis, this study found out that the religiosity of immigrants tends to be high than that of natives in most European countries. It also noted that the initial religiosity of immigrants drops with an increase in the duration of time the individual immigrant stays in the host country. This study makes available knowledge about religious differences in a cross-cultural perspective and strives to help sociologists in outlining the differences in order to help in studying behavior patterns in different cultural settings.

**Keywords:** *International migration, religiosity, immigrants, social integration*

## Introduction

Religion is arguably the most common factor of social integration between immigrants and natives (Maliepaard & Karen, 2012). Most immigrants arriving in host countries are faced with difficulties in integrating at first with vast cultural differences, language and climate standing in their way. Religion being the only thing that cuts across cultures, it's remarkably notable that immigrants maintain religious identities and seems to settle with natives that profess same religious beliefs (Borup & Ahlin, 2011). That said, more difficulties are experienced in cases where the religiosity of the immigrants does not match with that of the natives. The contemporary Europe has become more secular over time compared to the previous century (Davie, 2000). Most European countries reports a diminished church attendance or affiliation to any religion, with some quarters believing in the non-existence of a supreme being called God (Pereira, 2016).

The largest population of European immigrants has been noted to strongly adhere to their religious beliefs (Wendy & Elaine, 2007). The strong and sometimes radical religious stands have raised concerns over the immigrant religiosity within the host societies. Amongst the factors that contribute to the differences in the religiosity of the immigrant and the natives include individual characteristics like education, age, level of exposure and religious denominations (Mariya & Chiswick, 2011). Government policies in both the country of origin and destination country on issues such as religious freedom or even societal views about specific religions also contribute a great deal to the differences in the religiosity of immigrants and native (Wendy & Elaine, 2007). These differences have particularly hindered social integration of immigrants based on religion. They have further led to unveiling of policies in host countries that are specifically geared towards curbing the extreme religious practices of immigrants (Foner & Alba, 2008).

The perception of most European countries has been that the immigrants' religious practices are rigid and persistent over time (Threlfall, 2003). Some of the practices have been seen to be undesirable by the natives and even in some cases associated with crime and terrorism. In Netherlands, sociologist Paul Scheffer notes that the intolerance of religions towards criticism or dissenting opinions of certain aspects of their religion makes them unfit to integrate into the Dutch society (Scheffer, 2000). Other countries like France and Belgium have banned the wearing of visible Islamic veil in public appearances as means to curb extreme religious practices (Renaut & Touraine, 2005).

This study advances the existing literature on the role of religion on social integration of immigrants into the host society, but more specifically focuses on the differences in the religiosity of immigrants and natives that hinder social integration. The major thesis of this study is to show that the religiosity of immigrants exceeds that of the natives even within the same religious denominations. This study explains several factors to this observation with a report on how these differences hinder social integration.

To begin with, this study focuses on immigrant individual lives with an analysis of personal characteristics against the individual lives of natives. The study then argues that differences in personal characteristics can be viewed in terms of religion especially on the side of the immigrant where religion is seen as a motivator to every life aspect. As a result of migration, immigrants undergo changes in their lives affecting personal behavior and attitudes towards life and religion

seems to be the only refuge that offers solace (Maliapaard et al., 2012). This could be the reason of increased religiosity within immigrants in host societies. If this argument holds the waters, then there is a high chance of a shift in the religious position of immigrants as they stay longer and get used to the host society, a point when other factors like education, language and employment play a connecting role more than religion.

### **Immigrant religiosity and social integration**

The concept of religiosity spurs a lot of interpretations depending on the purpose intended to be given (Dow, 2007). The religiosity of an individual person can be measured based on personal behaviors and habits such as attendance of church during religious services, contributions towards religious causes, frequency of praying and degree of commitment towards the doctrines of a given religion (Mariya & Chiswick, 2011). All these aspects of religiosity cannot be directly observed as they fall into either private or public religiosity. As immigrants arrive in their host countries, they often undergo the two categories of religiosity (Mariya & Chiswick, 2011). Private religiosity is mainly inspired at a personal level based on the immigrants' beliefs and feelings. This type of religiosity varies greatly from one immigrant to another even within the same religious denomination (Dow, 2007). For instance Christianity has not set a specific number of times for its members to pray in a day and this stands to explain the differences encountered in the frequency of prayers by Christian immigrants. On the other hand, the publicly observed religiosity that comprises of church attendance and contributions towards religious causes is mainly to a greater degree a notion of human and social capital (Garcia, 2012).

The religiosity of immigrants is observed to undergo changes from the country of origin to the host society. More often, it is argued that immigrants tend to be more religious in their host countries than they were previously in their countries of origin (Yang & Ebaugh, 2011). Most of the reasons as to that trend can be explained in the salient role religion plays in the process of social integration. Being in a culturally different society, immigrants find themselves lost and resort to religion as the only social link between them and the locals (Maliapaard et al., 2012). Besides religion being a social link, there are other attributes that seem to cut more into personal lives of specific members of a given religion. Issues like the idea of a good afterlife as reward to good deeds in Christianity, spiritual balance and social wellbeing are seen as motivators in one's increased religiosity (Azzi & Ehrenberg, 1975; Iannaccone, 1990). Although it's generally observed that belief and commitment to those elements of religiosity is high in host countries it does not rule out the fact that immigrants still held those values in their countries of origin (Yang & Ebaugh, 2011). The difference is associated with the sudden change of life order which immigrants face in host countries. Being in isolation they are quick to notice that some things are not morally right in the face of their religious doctrines and so in return tend to behave in a way that will try to indirectly show the right way of doing such things (Maliapaard et al., 2012).

Another benefit of religion is the psychological comfort it offers especially in times when immigrants are faced with hard times in a new land (Mariya & Chiswick, 2011). The mere belief that there is a God who is in control of every situation that's the foundation of Christian faith tends to gain ground in hard times than when people are not faced with any troubles in life (Naik, 2018). Since the immigrants in their countries of origin have no much social problems, the degree of

religiosity may not be as high as when in a new land where they are faced with all sorts of social problems in the process of social integration. This in a way explains why immigrants' religiosity increases when they arrive in host countries (Broup et al., 2011).

The need for institutional attachment has been seen to be another factor for immigrants running to religion to help them in the process of social integration (Rumbaut, 2014). Religion provides an identity with which one can be classified and in most situations immigrants have a variety of sociological aspects to identify them with in their countries of origin than in their host countries (Pamela, 2003). For instance, ethnic and cultural practices can be a form of identity competing with religion in home countries but in host countries such sociological aspects as ethnic culture are rendered irrelevant, leaving religion as the only tradition with which immigrants can freely identify themselves with. As a result, the religiosity of immigrants becomes more pronounced as the religious aspect does not compete with any other sociological inclusions when they are in the new land (Broup et al., 2011).

Religious affiliations also provide access to materialistic needs through the networks created in churches and other religious activities. Being active in religion gives immigrants opportunities to venture into the natives sociological sphere and hence finding access to job opportunities, assistance through settlement hardships and even economic creativities such business ideas (Stark & Finke 2000; Steve & Stasavage, 2006). Since religion promises all these things that are hard to access by immigrants through other routes, they therefore resort to religion in numbers. This explains why immigrants records high numbers of religious membership in most European societies (Foner & Alba, 2008).

Existing literature indicates that the religiosity of immigrants tends to exceed that of natives in most European countries because religion affects the personal lives of immigrants directly (Massey & Higgins, 2011). Even in a situation where immigrants have come from different countries with different cultures, their personal lives are greatly influenced by religious beliefs and practices that they hold onto when in new land, almost unifying them under religion as opposed to culture and nationalities (Threlfall, 2003). But even with the generalized high degree of religiosity within immigrant populations, there still exist determinants that contribute to individual preferences of religious practices such as church attendance or institutional membership of religious organizations (Mariya & Chiswick, 2011). Such determinants include the location of settlement of immigrants, age of immigrants and even the level of education of immigrants. Immigrants who settle in rural areas are more likely to attend to religious practices than those who settle in urban areas since in urban areas there are a lot of activities that might keep them off churches and other places of worship (Mariya & Chiswick, 2011).

Azzi and Ehrenberg (1975) note that immigrants of older age above 40 years tend to be more religious than youth immigrants of ages between 30-35 years because this age is occupied with professional development and family creation. Such factors tend to show a varying degree of immigrant religiosity but most of the determinant characteristics like education are associated with increased duration of stay immigrants in host societies (Pereira, 2016). It's argued that a longer stay in the host community by immigrants reduces their degree of religiosity and factors such as education take over from religion as a link to the native society (Mariya & Chaswick, 2011).



In most cases, the religiosity of immigrants is considered different and unique in the eyes of the locals because of at least two reasons. Firstly, immigrant religious tradition differs from that of natives and this creates different perceptions of religion within the two parties (Massey & Higgins, 2011). For instance, religion in most immigrants' countries of origin is incorporated with aspects of cultural practices that are absent in host countries. This makes it difficult to compare with the religious practices of natives even within same religious denominations because of the outlined differences.

The rugged religious landscapes in most European countries make it difficult for immigrants' religious practices to fit in too (Foner & Alba, 2008). Religion is seen to be something of the old in European countries but in most Asian and African countries where most European immigrants come from, religion is taken seriously by people across all ages (Mensah, 2013). In such cases, immigrants of young age seem odd when they cling to religious practices in host countries because their counterparts do not practice religion. This affects the religiosity of the young immigrants in most European countries, by either demoralizing them or making them shift from their childhood beliefs into accepting the views and religious perceptions of the natives (Zannoni, 2015).

Individual characteristics of immigrants such as education, profession, income or even area of residence also affect the religiosity of immigrants as they integrate socially in a new society (Mariya & Chiswick, 2011). A comparison, for instance, of natives in the same profession as the immigrants generates a lot of differences in the two parties' religious perceptions. Most professionals in European countries, especially in the areas of science have a low regard for religion (Davie, 2006). Immigrants in this profession are then forced to take a step back in their religious perception, highly affecting their religiosity.

Migration results in a process of individual life transformation as it subjects the immigrant to a different cultural setting whereby a usual life order is changed (Wendy et al., 2007). The immigrant therefore requires a shift in behavior to accommodate the new cultural setting. Because religion seems to be universal, even non-religious immigrants from countries of origin may resort to religion to seek comfort in sociological difficulties faced during the process of social integration or even escape loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted as an ethnic or racial group (Waite & Lehrer, 2003; Connor, 2010; Lehrer, 2010).

Based on this analysis, this study takes a position that the religiosity of an immigrant takes center stage in the process of social integration. The study also notes that immigrants' religiosity is different in home countries and in host countries. The religiosity of immigrants tends to increase in host society because religion acts as a social link for connecting immigrants with natives. It's also observed that immigrants' degree of religiosity reduces with an increase in the duration of stay in host countries. Given the analysis of factors that come into play as the immigrants stays longer, this study associates the transformations in the immigrant's religiosity as an indication of either positive or negative integration.

### **European religious perceptions and culture**

Europe as a continent has undergone transformation starting off as the world's oldest civilization to the current challenges that face its identity. A continent formerly regarded as highly Christian

can barely claim the same today (Davie, 2006). Christianity, the biggest religion in the world was born in Europe during the reign of the Roman Empire and spread to other places of the world (MacGregor, 2016). It's quite ironic that the contemporary Europe does not regard Christianity as highly as it used to be, with a reported increase in secularization (Davie, 2006). A quick look on what can be identified as European culture or European identity leaves one with many unanswered questions as to the authenticity of such a claim. Sociologists have attempted to approach this question in a multidisciplinary perspective to include history and political science (Arts & Halman, 2014; Carey, 2002; Checkel & Katzenstein, 2009).

European culture and identity, has been argued to have lost and mixed up within other cultures since the contemporary Europe is multi-cultural as the continent is the major receiver of immigrants in the world (Pereira, 2016). Another reason that has contributed to the diverse European culture is the high degree of democracy and respect for human rights by European societies (Davie, 2006). This particular factor has provided a ground for flourishing of immigrant cultures and religious practices over time. Surprisingly, in most European countries of the contemporary Europe there exist no strict cultural traditions or adherences that are as bounding as the culture and religious traditions of the immigrants (Massey & Higgins, 2011). Vignoles & Easterbrook (2018) in studying the European culture raise questions to as if Europeans can be distinguished from themselves when they are in other parts of the world. European religious perceptions and cultural positions can be grouped into individualistic and collectivistic categories with the Western Europe leading on the individualistic categorization (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

At some level, it is noted that European religious perceptions share distinctive features, with specific groups believing in the religion and others completely not professing any religion, but generally there is a substantial diversity across the entire continent (Davie, 2006). It is hard to categorize since most of the traits are individualistic that you cannot exactly know if a certain behavior or conduct can belong to a given religion or culture (Zannoni, 2015). A comparison of such traits with most immigrant culture and religious perceptions outlines major differences, as in most other cultures collectivism is practiced as opposed to individualism.

Brewer (1999) observes that as most cultures and groups of people existing today in the world identify themselves in a scale of "who we are". European identity is both "who we are" and "who we are not." Largely the European identity on the part of "who we are" is taken to be White and Christian (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2018). With such a baseline, it's even more difficult for immigrant cultures and religious traditions to incorporate into the European cultures since a few of them can meet the criteria of cultural identity. A study conducted by Fleischmann and Phalet (2013) found out that European identities are deeply grounded in religious ancestry with most regions within the continent having specific influential religious denominations (Davie, 2006). For instance the Scandinavian region is more inclined to the Lutheran church while other countries like England have the Church of England and to the south countries like Italy are dominantly Catholic. Such orientations have guided immigrant settlements since most of them have followed patterns in which they prefer immigrating into countries where their religious denominations are dominant (Threlfall, 2003).

The European culture and religious perception does not fit new comers instantly even in situations where immigrants fit into a majority religious practice (Foner & Alba, 2008). As a result of an increased global migration, with Europe reporting a receivership of approximately 22 million immigrants of the 49% increase recorded in 2017 (United Nations, 2017), there has been a need for discussion of immigrant influence in European social sphere (Castles & Miller, 2013). Policies have been formulated in most European countries to regulate immigrant activities which have been found to propagate feelings of threat amongst immigrant groups that settle in Europe (Datler, 2016). Visitin (2018) observes that the more liberal and egalitarian European identity is related to social prejudice towards immigrants who feel not represented within the majority of European culture.

Despite the observable differences between the immigrants' religiosity and the religiosity of natives, a middle ground has been achieved whereby immigrants have been able to integrate into native communities (Threlfall, 2003). Social integration has been seen to be motivated by the fact that positive relationships with dominant religious views influence integration outcomes in a positive manner (Mariya & Chiswick, 2011). Through interaction, the minority groups get to easily understand the cultural perceptions and religious practices of the majority groups.

For social integration of immigrants into European societies to succeed, Europeans' attitudes towards the religiosity and culture of immigrants need to change. Mahfud & colleagues (2018) in a study conducted in Netherlands and France, observes that when natives think abstractly about diversity and multiculturalism in a sense of what ought to be done, it reduces the impact of the perceived threat towards immigrants religiosity and cultural perceptions. Nevertheless, in more secularized European societies, public expression of religious practices is not highly welcome and in other countries where religion is dominant like Italy there seems to be a tolerance to public expression of religious traditions (Pereira, 2016). The secularization of most European societies is mainly influenced by the hypothesis that suggests that religion and development are inversely proportional. Some public intellectuals from European societies like Britain have been seen to regard religion as the enemy of progress (Dawkins, 2006). Such a position stands to explain the trend that the low the religiosity of European societies, the more the advancement in economic development (Weber, 1993; Martin, 1978).

Based on the analysis in this section, this study finds out that religious perceptions and cultural practices in Europe are not as strong an identity as the nationality of an individual. It is generally observed that European culture is insignificant in social integration and the religiosity of the contemporary Europe is influenced more at a personal level. The findings therefore suggest that, in regard to the religiosity of Europe and cultural practice, Europeans are unlikely to constitute a homogenous group of societies (Van der Noll, 2018).

### **Role of home and host country characteristics that affect religiosity of immigrants**

Apart from personal characteristics such as age, marital status, level of education and many others, the religiosity of an immigrant can be affected by other factors such as economic status of a country (Mariya & Chiswick, 2011). High economic status in home countries suggest reduced degree of religiosity of immigrants. More often, home countries economic status differs with the economic status of host country in many ways. Generally, most immigrants move from low economic status



country to a high economic status country (Broup et al., 2011). It is observed that a high economic status in both the home and host countries has a negative impact on the religiosity of the immigrants. The more a country is economically stable, the less the religiosity of that country (Mensah, 2013).

Secondly, governmental policies have worked hand in hand with the status of religiosity in both home and host countries (Fox, 2012). Religious freedom in most host countries has contributed to high degree of immigrant religiosity. In home countries, immigrant religiosity maintains at a stagnant or even waning state mainly because religious views are not put to taste given that the cultural structures available complement religious traditions (Naik, 2018). When immigrants are in host countries, things are different because in the new land the cultural practices perceived to be as normal are absent. Even with religious freedom, the religiosity of immigrants appears threatened because it's subjected to scrutiny by the host society (Rumbaut, 2014). In that regard, social regulation of immigrant culture becomes necessary, affecting immigrant religiosity. If some of the immigrant cultural behavior is suppressed, then the religiosity of the immigrant sprouts as a compensation for the suppressed cultural practices.

Another characteristic that seems to affect the religiosity of immigrants is the position of church in either government. In some European countries, the government has a state church whereby a specific religious denomination is considered as the official church of the state. Countries like Finland has the Lutheran church as the state church and immigrants settling there get motivated by such a setting, improving on their religiosity (Bunikowski, 2016). However, in some cases, some host country characteristics like religious pluralism have been observed to elicit similar effects for both natives and immigrants. In a situation of a host country with a high religious pluralism, the religiosity of immigrants has been reported to be low as opposed to host countries with stricter social attitudes (Mariya & Chiswick, 2011).

## **Conclusion**

This study focused on exploring the differences between the religiosity of natives and immigrants and how they affect social integration of immigrants into host societies. The analysis is based in Europe as a continent, mainly for the purposes of Europe being a major immigrant destination in the world. The religiosity of the immigrants was assessed as from the home country to the host country, with various factors that influence their religiosity being considered. The study sought to show out that the religiosity of immigrants is higher than the religiosity of natives. A lot of factors have been associated with these differences and most of them point out to the fact that religion seems to be the only social link between immigrants and natives when they settle in new areas. As a result, immigrant religiosity increases in new land as a hope to get social connections or institutional affiliations.

The contemporary European society is highly diverse, with multiple cultures brought upon by the increased global migration. The immigrant cultural practice is therefore not much experienced in European societies, making immigrants to resort to religion as a refuge in social integration. However, the European societies where immigrants settle differ in regard to the level of religiosity. There are countries where religion is nationally acclaimed and some where secularization has taken over from religion. Immigrants settling in countries like Italy where for instance the Roman

Catholic Church is prominent are bound to be more religious than those settling in countries like Germany where the level of secularization is high.

This study has evaluated characteristics of both home and host country that affects the religiosity of immigrants as well. As many immigrants in the European countries settle in the respective societies, religion has played a specific role in the process of their social integration. This study emphasized that differences in religiosity of the immigrant and the native affects the settlement and social integration of the immigrants into the host society. Some other characteristics like the economic status of both the host and home countries of immigrants were considered as partly being influential in the religiosity of immigrants.

### **Recommendations**

Social integration has been a problem faced by immigrants all over as they settle in host societies. Religion has been as a social link between the immigrants and the natives. Nonetheless, there exist huge disparities within religion that have always been seen to hinder social integration. More often, the religious landscape has been taken as the most significant factor of religion as an influence of social integration. It has been then argued that immigrants with the same religious affiliations as natives tend to integrate with easiness in their host societies. What has never been taken into account is the fact that the religiosity of the immigrants and natives differ to a certain degree.

Findings by this study indicate that there are differences in the religiosity of immigrants and that of natives. By analyzing the European society, it's observed that the religiosity of the natives is low compared to that of immigrants. Such differences have been associated with difficulties in social integration that is faced by immigrants. To curb such problems, more efforts need to be put by most European countries to encourage religious traditions of immigrants so as to allow the immigrants to feel connected to the host society. More studies need to be done also to determine the maximum achievable role of religion in the process of social integration of immigrants into host societies.

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