

**Canadians' identity and the
new religious diversity :
New wine in old bottles ?
A case study in Quebec**

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Problematic

How do the new religious referents and resources made available by immigration modify Quebecois' relationship to religion ?

In which way do they influence Quebecois' identity construction and lifestyles ?

Theoretical Approach

Considering the case of mixed unions as a meeting point between immigrants and members of the host society, I will illustrate 3 different ways in which Quebecois recompose their identity through the reappropriation of immigrants' religious referents.

I will focus on Quebecois' discourses around the transmission of religion to children on the one hand, and on the project of identity construction they embark upon for their children on the other.

Hypothesis

It is widely recognized that Quebecois identity was traditionally based on religion, that is, before being supplanted by the referent of language following of the Quiet Revolution.

I argue that the latter has not excluded religion from Quebec's identity-making process. Nevertheless, by integrating religious resources made available through recent waves of immigration, religion has installed new modes of identity recomposition based on the reinterpretation of past referents, and on the reappropriation of the newly imported ones.

The research

The research objective is to examine practices and perceptions of young couples in mixed unions as far as their children's identity is concerned.

- 55 couples interviewed.
- 8 of them included a Quebecois and a Muslim immigrant, from Maghreb or West Africa.
- Respondents were between 23 and 45 years old, the majority were in their thirties.
- All couples lived in the Greater Montreal Area.
- All were all married and had at least one child.

Caroline and Hassan

**Underlining the commonalities
of both partner's religious
referents and minimizing
their differences**

Caroline and Hassan

« For me it is not important that my daughter gets my religion, since I believe that all religions are equal and they all have the same basis. I am a Christian because I am Christian, that's it, but Islam is a very nice religion too and I do not mind if she is a Muslim. But I want her to be able to choose.»

Jack and Dia

**Choosing one of the two
partners' religions**

Jack and Dia

- Jack decided to convert to Islam.
- Jack wants to teach his daughter the basis of spirituality, that is to acknowledge God and to keep a modest attitude.
- For Jack, being born from a mixed union gives the child a multiple identity which he considers a wealth and a great opportunity, provided that the child keeps aware of and respects the different referents that compose identity.

Rosalie and Amadou

**The option of secularization:
Rejecting religion as an
identity resource**

Rosalie and Amadou

- The couple considers that their children have no religion for the moment.
- They talk about transmitting human values, including honesty, respect and critical thought.
- Religious feasts are not important for them, but they still celebrate the «commercial» ones (Christmas, Easter, and New Year's Eve) as social events, «especially for the children».

Analysis and Interpretation

- The Quebecois' discourses show a form of acculturation of religious referents: religious traditions and commitment are reduced to a spirituality or to an array of values that are presented as transcending particularities of religions.
- Religion is considered as a system of representations and values dissociated from the code of conduct and the practices they may entail.

Analysis and Interpretation

- The Quebecois' discourses reflect the individualization of religious referents as personalized visions of the world and codes of conduct as opposed to a process of institutionalization of religious practices and representations.
- Religious referents are still perceived as fundamental. However, they are not necessarily transmitted through kinship, they may result from an individual choice.

Conclusion

- The three cases discussed here show that Quebecois religious identity is perceived as an individualized bricolage or negotiation which tends to acknowledge some common universality of values, transcending cultural idiosyncrasies.
- This process is based on the reinterpretation of traditional Catholic values and on the reappropriation of new religious resources imported from immigrant populations.