This insightful text examines the impact of Islamic schooling on Muslim youth in French-speaking Canada to consider how these institutions influence the formation of students’ cultural, national, ethnic, and religious identities, and their sense of belonging to Quebec and Canada.

Through close qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with first- and second-generation students, as well as parents, teachers, and leaders involved in Islamic high schools, this text explores how far institutions succeed in preparing young Muslims to participate in the broader secular society in Quebec and in English-speaking Canada. As well as investigating the historical and contemporary development of Islamic schooling in Canada, and addressing public perceptions of this educational sector, the volume foregrounds the voices of those directly involved in these schools to illustrate first-hand experiences, and the motivations and objectives of those choosing to support or engage in these schools. Overarching themes include citizenship, integration, and the complex interplay of Muslim, Quebecois, and Canadian values.

This book will be of great interest to graduate and postgraduate students, researcher scholars and academics in the fields of religion, education, Islamic studies, multicultural education curriculum studies, and faith-based teacher education.

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Islamic Schooling and the Identities of Muslim Youth in Quebec
Navigating National Identity, Religion, and Belonging

Hicham Tiflati
To all those who are trying to better themselves through resilience, perseverance, resistance, and hard work.
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“They weren’t wearing the uniform, so there is no way to relate them to the school, yet they were punished. If I did the same thing at a public school, they wouldn’t give a damn.” This was the opinion of Bassem, a male participant, regarding an incident involving his classmates, which was seen as inappropriate by his Islamic school officials. While they were preparing for their graduation and an outing in a cottage, a few male students from his school went shopping for groceries. For fun, two students took pictures with cases of beer on their shoulders and posted them on Facebook. Beer, like wine, is considered impermissible (haram) in the Islamic faith. The post went viral among their peers at the school. Once the school’s administration discovered it, the students were called into the principal’s office and suspended for three days. The students were severely blamed and shamed by the administration for their “un-Islamic” conduct. This incident is an example of how Islamic schools, in their role as community institutions, collaborate with parents to supervise students inside and outside of the school building. The Islamic school sees students as its children and as subjects who are under its authority everywhere, not just on school grounds. In fact, Bassem insisted that if a staff member ran into any students engaged in disrespectful or un-Islamic behaviour, their parents would be notified immediately, even though the incident did not happen on school property.

This book explores the ways in which Islamic schooling serves as a barrier to, or a vehicle for, young Muslims’ social integration in Montreal, Canada. The empirical study examines how such schooling may inform and construct Muslim youth identities (national, religious, ethnic, social, and cultural) and influence their sense of belonging in a “multicultural” francophone society. The main goal is to investigate how immigrant Islamic schools educate their youth, and how this education influences the students’ integration process in Quebec society. In particular, the study examines the type of education offered in Montreal’s Islamic schools; it also investigates whether these schools directly or indirectly encourage or dissuade Muslims from integrating with other Quebecers and developing a sense of belonging, which allows them to act as full
citizens. In order to assess the previous points, this work considers school instructions and analyses data obtained from teachers, principals, parents, and graduates. The findings from the empirical research indicate that while Islamic educational institutions in Montreal use various tools to nurture a traditional Islamic identity and culture, they still face considerable internal challenges such as limited resources and internal dissent. Youth who graduate from these schools tend to embrace a more intense religiosity than their co-religionists in public schools. However, these youths are also very attached to Quebec and Canada, having found ways to reconcile their Muslim identity with their Quebecois and Canadian identities. The internal challenges they face are often exacerbated, however, by external pressures in the form of Islamophobic sentiments or acts fuelled by biased media coverage.
The completion of this work, which began as a doctoral dissertation, was not an easy task. It has been the culmination of the efforts of many individuals who supported and inspired me during this journey. I owe a debt of gratitude to those who stood by my side. For their commitment and support, I would like to thank each one of them and acknowledge their contributions.

I would like to thank Dr Roxanne D. Marcotte for her persistence and insights in helping me finalise this work. She always provided timely and helpful feedback and encouraged and supported me throughout my PhD years. Her hard work and commitment to academia and to her students inspired me the most. I am grateful to my co-supervisor, Dr Kevin McDonough, for accepting to get on board despite his busy schedule. His expertise, advice, and guidance were very helpful in completing this study.
Since September 11, 2001, Islam and Islamic teachings have attracted a great deal of media and academic attention. For many, terms such as Islam, Islamic school, jihad, and sharia hold negative connotations. For instance, the Arabic term *madrasa*, which simply means school, has come to connote a place for the training of future terrorists (Haddad et al., 2009, p. 7) or for the isolation and indoctrination of children (Cristillo, 2009, p. 76; Tremblay, 2012). With the recent rise of the so-called *da’esh*, or the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS), concerns have been raised about Muslims in general and about radical Islamic and homegrown terrorism more particularly. In the West, there are ongoing debates about Muslims’ integration in their host societies. Doubts are also being raised about Islam’s (in)compatibility with Western secular democracy and values. For instance, in recent years in Quebec, controversies have arisen around the extent of reasonable accommodations (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008), the wearing of the hijab in public schools (McAndrew, 2006), the presence of the face veil in public spaces (Meena, 2011) and during citizenship ceremonies, and the proposal for a Charter of Laïcité by the Parti Québécois in 2013. The current Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) government passed a law (Bill 21) that made laïcité a reality. The CAQ is described as an anti-immigrant and nationalist party. While protecting Roman Catholic and Anglican symbols, Bill 21 targets the ostensible religious symbols of minority groups such as hijabs, kippahs, and turbans. The CAQ claims it is promoting Quebec’s version of laïcité. As the law violates the Québécois and Canadian Charter of Rights, Mr. Legault, the premier designate, invoked the notwithstanding clause to pass the ban. The CAQ also succeeded in introducing values tests for new immigrants, reducing immigration by 20%, and proposing more laws to further protect Quebec’s identity and language. These issues reveal that minorities and Muslims are often portrayed as problematic, and that the subject of Muslims’ integration remains challenging (Mancilla, 2009, p. 28).
Introduction

The Essence of Islamic Education

According to Husain and Ashraf (1979), Islamic education trains the sensibility of Muslim youth in a manner that affects their attitude towards life as well as their actions, decisions, and approaches to all kinds of knowledge; it helps them grow into peace-loving, harmonious, and righteous adults who believe in God. Memon (2009, p. 240) suggests that the essence of an Islamic education is the development of a moral character founded in an Islamic framework, which ensures the natural growth of the original Muslim nature (fitra) of every individual. The code of conduct of Islamic schools, for instance, shows how religious notions are effectively used to reinforce these standards and to disseminate Islamic values (Kelly, 2000, p. 70; Cook, 1999). In other words, Islamic schools seek to implement what seems to be a “double curriculum:” Despite the fact that the school day and year are equal to those of other schools, Islamic schools must additionally include supplementary subjects such as Arabic, the Qur’an, and Islamic studies (Douglass, 2009, p. 103). Memon (2012, p. 83) suggests that Islamic schools’ ethos and values are one of the main reasons behind the establishment of these schools. Put differently, the first-generation Muslims who built these schools believed in the importance of transmitting the cultural and religious heritage that they imported with them to their children. However, second-generation Canadian Muslims tend to draw a clear distinction between “cultural Islam” on the one hand, which they usually identify with their parents’ cultural heritage, a heritage whose features often contradicts Western secular values, and what they consider to be the authentic form of Islam on the other hand, which most second-generation Muslims claim is completely compatible with Western secular values. Nonetheless, there is no culturally neutral (i.e. pure) Islam. The question is whether the cultural formations advanced by second-generation Muslims are “reconstructions” of the sometimes-illiberal cultural materials provided by their parents, resulting in new, and more harmonious, alignments between Islam and secular-democratic societies.

“Shopping” for the Right School

Devout Muslim parents face the dilemma of choosing between the Islamic school and the non-Islamic school (public or private). First, Islamic schools often lack basic funds, as most of them are not subsidised by the state and rely on the community’s help (fundraising, etc.) to cover many costs, which affects the quality of the education provided. Second, public schools, as well as private non-Islamic school, do not adequately respond to devout Muslim parents’ cultural and religious expectations. These schools lack the religious and cultural values that devout parents seek and are sometimes seen as teaching against conservative values. For
Muslim parents, a sacrifice of values is inevitable in either option. On the one hand, if they enrol their children in Islamic schools, they fear that the education received may not fully qualify them to compete at good universities, which could negatively affect their social and economic status. On the other hand, whereas public and private secular schools might help Muslim children acquire the social skills needed to integrate into mainstream society, these schools will not contribute to the preservation and transmission of religious and cultural values. Additionally, certain parents do not view the public educational system as a neutral, secular, and balanced system that promotes equality, citizenry, and human rights. Instead, they believe that it mostly empowers a Euro-centric and Christian tradition (Blumenfeld, 2006b; Memon, 2009, 2012; Zine, 2008).

**Islamic or Muslim School?**

The use of the expression Islamic versus Muslim school is something I struggled with when I started working on this book. I felt, at the beginning, that the term “Islamic” is politicised and holds a negative connotation, one that is very close to that of the term “Islamist.” However, for the lack of a better term and after some hesitation, I decided to employ “Islamic” schools to define modern schools that adopt the state’s secular curriculum and add a “flavour” of Islamic instruction (Qur’an, Islamic studies, Arabic, etc.). In Arabic, we do not refer to an Islamic school as a madrasa muslima, or Muslim school, because the adjective muslima is usually restricted to portray living persons (i.e. a Muslim woman not an Islamic woman). According to Zine (2008, p. 7), whereas the term Islamic, which is less open to discursive manoeuvring, refers to adherence to a tradition, it is the term Muslim that indicates the adherence to the Islamic faith. In any case, the meaning of the term, void from any political bias, is still ambiguous and useless unless it is employed in a specific context. Therefore, an Islamic School is a school where the Qur’an is usually taught in Arabic and where Islamic core tenets are instilled, along with the formal curriculum required by the state in which the school is situated (Sirin & Fine, 2008; Clauss et al., 2013, p. 4). In other words, Islamic schools are implementing two curricula, the first responds to the tradition and heritage behind the school’s community, and the second strives to meet the academic requirements of the state.

With concerns about Muslims’ integration in general, and with how Western Muslim youth are being raised in the post-9/11 and post-ISIS era more particularly, Islamic education and culture have become a subject of scrutiny (Saghaye-Biria, 2012, p. 24; Elbih, 2012). There are serious fears in the West about whether Islamic schools teach against integration and belongingness, as well as whether and how they contribute to social cohesion through the formation of productive future citizens. These fears especially coalesce around the teachings of religion
classes and the internal climate of the school (i.e. whether the hijab is a part of the dress code, whether segregation is enforced in certain schools, whether prayers are mandatory, etc.). Some Islamic schools even insist on an Islamic dress code for teachers, which means that non-Muslim employees and Muslim women who do not wear the hijab have to wear it while on duty at the school. These points raise serious questions about the role of Islamic schools in preparing their students to fit into the secular societies in which they live. There are also concerns that Islamic schools are extending their influence beyond their religious boundaries and, therefore, indoctrinating students with behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs that do not conform to mainstream Western social norms and common values. Furthermore, Gender discrimination, indoctrination, hatred of the West and of democracy, loyalty to a global nation or ummah, radicalisation, all of these have become associated with Islam and, by extension, with Islamic education. National and international events (Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, the war in the Middle East, Western interventions in Muslim countries, ISIS, etc.) fuel these tensions as well. Over a dozen Quebecers are confirmed to have left to join ISIS (the *Globe* and *Mail*, 2015); another ten adolescents were intercepted at Pierre Elliot Trudeau international airport in Montreal because there were proofs these youth were intending to join ISIS. There are concerns about what influenced these youth in adopting this decision, and the role mosques and Islamic institutions play in that.

**Practices at the Islamic School**

Many Islamic beliefs and practices (i.e. the niqab, gender segregation, guardianship, and the reign of men in inheritance) seem controversial and incompatible with those of Western secular societies. If Islamic schools are loyal to such traditional teachings, students exposed to these beliefs might develop anti-Western and anti-democracy sentiments, which will negatively affect their integration and sense of belonging in society. In her ethnographic study of an Islamic school in Montreal, Kelly (2000) stated that “none of the Muslim teachers and parents who did not wear the hijab outside the school considered the rule oppressive to the extent that the media did” (p. 73). Likewise, the degree of gender segregation practiced in certain Islamic cultures may be imported to Islamic schools. Kelly (2000, p. 82) suggests that if segregation exists in Islamic schools, it is usually not perceived negatively and does not create any serious problems. She affirms in her study that female and male staff members interacted freely, though rarely, with professionalism and familiarity. However, at the four Toronto Islamic schools Zine (2008) studied, more surveillance was placed on girls’ clothing, which is considered compulsory religious attire that is part of the schools’ uniform (p. 163). However, various opponents of religious schools insist that
state accredited schools must exclusively serve as educational institutions that focus on secular subjects, citizenship, and national identity, and not as mosques or churches that tackle spiritual and metaphysical issues.

The Participants

The participants in this study consist of 21 graduates and 15 stakeholders. Few graduates attended more than one Islamic school. Some participants also had experiences with public schools or other private secular schools. My criterion for graduates was that they had attended an Islamic school in Montreal for at least two years at the secondary level. Two years seemed enough time to develop a clear understanding of one’s experience at an Islamic school. I excluded those who had only attended elementary Islamic schools because these experiences were too remote for them to accurately narrate their memories. I divided the participants into two categories: (1) former students or graduates who were the products of Islamic schooling and (2) adult shareholders and stakeholders, which included teachers, parents, principals, and founders.

In this study, I partly adopt Jackson’s (1997, 2004, 2011) interpretive approach to religious education by privileging participants’ worldviews in explaining and interpreting their personal experiences. This interpretive approach has three main key concepts: (1) interpretation, (2) representation, and (3) reflexivity. I am fully aware that this approach to religious education was mainly developed for use in publicly funded and community schools concerned with helping students to gain a critical, modern, and reflective understanding of religions (Jackson, 2011). However, I believe these three main concepts will help me distance myself from my terrain, strive for a more objective understanding, while keeping to my academic and cultural standards. In what follows, the interpretive approach is concerned with how religions are represented by stakeholders, the media, and resources for religious education.

Jackson’s (1997) interpretive approach “takes a critical stance towards Western, post-Enlightenment models of representing world religions as homogeneous belief systems, whose essence is expressed through set structures and whose membership is seen in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions” (p. 189). Jackson (2011) asserts that this approach privileges neither the individual nor the faith but focuses instead on the hermeneutical relationship between the two without neglecting the impact of external factors on either one. He adds that,

in contrast to the phenomenology of religion, in which researchers or learners are expected to leave their presuppositions to one side, the interpretive method requires a comparison and contrast between the religious symbols, concepts and experiences of those being studied
and the nearest equivalent concepts, symbols and experiences of the researcher or learner.

(p. 190)

According to Jackson (2011), interpretation of data may begin from the informants’ experiences, points of view, or language before transitioning to the researcher’s experiences and, finally, navigating between the two sides. In other words, “interpretivist traditions emphasize empathy as a research tool in order to understand and present the point of view of the subjects” (Neitz, 2013, p. 130). Representation refers to the accurate portrayal of the diversity of participants’ religions and cultures.

As for reflexivity, it is a methodological approach in which one critically examines one’s own position in the field in order to understand the false distinctions between subjectivity and objectivity (Reed-Danahay, 2009). Reflexivity is understood as the relationship between the experience of researchers and those of their informants. Reflexivity is employed to maintain the researcher’s self-awareness in relation to the data, requiring thoughtfulness in regard to the informants’ words and distance from the subject under study (Schihalejev, 2010, cited in Jackson, 2011, p. 195). That said, I am applying these three methods (interpretation, representation, and reflexivity) in order to uncover my own presuppositions and to examine what emerges from my interviews with graduates and stakeholders as well as from the literature. Miller et al. (2013) assert that

[t]he fields of religion and adolescent development are complex indeed, meaning that related educational attempts need full and grounded theorizing. Because religious education has to include attention to pupils’ own values development, their own voices are crucial.

(p. 32)

The strength of Jackson’s interpretive approach lies in its recognition of these factors. It occupies a middle ground among the theories applied to religious education in secular societies. It neither privileges religion nor treats it as an unimportant metaphysical subject.

Interviewing Challenges

According to Ogbu (2008, p. 73), learning the local customs, language, and culture helps ethnographers gain more trust, acceptance, and rapport among their informants, allowing them to collect data coded in the native language. Some details are not easy to translate and must be learned as the ethnographer becomes socialised into the “native theory of speaking.” The language of interviewing was one of the challenges I encountered during my fieldwork, writing, and translating process. Whereas all stakeholders interviewed for this study are Arabic native speakers, graduates
are native speakers of French. Some of them also speak English or Arabic dialects at home with their siblings and parents. I gave my participants the option to choose the language in which they felt most comfortable. Two preferred to be interviewed in Arabic, 11 preferred English, and the rest opted for French—irrespective of their migration history. The difficulty that I encountered in this regard involved my attempt to be as accurate and comprehensive as possible when transforming participants’ responses from French and Arabic into English (Al Kandari, 2004, p. 35). Moreover, interviews were studied by analysing each transcript individually at first, and then by creating themes and categories for each encountered new subject. In the analysis of my data, I depended heavily on the computer aided qualitative data analysis software NVivo (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). NVivo supports qualitative and mixed methods research. It is very helpful in organising, analysing and creating insights and meaning from unstructured, and qualitative data such as interviews, surveys, social media, web contents, etc. It was very helpful in creating, organising, and understanding themes that emerged from my data; analysis of data was first done on individual themes, and then I moved on to work on all categories as a whole. In other words, I looked and analysed each transcript individually, and then I inverted common themes and categories. NVivo was also helpful in counting “who said what,” “where,” “in which context,” and within which theme; this was useful in coding and relating themes to one another (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).

**Interviewing Females**

Another challenge was interviewing female participants. As a male researcher, recruiting and interviewing females was more difficult than interviewing males. The latter were more accessible and flexible in their willingness to participate in my study. As a result, about two thirds of my participants are males. While female participants did not object to being interviewed by a male researcher, finding a place and time, and arranging meetings, was difficult. Some of them cancelled the meeting three or four times before deciding to postpone it indefinitely. It was easier with male participants as I could meet them anywhere and anytime. In fact, during the month of Ramadan, as Muslims usually socialise late at night, I conducted two interviews at 2 am with two male participants—a time frame that would be unimaginable with a devout female. Furthermore, some female participants—mothers in particular—were busy looking after their families. Taking time off from their daily activities to participate in the study meant being available later in the evenings when it might be viewed as inappropriate for a male researcher to visit their homes.

I let my participants express their feelings about their experiences as Quebecois Muslims (Jackson, 2011). This was facilitated through asking open-ended questions and allowing them to discuss their experiences in
as much detail as they felt comfortable sharing (Bakali, 2015). Interviews with parents and staff were semi-structured through the use of open-ended, direct, and indirect questions. Founders of Islamic schools were encouraged to share their life narratives, narrating their histories and struggles in establishing these schools. My role was limited to articulating questions or comments intended to bring them back to issues relevant to my research. All interviews were conducted on an individual basis.

Overview of the Chapters

Chapter 1: Muslims and Education in North America

This chapter introduces and historicises the phenomenon of Islamic schooling in North America and Quebec. Islamic schooling in this book refers to the kind of education offered at state-accredited full-time Islamic schools in Montreal. In addition, the chapter contextualises the main historic phases of the creation and the evolution of North American Islamic schools, beginning with the Nation of Islam schools and ending with the Islamic schools established by recent immigrants. The chapter also investigates perceptions about public and Islamic education in Montreal. It examines how the public educational system contributes, or does not contribute, to the creation of unity and harmony among future citizens. Furthermore, the chapter assesses parents’ rights to educate their children at the school of their choice.

Chapter 2: Muslims’ Belongingness and Islamic Identity in Intercultural French Quebec

This chapter looks at national identity and citizenship as vehicles for national belonging and as tools for facilitating social cohesion amongst all citizens. It tackles integration in Quebec and the importance of studying identities in order to understand how such social transitions occur. More specifically, the chapter looks at the construction of Islamic identity in French intercultural Quebec, which implies the construction of a minority religious and ethnic identity within a province that is itself a minority nation. The chapter also looks at the challenges facing Muslim youth in reconciling their Muslimness with their Quebecness and Canadianness. The discussion and analysis of identity are here informed by the work of Charles Taylor and Gutmann (1992) and Parekh (1995).

Chapter 3: Narratives of Six Model Participants

This chapter presents individual accounts of six “model” participants. These participants stood out by sharing the most information about their experiences and perspectives on Canadianness, Quebecness, identity, and
Islamic schooling. I include a brief description of these model participants to help contextualise my analysis as well as their comments and views. I chose the participants whose interviews stood out from the rest either because the participants had experienced various educational systems or because they voiced particularly unique perspectives.

**Chapter 4: Stakeholders’ Perspectives of Islamic Schooling**

This chapter draws on the perceptions of teachers, principals, parents, and founders of Islamic schools. It looks at their experiences and their motivations for involving themselves in this kind of schooling. It explores the nature of Islamic education in Montreal and its role in shaping the identities of Muslim youth as well as their sense of belonging within Quebec’s intercultural society.

**Chapter 5: Islamic Schooling’s Impact on Religiosity, Identity, and Belonging**

This chapter responds to my main research questions; it directly examines the impact of Islamic schooling on Muslim youth by analysing the interviews conducted with graduates of Islamic schools. The overall results reveal the impact of this schooling on Muslim youth in Montreal in terms of the formation of their identities and their sense of belonging to Quebec and Canada. The concluding chapter contextualises and compares the research findings with other studies that have been conducted in Quebec and English Canada. It looks at similarities and differences between participants in my study and those represented in other empirical studies that examine Muslim and immigrant youth identities and their sense of belonging.

**Notes**

1. There are 12 Islamic schools in Montreal: seven elementary schools and five high schools. Only three elementary schools are subsidised by the province.
2. I understand that the state does not have to recognise every parent’s desires or expectations. Nonetheless, when I refer to parents’ religious and cultural needs, I am pointing to some of the push factors that make many devout parents disregard public schooling based on the incompatibility (real or assumed) between their values (religious, cultural, etc.) and the dominant values and norms at public schools.
3. Throughout this book, the terms Quebecois and Quebecer are used interchangeably; I employ the term Quebecer to refer to being Quebecois (in French), which defines the state of feeling, embodying, and belonging to Quebec (i.e. Quebecness). Muslimness is the fact or the state of being Muslim and of embodying an Islamic identity. Canadianness is the state, quality, and fact of being Canadian.
References

1. My translation from French.
2. For more on Muslim Students Associations in Canada and the USA, see: http://msnational.org
3. These schools might also face legal consequences (e.g. suspension of permit) if they do not abide by the laws of the country. For instance, in October 2016, the Islamic school Jamia Al-Hudaa Residential College for Girls in Nottingham, England, was ordered to close its doors after being accused of teaching extremist views of sharia. For more, see: www.secularism.org.uk/news/2015/09/muslim-school-slammed-by-ofsted-as-former-pupil-says-the-college-was-utterly-cruel
4. As Islamic schools in the West have to teach the curriculum of the states in which they are situated, they are left with only a few hours a week (three hours in the case of Montreal Islamic high schools) to teach Qur’an, Arabic, and Islamic studies.
5. I employ the term “black” because the epistemology of early indigenous Islamic schools (i.e. the Nation of Islam) was centered on the purity of the black race and emphasized the “evilness” of the White man.
6. Because of the confusion that the term “indigenous” may bring, I decided to employ the term “black” for the reasons mentioned earlier.
8. There is a branch of the NOI that was established in Montreal in 1997 by Min. Linwood X. It is the first independent branch of the NOI outside of the US. The Nation of Islam of Canada is not affiliated with any branches of the NOI in the US and adheres to Islam as it was taught by the Hon. Elijah Muhammad.
9. www.emms.ca/dev/?page_id=318
10. Even though the school hosts students at the elementary and secondary levels, the ministry only subsidises the elementary campus. According to a school administrator, the secondary school applied many times for funding but was rejected.
11. Seventy-five percent of Muslims in Quebec adhere to the French culture and speak French at home (see: McAndrew, 2010; Triki-Yamani & McAndrew, 2009).
12. There was also a great deal of colonisation enacted by Catholic forces (in parts of what are now French Canada, the US, and Mexico).
13. For detailed information on the ERC course, see the ministry’s direct program at: www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/ethics-and-religious-culture-program/
14. It is also interesting to note that, in the case of Islamic schools, presuming harm is the default stance, whereas for Christian schools (and non-Orthodox Jewish schools) harm is only presumed if convincing evidence presents itself. It is as though Islamic schools are guilty until proven innocent, while the opposite tends to hold true for (at least mainstream) Christian and Jewish schools. This always places Islamic schools in a defensive stance vis-à-vis the public.
15. For the official introduction of the ERC course, see: www.education.gouv.qc.ca/programme-ethique-et-culture-religieuse/
16. For more on the “noble” goal of religious education from an Islamic perspective, see al-Attas (1979).
17. We can partially draw the same conclusion Western Islamic schools today. Stakeholders argue that one of the main reasons for establishing these schools is to protect Muslim youth from anti-Muslim bigotry in secular schools (see Zine, 2004, 2008; Memon, 2009, 2012).

18. An intersectional critique we could make of Zine’s analysis relates to the fact that there is an anti-colonial moment ongoing in Canada already relating to the struggle of Indigenous peoples.

19. According to Memon (2009, p. 94), immigrant Islamic schools are not anticolonial or postcolonial by nature because they are simply copying the colonial system. Here, Memon believes that most of the founders of Islamic schools in North America came from Muslim countries that were previously colonized; the education system in these countries is no more than a duplicate of what we have in the West.

20. In a case study by Kelly (2000), one informant compared public schools in his country of birth to military academies; in contrast, the public system in Montreal (and, equally, elsewhere in North America) seemed dangerous and chaotic to them.

1. Host communities can be real, assumed, or imagined. For instance, the conception of the global Muslim ummah can be employed as a faraway imagined community that helps in the preservation of Islamic identity, even in hostile environments (e.g. communist Russia).

2. I only mentioned the second referendum because the first one in 1980 was defeated by a 59.56% to 40.44% margin.

3. This complex integration into Quebec remains social and cultural in a sense that immigrants are encouraged to embrace the Quebeois culture, lifestyle, and language, but not to become Quebeois citizens. There is no such thing as Quebeois citizenship.


5. It is not just that they urge, it is that they legislate through the creation of a vast network of professional orders whose membership is limited to those who pass their exams.

6. It is worth noting that there was significant non-white immigration to Canada prior to this. For example, Asian immigrants in Western Canada, who arrived at the beginning of the 20th century and who experienced horrendous discrimination, exploitation, and marginalization at various historical moments. Nonetheless, they didn’t have access to citizenship, and they had to pay a head tax every year in order to stay in the country.

7. Even though the use of the term natives in the Canadian context might be a bit fraught, considering that this term has been widely used in Canada to describe indigenous peoples, I employ to refer to Canadians from non-immigrant descents.

1. I am aware that religious identity might also have a perceived association with visible racial traits; I categorize Dunya as a complete non-visible Muslim because, besides her real Christian name, she has a Caucasian appearance with blue eyes and blonde hair.

2. Can be translated as the framework and learning environment through mentoring offered by teachers.

3. On October 20, 2014, a Canadian named Martin Couture-Rouleau, inspired by ISIS, ran over two soldiers in St-Jean de Richelieu in Quebec, killing one and severely injuring the other; and on October 22, 2014, another Canadian, the 32-year-old Michael Zehaf-Bibeau attacked Parliament Hill in Ottawa and killed one soldier on duty.
4. CEGEP is the French acronym for Collège d’enseignement général et professionnel. It refers to pre-university colleges in the province of Quebec. While discussing my data in the rest of this dissertation, I will employ college to refer to English CEGEPs.

5. The school had since changed its dress code policies and rendered the hijab non-mandatory for the whole school.

6. Islamic schools in Montreal do not openly affiliate with any specific sect. People make judgments based on the community (Shia, Sunni, abbash, and etc.) behind the school.

7. The first elementary Islamic school in Montreal was established in 1985.

8. Praise be to God.

9. The weekly schedule of the three Islamic schools reflected in this study indicate this; also, all the interviewees stated that they had three hours of Islamic teaching in their high schools.

1. Memon (2009, p. 94) has another opinion. He believes that immigrant Islamic schools are not anticolonial by nature as they are simply copying the colonial system. Here, Memon believes that most of the founders of Islamic schools in North America came from Muslim countries that were previously colonised; the education system in these countries is no more than a duplicate of what we have in the West.

2. Islamic high schools in Montreal reserve a maximum of three hours per week for religious instruction (Islamic studies, the Qur’an, and Arabic). See http://lesavoir.ca/mlt/; http://ecolejmc.ca; http://ecoleali.com/en.

3. Praise be to God.

1. Generation 1.5 are those who immigrated with their parents to Canada at an early age; they were not born here, but they do not remember their homeland.

2. The principal of the same Islamic school told me that it was the Catholic school that approached them with the idea of having their students get together for an intercultural dialogue twice a year. He approved because he believed it too was a good opportunity for his students to learn about youth their age from other confessional schools.

3. There is no school policy related to this matter. The school’s supervision of its students outside of school hours is based on cultural issues and personal relationships with parents.

4. These two female participants were 30 and 32 years old during the time of the interview.

5. By disturbed families I mean those in which verbal abuse occurred or children suffered problems related to divorced parents.

6. As stated in Chapter 2, the Canadian public educational system was first established as a confessional system that served the majority’s needs. Even though educational institutions are now secularized, traits of the Christian faith are still visible.

7. Hanan mentioned that the school did take any serious steps to tackle this intra-cultural bullying.

8. And Catholicisation in Quebec.

9. See Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion on interculturalism and multiculturalism.

10. This is essentially because they live in Montreal. This might not be the case had they been living in Joliette or in rural Quebec.

1. Another explanation might be his social circle outside of his Islamic school or the Internet.

2. Because of French colonialism in North Africa, most North Africans in Quebec speak French fluently and are more familiar with and accustomed to francophone culture.
3. It is worth noting that, despite being here before the settlers, indigenous people do not enjoy this privilege of feeling at ease with the mainstream Canadian national identity. In fact, we can argue that their situation is worse than that of immigrants.

4. The exact term used by the principal was “morceau de vêtement.”


Berglund, J. (2014). *Islamic Religious Education in State Funded Muslim Schools in Sweden: A Sign of Secularization or Not?*. (Tidsskrift for islamforskning, 275–301.)


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